GENDERING RIGHT TO CITY:
POLITICS OF LEISURE AND URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE IN DELHI AND AGRA

Thesis Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for the award of the degree of

DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY

MAHIMA TANEJA

CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067
2021

DECLARATION

December 2021

This is to certify that the thesis titled, **"Gendering Right to City: Politics of Leisure and Urban Infrastructure in Delhi and Agra"** has been submitted by me in fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. This thesis has not been previously submitted for the award of any other degree in this University or any other University and is my original work.

Mahima Taneja

(Candidate)

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Ph.D.

Prof. Narender Kumar

(Chairperson, CPS)

Dr. Rajarshi Dasgupta

Supervisor

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I am grateful to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Rajarshi Dasgupta, for his constant guidance, support, and patience. Without him as my mentor, I might have given up on this work long back. His incisive comments, insights and interventions at various stages were indispensable to the arguments developed in this work. I would also like to thank the faculty at Centre for Political Studies for their brilliant comments, feedbacks, and suggestions at regular intervals and for being invested in this research process. I am especially grateful to Prof. Shefali Jha, who has deeply engaged with my work over the last seven years. Her interventions have been crucial in shaping some of the arguments posited in this study.

I am also deeply indebted to people who made the field work for the three case studies possible, opened their homes and hearts to me, and engaged in or facilitated countless hours of discussion – Mallika, Eeshta, Meghna, Shweta and the entire team of Women Walk at Midnight; Rajib Nandi, Mubashira, Kamlesh, Rajeev and others at Institute of Social Studies Trust and Saathi Centre; and Neha, Tahir, and Kaleem from Agra Heritage Walks. This research would not have been possible without these people, whose warmth and commitment constantly humbled and inspired me. I am also grateful to all those who participated in the research, and shared their life-histories and everyday lives with me. I also want to express my gratitude to Aditi Das who introduced me to the literature on affect and feminist geography, some of which proved indispensable to my work, and to Shruti Patil who constantly reminded about the importance of the dialogue between academic work and policy sector.

PhD is not just a degree, it is a way of life, and you cannot have a way of life without a support system, especially when gears shift constantly, with deaths, lockdowns, sickness, and a wedding thrown in the mix. Without the support of my friends, family, and peers, I would not have been able to complete this mammoth task. So finally, a big thank you to each of them. Arunima, Aditi, Rishabh, Shruti, and Simran who cheered me on every step of the way and generously proof-read some sections; Chottu, Priyanuj, and Menaka for all their love and support, and Neha, Swastee, Tarun, and Shubhanshu for being such inspiring peers. Finally, I am immensely thankful to my family – Nani (always in my heart), Taiji, Tauji, Mom, Didi, Jiju, Rishabh, and Mini Di whose love, support, and gentle prodding carried me till the end of this project.

Abbreviations

AAP	Aam Aadmi Party	NGO	Non-Government Organization
AHW	Agra Heritage Walks	NRC	National Register of Citizens
ANT	Action Network Theory	PCR	Police Control Room
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party	PI	Personal Interview
CAA	Citizenship (Amendment) Act	RTI	Right to Information
CCTV	Close Circuit Television	STS	Science and Technology Studies
CrPC	Criminal Procedure Code	TBTN	Take Back the Night
DTC	Delhi Transport Corporation	UN	United Nations
IPC	Indian Penal Code	UP	Uttar Pradesh
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University	WCD	Women's Commission of Delhi
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau	WWAM	Women Walk at Midnight

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Glossary of Hindi Terms

Bazaar **/** बाज़ार   *A marketplace consisting of multiple small stalls or shops.*

Basti **/** बस्ती   *Generally, refers to a low-income settlement.*

Chowk **/** चौक   *An open market area at the junction of two or more roads.*

Gully **/** गली   *An alley or by-lane*

Dikkat **/** दिक़्क़त   *Difficulty, problem*

Mahaul **/** माहौल   *Atmosphere*

Contents

Introduction

Background

According to United Nations projections, 68 percent of the world's population will be living in urban areas by 2050, with India alone adding 416 million urban dwellers[1]. In this context, India is witnessing a marked policy thrust towards notions of 'world class development', 'smart urbanism' and 'safer cities for women', mainly through infrastructural and planning efforts. At the same time, mass-based movements and protests around gender such as the *Nirbhaya* agitation[2] and '*Pinjra Tod*'[3] have challenged the mainstream narratives of safe and smart cities which are designed around the notions of securitization, surveillance, and restrictive regulations as opposed to freedom of movement. Alongside, small-scale demonstrations and collectives such as 'Women Walk at Midnight'[4], 'Why Loiter'[5] and 'Meet to Sleep'[6] are constantly subverting the dominant gender exclusionary norms that are manifested in the city. These campaigns and collectives leverage open urban spaces such as parks, streets, and markets while claiming physical and temporal access to them.

While scholars who have studied mass-based protests recognize the centrality of urban spaces as both a site and a lens to understand contemporary transformations (Ong 2004; Sassen 2011), there has been little focus on the vital relations between gender, infrastructure, and public spaces, as these protests unfold. **My research enters the debate on right to the city and urban politics through an empirical investigation of leisure spaces in a city, their material politics, and gendered exclusions and inclusions.** Framed by the conceptual understanding that space is socially constituted, this research focuses on public-public spaces such as parks and streets (as opposed to private-public spaces like malls and cafes). This entails an enquiry into access, denial, and subversion of planned leisure spaces in a city as well alternative spaces for leisure, specifically for women, and its implications for right to the city. The research brings to focus leisure spaces in two Indian cities – Delhi and Agra, through multi-sited ethnographic field work. Such a comparison, as McFarlane (2010) argues, helps

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[1] 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects Report by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. See: https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html (last accessed on August 17, 2020).

[2] A widespread agitation against the gangrape of a college student that occurred in Delhi in 2012.

[3] An autonomous women's collective active since 2015 which is campaigning against gender discriminatory hostel regulations and advancing the idea of reclaiming public spaces.

[4] A Delhi-based collective which has been organizing midnight walks in different neighbourhoods since 2016.

[5] Based on a book by the same name, it is premised on right of women to purposeless loitering in a city at different times, and different locations to reclaim the city.

[6] An iterative campaign by a feminist collective, Blank Noise, which encourages women to take a nap in public parks. It was started in response to widespread public sexual harassment and environment of fear across Indian cities.

to explore the 'assumptions, limits and distinctiveness' of one's empirical claims and formulate more situated accounts. By decentring urban studies and focusing on cities which are otherwise relegated to the periphery of academic research (Robinson 2016), my research contributes to postcolonial urban thought rooted in Indian experience. This is in context of an emerging agenda within comparative urban research to explore comparisons within Global South and not just between North and South (McFarlane, Silver and Truelove 2017) to re-think our discursive field and explore varying trajectories of urban change.

Research Questions

- Who can access different leisure spaces, at what times, and how? What kind of public leisure spaces and opportunities are available and accessible to women (in particular) from different social locations and geographies? As a corollary, what are the different elements of the dominant urban order[7] that shape this access?

- What is the relationship between urban leisure spaces and politics of *publics* and citizenship? More specifically, how do urban feminist collectives such as 'Women walk at Midnight' (staged in open urban spaces) challenge (or not) the material urban order and reconstitute dominant urban publics?

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This research is framed by literature on right to the city, feminist urban geography, and politics of affect and infrastructure, in order to explore the relationship between urban publics spaces, how they are gendered, and formation of multiple publics[8].

According to Lefebvre (1996), 'right to the city' fundamentally means right of inhabitants to the production of urban space and lived experience in it, right to participate and influence decisions that shape the city and its *oeuvre* (i.e., urban fabric), and right to physically access and use urban space in everyday life (Lefebvre 1996; Purcell 2002). Quite simply, it means the right to urban life. This right to the city is not about individual and exclusive rights to property (or exchange value) but right to a certain form of urbanism and use value. However, industrialisation and modern urban planning subordinates use value to exchange value and replaces 'inhabiting' as a lived experience of the

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[7] Borrowing from Ranciere's conceptualisation, I begin with the hypothesis that the material and political conditions that characterize and constitute urban spaces impose a certain form of 'police order' – an argument explored at length in my M.Phil. dissertation.

[8] Drawing from the scholarly tradition starting from Habermas to Nancy Fraser, 'publics' here refers to platforms where political participation is enacted. Since the dominant public sphere is characterized by exclusions, multiple publics emerge which might conflict (Fraser 1990).

everyday and participation in social life or a community, by 'habitat', a functional and material occupation of a place[9] (Lefebvre 1996, 76). This keeps urban inhabitants from experiencing the city as an *oeuvre* and finding possibilities for leisure, sexuality, and fun in it. While Lefebvre views this as a class strategy, urban scholars like Mark Purcell (2002, 106) point out that 'inhabitant' as a political subject is not limited to a single economic and social category but can also include an array of interests and identities such as race, gender, and sexuality within its ambit, each shaping, claiming and experiencing the city's lived spaces in different ways. In such a case, the agenda of the inhabitant may not be limited to reclaiming the capitalist city, but can include reclaiming the patriarchal, racist or heteronormative city, a point provocatively put forth by Purcell (2002). In that case, can the right to city be appropriated by sections other than those who are traditionally seen as the 'working class'? What does Lefebvre's *oeuvre* mean for women, trans-persons, or queer people?

Right to the city is intrinsically linked to access to public space, which is prone to appropriation and manipulation by the dominant sections (Mitchel 2003). These public spaces are constructed around particular notions of appropriate sexual compartments based on heteronormativity (Hubbard 2001), which is reproduced by the spatial exclusion of 'inappropriate users'. Cultural and feminist geographers have long since argued how space and place is racialised and gendered, (Valentine 1989) and how public spaces are sites for reproducing gender (Massey 2013). Gender theorists like Butler (2011) have critically emphasised on the centrality of bodies for reconfiguring public spaces. As per this strand, the everyday acts and gestures that inscribe gender norms on the body through constant repetition (Butler 2011) also determine how gendered bodies experience, or dwell in the city. The city then simultaneously becomes instrumental in production and regulation of the sexed body by re-inscribing gender norms through economies of fear, governance and regulations. Yet, empirical studies on public spaces and how they are experienced from the perspective of gender, sexuality, and bodies specifically in South Asia are few and far between. One exception is the influential work by Phadke et al (2011) who argue that women are constantly denied non-productive use of urban spaces as they have to justify their presence as necessary and respectable and are thus denied right to 'inhabit' the rationally planned and aesthetically sanitized city. Right to the city is then inherently gendered, which means "advantages and disadvantages, exploitation and control…is patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine." (Acker 1990, 146). Further, the way

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[9] As Lewis Mumford (1961) writes, industrialisation led to physical and temporal division between residence and work and between residence and recreation, setting up a strict urban order.

women experience leisure in a city and participate in urban life is determined not just by their gender, but also by their race, class, sexuality and age, as argued by Scraton and Watson (1998)[10].

It is then imperative to explore and document ways in which this gendering and policing is experienced, subverted or redefined by different actors. For doing so, engaging with leisure spaces and its politics provides an interesting starting point. In the process, this study holds the potential to open up and engage with the recent debates and scholarship on right to the city and urban citizenship, as well as on subaltern politics and publics. It can also raise questions about the kinds of public spaces available in a city and the kinds of 'publics' that can or cannot be constituted.

There is a growing literature on the different ways in which claims are being laid to the city, particularly in the Global South following the argument opened up by Lefebvre. One set of studies focuses on politics of bourgeois urbanism (Baviskar 2003; Anjaria 2011), aesthetic governmentality (Ghertner 2011), and the role of middle class in this politics. Others such as Appadurai (2002) and Holston (2009) focus on social movements by urban marginalized for expanding citizenship rights. Holston (2009), for example, using the framework of 'insurgent citizenship' argues that *right to city is moving south* and new citizenship enactments in the peripheries is destabilizing the old exclusionary citizenship formulations through struggles in the city. Demands for new formulations of citizenship in urban spaces are conceived in terms of housing, property, water, sanitation and security – aspects of material infrastructure and physical necessities by excluded citizens against the *entrenched* regime. This indicates that Lefebvre's estimate that the right to the city will be defined by struggles of poor residents, has potential. This also brings into focus the fact that the starting point of right to the city for marginalized groups is often material infrastructure, and its spatial manifestations, which is crucial to build a life of dignity at the everyday level. Debate about right to the city and public space flares up every time the excluded make a claim, and activists take to the streets through mass mobilizations. Unfortunately, Lefebvre seem to have overlooked the lived experiences of women, reducing them to 'receptive and participating' consumers of renewed cities (Lefebvre 1996, 85). Nonetheless, women's experiences in Indian cities have started to gain attention in the recent decade. For example, urban geographers like Datta (2016) unpack the category of subaltern urban citizens using a gendered intersectional lens, moving away from the dominant focus on caste, class, and kinship relations within studies on urban marginalization.

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[10] Scraton and Watson argue that we need for localized research of socially constructed leisure spaces in order to understand these intersections. More recently, they have also advanced intersectionality as a useful theoretical perspective for conceptualising leisure (Watson and Scraton 2013).

The other gap in literature relates to studies on urban infrastructure within the frame of right to the city. 'Right to the city' cannot exist without the material morphology and architectural reality of the city (Lefebvre 1996). However, locating this in material terms has proven to be a challenge, other than perhaps Don Mitchell's seminal work (1995) on public space[11]. The organisation of infrastructure has undoubtedly shown to have powerful impacts on gendered access and use of the city. Scholars in Geography, Urban Studies, and Anthropology have studied how a confluence of factors – built form, spatial organisation, policing, urban planning, and symbolic orders – govern the ways in which the urban experience is shaped and becomes gendered (Low 1995; Low 2012; Larkin 2013).

Theorists of infrastructure identify three ways in which infrastructure can be understood – technopolitical, modern and aesthetic/semiotic (Larkin 2013). According to Brian Larkin, it is important to understand infrastructure as a *system* and theorize the relationship between its technical function, symbolic value, and aesthetic form, or what he calls, poetics of infrastructure[12]. With this approach in mind, one can ask what are the technical, symbolic and aesthetic roles of multiple parks in postcolonial cities in India, and how do these roles change and adapt based on the needs of different urban citizens? Do they function as sanitised green buffers and symbolise modern urban planning; do they facilitate sociality and community building; or do they become private islands for romantically involved couples who are trying to escape surveillance by their families? Infrastructure also invokes deep affectual commitments because of the feelings of *promise and progress* entangled with technologies of infrastructures. Roads and railways, parks and squares encode the dreams and fantasies of individuals and societies and mobilize feelings and affects of desire, pride, and frustration, which can be deeply political. While urban anthropologists and geographers have written about politics of infrastructure in general (McFarlane and Rutherford 2008; Gandy 2011; Graham 2000), existing studies within India have accorded limited attention to how politics of infrastructure shapes citizens and urban *publics,* with a few exceptions such as Nikhil Anand's formative work on hydraulic infrastructure (2011). Material infrastructure has primarily been studied at the macro level through the lens of housing, slum eviction and politics of land development and acquisition (for example, Ghertner 2011; Hosagrahar 1999). In particular, urban leisure spaces, their infrastructure, their social constitution, and their affectual implications have escaped the attention of scholars (outside the frame of consumption), especially when studying normative ideas of public space. It is important to

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[11] Mitchell draws a line between right to city, the physical public space and the normative ideas of public as constituted in democratic societies, while studying the struggles of homeless population.

[12] Poetics in the Jakobsonian sense of the term pertains to a rearrangement of the hierarchy of signification within a speech event, in a way that material qualities of the signifier become dominant over the referential meaning of the speech act. When applied to the field of infrastructure, poetic mode would mean that the semiotic or aesthetic dimension of the infrastructure dominates over its technical functions

ethnographically study and locate the politics, pressures, and infrastructural visions that shape these public leisure spaces, and the ways in which their infrastructure constitutes and 'affects' subjects.

Affect has emerged as an oft-used concept in cultural and feminist geography since the early 2000s (see for example Pile 2010). Understood as a transpersonal capacity of the *body,* affect is a useful lens to understand the relationship between female urban subject, urban space and its infrastructure. Scholars like Nigel Thrift (2004) argue that with advancement in technologies and new knowledges on human psyche and cognition, it has become possible to manipulate and even 'engineer' affect through layout, design, infrastructure, and repetition. This understanding has been key to some of the seminal works on human geography and affect today. Infrastructure and urban design indeed invokes certain affects. In fact, in recent years there has been a renewed emphasis on 'design' within projects of urban regeneration based on the premise that urban design shapes human experience, can create vibrant and safe streets and public spaces, and alter sensory experience of the city. While it is true that women need enabling infrastructure to exercise their right to public space, what we experience, feel, and perceive in a city space is also determined by our gendered and sexed bodies, and our past memories and experiences which interpolate the sensory experience of a place (see for example Rose, Degen and Basdas 2010). Herein, works by feminist geographers such as Degen and Rose (2012) is a useful guide to understand subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in theories of affect and infrastructure. Work by feminist scholars like Sara Ahmed (2014) further helps us understand the role of subjectivity, memories, and historicity in human emotions, and how do emotions and affect work. Affect has also been used by some scholars to understand the 'night-space' even as research on night as a socially constructed space is relatively limited and new in South Asia. While there has been some research on night-time economy, alcohol and youth cultures, and street lighting, most of this is concentrated in the West (for example see Van Liempt et al 2015). In recent years, a theoretical framework that has been employed to study the night is that of **'assemblage urbanism'** especially within the field of human geography to understand complex 'socio-spatial formations' (See for example Anderson and McFarlane 2011). An assemblage refers to the 'process of emergence' (McFarlane 2009), and assembling and re-assembling of multiple heterogenous elements, subjects, and objects. It is always contingent, and subject to vibrant arrangings (Shaw 2014). Scholars like Robert Shaw (2014) employ the analytical framework of assemblage developed by Deleuze and Guattari to describe the 'affective atmosphere' of night time city as an assemblage of 'practices, bodies and materials'. Shaw explains affective atmosphere as a 'placed assemblage' which emerges as a result of multiple practices coming together in a certain manner, and in a certain time and space. It is driven

by various bodies and materials assembled together which transmits certain affects and determines how will the bodies 'feel'.

However, it seems that the existing studies, especially on South Asian cities, have ignored the politics of right to the city, its materiality, and its affectual qualities from a gendered lens. It is this crucial gap that this study seeks to bridge. This research brings together theories of right to the city, affect and infrastructure to examine the gender-based inclusions, exclusions and subversions in public spaces in Delhi and Agra.

Before moving forward, I will briefly touch upon politics of sexuality and gender to foreground our present inquiry within the context of extant scholarship on feminist movement in India (for scholarship on women's movement in India, see: Kumar 1997; Phadke 2003). In the past fifteen years, a gamut of scholarship has emerged on sexuality, sexual cultures and sexual economies in India (See for example Nair and John 1998; Narrain and Bhan 2005; 2013; and so on). Yet, the contestations and disagreements that characterize regulation of bodies of women, located in urban public spaces, have remained largely under-studied in India, with the exception of queer studies. Today, a major site of the politics of sexuality can be located in the transgressions, protests, and campaigns in Indian cities which have been foregrounding and challenging more or less similar issues of gender norms, sexuality and access to urban spaces such as 'Kiss of Love', 'Reclaim the Night', 'Why Loiter', 'Pads Against Sexism' and 'Meet to Sleep'. The everyday, banal and parodic tactics employed by these protests escape definition and fail to fit into dominant intelligible frameworks of understanding citizen action and social movements. Informed by this understanding, and framed by the two axes of politics of sexuality and right to city, the task of my M.Phil. dissertation was to trace the contemporary movements and moments of activism and resistance which are laying a claim to urban public spaces and explore the convergences and divergences in their tactics and aims. The research sought to recover their politics by locating the dissident bodies and weave them together as significant 'moments' in Indian feminist movement that help us re-think right to the city. In the process, the study argued that the city and its lived space is governed by what Ranciere would call 'the established police order and distribution of the sensible'. The 'police order' is comprised of implicit rules which establish roles and modes of participation and perception and determines what is visible and invisible, audible and inaudible (Rancière, 2004). [13]

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[13] I argued that the urban order is sustained by a tactful combination of imposition of norms of appropriate gender behaviours, policing by vanguards of religious and middle-class morality, regulation of 'night spaces' (Williams 2008), denial of public spaces to women and sexual dissidents (Phadke et al 2011; Massy 2013; Valentine 1989) and so on.

The doctoral research presented here extends this work into a new direction by **exploring the relations between infrastructure, publics, affect, and gender in the city through the site of leisure spaces**. An in-depth ethnographic study of leisure spaces can also contribute to untangling the complex (though oft-elusive) relationship between normative ideas of right to the city as an oeuvre and public space, and actual, physical public spaces in a city, while investigating how different spaces assume different meanings for different people and determine who will or will not occupy them to form publics.

Research Methodology

Case Study Selection

In the last two decades, Delhi has experienced fantastical re-development and planning efforts, especially in terms of public infrastructure, securitisation, and women's safety. It has also witnessed protest movements which have used public spaces in imaginative ways. Yet, Delhi remains the highest ranked city in terms of crime against women year after year (NCRB 2018; 2019; 2020). Even in 2020, when reporting of crimes against women plummeted in general because of covid19-related lockdowns, Delhi remained what the media describes as the 'crime capital'[14]. Agra, a tourist city located merely 200 kilometres from Delhi, has not witnessed an equally active public sphere with conversation on gender and public space being in its nascent phase and intense intermittent tensions over inter-faith and inter-community marriages marking the public discourse[15]. Within Uttar Pradesh, Agra has reported the second highest number of cases of crimes against women in the past (NCRB 2015). The crime rate against women is 73.3 per one lakh of population in Agra and 129.1 per one lakh in Delhi (NCRB Statistics 2020)[16]. Further, while Agra is part of India's Smart City Mission and receives a periodic planning thrust, re-development programs so far have been inconsistent in their implementation. Such differences in their urban trajectories and public discourse on the one hand, and commonalities in behavioural codes and norms due to geographical proximity on the other, made for an interesting comparative study, without running the risk of valorisation or over-emphasis. Scholarship on comparative urbanism also reminds us of the inevitability and desirability of

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[14] "Crime Capital: Delhi remains most unsafe for women". Indian Express. September 16, 2021. https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-is-most-unsafe-for-women-ncrb-data-confirms-7511261/ (accessed December 6, 2021).

[15] The latest case being of a mysterious death of a 22-year-old girl in an inter-faith marriage. "Tension in Agra over death of woman in inter-faith marriage." The Hindu. November 13, 2021. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/tension-in-agra-over-death-of-woman-in-inter-faith-marriage/article37469488.ece (accessed December 6, 2021)

[16] Data excavated from: https://ncrb.gov.in/crime-in-india-table-contents?field_date_value[value][year]=2020&field_select_additional_table_ti_value=All&items_per_page=All (last accessed December 6, 2021)

comparison in our analysis. As someone who has lived in these two cities – Delhi and Agra – it is inevitable that a comparative outlook was expected to seep into my analysis. At the same time, this enabled me to conduct in-depth research given my familiarity with the context of both the cities.

I have focused on three particular case studies in this research:

(i)   *Women Walk at Midnight* collective in Delhi and night as the (temporal) leisure space: This collective is directly concerned with night as a leisure space and leisure opportunity in a city, and women's lack of access to it. It was unfolding during the period of my field work and gave me a chance to actively take on the role of a participant observer for a year.

(ii)   Riverbank and gullies in Khaliyai Mandi in Agra which is located next to a renowned historical monument and tourist spot in Agra. Through this case study, I delved into gendered politics of leisure spaces like riverbanks, local community spaces, and courtyards in a low-income settlement. In the process, I also explored the narratives of love and 'love *jihad'*, and how they work to deny access to public leisure spaces to women in Agra.

(iii)   Public parks and gullies in Kalyanpuri resettlement colony in Delhi, which allowed me to engage with women's fraught relationship with parks as planned leisure public spaces in a city and their role in urban planning.

Taken together, these three case studies provided me with a chance to understand different types of public leisure spaces and gendered contestations within them. Throughout the research, I also extensively engaged with **narratives of safety** which were unavoidable when discussing public spaces and leisure opportunities with women; ***mahaul,*** a category rooted in vernacular habitus and perhaps can be most accurately translated to mean '**affective atmosphere'***,* and with perceptions of urban space, urbanism and urban participation. After careful analysis of the empirical data and narratives from the field, I decided to centre *mahaul* or 'affective atmosphere' as my main conceptual framing for approaching ideas of gendered citizenship and right to the city, informed by concepts of affect and embodied subjectivities. Repeated labelling of *mahaul* of certain spaces like riverfronts and parks and times like the night as *kharab (bad or wrong)* made me realize its centrality in upholding the established urban order and policing gendered bodies. Understanding and unpacking this **'*mahaul'* as a complex socio-spatial formation, which results in a certain exclusionary and gendered police order** is the main finding of my research.

Specific sources and methods of inquiry

I adopted ethnography as a methodology for this study in order to understand and render the 'webs of socio-cultural significances' and meaningful structures that constitute space and our experience within it (Geertz 1973; May 1997). For this, I conducted participant observations at selected field sites, observed and journaled thick descriptions of social settings and practices, interviewed informants, and conducted group discussions. Together this allowed me to lend legibility to how urban spaces are ordered, gendered, and experienced and capture the happenings, moments and textures that inform our urban experience. In total, I conducted in-depth interviews and discussions with 76 respondents between January 2019 to January 2020 (See Appendix A). Respondents included organizers, walk leaders, and participants of Women Walk at Midnight (20 – 40 years old), young girls and middle-aged and older women who live in Kalyanpuri (18 – 60 years old), members of Agra Heritage Walks (28 – 32 years old), men and women who live in Khaliyai Mandi (18 – 60 years old), young women who live in Agra and Delhi but are not part of any feminist collective, police officials in Agra and Delhi, and members of non-governmental organizations and independent collectives like Saathi centre in Kalyanpuri, Safetipin in Delhi, and Agra Heritage Walks in Agra. Around 43 respondents had completed at least their undergraduate degree, while the rest were either school drop-outs or had completed high school or senior secondary school. In terms of socio-economic profile, while most participants of Women walk at midnight belonged to middle class/upper caste categories with English education (with a few exceptions), respondents from Kalyanpuri (Delhi) and Khaliyai Mandi (Agra) were a mix of scheduled caste, other backward caste, and dominant caste categories, and belonged to low-income households. The interviews and discussions inquired into the demographic and social background of the respondents, their experience of inhabiting the city and their relationship with their neighbourhood, details on leisure spaces they access and why, reasons for not accessing certain leisure spaces, their perceptions of safety at different places and times, their relationship with night, strategies and insights on how they navigate the city, participation in urban life, and their visions of what their city should be like. These narratives are woven together using newspaper reports in local language and English dailies, journalistic accounts and perceptions, conference/seminar reports and speeches (on issues of safety and cities), and existing academic and feminist literature.

Taking cue from Wylie (2005), I also adopted 'walking' as a methodological tool, wherein immersion in the immediate environment allowed me to explore temporal and spatial practices of different women, the shifting affects produced by walking and the materiality of the spaces we walked in. Since access to leisure spaces and participation in urban life is also centrally tied to mobility and

movement, it became important to walk with my research participants, share their experience of the shifting '*mahaul'* and challenges in mobility, and observe how spatiality was remade at every step. These walk-alongs allowed me to "get closer to the unspoken, embodied relational engagements that produce experiences of the urban, …facilitated new levels of awareness of the diverse sensory modalities of engagement and uses of space…[and] chart the multiple and various ways in which the potentialities of the environment are realized by different bodies" moving through the city (Degen et al 2010, 66). Further, drawing from works by affect geographers and feminist geographers, I focused on bodily gestures of the research participants as well as my own embodied experiences in public spaces. I observed and noted how I felt in these 'field' spaces, amidst certain built environment and certain political contexts, and shifts in my own sensory experiences over time. This fed into tracing how bodies and built environments interact with each other and how an affective atmosphere or *mahaul* gets shaped.

All interviews were recorded through written notes and/or audio recording. This was accompanied with field notes which helped me recall the affectual and non-representational qualities of the field. For all the interviews and discussions, I sought verbal informed consent for both – research participation and recording of the interview, whereby I informed the participants about objectives of the research and that I will respect their opinion, confidentiality, and anonymity. Accordingly, I have changed names of participants who were uncomfortable in sharing their names on record, or revealed personal information while sharing instances of public harassment. I also strived to be sensitive to social differences in gender, caste, class, religion and age and aimed to include a diverse set of research participants.

Analysis: I transcribed, translated, encoded, and triangulated my field notes and interviews under thematic areas which emerged on the field to understand inclusions and exclusions of different leisure spaces. Ethnographic analysis, at the onset, entailed deciphering structures of signification or codes, how they relate to one another, and how they produce certain results (Geertz 1973; May 1997). Drawing from Setha Low's multidisciplinary framework of analysis (2012), I accompanied this thematic content analysis of transcripts and interview notes with critical discourse analysis to interrogate perceptions of urban order, experiences of access and denial, and alternative urban imaginations and to place these interviews within the larger socio-cultural context. Critical discourse analysis includes (i) analysis of context, (ii) analysis of processes of text production, interpretation, and language awareness, and (iii) analysis of text itself (Low 2001). This is further accompanied by a narrational style of writing especially in chapters on 'Women Walk at Midnight' to capture non-representational affect. Finally, learning from assemblage theory (Anderson and McFarlane 2011), I

have employed thick descriptions and narratives to discover the heterogenous elements, affects, and discourses that come together contingently to constitute the socio-spatial formations that characterise our urban experience.

Chapterisation

This thesis is divided into six chapters.

In the first two chapters, I trace the 'Women Walk at Midnight' (WWAM) collective over a period of one year because it was actively organizing midnight walks every month during the same period as my field work (Jan 2019 – Jan 2020). The first chapter traces the antecedents and larger context of women's movement and urban politics in India within which the WWAM collective emerged, the tactics adopted by the collective and the corresponding inclusions and exclusions. In the next chapter, I further unpack WWAM to analyse politics of walking, affects of safety and fear in urban public spaces, and the role of sustained women-led collectives on claims to citizenship. In simpler words, while the first chapter explores what WWAM *is* and the context within which it germinated, who walks and who does not, and narratives of a few midnight walks, the second chapter focuses more on what WWAM *does,* or its impact and entanglement within contemporary urban politics. In the process, I argue, walking at midnight by women is a claim on, what I call, *affective urban citizenship.* In these chapters, the specific leisure site is temporal (i.e., night space), and not limited to one geographical neighbourhood within Delhi.

The third chapter dives deep into the social context and history of Khaliyai Mandi, a riverside low-income neighbourhood in Agra, the leisure spaces within it, and gendered exclusions therein. While engaging with past memories of Yamuna River and people's relationship with the riverbank, the chapter focuses on exploring public leisure spaces especially for women living in an acutely gendered and regulated environment where *mahaul* (or what I translate as 'affective environment') is not conducive to their access to public space and where leisure is varyingly interpreted as '*faltu* time' or 'time-pass'. Despite the centrality of Yamuna in Agra's and in Khaliyai Mandi's geography and history, a close study reveals that for women in Khaliyai Mandi, the street and lanes (or gullies) are important public leisure spaces, instead of the riverbank. Cots placed in the gully outside one's house, or in a shared courtyard, the *chhat* (roof top terrace), and neighbourhood *chai* or *paan* shop provide a safe public space where women gather, exchange information, and develop social bonds. The chapter also raises some preliminary questions pertinent to urban theory: what is an essentially *urban* public space, given that the eastern riverbank and its uses were largely rural in Agra until a few decades ago,

and the everyday lives and behaviours still a suggest a certain continuity with practices associated with the countryside?

The fourth chapter further explores narratives of safety and *mahaul* in Agra, with a focus on Khaliyai Mandi. More specifically, it begins to unpack what does this '*mahaul'* mean and what are its implications for women's access to leisure and public spaces? At the onset, I had not taken into account love and romantic relationships as a form of leisure in cities and its role in shaping citizenship. However, interviews in Khaliyai mandi suggested that it is believed that one of the major reasons for bad *mahaul,* aside from '*chhed-chhad'* (public sexual harassment) is the risk of elopements by young couples and 'love-jihad'. Love then emerged as possible leisure site as well as a transgressive act. Right to love and find spaces for intimacy are also a crucial part of urban life. Therefore, after exploring narratives of safety, *chhed-chhad,* and *mahaul,* this chapter throws light on politics of love, romance, and elopements by young inter-caste or inter-religious heterosexual couples in Agra. In the process, the chapter explores love as a form of leisure and agency, the spaces it claims, and its denial and politicization and argues that if 'Women Walk at Midnight' is a claim on affective citizenship, then quite simply, anti-love jihad campaign, moral policing, normalization of *'chhed-chhad',* denial of love, and the resultant '*mahaul'* or affective atmosphere of risk and potential transgression is its denial.

The next chapter unpacks similar dynamics of '*kharab mahaul'* and safety narratives around women's access to public spaces in a different (yet similar) context of Kalyanpuri, a low-income neighbourhood in Delhi. In Kalyanpuri, I discovered that an RTI application had been filed by a local NGO seeking information on maintenance of public parks. This provided me with an opportunity to engage with public parks as a potential site of leisure and formation of publics, only to discover that for women in Kalyanpuri, gullies and cots in front of lanes are the primary leisure sites and offer opportunities for sociality instead of parks. The fifth chapter expands on this case study by exploring women's relationship with public parks, gullies, and cots; the position of parks within urban planning; and narratives of safety and *mahaul* for women in Kalyanpuri.

The final chapter brings together the insights from all the case studies and comes back to the questions of right to the city and gendered politics of leisure and the material public spaces to tease out and organize the findings of preceding chapters. In this chapter, I argue that the *mahaul* or affective environment is constituted by a shifting or contingent of arrangement of the following elements– (i) social norms and established codes of behaviour, (ii) circulation of affect through memories and narratives, (iii) embodied practices and experiences, and (iv) materiality of the city which is shaped by dominant policy narratives of safety and order. Together, I argue, these nodes shape right to the city

and urban citizenship. By tagging the *mahaul* of urban spaces as risky, bad, and corrupting, the women accessing them are also tagged as bad or corrupt, and the onus is put on women to avoid spaces with '*kharab mahaul*'. *Mahaul* thus emerged as a complex socio-spatial formation, which results in a certain police order and denies women access to urban life. In this chapter, I also argue that the mainstream rhetoric of safety understood as security is a limiting framework in defining access to urban spaces, as it actually works to restrict women's mobility and in turn, curbs their access to urban publics, re-enforcing an affective atmosphere of fear. It denies them right to the city, civic and discursive participation, and affective citizenship. Here, I bring in Martha Nussbaum's capability approach to argue that the dominant *mahaul* which breeds a fear of violence, wrong-doing, and risk severely impedes women's capabilities and freedom, and in the process denies them the right to participate in urban life.

It is in the context of this overall picture that I urge the reader to pay attention to the workings of the *mahaul* in the following chapters as I dive into the narratives and experiences of women from different field sites and social locations. The first chapter will begin by a discussion of the contemporary Indian women's movement and the political moment within which 'Women Walk at Midnight' emerged and unfolded. This will be followed by critical unpacking of tactics and politics of the collective, framing it as a 'performance-protest' aimed at shifting the affectual experience of the gendered body at night.

<h1>Chapter One</h1>

<h1>Leisure on Streets: A Case study of Walking with Women at Midnight</h1>

1. Introduction

This chapter will critically engage with politics and experience of 'Women Walk at Midnight', a women-led collective which has been organizing walks in different neighbourhoods of Delhi since 2016. The first section of this chapter traces the antecedents and larger context of contemporary Indian women's movement and urban politics in which the collective emerged. This section will touch upon the protests, demonstrations, and performances which erupted in response to Delhi gang-rape of 2012 and will begin to unpack the relationship between 'performance' and 'protest'. The second section will dive into the background and tactics of Women Walk at Midnight (henceforth, WWAM) – how it started, how are the walks organized, who walks, and more importantly, who does not walk based on empirical data collected from WWAM over the course of one year. In the process, this section will engage with the inclusions and exclusions that characterise a collective like WWAM. The third section of this chapter will exemplify some midnight walks conducted by the collective in 2019 using participation observation notes and in-depth interviews with the walk organizers and participants. Herein, I have adopted a narrative style of writing to document and analyse the lived embodied experience of participating in these walks. Before closing this section, I will also address and unpack some of the tensions and frustrations within the collective and among those who participate. The last section of this chapter frames WWAM as a 'performance-protest' which is aimed at shifting the affectual experience of the body at night and the visual map of the city itself. In doing so, the last section serves as an apt precursor to unpacking politics of walking (as a form of endurance, pleasure, and performance) and affectual politics of safety, ease, and fear in urban public spaces which is the subject matter of the next chapter.

Collective Memory of Nirbhaya mobilization

In the past two decades, a number of gender-based protests and mobilizations have erupted in India, notably the anti-rape *Nirbhaya* agitation, 'Slutwalk' marches, campaigns by 'Blank Noise' against victim-blaming, 'Take Back the Night' marches across the world, 'Why Loiter' (which is based on a book by the same name, premised on loitering aimlessly around the city), and '*Pinjra Tod*' (literally translated as 'break the cages', started against gender discriminatory hostel curfews in Indian

universities)[17]. As I argued in my M.Phil. dissertation, taken together, these mobilizations and demonstrations have made a significant contribution to the feminist discourse and activism in India in the last decade. What follows is a recapitulation of the politics, impact, and collective memory of Nirbhaya agitation, which was closely followed by Take Back the Night Marches in order to establish the political and discursive context within which 'Women Walk at Midnight' emerged.

The 2012 Nirbhaya agitation was triggered by the brutal gang-rape of a 23-year-old student, Jyoti Pandey[18] in a bus in Munirka in South-west Delhi, and soon spread across major Indian cities to protest sexual violence. Many view the 2012 Nirbhaya agitation and consequently the Verma Committee report as a watershed moment in the history of Indian women's movement (Baxi 2013, Roy 2014, Narang 2014, Lodhia 2015). While the movement was started by students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), several women's and student organizations and a large number of protestors who were not aligned with any organization or political party soon joined in. There was no central organizational node. Yet the protests took the form of a mass-based movement, defying bans on public gatherings and taking over public spaces to register their protest. Scholars such as Anupama Roy (2014) view the agitation as a point of convergence and collation of discrete, individual memories of gendered violence. The gang-rape became symptomatic of persistent sexual violence and gender-based discrimination on one hand and systemic problems such as lack of accountability by state organs, unreliable police system, and poor public infrastructure on the other. This was reflected not just in the slogans against sexual violence and patriarchy, demanding varying forms of justice and *aazadi (*liberation/freedom) but also in the slew of petitions filed in the courts in the aftermath of the rape-case such as those demanding GPS-fitting in public and transport vehicles, recruitment of more police personnel, installation of close-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, and setting up of one-stop crisis centres for rape survivors (See for example, Nipun Saxena and ANR. Vs Union of India and Ors. Writ petition no. 565/2012, 568/2012, 1/2013, 22/2013, 148/2013, 11188/2018[19]).

It is also important to note that the outrage emerged at a moment when conversations on victim-blaming, moral policing, and affirmative language of sexuality were already finding their ground

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[17] These protests and mobilizations were a subject of my M.Phil. dissertation submitted at Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi in 2014.

[18] The name, and not the title *Nirbhaya* (bestowed on Jyoti Pandey by mainstream media)*,* is consciously used here to distance oneself from valorized accounts of her survival and heroism; and iconization of a raped woman.

[19] Nipun Saxena vs Union Of India Ministry Of Home, Supreme Court Order, 31 July, 2019. https://indiankanoon.org/doc/36948114/ (accessed January 28, 2020).

through campaigns, protests, and mobilizations such as 'SlutWalk'[20], 'Pink *Chaddi* Campaign'[21] and Queer Pride parades. It was also a time when the memory and frustration of the 2011 anti-corruption movement was also lingering among people. It thus seems that the Nirbhaya agitation was squarely influenced by its immediate political and discursive context.

Nirbhaya agitation is largely seen as a successful movement. It led to the Justice Verma Committee Report (see Baxi 2013) even though the consequent Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013 diluted some of its recommendations. It also brought discussion on rape and safety to the centre-stage for policy makers and public alike. For example, the language of party manifestos in 2015 Delhi Assembly elections specifically included ensuring 'safety of women' through safer public spaces and installation of CCTV cameras as one of their main poll promises[22] – a narrative that I will circle back to in Chapter 6. A separate Nirbhaya fund was also set up to develop emergency response systems, central victim compensation fund, and cybercrime prevention etc[23]. Unfortunately, as of December 2019, nearly 90 percent of this fund remains unused[24]. In July 2019, Delhi High Court directed the Delhi government and police to utilize the funds to install CCTV cameras and street lights, and to improve PCR van's functionality[25]. However, questions on privacy of data collected through CCTVs and concerns of moral policing by increased surveillance remain unanswered. Simultaneously, we have witnessed an eruption of multiple mobile-based applications such as Himmat by Delhi police which are geared towards ensuring women's safety and tackling emergency situations. Most of these apps are designed to contact someone when you are in danger in the minimum amount of time possible and enable geo-tracking. Ranganathan (2017) rightly faults this fervour of developing such apps short-sighted for failing to meaningfully take on structures of violence and male hegemony. Such apps instead extend

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[20] Slut Walks started in early 2011 when a police constable in Toronto remarked that women should stop dressing like sluts to avoid sexual harassment. In response, 'SlutWalk' Toronto started to protest victim-blaming and gender-based violence. It reached India the same year under the name 'Slutwalk artharth Besharmi Morcha' (loosely translated as 'Slutwalk as in shamelessness front'). For analysis of Slutwalk, see Taneja 2019.

[21] On January 24, 2009, a forty-member strong mob of Hindu right-wing activists belonging to the Sri Ram Sena attacked a pub in Mangalore, claiming that girls were flouting norms of Indian culture there. In response, the Pink *Chaddi* Campaign was launched with the objective of sending pink underwears to the outfit's leader on Valentine's Day.

[22] For example, Congress's main poll promise in 2015 Delhi Assembly elections in the section of women empowerment was installation of CCTV cameras. Other contenders – AAP and BJP – also used a similar language. See: *The Hindu.* "Congress Manifesto for the Delhi Assembly Election". 24 January 2015.

[23] Harish Nair. "Supreme court slams Centre for unused Nirbhaya fund". *India Today.* March 28, 2015.

[24] Ambika Pandit. "Nearly 90% of Nirbhaya Fund lying unused: Govt data". *Times of India.* December 8, 2019.

[25] India Legal Bureau. "High Court advises Delhi Police to utilise unused Nirbhaya Fund worth Rs. 3000 cr." *India Legal.* August 1, 2019. https://www.indialegallive.com/constitutional-law-news/courts-news/delhi-high-court-advises-delhi-police-utilize-unused-nirbhaya-fund-worth-rs-3000-cr-70084 (accessed January 28, 2020)

surveillance's reach with a disregard for personal data protection, and are often biased towards cis-gender, able-bodied, urban women with smartphones[26].

While the state structures tightened the noose of surveillance in the aftermath of Nirbhaya agitation, the rape case also became the justification given by several colleges, universities, and families to reinforce stricter gender discriminatory deadlines and curfews and cancellation of provision of late nights for female students to ensure their 'safety' (Sreeram 2015). Freedom thus remained elusive, with safety and care becoming a means to further curb women's autonomy, especially at night, at the hands of the society and state. However, night spaces not only include possibilities of crime and risks, but also provide opportunities for rebellion, fun, romance, non-normative behaviours, and 'counter-hegemonic practices' (Williams 2008). Discourses of safety, morality, sexual debauchery, crime, alcohol, and evils of darkness, once employed by the state and society, work to control the night space, and shrink spaces for leisure, debate, and dialogue. Respectable women are then expected to stay indoors after dark, unless they are returning from a purposeful endeavour such as work (Phadke et al 2011). Respectability is constructed as a desirable virtue in women, much like the construction of a 'happy housewife', who seeks happiness, and in this case respectability, as her telos, even at the expense of acts which will actually bring about happiness (Ahmed 2010). A dominant social norm thus gets packaged as a social good, erasing the curtailment of freedoms that comes along with it (ibid).

Nirbhaya agitation also brought forth the *aazadi* discourse, which competed for space with the honour/dignity and safety discourse (Roy 2014). *Aazadi*/freedom was demanded spatially and temporally: *"Bus mein chahiye aazadi, Dafter mein bhi aazadi, Sadkon mein chahiye aazadi, Gharon mein bhi aazadi, Din mein lenge aazadi, aur Raat ko lenge aazadi, hum kya chahte? Azaadi. Chheen ke lenge - Aazadi"* (freedom in the buses, and in the workplace, freedom in the street, and in the home, freedom by day, freedom by night. What do we want? Freedom. We will claim freedom). In this call for '*bekhauf aazadi*' (fearless freedom), the protestors demanded freedom in city spaces they navigate everyday - roads, buses, offices, and parks. A new articulation of right to the city and its public spaces started emerging premised on freedom of mobility and freedom from violence of institutional structures, a line of argument which became central to the '*Pinjra Tod*' movement two years later. 2012 was also a moment which enabled and inspired creative claiming and reclaiming of public spaces. The pain, anger, and solidarity of the agitation made a dent in our collective memory and was subsequently harnessed by activists, students, artists, and performers alike.

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[26] Nayantara Ranganatha. "A Handy Guide to Decide How Safe That Safety App Will Really Keep You." *Internet Democracy*. February 2017. https://genderingsurveillance.internetdemocracy.in/safety-app/ (accessed March 4, 2020)

For example, the 'Take Back the Night' (henceforth, TBTN) marches gained significant momentum in a few Indian cities, especially Delhi and Kolkata during and after this agitation especially in the context of victim-shaming by some politicians and parliamentarians. For example, the then Andhra Pradesh Congress chief stated that women should not venture out after dark just because India achieved freedom at midnight[27]. Similarly, a Member of Legislative Assembly from Samajwadi party declared that women should not venture out at night with men who are not relatives. It is important to point out here that it is such narratives which work to establish and re-enforce a certain police order which determines when and where women can and should go[28]. In the following chapters, we will find similar narratives through amongst women and men in Delhi and Agra, as well as through safety policies which repeatedly put the onus of safety on women and seek to regulate their movements and freedom. Going back to 2012-2013, the TBTN marches in Delhi, also dubbed as '*Din Humara, raat humari*' (day is ours, night is ours) campaign, were organized by Citizen's Collective against Sexual Assault (a Delhi-based group of feminist organizations and activists). These TBTN marches were fashioned after the global TBTN marches. These marches sought to challenge 'conditional freedoms' that are granted to women and instead claimed equal access to public places, without fear, at all times (Mridul Kamal, PI, October 2015). Women who participated in TBTN marches shared how 'having fun' and 'singing songs on the street of Delhi' at night with a group of women made them feel 'free' and 'liberated' (ibid). Fundamentally, TBTN was about claiming leisure in public spaces and at night, even in the face of risk of harassment by men and clampdown by the police, and feeling 'free' while doing so. Between 2012 and 2014, the group conducted seven TBTN marches in different parts of Delhi such as Saket, Munirka, Tara Apartments, Delhi University campus area, Alaknanda, Green Park and Hauz Khas village. Thereafter, it lost its momentum. Nonetheless, it was instrumental in expanding the space and discourse of Nirbhaya agitation by taking the protest out of the spatial boundaries of Jantar Mantar and temporal boundaries of the day. It marked an important moment in the trajectory of Indian women's movement by claiming fun at night on the streets of Delhi. It did not seek police permissions and used tools of songs, laughter and levity during its marches. Tactics like these became the starting point of my doctoral project and prompted me to explore when

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[27] See: Staff Reporter. "Rape Victim should have been careful: Andhra Pradesh Congress Chief." *Times of India.* December 25, 2012.

[28] As recently as January 2021, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister suggested that women who are living outside the homes of their parents for work should register themselves with the local police so that they can be tracked to ensure their 'safety'. See: *The Wire.* "Women's Safety: MP CM calls for raising marriage age to 21, tracking of women by police." January 13, 2021. https://thewire.in/women/shivraj-singh-chouhan-womens-safety-tracking-marriage-age (accessed 27 January 2021).

and where can women find opportunities for fun and leisure in a city in the face of constant threat, denial of public spaces, and security-based narratives of safety.

Phadke et al (2011) in their seminal work, 'Why Loiter' argue that women need to take risks and demand right to loiter, have fun, and seek pleasure in the city, instead of safety, in order to truly claim citizenship. The book gives an excellent view of the challenges and policing faced by different categories of women when they try to have fun in urban public spaces of Mumbai. These challenges range from moral sanctions and societal norms about being 'good' and respectable, to fears drawing from their past experiences and infrastructural constraints which determine their varied strategies to have fun. In her subsequent writing, Phadke has argued that frivolous fun is essential to feminism and claims to citizenship (Phadke 2020). In the chapters that follow, I will engage with the varied lived experiences of women in cities with respect to leisure spaces and dive into the relationship between capability to leisure, claims to citizenship, and narratives of respectability and safety which together work to police women's access to the city.

Another significant gain of the 2012-13 anti-rape protests were the theatre performances it gave birth to, notable among them being Maya Rao's 'Walk' and Mallika Taneja's '*Thoda Dhyan se'* (Be Careful). The next section will contextualise and describe these performances, both of which were key influences on the 'Women Walk at Midnight' collective. The following discussion will also help us in understanding the relationship between protest and performance, which is an important piece in understanding the politics and impact of a collective like Women Walk at Midnight.

Performance and Protest

> "Walk, walk, walk. I want to, can I? will I? should I walk? A step at a time. Can I? will I?
> Not 1, not 4, not 9, not 10, not 11. At 12 midnight, I want to walk.
> I want to walk the streets of Delhi. At 2, at 3, at quarter to 4, at 5 in the morning.
> I want to walk. *Chalna hai.* I want to sit on the bus. Walk on the streets. Lie in a park.
> I try not to be afraid of the dark. There is so much to think. I need the entire night to think.
> I need to think. Will you walk with me? Maybe just stop, maybe just sing.
> I will hold my own lamp if you like.
> On 22,000 streets that the Police Commissioner says today are not lit. I will hold my own light."

-      Maya Krishna Rao. Excerpts from 'Walk' performed at Jaipur Literature Festival in 2013[29]

Maya Rao, who has been associated with theatre for four decades now and combines her activism with interventionist theatre devised her performance piece titled 'Walk' in response to 16-December rape case. Performed for the first time on December 31, 2012 in Delhi, she has since adapted

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[29] Maya Krishna Rao. "Walk". *Jaipur Literature Festival.* January 2013.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msUvCWKcCVQ (accessed December 19, 2019)

and performed it at various venues including schools, college campuses, streets, theatre festivals etc. In the process she has improvised the monologue, responding to the immediate political context each time. For example, when she performed in JNU in 2016 after some university students were targeted for alleged anti-national activities, she improvised the performance to respond to attack on teachers and the role of the student union leader in the protests (Parameswaran 2016). Similarly, when she performed her piece 'Loose Women' at the India Art Fair in January 2020, she included parts of the 'Walk' while talking about women who were protesting at Shaheen Bagh and resilience in the time of oppression (Field notes, January 2020).

Walking is central to Maya Rao's performance. She uses walking as a metaphor, as a performance, and as a satirical tool to underline the absurdity of not being able to do simple things as a woman such as walking on a street, sitting on the bus, and lying down in a park without feeling afraid. Note here how mundane activities like walking and sitting make its way to being central in a performance piece. By asking the audience – 'Can I, should I' – if she can walk, Maya Rao articulates her apprehension and places the burden of her pleasure on others. For Maya Rao, night is not only a transit space that should be accessible without fear, but it is also a temporal space to think, pause, reflect, and talk. She underlines the dilemmas and apprehensions women have regarding darkness and uses gestures and voice modulation to infuse her piece with emotions related to night spaces, and fears and joys of walking. Simultaneously, she takes on the state and police by telling them that she will hold her own light, literally and metaphorically, to fulfil her 'want' to walk (Ghosh and Singh 2017). In the process, she focuses on desire and pleasure instead of solely focusing on safe and productive use of the night. This is especially important since after all, Jyoti Singh was returning from a mall at night, after watching a movie with a male friend. Women's right to work has long been established and defended. Laws and policies that facilitate this have come about after decades of feminist struggles. As a result, demands for safe access to night for women who are part of the workforce has gained a certain degree of legitimacy. **Women's right to have fun, to leisure, and to occupy public spaces for pleasure, especially when untied from the consumer economy, however still remains underarticulated.** Maya Rao's performance then contributes to an articulation of women's right to leisure, to ruminate, pause, and to walk in city spaces.

Here, it is worthwhile to turn our attention to the lineage of relationship between Indian women's movement and feminist theatre. According to Ghosh and Singh (2017), theatre artists in India have often lent themselves to the women's movement while experimenting with boundaries of performance and performativity. Street theatre emerged as a 'political genre of postcolonial theatre' in 1960s and 1970s and gained popularity in 1980s (Dutt 2015, 375). During these decades, when the

Indian women's movement was at its height, theatre artists like Maya Rao, Anuradha Kapur, and Rati Bartholomew, grassroot feminist organizations like Stree Sangharsh, and autonomous left-leaning theatre companies like Jana Natya Manch created performances and street plays that addressed social and structural inequalities, violence against women, dowry, female infanticide etc (Dutt 2015; Arora 2019). This form of feminist street theatre was able to engage with larger political debates in India through its engagement with women's issues. However, by 1990s, as connections between feminist and left activism diminished, feminist cultural activists retreated to conventional theatre spaces (Dutt 2015). According to Bishnupriya Dutt (2015), Maya Rao's 'Walk', performed at mass gatherings and protests reopens the political and subversive possibility of performance and theatre. Drawing from interviews with Maya Rao, Dutt writes how during the Nirbhaya agitation, performers (like Rao) shared experiences with protestors, as protestors, and later translated that into performances, transgressing lines of civil and political society (ibid)[30]. This brings us to the question of how do we understand 'performance' as a category of political engagement, protest, resistance, and transgression? Performance studies scholars like Diana Taylor make a critical distinction between 'performance' which *is* rehearsed, eventized and theatrical, and performance *as* a methodological and analytical lens to analyse 'events' as performance epistemologically (2002, 45). This is an important distinction especially as we move away in this chapter from eventized, but transgressive performances like Maya Rao's 'Walk' to mundane, repetitive activities like midnight walks which can be read as a performance-protest.

Mallika Taneja[31], a theatre artist who started 'Women Walk at Midnight' traces the idea of midnight walking to Maya Rao's performance of the 'Walk' and the collective memory and experience of the Nirbhaya agitation. After the Nirbhaya agitation, Mallika also created her now-famous piece – *Thoda Dhyan Se* (be a little careful), a one-woman feminist act which addresses victim-blaming by playing on the various advises meted out to women in order to stay safe. Performed for the first time in December 2013, Mallika says it was a response to Jyoti Singh's rape, to Shakti Mills gang rape case[32] and to the countless times she was harassed on the streets and in the buses of Delhi, like many

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[30] Here, Dutt draws from Partha Chatterjee's work, 'Lineages of Political Society' to argue that in a situation such as Nirbhaya agitation, when the limits of active citizenry are extended, 'onlookers' join to make claims on the state, thereby bridging the gap between civil and political society (Dutt 2015, 375). In arguing this, Dutt critiques Chatterjee for ignoring the agentive role of progressive theatre and performance culture.

[31] The author has no relationship with the theatre artist and the similarity in last name is purely co-incidental. To avoid confusion, Mallika Taneja's first name is used throughout the thesis.

[32] A 22-year-old photojournalist was gang-raped in August 2013 in the Shakti Mills compound in South Mumbai.

other women[33]. The play starts with Mallika standing stark naked[34] for seven to eight minutes in front of her audience, looking into their eyes silently, and then frantically dressing up with layers and layers of clothes while delivering a breathless monologue on safety in Delhi because *'zamana kharab hai'* (Mallika translates this as 'the *times are bad'*):

> "You have to be a little careful. You know right, times are bad. When you know times are bad, be a little careful. That's all…And it's not that difficult you know. We just have to follow some rules. Like I come back home at 6 o'clock every day, without fail…And I do not take a shortcut after dark. Why take a chance?…See every place has a, it is in the air, an atmosphere. **Mahaul**. You have to understand that and move according to that.
>
> …The one thing I never ever forget is my responsibility. You know response-ability? The ability to respond. The thing about responsibility is that it exists. Someone has to take responsibility of responsibility… At the end of the day when you are waiting for a bus to go home *(long pause)* and something does happen to you, at least then you can say, it was not my fault."
>
> Excerpts from 'Thodha dhyan se', Mallika, Vimeo video (privately shared), 2018 recording

In this play, Mallika touches upon temporal boundaries that are placed on women and the spatial strategies that we are told to adopt such as avoiding shortcuts in order to stay 'safe' because the *'mahaul'* is such. Translating and describing this *'mahaul'* however proves to be a challenge – its 'something in the air', akin to atmosphere but not quite. Women must take this *'mahaul'* into account, and as Mallika comically puts it her play, must move according to the *mahaul* of a place. What is this *'mahaul'* and why is it so difficult to capture is a question I will keep coming back to as we will encounter this term in the following chapters in different field sites. Mallika also problematises the idea of 'responsibility' by simply and ironically repeating the advises meted out to women to ensure their own safety. In the process, she underlines the absurdity of placing the responsibility of tackling harassment on women and the mindless pursuit of safety, even at the expense of freedom and desire. There is a tone of sarcasm, wit, and a hint of lament throughout the performance. A female naked body is often hypersexualised. However, Mallika takes this hypersexualisation or the power to sexualise and objectify away from the audience by simply staring at them naked for several minutes, and nobody moves or sniggers. (For a discussion of naked protesting bodies, see Souweine 2005; Borah 2010; Misri 2011) When I asked Mallika in our personal interview if she sees bearing herself naked on stage as a risk, she exclaimed, 'of course, it is a risk and it continues to be a risk. Legally, socially… Someone can make a complaint, or click a picture and circulate it. And it is a political risk. Look at the *mahaul* right now. But personally, I do not see it as a risk in terms of my body or my relationships. Dramatically, I do not see it as a risk' (Personal Interview, October 2019). Here, by *mahaul,* she was

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[33] Dipanita Nath. "In her Skin: Mallika Taneja on feminism and her play Thoda Dhyan se." *Indian Express*. November 1, 2015.

[34] Initially, Mallika performed this play in her undergarments. In 2015 however she decided to shed those as well.

alluding to the political climate within which we were having this discussion, with rising intolerance against dissent. Between 2013 and 2019, Mallika performed this play more than 300 times across the world with both ticketed and non-ticketed shows. This is because she sees this as a form of practice and a rehearsal in itself, which must repeat even in the face of changing political context. Later, while discussing the need for recurrent midnight walking, Mallika drew parallels between repeated performance of this play and walking at night to explain how recurrent and sustained activity, though not always pleasurable, is crucial. For her, 'abhyas' or practice, manifested in the form of repetition of a performance or an activity, is an indispensable political act. In this vein, can we conceptualize recurrent midnight walking by women as a 'performance'? Is searching for and 'performing' leisure in the city itself a protest for women in face of its constant denial? In either case, what is the role of repetition in politics of performance, protest, and resistances? These are some of the questions I hope to address through the course of this chapter.

Mobilizations and demonstrations by women living in cities like 'SlutWalks', 'Take Back the Night', 'Meet to Sleep', 'Why Loiter', and now Women Walk at Midnight have been criticized by media, scholars, and some feminists for being exclusionary and limited in their reach, intention, and impact, and for being frivolous and ephemeral. Scholars like Swati Arora have sharply criticized Mallika's work for being limited to the concerns of 'urban, middle class and upper caste women' to the detriment of realities of 'non-urban, lower-class, lower-caste women' (Arora 2019, 3). While it is important to acknowledge the class privilege of the theatre artist here, my interviews with young women from a range of caste and class backgrounds in low-income settlements in Delhi and Agra about their access to the city suggest that the notions and norms underlined in the play are not entirely divorced from the realities of women from different socio-economic backgrounds, even if access to the play itself is. As we will see in the following chapters, women from different socio-economic-geographical backgrounds recounted similar advises that they have received, norms that have been imposed on them, tactics that they adopt like covering their bodies, avoiding some places, hiding some information from their parents, and constructing respectability when accessing urban spaces. Further, it is important to remind the reader that class or caste privilege does not translate smoothly into gender equality. Nonetheless, criticisms like these do the important work of indicating tensions within the women's movement itself. At the same time, as I argued in my M.Phil. dissertation, mobilizations like these which focus on accessing public spaces by using tropes of humour, levity, performance, and pleasure to challenge the dominant police order, even though ephemeral, should be read as significant moments in contemporary Indian women's movement. It is within this frame that Mallika's performance should be placed.

Before I move onto the next section, I also want to introduce the reader to the political context and the *mahaul* of late 2019-early 2020, to further contextualize politics of WWAM and to give a fuller view of Mallika's engagement with sustained activity and performance-protests. In 2020, in the face of the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 (henceforth, CAA), Mallika directed a street play called '*Zanana ka Zamana*' and performed it with a new troupe, the Zenana Ensemble, at various protests and sit-in sites across Delhi. Prima facie, CAA, passed by the two parliament houses in December 2019, offers citizenship to persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, except Muslims[35]. On its own, the Act has been criticized for ignoring the fact that some Muslim communities also face persecution and discrimination in these countries and for not including other countries such as Myanmar and Sri Lanka in the list. However, what has been criticized more sharply is the linking of CAA with a proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) which demands documentation regarding one's ancestors and long-term residence proof. Many worry that this might mean that many Muslims in particular, and marginalized and paper-less poor in general will be forced to prove their ancestry and citizenship in India, and will be left state-less if unsuccessful (Sengupta 2020)[36]. By linking citizenship with religious identity, the Act is also seen as an attack at the very tenets of basic structure of the constitution which is built on ideas of secularism (Parthasarthy 2020)[37]. More than 100 petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the Act on the basis of violation of Article 14 of the constitution and the Basic Structure Doctrine[38]. Due to these contentious provisions, students of Jamia Milia Islamia University in Delhi started gathering peacefully to protest the Act soon after the bill received Presidential assent on December 12, 2019. However, within a day, the police *lathi*-charged the protesting students alleging violence by the protestors. Police entered the university spaces including the library, used force on unarmed students without permission, and detained some students. As news of this crackdown spread, students from across the city gathered at the police headquarters to demand release of the detained students. By next morning, a video of a 22-year-old student, Ayesha Renaa, went viral where she was standing up to the

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[35] Source: The Gazette of India. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, No. 47 of 2019. 12th December 2019. Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India. Link: http://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2019/214646.pdf (last accessed January 30, 2021)

[36] Shudhhabrata Sengupta. "The Garden of Freedom." *The Caravan.* February 2, 2020. https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/lessons-that-shaheen-bagh-teaches-us-about-citizenship (accessed February 4, 2020)

[37] D. Parthasarthy. "Citizenship (Amendment) Act: The Pitfalls of Homogenising Identities in resistance narratives." *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 55, Issue No. 25, 20 Jun, 2020.

[38] Legal Correspondent. "Petitions pour into SC against the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act." *The Hindu.* December 13, 2019.
Also see: Murali Krishnan. "In Supreme Court today, 144 petitions on Citizenship Amendment Act." *The Hindustan Times.* August 29, 2020.

police to protect a male class-mate[39]. In the process, Ayesha Renna became iconic in representing the will of the 'female student' against the arbitrary might of the state. Soon after, the protests transformed into a widespread movement against CAA and NRC. Delhi witnessed multiple demonstrations and marches coordinated by citizen groups, students, unions, artists and so on. Simultaneously, mass sit-ins against CAA-NRC gathered steam which first started in Shaheen Bagh a day after students were attacked in Jamia Milia Islamia University. Shaheen Bagh is a neighbourhood very close to Jamia University, and a number of young boys and girls from this neighbourhood study at Jamia University. Inspired by Shaheen Bagh, different neighbourhoods came together in a similar manner -- Khejuri, Turkman Gate, and Hauz Rani in Delhi, Park Circus in Kolkata, Sabz Bagh in Patna and so on. What is remarkable is that the sit-ins were primarily constituted by women of the community. From late December 2019 to early March 2020, women sat on 24x7 vigils on highways, main roads, community parks and markets. They talked, gave speeches, listened to leaders who came on stage, sang songs, knitted mufflers, shared food, fasted, broke their fasts together, took turns to sit at the protest site, prayed, laughed, resisted, and sloganeered together (Field Notes, January 2020). This makes one **re-think the boundaries of protest, every-day life, and, resistance** when writing about politics of right to the city, citizenship and gender. Students and student collectives from different universities supported, coordinated, and mobilized the communities. [Should I remove the following lines, in view of the crackdown against such collectives?: Of significant note here is the mobilization facilitated by *Pinjra Tod* (translated as break the cages), an autonomous women's collective which emerged in 2015 to protest gender-discriminatory hostel deadlines in universities and colleges across Delhi, building on the Nirbhaya agitation and small-scale campaigns such as Pads Against Sexism in particular, and the women's movement in general (Taneja 2016)[40]. Other collectives such as Artist United also came forward to support the protests. Irrespective of the crucial role that these collectives played in the protest, independent women from these neighbourhoods were the ones who were at the forefront of the movement[41]. Mallika's musical performance piece, *Zanana ka Zamana,* was primarily inspired by these women coming together. The performance extolls that it is the age of the feminine, of femininity and of women being at the forefront.

> "*Chidiya udi, baatein judin. Muh khol ke bol, zor se bol – Ye Duniya hamari hai. ye sheher hamara hai. ye desh hamara hai. Tum chup karwaoge? Hum chuppi ko todenge. Hum dekhenge-dekhenge.*"

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[39] Ullekh NP. "I will do it again if I have to: the poster girl of Jamia protests." December 17, 2019. https://openthemagazine.com/features/politics-features/i-will-i-poster-girl-jamia-protests/ (accessed March 9, 2020)
[40] The collective comprises of students and alumni of universities in Delhi, some of whom have strong ties with left-leaning organizations and collectives.
[41] I will come back to Shaheen Bagh in detail in Chapter 2, given the centrality of women in general and the female student in particular in these protests.

(The bird flew. Conversations came together. Open your mouth and say. Say loudly – this world is ours, this city is ours, this country is ours. You will shut us up? We will break the silence. We shall see."

<div align="right">Field Notes, Zenana ka Zamana Performance at Shaheen Bagh, Delhi, January 2020</div>

This small snippet from the performance indicates not only a celebration of the feminine space and women leaders, but also an ownership of the city and the nation. It also invoked the popular Urdu *nazm*, *Hum Dekhenge,* by Faiz Ahmed Faiz which was written as a medium of protest against Zia-ul-Haq's regime in Pakistan, and has since been adapted by several protests across South Asia. Mallika started the Zenana ensemble because she wanted to contribute to the anti-CAA protests in a more meaningful way. '*Zenana-khana'* technically translates to a harem, or a place for women. By extension, zenana means 'for/of women' or a women's space. Mallika however problematized this translation: 'One is also trying to subvert the *zenana* by opening it to queerness. Anything that is feminine, female leaning, and perhaps feminist, is zenana' (PI, January 2020). For Mallika then, *zenana* is not just a women's space, but it is a space which is feminine and feminist. Reflecting on this piece a couple of months later, Mallika explained:

> "…*zenana* technically means a woman's space. It is a physical space, its everything to do with women, it is also something that is looked down upon. But now there were sit-ins [against CAA], all across the city, with the *zenana* on the street. Women are sleeping and waking up there. There is deep solidarity and camaraderie in women falling asleep together…And I thought it was important to capture this moment…The performance stitches women's lives through songs. The play is a bunch of images in which *women sleep, women resist, women sit, sing, run. I was interested in juxtaposing the mundane with the protest,* and people really resonated with it." (Podcast, Points of Entry by Katie Kheriji-Watts, March 2020, emphasis added)[42]

Here, once again we see the centring of mundane activities in a protest, and a celebration of that – 'women sleep, resist, sit, and sing' at the protest site, and in the process bring the otherwise enclosed space of zenana to the street. One can argue that this itself becomes a way to claim the city.

Another central figure in these protests has been the 'female student' (Sengupta 2020). Shuddhabrata Sengupta (2020) draws a continuity in centrality of the female student from Nirbhaya agitation in 2012, the protests in various universities since 2014 against fee hikes and hostel curfews, to the anti-CAA protests. This continuity is apparent not just in terms of the female student but also in politics of performance as well as women's movement in the last one decade. While Mallika does not explicitly link each of her performances with each other, there is a clear continuity that one can trace in her feminist politics as well – of endurance, repetition, performing body, and invoking the mundane to engage the onlookers. She views repetitive performance as an important tool of resistance. At the time of writing this chapter, Mallika had also started articulating very strong connections between the

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[42] Link: https://open.spotify.com/episode/1IKoAZMowwxcQLNmn51HTl?si=iLyepL-zRxOh8rl8azZUfA Last accessed January 30, 2021

2012 moment and the 2020 anti-CAA moment both of which have put women at the centre of agitational politics. The reason I have delved into these details is because it is not possible to understand women's relationship with leisure in a city and midnight walking without understanding our relationship with its various spaces, politics of safety and pleasure, and debates on citizenship and exclusion. Mallika's trajectory with theatre and her politics give us an opening to enter these debates.

Three years after she first performed '*Thodha dhyan Se'*, Mallika started walking at midnight. From 2016 to 2020 (which also coincides with the duration of this thesis) Mallika, along with several other women, walked in various neighbourhoods of Delhi at midnight –Shahdara, Moti Bagh, Dwarka, Vasant Kunj, Laxmi Nagar, Hauz Khas, and Pitampura – to name a few. As of March 2020, before the lockdown to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic was announced, women were also walking in other cities at midnight under the name 'Women Walk at Midnight' including Bangalore, Lucknow, Rishikesh, and Guwahati. I want to draw the reader's attention here to the shift that happens as we move from performances during or about a protest or a movement like Maya Rao's 'Walk' and Mallika Taneja's '*Thodha dhyan se*' and '*Zenana ka zamana'* which use the 'every day' and mundane in a theatrical way (or what Diana Taylor terms 'performance *is'*), and performance *as* protest like Women Walk at Midnight and Why Loiter which is about 'doing' or '**performing' the every-day as a protest.** Note here that the form of 'protest' also shifts – from a mass-based movement to a series of anti-disciplinary, everyday acts to claim what is otherwise denied – frivolous fun and fearless spatial and temporal access to the city. The following sections will analyse Women Walk at Midnight as a case study, exploring its organizational tactics, aims, and politics. In the process, I will also attempt to draw out the shifts between performance, protest, and every-day resistance.

2. What is 'Women Walk at Midnight'?

Simply put, WWAM is about each woman's relationship with the city, with night, and with walking. It is interesting to look at WWAM unfold in these turbulent times when the Indian state is pushing towards a Hindutva agenda with renewed forms of violence on protesting bodies [should I remove this line?]. By walking repeatedly, without permissions, and without an agenda, the initiative hopes to shift how women 'feel' about, and 'experience' safety and pleasure in the city, and at night. Interviews alone would not have sufficed to unpack the politics and impact of WWAM. Instead, walking, and walking repeatedly with the group, in the face of risks, emerged as an indispensable methodological tool to study this collective. Drawing from principles of ethnography, I actively participated in this initiative as it unfolded, constantly negotiating my own position within and outside it. I studied the 'walk' by walking with these women for a year and attending all the team meetings.

Walking as a methodological tool also allowed me to explore temporal and spatial practices of different women, and affects produced by the walk at personal and collective level. I closely followed the WWAM group from January 2019 to March 2020, conducted participant observation of 8 midnight walks, and analysed their registration database from February to November 2019 (after which they changed the registration format). In writing up, I have consciously adopted a stylistic strategy to bring forth the personal and collective affective experience of the walks.

How it all started?

As mentioned above, WWAM is a Delhi-based women's only collective which conducts strolls in different neighbourhoods of Delhi at night, inviting anyone who identifies as a woman to walk with them. As of March 2020, the collective had conducted more than 20 walks. The number of participants per walk varied from 4 to 40. It was the 2012 mobilization and Maya Rao's performance of the 'Walk' that sowed the seed for Women Walk at Midnight. Tracing back the genesis of the walk, Mallika shared:

> "In 2012, we all had walked a lot – in protest, in mourning, in solidarity. I remember this particular walk on the evening of 31st December 2012 from JNU to Munirka. At Munirka, we all gathered and Maya Rao performed 'Walk' for the very first time. The refrain of this performance piece was the word 'walk'. At one point, she said, 'in the day, at midnight or at 3 in the morning, I will walk'. This stayed with me. I understood the politics as well as the performance of walking from that show and from the collective experience we had in Delhi after 16th December." (PI, October 2019)

A few years after the Nirbhaya agitation, Mallika wanted to do a 24-hour walk. The starting point of her walk, as she puts it, was not safety, but endurance. However, in the course of 24 hours also came the night, and 'in a city like Delhi, she could not think of walking alone because of practical safety concerns' (PI, October 2019). As a result, she gave out a call on social media, which brought some women and men together and they walked from 10 pm to 4 am on 13 February 2016. Mallika recounts:

> "We wandered around SDA, braved Hauz Khas Village on the eve of Valentine's Day, met travellers, walked towards JNU and then, with the help of a friend, slipped into JNU from the gate on Aruna Asaf Ali Road. JNU was still…past midnight, there was no place safer than JNU. We had walked through deserted roads, all over the campus feeling totally at ease. Strolling. Tiring. Resting. Walking. What a contrast from Hauz Khas Village and all that chest thumping valentine's day partying that no woman ever would feel safe being around." (WWAM Volunteer Meeting, March 2019)

This is how midnight walking began for Mallika – from walking as a performance to walking as a way to endure the city and the risks it came with. Soon enough, Mallika decided that this has to be an all-women's space because 'walking with a mixed group of men and women at night was still not as threatening or risky as walking with only a few women' (PI, October 2019). Sometime in 2018,

two women joined Mallika to coordinate the walks with her, and by 2019 the initiative acquired the form of a loose collective called 'We Walk Team'. In 2019, the collective conducted more than 10 walks, with more than 200 women participating cumulatively. As of March 2020, the collective is coordinated by a motley group of women from Delhi, Bhubaneshwar, Bhopal, and Kolkata. All these women are currently working and living in Delhi.

Every month, the collective circulates a message in their network asking for a volunteer to lead a walk in their own neighbourhood. Walk leaders are typically women who have joined a midnight walk by the collective earlier. The walk is then announced on WWAM's social media channels (Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp) and through mailing lists. The posts on Instagram and Facebook are in English and Hindi. Participants are requested to fill up a short google form with their contact details[43]. In the meanwhile, the walk leader finalises the route of the walk, in tandem with the collective. Two days before the walk, a WhatsApp group is made with the registered participants to share meeting point and details of the route, and to coordinate cabs and car pools for returning back after the walk due to non-availability of public transport after midnight. The cost of the cab is shared between everyone taking the cab and usually comes to less than Rs. 100 per person. The meeting point is often a metro station. Participants are encouraged to get their friends along. Throughout, the participation is limited to 'womxn' – a term that has emerged in recent years to include both cis-gender, queer, and transgender women.

As is apparent, social media and digital platforms play an important role in organizing these walks. Social media has gained increased visibility in the last few years and is a constitutive part of urban experience today. It is being mobilized by social movements, campaigns and protests and is often celebrated for serving as a medium to open up and coordinate possibilities of resistance (Lim 2014)[44]. However, it is important to not give an over-determining role to social media because media is itself mediated by 'individual subjectivity, collective activity and technical capability' (Hansen and Mitchell 2010, xv). It is open to legal and political manipulation and varies as per individual use (ibid). The digital space is also a space rife with tensions, contradictions, online abuse, and trolling. Another flip side of depending on social media is that the reach remains limited to those with smart phones. Even though smart phone penetration in India has increased significantly (McKinsey Global Institute

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[43] This section is based on field and participant observation notes collected over a period of one year – Jan 2019 to Jan 2020. Since then, the modus operandi of the collective has shifted in response to the pandemic, change in WhatsApp privacy policies, and the political context.

[44] The problem with this line of analysis is that it assumes that digital space is a participatory, open and equal space. There is an urgent need to locate consensus and dissensus within the space of social media, while locating its role in activism.

2019), the circulation of news about walks by WWAM probably remains limited to extended networks of the collective, walk leaders, and some walk participants. In the context of acknowledging such exclusions that reliance on social media entails, the collective repeatedly discussed offline outreach strategies such as putting up flyers with details of upcoming walks on bulletin boards of housing societies, Resident Welfare Associations, and local markets. However, offline outreach meant labour and financial costs, and proved difficult for the collective to execute due to time constraints. For most part of 2019, the collective tried to expand its reach through a concerted presence on social media with posts in Hindi and English. In the process, the coverage of the walk by print, television, and electronic media increased. The collective welcomed queries from the press but insisted that the journalists should walk themselves with WWAM, instead of merely conducting interviews, and write from their own experiences. This also meant that only female journalists and camerapersons were allowed to cover the walk. Platforms such as Scroll.in, Youth *ki Awaaz*[45], National Geographic[46], Hindustan Times[47], Feminism in India[48] and Swaraj TV which featured WWAM, presented the collective along with other gender-based initiatives such as 'Why Loiter', 'Blank Noise' and 'Nirbhaya agitation' or within the context of concerns around women's safety in cities. In doing so, the mainstream media narrative has been doing the important task of identifying continuities between these collectives and campaigns and bringing them into conversation with the policy discourse on women's safety.

WWAM strives to remain non-branded, non-ticketed, non-commercial and independent. The group does not take any police permissions for these walks, irrespective of the number of registrations. Walk participants are also informed about this and are advised to be non-confrontational if police approach them. Emphasis is also laid on the fact that this walk is *not* a protest march, and there will be no sloganeering, fist pumping, or display of placards. Instead, it is framed as a mundane walk, a *sair,* a stroll for leisure. Participants are encouraged to get a song or a poem along and have fun. This mundane, everyday-ness of the activity, is very important for the women organizing the walk:

> **"**We are also to a large extent a guerrilla activity where we just do it. That is the most important thing for me. You get up and just do it, don't seek permission, don't announce your route. Every time it is a different place. Different route. Different set of women. But we will do it." (Mallika, Team Meeting, April 2019)

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[45] Youth ki Awaaz. "Women walk the streets of Delhi in memory of Nirbhaya". Youth ki Awaaz Youtube channel. December 16, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDhQ45nNZDM (accessed November 6, 2019)

[46] Nilanjana Bhowmick. "How women in India demanded and are getting safer streets." National Geographic. October 15, 2019. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2019/10/how-women-in-india-demanded-and-are-getting-safer-streets-feature/ (accessed November 6, 2019)

[47] Kainat Sarfaraz. "Unlit roads a major women's safety concern in Delhi." Hindustan Times. March 11, 2019.

[48] Shivangi Gupta. "Women walk at midnight: Reclaiming spaces and 'odd' hours". Feminism in India. October 11, 2019. https://feminisminindia.com/2019/10/11/women-walk-at-midnight-reclaiming-spaces-odd-hours/ (accessed November 6, 2019)

By not seeking permissions and remaining largely a 'guerrilla activity', the walk, in a way, takes away some of the power of the police. Mallika reiterated this point during a personal interview few months later when I asked her if WWAM will seek permissions if a lot of women sign up for the walk. 'Why should I take permissions to walk, for a *sair* from Point A to Point B in my city? Just because we are women? Which man will even think of seeking permissions for a *sair*?', she exclaimed. For her, this is merely a '*sair,* a stroll, and not a protest march,' and does not warrantee permissions, funding, or a banner (PI, October 2019). One can also see a sense of ownership of the city emerging in her articulation. WWAM has thus consciously adopted a tactic of underlining the banality and desired abandon that constitute the act of walking or strolling. Additionally, this approach also constructs walking as a leisure activity. In doing so, it lends itself to performative subversion precisely because leisurely walking at midnight by women is neither banal nor common. Different strategies have been adopted to respond to police whenever they have approached the group asking what are so many women doing outside late at night. This response has varied from casually stating that 'we are taking a stroll', to saying that 'we are out because we can', or because 'the weather is nice', and in some instances stating that 'we are walking back home'. Not taking police permissions and not actively confronting the state by holding banners and creating a spectacle also helps WWAM in staying 'under the radar' and sustaining the initiative (Mallika, PI, October 2019). The group conducted a 12-hour walk on Independence Day in 2019, which was barely a few days after Article 370 was revoked and Kashmir was put under a lockdown. For this walk as well, the team did not seek permissions, even though security was heightened across the capital.

Who walks and who does not?

In the period from February 2019 to October 2019, WWAM received 237 registrations in Delhi spread over 12 walks[49]. Out of these, 30 women registered for more than one walk. The average age of registered women was 27.6 years (only 144 registration entries had answered the age question). The youngest registered participant was 17 years old and oldest was 55 years old. In terms of spatial distribution, maximum registrations were from South Delhi and South-West Delhi from areas such as Saket, Dwarka, Vasant Kunj, Malviya Nagar, Lajpat Nagar etc. There was a decent size of registrations also from South East Delhi (especially Jangpura), North-West Delhi (Pitampura, Rohini, Ashok Vihar), and East Delhi (Shahdara, Vinod Nagar, Laxmi Nagar etc). This was mapped based on the addresses shared by participants in the registration forms. The addresses were then spatially located

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[49] This pertains to the nine-month period when WWAM used google forms to maintain a record of participants, and later discontinued the practice.

district-wise and then analysed (See Figure 1). The registration database also reflects the spatial distribution of the walks itself (See Table 1).
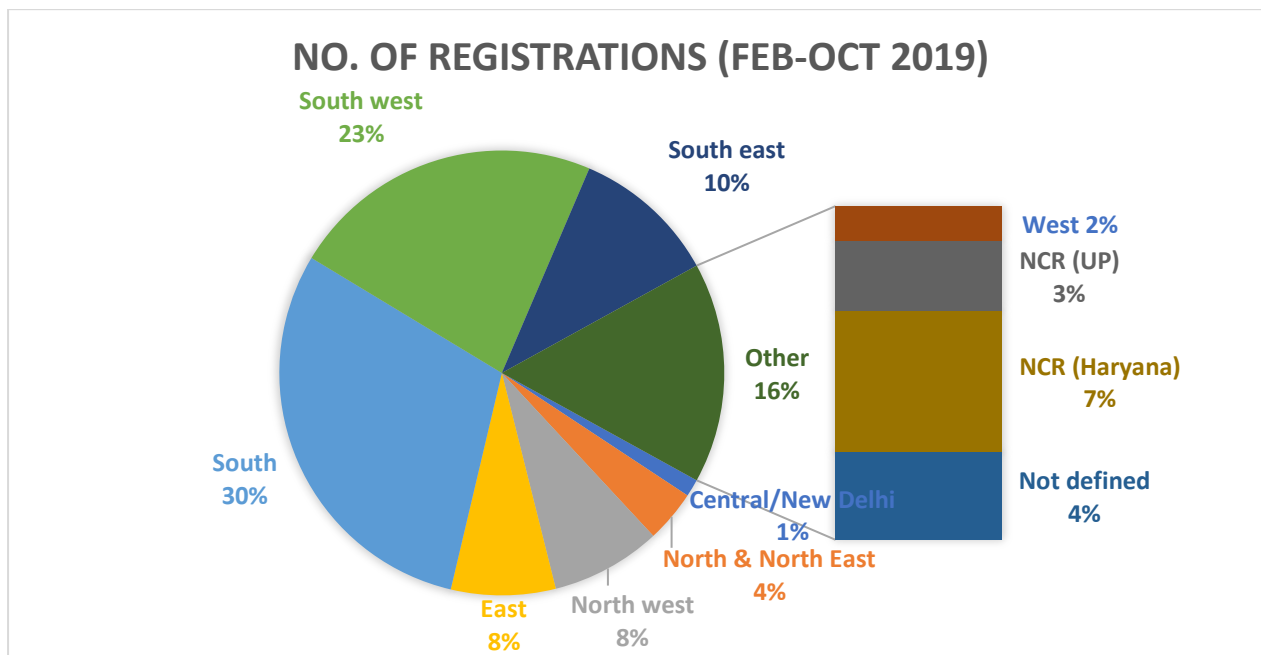

Figure 1: No. of registrations that WWAM received between Feb to Oct 2019

District	No. of registrations	No. of WWAM walks in the area
Central/New Delhi	3	1
North & North East	9	0
North west	19	1
East	18	2
South	71	3
South west	54	4
South east	25	1
West	4	0
NCR (UP)	8	0
NCR (Haryana)	16	0
Not defined	10	0
Total	237	12

Table 1: Geographical distribution of no. of registrations WWAM received and no. of walks conducted (Feb-Oct 2019)

WWAM thus receives registrations from women across different parts of Delhi, even as the majority of registrations continue to be from South and South-West Delhi. This is perhaps partly a result of WWAM's and Mallika's own social and geographical location. In her paper on Women Walk at Midnight, Swati Arora (2019) based on her observation of one midnight walk in Delhi in December 2018, writes how the participants that night had 'material advantages' such as living in South Delhi (which she characterizes as an affluent part of Delhi with 'high cultural and financial capital') and possessed the resources to hire a cab which facilitated their participation in the walk. This in turn, she argues, limits the 'radicality of the initiative' (Arora 2019, 174). Arora characterises WWAM is a

classist initiative which overlooks the important question of who can afford leisure. While South Delhi is not as homogenous as Arora paints it to be[50], what is important to point out here that affluence and class does not imply safety and unhindered access to the city. According to Delhi Safety Assessment conducted by Safetipin for Delhi government in 2019, the safety scores of South Delhi are equivalent to, and on some parameters lower than North and East Delhi (See Table 2. Data Source: Delhi Safety Assessment Report, Safetipin, 2019). While this audit report should be critically analysed in terms of its methodology and parameters, this still indicates that South Delhi is not much 'safer' than other areas when measured on parameters such as light, walk path, visibility, openness, transport, feeling, and gender use (Safetipin 2019).

Area	Safety Score	Light	Walk Path	Visibility
North Delhi	2.4/5	1.8/3	1.4/3	0.8/3
East Delhi	3/5	2.1/3	1.4/3	1.1/3
South Delhi	2.5/5	1.9/3	1.5/3	0.8/3

Table 2: Safety scores in different parts of Delhi, Delhi Safety Assessment Report, Safetipin, 2019

What my analysis of 10+ midnight walks also revealed is that the number of registrations was not the same as number of participants – the actual number of women who showed up for the walks was usually half or two-third of those who registered. WWAM repeatedly emphasizes in all its communication that it is important to show up once you register to ensure there are enough women present for the midnight walk for safety concerns and to support each other. 'Safety' and 'freedom' is searched for in the comfort of numbers, and in establishing a community or collective of women who show up for each other, and in the process have fun on the streets of Delhi at night. Instead of safety, what is sought is endearment, solidarity, and fun. Walking with a few women as opposed to walking alone at night seems like a less risky proposition. Yet, participants dropped out at the last minute. The reasons for dropping out varied from feeling unsafe and scared, lack of public transport at night, lack of company to commute at night to work or family commitments. One person backed out of a walk after WWAM in its pre-walk communication suggested that 'everyone should carry whatever makes them feel safe – a song, a stick, pepper spray or a magic wand' (Field Notes, November 2019). The idea of carrying a pepper spray made this woman feel uncomfortable as it indicated that the onus of navigating the risk of being out at night is being placed on the participants. Another participant faced a hostile taxi driver when returning from a midnight walk, where the driver aggressively questioned her about the walk and about her 'character', morally judging and shaming her in the process. After

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[50] There are considerable number of Jhuggi-Jhopri clusters and unauthorized colonies all across Delhi with diverse socio-economic profile. See for example maps drawn by Gautam Bhan when tracing production of housing and planned illegalities in Delhi between 1947 and 2010 (Bhan 2016, 44-95).

that she decided to not participate in midnight walks unless she has company to return home. The fear of walking and travelling at night and concerns of safety, which themselves are result of the sticky association between night, fear, crime, and social and moral norms creates the boundaries regarding who walks and who does not.

Thus, one cannot deny that there are exclusions within WWAM based on class, access, and physical ability to walk which together makes it possible for the participants to join the midnight walk. It is also important to ask who can afford night as a temporal leisure space and who cannot. What is notable however that in spite of some of these privileges, women have found it difficult to walk at night. In fact, for a lot of women, participating in even one midnight walk has been an important feat because of the negotiations they had to go through with their family and inhibitions they had to shed themselves. As mentioned above, often times women who registered for the walk were not able to eventually join because of their work schedules, care responsibilities, personal inhibitions, or because it worries their parents or spouses. One participant for example shared how her parents do not understand the 'need' for her to walk at midnight, view it as a 'waste of time', and urge her to instead volunteer with NGOs which address 'serious feminist issues' (Discussion, Vasant Kunj Midnight Walk, June 2019). This also indicates the fault-lines within the feminist movement which continues to be suspicious of the idea of claiming fun for being a class privilege, exclusionary and individualistic in a neoliberal age. The collective in itself is conscious and reflective about these exclusions. Almost after each walk, there is a collective reflection on the irony of our dependence on private cab aggregators for getting us home and the privilege that makes it possible. However, instead of dismissing Women Walk at Midnight as a classist and exclusionary initiative, perhaps it should be analysed within the framework of affect, performance, and protest. Read as a repetitive performance-protest, (and not a protest march, or a one-time 'performance-event'), I argue WWAM is playing an important role in redefining women's relationship with night and with cities. Before I expand on this line of argument further, I will share notes from a few midnight walks.

3. Walking with Women at Midnight

Shahdara and Pitampura | March – May 2019

> "The city feels so empty at night. It seems everyone has gone someplace else, leaving the city alone. Let's make this city laugh today. Let's keep it awake all night. Let's jump over police barricades. In the dark, let's get entangled and fall in our own webs. No matter what you do, the city will still look empty at night. Why? Because no one let goes of their loneliness so easily."
>
> Ravish Kumar, *Ishq mei Sheher Hona* (A city happens in love), 2015, translation by author[51]

On a particularly pleasant Saturday evening in March 2019, these are the lines which one of the participants of WWAM read out, as we stood outside the Shahdara Metro station at 10 pm, waiting for everyone to arrive for the midnight walk[52]. The metro station was well-lit and we felt fairly comfortable standing there (See Picture 1.1, Appendix B). The We Walk group encourages participants to bring any kind of poetry, song, artwork, or written piece that they would like to share with the group to these walks. On some occasions, participants brought along stencils and spray paint to leave guerrilla art work on the streets of Delhi. Other times, participants brought along their guitar and flute to sing about the night, or shared a short story or poem, underpinning the leisurely quality of these walks and of night as a temporal leisure space.

Shahdara midnight walk was the first walk of this kind that I participated in. While 21 women had registered for the walk, 10 of us showed up, including the walk organizer, Mallika, and the walk leader for the night, Ratika (name changed). 9 of out 10 participants were in the age group of 25 to 35 years and one of the participants was the walk leader's mother, probably in her 50s. All the participants appeared to be English-speaking and urban residents. Before starting the walk, the walk leader gave us a vivid description of how it is for her to live in this area, lamenting the dearth of public spaces to meet up her friends. The only place where she meets up her friends in Shahdara, she shared, is the metro station itself since there are no other places, 'not even a small café' (sic). In this, like many young men and women in Delhi, she inscribed a function to metro station other than what the planners intended it to be for – a place to meet up friends, and even 'hang out' in their leisure time. Theorists of infrastructure argue that infrastructures are at once things and *relations* between things, on which

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[51] In his short collection of poems, journalist and news anchor Ravish Kumar writes about his intimate tryst with living and loving in a city like Delhi (Kumar, *Ishq mei Sheher Hona*, 2015). It seems he has developed a relationship with places as they are people, etching them with his memories and metaphors. See: Ravish Kumar. "Book Excerpt: These micro-stories by Ravish Kumar are a tribute to both love and the nooks of a modern Indian city". *The Scroll*. Sept 21, 2018. https://scroll.in/article/894806/these-micro-stories-by-ravish-kumar-are-a-tribute-to-both-love-and-the-nooks-of-a-modern-indian-city (last accessed on February 1, 2020)

[52] Note here that the poem by Ravish is not an official endorsement by the Women Walk at Midnight Group.

other objects operate, displaced in focus in the process (Larkin 2013). According to Brian Larkin, it is important to understand infrastructure as a *system* in order to understand its politics. By bypassing the functional role of metro station as a transit zone, Ratika inscribes the metallic, concrete, open, and well-lit infrastructure with new meanings, which dominates over its technical function. According to Ratika, Shahdara can be divided into two parts. One part has a bustling market and a railway station. However, in this area fewer women are visible. The other side, as she described, is a residential area, with houses very close to each other but is dimly lit. Nonetheless, in that area, she added, 'you might see a few women sleeping outside because there is not enough space to sleep inside the house' (Shahdara Midnight Walk, March 2019). Ratika lamented that 'by 9.30, everything starts getting shut. So, coming back here has always been an issue for me' (ibid). As we stood waiting, one of the participants mentioned 'Safetipin app', a mobile phone application which is designed to crowdsource experiences of safety in different public spaces based on parameters such as light, openness, walk-path, transport, people, visibility, feeling and gender. We downloaded the app to check the safety score of Shahdara which we discovered to be 3 out of 5.

As we began the walk after a round of introductions, we wrapped our shawls around ourselves. Winters were over but there was still a light chill in the air. Two street dogs followed us for a while and then left. The road was mostly deserted, and we saw very few people on the street. It was marked by potholes and a narrow concrete footpath which disappeared at places due to parked cycle rickshaws, open garbage dumps or empty food carts, giving one an impression of high traffic on this road during the day. Right outside the metro station, we started encountering spots of darkness. It was quiet and we walked on the road instead of the footpath, huddled close together (See Picture 1). Ratika told us this is a market area during the day, and we noticed shops with their shutters now.

Picture 1: Midnight walk, Shahdara, Delhi. March 2019. Photo by author

Soon after, we turned a corner and entered a residential colony. A few of us felt a bit more relaxed here even though the street was even more deserted, because of absence of passing vehicles or any other activity. We checked the safety score of this lane on Safetipin – it was 1.6 out of 5. This did not match up with our experience. The walk leader then explained that during the day, the by-lanes indeed feel more unsafe than the main road because it

Picture 2: Midnight walk, Shahdara, Delhi. March 2019. Photo by author

is mostly men who occupy them throughout the day. Shahdara is an amalgamation of different communities, religions, and castes. As one of the walk participants later wrote, 'as we walked the streets, we experienced a change in the structure and size of houses with the change in surnames…The location of the garbage dump, the park and the police station narrated a story' (Sasmita Patnaik, Blogpost, 2019)[53]. We indeed crossed a few different localities that night – Jain colony, Bihari colony, and Jharkhandi colony, with variation in the structure of the houses in each residential cluster. The houses in Jain colony for example had ornamental gates and nameplates outside the houses, while most of the houses in Jharkhandi colony appeared small, with two or three stories built in a haphazard manner. The lights installed on the door of some houses and shops illuminated the lanes, with some dark patches every few steps, and a criss-cross of wires hanging above our heads (See Picture 3 and 4). There was hardly any street light in these lanes.

Around 11.30 pm, we moved out the colonies and entered the main road. On the service lane, there were several big shops and street lights illuminating the entire stretch (See picture 5). We stopped to click some pictures. Our bodies were relaxed here – we were smiling, giggling, taking pictures. I looked above to see the moon shining through a tree. Soon, we resumed walking, with some fatigue taking over our bodies. We entered another colony as it was a short-cut to the 'Welcom' metro station – our end-point. As we turned another corner, we saw a group of 8 young men, perhaps teenagers, on bikes. They did not make any move towards us, but they stared. All of us were suddenly very alert. We quickened our pace. Some of us wondered what if those men decide to follow us – are there enough of us to retaliate? Is there anyone in sight to help us? But nothing happened. A few minutes later, we turned another corner and stopped for ice cream at a very well-lit, open intersection with large old trees growing out of the boundary wall of a park (Picture 6). In fact, one of the few categories of people we consistently, repeatedly came across on our midnight walks were the ice cream vendors. Here, some of us sat down on the raised footpath with our ice cream, to rest our tired feet, talk about our lives, and exchange stories of the night.

Finally, we started walking again towards Welcom metro station. After a few hundred metres, we made a turn and reached another main road, with an empty ground on our left and the metro rail running on right. There was a narrow but paved and functional footpath here (Picture 1.2, Appendix B). A few cars passed us by on the road every few minutes. As we walked on the narrow footpath, we squeezed ourselves together every time we heard a vehicle come in from behind. The openness of this

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[53] Sasmita Patnaik. "Beyond the physical idea of space: Walking the lanes of Shahdara at Midnight." *Medium.* April 10, 2019. https://medium.com/@wewalkatmidnight/beyond-the-physical-idea-of-space-walking-the-lanes-of-shahdara-at-midnight-122f26d5de5c (accessed May 4, 2019).

road made us feel slightly vulnerable. On our way, we also crossed an underpass which was engulfed in darkness (Picture 1.3, Appendix B), which pushed us to hasten our steps. We reached Welcom metro station at 2 am. The metro station was shut but still brightly lit, which put us somewhat at ease.
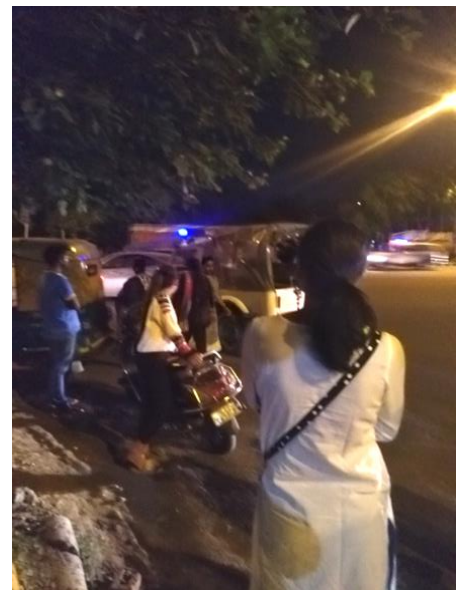

Picture 3

Picture 4

Picture 5

Picture 6

Picture Grid: Midnight walk, Shahdara. March 2019. Photos by author

Before dispersing, we formed a circle to reflect on the walk. One participant who had come from Gurgaon and was walking at midnight and in Shahdara for the first time remarked how walking enabled her to 'take in her surroundings better'. Other people remarked that while they were alert, they did not feel scared and walked with ease for most part because they felt comforted by the presence of the group. The walk leader however confessed that she was taking mental notes of registration plates of cars and bikes that crossed us. To explain this difference in 'feeling' of fear, another woman pointed out that sometimes not knowing the place, and banking on someone else's knowledge of the area can make you comfortable and feel safer. This indicates the role that familiarity, and personal and collective memories of a space can play in our perceptions of safety. As we waited for our Ubers and Olas (private cab aggregators) and coordinated routes with each other, making sure no one was taking a cab back alone, we pointed out the irony of relying on private cab aggregators after a midnight walk. As one of the walk participants eloquently put it: "It was a sordid realisation...As we stood outside the Metro Station, someone from the group asked, how many of us could afford spending on cabs to spend time with our families at India Gate? Then, is the right to visit India Gate at night, enjoy an ice-cream on a warm summer night, only reserved for those who could afford to pay for the journey leading up to the ice-cream?" (Patnaik 2019).

Memory of the Shahdara walk stayed with us, even as the pictures were hazy and walk itself, ephemeral. Reflecting on the walk later, in a team meeting with six other women, Mallika remarked that while there were only 2-3 people from Shahdara, for Ratika who was the walk coordinator and lives in Shahdara, the walk 'meant a sense of autonomy, it meant that she could do this, she could walk at night. If we had not travelled to another part of the town for this, she would not have been able to this…And she said that though women from the neighbourhood did not participate this time, the walk triggered a lot of conversation and maybe next time more women would come' (WWAM Team Meeting, April 2019). However, at the same time, Mallika added that this does not discount the importance of making these walks neighbourhood-driven because local participation changes the 'ethos of the walk' (ibid), recollecting how during the midnight walks in Dwarka and Moti Bagh in 2018, local women outnumbered the women joining from other areas. This translated into a game of *antakshari* and other forms of camaraderie as the WWAM group entered an already existing 'community'. Familiarity with their neighbourhood and the community allowed the women in Dwarka to occupy the entire road and walk with abandon. However, as Mallika pointed out, working at the neighbourhood level and reaching new people is a difficult task, requiring us to mobilize beyond social media[54].

Another walk, another night

In late May 2019, 12 women gathered again, this time in Pitampura (North-West Delhi). Fewer women had registered for the walk, perhaps because of the warm weather, with day temperatures hitting more than 40 degrees Celsius. Throughout 2019, the registrations and interest in WWAM waxed and waned, depending on the political climate of the city and the weather. That night, we gathered at a small eatery next to the metro station and had a round of introductions. One of the participants was from a Hindi-language, online news organization and wanted to write about the walk. She joined us on her scooter, with her mother, and wanted to do a short interview. WWAM team told

Picture 7: Midnight walk, Pitampura, Delhi, May 2019. Picture by author

her that she can walk with us for a while and talk to the participants on the way. She was hesitant, unsure of what the walk was about, and kept asking us what is our 'objective'. We started walking on

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[54] The team went back and forth on mobilization strategies throughout the year – whether to limit the outreach to social media, or to physically reach out to communities, RWAs, neighbourhoods with flyers. While the intent to do the latter was expressed several times, it was not followed up because voluntary nature of the group, and lack of time and resources.

the main road just outside the metro station. The road was wide and fairly well-lit with street-lights at regular intervals, and a narrow but functional footpath. A few autos slowed down next to us, asking if we needed a ride. We politely declined. 15 minutes into the walk, we got a call from another participant who had just reached the metro station – she was running late. We decided to wait for her at an intersection on the main road. Another auto slowed down near us and waited to be hailed for a ride. As we stood there, I saw a police patrol van cross us. It then stopped, turned around, and came back towards us. Stopping right in front of us, the police personnel asked us, 'what are you doing at this hour, out on the road?' 'We are taking a walk' *(sair kar rahe hain)*, a woman replied. He laughed, and asked, 'how can you stroll while standing in one place (*khade khade bhi sair hoti hai?')*. We also laughed and told him we were just waiting for another friend. He was perplexed, but left. 10-12 odd women, standing in groups of twos and threes, at a major road junction at 11.30 pm, was perhaps an unusual sight for him. During this interaction, we noticed that a man had also stopped to see what this was about. (See picture 7. It is a hazy picture but one can make out the police van in the background, a participant with her scooter, a man standing by and looking on, and a few other participants). At that time, I was reminded of interviews with Delhi police officers that I had conducted earlier, where I had asked them why do cops enquire after women (and not men) if they are out at night. One inspector had explained that this is because the police 'cares' about women and their safety as women are more vulnerable:

> "See girls are believed to be physically weaker than boys. All this [sexual harassment] does not happen with boys but with girls…Even in the household, girls are protected, that is the *mahaul* we have…So because of this protectiveness, we do not want women to be out of their house at night, or to be too far away from their house…Police *wala* cares because we have the culture to protect women." (Inspector Kumar, Delhi Police, PI, September 2015).

The other participant soon reached and we started walking again. The news journalist who was on her scooter decided to leave at this point and told us that she will join the next walk. Someone played Hindi music and songs about the night on their phone and we sang along – *ye raat bheegi bheegi, raat akeli hai,* and others. This was my third such midnight walk and I felt relaxed, perhaps because of the wide roads, paved footpaths, and ample street-light (Picture 8). We reached a junction with a lot of police barricading, but the police did not enquire after us this time. After a while, we stopped to take pictures. Some of us took some rest at a bus stop. It was past midnight now and we had been walking for an hour. The participants who were from Pitampura talked about their relationship
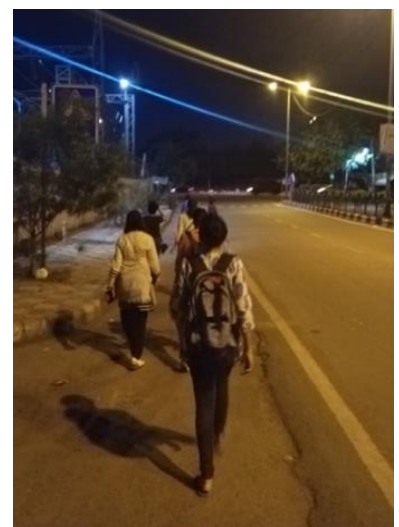
Picture 8: Midnight walk, Pitampura, Delhi. May 2019. Picture by author

with the neighbourhood, how the society gates shut after 10 pm, and they have to take longer routes to reach home on foot. The route we were walking on that night was mostly through main roads lined by posh, gated localities with ample street lights and wide roads. It was an easy walk, we talked, exchanged work stories, laughed, and walked quietly. But the road was deserted, and other than us, we did not see anyone else (See Picture 12). 'I still would not walk this stretch alone at this hour', someone remarked. This reminded us about the strength of our numbers, however small, and the feelings of solidarity and endearment that circulated amongst us. We did not meet any other women or men that night, other than a police personnel and an ice cream vendor (Picture 1.4, Appendix B). We also saw a Guernica painted on a garbage *dhallan*

(Picture 1.5, Appendix B), a stark contrast to the open garbage *dhallan* we had encountered in Shahdara. We ended the walk at NSP metro station at 1.30 am. At the end, instead of discussing the walk, we climbed over the foot-over-bridge, and witnessed the trucks and cars passing by below us (Picture 1.6, Appendix B). We did not feel threatened. Everyone's body seemed to be at ease which was an unusual sight for women in a public space at 1.30 am in Delhi. There was a general sense of camaraderie, relief, and happiness.

Conversations with women during these walks revealed that most women who joined these midnight walks did so in search of an opportunity to explore the city at night, meet new people, and take a walk in their own as well as new neighbourhoods – something that they did not do outside this collective. When talking about her reasons for volunteering with WWAM, Nisha (name changed), a 34-year-old woman, shared that when she moved to Delhi from Kolkata after her divorce in 2018, everyone told her 'to be careful', and 'stay indoors' after 7 or 8 pm because 'Delhi is unsafe'. Having stayed in Kolkata all her life, she had heard about Delhi's reputation as a 'rape-capital' which was further accentuated after the Nirbhaya agitation. Yet, she decided to challenge these assumptions:

> "In spite of these advises and warnings, I went out with my friends at night in Delhi…I would return late at night all alone. But my friends and family kept saying that 'this is not good, I am the only person taking these risks, don't I know how Delhi is' etc… And honestly when I used to return [at night], I did not see a lot of women on roads at night. I noticed that even when there is a girl, there would be a guy accompanying her. I never saw just girls going out." (WWAM Volunteer, PI, September 2019)

Thus, Nisha started pushing her temporal boundaries and navigating the city on her own terms, even as she did witness the near-absence of women on the streets of Delhi at night. Because of this experience, when she found out about WWAM, she joined the collective and started walking with them, not 'as a protest', but 'to have fun' and 'encounter the city' irrespective of the warnings and dominant norms around the night:

"So when I found out about WWAM, I thought I will encounter some like-minded women who also want to go out and encounter the city at night irrespective [of what I was told]… I wanted to see people who want to go out at night without any intention. This is not a protest, it is not a march, it is not a rally. It is completely for fun and to be out...So WWAM aligns with my interest." (PI, September 2019)

Even though she categorically stated that she does not view WWAM as a protest or a march, her actions embodied resistance to dominant norms and to advices meted out to her, and a non-normative form of protest. Shahdara was the first walk that Nisha attended. Recounting her experience of the walk, she shared that she had fun that night: 'It was a very nice experience, it was nice to meet other women…Shahdara is an area I had never been to before. There weren't too many people there. It felt very good to be out', she shared. At the time of the interview, she had walked with WWAM five-six times. I asked her if she still enjoys it. 'Yes, I definitely do', she exclaimed. She further shared:

"I take it as a fitness exercise... But it is also about my space and time…There is nothing specific as to what motivates me to keep doing this. I see a lot of men go out at night, I see boys strolling around, or guys on bike, but I do not see women like that. So, it makes me feel good to walk with a group of women, without an apparent motive. A male friend of mine asked me if this is protest. I told him it is just a simple walk for fun. There is no hidden agenda. We are not holding any banners. You are in whatever state you are, whatever you feel like wearing, you wear it, you go, it's just going out with your friends. Simply. That is something I really like about this walk." (PI, September 2019).

For Nisha, the walks have become a chance to flex her muscles, take some space and time for her own self, walk, and talk. Simultaneously, it is a deeply political act for her when she says that while the walks do not have a hidden agenda, the unequal access to public spaces at night does drive her to keep participating in midnight walks. In doing so, she is not only changing her own experience of the night, but also contributing to a visual of women accessing the night without an 'apparent motive'. Interestingly, during this interview we were walking on a footpath, heading to another midnight walk together. There were bikes parked in the middle of the footpath and a garbage dump. We got off and on the footpath several times, making our own way, and our own pedestrian map, much how de Certeau would have envisaged. The road was not well-lit and was in fact a bit deserted since it was 10 pm. Ironically, we were very alert while talking about the fun and ease we have on midnight walks when done with the group that comes together through WWAM.

Hauz Khas and Malviya Nagar | August – September 2019

After Pitampura, WWAM walked in Vasant Kunj, Jangpura, Dwarka, and Malviya Nagar between June to September 2019. Each of these walks were led by a woman who lived in each of these areas. Participation in these neighbourhood walks varied from 5 to 30 women, with local women often outnumbering those who joined from other areas. With each subsequent walk, I relaxed a little more,

I started going for the walks not just because they are a part of my research but because they gave me a chance to be outdoors without running into a dozen vehicles, a chance to talk to and meet new women, and to closely understand the city's geography, lanes, and by-lanes.

On 14th August 2019 (eve of India's 73rd Independence Day, which coincided with the Hindu festival of *Rakshabandhan*), WWAM did its first all-women's all-night walk. Since it was independence-day eve, security was heightened across the city, which manifested itself in the form of more police presence on the streets and lesser vehicular traffic. Added to this was the fact that this walk was happening barely eight days after Article 370 was scrapped, which effectively ceased the special status and autonomy granted to Jammu and Kashmir. This walk was conducted from Vasant Kunj to India Gate, via Hauz Khas, Lajpat Nagar, Lodhi Road and Rajeev Chowk, covering a distance of 14 kilometres over 10 hours, from 8 pm to 6 am. The walk had six meeting points, and participants were free to join and leave at any

Picture 9: Midnight walk, IIT Metro Station, Delhi. August 2019. Picture by author

of the meeting points. 75 women registered for the walk, and through the course of the night, around 40 women joined. The biggest gathering was at IIT metro station at 10 pm by which time a total of 25 women had joined (Picture 9). At IIT metro station, which is located on the Outer Ring Road – a busy arterial road for Delhi – there were around five police personnel. The organizers had decided beforehand that if the police stops or interrogates us, we are going to stay non-confrontational, and simply state that we are walking. As we stood there, sharing home-made snacks and talking, two police personnel approached us to ask what are we doing. One of the organizers told him we are just talking and would leave soon. The metro station was well-lit. One of the participants then sang a song she had composed about the city, and some of us hummed along. A few men stopped as they emerged out of the metro station, curious to see 25 women busking at a metro station. After a few minutes, we started walking again. The police personnel again approached us to enquire why are we all walking in the same direction, and if this is a protest march. One of the participants said we all are walking to our homes. He was surprised, but did not pursue the matter. Before leaving, he remarked: '*zyada idhar udhar matt jana* (do not go here and there)'. It was perhaps a strong visual yet again: 20-25 women, seemingly middle class, walking together at 10 pm without any banner or a visible agenda. And yet, our anti-disciplinary movement was a cause of worry for that policeman. That night, we saw Indian flags being sold on red-lights, we talked about the poor state of footpaths which makes the city pedestrian-unfriendly, we stopped to drink water from public water taps, walked again, and stuck

stickers on street poles which simply said 'We Were Here', marking our presence on the street. It had rained during the day and there were puddles of water on the ground and on the footpath. The wind was pleasant and we carried glucose, coffee, and biscuits to keep our energies up through the night. We walked at a slow but rhythmic pace, stopping often to make sure no one was left behind.

As the walk progressed, our numbers dwindled. The route was largely though the main roads, with street lights at every few metres, metro stations to serve as markers, petrol pumps which were well lit and functional, and patches of deserted, quiet roads. I left the walk around 3 am just before we reached Lajpat Nagar. At that hour, around 8 women were still walking. Through pictures and messages on the WhatsApp group, I found out that the participants drew with chalks on the wide streets of Lodhi colony (Picture 10), it rained and they took shelter at a bus stop and ended the walk around 6 am at India Gate. This walk was about endurance – physical endurance of walking for 10 hours, but also of enduring the city as it comes.

Picture 10: Midnight walk, Lodhi Road, Delhi. August 2019. Picture by author

Next month, in September 2019, I led a midnight walk around Malviya Nagar, a neighbourhood in South Delhi where I had been living since five years. While the cumulative participants on the Independence Day walk reached up to 40, for Malviya Nagar, only five women showed up. This had happened on a few WWAM walks before also, and in each case the decision to continue or cancel the walk had been taken by those present depending on their own perceptions of safety and desire. In this case, we decided to walk nonetheless since 4 out 5 participants were from Malviya Nagar and were somewhat familiar with the area. Yet, none of us had ventured out on foot at midnight in this area because of our own fears and presumptions. That day was our chance to take this risk. One of the walk participants, a 29-year-old marketing professional, shared how on her way to this midnight walk, she was cat-called by the young men who live in her neighbourhood in Malviya Nagar. Another participant, Sneha (name changed), a 23-year-old development sector professional from Bangalore shared that even though she had been living in Delhi since a year and a half, she does not venture out after 10 pm. This is because she does not like putting herself in situations where she feels unsafe (sic). 'If I am reaching home after 10 pm, then I stay on call with my parents or someone else on the way. I have someone track me. I think this is what we have learnt in middle-class families – that don't do it, avoid it', Sneha explained, giving us a glimpse into the social norms and lists of do-s and don'ts that work to uphold the boundaries placed on women. After a round of introductions at the rather deserted

Malviya Nagar metro station (Picture 1.7, Appendix B), which during the day is extremely crowded with at least 10 auto-rickshaws lined up at all times, we started walking.

Throughout the walk in Malviya Nagar, we talked about things the participants liked and disliked in this neighbourhood, their relationship with neighbourhood parks which they frequented, the shops they preferred etc. When Sneha first moved to Malviya Nagar, she found it noisy and crowded but with time, she built close bonds with her neighbours, and with vendors in the neighbourhood, which now makes her feel at ease in and around her colony. When I asked her if she feels Bangalore is safer than Delhi, she explained that 'as a woman, she feels unsafe' wherever she is – 'it is a state of mind' (ibid). In Delhi, she feels more 'autonomous' (as opposed to more 'safe') because she pays her own bills, is 'responsible' for herself, and makes her own decisions regarding what risks to take or not. This is an important difference she marks out – between autonomy and safety.

That night, when we reached the Malviya Nagar main market around 12 midnight, we were happily surprised to find it well lit, and bustling with people, who were eating street food or hanging out with their families, children, and friends (See picture 1.8, Appendix B). One of the participants confessed she has never ventured to the main market this late at night, even when she needed something, because she was afraid 'what hypermasculine threat might be at display'. After sauntering at the open market for a while, we walked towards our final stop, where we all got ice cream and reflected on the walk. It was 2 am. 'This is my eighth midnight walk, and so far, this is the smallest group I have walked with, but I was not scared. It was an energetic group and I had fun', remarked a 36-year-old participant. Another participant, Nabiha Tasnim, a 23-year-old woman from Guwahati chipped in saying that she is likewise glad that we went ahead with the small number because the 'idea is to reclaim the streets even if we are alone, laughing, walking.' (Malviya Nagar Midnight walk, September 2019). Another participant, Zabaish, a 26-year-old theatre school teacher who grew up in Noida pointed out:

> "It was a really enriching experience because I had not thought something like this happens…I never imagined this sort of safety I would feel with women. More than that, I never realized how unsafe I feel otherwise…If I am walking alone at night, I am usually talking to someone on the phone or doing something that keeps me engaged so that I do not have eye contact with any man. We mould our schedules accordingly. Now I can draw a comparison. Tonight, we were discussing insane things, singing on the road, and did not care about men passing us. It was really an eye-opening experience." (Malviya Nagar Midnight Walk, September 2019)

The walk therefore became a means for Zabaish to acknowledge and compare the way her body feels when walking alone at night v/s how it felt when walking with a group of women. She also underlined the strategies she usually adopts – like avoiding eye-contact with men, appearing busy on her phone, walking on the edge of the road etc – when navigating the city alone at night. Other participants also

shared that they felt 'comfortable' throughout the walk, it was 'easy' and 'fun'. (Malviya Nagar Midnight walk notes, September 2019). The collective perhaps facilitated the affective experience of the city to change. On other occasions too, women shared how 'walking at night on streets of Delhi and claiming the streets was a lot of fun' (Vasant Kunj Midnight Walk notes, June 2019) and how the midnight walk was a good way to 'meet new people and interact with other women' (Ghazipur Walk notes, October 2019). Repeatedly, women expressed surprise at how safe and free they felt walking in the company of other women at night, eating ice-cream at unknown intersections, and singing songs on deserted roads of Delhi. For Sasmita, who was the walk organizer of the Vasant Kunj walk, this became a way to negotiate with her fears of the night and reclaim her own neighbourhood. Some women shared how they were apprehensive at the beginning of the walk and about the 'time' of the walk, but were glad that they joined in spite of their inhibitions, 'had fun', and 'demystified the night' (Vasant Kunj Midnight Walk notes, June 2019). Slowly, but surely, women's relationship with night started changing.

Before closing this section, I also want to address some of the tensions within Women Walk at Midnight. The first is the tension, or more precisely, lack of meaningful dialogue between the women who walk at midnight, and the people it encounters – ice-cream vendors, police personnel, security guards, cab drivers, auto drivers, sex workers and transwomen during these walks at night. Often times, men – on their bikes or on foot have stared at us on these walks, or passed a lewd comment. Auto-rickshaw and cab drivers, almost-always male, have slowed down to ask if we need to be dropped anywhere. As discussed above, male police officers have stopped us more than once to ask why are we walking or where are we going. As a WWAM volunteer puts it, 'questions of what are we doing out at this hour are always lingering in the air when we pass anyone on the street' (Meghna, Personal email correspondence, July 2019). However, most of the times the collective's response has been that on non-engagement. This is a point of frustration for a few participants who believe that confrontation can also lead to a conversation. Yet, the dominant strategy adopted by WWAM when questioned by police and cab or auto drivers has so far been that of non-confrontation as exemplified in statements like: 'we are just walking home', 'we are just strolling', 'we are just having fun'. Some argue that in doing so, WWAM misses opportunities of opening up a conversation about women's access to night and to leisure, and bringing the 'disagreement' between those questioning and those walking on the table. However, once we see WWAM as a *performance* aimed at shifting the circulating affects of fear and un-safety, one can perhaps resolve this frustration. WWAM seeks to change the every-day experience of participating bodies and normalize the idea of women walking at night for fun. Understood this way, one can instead argue that the mere presence of women at midnight on public

streets leaves a lingering question in all those who witnesses them and shifts the affectual and visual map of the city.

A more important reconciliation that WWAM is yet to make is how to interact and engage with sex workers and transwomen that the group often encounters on its walks. This tension is something that WWAM is very cognizant of. For example, after a walk in Dwarka in 2019, Mallika shared:

> "In this walk, we went past that petrol pump where last time the local women had remarked that 'illegal activities' happen there. By that, they meant sex work…This time, we came face to face with the sex workers who were trans-women. They were standing in complete darkness... When we were walking, it was only in that area where we felt threatened because *men* were circling that area…And the gaze was extremely different than what we encountered in other parts…It is one question that I do not know how to reconcile with is that the only other women we find on the streets during midnight walks are trans women, who are indulging in sex work…What is the trans women position in all this? We must open the dialogue... And what happens to the one or two trans women or people who identify as women who walk with us? What sort of responsibility for their safety can we take when the gaze of the night on that body is as violent as it is?... My question is coming from something that repeatedly occurs on the streets. As do we." (WWAM Meeting, May 2019, emphasis original)

Here, coming face to face with trans women and sex workers immediately brought forth the differing subject positions of the women who are walking at midnight as a protest/performance, and trans-women who are out at night for work. While WWAM is reflective of this tension, it is something that the collective is yet to reconcile.

Another challenge that WWAM faces is in terms of practical concerns of safety and lack of public transport at night. Structurally, the city is not welcoming to women who want to walk at night. As a corollary, as discussed in the second section of this chapter, the way WWAM is structured, it automatically limits the collective to able-bodied urban women who can afford private taxis and can negotiate the boundaries placed on them by their families or hostels. A third criticism of WWAM is that which comes from feminists and women who do not believe in the kind of ephemeral politics that WWAM stands for, and instead believe in action-oriented, placard-holding activism, and bringing out change in more tangible terms like improving access to education for women, tightening laws on sexual violence and so on. Eeshta, a 25-year-old volunteer at WWAM who has walked with the collective a few times for example shared how her mother is against this kind of action and therefore stops her from participating:

> "For my mother, the problem is that we walk at night. According to her, we should walk during the day when more people can see us and understand our cause. For her this is irrational as a movement because who walks at midnight, people sleep at night… My father thinks this is pointless activism and is not going to create any change, and that we are merely sensationalizing the topic. But I think his biggest problem is that he is scared for his daughter and does not know how to stop her… I *am* scared to walk at night. It is unsafe, it is inconvenient. But once I started walking, so much changed. The ability to feel safe around strangers was a wonderful feeling, and it felt like we were united for something bigger than us." (WWAM volunteer, PI, October 2019)

Thus, questions about what is the impact of WWAM, and its comparison with traditional, change-oriented activism is something that the walk volunteers often find themselves fielding. Here, we also get a glimpse of how the normative order is sustained by families by using tropes of care and worry. I also got a chance to speak with Eeshta's mother who said she does not want her to walk at night not because she is scared for her (as she is with a group) but because she strongly believes that WWAM is 'sense-less' and 'stupid', and that 'night is a time to sleep, and to rest, not to walk and move around on the road'. According to her, roads can be claimed at other times as well and that there are 'other ways to make a statement' (sic, PI, January 2020).

What stood out in these conversations is the question that what is the impact of a walk which no one witnesses, and the corresponding suggestion that why not organize such walks during the day, with bigger numbers, to bring attention to the issue. However, such a criticism misses the point of the walk which is about changing the everyday (or rather every-night) experience of the city for those participating and changing the sensorial and perceptive feeling of the city at night. Nonetheless, this criticism brings me to another tension that has emerged within WWAM at times regarding the 'goal' or 'objective' of the collective. Some of the younger participants and volunteers (in the age group of 20-25 years) have articulated that they want more and more women to join these walks and increase its reach, while others (usually those aged above 30 years) have insisted that what they value more is neighbourhood walks, in smaller numbers, but in a sustained manner[55]. For Mallika for example, what remains fundamental to WWAM is walking repeatedly, in different neighbourhoods, irrespective of number of participants, while acknowledging that 'change' if any will come after a very long time through sustained action. In both cases though, the underlying politics is about normalizing the idea of women walking for leisure at night.

4. Unpacking WWAM: Performance or Protest?

Having fun and walking with ease and comfort from one point to another remains central to WWAM. Between February 2019 and January 2020, I walked and volunteered with the collective every month. With each subsequent walk, my body language eased up. Even on midnight walks with just 5-6 women, I was alert but not scared. Increasing familiarity with different neighbourhoods and the trust I placed in other women helped. With time, I started paying more attention to differences between different neighbourhoods, and the effect of presence or absence of key infrastructure such as

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[55] This tension within the collective largely remained unresolved when the collective paused in March 2020 (due to the pandemic) with both formats – small neighbourhood walks every month and bigger, centralized walks on important dates like 16 December or Women's Day being adopted.

street lights, toilets, height of walls, shops, mixed use, and so on. For the women who participated more than once, it was the idea of leisure and having fun that became central to the walks.

At its very core, WWAM is about three things – it is a women's only collective, it is about walking, and it is about the night. Fundamentally, it is about women, walking from one point to another, at night, with ease, and feeling 'free' while doing so (Mallika, PI, November 2019). It is about the mundane act of walking through the city. It is important precisely because it is not easy and it is denied. These walks are *not* a protest march, and there is no sloganeering, fist pumping, or display of placards. Instead, WWAM has consciously adopted the tactic of underlining the banality and desired abandon that constitutes the act of walking or strolling. Banal activities such as sitting on the footpath, having ice cream, listening to a song – when done at midnight by a group of women attain a certain relevance and become subversive because it is neither banal nor common in the context of heightened anxieties around safety and morality. This kind of outright display of will and leisure without consumption does not sit well with societal moralities and capitalistic expectations. This is precisely why scholars like Shilpa Phadke (2020) make a case for frivolous fun as an essential feminist strategy. Read this way, women walking at midnight in search of leisure is a protest against the dominant social norms.

To understand this further and to explain how a collective like WWAM has a potential to subvert the established order, it will be helpful to unpack what *is* WWAM in terms of 'performance' and 'protest'. As previously mentioned, for Mallika, walking at midnight was 'born out of a performance', and 'out of a moment of deep solidarity and support'. Correspondingly, for her midnight walking is a performance, even though it is removed from traditional markers of a performance – it is not rehearsed, it does not have a fixed audience, and it is not staged. Yet, according to Mallika, by the mere fact that there is a gaze on women walking at midnight, it is a performance. She explains:

> "For me anything that has a gaze on it, is performative. When we walk at night, there is a constant gaze on us. The visual, the imagery of this group of women traversing the street is performative. Yet it is totally mundane." (PI, October 2019)

> "…it [WWAM] is about drawing lines in the city. Leaving traces of bunches of women just walking, that's it…My entry point into everything is art. I think of in terms of image, of performance, gaze, what happens to the body in the doing, in fatigue, exhaustion, transformation… For me it is art but for many women who walk, it is a means to assert themselves, have fun, or discover their city". (Podcast, Points of Entry by Katie Kheriji-Watts, March 2020, emphasis added)[56]

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[56] Link: https://open.spotify.com/episode/1IKoAZMowwxcQLNmn51HTl?si=iLyepL-zRxOh8rl8azZUfA Last accessed January 30, 2021

For Mallika then, WWAM is primarily a form of performance, or as she puts it, it is 'performative', even as for other women who walk with WWAM, it is a means to assert themselves, discover the city, or find opportunities for leisure. The terms 'performative' and 'performativity' have been unpacked by rhetoric and philosophy scholars like Derrida and Austin as conceptual terms to understand utterance and iterativety of action and discourse. Feminist theorists like Judith Butler have taken the argument further to unpack performativity of gender which includes corporeal behaviours, actions, gestures, and signs. Performance of these acts and gestures, she argues, manufactures and normalizes dominant gender identities (Butler 1990; Taylor 2002). However, according to Butler, the 'variable repetition' of these acts and gestures can also lead to subversion and resistance (Butler 1990, 145-147). Read in this context, by emphasising on walking repeatedly and 'performing' the mundane act of walking, WWAM does become a means to subvert dominant norms. For Mallika, midnight walking as a sustained and repetitive activity is of particular interest. It is in sustenance, endurance, and the repeated act of walking that she finds pleasure and joy. According to her, it is through this repetition that a shift comes in the body:

> "I find the joy only in sustenance. I am personally very interested in endurance. And repetition…Pushing the limits of human body is of performative interest to me, social interest to me and feminist interest to me…I am a performer. It is only in repeating and rehearsing that you make a performance. And with each repetition, something shifts in the body." (PI, October 2019)

In this vein, perhaps Mallika's politics of walking repeatedly is closer to Butler's call to find and repeat subversive actions and acts to reconstitute gender identity and norms. However, by 'performative', Mallika here also means that WWAM has the quality of a performance 'because there is a gaze on it'. Scholars like K. Frances Lieder (2018) have framed similar demonstrations like 'Why Loiter' and 'Meet to Sleep' as performances. Writing about 'Why Loiter', K. Frances Lieder finds that the women who are loitering, are doing so for an audience to normalize the idea of women finding pleasure in the public spaces of a neoliberal city. To understand how performance can make a difference, Leider invokes an affective framework to frame 'Why Loiter' as a public performance to transform 'affect' and circulate 'different affective norms' (2018, 159). By labelling 'Why Loiter' as a performative protest group, she argues that it is their performative character which gives it a political power, even as it does not adopt 'visual markers of political nature', does not announce its presence loudly, and yet uses 'its performance to inspire change at the level of affect' (Leider 2018, 146). Critics of 'Why Loiter', much like critics of WWAM, argue that it a middle-class women's project as lower-class women do not have the choice to adopt public-private codes of behaviour and do not have the material resources or time to have fun. Such criticisms are not misplaced and collectives like these are self-limited in their structures and functioning, even as they try to be cross-sectional. However, Leider

argues against reading of campaigns such as 'Why Loiter' and 'Blank Noise' merely as individual desires reflective of class privilege. She instead reads these as an attempt towards 'collective solidarity grounded in the notion of prefigurative politics' and dependent on the performance to embody the affective changes one desires to see in the society (2018, 158-159).

Performance and performativity have been difficult to define in a singular manner in the context of this research. However, as performance scholars like Diana Taylor rightly argue, untranslatability or indefinability is not necessarily a bad problem because it indicates the multiplicity of meaning and potential, and carries with it a 'possibility of change' (2002, 49). According to Taylor, performance is 'simultaneously a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission and a means of intervening in the world' (2002, 49). In this case, **we can perhaps read WWAM as both a performance and a protest (or performance-protest) in order to intervene in the world by repeatedly performing the mundane in face of risks and denial. In doing so, WWAM subverts the dominant urban order, and creates affectual shifts in the body and in the city.**

Traditionally it has been argued that performance is ephemeral and is a process of disappearance, leaving no material traces. Performance scholars like Rebecca Schneider (2001) have questioned this traditional understanding by interrogating dominant, western thinking about archive as physical and material documentation. Schneider argues that privileging the material and quantifiable form of archive undermines the oral and embodied ritual practices which also constitute history (Schneider 2001). She instead draws attention to memory, oral storytelling, and repeated gestures as a form of archive. Based on this approach, she frames performance 'not as that which disappears but as both the act of remaining and a means of reappearance' (2001, 103). If we place WWAM within this framing of performance as something that remains, we can understand how it creates shifts in the body, by leaving traces in flesh, in memories, and in the visual map of the city. The feeling and affect generated by walking at midnight in the face of risk and denial; feelings of freedom, joy, pleasure, and endearment start sticking by repetition and circulation (Ahmed 2004). In the process the body becomes a host to the collective memory of walking at midnight, abd we find the courage and desire to walk individually at night too. Performance, through the performative trace, challenges any near dichotomy between appearance, disappearance and between documental archive and its absence. **WWAM as a repetitive performance *remains*, and in its repetition, it echoes and leaves a trace.** Following the likes of Richard Schechner (1985) and Paul Connerton (1989), Diana Taylor argues that performance acts as 'vital acts of transfer' and continuity 'of social knowledge, memory and sense of identity' (2002, 44). Women walk at midnight, read as a performance, can then be read as a means to create new kinds of memories and sense of identity which subverts the dominant norms, remains, and is

transferred. The act of women walking at midnight also changes the normative visual of the night, or to borrow Ranciere's vocabulary, redistributes the sensible. Finally, the shift in the body that Mallika talks about as a result of this repeated performance can be read in the affective register – it shifts how the body feels in a place, is affected, and affects a space. I will come back to this line of argument in the Chapter 2.

Chapter Two

Politics of Walking, Affect, and Citizenship

Introduction

"Eventually, one wants to shift something about the *experience* of women on the streets at every hour" – Meghna, Women Walk at Midnight (WWAM) Volunteer, Personal Interview, October 2019 (emphasis added)

"*…hum bass sheher pe apni chap chhod rahe hai* (we are just leaving our imprint on the city)" – Mallika, WWAM Team Meeting, November 2019

Walking is a complex and multi-faceted activity – it can be precise and calculative, ruminative and leisurely, musical, creative, and romantic, or disruptive, anarchical and activist (Solnit 2001). More importantly, walking is linked with histories of access and exclusion as well as of protest. Historically, women in particular have been represented as an 'interruption in the city, a symptom of disorder, a problem' (Wilson 1992). In such a case, I argue that walks by collectives such as Women Walk at Midnight can be read not only as a leisure activity or a performance but also as a protest and a claim to what can perhaps be called affective citizenship.

Walking is central to Women Walk at Midnight (WWAM). As we witnessed in the first chapter, throughout 2019 (and even before that), WWAM organized several two- or three-hour walks in different neighbourhoods almost every month, often with a local resident as the walk leader. It became something that now 'happens' on the street of Delhi (Mallika, PI, October 2019) just like street harassment 'happens' – it aspired to become (and indeed for a while became) frequent and habitual, and assumed the quality of an urban ritual, albeit for a relatively small group of urban women who walked consistently or heard about the walks repeatedly. The women who walked with WWAM navigated the night on their own terms, crossed roads at peril because of poorly located pedestrian crossings, jumped over garbage dumps and police barricades, walked on motorways wherever cars were parked on footpaths or when the footpath was engulfed in dark shadows, drank water out of communal pots set up by 'Matka Man'[57], and entered hospitals and metro stations to urinate at night because nothing else was available. They found creative tactics to fill the infrastructural gaps they encountered on the walks and devised ways to deal with the risks in order to claim pleasure. In the process, they found pleasure and joy, and the city became more meaningful to them. Why is this simple

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[57] Throughout South Delhi, one will often notice earthen pots filled with drinking water, and labeled 'Matka Man'. These earthen pots have been set up by Alag Natrajan to 'provide drinking water to poor people'. See: http://www.matkaman.com/projects/ (accessed March 12, 2020).

act of walking so important? How does walking in a city at night 'affect' us? And how do we affect the city or 'leave our imprint' on it, as Mallika articulated in the epigraph to this chapter? What is the 'experience' that WWAM seeks to change and how does the experience of walking itself changes with change in a city's affectual and political geography?

Walking with women at night held different meanings for different participants and organizers. For Mallika, the theatre artist who started WWAM, it was a chance to walk introspectively, quietly, and at midnight. For Sasmita, a 32-year-old WWAM volunteer who grew up in Bhubaneshwar and moved to Delhi a few years ago for work, midnight walks enabled her to meet people from different walks of life, see their neighbourhood from their perspectives, and 'experience the city in a different way' (WWAM Team Meeting, October 2019). For Meghna, the fact that she could walk nonchalantly in the city in silence, while in the presence of others, was endearing. Another volunteer who grew up in Dwarka in South-West Delhi shared that while she was not 'allowed' to go out at night earlier by her family, she was able to do so now because of WWAM. In the process of walking with WWAM, she shed her internal fears and now successfully negotiates the mobility restrictions placed on her by her family. Walking at night with a group of women has thus been about tackling fear, finding pleasure, coming together with a women's collective, and simultaneously building our individual relationships with the city. It has worked to deepen these women's relationship with and claim to the city, and to urban and affective citizenship. **Affective urban citizenship, I argue, means a sense of belonging to the city at the level of everyday experience.** However, what happens when citizenship itself is endangered and possibility of exclusion is heightened with policy or legal changes?

As discussed in the last chapter, in late 2019 and early 2020, the country witnessed widespread protests by students, some sections of the civil society, and opposition parties against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) 2019. In response, the police heavily cracked down upon and detained many protestors and issued a complete ban on protests in several cities. In Delhi, one could see an increase in police barricades and police surveillance in parts of the city. Increasingly, public gatherings were made suspect, dissent made intolerable, and any criticism of the government was labelled anti-national even in the digital space of social media. This kind of hyper-vigilance, one could argue, points towards a security state wherein 'rulers subordinate citizens to ad hoc surveillance, search or detention and repress criticism of such arbitrary power,' justifying it in the name of security of people and the state's role as 'protectors' (Young 2003, 8). A security state, writes Young, 'keeps a careful watch on people within its borders…overhears conversations….[and] prevents people from forming crowds or walking the streets after dark." (ibid, 8) Such a paternalistic protection and mobilization of fear and security, Young argues, is detrimental to democratic participation and reduces citizens to a subordinate status.

However, while every state presents some features of a security state, it seems the exercise of arbitrary power and surveillance has reached expanded in India in recent years.

In this changed context, WWAM continued to walk regularly until the lockdown was imposed in March 2020 in response to the Covid19 pandemic. However, while earlier *walking* at midnight by women was the exception to the everyday order, in late 2019/early 2020, these women were walking in a state of exception with heightened security concerns in the context of anti-CAA protests. The erstwhile fear of walking as women at midnight was amplified due to explicit policing and use of force by the state on protesting bodies. As we will witness in this chapter, during this time the experience and sometimes even the purpose of these walks shifted away from being a guerrilla performance-protest aimed at changing the everyday experience of the city to a performance of solidarity and protest.

This chapter is concerned with the various facets of walking itself -- walking as resistance against everyday police order and as a way to claim leisure, walking during a state of exception and political crisis, 'affects' of walking repeatedly in a city, and finally, walking as a way to deepen and claim urban and affective citizenship. Some of the other questions that guide this chapter are: what does it mean to 'experience the city' by walking at night with other women? How does the affective 'experience' of walking in the city vary with time? What does 'feeling' at ease or alert mean and how does it change with changing urban environment or '*mahaul*'? And more importantly, what are the political and affective implications of walking with women at night repeatedly not just to challenge everyday established police order but at a time when citizenship is being contested and the 'feeling' of exclusion is heightened? The following section should be read as a continuation of the first the chapter and narrates the experience of WWAM between December 2019 to March 2020 – a highly polarised time in Indian subcontinent and in Delhi in particular, indicating the need to take into account debates on citizenship when writing about affect, walking, and city.

1. A Different Delhi

"We have to remember we are in a very different city now than we were three years ago… When I was doing 'Lost and Found', people were more open to listening and engaging. I feel like those modes are shifting…There are larger things happening in the city in ways we do not understand. And the environment (*mahaul*) is changing." – Mallika, WWAM Team Meeting, May 2019

Mallika pointed out this evasive but real shift in the city's affectual geography and '*mahaul'* which I translate as affective environment or atmosphere in May 2019, right after the 2019 General Elections. Bhartiya Janata Party had won a majority for the second time with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at

the helm. It was a comment on the polarization that India had been witnessing since six years and decline in tolerance and freedom of speech. We were discussing the relevance of WWAM to the city during one of the team meetings. In a way, these lines foretold what was to come. Delhi was indeed changing. By the end of 2019, it was becoming impossible for university students to protest peacefully without the threat of state-led violence.[58] The spatial and demographic changes that the anti-Muslim riots in North-East Delhi in February 2020 will bring about are yet to be studied and documented.

Through November and December 2019, WWAM planned its annual 16th December walk, in memory of the Nirbhaya agitation. The group had organized this walk in 2018 as well in which 30 women had walked. The route of the walk – Saket to Munirka was the same as that traversed by Jyoti Singh on that fateful night in 2012 (See Chapter 1). 130 women registered for the walk and a WhatsApp group was created to coordinate logistics. We were to meet at Select City Walk mall in Saket at 10.30 pm on 15th December and then walk towards Munirka till the wee hours of 16th December. The team had also decided to try and take a public bus for a short distance on the route if we spot one, though a cursory online search had suggested Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses only ply till 11 pm on that route. However, on the evening of 15th December, news started pouring in regarding brutal police crackdown on students of Jamia Milia Islamia University, Delhi, who had been protesting the newly passed Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019. Chilling videos and news of male and female students being lathi-charged inside the campus, tear gassed at the University Library, and videos of detained students made way to the WhatsApp group created to coordinate the WWAM's midnight walk. Almost spontaneously, the organizers of WWAM decided to cancel the walk. Simultaneously, on their own accord, women who had been volunteering for and organizing the midnight walks decided to go to the Delhi police headquarters where already hundreds of citizens had started to gather in order to build pressure on the police to release the students detained from Jamia University. Several women who had signed up for the midnight walk also ended up there. In the process, the all-women's WhatsApp group of 130 women that was created to coordinate the 16th December midnight walk by WWAM transformed itself over-night into an all-women's forum to discuss protest updates, coordinate and find company to go for protests and marches and to exchange information. It was also renamed to *Saath Chalo,* translated to 'walk together', before it was finally dissolved in March 2020.

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[58] The police had repeatedly cracked down on students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) for protesting university fee hike and on students of Jamia University for protesting the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. See: Ditsa Bhattacharya. "Brutal Police Crackdown on Protesting JNU Students." *News Click.* November 11, 2019. https://www.newsclick.in/JNU-Students-Protest-Hostel-Fee-Hike-Police-Brutality (accessed March 11, 2020). Also see Sengupta 2020.

Four days after the crackdown at Jamia University, on December 19th, 2019, several citizen groups, student organizations, and political organizations gave a call for an all-India march against CAA 2019. This march was propelled by not just the contents and implications of CAA but also by the crackdown on students themselves. In Delhi, the march had two starting points – Mandi House and the Red Fort. Both marches were to converge at Shaheedi Bhagat Singh Park[59] for a peaceful demonstration. Through the WhatsApp group, I discovered that several women who had signed up for the 16th December midnight walk were going for the march and were coordinating with each other using this group. This piqued my interest. I decided to join the protest from Mandi House as a participant-observer in my bid to follow and document the experience of urban women who were walking (and now marching) in the city.

Picture 11: Scene outside Mandi House Metro station (Delhi) on 19 December 2019. Photo by author

For this particular march, due permissions had been taken from the Delhi police but those permissions were withdrawn at the last minute and instead Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code was imposed which disallows public gathering, rallies and demonstrations. As a result, once people reached the meeting points, they were indiscriminately detained, threatened, chased, or made to leave. Mobile networks were jammed and the might of the state was visible with tear-gas and water cannons and hundreds of policemen in riot gear on standby in the heart of New Delhi (See Picture 11). The protestors ranged from civil society groups and political organizations to students from different universities and backgrounds, professionals working in the field of media, non-profit and development sector, lawyers, journalists and so on. Following is an excerpt reproduced from my field notes from December 19th:

> "It seemed all permissions were in place for today's march. However, just before I left for Mandi House, I received an update about permissions being revoked from Red Fort. Simultaneously, people messaged saying we should still assemble but not head out alone because *anything can happen*. I met up a few friends and reached Mandi House metro station at 11.30 am, half an hour before the scheduled time for the march…There is heavy police presence here. Police is wearing riot gear. A few paces ahead, there is more police. We see water cannons. We see a few DTC buses on standby for detainees. Lots of barricades. This is the heart of Delhi – broad streets, running traffic. We are five of us, all women. As we stand waiting outside the metro station in a huddle, we see a few other groups of people waiting like us but there is no visible leadership at the moment. There are no banners, no slogans, and except the heavy police deployment and media presence, the scene isn't out of the

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[59] This park was built where revolutionary freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Chandrasekhar Azad had conducted meetings with their comrades during India's freedom struggle.

ordinary…Suddenly, I feel a pull on my elbow. I turn to see three women police constables trying to pull me from where I am standing. Two others are pulling my friend who is visibly Muslim, with a hijab covering her head. Two male cops are giving the instructions to female cops – "*pakdo inhe, lekar jao, pakdo. Kheech ke le jao*" (catch them, take them away, drag them away). We free ourselves from their grip and ask them the reason for detaining us. One of the male cops tells us: 'this is not allowed, you cannot stand here. Either leave from here, or come with us to the police van.' Another cop comes running and yells: 'Do not let them go. Make them sit in the bus'. We get scared, turn and run towards the metro station. Out of the corner of my eye, I see that the cops are detaining others who were still standing. We come out of the other exit of the metro station only to realize one of our friends has been detained. We try making calls. We try sending messages. But our cellular networks are jammed…Its broad daylight, and we are more scared than we ever have been at midnight… Where are the leaders of the protest, we wonder (only to realize much later that they have already been detained)… The police detained five buses of people that day…After ducking from cops at Mandi house, we walk till Shaheedi park with 40 odd people who also had escaped detention, hoping to meet and join the rest of the protestors there. We still don't have cellular network and with so many detentions, there is absolute confusion. Still, we walk, without a GPS to guide us, without a leader, without slogans, without banners. We just walk. We take the city as it comes. We turn. We stop. We see some cops, we disperse and reassemble. We stop and strategize, take a by-lane, re-route our steps. We finally reach Shaheedi park at 1 pm only to meet an even bigger police force waiting to detain the rest of us. Some of our phones finally get some network, and we realize everyone is now gathering at Jantar Mantar. So we take autos to Jantar Mantar. At 2 pm, we reach Jantar Mantar. The police has cordoned off and contained the protest in the usual 1 km stretch on Jantar Mantar Road. Thousands of people are there, singing songs, raising slogans, sharing tea. I see a pole with 4 CCTV cameras recording the protest. I notice several cops are also capturing videos of the protestors on their phone. Someone makes a remark about facial recognition software and targeting of protestors. There are water cannons on stand-by and a huge police contingent…The detainees are released around 6 pm, after which some of us finally leave...From Jantar Mantar, I go to CR Park, a neighbourhood in South Delhi. It is around 7 pm and a candle-light demonstration by local residents is underway to register their protest against the new law. There are some 60-odd people, standing peacefully. Yet there is a significant police presence... Today it felt as if the entire city is under lockdown, surveilled, policed with brute force." – Field Notes, December 19, 2019

Mandi House, one of the most elite and centrally located areas of Delhi with art galleries and theatre halls thus found itself heavily policed and barricaded that day. The atmosphere or more precisely, the *mahaul* was that of fear and revolution. The city had indeed changed – under lockdown even before the pandemic hit, surveilled, and policed. Our experience on December 19th, and then on several subsequent marches and protests was one of fear, of loss of faith in rule of law, and of abundant precaution. Police, barricades, and water cannons seemed to become a permanent background to wherever I went to observe a protest. The city's affectual geography, its environment – that palpable yet evasive quality of a space – had changed. This experience also revealed our dependency on cellular networks and GPS devices to navigate the city and our vulnerability to the police force.

While the police closely monitored and broke up several citizen protests and marches, what also happened around this time was the emergence of 24x7 sit-ins by women against the CAA-NRC in different neighbourhoods of Delhi (and eventually in other cities). What was striking was the sheer number of women on the streets – across different socio-economic categories, occupying public space. In this context, it became important to continue and expand my field work to capture this new striking

moment of occupation of urban public space by women of different backgrounds to demand citizenship and the role of collectives like WWAM therein.

The gathering in Shaheen Bagh, a Muslim-majority neighbourhood in South-East Delhi, began in late December 2019, a day after the crackdown on students of Jamia University. Hundreds of women who live in Shaheen Bagh and adjoining areas blocked a main arterial road which connects Delhi to Noida to protest the citizenship law and the police brutality on students. With time, the numbers increased, drawing men and women of all ages. According to Ellis-Peterson and Rahman (2020), the reason these protests overwhelmingly drew women is because it is believed that women are unduly disadvantaged from the new law since it necessitates documentational proof of citizenship which women, especially from poorer backgrounds, often lack[60]. Further, located at a distance of 2 kilometres from Shaheen Bagh, a number of students from this neighbourhood study at Jamia University which also led to a narrative of mothers and grandmothers of these students coming out on the streets to stand up for their children who faced police repression. Several scholars have extolled the resilience shown and tactics adopted by Shaheen Bagh protestors. Pradip Kumar Datta for example called it a new kind of satyagraha which encourages dialogue and sharing of experiences (Datta 2020)[61]. Shaheen Bagh, as Datta further writes, had a lot of organizers, but no leaders, making it difficult for the police to negotiate with the protestors. "There is a mass of hijab-clad women with children, buzzing with talk and listening attentively to speakers…or at other times bursting into impatience with *Inquilab Zindabad*," he writes. International newspapers such as the Guardian termed it as a 'women-led political awakening' (ibid).

I visited Shaheen Bagh in January 2020, on a day when the women had been sitting on the road for 30 days. As I walked from the metro station to the protest site, I saw heavy police barricading blocking all vehicular traffic at least 700 meters before the pandal. On the way, I met some young boys who were helping people find their way to the protest site through the by-lanes. They were from Shaheen Bagh – 'we have lived here all our lives', they told me. They were currently studying in Jamia University. Through them I discovered that there were around 60-80 such volunteers working round the clock, taking turns, to keep things organized. We chatted briefly, and then as I was leaving they

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[60] Hannah Ellis-Petersen *and* Shaikh Azizur Rahman. 'Modi is afraid': women take lead in India's citizenship protests". Jan 21, 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/21/modi-is-afraid-women-take-lead-in-indias-citizenship-protests (accessed March 15, 2020)

[61] Pradip Kumar Datta. " Shaheen Bagh – A New Kind Of Satyagraha, A Culture Of Dialogic Protest." Kafila. January 17, 2020.   *https://kafila.online/2020/01/17/shaheen-bagh-a-new-kind-of-satyagraha-a-culture-of-dialogic-protest-pradip-kumar-datta/* (accessed March 15, 2020)

said, '*ye ladai ab sab ki, sirf hamari nahi*' (this fight is everyone's, not just ours), indicating that this fight for citizenship and equality is a universal one, and not of one community. From their names, I gathered they were Muslim. Soon, I reached the protest site, navigating my way through several by-lanes. It was early evening, and there was a huge crowd. There was also an almost festive air and a very visible display and performance of patriotism with Indian flags on display all around in different sizes and forms. I even saw an infant with the Indian flag painted on his cheeks – the kind of display otherwise only witnessed during the Cricket World Cup in India. The infrastructure of the main road had been completely transformed. All the shops lining the main road were closed and women of all ages were sitting on the stairs in front of the closed shops. There were posters and banners with poetry and art against CAA-NRC on the shop shutters and railings, on the tar road and foot over bridge (See Picture 2.1, Appendix B). Food, tea, and snacks were being distributed to everyone at regular intervals, speakers were taking turns on the stage, and calls for *inquilab* and against CAA burst out every few minutes from the people. After I crossed the tent where speeches were going on, and reached the foot-over bridge, I saw that its functional purpose had been rendered redundant with no running traffic on ground. It was instead being occupied by students and young boys and girls, who were sitting atop the bridge and making more posters. Younger kids were studying. Once back on the ground, I saw a

makeshift library at the bus stand, a replica of India Gate with names of deaths in anti-CAA protests, and massive murals on the tarred road. The highway which until 15th December was primarily a motorway had been completely changed.

Picture 12: Countless women sitting on the road in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi. facing a makeshift stage. January 2020. Photo by author.

As I weaved myself through the crowd, I crossed a lot of men. Soon I realized that men were only standing on the periphery of the *pandal*. Inside the *pandal*, there were around 200-300 women, mostly hijab clad, working class, local, sitting very close together, on dusty durries, listening to a speech with rapt attention, clapping, and sloganeering (Picture 12). There were people of all ages. The elder-most woman was 92-years-old and was sitting near the stage. The youngest person was a few months old, in the arms of a woman sitting in front of me. As the evening progressed, the number of women increased to 600 -700. I asked the woman I was sitting next to, who was wearing a hijab and was probably in her 40s, how long she had been coming to the *pandal*. 'Since the first day. My daughter studies in Jamia. We had to

come out. There was no choice', she told me. I asked her if this interrupts her work or household chores. She said, 'I manage but the routine is messed up. Now I sometimes wash clothes at night…My son will finish his tuition in a while. So, I will go home now, make dinner, and then come back here around 10 or 11 pm for an hour. We all do this. Sometimes, when I cannot come, my sister-in-law comes' (Discussion, January 2020). As the evening progressed, food packets arrived and were distributed among people. The women urged me to take a packet saying that the local residents can still go home and eat but those who are coming from outside of Shaheen Bagh must be taken good care of. Indeed, as Datta writes (2020), there was a culture of care among both men and women in these protest sites. I then asked the women why are they protesting. The first response which came was that 'why should we show papers' (*hum kagaz kyun dikhayen),* indicating their frustration at the suggestion that they should prove their citizenship through documentation. One of them, who grew up in Bulandsheher in Uttar Pradesh (UP) but has been living in Shaheen Bagh since her marriage four years ago explained: 'This fight is for the poor. Whatever public you see here is here because they all do not have papers to show. That's why...*Humme Modiji se naraazgi hai* (we are upset with Modiji).' Another woman, who seemed to be around 50 years old piped in:

> "The lord (*Allah)* will not favour the one who is unfair. Lord only favours the just. This is a fight for our rights. I never thought that such a time will come. Modi is wrong for not one but many things. It has crossed all limits now. We also remember his past actions. Demonetisation was unfair. We could eat by grace of God but those poorer than us could not. Then he implemented GST. Businesses suffered." (Female Protestor, Shaheen Bagh, Discussion, January 2020)

Here then, she not only expressed her anger with CAA but also connected it with past policies by the ruling government, which in her view, have systematically worked to disadvantage the poor. This woman had been coming to Shaheen Bagh every day for a month. Often, she stayed at the protest site till 1 or 2 am. I asked her if it was difficult for her to stay here till late. 'It is difficult', she admitted, 'but it is only to ease things up eventually.' She further added, 'as the evening will progress, more women come. Entire families come. By nightfall, its completely packed.' As I sat there talking to these Muslim women, I saw a pastor giving a speech on the podium on religious unity, and a Sikh contingent that had just arrived setting up a *langar* facility. Once the pastor finished his speech, one of the women remarked: '*Dekho Allah-talah ne sabko ek kar dia hai* (See God has united everyone) – Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian. *Sabke mijaz mila diye* (Everyone's temperaments are united.) This is God's order.' *Mijaz* does not translate easily into English, the closest translation being 'temperament' or 'mood'. Indeed, there was a certain overwhelming quality and mood in the air at Shaheen Bagh, an atmosphere or what in colloquial Hindi and Urdu could be called *mahaul* of bonhomie, care, and purpose; an affectual environment which was 'felt' in this fight for citizenship and secularism.

That day, it seemed no one knew what will happen. Someone remarked that at least until the Delhi Assembly elections, which were due in early February 2020, no adverse action would be taken against the protestors, but after that, there was uncertainty about what would befall. The police had tried to remain tactful with this group of protestors who were primarily women and families. They had requested them to move several times, but not used excessive force until then. It was extremely cold. I stayed on until 10 pm that day. It got colder but more crowded with every passing hour. I didn't feel scared or alert even as we approached midnight as I found myself surrounded by women. 'It is such a different experience', I wrote in my field diary. Here I was in the middle of a visible and explicitly political occupation of space and the city, very different from the politics of walking at midnight that I had documented thus far. It was a vibrant enclave of women as well as men. Often the number of protestors swelled at night once men and women had tackled the demands of their daily lives. In fact, as the protest went on for more than three months, the ebbs and flows of everyday life often spilled onto the street. The street became a place where men and women cooked, ate, exchanged stories, helped each other, slept, and kept vigil. Women balanced the demands of everyday life with their political assertion. In the process, they laid a claim to the city and its public space.

One can immediately identify some obvious similarities as well as differences between WWAM and Shaheen Bagh's occupation. Both were forms of resistance by women, and both were laying a claim to urban space and citizenship, and to the night space though in different forms. The aim of the protestors at Shaheen Bagh and other anti-CAA protests was not just to make their citizenship experience more meaningful, but to retain it in the first place and challenge the threat of exclusion based on one's religion and capacity to produce documentation. It was a response to a threat to legal citizenship in an extraordinary situation and not just as attempt to deepen their existing citizenship practice, unlike WWAM. One of the things that made sit-ins like Shaheen Bagh strikingly different from walks by WWAM was the fear of police crackdown which loomed large at all times (and which ultimately happened), unlike in the case of WWAM where the fear of the night instead came from the urban order at large. During the Shaheen Bagh protest, the might of the state was no longer hiding in the interstices, it was no longer covert. The police vans and barricades were omnipresent and set up with the express purpose of containing the protests when needed. Yet, these sit-ins were substantially altering the geography of the city, especially for women. I never felt scared as a woman at night at Shaheen Bagh during those three months. In that case, I wondered, what meanings did walking at midnight still hold?

Walking from Zakir Nagar to Shaheen Bagh at midnight

During that time, WWAM was also asking similar questions, and decided to respond to the political moment and walk in the neighbourhoods where women were gathering for these sit-ins to protest CAA. Inspired by the resilience of the women at Shaheen Bagh, the first such walk was conducted from Zakir Nagar to Shaheen Bagh, via Jamia Milia Islamia University in January 2020. There was no walk leader and the women decided they'd figure out the route as they go. On a crisp and cold January evening, at around 9.30 pm, we reached Zakir Nagar, where men and women of the neighbourhood had been holding a peaceful candle light vigil against CAA every day from 8 pm to 10.30 pm by standing on the footpath on either side of the road with posters and candles without stopping the flow of traffic. We stood with them for a few minutes and once the vigil dispersed, the women who had gathered to walk with WWAM circled around for a brief discussion. A few volunteers introduced this and the past walks by WWAM, remarked on the political situation we are in, and requested everyone to walk together and communicate if anyone felt in danger. There were around 35 women who joined the midnight walk that night. From Zakir Nagar we walked towards Jamia University via New Friends Colony. New Friends Colony is a relatively posh stretch, with well-lit roads and proper footpath. We walked with ease through it, bolstered by our numbers and the infrastructure. It was silent and somewhat deserted at 11 pm with only the parked cars on the tar road for company. But because we were a big group of women, we did not feel threatened. Some of us walked silently, some huddled together and talked, some took pictures, laughed. Around 11.30 pm, we reached Jamia University. Just before we reached the University's gate, we stopped to look at the guerrilla graffiti art on its boundary walls that had come up following the incidents of 15th December 2019 and the Shaheen Bagh sit-in, extolling the unnamed women of Shaheen bagh and female students who had been on the forefront of the movement (See Pictures 2.2 and 2.3, Appendix B). As we moved towards gate no. 7 of the University where a 24x7 sit-in had been going on against police brutality and CAA since December, a volunteer from the university offered us all tea. We then joined the motley group of protestors which comprised of students, younger children, and men and women who live in the surrounding neighbourhoods. We stayed for a few minutes, stretching and resting our tired bodies. Some of the women joined in the sloganeering and some veered off to speak to protestors. At midnight, we left from Jamia University and started walking towards Shaheen Bagh which was still 2.7 kms away. Just as we left from the Jamia sit-in, men and women who were returning home from this protest site joined our walk for a few hundred meters. They started sloganeering as we walked together and some of the women walking with WWAM joined in the slogans of *aazadi* as well. Calls for *azadi* or freedom resonated with us as women, as citizens, and as protesting bodies.

A little after we left Jamia University, we took a narrow road through a market which led us to Shaheen Bagh. We walked silently here, with fatigue taking over. This market was absolutely empty at this hour, shutters were down, roads deserted and narrow, houses were stacked close together, dense. For a few minutes we debated whether to take this lane or go via the main road, as somehow the main road seemed safer and familiar. But given that we were a big group, we decided to take this route. A walk participant recalls smelling something being baked in this narrow market lane: 'I remember smelling whiffs of nice baking – rusk or bread. That stretch was empty but it was indicative of activity happening inside and leaking into outdoors …From that nice bakery smell, the next smell that really left an impact on me was when we crossed a huge unauthorised dumping ground just before Shaheen Bagh and there is no way to avoid that as it was on our route' (Meghna, PI, February 2020). This walk was not just about the visual but also about our olfactory senses, the sounds we heard, slogans we raised and feelings that we experienced as we immersed ourselves into that geography. We ended the walk at Shaheen Bagh three hours later where we had tea in one of the by-lanes. Even at 2 am, there were a lot of people on the roads. Several groups of older women, mothers with their children, men and women crossed us either on foot or on tuk-tuks as we walked towards Shaheen Bagh, who we assumed were returning home from the protest site[62].

This walk was different from all others till date. We met a lot of people in this walk. We were not alone on the streets. And yet it was midnight, it was Delhi. While we were still a group of women walking at midnight, it felt like we were primarily seen as protesting bodies due to the spaces we were traversing. One of the walk participants recollects, 'on this walk, there were so many people that we didn't stand out…because there were other people also. There were women, men, there were children… It was interesting that we weren't the only group of people out there.' (Meghna, PI, February 2020). When we were walking from Jamia University towards Okhla, two men on bike yelled '*azaadi*' (freedom) at us as they crossed us. A short while later another bike crossed us but this time they yelled *'Bharat Mata ki Jai'*. Yet we didn't feel scared in terms of safety at any of the locations or on the route probably because there were so many women out in protest on the roads at Zakir Nagar, Jamia Nagar, Okhla and Shaheen Bagh (though admittedly there was a fear of police detention that I personally carried with me throughout the night.)

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[62] This particular walk was covered by a female cameraperson and a female reporter from Swaraj Express, a right-leaning news channel. The final video did not show the protest sites or adulate any of the other women who were out of the streets at 2 am protesting, walking, sloganeering. Instead, it focused on the WWAM group solely and characterised us as '*dilli ki ladkiyan*' (girls of Delhi) as seen in a video personally shared by the reporter over Whatsapp.

Notes from Hauz Rani and JNU

Throughout the months of December 2019 and January 2020, sit-ins inspired by Shaheen bagh emerged in public spaces like parks and chowks all across Delhi and India – ranging from Turkman gate and Jaffrabad in Delhi to Park Circus in Kolkata and Mansoor Ali Park in Prayagraj, UP. Several of these sit-ins erupted in Muslim-majority or mixed neighbourhoods. The sit-ins followed a similar template – women from a locality came together to sit at the forefront, supported by students and men from their neighbourhood, and activists from across the city. Women would take turns to keep the tent occupied 24x7, male and female student volunteers would take turns to manage logistics like tent and food, activists would make speeches to keep the morale up, set up medical camps or libraries, and so on. One such protest site was Hauz Rani, near Malviya Nagar in South Delhi, right opposite the Max Hospital (a private healthcare facility generally accessed by economically well-off sections) and Select CityWalk Mall of Saket. The protest-site gained momentum on January 23, 2020, although a few women had been coming together to protest every Sunday since a few weeks. I went there for the first time on January 24, 2020. Local men and women were sitting under a pandal in a small, otherwise unused park called the Gandhi Park. One of the boundary walls of the park was dilapidated and cordoned off using wires. Since this sit-in was only on its second day, the police was actively trying to dissuade women from sitting through a mix of persuasion and force. There was a constant fear circulating through darting eyes and anxious whispers that the police was going to crack down on the protestors any moment. On the mike, a female speaker was reassuring everyone to not be afraid, that the police was being dealt with through dialogue, and that men should not get agitated since this is a 'women's protest' (Observation Notes, January 2020). As the evening progressed and the police backed away that evening, more women reached. By 9 pm, there were around 120-150 women inside the small *pandal*.

Here I met Imrana, a middle-aged house-wife who had been living in Hauz Rani since 23 years with her husband and two children. At the beginning itself, without provocation, Imrana told me with some emphasis that her in-laws and brothers-in-law were all born in Delhi, and her parents and grandparents were born in UP, in India – a testament to the anxieties that have been brought forth by the new law. She further added that while she has all the documents of her children and herself, her father and grandfather do not have the requisite 'certificates'. 'Earlier, people did not preserve these documents or did not get them made at all. How will I get my father's or grandfather's documents? And of those who are no longer in this world?', she asked (Imrana, Hauz Rani Protest site, PI, January 2020). This concern stem from the new amendment to the citizenship law along with the proposed National Register of Citizens and National Population Register has fuelled anxieties that Muslims

might have to prove their citizenship status through documents and legacy papers (Sengupta 2020). Further, as Shudhabrata Sengupta (2020) points out, 'fears of being document-poor' has come not only from Muslims but from migrant workers, women, Dalits, and Adivasis – anyone marginalized and worried at the idea of proving one's citizenship in one's country of birth through a set of documents. Varun Grover's[63] now viral poem '*hum kagaz nahi dikhayenge, tana-shah aake jayenge, hum kagaz nahi dikhayenge' (we won't show papers, dictators will come and go, we won't show papers),* written in response to CAA captures the intensity behind the opposition to present one's papers even in the face of crackdown by the state. '*Hum kagaz nahi dikhayenge*' in fact had become the clarion call of several sit-ins like Shaheen Bagh and Hauz Rani. It is perhaps important to remind the reader here that the task of this chapter is not to critically debate the provisions of CAA and NPR. It is instead to establish the context in which field work for this thesis on gender and public space was concluded.

Let us return our focus to Hauz Rani where women stayed put in the tent the entire night since the sit-in started, despite pressure from the police. Imrana stayed till 3 am on the first night. When I asked her if she felt scared or uncomfortable being out so late at night, she exclaimed:

> "Why would I feel afraid? There is so much public here, what's there to fear? The police will back away with this much public…And police might for once hit men but it would think twice before hitting women. That's one reason as to why women are at the forefront." (Imrana, Hauz Rani Protest Site, PI, January 2020)

Perhaps she interpreted my question to mean fear from police action, though what I also meant to ask was if she is afraid about her bodily safety as a woman. Her response also reveals a tactical manoeuvre adopted by women to mitigate potential police attack by staying at the forefront during these protests. A detailed analysis of the role of women in anti-CAA protest in context of the Indian women's movement and its comparison with earlier movements and protests is perhaps called for another time. What is of interest here for us is how the experience of and anxieties about the night changed in this context – darkness, possibility of crime, or fear of immoral activities was not the concern for these women. Instead, possibility of crackdown from the police loomed large, though even that seemed to be mitigated by a large presence of women. I asked Imrana again, this time framing my question in terms of her access to night before the protest started. Again, she told me that she does not feel afraid and in fact often goes for a stroll with her family or neighbours 'even at 10 pm' after dinner till the Malviya Nagar metro station (a distance of roughly 1 km) or to the local market. Her daughter who is 22 years old carries a phone with her and that puts her mind at ease 'even when she returns home after 9 pm'. However, the interview suggests that this sense of ease of access is limited to the boundaries of her neighbourhood owing to familiarity with people living here. 'This entire area is ours *(apna)*, its

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[63] An Indian comedian, screenwriter and author.

familiar', she explains, by which she means to imply familiarity. This is confirmed later on when she tells me that the ration shops in Hauz Rani usually stay open till 10 pm and they all know her and her daughter. So, if any untoward incident is to happen, they will themselves 'drop her daughter home'. This perhaps also explains 10 pm as a temporal marker in most of her answers – it is the time till when there are eyes on the street. When discussing the social profile of Hauz Rani, which is a Muslim-dominated area, she explains that 'if we stay nicely, behave well, then why would anyone bother us? If you misbehave with anyone only then that person will tease you or bother you. We do not fight.' Here, she seems to be placing the onus of not being teased on herself and her family – good behavior will ensure 'no one will bother' them. She then goes on to tell me how most of her friends are Hindus and how she gets along really well with them, again without provocation, hinting at the fact that she felt the need to demonstrate her social moorings and community's cohesion to me, an outsider. By this time, we were joined by a few more women from Hauz Rani who were listening in. Shehnaz, who works as a domestic worker in neighbouring houses and lives in a rented accommodation in Hauz Rani piped in:

> "This country is everyone's. India is a *khichdi*. All types of people stay here. On 26 January's parade, all kinds of tableaux are displayed. We all are one. Then how can you declare this a Hindu *rashtra* (nation)? Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Isai have all co-existed since the beginning then what's the problem... Gandhi was also from Gujarat. He was so nice. Modi is also from Gujarat but look at him. If he does good deeds, then public will also support him. But he will be unjust then who will let him stay in power?" (Shehnaz, Hauz Rani Protest Site, Group Discussion, January 2020)

Shehnaz uses *khichdi* as a metaphor to once again underline the syncretic ethos of India and its religious diversity as well as unity – in a manner similar to the narratives I heard in Shaheen Bagh, indicating a commonality in the discursive politics across the sit-ins. The articulation of reasons for this protest -- dissatisfaction with the ruling government and anger at the perceived injustices also echoed what I heard in Shaheen Bagh:

> "Modi is in the wrong here. Ever since he came to power, he has been taking wrong decisions. We faced so much problem during demonetisation. People had to queue up outside the bank for hours. Who had to queue up? The middle class. The poor. The rich didn't have to stand in a queue. Public was so inconvenienced. People had to leave all their work and stand in queues. Then he implemented GST. Modi attacked everyone's business…My husband had a steel fabricator factory. Before Modi came to power, the factory was doing well. Now it is just a shop. GST impacted us adversely. Businesses suffered. Everyone's work plummeted. Money fell. When people won't have money to spend then how will they get any work done? There was a time when I didn't have to think twice before buying anything for my children. Now I have to think of my budget even when buying vegetables.' (Imrana, Hauz Rani Protest Site, PI, January 2020)

Imrana is then not just agitated at the new law but the past policies implemented by the current government. She further added, in an agitated tone: '…we were born here, my parents were born here, all my relations are here. Then how can Modi now throw us out? How can we leave our homes? Other

countries are not known to us. *This* is our country' (Imrana, Hauz Rani protest site, Group Discussion, January 2020). Another woman also piped in: 'Exactly. How can we leave our homes, our country? You cannot leave your country and go elsewhere. And why should we? A lot of ministers came before Modi but no one asked us to leave the country' (Female discussant, Hauz Rani protest site, Group discussion, January 2020). **The sense of belonging and territorial nationhood, the most classical sense in which citizenship gets theorized, is then clearly articulated here. A question I would like to flag at this juncture is how does this 'sense of belonging' come about, and what is its nature? Is it an affectual quality or a documentational consequence? How are the two related, if at all?** Can one feel like an unequal or inadequate citizen despite possessing requisite documents and citizenship in political and legal sense?

What is interesting for me in a study of leisure spaces and gender is that the park where the demonstration is happening was lying unused until the protest emerged, much like how the highway where Shaheen Bagh women are protesting was a motorway which women hardly ever accessed until the protest. Shehnaz told me that they hardly ever visit this particular park because often it is occupied by iterant men. Instead, they go to Jamun Park which is a few hundred meters ahead, in front of Select City walk mall. Jamun Park, with well-trimmed grass and a couple of gazebos was constructed over a garbage disposal site a few years ago by Select CityWalk mall as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitment[64]. Shehnaz, Imrana and other women from Hauz Rani like to visit jamun park in mornings or evenings to sit in the sun and to walk. However, they also lament that usually they do not get the time to step out or even meet anyone since they have a lot of household chores to take care of. 'But now, women sit here all night, all day', Imrana adds. Through conversations with other women from the nieghbourhood I learnt that the Hauz Rani sit-in was started by around 10 young boys from the neighbourhood, between the ages of 15 and 20 years who mobilized the women of the community. They asked their mothers and neighbours to join, made announcements on a mike to mobilize and gather people, and gradually women came together. But why are women, and not men at the forefront in these protests, I ask them. According to Imrana:

> "The government listens to women more. And to children. At least this will catch Amit Shah's and Modi's attention…And see, men have to work also, earn a living. If they won't go to work then how will we manage? We have to run the household after all. Where will the children eat from? So the men go to work. But still there is a lot of public here. Everyone comes here after finishing their work…and the biggest thing is husband's support. My husband doesn't object. Because this fight is for everyone, not one person." (PI, January 2020).

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[64] N.d. "Jamun Park Extension". City Sabha. N.d https://www.citysabha.org/jpe (accessed March 20, 2020)

Here, once again we can ween the tactical reason behind women being in the forefront in this protest. In this neighbourhood, men are the primary breadwinners in the family, while women manage the household or take on part-time work (like paid domestic work or ironing clothes) within the neighbourhood or in surrounding areas. As a result, they are able to participate in this protest site, which is right in the middle of their neighbourhood more actively. Another way to think about this is that perhaps the protest site *is* the neighbourhood park because it is the women who are protesting. The women I met over the course of this field work, both in Shaheen Bagh and Hauz Rani have a close relationship with their own neighbourhood where they live and work. Therefore, for a fight for citizenship understood as a sense of belonging, it makes more sense to protest in urban sites familiar to them instead of going to impersonal or inert protest sites like Jantar Mantar which are far removed from their own context. Claims to citizenship are after all territorial and deeply tied to 'space'.

The next walk that WWAM organized was from Munirka to Hauz Rani on March 8th 2020 which is recognized as International Women's Day. This route was an attempt to link up the two watershed moments in Delhi's recent history – 2012 anti-rape agitation and the 2020 anti-CAA agitation, both of which had women at the forefront, even though the discursive politics of the two movements is significantly different. Munirka was where Jyoti Singh was raped, and where Maya Rao first performed the 'Walk'. Hauz Rani was one of the several locations in the city which had become a testament to women's resilience in the face of mounting pressure and crackdown from police and anti-Muslim riots in North-East Delhi[65]. The walk sought to link the various structures of violence and in the process observe International Women's Day through walking.

We met at the Munirka metro station. Many of us were wearing masks and some women had even cancelled as the Covid-19 pandemic had recently reached India and was spreading fast. At the metro station, as 10 of us huddled up for introductions, a young man, reeking of alcohol, walked up to us and yelled, '*Bharat mata ki jai*' several times, insisting we join in. Translated as 'Victory for Mother India', this otherwise patriotic slogan has become synonymous in recent years with a call for a Hindu nation and a symbol of Hindutva cultural nationalism. In 2016, a Muslim MLA was punished for refusing to chant the slogan[66]. Over the last decade, this slogan has been used as a test of one's

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[65] Hannah Ellis-Peterson and Shaikh Azizur Rahman. "Delhi's Muslims despair of justice after police implicated in riots". The Guardian. March 16, 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/delhis-muslims-despair-justice-police-implicated-hindu-riots (accessed March 24, 2020)

[66] Shoaib Daniyal. "History Lesson: How 'Bharat Mata' became the code word for a theocratic Hindu state." March 17, 2016. The Scroll. Link: https://scroll.in/article/805247/history-lessons-how-bharat-mata-became-the-code-word-for-a-theocratic-hindu-state (last accessed June 16, 2021)

Indianness and patriotism even though such a slogan goes against the monotheistic belief of Islam[67]. In the process, it has tied together notions of Indianness with one's religious beliefs. During 2020 Delhi riots, several videos emerged where mobs were seen forcing visibly marginalized men to chant the slogans of 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' and 'Jai Shri Ram' and beating them until they complied. And so, when this man came up to us and chanted the slogan, we all became alert, our bodies stiffened, we stopped talking and immediately started walking away from the metro station, even though we were still waiting for two more women to join us. The man didn't follow us, 'but what if he did', someone said. We were a bit unnerved. However, once we started walking, we didn't face any other challenge. It was a remarkably unremarkable and 'normal' walk – the riots were behind us and the full impact of the pandemic still ahead of us.

As we walked silently from Munirka towards Lado Sarai, crossing the turn towards Aruna Asaf Ali marg on which JNU's North Gate is located, I was reminded of January 5th, 2020 when the university students had been attacked by a gang of masked men and women, armed with iron rods and acid bottles. The JNUSU President was attacked severely, as were many students with left inclinations, many Muslims, and many from Kashmir. The goons, later identified as members of ABVP, had gone from hostel to hostel ransacking rooms (Sengupta 2020). This seemed like a logical conclusion of attacks launched on JNU since 2016 by the right-wing on various pretexts. The immediate context for this clash (or rather attack) was the anti-fee hike protests by students and JNUSU's support to the anti-CAA agitation. That night, videos of the violence reached us once again, just like they had a month ago from Jamia. In response, students and alumni of the university (those who weren't locked in the campus) started gathering at the North Gate of the University to mount pressure on the police and administration to intervene. That day, even as this rampant hooliganism and violence continued for 3 hours, the police refused to intervene (a fact-finding committee by the Delhi police later gave itself a clean chit in this case[68]). When I reached Aruna Asaf Ali Marg that night which was barricaded for vehicles, I found that all the street lights had been shut off and it was pitch dark. As I walked towards the university gate, I crossed several young men of the attacking gang with rods in their hands and handkerchiefs covering their faces. They were walking with ease, joking and laughing, occupying the entire road. On the other hand there were people like me, arriving in pairs or small groups, terrified of the goons, distrustful of the police, and walking on the edges of the footpath, with closed and alert

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[67] Seema Chishti. "A mother's worship: Why some Indians find it difficult to say 'Bharat Mata ki jai'." November 1, 2017. The Indian Express. Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/a-mothers-worship-why-some-muslims-find-it-difficult-to-say-bharat-mata-ki-jai/ (last accessed on June 16, 2021)

[68] See: Mahender Singh Manral. "JNU January 5 Violence: Police gives themselves a clean chit." November 19, 2020. Indian Express. Link: https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/jnu-january-5-violence-police-give-themselves-a-clean-chit-7056658/ (last accessed on June 16, 2021)

bodies, constantly checking our phones, and our surroundings. Every passing body seemed threatening. The might of the state which had switched off street lights and left us in darkness was as palpable as possible. At the main gate, there were a lot of students, journalists, and more than 50 cops. And despite this, some of the goons which were now outside the campus attacked a well-known academician and politician, Yogender Yadav in front of media cameras, attacked an ambulance which had come to pick up injured students, and yelled out threats to other protesting students. The police did not detain them, unlike how it detained people for merely standing outside a metro station few weeks back at Mandi House. The police refused to enter the campus citing jurisdictional boundaries, even though it had entered Jamia a few weeks ago and attacked students in the library.

As people standing against the might of the state which is led by an Hindutva party, the students 'felt' much more vulnerable than the goons on the loose. It 'felt' that the rule of law is not the same for us, as it is for supporters of the government (Observation Notes, January 2020). By midnight, more students, faculty, and activists had arrived demanding the gates to be reopened. In the meanwhile, perhaps because of mounting number of the protestors and media attention, or perhaps their work of intimidation was done, the goons slipped out of the university through a narrow pedestrian gate and left. A few minutes after I saw a line of masked men and women leave the pedestrian gate, the street lights came back on. Students could recognize and find each other and immediately felt empowered. Our bodies eased up, and we feel reassured. Soon after, the gates were opened. **The technologies of light used to control the darkness of the night and promised as the panacea to ensure women's mobility and safety played a crucial role that night, reminding us that it can just as easily be taken away by the state.**

Why did we 'feel' so vulnerable even though the state apparatus was present to ensure the rule of law and order that night? Why did women in Shaheen Bagh and Hauz Rani feel the need to underline their ancestry to me, even as they emphasised that they won't show their documents to the government? Why did women walking at midnight on women's day feel scared of a man chanting '*Bharat Mata ki jai'?* Why did the same women feel safe and relaxed at Hauz Rani and Shaheen Bagh in public spaces well past midnight? And finally, what is the role of *walking* and *public space* in these claims to citizenship and life in a city? Perhaps, all of this can be tied together through an understanding of **affect or a 'feeling' that underlines much of how citizenship is being practiced, experienced and manifested in urban space. This feeling, or more precisely the 'affect' is shaped by national and mainstream narratives of belonging and exclusion, physical infrastructure, rules and regulations, circulation of certain fears and fearing objects, and sticking of some feelings to some places.** I will come back to the shaping of this affect in chapter 6. The remainder of this chapter will

address some of the questions highlighted above, starting with a discussion on walking, affect and resistance.

2. Walking, affect and resistance

Michel de Certeau's work is a helpful starting point to conceptualise politics of walking as resistance and its role in citizenship practices. According to Certeau, the heterogenous everyday practices or what he calls 'ways of operating' that urban users adopt to navigate the city elude panopticon procedures that impose discipline in a city. These 'microbe-like singular and plural practices', he argues, flourish in the 'interstices of institutional technologies' (Certeau 1984, xiv-xv) and weave themselves into disciplinary networks of surveillance while staying hidden from the dominant order (ibid, 96). The creative and covert procedures and practices that users use to resist and deflect disciplinary technology constitute, what he calls, 'anti-discipline'. This anti-discipline by common users subverts the rituals, representation of culture, and laws imposed on subjects not just by rejection but by making them different from what the law-makers or the elites intended them for. Through everyday practices like walking or sauntering, urban users and pedestrians re-appropriate and re-make urban space and fill the streets with their own desires and goals. Understood this way, women walking at night, sleeping in parks, or protesting on streets are defying the urban order and filling it with their own desires, negotiations, demands, and goals. These activities are not passive but active and constitute the lived space of the city. By walking at night as an everyday act of resistance, protesting at everyday urban spaces like public parks and highways, or bringing everyday activities like cooking, eating, caring, and sleeping to a political protest site, women are re-interpreting the dominant strategies and rules and turning ahistorical places into spaces. Here it is important to remind the reader that while politics of WWAM and of the women in anti-CAA protests overlap and converge, there are also obvious differences. WWAM started to challenge the everyday, gendered urban order while anti-CAA protest is a response to an extraordinary political situation. Nonetheless, as we saw above, the former also responded to the latter, and the two are somewhat intermingled if one is to write a contemporary history of Delhi's urban spaces and Indian women's movement. Women in both cases are infusing different neighbourhooods with their presence, finding new routes, changing the visual memory of the space, and in the process, transforming their own relationship with the city. They actively are remaking urban maps through new routes, detours, and transgressions. In the process, they are weaving themselves into the fabric of urban order, inserting their bodies into urban space through walking, gesturing, finding pleasure, singing, and expressing urgency or languor. They are re-writing the order and

purpose imposed on these public spaces and in the process shifting their affectual relationship with the city as urban citizens.

If we take from Certeau his focus on everyday anti-disciplinary networks and clandestine and tactical creativity of individual and groups caught in disciplinary power, there is something of immense value for us in his conceptualisation. Groups like WWAM use tactical creativity to 're-make' their own urban space by manipulating spatial and temporal signifiers. I say re-make space is always in the process of being made, it is a production in process (Massey 2005, 9). Any place is always-already imbued with socio-cultural scriptures, norms, relations of power, and experiences of different individuals, groups, planners and authorities. The urban user doesn't produce space afresh. It instead contributes to its production, deflects it, accepts, or in the case of WWAM, 'remakes' it by imbuing it with new meanings and tactics. '*Raat aur sheher aisa bhi ho sakta hai, aaj pata chala*" (the night and the city can be like this also, I discovered today)', was a common response in several end-of-walk discussions, indicating how new meanings got inscribed on the city and on night by the simple act of walking. Every time we walked, auto-rickshaw drivers slowed down to ask us if we want to go somewhere, or police officers approached us asking where are we going and the purpose behind our outing. By refusing to follow expectations, and instead choosing to walk for those two hours, laying down our own route, choosing to defy moral sanctions and temporal curfews, and finding pleasure through walking at night, WWAM resists and redefines the spatial order and the everyday.

Walking thus manipulates spatiality. It inserts social and cultural modes and personal factors into spatial order, altering it in the process. As pedestrians, these women invest the spatial order with other possibilities by improvisation, drifting, and transforming spatial elements, creating shortcuts, and taking detours. At each step, we make a choice regarding whether to use the dominant spatial signifiers or displace them, reject them, or manipulate them. To give more examples for this from our present milieu, a walker is expected to enter a shopping mall to consume and a street to reach somewhere. But by sauntering around a shopping mall or a street, she defies rules and expectations laid out by the authorities. She finds joy, relaxation, takes a detour, discovers, disappoints, rejoices. Similarly, local authorities such as Resident Welfare Associations and Delhi Development Authority in Delhi control parks by laying down restricted timings for accessing parks, and dos-don'ts of how one should behave. Several parks in Delhi for example carry a notice board saying couples are not allowed to hold hands

in the park, sit on the grass, or even carry snacks (See for example Picture 14). Yet, urban users adopt

tactics to bypass these restrictions, seize temporal opportunities to enter a park when no one is looking, hold hands away from prying eyes or find intimacy behind bushes, in search of some privacy in otherwise public spaces. This tactical appropriation of space constitutes a resistance to the official order.

However, it is important to remember that walking is not *intrinsically* a resistance. Anthropologist Brian Morris (2004) problematises Certeau's rigid binary distinction between official and everyday and argues against a universal meta-understanding of all kinds of practices of walking. Morris draws our attention to mediation of everyday practice of walking by civic institutions and reminds us that we could merely be following another order. One can go on to argue that by following a route laid down by the GPS system on the

Picture 14: Vasant Vatika Park, Vasant Kunj, Delhi. November 2019. Picture by author

phone, women walking with WWAM are complying with the dominant route laid down by the digital technology instead of mapping their own route. No act is therefore innately resistant or compliant. It is its mediation and articulation with respect to social context as well subjectivity that contributes to its social effect or makes it a resistance. The reason walking at night by a group of women becomes a resistance is precisely because it is not mandated by the social and spatial order. The women who walk at night as part of WWAM have to navigate risks of verbal and physical sexual harassment, implicit and explicit restrictions placed on them by their families and socio-economic conditions, and lack of physical infrastructure. Natalie Colie (2002) in her feminist reading of Certeau's work rightly argues that the subject position of an urban user is not an equal one, and is mediated by his/her gender, class and racial background. The female urban subject has historically been viewed as a problem for everyone from planners to moral crusaders. She is always a transgressor in public space, inviting gaze, and defying order. Her presence in urban public space is only justified if she is contributing to the economy in a respectable manner, adhering to rules of decorum. As scholars such as Phadke et al (2011) argue, women are constantly denied right to public spaces as they have to justify their presence as necessary and respectable, and enact 'appropriate femininity' repeatedly. By being denied leisure and non-productive use of city spaces, women are thus denied right to 'inhabit' the rationally planned and aesthetically sanitized city, seek leisure and experience urbanism. Here, 'right to the city' is

understood as right to urban life as an 'oeuvre'. It includes right of urban inhabitants to participate in the decisions and acts that shape the city as well appropriation of the city and its lived space. The women who walk with WWAM as a leisurely activity also refuse capitalist consumption of 'night-life' and expectation that women can only access urban public space for work. Here, exercising leisure in public space itself becomes a form of resistance. By placing their body in public space at night and using the public space against its dominant heteronormative and temporal construction, these women are embodying resistance against what Ranciere would call the established police order. The women of Shaheen Bagh and Hauz Rani are similarly placing a claim to their right to the city by blocking highways and occupying parks in or near their neighbourhoods to assert their demands. In the process, they are redefining their relationship with urban spaces and etching themselves on the geography of the city.

Let's now go back to Certeau's conceptualisation of walking as resistance and anti-discipline. While providing a good starting point, Certeau's conceptualisation has some limitations. He doesn't engage with the varying experiences and subjectivity of subjects themselves. In other words, he is concerned with action and its modes and not with subjects per se. However, not every woman's relationship with the night and with the city will be the same, nor will the experience of walking as resistance be. Once we acknowledge this multiplicity, it becomes imperative to also engage with subjects and their varying affectual, corporeal, and spatial relationship with urban order. Scholars like Brian Morris (2004) take this into account and conceptualise the role of subjectivity, affect and assemblages in analysing everyday urban practices such as walking. According to Morris, the embodied experience produced through walking can be understood better through the conceptual framework of affect. For him, it is the affective dimension of walking that makes an otherwise common practice significant and imbued with ideological effects, he argues (Morris 2004, 690-691).

But what is affect, and what does it do? What is the role of affect in resistance and in everyday practices such as walking? What kind of affect does city invoke in the female urban subject and in urban citizens who are marked by several axes of marginalization? Before going forward and engaging with these questions, it is important to lay down our understanding of affect. Since the early 2000s, affect has emerged as an oft-used concept in cultural and feminist geography. Morris, drawing from Massumi, argues that affect is the conservation of traces of past actions and their context or what Seigworth calls 'habitual accumulation of everyday time and space' in brain and body (Morris 2004, 690). Others like cultural geographer, Steve Pile emphasises on the argument that affect is a capacity of the *body,* and it precedes emotions (Pile 2010). This understanding that affect is a *capacity of the body* is very important to understand its role in relationship between female urban subject and walking

as resistance. Affectual geographers also make a distinction between emotions such as joy, sadness, etc, and affect and argue that while emotions can be represented, affect is non-representational, it cannot be represented. Instead, affect is felt and experienced. According to Pile, affect is 'beyond cognition, always interpersonal…and inexpressible' (2010, 8). This however does not mean that affect and emotion are divorced from each other altogether. Feminist scholars like Wylie (2005) argue that while affect implies human emotions, more broadly it is about experience. It is 'more than subjective' i.e. it goes beyond those who undergoes the feelings or affections associated with affect, it is more than rational, and it is concerned with corporeal practice (Wylie 2005). Following Deleuze and Guattari, Wylie (2005) argues that affect is an intensity, a field 'which *enters and ranges over* emotions of a subject who feels' (ibid, 236). Others use affect and emotion interchangeably. Sara Ahmed for example explores 'feelings' as something experienced by the body. While agreeing on centrality of body in affect theory, feminist geographers like Thien emphasise on embedded relationality and emotions in our daily life (Thien 2005). Thien describes affect as 'motion of emotion' (ibid, 451) or the 'how' of emotion. Drawing from feminist and cultural scholars, Thien argues that affect is an inter-subjective process (ibid, 453). This **intersubjectivity** emerges as a common strain among feminist scholars and is important to take note of.

More recently, scholars like Nigel Thrift have argued that with advancement in technologies and new knowledges on human psyche and cognition, it has become possible to manipulate and even 'engineer' affect through manipulation of what he calls the 'sub-liminal' (Thrift 2004). The sub-liminal exists in the half-second delay between preconscious (action) and thought (cognition). This idea that affect can be manipulated is key to some of the recent works on human geography and affect. John Allen for example writes about how privatised public spaces like the Sony consumer complex in Berlin manipulate affect (Allen 2006). Allen observes that in such places, power is not merely exercised through surveillance techniques, guards and gates which exercise exclusion. It is instead an 'ambient form of power' which achieves closure using logic of seduction and inclusion (instead of exclusion). This is achieved through the layout and design of a place and 'inscribed social relations' that determine how a place is experienced. In other words, 'publicness' is staged through design and layout to bring about an affective response of experiencing a place as open and accessible, while at the same time limiting movement of people in 'broadly scripted ways'. This form of power is 'felt' through its 'unmarked presence' and this in turn affects our experience of the urban space (ibid, 442-445). According to Allen, while people can opt out of this seductive presence, they usually don't and 'unknowingly remain subject to a form of control that is regularised, predictable and far from chaotic' (ibid, 443).

Infrastructure and urban design indeed invoke certain affects. In recent years there has been a renewed emphasis on 'design excellence within urban regeneration projects' based on the premise that urban design shapes human experience, can create vibrant and safe streets and public spaces, and alter sensory experience of the city (Degen and Rose 2012). Such an emphasis on urban design altering feel or sense of a place can be found in contemporary urban development discussions in India. For example, there has been considerable conversation around the role of urban design in altering perceptions and experience of safety (especially women's safety) in Delhi since the Nirbhaya agitation of 2012, with a focus on mixed-use planning, safety audits using parameters such as footpaths, openness, height of boundary walls, and lighting, and an emphasis on installation of CCTV cameras. Undoubtedly, the organisation of infrastructure can have powerful impacts on gendered access and use of the city. We indeed need enabling infrastructure for women to exercise their right to public space for pleasure or for work. Walking with WWAM revealed significant infrastructural gaps in urban design which makes walking, midnight walking, and walking for leisure, particularly for the female urban subject difficult. Having inadequate infrastructure which disables walking also takes away opportunities to ruminate, have fun, and to protest. However, at the same time, walking allows us to re-make space organized by the dominant social order. It allows us to walk within these constraints and use our creativity to overcome barriers. Simultaneously, it also makes us realize that adequate infrastructure does not guarantee a feeling of safety and ease. Cautionary tales about a place can produce the affect of fear and threat, or to use Sara Ahmed's articulation (2014), feelings of fear stick to certain places by sliding sideways and backwards, irrespective of the infrastructure present, and in the process create the very boundaries between the urban subject and night space. A street can be well lit and have a functional footpath, but women can still end up feeling scared because of past memories or a collective narrative of threat and risk at night. What we experience, feel, perceive in a city space is also determined by our gendered and sexed bodies. Pedestrians are thus affected both by the city spaces produced by the official state and their own body and subjectivity, and by people around us. Walking allows us to immerse ourselves in our immediate environments (Wylie 2005). But this immersion is distinctive for each subject. For a female urban subject, this immersion comes with risks, alertness and collective and individual memories of violence, threat and sanctions. To go back to Maya Rao's performance – even if the streets are well-lit and footpaths well-maintained, can I as a woman take a quiet contemplative walk alone at night, can I sit on the side of the road, can I walk back from work after dark, can I loiter and have frivolous fun?

Herein, works by feminist geographers is a useful guide to understand subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in theories of affect and infrastructure. Rose and Degen (2012) for example, while

acknowledging contribution of scholars such as John Allen argue that he doesn't take into account the human subjective experience. According to Rose et al (2010) 'affects are multiple' and work alongside emotions and human subjectivity. They argue that while buildings do generate certain affects, practices by users can diminish the affect intended by the building's materiality. This is because past memories of individuals can play a crucial role in determining what emotions a certain building generates. For example, someone can feel claustrophobic in a clean, open building because of a past memory or women can feel unsafe on a well-lit, broad road at midnight because of accumulation of past memories of violence or fear. In other words, humans can feel differently about a building (or about any built space) based on their reflective judgment than it is intended to make them feel (Rose, Degen, Basdas 2010). In another paper, the authors further exemplify the role of memories in human subjectivity, and in the relationship between affect and built environment. According to Degen and Rose (2012), corporeal bodies attach particular meanings and feelings to built space through spatial mobilities, temporal practices and everyday memories. In particular, they find three kinds of memories that interpolate the sensory experience of a place -- (i) past memories of encounter with the same place to identify difference, (ii) memories of a similar place in other towns or locations, and (iii) memories of previous visits to same or similar places to identify similarity. In arguing for the role of memories, the authors are underlining the role of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity in shaping urban sensorium, moving away from a theory of affect which is based on an engineering and manipulation of affect by design.

If I was to extrapolate Degen and Rose's (2012) understanding of relation between memories and urban space to my work, one could argue that women's memories of past experiences of feeling scared or safe in a public space impacts their current perception of the city, irrespective of its infrastructure. Further, in my interviews, women, without prompting, drew comparisons between Delhi, Mumbai, and their home towns to indicate a benchmark (positive or negative) for their present perception of safety in the city under discussion. Women drew from their past memories of public sexual harassment to identify similarity across cities, and across experiences of other women and in the process, dulling the feeling of 'unsafe'. We will see this more starkly in Chapter 6 wherein I will take up such narratives of safety in more detail. Here it is important to point out that while Degen and Rose emphasise on individual and 'pure' memories primarily, I instead argue that the collective memory of events such as the 2012 rape case and subsequent mobilization and memories of other similar mediatised cases or what can be called 'urban events' significantly shape our urban sensorium, *along* with individual memories.

Sara Ahmed's work further helps us understand the role of subjectivity, memories, and historicity in human emotions, and how do emotions and affect work[69]. She frames emotions as **social and cultural practices** which are shaped by contact with objects. According to Ahmed's, emotions do not reside within or inside an object, nor are they caused by an object. Emotions are not discrete or fixed, they are not something that one can possess, catch or pass on. They instead reside in *contact* of objects with other objects and are produced as effects of *circulation* of objects and emotions (Ahmed 2014). They move both sideways between bodies and objects, and backwards, shaped by multiple histories (2004, 131). In the process, certain emotions 'stick' to certain objects due to repetition, past memories, or particular histories. As a result, it may *seem* that emotions reside in a subject or object but that is actually the effect of a certain history and context that makes certain emotions stick for longer with certain objects. Ahmed thus develops a theory of affective economy or circulation of affect, which she compares to capital economy (2004; 2010). According to this theory, affect does not reside in a commodity, object or sign, but is produced through its own circulation and exchange. Emotions circulate and accumulate, just like capital, which creates surplus value over time and shapes the surfaces of object and subject (Ahmed 2004, 120-121). Emotions cannot be located in a particular body, instead they circulate in an economic sense, and reproduce (2004, 123). Importantly, they are shaped by histories including histories of production and circulation. In the process some signs or objects become more affective or seem to contain more affect. At the same time, a subject's relationship with the object of feeling is not exactly the same as someone's else's and shifts depending on his/her own subjectivity and personal history.

To explicate this theory of circulation of affect, Ahmed uses the example of racial hate in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attack in USA. She demonstrates how certain emotions of hate stick with certain figures through repetition and a specific history. Hate does not dwell in a subject or object, but it circulates. It slides sideways between figures through sticky associations between objects and signs (for example terrorism and Islam in the aftermath of 9/11 got stuck together with hate), as well as backwards by reopening past associations or absent historicity. In the process, emotions narrate a story of 'border anxiety' in making us turn away from what we imagine as the source of fear or hatred. To think about affective contagion in these times of a viral biological contagion is specifically interesting. Paranoia and fear are excellent examples of emotions in circulation. The virus behind the 2020 pandemic, Covid-19 was first detected in China. A few months later, in March 2020, US President

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[69] Ahmed uses emotions and affect interchangeably.

Trump called it the 'Chinese virus'[70]. This sticky association between China and the viral pandemic fuelled racism across the world – from Europe to India with instances of people from North-East India being targeted specifically[71]. This once again goes to show how fear circulates, sticks to objects, and creates boundaries between objects, fuelling stereotypes.

This theorisation of circulation and sticking of affect is the most significant take-away for this research from Ahmed's theorization. In context of this research, one can argue that constant repetition and sticking together of words like 'unsafe', 'streets', 'night' and 'Delhi' in media and policy discourses works to frame streets and night spaces in Delhi as unsafe. For example, in Picture 15 here, which is an advertisement published in a leading English daily, the Chief Minister of Delhi is quoted as saying how 'dark spots' are places where women feel unsafe and how installation of CCTV cameras and streetlights is a 'major step towards women's safety'. Darkness gets automatically associated with fear and 'unsafety', and as a result, streetlights and CCTV cameras become the de facto and the most dominant solution to improving women's access to public space.

Picture 15: Info-ad issued by AAP-led Delhi government in Indian Express, 27 September 2019

In fact, for many women, fear and alertness is the defining emotion that defines the relationship between their body and urban public space. This fear circulates and sticks to certain objects which could appear to be threatening based on personal and collective history of violence. The object of fear however is always 'passing by' and is not fixed. Fear is in fact intensified by the impossibility of containment of perceived threat in one object. The perceived threat moves, the object or the perceived source of fear moves, which in turn circulates fear. The possibility of approach of object of fear enhances fear and so does its passing by. As Ahmed writes, even though it seems 'fear is directed towards an object…it doesn't reside in a particular object or sign...it instead slides sideways and backwards and forwards across signs and between bodies and can get stuck temporarily' (Ahmed 2004, 127). Fear doesn't disappear in the disappearance of object related to fear. The source of fear can be anyone, the figure of fear circulates. This makes women walking at night alert to any passing vehicle on the road, a group of boys standing on the curb, or a

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[70] Liu Yinmeng. "Trump under Fire for calling COVID-19 Chinese Virus". The Star. March 23, 2020. https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2020/03/23/trump-under-fire-for-calling-covid-19-chinese-virus (accessed March 24, 2020)

[71] India Today Web Desk. "Verbally abused, spat at, harassed: Northeastern citizens come under attack amid coronavirus panic." India Today. March 23, 2020 https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/verbally-abused-spat-at-harassed-northeastern-citizens-come-under-attack-amid-coronavirus-panic-1658826-2020-03-23 (accessed March 24, 2020)

male loiterer without a purpose (see Chapter 1 for examples). In the process, fear accumulates. It amplifies with personal as well as collective experiences and memories. Fear also opens up past histories that stick to the present and amplifies the fear. This fear gets amplified in certain temporal and physical spaces, like at midnight, or in isolated spaces perceived to be dangerous, specifically for those with past memories of threat, assault or violence. The object and the perceived source of this threat keeps shifting and circulating. Furthermore, the dominant police order invokes different feelings in different subjects due to intersectional identities of caste, class, religion, and gender and acocompanying histories which together determines which feelings stick to which bodies. Marginalized communities with a history of exclusion, discrimination and violence therefore feel more scared or at risk by state's impunity. Perhaps, the anti-CAA protest can be read as a result of fear of losing one's citizenship rights and fear of suppression because of a history of discrimination against and suppression of not just the Muslim community but of the poor in general. The fear of loss of citizenship and exclusion that women in Shaheen Bagh and Hauz Rani carried was exemplified by articulations of *'hum kaagaz nahi dikhayenge'* (we will not show our documents). This fear of possible loss of citizenship and disenfranchisement even before the law is implemented is a result of a particular history of exclusion of and discrimination against certain communities like the Muslim community in India, as well as the poor and the marginalized. During the anti-CAA protest, several politicians and ruling party leaders gave speeches which declared Shaheen Bagh as 'anti-national', protestors as 'traitors' and muslims as those who want to 'take over India'[72]. The Prime Minister in an election rally went so far as to suggest that those who are protesting can be identified by their clothes[73], suggesting that it is only Muslims who are indulging in violence and arson. This kind of tagging and then its repetition by the media[74] makes any kind of protest and dissent suspect and as a corollary makes one's religious identity a ground for presuming propensity for violence as well as dissent. Dissent itself gets associated with being anti-national and violent. The repeated tagging together of certain words like protestors and muslims, 'anti-nationals' and protestors, and clubbing terms like outsiders and registration with certain communities leads to a situation where one community is made to 'feel' excluded. It results in an affect of fear and a feeling of being excluded as opposed to a feeling or sense

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[72] Elizabeth Puranam. "Why Shaheen Bagh protestors are an important moment in India's history." Feb 3, 2020. Al Jazeera. Link https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/2/3/why-shaheen-bagh-protests-are-an-important-moment-in-indias-history (last accessed 23 June 2021)

[73] Staff Reporter. "Those indulging in arson 'can be identified by their clothes': Narendra Modi on anti-CAA protest." Dec 15, 2019. Economic Times.

[74] See for example: Staff Reporter. "Can be identified by their clothes': PM Modi on CAA protestors." Dec 15, 2019. The Quint. https://www.thequint.com/news/india/can-be-identified-by-their-clothes-pm-narendra-modi-on-caa-protesters (last accessed 23 June 2021)

of belonging. This affect also circulates leading to substantial alteration of the contours of not legal or economic citizenship, but of, what I call, affective citizenship.

3. Conceptualizing Affective Citizenship

Now, if individual and collective memories, histories, and repetitions play a crucial role in determining the urban sensorium for women, **I would take a step forward here and argue that walks by Women Walk at Midnight works to alter the urban sensorium and experience by altering the memories of a few women in city spaces through a repeated yet specific walking practice and enables affects of 'enjoyment and autonomy, as opposed to fear and alertness.** By a repeated and regular walking and touching, smelling, seeing, hearing, and experiencing the city at night, the urban night space becomes a little more familiar, a little less scary, and changes the meaning of night as a space. New emotions of joy, happiness and autonomy start to stick with the idea of walking at night, new visuals and imagery circulate, and experiences get shared. This understanding of how affect sticks and circulates and shapes our relationship with urban spaces also explains why some women find it easier than others to walk with WWAM, why women who have walked with WWAM once feel less fearful the next time, or why night continues to be scary in spite of infrastructural improvements.

WWAM realizes that changing the circulation of affect and making different emotions stick requires time and repetition, and repetition is very important to change how we experience the city. As Mallika puts it:

> "I sometimes feel that we are printing an image on the canvas of the city. And eventually, after a lot of years, or even centuries, a shift will come. *Par vo image hum chhapte ja rahe hai* (but we are imprinting those images*). Images ki chhapne ki ek ability hota hai, aur na chhootne ka* (images have an ability to imprint and not peel away). For our own selves first of all…I laughed, listened to a song, perhaps danced, talked with someone and then never met her again, sang a song in front of the metro station, interacted with a cop. Nothing changed in the world. But something did happen. Something, somewhere. It's like a fragrance. Like the fragrance of *raat ki rani* (night blooming jasmine) is always there. But you only get a whiff of it. I like that quality of many things in life. They are a powerful antidote to 'viral things'. They dig deeper." (Mallika, PI, October 2019)

For Mallika then impact of walking with women at midnight is difficult to grasp, but palpable. It's like a whiff of fragrance which you feel, an imprint which is left behind, or an image which sticks – both on the physical space of the city and on the women themselves – it leaves 'something' behind. This unrepresentable feeling or affect maps itself onto the geography of the city. Changing the circulation of affect then is very important for WWAM, and it seeks to achieve this through repetition. As Mallika further explains:

> "Something shifts in the body through repetition…Physically shifts. As generations if we pass on trauma, joy, change…But change is not an easy thing… Four walks won't change anything. We will have to keep doing it for

a long-long period of time. It requires sustained effort. Eventually, maybe 30,000 or 3 lakhs women would have walked, some memory would be there in their bodies, and then some change might start." (PI, October 2019)

Thus, it through constant repetition that 'something' shifts in the body. Because even if affect is found in circulation and the contact between objects, it is corporeal as well -- it is experienced by bodies. Change in circulation of affect can only be achieved through sustained repetition, and by working on the body which makes walking in the city a powerful tool towards this end. The rhythm and mood of each walk changes with change in landscapes, political context, local history of a particular neighbourhood, and the collective memory of the group walking on a particular night. In the process of this repetitive walking, something shifts not just for the women but for the city and for the people who witness these women walking at night. Mallika's articulation also reiterates how affect is corporeal, how it sticks and circulates, and the importance of both subjectivity and historicity in circulation of affect. Similarly, rightful and peaceful occupation of streets to make demands on the state and to make one's presence felt in the city's geography is perhaps a way of shifting the affect of exclusion brought on by a particular history as well as political utterances. Infusing a protest with care, songs, performance, art and most importantly displays of patriotism and nationalism similarly works to debunk the notion of the protest being anti-national, unlawful or violent and shift the emotions stuck to the idea of protesting. Ultimately, all this – walking repeatedly for leisure and in defiance of risks by women, and occupation of public spaces by marginalized groups makes a claim on affective citizenship, and on a sense of belonging irrespective of one's documentation, ancestry papers, religion, class, or gender.

Conclusion

According to Shuddhabrata Sengupta, there is an underlying commonality between women who were refusing to show papers at the anti-CAA protest and JNU students who were refusing to register at the university for a new semester without a reversal of fee hike. This commonality is an insistence that 'in order to be recognized, one does not have to be necessarily counted' (Sengupta 2020). This implies that citizenship is not limited to being enumerated and identified, but it is about belonging as well as participation, 'it is more about quality than about quantity', irreducible to a number (ibid). What is this quality that Sengupta writes about? What is the 'sense of belonging' that citizenship theorists have alluded to?

While citizenship is definitely about tangible aspects like entitlements, enumeration, and duties; economic, social and political rights, and claim-making (as identified by scholars like Holston), it is also about a sense of belonging, which is intangible and elusive yet palpable. **I call this intangible**

aspect of citizenship as affective citizenship. Drawing from theories of affect and circulation of affect, I tentatively argue that this affective citizenship is a quality of citizenship which is always a work in progress. Citizenship after all, is and should be, a work in progress, otherwise as Sassen says, it will be a 'dead institution' (Sassen 2003, 14).

Affective citizenship is akin to a map of the different affects in different subjects that the experience of citizenship entails. Affective citizenship determines perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, and in the process creates the very borders between different subjects and communities. Drawing from feminist affectual theorists, this chapter argues that feelings of exclusion stick with some subjects more than others due to histories of discrimination or violence. Past memories and history then make marginalized communities distrustful of the Indian state and feel excluded even before a law which is discriminatory in letter is implemented, just like memories of past violence by police makes some women feel less protected as citizens. If we understand affective citizenship as such, then **Women Walk at Midnight can be conceptualised as a claim to affective citizenship,** a bid to shift the affects generated by the established urban order in the female subject, and an attempt to inflect and re-make urban space with new memories, strategies, and claims. WWAM repeats, and in the process, it leaves an affect (or imprints) in memory and in flesh. And this remains its most significant impact. In conclusion, this chapter thus makes an important intervention to argue that we must pay attention to the affective citizenship, and not just legal and social citizenship and to the *everyday life* where citizenship is actually practiced and experienced. This will serve as a useful reminder in subsequent chapters of the thesis which further explore women's experience of leisure and urban space while keeping the lens of citizenship, affect, and right to the city at the forefront.

Chapter Three

Past and Present Leisure Spaces in Agra:

A Case Study of a Riverside Settlement

Introduction

This chapter will engage with a thick ethnography of a riverside low-income neighbourhood in Agra – Khaliyai Mandi. At the surface it seems that the politics of leisure spaces in Khaliyai Mandi stand in contrast from midnight walking by women as a form of making of urban leisure space, subverting the established police order, and making a claim on affective citizenship. For Women Walking at Midnight (WWAM), streets are not just a functional space that facilitate mobility, they are also a public space and potentially, a space for leisure. Through the midnight walks, they become a space to have fun, to talk, reflect, ruminate. When we assemble to walk against the erosion of citizenship, streets also become a site of protest. A deeper study of Khaliyai Mandi reveals that for women in Khaliyai Mandi, the street and lanes are similarly a public space; a space where they can lay out their cots and gather with other women from the neighbourhood, and form bonds of solidarity. The cot on the street or on a shared courtyard, the *chhat* (roof top terrace), and neighbourhood *chai* or *paan* shop are important everyday spaces of leisure for women, especially during the day when men are at work. Even though the neighbourhood is spatially compact, and lanes are narrow, more 'public' and open spaces such as the riverbank remain occupied by young men and are avoided by women because of '*kharab mahaul'* (bad environment), a term that I unpack at length in Chapter 4.

This chapter is based on ethnographic field work conducted in Agra's Khaliyai Mandi between October and November 2019. The chapter begins by locating Khaliyai Mandi within Agra's heritage discourse on built environment and the riverscape, followed by a socio-economic and geographical profile of the neighbourhood. The next part of the chapter explores the dynamics of everyday life and leisure for women in two courtyards surrounded by housing units. These ethnographic sketches give us a glimpse into politics of gender and leisure in a low-income settlement like Khaliyai Mandi. In the process, the chapter explores the riverbank, cots, and courtyards as public leisure spaces. A thick ethnography of the neighbourhood and its social context also gives us crucial information about the political, caste, and religious divisions and dynamics which together shape the *mahaul* or affective environment of the space and determines women's access to leisure activities and spaces.

1. Agra's Heritage and Centrality of Yamuna River

Built around the Yamuna riverbank, Agra city is one of the major cities of Western Uttar Pradesh. Presence of several historical monuments, notably Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Itmad-ud-daula has had a significant impact on the city's urban planning and development, which is confirmed by a close reading of the last drawn Masterplan of Agra (2001 – 2020). Much of urban policy discourse focuses on the 'tourist' as the most important stakeholder in the city, with very little focus on urban poverty alleviation and provision of basic services for the locals. According to Prasad and Gavsker (2016), the 2021 Master Plan of Agra is heavily influenced by its 'Global Tourist Destination' image with a strong emphasis on improving mobility for tourists, development of high-quality infrastructure and recreation facilities, and 'redevelopment and gentrification' of the Old City area. The authors criticize the elite capture of the city's development discourse through the brand marketing of historical sites like Taj Mahal and elevation of a small town like Agra to a global tourist site. This in turn undervalues the lesser-known monuments and cultural heritage of the city. The overwhelming attention to Taj is a legacy of the British rulers which had a bearing on postcolonial imagination of planners and the public. The romanticization and privileging of Taj Mahal actively constructed it as a symbol of love and eternal romance. The poorer locals had little role to play in this construction and had little to gain. This is evident from the fact that most tourists visit Agra for a day-trip to see Taj Mahal and then return, thereby hardly contributing to the local tourist economy. This in turn, argue Prasad and Gavsker (2016) is redefining citizenship in Agra by legitimizing exclusion of local citizens from sanitized tourist spaces. Taj Mahal is even more fortified today and excludes the locals as is evident from the increase in ticket prices in recent years, turning the locals into 'outsiders', thereby bolstering social and spatial inequalities. This was confirmed during my field work as well, where women across different geographical and social locations told me that, while earlier they used to go to Taj Mahal for sauntering or spending time with their friends and family, they no longer do that because of high ticket prices and long tourist queues.

Intimately connected to this built heritage is the ecological geography of Agra. The Yamuna River has played an important role in the city's geography since centuries. Until the eighteenth century, Yamuna riverfront in Agra constituted of 44 gardens, surrounding tombs, shrines, and palaces, carefully maintained and enjoyed by the Mughal royalty and nobility. With the onset of British colonial rule, the riverfront gardens in Agra turned into orchards, farms, and nurseries dotted by residential settlements and religious shrines (Harkness and Sinha 2004). Over time, these gardens disappeared, much like the disconnect between cultural and religious spaces and ecology that Delhi witnessed in

colonial and postcolonial period. Today, only five parks remain in the city as reminders of Mughal Agra, two of which are 'out of reach for ordinary people' (Masterplan 2001-21, 73). Acknowledging the lack of adequate facilities for recreation and exercise like parks and open spaces, Agra's Masterplan 2001-2021 included guidelines for development of community auditoriums, theatres, meeting halls etc. based on existing and projected local population. However, here again, more attention has been given to development of recreation spaces for tourists through beautification of the heritage zone and boosting river tourism, in order to 'connect the whole heritage zone to ease the mobility of tourists' (ibid, 26).

One of the most notable, albeit controversial proposals in the Masterplan 2021 is the development of an 'Agra Heritage Zone' and reclamation of some parts of riverfront to develop 'recreational sites'. Within this heritage zone, extending from Mahtab Bagh (in front of Taj Mahal) to Ram Bagh (see Map 1), lie several settlements, *bastis*, and local markets including the settlement under study here – Khaliyai Mandi in Moti Bagh (Municipal ward -- Nawalganj), located adjacent to Itmad-ud-daula on the eastern bank of Yamuna. An interesting point to note here is that until a few decades ago, this area was largely rural, with urban development focused in
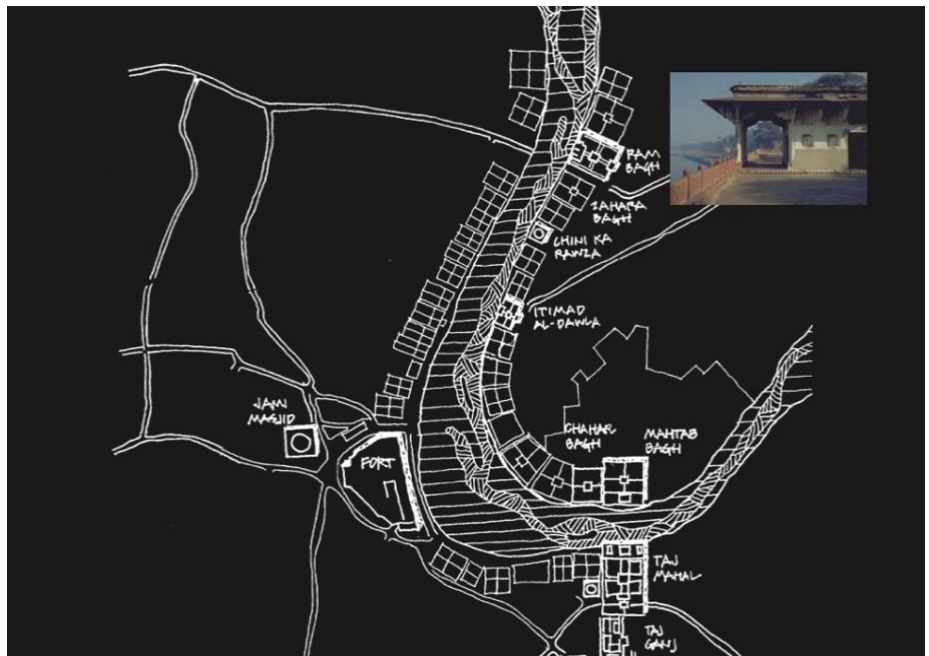
Figure 2: Map of Taj Heritage Corridor Area (not to scale). Source: Harkness and Sinha (2004)

northern and western parts of Agra. In Masterplan 1971-2001, the area east of the river is marked out as 'proposed land use area' with most urban settlement and built-up area being concentrated to the West of the Yamuna.

Writing about the Yamuna riverbank in Agra, Harkness and Sinha lament that in recent years the 'marble pavilions and red sandstone chhatris' have been replaced by 'vernacular landscape of rural communities on the eastern bank', local shrines, and dirt tracks going up to the river used by locals and animals (2004, 62). They further write that in some places floodplain and riverbank is used for

seasonal farming while in others it serves as a common ground for local communities where they fly kites or play cricket (ibid). The authors interpret this to mean that while the riverfront is accessed by locals, it is not open for 'truly public use' (ibid). As a result, they argue, neither the locals nor the tourists experience the landscape surrounding the protected heritage sites and instead experience Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Itmad-ud-daula in isolation. Following this, Harkness and Sinha call for moving away from a monument-centred approach and instead nurturing the relationship between buildings and landscape and developing the river corridor as a 'civic landscape of participation' where small rural and urban communities by the eastern riverbank can participate in the tourist economy if they so desire (Harkness and Sinha 2004). However, the question remains as to who comprises this 'civic' and who are the civic participants if use by locals is being painted as 'not truly public use' unless they serve the tourist economy? It becomes pertinent to ask that if the relationship between buildings and landscape is to be restored, then what are the exclusions entailed by way of sanitisation and cordoning off of beautified areas? Scholars like Ghertner (2011) and Bhan (2014) have demonstrated that often sanitisation and beautification efforts are detrimental to marginalized communities' access to public spaces. Departing from Harkness and Sinha, I would argue that the local use of the riverfront by the urban residents is indeed already a public use. In fact, Yamuna continues to play an important role in the imagination of some of the communities that live near the riverbank today.

Over the past three decades several plans have been drawn up for what has been labelled as 'pro-poor tourist development' of the Yamuna riverfront in Agra (Masterplan 2021). These plans have proposed landscaping, fencing, and building of walls around the riverbank to 'avoid children from playing in the developed landscape'; constructing visitor centres and parking on an area of five acres in front of Itmad-ud-daula[75]' and development of boating and other recreational activities on the river by construction of a barrage downstream from Taj Mahal and taping of drains that flow into Yamuna (Masterplan 2001 – 2020, 27). Localities which fall within these proposed development plans like Khaliyai mandi are likely to be seriously impacted by any such developments even though the plans proclaim that the existing areas that fall under the proposed heritage zone will not be removed. Media reports suggests that as per the plans, the population staying on the riverbank will not be affected. Instead, lanes going towards the river through the *bastis* will be upgraded and the facades of houses will be improved. Proposed plans thus claim to be pro-poor and assert they will not impact locals adversely. However, past experiences of riverfront development projects in other cities suggest

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[75] Jagran reporter. "टुरिस्ट ज़ोन के रूप में विकसित होगा यमुना किनारा, जानिए क्या चल रही तैयारी". *Jagran.* July 5, 2019.

otherwise[76]. If the riverbank is sanitised and walls are erected to regulate access and use (in order to avoid children playing on the beautified banks as one report suggests), then one is left wondering about its impact on local community's access to and relationship with the river and the riverbank.

For now, all riverfront development plans in Agra have been stalled for various reasons ranging from corruption to land acquisition woes and environment clearances[77]. Thirty years of activism and judicial intervention has failed to keep Yamuna's pollution in check and the ecological conditions in the proposed Taj heritage corridor area have only worsened. With inadequate flow, discharge of untreated industrial waste and sewage into the river, and over-extraction of water, Yamuna barely has any organic life in Agra[78]. Locals and river activists have periodically organized cleaning drives and more symbolic events such as conducting river *aartis*[79] and offering glucose to a 'dying yamuna'[80]. Activists have forwarded scores of petitions, demonstrations to state and central governments, and yet their basic demands – desilting and dredging of Yamuna, taping of drains, and construction of check-dam or barrage downstream of Taj mahal have not been met. In 2017, Uttarakhand High Court went so far as to declare Yamuna and Ganga as living entities, akin to humans, resulting in a river activist in Agra reporting its attempted murder, though the judgment was overruled by the Supreme court months later[81]. All these attempts – conducting an *aarti*, giving it a glucose drop and declaring it a human entity, albeit humorous, also indicate a deep connection that the local residents and river activists share with the river and what it symbolizes.

In recent years, a few collectives like *Sair-e-dastan* and 'Agra Heritage Walks' have been working towards moving away from a Taj-mahal centric discourse to highlight the local heritage of the city and its relationship with Yamuna. Agra Heritage Walks (AHW) is run by five middle-class Agra residents, mostly in their late 20s and 30s, who returned to Agra after studying and working in other cities. They

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[76] See for example reports on riverfront development in Indore, under which illegal slums are set to be demolished: Ashok Kumar. "180 structures to be razed for riverfront development 2.0." *Times of India.* October 26, 2019

[77] Siraj Quereshi. "Land acquisition woes block Taj riverfront project in Agra." *India Today.* July 23, 2019. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/land-acquisition-block-taj-riverfront-project-agra-1572707-2019-07-23 (accessed April 2, 2020). Also see: Jagran reporter. "Tajnagri mei aasan nahi riverfront development ki rah, zameen aur anumatiyan mushkil." *Jagran.* Jun 29, 2019.

[78] Anil Kumar Misra. "A River About to Die: Yamuna." *Journal of Water Resource and Protection. May* 2010 ((http://www.SciRP.org/journal/jwarp

[79] PTI. "Locals in Agra hold Yamuna aarti spread awareness about pollution." *Indian Express.* June 9, 2015.)

[80] IANS. "In Agra, Activists offered Yamuna and glucose to dying river." NDTV. March 17, 2017. https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/agra-activists-offered-water-glucose-dying-yamuna-3271/ (accessed April 14, 2020)

[81] Michael Safi. "Murder most foul: polluted Indian river reported dead despite living entity status." *The Gaurdian.* July 7, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/07/indian-yamuna-river-living-entity-ganges (accessed April 4, 2020).

periodically organize heritage river walks, walks in the Old City area, midnight walks, and cultural events such as music *baithaks* and art or theatre workshops for locals and tourists to bring into focus Agra's local practices and culture. During the course of one of their river walks from Itmad-ud-daula to Mahtab Bagh, AHW found that several stretches of the riverbank were inaccessible due to open drains, open garbage disposal, and social and political negligence. These river walks also made them realize the increasing disconnect between local Agra citizens and the river. With this in mind, AHW organized a week-long event called 'Picnic by the Ghats' in October 2019 at Khaliyai Mandi as it was the first settlement they encountered when one walks from Itmad-ud-daula towards Mahtab Bagh along the river. Through this event, AHW wanted to clean a stretch of the riverbank, interact with the local community, create and install a piece of public art (See figure 3.5 in Appendix) to encourage a conversation around people's relationship with the river, and encourage Agra's citizens to redevelop their relationship with the river. They also got the attention of some staff members at the municipality who provided a JCB waste-handling truck and some manpower for four days to help them clear the garbage. This resulted in clearance of several truckloads of garbage, plastic and surface litter from the bank which seems to be a result of lack of sanitation facilities in Khaliyai mandi. Residents had been dumping their household waste at the riverbank since at least a few years and this was compounded by lack of individual toilets in most houses until a few years ago[82]. AHW also tried to raise awareness about perils of single-use plastic and urged locals to not throw their garbage on the riverbank during their week at the riverbank. The people retorted and blamed the municipality for failing to provide garbage collection facilities. On the last day of this week-long event, AHW organized a small cultural program, inviting poets, young singers, and theatre artists to perform skits and songs about the river and river's ecology at the riverbank for the people of Khaliyai Mandi. The efficacy of this kind of one-time awareness generation on sanitation practices is doubtful at best. Nonetheless, AHW did succeed in cleaning up a considerable amount of garbage on the riverbank.

What's interesting is that for Neha, a 32-year old Agra resident who co-founded AHW, the primary objective of this 'Picnic by the ghats' was not river-cleaning but to make the riverbank more accessible. This is because, according to her, cleaning or saving the river is a lost battle. She explained: 'the river

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[82] However, once the news reached higher up, local politicians intervened, citing a Supreme Court judgement which disallows any JCB on the Yamuna riverbank. I infer this could also be because of politics of sand mining since there is considerable litigation in the high courts, Supreme court and NGT regarding use of machines for mining on Yamuna floodplains and regulations regarding the same. During early 2010s, JCB came to be synonymous with illegal sand mining. See for example: Kumar Vikram. "Illegal sand mining has changed course of the Yamuna river, experts claim." *Daily Mail.* August 7, 2013. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2386267/Illegal-sand-mining-changed-course-Yamuna-River-experts-claim.html (accessed April 12, 2020). Also see: N.D. "River sand mining in India in 2016 – Judicial Interventions." *South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP).* 2017. https://sandrp.in/2017/01/07/river-sand-mining-in-india-in-2016-iii-judicial-interventions/ (accessed April 21, 2020)

is dead. People have been fighting to save the river since I was in school. I deeply and desperately care about the river but I do not want to enter that battle. I am trying to do something else' (PI, October 2019). For other members of AHW, the event was similarly about connecting with the river and riverfront and to understand the city better through its people and spaces (Group Discussion notes, AHW Team, October 2019). Over the course of one week, the team interacted with the locals at length, and the local residents – children and male members of the community in particular, helped the AHW team in assembling the art structure. The team adopted a participatory approach wherein it facilitated an inclusive use of public space *by* the local community and prioritised dialogue above all else.

When I later asked Neha why she got interested in the river to begin with, she said, 'I think every time I used to pass over the bridge I used to cry. I don't know why but I felt like crying... Even when I was younger, when I was 10 or 12, I would feel very overwhelmed.' This feeling of a river being overwhelming for a 10-year-old perplexed me. Neha then explained to me that she grew up listening to stories about the river, about how people used to bathe in the river, or how their day wouldn't start without visiting the river. She recalled one such story:

> "I have heard stories of one man who was in his 80s or 90s who used to go to the river every day. But then he fell sick and he was not able to go to the river anymore. He was literally in tears, he was missing the river…Apparently once the river flooded, his cot was in the flood! It's almost mythological…It's told to us as a story of how close people's attachment sometimes to the river is. He couldn't go to the river so the river flooded into his house…there is something about this story that gives me a lot of peace...Then I heard people talking about small rivulets. People say there used to be a rivulet near their house and they are so proud of it. But now nobody cares." (PI, October 2019)[83]

Neha's relationship with the river is thus rooted in its stories, past memories and in an imagined ecology. She is always looking for 'spots of tranquillity and serenity' during AHW's river-walks – be it a temple by the riverbank, a rooftop that looks on to the river, the top of the bridge or the dhobi ghat. And yet, she doesn't visit these imagined spaces of tranquillity much on her own. This is confirmed when I asked her if she went to the riverbank often as a child or if she sits by the river now and she replied in the negative: 'no, not really'. It is then the stories of the river and the *possibility* of sitting by the river that has deepened her connection despite the steady and intense deterioration of the river's ecology. For Neha, 'the beauty that the river retains despite the filth is nourishing. There is something so sublime that everything withers away…even as drains and sewage all go into it.' Reflecting on the week spent at Khaliyai mandi, Neha further shared that how even when she was sweating under the sun, if she would just sit under some shade and look at the river for some time, 'it washed away so much' (PI, October 2019). She even felt like taking a dip in the river in the sweltering October heat

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[83] This excerpt is also indicative of Neha's socio-economic profile. Raised by a single mother who is a political science lecturer at a University in Agra, Neha was exposed to the academic circle early on.

but found it 'too filthy for that', while simultaneously acknowledging her 'upper-class upper-caste morality and associated ideas of filth, cleanliness and hygiene' (sic).

There is no doubt that despite its deterioration, the setting sun over the river, the birds, even the bridge over the river, evoked a certain affect as we stood and looked at the river from my field site, Khaliyai Mandi, an affect which is difficult to express in words, reminding us once again that affect is non-representational. Is it because of the sticky association of river with the sublime, of nature with calmness, or of ecology with sacrality that this affect is produced even when we can see drains going into the river, or when we have no past individual memories of this particular river? As narratives from Khaliyai mandi will further illustrate, there are now significant gaps in people's relationship with the river and yet it still exists in some insistent ways. This is the backdrop against which I got introduced to Khaliyai Mandi. Through the course of spending a week with AHW in this area I became closely acquainted with the *basti* itself, and the *basti's* own unique relationship with the river and the riverbank as a leisure and community space. Several follow-up field-visits in subsequent weeks (in October and November 2019) revealed community tensions and gendered politics of different spaces of leisure within the *basti*.

2. Khaliyai Mandi: Location, profile and history

Khaliyai Mandi is a small low-income, spatially dense settlement on the Eastern Yamuna riverbank, adjacent to Itmad-ud-daula which is a Mughal mausoleum and one of the 43 ASI protected monuments in Agra. As already mentioned, the *basti* falls under the proposed Agra heritage corridor, in Nawalganj ward of Agra. The way to reach Khaliyai Mandi is a narrow lane that starts a few meters before Itmad-ud-daula. As one enters this lane, one sees a couple of sweet shops on both sides of the road and men sitting on benches outside the shops. A few steps further, the road is lined by single or double-storied houses on both sides, with cots lying outside them (See Picture 16). Narrower by-lanes emerge on the left going into even smaller housing units. A few single-room buildings have industry level machinery inside them, indicating small workshops (*kaarkhanas*)

Picture 16: Picture taken after entering Khaliyai Mandi lane. October 2019. Photo by author.

in this area. There is a small barn with buffaloes tied on the side, and another room-size barn with goats. There are also a couple of small shops selling daily-use items. On some of the cots laid out in

front of houses, old men are resting, on others groups of women are sitting, peeling peanuts, oiling their hair or talking. In one of the by-lanes, there are small courtyards flanked by room-sized houses on all sides, each occupied by a family. In one such courtyard, called *Kali ka bada* (Kali's house), there is a small production workshop of shoes, along with housing units on four sides. In another by-lane, there is a small room where 8-10 men are sitting and carving stone and marble. A few paces ahead, in another small room, three women are engaged in making grocery bags, which they take on as piece-rate work. This indicates that home-based production and small-workshop production is one of the major sources of employment in this area. As one comes out of these by-lanes and follows the street through which we entered Khaliyai Mandi, one reaches the Yamuna riverbank. Here, on the right, there is the recently renovated Gandhi Smarak's compound (See Picture 3.1, Appendix B) A few meters before the river's edge, on the left, there are around 5-6 houses looking out to a common courtyard facing the river. The houses are small, but pukka, made of brick and cement, unadorned, mostly single-storied (Field Notes, October 2019).

The *basti* is mainly comprised of Jatavs (a Dalit community) and Muslims. The first 200 meters from the main road to the middle of the lane is mostly resided by Muslims. The next 200 meters from the middle of the lane till the riverbank is mostly resided by Jatavs (and is called Jatav *basti* by some) and few Baniyas and Jains. This is in line with the general trend in the city wherein most slums are comprised of Dalit and Muslim populations, with daily wage labour as the main source of income (Prasad and Gavsker 2016). In Khaliyai Mandi, most of the men from Jatav basti are engaged in wage labour related to manufacturing of shoes. There are some small manufacturing shops of footwear within the *basti* itself[84]. Agra is one of the biggest footwear producer in the country with several main and ancillary footwear industries located within the city (Prasad and Gavsker 2016). Having home-based workshops for small-scale production of shoes is a common feature in Jatav community areas (Peter Knorringa 1999, 311). Tracing the social history of Jatavs in Agra, Owen Lynch (1969) writes how traditionally Jatavs were leather workers and craftsmen and extensively participated in the shoe industry of Agra as they did not face much competition from other castes because leather work was considered polluting. More recently, in her work on leather and caste in UP, Shivani Kapoor similarly explains how Jatavs have traditionally been associated with leatherwork in UP and demonstrates how

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[84] The manufactured shoes are sold to merchants and middle men often in Heeng ki Mandi across the river which is a central node of shoe trade in Agra. There is an interesting story regarding the origin of heeng ki mandi as a trading centre. Leather skins or *mashaks* were used to transport asafoetida to Hing ki Mandi (asafoetida market) during Mughal era due to their moisture prevention properties. These *mashaks* were then later converted into shoes and sold in Heeng ki Mandi (Shoe Factory owner, Personal Discussion, October 15, 2019). Also see: https://smefutures.com/agras-footwear-industries-heritage-contributes-indias-economy/ (accessed April 13, 2020)

the colonial education system failed to move away from the framework of caste and instead reconstructed the leather artisan's body as a repository of *both* skill and pollution and disgust (Kapoor 2018, 131). However, since 2008 Agra's shoe industry has been on a decline, with occasional recoveries. Notably, this has had an adverse impact on daily wage workers who were working for these businesses. Certain policies such as 'introduction of GST by the current government also had a negative impact on workers because while food inflation increased, wages for shoe artisans remained the same', as explained by one of the female residents of Khaliyai Mandi whose husband works in a shoe factory (Discussion, October 2019). This is corroborated by media reports and accounts of local industrialists as well[85]. This has meant further economic marginalization of an already marginalized community. Most women in Khaliyai Mandi are engaged in household work, with considerable number of them also taking on piece-rate work from home such as making tote bags, candles or peeling or sorting peanuts, pulses etc. Muslims living in Khaliyai Mandi earlier worked as motor repairmen and tailors. One woman tells me that there used to be a car and truck repair shop on the riverbank which was run by Muslims from this area, but it was removed during the construction of the new bridge in 2010. These days, Muslims work as daily wage labourers in various industries including footwear manufacture and other local trades.

The area is a quite volatile with ebbs and flows of communal tension between Hindus and Muslims. As per one of the residents, until 15-16 years ago, skirmishes and fights between the two communities were quite common in this area and the police had to intervene often though now, she added, it is mostly peaceful. However, through the course of the interviews, I sensed an underlying antagonism between the two communities that has persisted with the one blaming the other variably for poor sanitation practices, unruly behaviour, or lack of education. An 18-year-old girl from a Jatav family for example told me that she doesn't like befriending Muslims because they are 'unhygienic' and 'stay in a filthy manner' (sic). The empirical basis of this bias remained unclear. Personal visits to both Jatav and Muslim families during field work did not corroborate any of these biases. An interview conducted later with an RSS Secretary who framed Muslims as 'polluted' and 'undesirable', along with a reading of Hindutva politics and pride does give us a hint as to how these biases propagate and take root (the interview with RSS Secretary is analysed in the next chapter). At the same time, I also

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[85] See for example: Gaurav Arora. "Agra: Shoe industry in peril and impact will be reflected in the election, says industrialist". ANI News. Apr 17, 2019.
https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/agra-shoe-industry-in-peril-and-impact-will-be-reflected-in-the-election-says-industrialist20190417175820/ (accessed on April 13, 2020).

sensed some sort of bonhomie and syncretism between the communities with stories of Eid, Holi, and Diwali being celebrated together in the past.

Other than the riverbank and the Mughal mausoleum, a conspicuous element in the geography and history of this area is Gandhi Smarak, which shares one wall with Itmad-ud-daula. With a long colonial and postcolonial history (as we will see in the third part of this chapter), Gandhi Smarak emerged as an important space in my conversations on leisure with the residents of Khaliyai Mandi with accounts ranging from it being an erstwhile hub of gamblers to a place where men and women congregated with their cots and peeled peanuts all day until it got renovated. The presence of Gandhi Smarak also had the consequence that Khaliyai Mandi came to be known as Charkha mandi or the Gandhi Ashram *gali*, which is still used by people to identify the area.

Khaliyai Mandi itself is around 80-90 years old. According to an octogenarian who I met during field work, Jagdish ji, this area was earlier called Chamaryana because of the population of *chamars* here (Chamar, a Dalit caste group is traditionally associated with leather work and the term chamar has its root in 'chamr' or skin. Jatavs are considered a sub-group of Chamars. See: Knorringa 1999). As per Jagdish ji's account, this area was earlier mostly inhabited by Jatavs and a lot of work related to leather (or *chamra)* and footwear used to happen here. When Mayawati came to power in late 1990s, this area came to be known as Khaliyai mandi (Jagdish ji, Discussion, October 2019), indicating a caste-based politics of naming and renaming, and the name '*chamaryana*' fell into disuse. To explain the origin of the term 'Khaliyai mandi', Jagdish ji further told me that during the Mughal rule, there was a *khaal* (skin) godown here where the skin of slaughtered animals was stored. This godown was removed more than 50-60 years ago, which is perhaps why I did not find its mention in narratives by residents in their 30s and 40s even after probing. According to another narrative by a shoe industrialist, Khaliyai mandi was the place where *mashaks* (bags made from waterproof goat-skin) from *Heeng ki Mandi* were stored, and since *mashaks* were made out of skin or *khaal,* it assumed the name of Khaliyai mandi (Discussion, October 2019). I did not find 'Khaliyai Mandi' anywhere in Municipal records, but I did find 'Khaliyan mandi' which seems to refer to the same area based on ward and zonal information. '*Khaliyan*' can be translated variably to a barn, grainery or a stackyard.

Other people from the *basti* suggested different stories. What is remarkable is that those who don't belong to Jatav community distanced themselves from the name Khaliyai mandi, and instead insisted that this area is known as Gandhi Ashram Lane, or more generally Moti Bagh, which is the broader area under which this settlement falls. For example, Mrs. Chaudhury, a 62-year-old woman who lives opposite Gandhi Smarak in a well-constructed two-story house, vehemently told me that this area,

where her house stands is called Moti Bagh while Khaliyai mandi is merely one of the smaller *bastis* in the lane up ahead. Notably, her immediate neighbours who were Jatavs had called the entire area as Khaliyai Mandi in our conversations. Mrs. Chaudhury further explained: 'on Adhaar card, our address is Moti Bagh, in front of Gandhi Smarak. Khaliyai Mandi is just one *basti*, just like there are other *bastis* around here like *bhooton wali gali* (ghost lane)*, dhuan gali* (smoke lane) etc.' (PI, October 2019). She clearly wanted to distance herself and her house from Khaliyai Mandi, perhaps because the term has strong caste associations. Similarly, in Kali ka Bada (Kali's house), which is inhabited by only Muslim families, the women told me that Khaliyai Mandi is the lane where Jatavs live. They instead retain the nomenclature of 'Kali ka Bada, Moti Bagh' to identify their courtyard. On the other hand, the RSS secretary who has been working in this community since 30 years, told me that entire area from the main road till the riverbank is called Khaliyai Mandi. I speculate that this might be because of tokenism to Jatav community and its association with a Hindu, albeit Dalit community.

Naming then becomes the symbolic register of claims to the locality by different communities. Names of places work to mark particular histories and cultures, as Shubhanshu Singh[86] argues, following scholars like Karen Till and Derek Alderman. The sticking of the 'Khaliyai or Khaliyan Mandi' in official records as the name of this *basti*, with the co-existence of other names in local narratives reveals a particular history of caste-based and communal politics that has marked UP in the last few decades. Khaliyai Mandi becomes a palimpsest through its naming and renaming as Khaliyai mandi, Chamaryana, and Gandhi smarak lane, decline and rise of Gandhi Smarak itself, and presence of Itmad-ud-daula and the Yamuna river. Traces of the past continue to be visible in this locality, along with erasures and re-telling of specific events such as the floods of 1978 and renovation of Gandhi Smarak in 2019.

For a study on leisure spaces and gender in cities, Khaliyai Mandi struck me as an interesting place with its contested history and present. Politics of gender and of leisure spaces is inseparable from one's class, community and caste affiliations, as well as from the social and historical context of a particular space. Therefore, it is important to understand the context of conflict and volatility in this particular neighbourhood to unpack how gender is experienced at the intersection of family, community, and geography, what leisure spaces and opportunities are available and accessible, and what is the role of leisure for the women living in this context. What follows is a case study of two courtyards – one inhabited by a Jatav family and another by a Muslim family, within this area, which

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[86] Shubhanshu Singh. "What's in a name? Far more than the opposition is able to understand." *The Citizen.* October 24, 2018. https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/8/15340/Whats-In-A-Name-Far-More-Than-The-Opposition-is-Able-to-Understand (accessed April 23, 2020)

for the purposes of this chapter I have decided to call Khaliyai Mandi. Thick ethnography of these two courtyards and the relationship between the families living here and public spaces in this *basti* provide a nuanced entry into the politics of leisure spaces and gender in a small city like Agra.

3. Of Cots and Courtyards

Courtyard by the river

Let us go back to the description of the *basti* presented in the previous section. Right in front of Gandhi Smarak, one sees an archway, which opens into a wide-open area or a courtyard. This courtyard is flanked by 5-6 small houses on the left and the river on the right. The courtyard's floor is made of tiled bricks for some part and mud for the rest. There is a handpump in the middle of the open area, in front of a small temple called the Prithvi Mandir (Picture 3.2, Appendix B). On one far corner of this open land, close to the archway from where one enters, there is a thatched shack where a few goats are tied up to a pole. On the other far end, there is a large room with the words 'Ashram' engraved on top of it, with other details worn out. A few cots are kept in front of the houses. Here, I met Rakesh Jatav, a middle-aged man who lives in one of the houses in this courtyard, and Vartika, his 18-year-old niece.

Rakesh Jatav was involved in the footwear industry until around 20-25 years ago. When jobs became scarce, he started plying an autorickshaw for a living. At the time of the field work (October-November 2019), he was 52-years-old and lived right opposite the riverbank where AHW organized the week-long 'picnic by the ghats' and cleaning drive. During this event by AWH, I built a rapport with Rakesh and his family and interviewed them over the next few weeks on local history of the place, their relationship with the river, leisure spaces and gender norms. From him I learnt that four of the room-sized houses around this courtyard are inhabited by Rakesh and his two brothers and their families. The entire property around the courtyard however is owned by a certain Ram Das, whose grandson lives in one of the rooms now. These rooms and an orphanage (which was involved in an alleged sex racket at the time of the field work which I explore in the next chapter) in the adjacent lane were constructed in 1940s as an ashram. Rakesh's ancestors were appointed as caretakers of the ashram by the owners, as part of which they were given rooms on rent to stay here. Their ancestors have long passed away and the ashram is discontinued but Rakesh's family continues to stay here. Rakesh still maintains the Prithvi Mandir and cleans the entire courtyard every morning and evening. The picture here (Figure 3) was taken while I was sitting with Rakesh on a cot outside his room. The white building

in the background is the renovated Gandhi Smarak[87]. In the foreground, the handpump is visible. In the centre, Neha from AHW is seen playing with the local children, mostly boys, between the ages of 5 and 12 years.

On that day, I also noticed that 7-8 women, of varying ages (16 - 60 years) had also gathered on one end of the open area (see right edge in Picture 17) because there was a power-cut in their house and because their children were playing with AHW team members at the riverbank. While some men who live in nearby houses came and helped AHW in assembling the iron structure for the art installation, the women maintained their distance and did not interact with us. This mid-noon gathering, albeit in a corner, struck me as an interesting leisure activity and use of public space. In fact, the whole week-long event by AHW threw up some interesting insights about the intersection of public and private spaces in a *basti* like this. With extremely small houses, middle aged and older men, women and unmarried girls often sit on cots or stairs outside their houses – this is their public 'leisure space'. At the same time, it is also private, each cot belonging to one family, though easily moved and shifted between households and used by everyone. After sitting for a while with Rakesh Jatav, I approached these women and joined them on the broken stairs where they were sitting. We talked about their lives and about their use of public space. Here I met Anju, a 37-year-old woman, and a much older woman who is called Amma by everyone. Amma runs a small snack stall in the lane which is where Anju and other women often gather in the afternoons.

Picture 17: Courtyard in front of Ramesh Jatav's house facing the river. In picture here: children from the community playing around the art structure being installed by AHW. On the right: Women sitting by the edge. October 2019. Photo by author

Anju has been staying in this *basti* since she got married 27 years ago. She belongs to the Jatav community, and her husband works for a shoe factory. Recalling the time when she first moved here, she said that time 'this area was a jungle'. She does not sit at the riverbank usually because 'men and

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[87] The reason I have included pictures of the neighbourhood in this chapter is to facilitate a spatial imagination while discussing politics of leisure spaces and to add to the thick description.

boys occupy this place, they gamble, drink and play cards.' But because of AHW, 'it is very lively here today'. Anju throws an important point into light regarding the appropriation of the riverbank by young men and boys to the detriment of women and girls. She goes on further to tell me that aside from drinking and gambling, adolescent boys usually play with marbles all day here and fight violently with each other since they don't go to school. Because of this '*mahaul*' or environment, women and girls do not spend time at the riverbank, she added. Several other women also alluded to this '*kharab mahaul*' or bad affective environment when talking about the basti, the riverbank and women's access to public spaces (I will discuss this at length in Chapter 4). According to Rakesh however, gambling or drinking is not bothersome. '*Sab apne mei peete hai toh dikkat kyun hogi* (they drink amongst themselves so why would it be a problem)', he explained, seemingly unaware of the '*kharab mahaul*' that women told me about. He instead proudly said that '*people* come and sit by the riverbank till 10-11 pm' (emphasis added). In fact, he went on to tell me that earlier he used to set up swings in the courtyard by tying a thick rope to one of the sturdy trees for 'all the daughters of the neighbourhood who used to come home from their in-laws place during Rakshabandhan or Diwali'. However, things have changed now, he acknowledged, and said that that now most women go to Gandhi Smarak instead.

However, despite the deterioration of the riverbank's *mahaul,* it continues to play an important role in men and women's imaginations and narratives in this *basti*. When I asked Anju about how the Yamuna was when she had first moved to Khaliyai Mandi, she immediately told me, with a sense of pride, that Amma used to bathe in Yamuna and wash clothes in it. She explained: 'There was a very good ghat here. Nobody defecated here. It was not dirty. But since at least 15-16 years, the filth has increased mainly because of lack of household toilets. Now finally a community toilet has been made. But before that, everyone would go (to defecate and urinate) to *jamna* (yamuna).' But wouldn't you feel scared, I asked. 'Of course,', Anju replied, 'people would come, sometimes abuse us or stare, so we always went early in the morning'. Amma however laughed it off – 'what is there to be shamed or scared of, we have to do it after all.' Currently, there are six male and six female community toilets that were constructed in the *basti* four years ago, but even now a lot of men continue to defecate in the open. Women and children however now use the community toilet. As a result, according to Anju the riverbank is not as dirty now as it was until four years ago. While Anju herself has not seen the river clean, she shared stories narrated to her by older women in the community about bathing in the river. Amma herself shared how during Kartik season every year (October/November), she would bathe in the river for a month, every day at 4 am. The water was very clean that time and people did not defecate or urinate in the river, she explained.

Interestingly, Kartik month also finds mention in works by urban ethnographers like Anand V Taneja who traces the 'processes of erasure and remaking' of sacred ecology in Delhi. He presents accounts from three different historical periods of the same sacred space, the Satpula dam in South Delhi, built on the banks of *Naulakha nala* (a stream which carried the monsoonal water to Yamuna[88]) (2017, 184). In his research he similarly found narratives of huge crowds gathering to bathe in Naulakha nala during the Kartik month which was considered sacred, indicating a deep entwinement between local ecology and sacrality. However, as per local accounts, ritual bathing and *melas* on the riverbank stopped around 1970s because the sewage from new slum settlements started flowing in the stream's water. The sacred value of local ecology thus underwent a significant change in the last 50 years. It seems same is true in Khaliyai Mandi as well, even though the more nuanced processes of erasure of people's deep relationship with the river remain unexplored in case of Agra. While Amma used to bathe in the river as a sacred ritual during Kartik month 30-40 years ago, today Yamuna is ripped off of its moral and sacred values due to increasing pollution. Jagdish ji, the octogenarian who explained me the history of Khaliyai Mandi, likewise lamented that the river is so dirty now that he can't even wash his hands in that water. But it was much cleaner before. In 1960s, he recalled, river water was so clean that if one would drop a coin from the bridge, he could tell exactly where it has landed on the riverbed. When I asked him to share some more about the riverbank from that time, his eyes lit up and he exclaimed: 'when I was a young child, I would lie by the river all day so much so my mother would beat me for it!' He then went on to tell me about the two annual fairs that happened on the Yamuna riverbank every year – one during the month of Dussehra (usually, October) and the other during Baisakhi (usually, April):

> "Earlier, during Dussehra, people would come from Gujarat and Rajasthan to bathe in *jamna*. During fairs, people would drink water from the river…Now jamna barely has any water, who'd come here now…Even during Baisakhi, there used to be a tremendous fair (mela) here. Everyone would come with flags of their *akhadas*, flags of different colors, and *Jai Singh ki chhatri*. Everyone would sail their boats in Jamna with their flags. Snacks and food would be sent to them in the river. In Nauchandi, some of these traditions are still followed during *nauchandi mela*." (Discussion, October 2019)

Nauchandi mela, I later learn, is still a popular month-long fair celebrated in Meerut, two weeks after Holi (which would mean sometime in late March or April). Jagdish ji's account suggests that similar customs and fairs were a part of multiple communities along the riverbank which drew value and meaning from the river. But when and how did these customs and fairs seize? Did release of sewage into Yamuna upstream in Delhi which increased in 1970s, had an impact on people's relationship with

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[88] Also see: Sohail Hashmi. "Death of a river." *Kafila.* February 4, 2011. https://kafila.online/2011/02/04/death-of-a-river-yamuna-jamuna-delhi/ (accessed April 20, 2020)

it in Agra as well? Perhaps. One recent event that decisively punctured this relationship was perhaps the 1978 floods[89] which featured repeatedly in several interviews around the riverbank.

Rakesh Jatav vividly recollected the 1978 floods during a conversation we had a few weeks after the 'Picnic by the Ghats' event: 'during the 1978 floods, water covered half of our houses, but these walls are strong and didn't fall'. That time, he shared, that boats had to be used to navigate the lanes and the army was called in to vacate the river-side. However, his family decided to stay put since, as he explained, even the youngest child in his family could swim well due to proximity to the river. The day we were having this conversation, water level in the river had increased unexpectedly and adolescent boys were diving into the river. According to Rakesh, the river has not changed much in his lifetime other than the increase in garbage and filth in it, making it non-potable: 'We used to drink Yamuna's water but now we can't use it for anything. It has deteriorated in the last 30 years.' He speculates that this is because of increase in population and corresponding increase in household waste and sewage which now goes into Yamuna. He explained: 'all these houses you see across the river – they came up in front of my eyes. As number of houses on the riverbank went up and population increased, garbage in Yamuna increased' (PI, October 2019). Other residents also told me that while open defecation by the riverbank has significantly reduced now, people continue to throw their household garbage by the river.

The fact that 1978 floods serve as an important temporal marker of change in people's relationship with the river and riverbank is evidenced in my conversations with other residents, who reminisced about the 'beautiful ghat' (broad stairs leading down to the river) that once adorned this entire riverbank and got permanently submerged during these floods. Ramvati (mid-50s, female, Khaliyai Mandi) for example told me that 'there were broad sturdy stairs earlier which are now covered by layers of mud and garbage' (PI, October 2019). In her memory it was an imposing ghat, comprising of six feet of stairs, of at least nine steps, going down to the river. The last three steps of the stairs at the bottom of the ghat were broad and then they progressively became narrower. However, after the 1978 floods the stairs got completely submerged under garbage, filth, and mud:

> "It was such a big ghat, and so beautiful. It had big stones to sit on…now when we gather and talk, or when our daughters visit us, we talk about how we used to sit by the river a lot, wash clothes there, talk about our families… At night, when water would recede in Jamna, older women would go and sit there for 2-3 hours and talk …But now it's so dirty. And only boys and men sit there now, drink alcohol, eat meat, and then leave their glasses and

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[89] Siraj Qureshi. "Agra was flooded in 1978. What if it happens again?." *India Today.* September 15, 2014. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/yamuna-desilting-prevent-floods-agra-environmentalists-292632-2014-09-15 (accessed April 14, 2020)

bones there. It's horrible now. Women can't go there. And if we say anything, they fight. My daughter-in-law doesn't go to the ghat at all." (Ramvati, PI, October 2019)

It seems that the loss that she feels is not just of the river, or the river getting polluted, but of the ghat or the riverbank itself as a public space where women like her could go without hesitation and meet other women. Further, even as the ghat lies submerged and the water dirty with mounting garbage, the space itself is usurped by men making the *mahaul* unfit for young women. As per Ramvati, when they approached the municipality to clean up the riverbank and to complain about the people who gamble and drink there, the officials mocked them and said that '*jamna* doesn't belong to their father' and that they cannot control what happens there.

Currently, Yamuna dries up to barely a trickle for most part of the year. Only towards the rear end of monsoons, when Delhi releases water because of excess rain, then Yamuna's levels increase. An interesting narrative that emerged here was that of women's relationship with the river when it dries up, opening up the riverbed. Anju (mid-30s, female) for example told me that 'when *jamna* dries up, we go and roam on the riverbed and feed the fishes'. Amma chipped in: 'yes, when there is very little water left in the river and its largely dried up, we prepare food and go for a round in evenings (*ghoom aate hai.*) A lot of kids cross the entire river on foot because the water becomes so shallow especially during June-July'. While conservationists and tourism proponents have been pushing for increasing the amount of water in the river, for locals interestingly, the river is also enjoyable and accessible when water has receded, as then they can walk on the riverbed and reach the deeper parts of the river where it is slightly cleaner and aquatic life is still there. In fact, according to Anju, when water level rises, even though it looks pleasant, it brings more *gandagi (*filth*)* along with it and deposits it in the area close to their houses, which then attracts mosquitoes and disease. The wind that blows over the river when the water level is high is considered harmful: '*yahi hawa toh nuksan karti hai* (this wind is harmful)' Anju remarked as one day we sat at the riverbank and a strong pleasant gust of wind came towards us cooling our sweat-drenched bodies, indicating a unique understanding of river's ecology. This also means that when the authorities release water into Yamuna to make it look aesthetically pleasing (for example, as was done in February 2020 when US President visited Agra[90]), it might be harmful for the local communities because it carries filth and deposits it near residential settlements[91].

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[90] Scroll Staff. "Ahead of Turmp's India visit, UP releases water in Yamuna to mask its foul smell." *Scroll.* Feb 19, 2020. https://scroll.in/latest/953641/ahead-of-trumps-india-visit-up-releases-water-in-yamuna-to-mask-its-foul-smell (accessed April 20, 2020).
[91] Even river activists have called such steps superficial with little gains. See: Rashmi Verma and Shrishti Anand. "Trump's visit got the Yamuna a makeover: How far will it go?" *Down to Earth.* February 24, 2020.

What is interesting here is that in spite of increased pollution in Yamuna over the last 30-40 years, children and young people living on the riverbank continue to bathe in the river for fun. Let us take the example of another conversation that I had with Vartika (Rakesh Jatav's 18-year-old niece) (name changed) to further unpack the relationship between river, leisure, and women. On most days when I visited Khaliyai mandi, I found Vartika sitting with her phone on a cot outside her house, facing the river. I asked her if this is where she sits with her friends usually. 'All of my friends are already married, but yes, before they got married, we used to sit here (by the riverbank) together and talk for long hours' (PI, October 2019). While Vartika still likes sitting by the river when water level increases (which is usually around Rakshabandhan in August) she added that increase in water also brings a lot of garbage and dead foliage with it, which is left behind when water recedes leading to a foul smell. This is why no one bathes in the river when water is receding, she explained. When Vartika was younger, she also used to bathe in Yamuna and loiter at the riverbank with her friends: '*hum kissi bhi haal mei dolte the'*. Once, she recalled humorously that water increased so much in the river that it reached her house and she slipped and fell in the water, but she didn't drown because 'everyone living here knows how to swim' (PI, October 2019). When I asked her why does not she bathe in the river now, even though young boys still do, she said '*jabse maine hosh sambhala, maine chhod dia* (ever since I matured, I stopped)'. '*Hosh sambhalna* '[92] is used here as a euphuism for puberty and in several communities is often marked as the event after which young women's mobilities become seriously truncated. As we sat talking about her memories of the river, a strong wind blew and Vartika immediately said, 'my mother says this is the wind that does most harm, the wind which comes when water level is high' – something that Anju had told me on another occasion. Vartika then pointed to a well in the middle of the river (whose only mouth was visible as the water level was high) and told me that she used to go till that well to bathe when *jamna* would dry up especially in summers:

> "Even now, I go there sometimes with my friends (*dol aati hun)*…When my friends were unmarried, we used to go there often to feed the fishes. We'd feed them flour and pulses every day when the river would be stagnant and dry. I used to enjoy that a lot. Even now, if you'd come here in the mornings, you'd be able to see fishes with their mouth open waiting to be fed if you'll look closely. At night, they come towards the edge of the river. We can in fact catch them with our bare hands. When I was younger, I used to catch them with a *duppata* with the help of my friends." (Vartika, PI, October 6, 2019)

Note here that 'dolna' emerged as an oft-used term in my conversations about leisure. It can be translated as dilly-dallying, or perhaps more accurately as 'loitering' – spending time and roaming around without a purpose. This narrative also indicates that Vartika still shares an intimate relationship

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https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/environment/trump-s-visit-got-the-yamuna-a-makeover-how-far-will-it-go--69433 (accessed April 20, 2020).

[92] When I asked her what does '*hosh sambhalna'* mean here, she just giggled and told me to understand.

with the river, with strong memories of bathing in it and having fun with her friends. However, even as younger women like Vartika and Anju share a relationship with river's ecology, it seems that earlier women had a freer and more communal access to the river and the riverbank served as a platform to form communities.

The week-long event that AHW organized culminated in a plantation drive of 100 saplings at the riverbank and the courtyard facing the riverbank, followed by a two-hour program with music and theatre performances by friends of AHW. After AHW team planted the saplings and was setting up logistics for the cultural program, I found Rakesh warding off goats from grazing on the saplings and actively monitoring children from running over them. The goats were owned by a Muslim family and this had disgruntled Rakesh significantly. As I was sitting on a cot and talking to some women before AHW's final program, a fight broke out. Rakesh, was brutally beating up a 10-year-old boy for trampling over one of the saplings when running around playfully. When others tried intervening, he threatened to beat them up as well. Vartika then called her aunt and asked her to stop him because otherwise, she said, 'the boy's mother will register an FIR against him and charge him under harassment'. In the meanwhile, a member from AHW physically intervened to control Rakesh, at which Rakesh took great offence. By the time Vartika and her aunt reached to stop Rakesh, the boy's mother had also reached (who was wearing a burqa, I note) and was threatening Rakesh with a formal complaint. When the fight finally broke apart, Rakesh started yelling at me, blaming AHW for planting saplings here, increasing his work, and most importantly, for intervening in the fight, making our position as outsiders apparent at once. What this fight and the overall conflict however also revealed is an intense struggle over space, and as I couldn't help noticing, a communal tension.

Today, narratives about people's relationship with the riverbank are marked not just by narratives of garbage and filth but also an underlying tension as members of the two communities residing here blame the other for degrading the riverbank. Rakesh and Vartika in our conversations blamed the Muslim families for dumping their garbage on the riverbank while interviewees from Muslim families blamed the 'people living on the riverbank' for ruining the riverbank. In the evening of AHW's final event, a number of women reached the riverbank to attend it, and remarked that if the riverbank stayed clean like this all the time, then they might come here for '*dolne-firne*', regularly. Once the event started (see Figure 3.6 in appendix), children sat down on the carpets that were laid out, and women continued to huddle on the edges, on the periphery of the compound. As the evening progressed, women returned to their houses to prepare dinner and number of men increased. I also noted that as the men increased, the women who stayed behind started covering their heads and faces. In fact, women who live in the households dotting the riverbank continued doing their household chores like

washing utensils at the common handpump or watching their children while the event progressed, watching the function intermittently. The overall mood of the event, as experienced by the locals, was that of a *mela*, a fair. People seemed disinterested in the event itself but were still happy that this allowed them to gather here and talk amongst themselves. It became a reason for the community to come together.

When I met Vartika again a few weeks after the event, everything was back to what it was before. Goats were grazing on the few remaining saplings and garbage had again started to accumulate on the riverbank. The festive season of Diwali had entailed even more gambling and alcohol consumption. 'Nothing will change here!' Vartika exclaimed. 'Young men sit here all day and gamble and play cards. They have no work, so they have nothing else to do. When police comes for checking, they jump in the river and sometimes even get hurt or lose their lives. So now police has also stopped coming to check on them!' explained Vartika (PI, October 2019). That day, as we stood looking at the river, suddenly, without provocation, Vartika asked me if I have ever visited Gangaji, and told me stories about how Gangaji is still worshipped. It made me wonder about Yamuna's own sacrality and perhaps, its loss.

The next part of the chapter will now engage similarly with another courtyard – Kali ka Bada – and families living there, and their leisure spaces.

Kali ka Bada Courtyard and by-lanes

Kali ka Bada literally translated as Kali's house, is a large compound in one of the by-lanes of Khaliyai Mandi. The compound's courtyard is flanked by room-sized houses on all four sides. There is a small production workshop in one corner, and a few goats are tied up on the opposite corner. The entrance is through a gate located on a narrow lane which opens into a wide courtyard. The first time I visited Kali ka bada, it was mid-afternoon in early October. I was accompanied by an AHW team member who was sharing information about the cultural program scheduled on the final day of their week-long event. As we stood at the courtyard's gate talking to a few women, I saw two young girls peeping from the rooftop, in an attempt to listen to our conversation. Inside the courtyard, an old man was sleeping on a cot on one side, and on the far end of the courtyard, a few women were sitting on cots and some clothes had been hung out on ropes for drying. The walls of the housing units were chipping away, exposing bricks at several places. The women we were talking to told us that their families have been staying here since many generations on rent. The rent is increased once in 5 years and currently its fixed at Rs. 300 per month for each housing unit. Each housing unit has a room, a kitchen and latrine, and each unit is inhabited by a different family.

The next time I visited Kali ka bada was a week after AHW's event, in mid-October. As I had come to expect, I saw several groups of women sitting on cots outside their houses in the main lane on Khaliyai mandi, talking, lying down or cutting vegetables. It was early afternoon and some or the other activity was going on in front of each house on the street, perhaps facilitated by warmth of the winter sun. The scene was no different inside Kali ka Bada. Around 5-6 women, as young as 16 years old and as old as 60, were sitting on two *basiyas* (cots) placed at right angles in front of one of the housing units. At one end of the compound, two teenaged boys were leaning on a parked bike and talking while young children were running around in another corner of the courtyard. The teenaged boys stared at me for a while but once I started talking to the women, they turned their eyes away. In the background I could hear a light humdrum of machinery from the shoe workshop operating in one corner within the compound. Through multiple conversations, I learnt that most families have been staying in this compound this 3-4 generations, spread over at least 100 years. The owner of the property also stays within the same compound in the only two-story housing unit, to the left of the shoe workshop. The owner, himself in his 70s, is Kali babu's son, the original owner of this entire compound. The owner's younger son is a journalist and the older one runs the workshop for manufacturing shoes inside the compound. When I asked if people from within this compound work in this *kaarkhana*, people were quick to correct my assumption and pointed out that it's the 'jatavs from the *basti* who work in this workshop', and not people from their community. Most men who live in Kali ka Bada are engaged in daily wage labour and motor repair work.

I had a long and winding conversation that afternoon with the women who were sitting on the cots inside Kali ka Bada on topics ranging from memories of the riverbank to their plans for their daughters, immigrants in Agra, and the shoe industry. From them I learnt that between 12 noon to 3 or 4 pm every day, the women staying in Kali ka Bada often come together and sit here to while away time: 'You will find us sitting right here only, this is like our *aangan* (courtyard). Everyone sits here. Then the men return from work and we get busy with chores,' explained an older woman who everyone called *Khala* (which means Aunt in Urdu). I had reached Kali ka Bada around 1 pm and we talked till 3.30 pm. Towards the end, another woman similarly told me: 'You should have come even sooner. Now we will go buy vegetables, start cooking dinner. We are *faltu* during afternoons. We cook in the mornings, bathe etc, then our husbands leave for work. After that we have time and we sit *faltu*' (Female discussant, Kali ka Bada, October 2019). During few hours of the day, when men are at work, perhaps this space is akin to a *zenana* for them – an all-women's space where they feel comfortable, at leisure and free, and notably, '*faltu*'. They don't usually go to the riverbank. This compound itself is their public space. *Faltu* literally translates as useless or extra, though in other contexts it can also

mean undesirable. For these women, time is *faltu* when they are not doing household chores or care work. In fact when I approached them for the discussion, they said, '*aao, hum faltu baithe hai,* which roughly translates to 'come, we are sitting idle'. But even in this apparently *faltu* or idle time, they sometimes peel peanuts to sell them on a per kilo basis or peel peas to be used in their kitchen later. Other times, they sit and chat. Is *faltu* then akin to leisure? At the same time, it seems there is no pure leisure time for these women, only *faltu* time when leisure and work co-exists. Perhaps *faltu* time is best understood as slow time, it is a time which allows for flexibility because in this context, leisure is inseparable from work – the two are deeply connected.

Does this *faltu-pan* and *faltu* time facilitate community building and use of a semi-public space such as a courtyard or riverbank? Writing in a very different context of young Muslim boys in Hyderabad, Rafia Kazim (2018) explores how the street space becomes an avenue for 'informal alternative learning' for Muslim boys living in enclaved neighbourhoods with minimal education. Through her ethnographic work she discovers that '*khaali firna'* (roaming around idly) is actually a way for these boys to develop social networks and pick up crucial skills as opposed to being a waste of time (Kazim 2018, p 67). I argue that *faltu-pan* can be read in a similar register of 'useful idleness' for these women who are, while sitting *faltu*, come together with their neighbours, find means of income by exchanging notes on and indulging in piece-rate work, share stories of hardships and joys, and form an all-women enclave of sorts. This is borne out by the discussions I had with women during my field visits.

One of the discussants that I met in this courtyard that day was Mubina. She was 30 years old at the time of field work, and lived with her in-laws, husband, an 8-year-old son and her sister's daughter inside the Kali ka Bada compound. Her sister passed away due to excessive violence by her husband. During the conversation, she re-iterated several times that she will ensure her sister's daughter becomes independent and doesn't marry early 'because everyone later regrets early marriage'. Other women nodded in agreement each time, and repeated that they also won't marry off their daughters at young age from now on, also indicating a sharing of wisdom and life lessons during this *faltu* time. Mubina herself was married at the age of 16 years. We then also discussed education opportunities for young girls who live in Khaliyai mandi, and all the discussants raised similar problems of inadequate instruction at school, high fees after class 8th, and the absence of senior high school within the *basti*. The nearest high school is located after crossing the bridge over Yamuna which some young girls are scared of crossing alone, which I assume is because of fear of public sexual harassment. The discussion

itself suggested that there are close bonds between the women who live here and they perhaps also advise each other on personal matters.

Later during the conversation, I asked Mubina if she ever goes to the riverbank. She doesn't, she replied, and was in fact confused at my question – 'what is there to see?', she exclaimed. Her grandfather-in-law used to cross the river on boat everyday but for her, Yamuna is merely a river, with no relationship to her daily life. Instead, she told me, like other women she sometimes goes to the park around Gandhi Smarak for morning walks, or when her relatives visit her. Otherwise, 'in *faltu* time, we just sit here, in our courtyard, and women from the neighbouring houses also join us, we just sit here', explained Mubina. Other than this, she shared that when her relatives visit her, she takes them to the various monuments and parks across Agra like Taj Mahal, Red fort, Itmad-ud-daula, Rambagh, Daulat park, Paliwal park and so on (PI, October 2019).

Women who live at Kali ka Bada in fact do not visit the riverbank much because 'there is nothing to see' (sic). When I had asked them if they go to the riverbank, one of the female discussants had instead asked me rhetorically – 'why would we go to *jamna*? We get water in the house, we have a toilet in our house. We only go there to throw garbage, or when someone dies or an accident happens, why else would we go?' (Female discussant, Kali ka Bada, October 2019). Another woman nonetheless added that they do go when the water level rises, but only to 'see the river for a few minutes'. 'Yes, when water level rises or when our relatives visit us, we go, stand for 5-10 minutes, and come back', Mubina added in agreement.

Further, unlike the people I met at the riverbank courtyard, most women at Kali ka bada said they never bathed in the river even in their childhood. At the same time, older women shared that earlier they used to go to the riverbank to wash clothes or for '*udham-bazi*' with relatives (*Khala*, mid-50s, Kali ka Bada, October 2019). *Udham* literally translates as hustling or making noise, but when used with 'bazi' which means a match or play, it can mean playing together to make noise. Visit by relatives was thus an important occasion to visit the river for these women, and continues to be so today, but generally now they don't go to the riverbank in their *faltu* time unless the water level rises substantially. Even then, they said, they go to just 'see the river'. According to Mubina, riverbank is a place full of filth and a bad *mahaul*, which is why women do not like to go there:

> "Why would we like to go? The entire world's filth is there…and the *mahaul* is also bad. Boys sit there, play cards, drink…and we have young daughters in the house. Why would we take them to jamna. Even we feel odd going there." (Mubina, PI, October 2019).

The riverbank is not a friendly space then for these women who stay at a distance of 400 meters from the river's edge. The refrain of '*kharab mahaul*' and garbage is in fact the only, but glaring commonality between the narratives by women living in Kali ka bada and those living closer to Prithvi mandir courtyard (in front of the river bank) and I will explore this at length in the next chapter. The younger women in Kali ka bada, who are in their 20s and 30s, have always seen the river dirty. For them, throwing garbage on the riverbank is completely acceptable because until four years ago, everyone used to defecate there anyway, which was much worse.

At Kali ka Bada, I also met Ruksana Mombatti-wali[93] who is *Khala's* daughter. At the time of field work, Ruksana was separated from her husband, and lived in a small rented house in Khaliyai mandi with her 4 children. On my next field visit, I interviewed Ruksana at her house, which is in a narrow lane right after Kali ka Bada courtyard (see figure 3.4 in appendix). When I reached Ruksana's house, she was washing clothes in front of the toilet, and asked me to wait for her on the rooftop. A small flight of chipped cement stairs led me upstairs to a busy terrace which had two rooms, roughly 6x6 feet in dimension, and a small open space where there were two cots stacked by the wall, and piles of unpeeled peanuts. Her two daughters emerged from one of the rooms, where I saw several piles of candles that they were packing in plastic bags. They offered me one of the cots to sit on. As I took a seat, the openness of this small terrace space, after a narrow lane and a dimly lit ground floor struck me. One could see other rooftop terraces from here and could even easily hop the boundary wall. I saw people sitting on cots on other terraces as well. I asked Ruksana's 17-year-old daughter, Karishma, if she sits here often. 'Yes, me and my sister even sleep here, the wind is nice here,' she said. This reminded me about what someone else had once suggested to me – that in densely packed urban localities, terraces are the [only] leisure spaces available to people, and become semi-public due to their openness[94]. At the same, the roof remains very firmly part of the house.

While waiting for Ruksana, I chatted some more with her daughters – Karishma and Munni. They both were wearing salwar-kameez and the elder one had her head covered by a scarf, even though I didn't see Ruksana with her head covered. Karishma has attended school till class 8th. She wanted to study further but Ruksana pulled her out because the nearest high school after class 8th is a private one which she couldn't afford. During the day, Karishma helps her mother in peeling peanuts and making candles. In the background, I could hear the azan from a speaker of a mosque and chirping of birds. Soon, Ruksana joined us. To earn a living, Ruksana told me she makes 25-30 kgs of candles every

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[93] She is known as 'Ruksana mombatii-wali' (one with candles) in the neighbourhood because she makes and sells candles.

[94] I owe this insight to a discussion with Ms. Ratna Sudarshan, Trustee, ISST, Delhi in September 2018.

week which her brother then sells to a buyer near the dargah. Aside from that, she peels and sorts around 40 kgs of peanuts every day with her daughters, for which she earns Rs. 2.50 per kilo. She is also responsible for household chores like preparing food daily and washing the entire family's clothes once a week. She narrated her schedule to me to underline that she doesn't get any time or '*fursat*' to do anything else. Sustenance keeps her busy, so my questions on leisure hold little importance. We talked for a while nonetheless.

Ruksana spent most of her life in Khaliyai Mandi. She got married at the age of 16 years and left her husband when her children were very young because he had an extra-marital affair. So she returned to Khaliyai mandi where she grew up. Her older son works in a factory which makes and prints shoe boxes. She expressed dismay at the level of civic amenities in Khaliyai mandi and criticized the BJP-led central and state government at length for failing to provide essential services, while adding that the local councillor, Abdul Salam from BSP has been proactive in getting roads fixed and the area cleaned. I asked her about the changes she has witnessed in Khaliyai mandi since she has spent most of her life here:

> "A lot has changed. Earlier, children used to run around in all directions and play. Would even run naked. But nowadays we have to ensure even a little girl is wearing an underwear at all times. Earlier, we used to meet each other on holi-diwali, play holi together, dance. Now no one plays. Even on Eid now, we just hug each other and then retreat into our houses, eat in our own houses. Earlier there was much more unity and bonhomie. Now a lot has changed." (Ruksana, PI, November 2019)

Her narrative indicates two things – one, children, especially girls were in some sense freer earlier, with little threat in her worldview. And second, a bonhomie between Hindus and Muslims which has ceased to exist now. She was talking about the time when she was a young child, probably in 1980s, before Hindu-Muslim antagonism gained heat in UP. Much in line with her narrative, I indeed sensed a volatility between the two communities in Khaliyai Mandi, with one blaming the other for this '*kharab mahaul'*, while co-existing simultaneously. Much like Mubina, Ruksana said she roams around the city only when her sisters visit her, usually during festivals. I asked her if she ever goes to the riverbank.

> "When I was young, we also used to play by the jamna a lot. We'd go alone and play. A lot of buffaloes used to come to the riverbank. We'd collect all the cow-dung by the jamna and then dry them in the sun. But now can girls go there? They can't. Now the *mahaul* is such there. Earlier, we would only occasionally hear that someone's husband is a drunkard. But now even small kids drink…So my daughters don't go to the riverbank. When they were younger, they used to go some times, but not now. I still go sometimes, if there is a program, or if I feel like walking. Or if my son wants to take a dip in the water, then I'd go with him. My younger son goes there whenever his school is off. To the jamna. So I go to call him then. In the process, I also take a round (*dol aati hun)*. But girls don't go. Because that side, there is gambling. 2-3 drunkards are always there. It's never empty. And men still defecate and urinate there.." (Ruksana, PI, November 2019)

Neha and Munni nodded along as Ruksana told me about the *mahaul* at the riverbank. What's interesting is that Ruksana's status as a mother of two young boys allows her to still access the riverbank, though not in the same way as she used to when she was a child. What this narrative also reveals is an intimate, nostalgic and yet fractured relation that Ruksana continues to share with the river. Her daughters however completely stay away from the riverbank.

What's notable is that in several of these narratives, the river was reduced to merely a source of water and a place to defecate which these women don't need since they have a provision inside their homes. It is instead a place rife with risk and a bad affective atmosphere or *mahaul*. It is acutely gendered, a space where the *mahaul* is unfit for women of reproductive age. In fact, Yamuna and its riverbank did not even come up in discussions of leisure spaces and spaces of personal importance in interviews with middle class women of different faiths living in Taj Ganj[95] area either. It's something that they 'never actively thought about', as one research participant who is a Lab Technician said (Ankita, 29-years-old, PI, October 2019). One explanation for this perhaps could be an emergence of what Bilgrami calls a 'disenchanted world view', as opposed to an enchanted worldview which was once common in cities of North India and saw the natural world such as rivers and mountains imbued with values and sacrality. Unfortunately, the emergence of new science of the seventeenth century saw the use of nature with impunity for only its use, and not for any innate value due to a process of desacralization (Bilgrami 2009, 11).

An emerging space: Gandhi Smarak

Another space that cropped up in several conversations on open public spaces was the Gandhi Smarak. Access to Gandhi Smarak however has seen its own ebbs and flow. In 1929, Mahatma Gandhi stayed at this location for 12 days, as a guest of a jeweler and businessman Ramkrishna Mehra. As per accounts of residents of Khaliyai mandi, he used to bathe in Yamuna River and would sit by the ghats every day. After Gandhi passed way, Ramkrishna Mehra's son donated the building to the government. For several years, it served as a government maternity hospital, child welfare centre and ayurvedic clinic, which shut down a few years ago[96]. After that, it laid dormant, and according to some accounts, in disarray for several years. Anju for example shared that after the government-run hospital got shut down, it was reduced to ruins, people started gambling and drinking there, and would even defecate

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[95] Taj Ganj is one of the four municipal zones in Agra. It includes Taj Mahal, gated residential complexes, low and middle income neighbourhoods, slums, hotels, and shopping malls.

[96] Bhanu Pratap Singh. "आगरा में है गांधी जी की घड़ी, जरूर देखिए स्मारक". Jan 30, 2016. Patrika. https://www.patrika.com/agra-news/visit-gandhi-smarak-in-agra-11008/ (accessed April 3, 2020)[97] Her husband was also employed by the municipality as a house tax inspector. She is still referred to as 'doctorni' by her neighbours and conducts house-calls for deliveries in nearby areas. She keeps the main gate of her house shut at all times because of 'security concerns'.

there at night. That time, a self-help group (SHG) formulated by the municipality and run by local women, including Anju, was active in this area. When government officials visited this area, the SHG group placed their demand to shut down or renovate Gandhi Smarak in order to curb gambling and drinking. That, Anju explained, eventually resulted in construction of a park around Gandhi Smarak and community toilets. Ramvati likewise told me that the boundary wall around Gandhi Smarak compound was renovated after repeated applications submitted by women of the area, including herself, and before that the compound was a hub of 'gambling, meat eating, drinking, and fighting'.

The Gandhi Smarak was thus renovated and reopened sometime in late 2015 as 'Gandhi Smarak and Museum'. However, this also had the side-effect of Gandhi Smarak compound becoming highly regulated. Currently, it houses a newly renovated white building surrounded by a manicured garden. It is maintained by the municipality and remains locked for most part of the day, with the key kept with a caretaker. 'Men blame us for getting the compound locked and making it inaccessible,' laughed Anju during our conversation. In fact, it was only in 2019 that women from the neighbourhood got partial access to Gandhi Smarak and now use it for morning and evening walks.

However, I also encountered competing narratives regarding Gandhi Smarak during my field work. According to Ruksana, 'before Gandhi Smarak got renovated, more than half the public would spend time there (inside Gandhi Smarak compound). Boys, children, men, women – everyone would just put a *basiya* (cot) there and sit. Women would peel or sort daana (grain/seeds). Or do some other work. People would graze their goats there. People also put swings on the trees. More than half the people of the *basti* would be inside that compound. Now this gate has been erected and a wall has been constructed.' Her tone had a hint of nostalgia and sorrow over a lost space. When I prodded her to tell me more about the compound, she told me that several years ago, a doctor used to sit inside the same compound and charge a consultation fee of Re. 1. After that was discontinued, people started sitting there. However, now the gate remains shut most of the time and people cannot go inside with their cots. Some women now go for a walk in the mornings to the Gandhi Samarak compound (Ruksana, PI, November 5, 2019). This narrative suggests that what was once a democratic open space is now only used for what Amita Baviskar (2018) calls a very specific quotidian urban practice -- walking.

This narrative is at odds with Anju's narration of the compound being used solely by young men for drinking and gambling. It instead indicates an alternative narrative – that Gandhi Smarak was perhaps, at some point, an open and vibrant space within the *basti*. It suggests a much more community-based, equitable and somewhat romantic use by both men and women, young and old, where they could gather on their *basiyas,* hang swings, and spend time together. I found reiterations

of both versions by different people, though Anju's version was the more dominant and oft-repeated one. For example, according to Mubina, Gandhi Smarak compound was recently renovated by the municipality and 'before it was renovated, there was a lot of filth in the compound, and outsiders used to drink and gamble there. It was after a campaign by a local organization, that it was finally broken down and reconstructed, and at the same time, toilets were also constructed' (Mubina, PI, October 25, 2019). She further said:

> "Since Gandhi park (referring to the park around Gandhi Smarak) got renovated, it's been good (*achha ho gaya*). It remained locked for a few years after renovation. Since a few months it has started to remain open and women go for a walk inside the compound in the mornings (*auratein subah tehelne jati hai*). Earlier, it wasn't open. Now it opens and lights have been installed. Now children also go there in the afternoons to attend classes." (Mubina, PI, October 2019).

This is one of the challenges I faced while talking about memories. Who accessed Gandhi Smarak earlier, and who found it an intrusion? Who accesses it now, and who thinks of it as an inaccessible, gated space? Both Anju and Ruksana told me that women now go for walks to Gandhi Smarak, but both of them also pointed out that it is gated, locked and walled, and the movement is regulated.

Mrs. Chaudhury (introduced earlier) gave me more details of the story behind Gandhi Smarak. I first met Mrs. Chaudhury outside her two-story well-built house which stood out to me in a lane of make-shift shacks, open workshops, and modest single-story houses. Along with her name, this indicated to me an upper caste and class status. Until a decade ago, she was working as a mid-wife and helped in deliveries in the maternity hospital inside the Gandhi Smarak complex. In fact, for several years, she and her husband stayed inside the Gandhi Smarak compound in a room provided by the municipality above the hospital until they saved up and bought this house[97]. As the story goes, the property on which Gandhi Smarak and the compound stands today belonged to a Bengali Seth (merchant) from Calcutta. He donated the property to Mahatma Gandhi, who in turn handed it over to the Nagar Nigam, which opened a government hospital at the site with 5 centres – family planning, children's ward, vaccine centre, and gynaecology. Gradually, each of these centres got shut down as doctors and staff members retired or expired and the building started to break down. New staff wasn't recruited so no one was left to run the place[98]. Furthermore, according to Mrs. Chaudhary, renovation and reconstruction of the building was prohibited by 'Itmad-ud-daula people' ('*itmad-ud-daula walon*

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[97] Her husband was also employed by the municipality as a house tax inspector. She is still referred to as 'doctorni' by her neighbours and conducts house-calls for deliveries in nearby areas. She keeps the main gate of her house shut at all times because of 'security concerns'.
[98] According to another narrative that another woman living in Kali ka Bada told me, the hospital got shut down after the doctors botched up a few cases.

ne nahi banne dia', as she said) which I infer is perhaps because of the protected status of Itmad-ud-daula by ASI which regulates and prohibits construction within a 300-metre radius of the monument. Now the entire compound is with a Trust dedicated towards Mahatma Gandhi. Officials come here only to celebrate Gandhi Jayanti and make a few speeches and leave (Mrs. Chaudhury, PI, October 2019).

Nonetheless, several women, including Mrs. Chaudhury, Anju, and Ruksana told me that they now go for walks to the Gandhi Smarak park during mornings and evenings. Children are not allowed to play inside the walled park. Men usually do not go inside Gandhi Smarak anymore. During the day, the compound is often shut and the key is with a caretaker. In all my visits to Khaliyai Mandi spread over October and November 2019 I did not see any women sitting inside the compound, or any children playing inside during the field work duration (though it should be noted that my field work was usually from 10 am to 5 pm). In fact, I saw it being actively used only twice during the day, both times when a local leader was teaching young children in the park surrounding the building.

On one such occasion, I met a few RSS workers at Gandhi Smarak who were distributing sweets to children on the occasion of Dhan Teras. One of them, who said he has been serving the Sangh since several years, pulled me aside to explain that they are trying to teach 'Hindu values to *mohommeden* kids'. He further clarified to me that the Sangh is not associated with any one political party but are 'protectors of Indian culture' (sic). I later found out that the reason why he underlined this was because one of the men who was helping him distribute sweets was a local resident and aligns with BSP politically. Another man who I met the same day was Shastri ji who is the Principal of Saraswati Shishu Mandir, a middle school in Khaliyai Mandi run by Vidhya Bharti, the education wing of RSS. Shastri ji has been serving the RSS since more than two decades and started teaching in different settlements of Moti Bagh in 1996. He is also the district chief of Sewa Bharti organization which runs 19 types of 'sanskar kendra'. A considerable number of children in Khaliyai Basti study at Saraswati Shishu mandir school. The school itself started a version of Sanskar Kendra in Gandhi Smarak compound in September 2019 to reach Muslim kids and teach them '*sanskar*' ('*sanskar*' is not easily translatable to English and refers to a system of moral values and norms, culture and beliefs). I later interviewed Shastri ji who told me that the key to Gandhi Smarak compound is with an appointed staff person. I also asked him about the classes he conducts inside Gandhi Smarak compound as part of Sanskar Kendra where children from both Hindu and Muslim families study. He explained this to me in detail:

> "Any school will teach you 2+2 is four. But to teach this, what kind of *mahaul* is needed, that this organization teaches. We go into the *basti* and politely persuade families to send their children to attend our classes. Once the

children start coming, we teach them *sanskar* – how to arrange the chappals in a line, greet elders, wear clean clothes, wash their face. Once their parents see this, then they will also get conscious... Our objective is to teach *sanskar* to parents through the children…We teach about morality, patriotism, patriotic songs, and some games…50% of the population here is Muslim. But now they (the kids) celebrate all festivals, conduct prayers, they remember all sanskrit *shloks* (verses). *Ekdum hindu-may ho gaye hai (*they have become Hindu-like)." (Shastri ji, PI, November 2019)

The focus of these classes is then to teach purportedly 'Hindu *sanskar'* or values to both Hindu and Muslim children who live in this neighbourhood and make them '*hindu-mey'*. Ruksana's 11-year-old daughter and Mubina's 8-year-old son attend these classes on culture and values at Gandhi Smarak. Both Ruksana and Mubina called it 'free tuition' which help their children in school work. When I asked Ruksana's 11-year-old daughter what she learns in these tuition classes, she said, 'they make us exercise (PT), learn tables, Hindi, Jan-gan-Man, prarthna (prayers) and *hamara bharat mahan* (our country is great)'.

Currently, BSP has a stronghold over the politics in this *basti*, with an elected Councillor from the party in power. Several people credited the Councillor, Abdul Salam for getting roads and electricity fixed. His religious identity and political affiliation also provide insights into the caste and religion-based politics in this area, something which is symbolic of politics in the state as whole with the rise of regional caste-based parties in UP since the 1990s. The BJP has been trying to gain popularity in this area since several years, through a careful balancing act of working with the local BSP leaders and providing out-of-school tutoring classes to children of different communities – Muslims and Jatavs -- to push for a Hindutva culture.

Conclusion

Moving away from a tourist-centred narrative on one hand and a conservation-perspective on the other, this chapter engages with intimate relationship of the local community with the riverbank as a public space, a leisure space, and a gendered space. These ethnographic sketches also give us a glimpse into alternate and emerging leisure spaces in Khaliyai Mandi such as the cots placed in front of houses in by-lanes and courtyards and Gandhi Smarak's compound.

The first strand that emerges through this chapter is the changing relationship between local communities and a public space like the riverbank. Questions about riverbank as a leisure space made people reminisce about the stories that they had heard about the pristine-ness of the river, the past relationship between sacrality and ecology through rituals of bathing and fairs during Kartik month, and stories of *udham-bazi* and *dolna,* indicating a deeply intimate relationship with the river. The river was once a common good, imbued with values and sacrality. Anju, Amma, Ramvati, *Khala,* and

Ruksana narrated stories that suggested nostalgia about the river's past. At the same time, they repeatedly associated the riverbank with filth, defecation, garbage, 'kharab mahaul' and deterioration in present times. At some point it seems that the sacred nature of the river got undone. It is not entirely clear when and why did Yamuna become primarily a defecation ground and what was the source of this disenchantment[99]. Nonetheless, listening to these narratives, one can speculate that this was perhaps a result of processes of urbanization and postcolonial development, and more recent extraordinary events like the 1978 floods in Agra which became a temporal marker for a definite change in people's relationship with the river. Unfortunately, while several proposals have been made for revival of gardens and riverfront in the Taj Heritage zone, they seem disconnected with the people's everyday relationship with the river. Moreover, these plans propose a cordoned off area and a walled riverfront development, instead of encouraging a seamless connection between the locals and riverbank.

According to Akeel Bilgrami (2006; 2014), there are two planes that co-exist in individual mentalities. One is the collective and public epistemology of disenchantment as per which nature is devoid of value and is brute, to be used materially for its utilitarian value. The other is a quotidian, enchanted responsive relationship that ordinary people have with the world where they see the world imbued with normative values. Drawing from Bilgrami's distinction between the two planes, scholars like AV Taneja argue that because these two frames co-exist in people, people are prone to inconsistencies in their articulation vis-à-vis their relationship with nature (Taneja 2017, 193). As per this understanding, the pollution of rivers and streams belongs to the public epistemology where nature is devoid of moral and sacred values, while memories of the river being sacred, being a communal public space for fairs and gatherings, and the feelings of 'sublime' that the river still evokes perhaps belongs to the realm of the quotidian, enchanted individual relationship. This perhaps explains why the people living in Khaliyai Mandi shared stories of the riverbank with nostalgia while simultaneously criticizing its filth and mahaul.

Today, the riverbank has become a space rife with risk and a kharab mahaul, where women, especially of reproductive age do not go. It is a space where iterant men drink and gamble. Local women have in fact moved away from the riverbank as a leisure space to Gandhi Smarak as a space for walking and coming together, even as access to both spaces remains punctured by gendered as well as somewhat communal conflict. The characterisation of the affective atmosphere of riverbank as

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[99] These questions require a deeper intellectual and historical inquiry than this research allows for.

kharab (bad) and its impact on women's access to public space in Khaliyai Mandi is one of the key questions explored in the next chapter.

Another strand that comes out through this chapter is the complicated relationship between leisure and work in a low-income, low-caste neighbourhood such as Khaliyai Mandi. Gossip among women is not something to be censured but acknowledged as a means to exchange information, to lighten one's heart, and to build solidarities. More importantly, this leisure time co-exists with work. Similarly, perhaps there is no purely public leisure space here. The space outside one's house, where one places a cot, though physically public, is also semi-public in its functioning. Invisible strings keep the cots tied to a certain perimeter of the house. While others are welcome to join you, it is usually only known relatives and neighbours who actually do, leaving little space for chance encounters.

Finally, this chapter brings forth the specificity of Khaliyai Mandi itself. Khaliyai Mandi is a volatile neighbourhood, as is borne out by the intense politics over naming, intermittent conflicts between the two communities, and the tug of war between political parties. This social context and contested nature of space itself fundamentally shapes women's access to public spaces. After all, the question of gendered bodies and their relationship with urban space is intricately tied to one's caste, community, religion, class, age, and geographical context. Khaliyai Mandi is also a space where the urban and rural ways of life seem to co-habit. Agra is a city which is still intimately connected with a rural lifestyle while simultaneously competing to be a global tourist and heritage city. Until a few decades ago, the broader area under which Khaliyai mandi falls was characterised by a rural landscape and land-use pattern, with its location on the eastern riverbank. In that case, it is important to ask that is Khaliyai Mandi in Agra, or Kalyanpuri in Delhi (explored in Chapter 5), completely urbanized? What does 'complete urbanization' would mean in the first place? If the spaces produced by processes of urbanization are both urban and rural, then what can one say about 'public spaces' within these geographies and how they are gendered? More specifically, aside from punctured relationship with the river and the riverbank, and the relationship between ecology and urban populations, the other set of questions that one is faced through a study of Khaliyai Mandi are: What is an essentially *urban* public space? Secondly, what are public leisure spaces especially for women living in a highly gendered and regulated environment where *mahaul* is not conducive to their access to public space? Finally, what are implications of these on *urban* citizenship? I will take up some of these questions in detail in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Four

'Mahaul', Safety, and Love in Agra

Introduction

An oft-repeated refrain in the interviews conducted in Khaliyai Mandi, especially with women, was that '*yahan mahaul kharab hai*' (the atmosphere is bad is). This took me back to the theatrical performance by Mallika Taneja, 'Be Careful', described in the first chapter, which underlined a similar maxim, using *mahaul* and *zamana* at different times during the performance:

> "You know na, times are bad (*zamana kharab hai*)…See every place has -- it's in the air -- an atmosphere (*mahaul*). You have to understand that atmosphere (*mahaul*) and move according to that…" (Excerpt from 'Thodha dhyan se', Mallika, Vimeo video, privately shared, 2018)

What does this '*mahaul*' mean and how is it constituted? What are its implications for women's access to leisure and public spaces? On whom does the onus of safety and *mahaul* fall? The first part of the chapter will focus on unpacking some of these questions through an analysis of some oft-repeated maxims such as '*mahaul kharab hai*' and '*hum sahi toh sab sahi*' in Khaliyai Mandi in particular. This will be followed by a discussion around data on crimes against women in Agra and Khaliyai Mandi area in order to contextualize the narratives of women around access to public spaces. This section is based on interviews at the local police station near Khaliyai mandi, NCRB and local level data, and newspaper reports. The last section of this chapter throws light on politics of love, romance, and elopements by young heterosexual couples in Agra which has also contributed towards this allegedly '*kharab mahaul*' (bad atmosphere). In the process, I will explore love as a form of leisure and agency, the spaces it claims, and its denial and politicization.

1. Affective environments and Safety Narratives

Mahaul Kharab hai: Unpacking affective environments

Quite simply, '*mahaul*' can be translated to atmosphere or environment. However, it's not merely the physical atmosphere that is in question here, but an 'affective atmosphere'. Let's go back to some of the interviews at Khaliyai Mandi to understand what does this *mahaul* or affective atmosphere actually means, and to unpack perceptions of safety and risk in Khaliyai mandi. According

to Anju, a 42-year-old woman who lives in front of the riverbank, 'the basti is generally safe'[100]. I felt this was at odds with an earlier conversation that I had with Anju where she had strongly criticized the '*kharab mahaul*' by the riverbank as 'men gamble and drink here', because of which women and girls don't sit by the riverbank (See Chapter 3). However, when I asked her direct questions on safety, she kept underlining that 'there is no trouble' (*koi dikkat nahi hai*):

> "We step out at 12 or 1 am also, there is no fear, no problem. All these girls (*pointing to her 17-year-old daughter*) get up at 4 am because they are fasting for *navratre*. There is no trouble (*dikkat*). Even outside the basti, there is no *dikkat*. They can go to the market…My daughter came from the railway station at 2 am via autorickshaw – she didn't face any trouble. We know the auto-driver. *Koi dikkat nahi hai.*" (Anju, PI, October 2019).

Anju thus repeatedly denied facing any problem or '*dikkat*' (problem) in terms of women and girls accessing public space or feeling unsafe in public. In fact, '*koi dikkat nahi hai*' was repeatedly uttered by several women in Khaliyai Mandi, and later in Kalyanpuri (see Chapter 5) as well whenever asked about their perceptions of safety in urban public spaces. Time and again, *dikkat* was denied, with a simultaneous narrative of *kharab mahaul* and the need to negotiate it carefully. This '*mahaul*' or affective atmosphere is ephemeral and cannot be captured by terms like 'safety' or unsafety. This was quickly revealed when Anju's daughter, Pooja, who was 17-years-old at the time of this field work and was married, joined our conversation. When I asked Pooja if she goes out at night, she gave an emphatic no. 'Not in this basti, not here, but in Delhi I do. In Delhi one can come and go anywhere anytime but not here. *Dilli mei maze aate hai*', she said. Pooja got married when she was 16-years-old and stays with her husband in Rohini in Delhi. She has visited shopping malls and historical places in Delhi with her husband, who owns a bike and works at a mother diary booth in Saket. I asked her if she ever felt scared in Delhi. 'No, it's all good there', she immediately responded. She finds Delhi much better than Agra and reiterated: '*wahan kahin bhi ghoomne chale jao, yahan toh mummy jane nahi deti* (there one can go roam around anywhere, but here my mother doesn't let me go)', she giggled while telling me this. Anju, who sat listening to our conversation, chipped in here with an apologetic smile: 'yes, there it's fine but I don't let her go around in Agra, it's true, because the *mahaul* is good there…It's not good here.' When I asked her why, she explained: 'it's not good here. Mohammedens stay here. Earlier, there used to be a lot of fights. They'd even throw bricks at each other over a girl (*ladki ke chakkar mei*). Even now that happens' (Discussion, October 2019).

Thus, while initially Anju proclaimed that women can go out anywhere, anytime, without fear or trouble in and outside of Khaliyai Mandi, she later conceded that she doesn't let her daughters roam around because the *mahaul* is bad, boys turn violent 'over a girl' and there is inter-religious strife. How

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[100] I met Anju several times during the field work – either sitting on broken steps in the courtyard-like open area opposite the riverbank or sitting on a cot where an old woman (introduced as *Amma* in previous chapter) runs a *khokha* (pan shop).

does one understand these conflicting assertions? Though unsaid, is 'purpose' the operative word here – if her daughter has to go anywhere for a legitimate purpose such as the railway station or market, then she will not face any problem, but *'ghoomna'* is not allowed because 'the atmosphere is bad' in Agra. There is clearly a need to unpack this co-existence of absence of trouble (*koi dikkat nahi hai*) and an undesirable affective atmosphere (*kharab mahaul)* that Anju articulates. Does accessing leisure activities and leisure spaces itself suggest some sort of transgression that 'good girls' are not expected to indulge in, unless they do so after marriage, with their husbands? The fact that Pooja got married at the age of 16 years and feels more autonomous and happier with respect to her mobility and leisure since then is also noteworthy. As Phadke et al (2011) write in their now famous book, *Why Loiter,* women get access to public spaces only when they can demonstrate a respectable purpose for occupying it. The book dives deep into the challenges, obstacles and policing that different categories of women face when trying to have fun in urban public spaces and the unique strategies women adopt to navigate moral sanctions, societal norms, and fears drawing from their lived experience.

What is also notable in the above conversation is that Delhi gets constructed as a space which provides autonomy and opportunities for leisure precisely because of the *'mahaul'* that it provides. During a rather long conversation, Vartika, who is 18-years-old and lives opposite the riverbank in Khaliyai mandi told me that she wants to go to Delhi once and see what is it all about because her sisters and friends (including Pooja) who are married and live in Delhi talk very positively about it (Personal Interview, October 2019). In fact, her elder sister has been trying to convince her to get married to a man who lives in Delhi because then 'they can have fun together'. What makes it possible to have more 'fun' in Delhi than in Agra? Is it the anonymity that a metropolitan city provides? Is it the transition from being unmarried to married that provides a garb of respectability, thereby legitimising leisure activities? Or, is it the 'atmosphere' or *'mahaul'* of Delhi which facilitates leisure? When I probed Pooja on this question, she merely reiterated that '*wahan sab aise hain, aisa hi hai wahan' (*'everyone is like this there, everything is such'). What is 'this' and 'such' however remained underarticulated. Vartika speculates that perhaps it is the people who make Delhi different as 'they talk with etiquettes' and 'are well-mannered (*tameezdar*)', even though Vartika herself has never been to Delhi. Yet she believes that Delhi's *mahaul* is different, which is shaped by 'people's thinking and culture' (PI, October 2019).

This instant comparison with Delhi, even without probing or an immediate connection came up organically in several of the interviews. For example, in an interview with Sidra, a 26-year-old middle class woman who works in a bank and lives with her parents, such a comparison with Delhi ran through most of our discussion on her life in Agra. At one point for example she said, 'in Delhi,

people know that if they do anything, then the women are proactive and aware enough to take some action against them. People in Agra take a lot of liberty, they think they can eve-tease anyone just for fun and nothing will happen' (Personal Interview, October 2019). As a result, much like Pooja in Khaliyai Mandi, Sidra, who lives in an MIG (middle-income group) flat in Tajganj prefers hanging out in Delhi instead whenever she gets a chance because she feels 'safer and free-er' there (sic). This is because of two reasons. Firstly, because she doesn't fear as much street harassment in Delhi. And secondly, because she enjoys some anonymity in Delhi as opposed to in Agra where her parents can track her whereabouts at all times through their network of friends and family. This adds another layer in the circle of policing women face, a point I will come back to in the third part of this chapter. In recent years, scholarship on comparative urbanism has also flagged the inevitability and desirability of comparison in our analysis (for example, McFarlane 2010; Robinson 2016). This can be taken further to argue that comparison is inevitable in our everyday perception and understanding of cities and imaginations of urbanism and urban life as well.

While interviews with younger girls in Khaliyai Mandi suggested that Delhi is perceived as a liberating and desirable city with opportunities for mobility, freedom, access, and good '*mahaul*', for middle aged and older men and women living in Khaliyai Mandi, Delhi is also a place rife with risks and instances of extraordinary violence. According to Rakesh for example, who is Vartika's uncle and guardian, 'Agra is the safest place for my daughters'. This is because he trusts Agra: 'my daughters can go anywhere in Agra, I trust the city this much. I don't have this much faith in other cities like Delhi where I don't know if my daughter will return home or not' (Personal Interview, October 2019). I surmise that this trust is a result of strong kinship bonds and networks of familiarity that Rakesh has established within Agra which enable him to informally police the young woman's mobilities and desires. It is precisely these kinship networks and extensive familiarity which restrict women's mobility and access in a non-metropolitan city like Agra.

Much like Rakesh, Mrs. Chaudhury, a 62-year-old upper-caste woman who lives in a well-constructed two-story house in Khaliyai Mandi, finds Agra to be a safe city in comparison to Delhi where extraordinary instances of violence and harassment take place. She admitted that 'small' incidents of public sexual harassment or what she called *chhed-chhad* are commonplace in Agra (as opposed to extraordinary violent incidents in Delhi which get mediatised). However, she placed the onus of this *chhed-chhad* on young women. Note here, that *chhed-chhad* is a colloquial term in Hindi which literally translates to teasing, meddling or flirting. The closest term for this in English which is used in South Asia is eve-teasing and includes staring, winking, passing sexually suggestive and vulgar remarks, stalking, groping and any verbal or physical sexual assault. Both '*chhed-chhad*' and 'eve-

teasing' downplay the severity of acts which are best described as public sexual harassment. Within the local vocabularies of Agra, another term exists to refer to milder forms of public sexual harassment: '*cheenta maarna*' which translates as passing a taunt or comment in public. The following is a snippet from a long conversation I had with Mrs. Chaudhury, sitting in her small veranda in Khaliyai Mandi, which is cordoned off from the road through a big imposing gate, unlike the riverside courtyard. Anju also joined us here:

> Chaudhury: If Agra was not safe for women, then why would women stay here? *Luchha-giri, gundagardi* (hooliganism) happens everywhere. Boys tease girls everywhere. But if the girl will not encourage it, then how can the boy tease her? Girls encourage teasing (*ladki lift deti hai*).
> Anju: It means that the boy teases only because you have given him the approval. *Tumhari manzoori hai.* So it depends on you… If the girl will answer back, then no one will tease her.
> Chaudhury: Say for example, a girl is passing by, and a boy shouts, '*ye cheez badi hai masst*[101]'. If the girl keeps quiet, then she is approving it. If the girl approves, then how is it eve-teasing? The girl should answer back…In Delhi, such big cases happen, but the CM and the PM are there – everyone is watching. Who is watching here in the lanes? So the girl has to be strong. (PI, October 2019)

Here, Mrs. Chaudhury downplays hooliganism and public sexual harassment as commonplace and squarely places the onus of avoiding it on women. According to her, girls encourage boys and give them their consent, or as she words it, '*ladki lift deti hai*' (which is difficult to translate accurately) by keeping quiet when they are teased or stalked. 'If the girl keeps quiet, she is approving it, and if she is approving it then how is it *ched-chhad*' – this one sentence quoted above succinctly summarises the problematic notions of consent and harassment which are still deeply normalized in several parts of India. Scholars like Bohidar (2021) however also remind us that that stalking and passing remarks in public is still a dominant flirting and courtship style in many parts of India especially among lower-middle class and working-class couples, with complicated notions of consent and approval. Strict rules of sociality between boys and girls mean that there is little space for healthy cross-sex interaction or conversation. Flirting and persuasion then takes place in public spaces through means which might be interpreted as abusive by a reasonable observer. Young boys make their intentions known by passing comments or singing songs, and girls respond by acting coyly if they are interested, but avoid being explicit in their intention, leaving the whole thing ambiguous (Bohidar 2021[102]; Osella and Osella 1998). This equates silence with consent, albeit problematically. This understanding of 'micropolitics of flirting' in contexts where there are no avenues for healthy interaction between boys and girls

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[101] Here, she is referring to a song from a 1994 Bollywood movie, *Mohra* – '*tu cheez badi hai mastt mastt'* (you are a very desirable thing) to exemplify the ways in which boys comment on girls in public. Such song lyrics and plots, which objectify women, valorise stalking and public harassment, and deny consent are quite commonplace in Indian cinema. For an interesting discussion, see: Anamika Singh. "Mardangi in Bollywood songs: Lyrics that objectify women and romanticize harassment". Youth ki Awaaz. June 25, 2019.

[102] Meghna Bohidar. 2021. "Performances of 'Reel' and 'Real' Lives: Negotiating Public Romance in Urban India." In *The Routledge Companion to Romantic Love*, edited by Ann Brooks. Routledge

perhaps explains why Mrs. Chaudhury places the onus of 'encouraging *chhed-chhad*' on girls by not explicitly stopping the perpetrator and reveals complicated practices around pursuit of love and romantic relationships. Nonetheless, this does not discount the fact that public sexual harassment continues to be a rampant problem, and not all acts of public sexual harassment can be interpreted as a flirtatious game. This is evidenced not only by personal narratives of women but by reports of suicides due to excessive unwanted advances and stalking by men in extreme cases.

Let us go back to the field site in Khaliyai Mandi. Before moving on, I want to flag one incident which made me reflect on my own position as a researcher within the community conducting research on notions of safety vis-à-vis as a woman putting myself in a situation where I 'felt' unsafe. The day I interviewed Mrs. Chaudhury, a 23-year-old woman who is engaged in an art residency, accompanied me to the field. Later that day, a young boy brushed his hands across her chest just as we were coming out of Gandhi Smarak. She retaliated and an argument broke out. The boy, it turned out, was the 17-year-old son of one of the women I had interviewed earlier. The women gathered at the nearby *khokha* started defending the boy saying, 'let it go, he is a child, might be a mistake' and put up a united front. At the time, Mrs. Chaudhury pulled me aside and said in a hushed, conspiratorial tone, 'look, *these* are the kind of people who stay here and that is why the girl must retaliate and answer back if she is teased,' reminding us again on the onus placed on women for their own safety[103].

Hum sahi toh sab sahi: Locating responsibility vis-à-vis safety

On one of the field work days as I was walking through Khaliyai mandi, I struck a conversation with two adolescent Muslim girls standing in the lane outside Kali ka bada and asked them if they ever go by the riverbank. 'No, the *mahaul* is bad. Our parents don't let us go,' they said. Before I could ask them anything further, their mother joined us and remarked, 'these girls of course don't step out, they stay indoors'. I prodded some more to unpack the ways in which the *mahaul* is bad. However, dismissing my question, the woman said, '*mahaul* is bad but see it's on us, *hum sahi toh sab sahi* (if we are right, then all is right), and if we are wrong, then the other person will easily overpower you', much in line with Mrs. Chaudhury and Anju who also placed the onus of safety on women themselves. This is why, she added, she doesn't let her daughters go out (woman in mid-40s, Informal Discussion, November 2019). The best way to ensure safety and avoid the bad *mahaul* is then to stay indoors and ensure your righteousness. In Kali ka bada too, when I asked women if they feel safe in Agra, the immediate response, repeatedly, was '*hum sahi toh sab sahi*' ('if we are right, then all is right),

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[103] I didn't go back to the basti for field work for a few days after this incident, but the news about this small conflict spread across the basti. The narrative of placing the onus of safety on women themselves, and incidents like these did deter me from making multiple visits to the community alone going forward.

implying that the responsibility of avoiding any kind of harassment rests on 'good' or 'right' behaviour of women and girls themselves. This is not a new discovery, and has been extensively written about by feminist and postcolonial scholars (Chatterjee 1987, 1993; Phadke et al 2011). Nonetheless, it is important to ask what is this good or right behaviour in our present context in Khaliyai Mandi? We can find clues for this in the group discussion I had at Kali ka bada with several women including Mubina (30-years-old) and Farzana (38-years-old), introduced in the previous chapter.

> "Look, if we are right, then everything is right (*hum sahi toh sab sahi)*. When we are ourselves in the wrong, then everyone is wrong. We stay inside our houses. Our daughters stay inside. Whatever is to be bought from the market, all dealings – we do that, the older women do that. Earlier, our mothers-in-law used to go to the market and do all purchasing. Now they have expired, so we go. Our daughters and young daughters-in-law do not step out…. They feel shy themselves (*sharam lagti hai)*. I used to send my daughter to the big school, but she got scared looking down at Yamuna from the bridge and said she won't go." (Farzana, Group Discussion, Kali ka Bada, October 2019)

Women thus self-police themselves and their behaviours and conform with the patriarchal rules. One of the 'good' or 'right' ('*sahi*' can be translated both ways) behavioural traits needed to ensure safety for women is staying indoors: 'inside our houses'. The fact Farzana and Mubina are able to keep their daughters inside the house is a matter of pride for them. This restriction, it seems, eases with age, with adolescent and unmarried girls facing the brunt of it. '*Hum badi-budi sab sauda karti hai*' (us older women deal with the market), they said, even though Farzana and Mubina are merely in their 30s themselves. It is their relationship vis-à-vis their daughters and their parents-in-law that actually determines their mobility. Further, even though it is widely re-iterated that the '*mahaul*' is bad, they defensively denied any sexual harassment within the basti. The '*mahaul*' then perhaps refers to how the atmosphere of the basti makes people 'feel', or what I call affective environment because of activities like drinking and gambling and consequently, *potential* – instead of actual – conflict and harassment.

When I asked Farzana if her daughters have faced '*chhed-chhad*' (eve-teasing/public sexual harassment) in the neighbourhood, she immediately refused, explaining that her daughter doesn't even 'feel' like going outside. This because an outsider (as opposed to men from the basti) 'can do anything – he can wink at you, tease you, grope you, or pull your hand'. Farzana believes therefore it is important 'not to take the path where anyone can say anything to you', and instead stay indoors, and within the basti, because 'our safety lies in our own hands' (sic). As long as women and girls are going anywhere with boys/men known to them, they won't face any problem. The danger is outside, an unnamed, untamed outside and the source is the 'outsider' and not 'the boys of the *basti*', even though data suggests that more than 90 percent of rapes are committed by people known to the victim – family

members, neighbours, co-workers, or friends (2019 NCRB data)[104]. In this discussion, women also asserted that such cases only happen in other cities, and 'not in Agra', 'not even late at night' (sic, Group Discussion, October 2019). This defence of the *basti* thus extended to the entire city as well and the 'outside' became other cities. Farzana for example stated that 'there is a case in Delhi every other day, but nothing happens in Agra, in comparison'. While Farzana conceded that there are troublemakers in every city, she added that 'such instances are very few in Agra'. When I probed about several harassment cases reported by tourists in Agra, Mubina blamed it on migrants: 'people from Agra will never do all this. It's the outsiders who have dirtied Agra. Those who sell books and knick-knacks on the road – they are migrants from Bihar and *banjare (nomads)* who come from outside and stay in shacks and camps'. It is these outsiders who have ruined the 'mahaul' of Agra, especially at night, Farzana added. They believe this is because, 'someone who belongs to Agra and has been staying here since the beginning' will not do any wrong-doing because 'it will sully the reputation of their parents and ancestors', and 'bring them shame and disrepute' (sic, Group Discussion, October 2019).

This of course is not entirely true and even cursory glance at crime statistics will prove that. However, it's noteworthy that Mubina and Farzana defended Khaliyai Mandi, Agra and native Agra residents, in comparison to 'other cities like Delhi' and 'outsiders' who come into the city, indicating a certain sense of ownership of the city and the neighbourhood even in the face of *kharab mahaul.* As we sat on the cot talking about safety and crime, another woman joined us and hearing Mubina and Farzana talk about Delhi chipped in to defend Agra further: 'here it's not like girls wear short clothes *(nanga-pehnav)*. People wear respectful clothes here. Girls roam around openly wearing jeans in Delhi – that doesn't happen here,' she stated. A little taken aback at this since I was incidentally wearing a long kurta over a pair of jeans that day[105], I politely asked if jeans actually invites trouble. Farzana immediately jumped in to clarify, bringing the conversation back to the maxim with which we started -- *hum sahi toh sab sahi*: 'it's not like that, but these things happen more in Delhi because people don't walk around like models here. You are wearing a kurta right now so that's good and ensures safety. Because no matter how the world is, *hum sahi toh sab sahi*. We have to look at ourselves and our behaviour first...And we should have that much courage, then no one will misbehave with you.' (Farzana, Group Discussion, October 2019). This ubiquitous emphasis on self-policing in terms of clothing, the places one ventures to, and the ways in which one responds to harassment, places the

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[104] Neeta Sharma. "Accused known to survivors in 94% cases of rape in 2019: Government data." NDTV. September 30, 2020.

[105] As a female researcher I have to carefully monitor my own sartorial choices when conducting field work and portray an image of a 'good girl' in order to gain trust.

blame squarely on women for failing to negotiate the *kharab mahaul*, instead of perpetrators and the system. At the same time, these narratives were also punctured by utterances where women acknowledged how ubiquitous harassment is. For example Farzana stated that 'men do not even spare the older women, who are 40-45 years old; then how will they spare our girls', underlining how even women who are apparently sexually unavailable and not 'at fault', face harassment at times. What's also noteworthy here is that comparison with Delhi cropped up organically, not just in terms of extraordinary cases of sexual violence but also in terms of lifestyle of young girls. This perhaps suggests that our understanding of a particular urban form or urbanism is always already comparative, in terms of what a city or its urban form should be, could be, or is in comparison with other places and imaginations including other urban as well rural places.

Let us turn our attention now towards a conversation I had with Ruksana, a 36-year-old woman who is separated from her husband and lives in Khaliyai Mandi with her two daughters and two sons. Much like others, when I asked Ruksana about the '*bad mahaul*' and '*chhed-chhad*', she dismissed my question at first: 'what can I say about *chhed-chhad*, I am married and my daughters are still young.' Perhaps, she was implying that neither she, nor her adolescent daughters, are sexually available or desirable to face harassment. Nonetheless, she added that the *mahaul* is indeed bad because 'people drink, gamble, and take drugs which are easily available'. 'Even little children are addicted to drugs because parents don't educate them, make them work, and so they pick up bad habits,' she added (Personal Interview, November 2019). Like Anju, Ruksana thus stated that drinking and gambling has deteriorated the '*mahaul*' of Khaliyai Mandi. Interestingly, when I had asked people who stay at the riverbank about the young boys who gather to drink and play cards a few paces outside their house, they did not seem to be much bothered by it. Vartika for example who often comfortably sat on the cot by the riverbank, said, 'they play among themselves, it doesn't matter to me'. Then is the cause of discomfort the sticky association of drinking with violence and *potential* harassment? According to Ruksana, 'what if someone harasses my daughter? Anything can happen. If two drunkards are standing, one feels scared in walking past them, that what if they tease, harass, or catch hold of our hand.' (Personal Interview, November 2019). This perception of supposed risks is further heightened by narratives about 'good behavior' prescribed for young girls based on which Ruksana has laid down the dos and don'ts for her daughters:

> "People tell me that my daughters are now growing up so I should keep them inside. My daughters don't go out anywhere anyway. My daughter is almost 16 now but she doesn't even go to the market. People talk…Some time back a lot of noise was made about kidnapping of children and young girls. So that is another reason why I put restrictions. It's not safe, so I stop them from going out. But I have to step out for work out of compulsion…We have also heard so many stories that a woman started working outside, and then she eloped with someone, leaving her husband and children behind. We see on TV also that even married girls sometimes run away or have love

affairs. So we become alert, we think 'let it be, what will we gain by working outside other than infamy and disrepute. We will eat dry, stale food with what we can manage'. That is why we don't step out. Even if sometimes I think that I should go outside and work, I re-consider after listening to people…But see, first and foremost, if we are pure, then everyone is pure (*hum saaf toh sab saaf*). And God forbid, if something happens that I lose my way (*kadam behek gaye*), then what will happen to my children? That is why I don't look for a job outside." (Ruksana, Personal Interview, November 2019)

We learn several things about Ruksana's worldview here. Let's unpack it one at a time. The first is her fear for her daughters who are now 'growing up'. She fears that they will get kidnapped or molested if they will step out of the *basti* and that is why she has put restrictions on their mobility. In this context, growing up is equated with puberty. In one of our several conversations, Vartika (18-years-old) told me how she used to play and swim in the river as a kid. When I asked her when did she stop doing that, she simply replied, '*jabse hosh sambhala hai*'. '*Hosh sambhalna*' is used as a euphemism for puberty in several parts of North India[106]. What's notable is that after a girl has attained puberty and consequently, maturity, she can no longer play with abandon and severe restrictions are placed on her mobility and leisure, partly because of the taboo associated with menstruation and partly to control her sexuality, thereby impacting her access to public spaces, and if one is to extend the argument further, access to urban citizenship.

In fact, because puberty is seen as a sign of physical maturity and opens up the possibility of sexual desire, most girls in Khaliyai Mandi are married off between the ages of 15 and 18 years. Legality has little role to play in these practices. According to Shastri ji, RSS *sevak* who runs a school in Khaliyai Mandi, 'girls are wedded at an early age of 14 or 15 years in some lower caste communities like *Sahus,* Kolis, Yadavs, and Muslims here.' This is confirmed through my conversations with residents of Khaliyai mandi as well. Rakesh Jatav for example proudly told me that he wedded all his three daughters when they turned 13 or 14 years old and now, he is looking for a suitable groom for his niece, Vartika. Boys, however, he said, should get married between the ages of 20 and 25 years. This is because he believes that 'girls have to get married and take care of their family – what else will they do', but boys have to 'become financially independent before marriage' (Personal Interview, October 2019). Performing reproductive labour and carework is then considered the most important role for women and therefore they are considered fit to be married immediately after puberty. Interestingly, several female respondents told me that they don't agree with the practice of early marriage but they have to adhere to these protocols and norms because they live in a 'society'. Anju

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[106] Literally, this would translate as 'ever since I became conscious of myself'. Another euphemism which is widely used for puberty is *'sayana hona'* (to mature). For example the song in a recent Bollywood song, Padman (2018, directed by R. Balki) – *ladki sayaani ho gayi,* depicts celebration of the onset of puberty in young girls.

for example remarked, 'life is ruined after marriage but we have to work according to societal norms'. Within the Muslim community of Khaliyai Mandi however, things seemed to be changing. Several women told me that they are keen on getting their daughters educated and will delay their marriage because they have experienced or witnessed several violent marriages in their kith and kin, because of which 'the girls suffered and their lives were ruined'. 'In some cases, the husband doesn't earn, is busy drinking, in other cases he hits the woman, the girl suffers and her parents are also troubled,' they explained. As a result, girls now get married between the ages of 20-25 years in Kali ka Bada (Mubina and Farzana, Group discussion, October 2019)

Even as it has become more acceptable for girls to marry after the age of 20 years, they are still not sent to higher secondary schools if they are far away. Neither do they take up paid employment outside their neighbourhood. This also came forth in the conversation with Ruksana which suggests that 'working outside' is associated with desires, promiscuous behaviours, and risks for both married and unmarried women. Ruksana for example fears she might 'lose her way' (*kadam behek jayenge*) if she starts going out to work. This is because, she explained, she has heard of multiple cases where married women ran away from their home after they started working outside. The 'outside' is then a space full of possibilities of all kinds of transgressions. She is separated from her husband but even then, she considers it wrong to think or talk of desire. Instead, she says she will manage with whatever little she can earn through home-based production work (such as making candles and sorting peanuts) but not risk 'losing her way outside'. Similarly, the only paid work that young girls are allowed to do in Kali ka bada is home-based piece-rate work. 'We know other girls now even work in offices and factories, but our daughters don't. They can work at home in their *faltu*-time. But not outside,' explained Farzana. What is also notable here is that this piece-rate work is taken on during perceived '*faltu* time' (extra or wasteful time), which the girls get after they are done with household chores. The '*faltu* time' is then not used for rest or leisure, but to undertake economically retributive work. In the process, nonetheless, some sort of bonhomie emerges between family members and neighbours who set up an informal assembly line to finish the piece-rate work. When I visited Ruksana a few days after I interviewed her, I saw her sitting with her two daughters in a small circle on the rooftop. Ruksana was filling new candles into packets, her elder daughter was sealing the plastic packets using flame from a lighted candle, and her younger daughter was placing a sticker on completed packets. The deftness with which their hands moved sped up the entire process. When I entered, Ruksana looked at me and said, *'ye faltu baithi thi toh maine apne saath laga lia'* (they were sitting idle, so I made them join me). Here, it is also important to think of time and temporality not just in terms of its direction

(linear/multiple) but also in terms of its perceived utility, its extra-ness, idleness, flexibility, and wastefulness.

According to Ruksana, going out to work is risky not only because it might lead to women falling astray but also because of a fear of kidnapping. This is because Ruksana has heard cases about young children getting kidnapped in this area. Interestingly, when I asked the local police station's sub-inspector (Rambagh Chowki) about cases of kidnapping in the area, he dismissed it as rumours and speculated that perhaps some people falsely accused someone of kidnapping during a dispute. Even if cases of kidnapping of children are indeed merely rumours and fears of 'losing one's way' or succumbing to desires is based on popular narratives and depictions, what these do is create a certain affective atmosphere because of which the 'outside' gets associated with risks, fear and transgression, thereby making the *mahaul* unconducive for mobility and access to public space for women. Later in the conversation, Ruksana shared that her daughter is 'afraid of crossing the river because she saw a few accidents wherein girls drowned in the river after jumping from the bridge…perhaps because they were involved in some *gande kaam (dirty work)'* (sic). This 'ganda kaam', though underarticulated, is clearly an allusion to dissident sexual behaviours or transgressions. What is also a noteworthy, albeit unstated, theme that one could pick up when one reads between the lines here is a fear of romantic love, desire, sexuality, and possibility of elopements by couples who flout societal approval and cross caste and religious boundaries.

The following section will further explore the narratives around crime and safety in Khaliyai Mandi and its surrounding areas, starting with a description of an incident that occurred during the course of my field work and was the talking point for several days in the basti. This will be followed by exploration of crime rates, especially against women in the area under Itmad-ud-daula police jurisdiction (under which Khaliyai Mandi falls). While an analysis of crime rates and police records is limited in scope here, what the field work revealed was a high incidence of elopements by unmarried heterosexual couples in this area which are registered as kidnapping cases under Section 363 and 366 of Indian Penal Code (IPC) by their families, suggesting that romantic love is often penalized here, and yet recorded in the pages of the police system by way of these complaints.

2. Crime and Safety

'Gande Kaam' at the Orphanage

In early October 2019, a young girl, aged 18 years, jumped from the roof of a local orphanage in Khaliyai Mandi into the river. Local boys who were by the riverbank dived and saved her, and then

the Agra Heritage Walks (AHW) team which happened to be there for their 'Picnic by the Ghats' event (discussed in Chapter 3) called the police and lodged a complaint. As per AHW team members who interacted with the girl at length, the girl was raped inside the orphanage but the orphanage management wanted to declare her mentally unstable (Tahir, Personal Interview, October 2019). The orphanage also ran a primary school in its premises where some of the children from Khaliyai mandi had enrolled. After the incident, the orphanage got sealed, the school was shut down, and an enquiry was launched by the State Women Commission which found several discrepancies and possibly a sex racket operational at the orphanage. What struck me was that despite the magnitude of this incident and the allegations (or perhaps because of it), people in Khaliyai Mandi were reluctant to talk about it and the local news reports steered clear of sexually-explicit terms (or even words like sexual harassment and rape) in their reporting. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon in India to have entire conversations around sex, sex work, and intimacies without directly naming any of it. Svati Shah (2014) in her extensive ethnography on sex work in brothels, streets, and public day labour markets of Mumbai similarly highlights the 'unspokenness' of sex work and prostitution in all her formal and informal conversations. Sex work is almost always referred to allusively as '*bura kaam*' or '*dhandha*'. While these terms and its semantics will perhaps vary from region to region, I did observe a certain similarity in my field site where activities in the orphanage were reported solely as '*ganda kaam*' or '*galat kaam*' (dirty or wrong work).

Mubina's daughter used to study at the orphanage until it got shut down. When the authorities shut the orphanage, it didn't make any alternative provisions. When I asked about the orphanage at Kali ka Bada, Mubina got annoyed and did not want to talk about it. Upon my insistence, Farzana told me that, 'these are all false accusations (of rape). The girl got enough food and she jumped into the river on her own. Some people said she is *pagal*.' I did not understand why the orphanage version of the incident was the one that was circulating in the *basti*, perhaps because of the clout the orphanage's manager enjoyed as a local leader and a member of a political party or because of the 'unspokenness' of sexuality itself. When I asked Rajender Shastri (RSS *sevak*) for more details on the orphanage incident, this is the story he told me: 'The head of the orphanage is a local leader. People say that he sells the emoluments and ration received from the government and charity organizations like rice and clothes instead of supplying it to the orphanage. Some lodger protested this. The younger kids don't say anything, but when they grow up, they don't bear all this. So that girl didn't bear it and had an argument. Maybe she wasn't getting enough food. And the behaviour of the management was also not good, maybe that's why she jumped' (Personal Interview, October 2019). However, the allegation by the girl was that of rape, and not of mismanagement of funds and ration. I asked him if there were

reports of any sexual harassment inside the orphanage. Even then he only alluded to its possibility but did not address the issue directly:

> "I don't know anything of that sort but people say such incidents have happened in the past. The orphanage has permission to house boys and girls only till they achieve the age of 18 years. But sometimes, the girls come of age and continue to stay there if they haven't been able to get married in the community weddings organized by the DM. In that case, they continue to stay so there are some girls who are 20-22 years old also." (PI, October 2019)

This incident received a lot of coverage in the news, but here again, the terms used to describe the incident were allusive such as '*sharmnaak ghatna*' (shameful incident), '*ghinoni ghatna*' (disgusting incident), without really spelling out what the incident was, or what was shameful or disgusting about it. The findings of the raid which was conducted at the orphanage were described in exaggerated yet vague terms in local language newspapers. For example, one news report in Hindustan, a national Hindi-language daily (ranked 6th in India by Audit Bureau of Circulation), which was headlined 'When the orphanage was raided, everyone was shocked'[107], reported that empty beer cans and other 'problematic material' (*aapatijanak samaan*) was found in the bushes, and several irregularities were discovered in the functioning of the orphanage. The report goes on to say that the orphanage came into light after a girl tried committing suicide and alleged the orphanage for a '*ghinoni ghatna*' (disgusting incident) with her, leading to arrest of three people. The raid conducted by the State Women Commission found that young men and women continued to stay in the orphanage even after turning eighteen, it didn't have proper documentation and licenses, it didn't maintain a record of donations, there is no female staff member at the orphanage, and that boys can easily come and go into the girl's section. The news report goes on to discuss how an '*aapatijanak chat*' (problematic chat) over WhatsApp was found in mobile phone of one of the girls staying in the orphanage, including several messages of bank transaction. Together, these findings suggest to the reader that some sort of sex work racket was going on inside the orphanage. However, neither the news report, nor any of the interviews spell out the exact connotations of under-age sexual relations, sex soliciting and possible sexual abuse that might be going on inside the ashram, but merely suggests it in vague terms such as '*apatijanak*' (problematic) and '*hairan karne wali cheezein*' (shocking things)[108]. Another news report in Dainik Jagran (Hindi-language daily, ranked second in India by circulation), titled, 'अनाथ आश्रम में हुआ गंदा काम, किशोरों ने दबोच ली साथ रह रही युवती' similarly writes about the '*ganda kaam*' (dirty work) happening inside the orphanage without really describing what it means. It goes on to say that 'some young men

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[107] Staff reporter. "जब अनाथालय में छापा पड़ा, तो जो मिला वो देख कर हर कोई था हैरान" Hindustan. October 5, 2019. https://www.livehindustan.com/national/story-bear-cane-and-offensive-material-gets-when-the-raid-was-conducted-in-the-orphanage-everyone-was-surprised-to-see-what-they-found-2783186.html (accessed April 3, 2020).
[108] As per the news report, the orphanage is a hub of controversy – two girls have died in the past because they didn't receive timely healthcare treatment, children don't get adequate food, and it is not registered.

indulged in dirty activities with a young girl staying at the orphanage' who alleged three underage boys for 'misdeeds'[109]. Yet another news report in another on the webpage of ABP Ganga (24-hour regional Hindi language news channel in UP, owned by ABP group) similarly described the whole incident in terms of '*gande kaam*' (dirty work) and discovery of '*apaatijanak cheeze*' (problematic things) during the raid[110]. Another report called the ashram as '*ayaashi ka adda*' (den of debauchery). Despite all of these reports, the orphanage was set to reopen by end of November as per my last field visit[111].

What this incident and its discussion suggests is that sexual violence remain largely under-addressed and hidden in Khaliyai Mandi, even when it's happening explicitly, leading to an atmosphere of unstated but palpable risk all around, and an undesirable *mahaul*.

Crime against women: Chhed-chhad and chheenta-kassi

Khaliyai Mandi, Moti Bagh and Ram Bagh fall under the jurisdiction of Itmad-ud-daula police station. The first day when I visited the station, it was around 5.30 pm in the evening in late October. Days had become shorter, with the sun setting around 6 pm. At the time of my visit, I did not see any female constable, sub-inspector or inspector on duty, which made me feel more alert than usual. The constables at the FIR desk told me that all female staff is on patrol duty at that time. One of them directed me to Rambagh police chowki, which was a kilometer away, where I might find Neelam, one of the only female sub-inspectors in this station. A short tuk-tuk ride later, I found myself outside a newly constructed single-storied room-sized building located at the extremely busy Ram-bagh intersection (*chowk*). Sub-inspector Neelam was not there at that time but I got a chance to speak to Sub-Inspector (SI) Pushpender who is in-charge of Rambagh Chowki.[112].

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[109] Staff reporter. "अनाथ आश्रम में हुआ गंदा काम, किशोरों ने दबोच ली साथ रह रही युवती' Dainik Jagran. October 4, 2019. https://www.jagran.com/uttar-pradesh/agra-city-misdeed-by-boys-in-shelter-home-and-girl-tried-to-commit-suicide-in-agra-19637174.html (accessed April 3, 2020)

[110] Staff reporter. "महिला आयोग की टीम पहुँची अनाथ आश्रम, जाँच के दौरान मिली कई आपातिजनक चीजें" ABP Ganga. October 4, 2019. https://www.abpganga.com/agra/women-commission-team-inspect-orphanage-home-in-agra-27825 (accessed April 3, 2020).

[111] What's notable is that the orphanage continued to stay in news for several days after the incident. A week after the orphanage was sealed, women who once lived at the orphanage and left after getting married demanded its reopening. They consider the orphanage as their '*mayeka*' (maternal home). The news report concluded by reiterating that the ashram was sealed because of 'suspicious activities' and discovery of 'problematic things' in the compound. Staff reporter. "दुष्कर्म-आत्महत्या का प्रयास के बाद हुआ सील अनाथाश्रम फिर चर्चा में, अब हो रहा अनशन" Jagran. October 11, 2019. https://www.jagran.com/uttar-pradesh/agra-city-former-residential-women-doing-protest-for-re-open-orphanage-home-19657138.html (accessed April 3, 2020)

[112] Hailing from Meerut, he has been with the police since 1991. He got the chowki renovated recently and installed 6 CCTV cameras at key junctions through citizen donations. He is extremely proud of the CCTV cameras and showed me the live feed in the feed room himself. Upon noticing that no one was live-monitoring the feed, he told me that the CCTVs help him in post-facto action in issues such as traffic scuffles.

At the onset, SI Pushpender dismissed the premise that public sexual harassment or what he called '*chhed-chhad*' is a real problem. According to him, most of the complaints of harassment or eve-teasing in this area are a result of neighbourhood spats between people living in slum areas on unrelated issues. He explained: 'when there is a fight between two people in a basti, they make a complaint accusing the other of harassment or eve-teasing, getting their wife or daughter involved in the process so that they can file a case under section 354 which is a non-bailable offense.' This is because, the 'courts made the rules stricter after the Delhi cases and people became aware about this provision. So now they turn petty fights into women-related issues to be heard faster' (PI, November 219). By 'Delhi case', he was referring to the Nirbhaya gang rape case of 2012 discussed in Chapter 1. He further argued that complaints made under Section 354 of IPC have a considerable ill effect on 'their daughter's education, marriage and future' and 'they should think twice about her reputation before getting her involved in police cases' (Personal Interview, November 2019). Unsurprisingly, it is the reputation of the complainant which is under question here, and not the accused, reminding us of the deep patriarchal bias of the police system. The Sub-Inspector then went on to dismiss most complaints of sexual harassment or *chhed-chhad* under Section 354 of IPC as bogus, estimating that merely two percent of sexual harassment cases are genuine, and out of these, more often than not, they are levelled against relatives or someone known to the complainant. 'People don't eve-tease or assault random strangers, it's always someone you know', he explained. When I shared my own personal experiences of facing '*chhed-chhad*' by strangers on the road in Agra, he responded with incredulity:

> "Really? You were walking on the road and someone harassed you? He must have known you, or seen you before. There can be one-off instances, I agree. But that'd be one in 1000…And there are so many provisions and services for women now. UP police is doing so much. And see, girls have a gift, that if someone even looks at them with the wrong gaze (*galat nazar*), they understand. So they can make a complaint. If they don't, then maybe…" (Sub-Inspector, PI, November 2019)

He left his thought mid-sentence, but I have a strong suspicion that he meant to suggest that if girls do not register a complaint against harassment then it is because either they know the perpetrator or have given their tacit consent for the actions. This is line with my findings in Khaliyai Mandi where the onus of preventing harassment was squarely placed on women. After this, we briefly discussed the challenges that police faces, and then I wrapped up the conversation as I noticed the constables staring at me, making me uncomfortable, reminding me of my apparently vulnerable position as a single woman, at an unknown police chowki, after dark.

The next day, I went back to the police station hoping to speak to a female constable or sub-inspector once again, though in vain. The few female constables who were there were extremely busy and reluctant to talk to me. Sub-Inspector Neelam was leaving for patrol duty again. There were a few

complainants at the FIR desk situated in the station's front courtyard and in another corner, a few constables were trying to resolve a spat between a husband and wife from a nearby low-income neighbourhood. It was a fast-paced, high-energy morning, much in contrast with last evening's environment when most constables were out on patrol duty. I managed to find Sub-Inspector Pushpender again and with his assistance, I got a chance to peruse women-related crime registers for 2017, 2018 and 2019 which were titled, '*mahila utpeedan*' (women exploitation) records. Following is a summary of the numbers recorded from the registers. I have calculated and tabulated these numbers under the main heads recorded in the 'women exploitation register'. Note here that crime is typically statistically recorded under the most severe of various sections that a person is charged with. For example, a person can be charged with Section 354 and Section 294 of IPC, but the crime will be counted under Section 354 for documentational purposes, because it has a more severe penalty associated with it. These numbers only pertain to the area which falls under the Itmad-ud-daula police station which is roughly 10 kms in length and 6 km in breadth.

Itmad-ud-daula Police Station region			
IPC Sections	2019 (Till Oct 31)	2018	2017
Murder (302 IPC)	1	1	1
Dowry deaths (304B IPC)	8	7	6
Snatching (342 IPC)	0	0	0
Rape/Attempt to rape (376 IPC) (reported in conjunction with 323/ 452/506/406)	14	22	11
Unnatural relations (377 IPC)	0	0	1
Kidnapping and abduction (363/366 IPC)	77	84	74
Outraging modesty of woman (354 IPC) (reported in conjunction with 323, 504, 147, 452, 506)	47	69	52
Obscene acts or song in public (294 IPC)	0	0	1
Dowry exploitation/ cruelty by husband or his relatives (498A/323/450 IPC) *(Bailable)*	15	30	35
Others (452/376/ 511/ 323/ 306/ 511/ 504 IPC)	3	17	

Table 3: Crime recorded against women at Itmad-ud-daula Police Station, Agra

What struck me immediately after putting these numbers together was the high incident of kidnapping and abduction (Sections 363 and 366 of IPC) and outraging the modesty of women (Section 354 of IPC of IPC). Let's first discuss Section 354 of the IPC further.

Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code reads as 'assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty'. The wording of the provision is itself indicative of the value placed on women's 'modesty' and honour, instead of her personal bodily rights. What is 'modesty', how is it 'outraged' and why is only the women's modesty in question here? As the conversation with the sub-inspector Pushpender

quoted earlier suggests, it is often believed that when a 'woman's modesty' is outraged, shame falls on her and her family and has serious implications for the woman's education, marriage, and future. I had a similar conversation with another constable, Vinod as I was noting down and unpacking these numbers. Vinod is responsible for maintaining the records of women-related crimes at Itmad-ud-daula thana. He explained that a case is registered under Section 354 when a woman makes a complaint against someone for teasing or harassing her on her way to school, coaching centre, toilet, or market. In these cases, Vinod added, often the accused is someone known to the woman and these are cases of 'one-sided love' where the man is trying to get the woman's attention by teasing her: 'see these are cases of one-sided love. A boy is attracted to a girl, and he thinks, 'let's try'. So, he would hold her hand suddenly when she is passing by'. He then sized me up and down, remarked that I look unmarried, and then asked me my experience of eve-teasing. The fact that Vinod glanced at me from top to bottom while discussing complaints made under Section 354 is ironic at best, and at worst, reveals a deep tendency of placing the onus of any kind of harassment on women, their marital status, and how they are dressed. During this field work, I often had to script my own image through sartorial choices, language, and body language to suggest that I am a 'good girl', belonging to a 'good family'[113].

Further, much like Pushpender, Vinod views cases under Section 354 with suspicion, and believes that the awareness that came with the Nirbhaya agitation and subsequent legal changes has led to overuse of the provision: 'the criteria for molestation have also been widened now, since the Delhi incident. It has multiple subsections – stalking or chasing a girl; staring; staring continuously; clicking her photo – everything falls under 354 IPC. People have also become more aware since the Delhi incident so they report such incidents more.' (Vinod, PI, November 2019). While Vinod clubbed all offences under Section 354, according to another senior constable on desk duty at the same police station, there is a difference between 'chhed-chhad' (harassment) which comes under Section 354, and 'cheenta kassi' (making taunts and jibes) which comes under Section 294, which has much lesser penalities. Cheenta-kassi, he said, is merely done in jest (hassi-mazaak mei), reflecting once again how public sexual harassment is trivialized, and its impact on women's access to public space is entirely discounted. While cheenta-kassi may not cause bodily harm, multiple conversations with women suggests that it leads to sticking of certain affects to certain spaces, makes women uncomfortable in their bodies, determines their access to the public spaces and shapes the affectual geography of the city.

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[113] In fact, on another instance a few months back during field work, a constable in Delhi told me, 'you look like you are from a good family, do you think girls from good families should roam around alone after dark', making me acutely aware of my positionality once again.

I also compared this data on women-related crimes at Itmad-ud-daula with data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for Agra and Delhi as a whole. NCRB data itself is an aggregation of crime-related data from all the police stations across the country. The following table summarizes numbers from NCRB for the year 2018 (last available report at the time of writing this chapter), and compares them with Itmad-ud-daula police station data for 2018, in order to contextualise some numbers within the larger trend.

2018 Data	Itmad-ud-daula thana	Agra district	Delhi
Murder and Rape	1	2	0
Dowry deaths	7	70	0
Dowry exploitation/ cruelty by husband or his relatives (498A)	30	556	21
Kidnapping & abduction of women (total)	84	431	28
Kidnapping & abduction of women to compel her for marriage	*Not available*	366	0
Above 18 years	*Not available*	257	0
Below 18 years	*Not available*	109	0
Rape	22	89	13
Outraging modesty of woman (Section 354 IPC)	69	491	51

Table 4: Crime recorded against women in 2018 at Itmad-ud-daual, Agra, and Delhi

What is apparent at once here is that incidence of dowry exploitation, dowry deaths, rape, sexual harassment (or outraging the modesty of a woman), and kidnapping and abduction of women in Agra in general, and in Itmad-ud-daula in particular, is considerably higher than in Delhi. In fact, in the case of 'kidnapping and abduction of women', the numbers for Itmad-ud-daula, a 60 square kilometer area, are almost *four times* that of entire Delhi, even though Delhi's population density is much higher. Further, as per the 2018 NCRB report, Agra is among the top 6 districts with high incidence of 'kidnapping and abduction of woman to compel her for marriage'. Why are so many women getting kidnapped for marriage? A further reading of the NCRB report also revealed that in 2018, more than 3000 men and more than 2200 women committed suicide in India because of 'love affairs'. When one reads these numbers in conjunction with news reports around love jihad, moral policing, and anti-Romeo squads in UP, the whole picture starts to fall in place, with 'love' as the transgressive villain behind it all. **Can love then be another category through which one can think of citizenship, affect, and right to urban life and leisure?** The next part of the chapter will explore this further.

3. Politics of Love

Abduction or elopement?

Section 363 of the IPC describes punishment for 'kidnapping any person from lawful guardianship'. Sections 366 is explicitly about kidnapping, abduction, and inducement of a 'woman to compel her for marriage against her will, or to force or seduce her into illicit intercourse'[114] and is often registered in conjunction with Section 363. When I remarked to Constable Vinod that there are a significant kidnapping and abduction cases registered at the thana, he explained to me that 'these cases are not actually about kidnapping. These are about couples who run away out of their free will. It's not abduction but the girl's family files an abduction case' (Personal Interview, November 2019). Another constable jumped in during this part of the discussion and further explained that the thana gets a lot of 'these cases where girls are made to elope (*ladki bhaga le jate hai*) and when parents find out, they file a case (of abduction)'. He further explained that in these cases, if both the girl and the boy are minors, they are caught and brought back, and if they are adults, they are caught and an investigation takes place. In cases where the girl is a minor and the boy is not, then her statement is not taken into account and the boy is imprisoned. If the girl is an adult and makes a statement that she wants to live with the boy, and went with him out of her own free will, then he is not imprisoned and both of them are set free. However, he added, the latter happens very rarely because once caught, the girl loses her courage in front of her parents (Constable, Itmad-ud-Daula Police Station, November 2019). In another interview, Sub-Inspector Pushpinder had likewise stated that 'girls are the most scared of their parents and not of the police, and as soon as we threaten to call their parents, they break down' (Personal Interview, November 2019). Families thus use the legal system to exert control over women's bodies and choices. Conjugal relationships, invariably, have to go through the family, and if they escape the family, the police steps in. Thus, arguably the police is also complicit in the policing of young girls.

This policing by family and police is further strengthened by tightly-knit kinship networks especially in small cities like Agra. Sidra, a 26-year-old woman who works in a public bank and lives in Taj Ganj area with her parents, for example shared that she feels 'bounded' and watched whenever she meets her friends in public: 'I feel bounded here…if I go anywhere, I have to tell my parents with whom, where, for how much time, till what time – everything – they find out anyway.' This is because, she explained, 'Agra is not a big city. People call up my parents and tell them they saw me at xyz market, at so and so time, with so and so people…every fifth person knows you or your family in Agra'. As a result, whenever she hangs out with her friends, her parents inadvertently get a call from

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[114] India Kanoon. N.d. https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1569253/ (accessed June 8, 2020).

someone reporting their daughter's whereabouts. This makes Sidra extremely frustrated but she has learnt to negotiate with her parents over time, informing them about her whereabouts herself, and avoiding places where there is a greater chance of her acquaintances seeing her (Personal Interview, October 2019). When she was growing up, her mother or her younger brother escorted her everywhere and she wasn't allowed to go anywhere alone. When she started working, they eased up on the restrictions but still insist that she returns home 'on time' and keeps them informed. She is engaged and her fiancé lives in Delhi. When I asked her if she meets her fiancé occasionally in Agra, she laughed and said, '*koi dekh lega and call kar dega*' (someone will see us and call my parents!). So instead of Agra, she meets him freely when she visits her relatives in Delhi, a city she likes much more.

The kinship networks thus further work to strengthen the policing of women's bodies and mobility. Conjugal relationships in particular remain heavily policed and supervised even when women enjoy some independence with respect to their mobility after they start working. If self-policing and censorship by women themselves (captured in phrases like *hum sahi toh sab sahi)* is one layer which determines women's access to the city, structures of family, kinship networks, and then the legal system is the second layer which firmly reinforces this.

Let us go back to cases of abduction for marriage and elopements that we discovered in Khaliyai Mandi. *'Bhaag ke shaadi karna'* (getting married by eloping) is a popular term used to describe love marriages in India which don't have parental consent and is largely looked upon as transgressive. Perveez Mody has written extensively about how in the Indian context love marriages are portrayed as 'love-cum-arranged' marriages in some cases to indicate parental consent (2008). Love marriage is considered a personal choice, a process of individuation and as a sign of modern identity as opposed to arranged marriage which is based on familial and societal choice, and traditions, and often takes into account compatibility in terms of caste, religion, economic and physical characteristics. In fact, according to Mody (2008), couples who do opt for love marriages and transgress communal and caste-based boundaries are pushed out of the community. Even though 'love marriages' are looked down upon, yet a lot of heterosexual couples are falling in love and eloping, if we are to interpret the crime data from Itmad-ud-daula thana in this context.

Sub-Inspector Pushpender (Rambagh Chowki, Agra) speculated that the reason for this is that 'youngsters are getting attracted towards TV, internet and social media, while our Indian *sanskriti*

*(*culture) is different'[115]. Love marriages are often equated with westernization (Shameem Black 2017; Perveez Mody 2002) and arranged marriages with traditional '*sanskar and sanskriti*'. When I asked Shastri ji (RSS *pracharak*, Middle School Principal in Khaliyai Mandi) about the high number of kidnapping and elopement cases in this area, he similarly placed the blame on new media technologies and argued that access to mobile phones, internet, and laptop has had a negative impact on children. This is augmented, he argued, by the dissolution of joint families because of which 'children are left unsupervised all day as both parents are working and as a result, children fall astray (*bhatak jate hai)* and get 'lured' by anyone (*kisike bhi behkave mei aa jate hai)'* (Personal Interview, November 2019). By children here he means adolescent or young boys and girls. In fact, he used the terms '*hamari bachiyan'* throughout the interview to refer to young girls and unmarried women. '*Bachiyan'* literally translates to young girls or female children but in this context (and colloquially) it can also be understood to mean 'our daughters'. In either case, there was a tone of patronization and denial of agency ascribed to girls throughout the interview. Notably, Shastri ji also went on to explicitly place the blame for elopements on the phenomenon of love jihad and underlined the need to 'protect Indian culture' and '*hamari bachhiyan' (our girls/daughters)* not just from western influence but also from purported Islamic influence, a line of argument which has been central to RSS's ideology of Hindutva. The following is an excerpt from the interview conducted with Shastri ji, transcribed and translated from Hindi to provide an opening into 'love jihad'.

> MT: I saw at the police station there are a lot of cases of elopements in this area…
> Shashtri: There are a host of reasons because which these things happen. There are all kinds of manipulative powers *(shadyantrakari shaktiyan)* in play here…There are some people, we can call them white-attired people. They provide help in terms of clothes, medicines etc., and in return take you to their centre. They will give you education there. They will indoctrinate you and tell you that you don't get any happiness within a Hindu household, it is discriminatory, and instead you should join us, become Christian, or Muslim. This is how people are induced, instigated and converted…For example, they'd get 10-15 smart-looking boys, they will be absolutely neat and clean. They'd be dressed well in kurta-dhhoti. They'd come with a tilak imprinted on the forehead and will look completely Hindu (*Hindumey)*– from an upper caste family. Then they gradually go amidst girls, amidst our daughters. They take admission where our daughters (*bachhiyan)* study. They take a room on rent nearby. At first, they'd offer help to the girl in her studies, or offer her a lift on his bike when she is going somewhere. This is how they attract the girl's attention. A person gets attracted only when there is some benefit. Then, *friendship[116]* and all that happens. The situation even reaches the stage of *live-in*. Then gradually, the girl is 'brainwashed'. In very rare cases, girls go out of their own will. They are entirely '*brainwashed'*. They entrap girls through their web of words *(Shabd-jaal mei fasante hai bachiyon ko)*. Why will our daughters or sisters get attracted towards someone? When she'd see some attractive features in him – bodily or economic. Or she'd feel that there is more benefit there – comfort or a rich family. So the boys take advantage of this…They are mostly Christian or Muslim boys.
> MT: I have also read cases about love jihad. What is that?

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[115] This fear of 'western influence' on Indian '*sanskar and sanskriti*' is not new and came up during my interview with RSS Spokesperson four years ago as well (See Taneja, M.Phil. Dissertation, 2016). More famously, Partha Chatterjee wrote about this division between western influence and Indian values three decades ago. See Chatterjee 1989.
[116] I also noticed that he used the term 'friendship' to refer to romantic heterosexual relationships. In fact, 'friendship' is used as a euphemism colloquially for romantic relationships in several parts of North India.

Shastri: Yes, that is going on in neighbouring *bastis*. It is exactly what I just told you.

<div align="right">(PI, emphasis added, November 2019)</div>

Shastri ji here made allegations of '*shadyantrakari shaktiyan*' or manipulative forces by both Muslim and Christian boys who emulate behaviours and symbols of high caste Hindu culture such as wearing a dhoti-kurta and a tilak imprint in order to 'seduce our daughters'[117]. What this means is that there is a fear that Muslim or Christian men can 'look' like Hindus and 'seduce women' to eventually marry and convert them. In other words, any couple can be comprised of a Muslim man and a Hindu woman, even if it doesn't appear so. This means that any couple spotted in a public space and any courtship is suspect. Therefore, it is considered best for young girls to stay at home, not meet any men in public, be accompanied by their family members at all times, and only marry a man who is approved and arranged by the family, who is typically from the same caste, religion, and socio-economic background. This narrative not only has adverse implications for women's right to find love and build romantic relationships, but also for women's mobility and access to public spaces. According to Shastri ji, young women get attracted to these supposedly predatory boys when they go to their coaching, school, or market, and are then 'brainwashed'. Therefore, it is important for families to place strict restrictions on women's mobilities and monitor them closely. This kind of discourse and the subsequent policing not only penalizes inter-religious and inter-community relationships but any romantic relationship. Unsurprisingly, the Hindu right wing has repeatedly created panics around love by launching attacks against inter-caste and inter-religious love, Valentine's Day, homosexual love, and public display of affection (Gupta 2009; also see Taneja 2016 (M.Phil. dissertation)). While these attacks have been met with some protests such as 'Pink *Chaddi* campaign' in 2009 in Mangalore against attack on young couples in pubs, 'Kiss of Love' protest in 2014 across different cities in India against an attack on couples in a café in Kozhikode, and '*Shudh Desi* Romance' protest in 2015 in Delhi against attack on Valentine's Day, the popular narrative around love jihad has stuck, especially in Uttar Pradesh.

The next section will dive deeper into the discourse of love jihad to argue how such ideological narratives and the resulting fear of romantic or sexual relationship between young men and women, irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds, further strokes family's and community's fears,

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[117] Ironically, while Shastri ji was painting the Muslim and Christian community in a predatory light, we could hear sounds of the evening *azaan* in the background as Khaliyai Mandi is a mixed neighbourhood with substantial Muslim population.

result in restrictions on women's mobility and denies access to leisure opportunities and public spaces to women.

Love as transgression

"Nothing threatens inter-community boundaries more than men and women who cross these artificial borders and meet in mutual love and desire… Inter-community relationships are policed and penalised with special ruthlessness by families because they involve great social courage. They declare the independence and self-assertion of the couple more forcefully than other kinds of love marriages... The love jihad campaign is, ultimately, a safeguard against love and individual decision-making." – Tanika Sarkar 2014[118]

Let's go back to my conversation with Shastri ji. When I asked him if he will allow his own daughter to get married for love, he said that he will 'first try to convince her to change her decision but if she doesn't agree then he will leave it up to her because she might commit suicide otherwise or run away.' He then went on to give me more examples about his extended family members who 'fell astray' and entered inter-caste marriages or eloped after their marriage, even though his family 'is very religious'. Clearly, love, and especially inter-community, inter-caste, and interreligious love is a highly politicized and policed affair here. Perhaps because, as Tanika Sarkar (2014) writes, it declares a couple's independence, self-assertion and courage against those who want to maintain the status quo. In turn, it is penalized ruthlessly.

The narrative of love jihad has received significant attention from the local and Hindi-language media in UP. I conducted a systematic review of news reports on love jihad in Agra in particular by using key words (Love Jihad + Agra) and downloaded and analysed around 30 news reports on this topic, starting from most recent and then tracing backwards (roughly covering a time period from 2014 to 2020). Hindi-language regional news dailies have time and again reported cases of love jihad in Agra where young girls 'have been ruined' by the 'love-net woven by young men' who tie a 'red thread (*kalawa)'. Kalawa* is a red thread worn by some Hindu communities around their wrists. For example, a news report in a widely-read national Hindi-language daily, Patrika, titled 'कलावा बांधकर रचा प्रेमजाल, फंसकर बर्बाद हो गयी युवतियाँ' implied that young men pretended to be Hindus by adopting and displaying visible symbols associated with Hinduism such as *kalawa* in order to catch 'Hindu girls' in their '*premjaal'* (love-net), married them, forced them to convert their religion, and then deserted them when they failed to convince them[119]. This news report then went on to cite several cases of 'love jihad' across Agra, including two cases registered at Itmad-ud-daula thana, which is the field site under study here.

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[118] Tanika Sarkar. "Love, Control and Punishment." *Indian Express*. October 16, 2014.

[119] Staff reporter. "कलावा बांधकर रचा प्रेमजाल, फंसकर बर्बाद हो गयी युवतियाँ" Patrika. N.d. https://www.patrika.com/agra-news/muslim-man-did-tona-totka-on-women-to-get-in-prem-jal-under-love-jihad-breaking-hindi-news-1592564/ (last accessed May 18, 2020)

What is remarkable was that no single news report reviewed here identified any particular cohesive group for propagating or organizing 'love jihad', and instead different cases were woven together to make it look like an organized plan. Similarly, not all news reports alleged that it is Muslim men who are 'enticing Hindu girls' but used 'love jihad' nonetheless to describe elopement cases. Jihad is an Arabic word and means a meritorious struggle, and in some contexts, a struggle to promote what's right[120]. This would imply that technically 'love jihad' would simply mean a meritorious struggle for love. However, since the 9/11 terror attacks and the subsequent anti-Islam propaganda led by US, jihad has increasingly been understood to mean 'holy war' in popular parlance, has become associated with terrorism and violence, and evokes fear. As Sara Ahmed writes, words have a habit of sticking together through repetitive usage in media and by leaders, which in our current milieu has led to association of terrorism with Islam, and of *jihad* with terrorism. (2014, 76-79). If one is to take this argument further, one can argue that the local news reports and the propaganda by right wing cultural organizations in UP has led to sticking together of elopements and love jihad with Muslim bodies and terror. As a result, the term love jihad immediately implicates Muslims and suggests a 'terrorizing' and manipulative strategy; and 'love marriage' is tied up with assumptions about elopements, transgression of community norms, and love jihad.

While some English-language news dailies and websites like the Economist[121] and Scroll[122] have been critical of the love jihad propaganda, regional dailies have largely used scandalous and tantalizing language to stoke people's anxieties. The language of these news reports in Hindi papers for examples is full of terms like '*tona-totka*', '*prem-jal*', 'ruined life', 'unearth the truth' interspersed in the headlines. Reports on cases in Agra, which is touted as '*mohabbat ki nagri*' (city of love) also assume some additional drama owing to this tag and its juxtaposition with the violence and forcefulness associated with the term 'love jihad'[123] due to jihad's sticky association with violence. One headline in Dainik Jagran for example reads as "*muhabbat ki nagri mei muhabbat ke naam par zindagi se khilwad*" (Lives ruined in City of love in the name of love)[124]. At times, rumours on love jihad or reports of a minor girl being allegedly kidnapped by a boy have even led to violence and arson

[120] Britannica. Nd. https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad (accessed June 8, 2020).
[121] Staff reporter. "India is working itself in a frenzy about interfaith marriages." The Economist. Sept 30, 2017.
[122] Rohan Venkataramakrishnan. "How real is the threat of love jihad?" Scroll. Aug 14, 2014.
[123] Staff reporter. "मोहब्बत की नगरी में लव जिहाद, युवती से बलात्कार" Patrika. August 13, 2018. https://www.patrika.com/agra-news/love-jihad-case-in-agra-21-year-old-girl-raped-by-other-cast-young-man-3251707/ (last accessed May 18, 2020).
[124] Staff reporter. "Love jihad: मोहब्बत की नगरी में मोहब्बत के नाम पर ज़िंदगी से खिलवाड़." Jagran. March 11, 2019. https://www.jagran.com/uttar-pradesh/agra-city-two-girls-missing-in-love-jihad-case-19033763.html (accessed May 18, 2020).

in Agra and surrounding cities and villages like Meerut, Semra etc, as reported in English-language news website, News18[125]. In most news reports, it is assumed and alleged that it is the girl who has fallen prey to the '*love-jaal*' and had to be 'rescued' from captivity. Nonetheless, some news reports have also reported cases where the girl was under pressure from her family to file the FIR against her lover/husband regarding forced conversion and attempted rape and abduction[126]. In other cases, the girl herself has asserted her free will in front of the court[127].

Certain Hindu organizations have stoked the issue of love jihad and inter-community love affairs especially around Valentine's Day (which is seen as a representation of 'western culture') every year[128]. Organizations such as Hindu Jagran Manch have gone so far as to announce 'reverse love jihad' or 'beti bachao, bahu lao' campaigns (save daughter, bring daughter-in-law) by setting a target of finding Muslim brides for Hindu boys to tackle the 'huge problem of love jihad' and conversion[129].

Organizations like Bajrang Dal, Dharm Jagran Manch, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad believe that Hindu girls have to be 'saved' from anti-social elements and love jihad, and to this end have taken several measures such as installing 'suraksha chowkis' (safety/protection outposts)[130] and launching Rakhi-tying campaigns to 'protect Hindu girls'[131]. Unfortunately, such protectionist measures have worked to intimidate the girls themselves, reminding us once again the perils of the *safety/suraksha* discourse. Regional and community-based associations in Agra have even advocated for banning of mobile phones for young Hindu women to counter love jihad as access to mobile phones supposedly leads to women falling in

Picture 18: Picture featured on scroll.in, August 14, 2014

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[125] Qazi Faraz Ahmed. "After rumours of 'love jihad', UP shops, houses set on fire as minor elopes with boy of another faith." News18. September 18, 2019.

[126] Ishita Bhatia. "Meerut's love jihad couple qubool each other as husband and wife." Times of India. Dec 6, 2015. Also see: Staff reporter. "चार साल पुराने विडीयो को वायरल कर फिर से हिंसा फैलाने की साज़िश, पढ़िए क्या है इसकी सच्चाई" Patrika. May 5, 2018.

[127] Siraj Qureshi. "Islamic scholar speak out on Love Jihad: Islam does not permit marriages under duress." India Today. August 17, 2017. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/love-jihad-agra-hindu-muslim-supreme-court-nia-isis-1030107-2017-08-17 (accessed May 18, 2020)

[128] Staff reporter. "वैलेंटाइन डे पर लव जिहाद के ख़िलाफ़ हिंदू कल्याण महासभा ने किया बड़ा ऐलान" Amar Ujala. Feb 5, 2019. https://www.amarujala.com/uttar-pradesh/agra/hindu-kalyan-mahasabha-big-announcement-against-love-jihad-on-valentine-s-day-in-agra (accessed May 18, 2020)

[129] Anuja Jaiswal. "Hindu Jagran Manch to launch reverse love jihad in UP." Times of India. Dec 1, 2017.

[130] Lalmani Varma. "Agra Dussehra celebrations: VHP to deploy Bajrang dal to 'save Hindu girls from love jihad'." Indian Express. Sept 14, 2017.

[131] Lalmani Varma. "RSS wing launches rakhi crusade against love jihad." Indian Express. Aug 11, 2014)

the 'love jihad trap'[132]. Love-jihad is repeatedly presented as a ploy by Muslims to destroy Hinduism by converting Hindu girls through marriage. 'Picture 18' here for example is a pamphlet on love jihad which was circulated online and offline, implicating even Bollywood actors like Saif Ali Khan and Amir Khan (Source: Scroll.in[133]). The issue of love jihad is then sustained in the public imagination through circulation of pamphlets, posters, and rumours, which make tall, often unsubstantiated claims regarding number of women who have fallen 'prey to love jihad'. However, no evidence has been found till date which proves these claims or that there is a 'love jihad organization'. Unfortunately, the state and the judiciary have also been complicit in this construction. The Karnataka High Court for example ordered a 23-year-old woman who had converted to Islam to marry a Muslim man to return to her parents' house until completion of investigation, being indifferent to the woman's agency and free will. Historians like Charu Gupta (2009) argue that narratives and claims like love jihad paint Hindu women as 'victims' of false love who are easily seduced. This in turn justifies any measures taken to discipline them and to control their physical movement, because the public space is full of undesirable 'risks'. This perhaps explains why families in Khaliyai Mandi consider it best to 'keep' their daughters indoors.

Let us go back to my primary field site in Agra – Khaliyai Mandi where girls usually get married between the ages of 14 and 20 years, and more specifically to my conversations with Vartika (18 years, female). Her case seems to be representative of a larger phenomenon of how young women's desires and mobilities are policed and regulated because of fear of love. Vartika never went to school. Her father passed away when she was 13 years old, and since then her paternal uncle – Rakesh Jatav (see Chapter 3) has been her guardian. She doesn't like staying in this basti because 'the *mahaul* is not good – people drink, abuse, gamble and fight'. Most days, she sits on the cot placed in front of her house facing the river, browsing on her recently acquired smart phone, while small groups of men gamble and drink a few feet away. 'They are playing amongst themselves, what can I say, this is an open space', she stated when I asked her about it. All her friends and cousins who are her age are married now. She doesn't roam around anywhere with her friends, other than within the basti. '*Yahin pe dol lete hai ya yahan baith jate hai*' (we just roam around or just sit here), she told me as we sat on the cot together on a warm October day. People here love sitting on the cots outside their homes, they sit wherever they feel like, she added. When her married cousins visit, she sometimes goes to the Taj mahal or Paliwal park with them, though she can't go to these places alone because her '*gharwale*' would object. '*Gharwale*' (household members) is usually used colloquially to refer to elder members

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[132] Staff. "Agra: Banning Hindu women from using mobile phones to counter love jihad." Asia News. Feb 9, 2014.
[133] Rohan Venkataramakrishnan. "How real is the threat of love jihad?" Scroll. Aug 14, 2014.

of the house who have some authority in the family. She doesn't step out at night, which for her is any time after 4 or 5 pm. She further added: 'I know in Delhi people go out at night also for all sorts of activities. My friend told me who got married in Delhi. But not here. The *mahaul* is also such.' Noticing that she, like several other respondents, used the term '*mahaul*' to explain her experience in the basti and in Agra, I asked her what she meant by it. However, yet again, much like Anju or Ruksana, she turned around the conversation and underlined that '*hum sahi toh sab sahi*' (all is good if we are good).

Listening to her comparison with Delhi, I asked Vartika if she wants to get married to someone in Delhi like her friends. But she refused and after some hesitation, shared that she has a boyfriend in Agra whom she wants to marry. There was a spark of joy as well as determination in her eyes when she told me this. She met her boyfriend four years ago at her elder sister's wedding, when she was 14 years old. They started talking but once her mother found out, she scolded her: 'she objected and told me this is wrong, I shouldn't do this, and they wouldn't marry me to him.' But Vartika was persistent in her decision and continued the relationship. When I asked why did her mother object to her relationship, she explained: 'everyone objects at the idea of love marriage at first, and so she did'. Love marriages are in fact seen as a taboo in Khaliyai mandi. I asked her if anyone else in Khaliyai Mandi had a love marriage and she recalled one instance from a few years ago where a girl married a man who owned a liquor store. Her parents were against the relationship, but she followed her heart and did what she wanted. After getting married, the man started drinking, and 'she had to suffer'. 'How can we stay happy after hurting our mother', Vartika stated when narrating this story, reminding us again about the stronghold of family and their approval in romantic relationships. Here, I noticed that even though she seemed determined to marry the man of her choice, she derided the idea of love marriage if done against the wishes of one's parents. That is why, Vartika explained, she has not married yet because she wants her mother's approval for her 'love marriage' (sic, PI, October 2019).

In any case, Vartika continued speaking to her boyfriend despite her mother's objections. Her boyfriend would buy her cheap phones which she would hide and use to talk to him whenever she could. Her '*gharwale*' would eventually find this out, often because the neighbours would see her on the phone and report to her family. She'd then get beaten up and phone would be broken. After this happened several times, she stopped talking to him and they stayed out of touch for a year, before they met again at another wedding and resumed their relationship. In the intervening period, her mother tried to convince her for an 'arranged marriage' with a boy they approved of. But Vartika refused because she believes 'it is not right to not marry the man you have dated'. This is because, she explained, otherwise people in the *basti* would gossip that she roamed around with one guy but married someone else, and make it impossible for her to live in the community. 'People here interfere in your

life a lot', she stated. And so, she remained steadfast in her decision and turned down offers for arranged marriage, patiently waiting for her family to approve of her relationship. This also became a way for her to assert her individuality and choice – she distanced her choices from her cousins and friends who had arranged marriages and also from girls who marry for love entirely against their parent's wishes. As Charu Gupta argues in another context (2009), the women who elope for inter-religious love marriage are perhaps claiming a 'limited arena of independent action' as choice in marriage is the only avenue left to assert autonomy. Painted as victims by right-wing organizations, these women are perhaps exercising their right to love and romance by choosing elopement (Gupta 2009, p 15). Therefore, argues Gupta, these women who are eloping for love should be framed as 'risk-taking subjects' and not as hapless victims (2016, p 298). In this case, Vartika's family eventually relented and doesn't actively object to her relationship now. There is a tacit agreement that she will get married to him, after which her boyfriend bought her a touchscreen smart phone.

Ever since she started using the smartphone openly, neighbours have stopped actively gossiping about her: 'They understand that if the girl is using such a big phone openly in front of her family, then they'd know about it already. That's why no one says anything to us now,' she told me. This reminded me how Mrs. Chaudhury who lives merely 200 meters away from Vartika's house had blamed sexual harassment on the access to mobile phones that young girls have, stating that if a girl is talking on the phone all day and all night, then 'what else can she expect', indicating she is inviting trouble. During this conversation, Mrs. Chaudhury had casually pointed towards the river bank but it was not until my conversation with Vartika that I connected the dots. In this basti, it is not just the physical movements of unmarried girls that are policed but also what they are doing, who are they talking to, who are falling in love, with whom, and so on. Vartika's love affair was not inter-religious or inter-caste. And yet, it was not acceptable to her family and to her neighbours. Her movements were heavily policed and monitored -- she couldn't go to places of leisure without family members, she couldn't use a phone without censure. This policing should be placed within the context of a narrative that ties women's safety with their own behaviours, an atmosphere of victim-blaming and shaming, discourse of love jihad, and the control that families have over women's decisions and choices. This intervention in women's everyday lives severely disempowers them.

The cases of interreligious and inter-community love marriages and elopements, politicised by the anti-love jihad proponents, also bring attention to love as a transgressive act when it stands against the Hindu family and household structure and draws attention to woman's sexuality, autonomous desires, and her free will. Case studies of Hindu-Muslim couples documented by Jyoti Punwani for

example indicate that Hindu women who married Muslim men were not some 'love-struck, helpless, giddy-headed' girls as claimed by love jihad proponents, and have in fact taken well-thought decisions about their lives (Punwani 2014: 42). And yet, it is quite common for parents in north India to file cases of rape and abduction when a daughter elopes with a romantic partner. This denies the woman her personhood, constitutional freedoms, and criminalises her otherwise legal decision to elope, and cohabit or marry a man out of her choice (Anjali Mody 2014[134]). Invariably, these campaigns on moral panics regarding romance, marriage and conversions are played out on the bodies of women, and place public morality above constitutional morality (Gupta 2016: 296).

Some scholars have also rightly argued that political and moral campaigns against romance and elopements are intricately connected with questions of citizenship. David James Strohl (2019) for example argues that moral panics stroked by the Hindu right through campaigns like love jihad construct and diabolize Muslims as bad or 'improper citizens'. Simultaneously, it reinstates gendered hierarchies within the idealized Hindu patriarchal family. Maintaining the patriarchal Hindu family and values get framed as necessary to protect and advance national interest. This burden of citizenly duties gets placed on virile Hindu men, patriarchal families, and right-wing collectives, who want to ensure that women are not 'seduced' by other men and are protected from dangers like 'love jihad'. According to Strohl, in imagining and promoting a 'citizen family', this phenomenon also upturns and undermines the tenets of modern liberal citizenship and political subjecthood which is premised on the individual as a unit. Women are denied agency and disciplined to behave like dutiful daughters for religious and national interests. Nivedita Menon (2014) similarly argues that anti-love jihad campaign and the subsequent policing of women and heterosexual couples have serious implications for citizenship since the modern identity of citizenship becomes mediated by the heterosexual patriarchal family[135].

Further, as already pointed out in the previous section, if one accepts the premise that Muslim men take on Hindu names and behaviours to entice Hindu women, then all love affairs become suspect, since any couple could be comprised of a Muslim man pretending to be Hindu. By this logic, love jihad then can only be tackled by launching attacks against all kinds of love outside the heteronormative arranged-marriage set-up, thereby painting love marriages in the same light as love jihad (Gupta 2016). As a corollary, if all romantic love is suspect, all spaces where this love can find avenue needs to be policed and patrolled – parks, schools, colleges, railway stations. As the news

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[134] Anjali Mody. "Love Jihad: The Sangh Parivar's sexual politics by another name." *The Caravan.* August 29, 2014.
[135] Nivedita Menon. "The Meerut Girl, desperate Hinduvaadis and their jihad against love". *Kafila.* October 14, 2014.

reports analysed above indicate, everyday spaces such as schools and colleges, theatres and markets, snack stalls, mobile phone recharge shops, and railway stations get constructed as sites where Hindu girls might be enticed by lurking Muslim men pretending to be Hindus. In the process, public spaces and opportunities for leisure are also denied to women, with imposition of strict disciplinary regimes on women, their choices, mobility, and actions, and ultimately, on their citizenship practices.

In 2004, UP police launched Operation Majnu, a systematic operation to ostensibly target eve-teasers, but in reality targeted heterosexual couples in public spaces like parks and malls across Aligarh, Meerut, Muzzafarnagar, and Ghaziabad. In 2005, after a physical attack on around 30 heterosexual couples by Meerut police was televised, Operation Majnu received a lot of flak from the National Commission Women after which it lost support. In 2017, it was revived under the name of Anti-Romeo squads, again ostensibly to check eve-teasing and trouble-makers and keep women 'safe'[136]. However, yet again, the police slipped into the role of moral agents picking up couples in parks, with the support of local politicians[137], even as the state leadership and top officers continued to assert that Anti-Romeo squads are not against consenting adult couples. Its notable that in both cases, the operation was named after iconic heroes of romantic tales – Majnu from Laila-Majnu (a seventh century love story) and Romeo from Romeo-Juliet (play by Shakespeare) – both of whom sacrificed their life or their sanity for the sake of their beloved. Interestingly, love and lovers have long been considered a threat to established social order even in folk tales and classical works of literature[138].

When I asked Sub-Inspector Pushpender (Rambagh chowki, Itmad-ud-Daula thana) if he has ever fined couples frequenting neighbouring parks like Mahtab bagh or Ram bagh, he told me that if finds such couples then he merely gives them a warning or threatens to call their parents:

"A lot of couples visit Ram Bagh Park. But they are usually consenting adults. They kiss and all. If they do something more, then we take down their name and address and ask them to leave…In those cases, girls get scared. If we ask them for her father's number for example, she gets really scared…Then they offer to pay us a fine so that we don't tell their parents…See you and I can be friends, we can go and meet somewhere, but if by chance, that time my father or brother or a family member spots us, then I will not be able to bear it and I will say that this person forced me to meet him or lured me and got me here. Even girls who are above 18 years of age will

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[136] Snigdha Poonam. "UP's anti-Romeo squads strike terror: A quiet, gloomy Sunday at Ghaziabad's biggest park." *Hindustan Times*. May 30, 2017.

[137] Lalmani Varma. "Anti-Romeo & Love Jihad: Experiments in moral policing in Uttar Pradesh." Indian Express. Mar 24, 2017.

[138] For example in his close reading of love and gender in medieval Punjabi literature, JS Grewal gives the example of Heer Ranjha who 'pursue love outside the traditional modes of conjugality' and are therefore punished and ousted from society. See: Grewal. "Love and Gender in the Rig Veda and Medieval Punjabi Literature." 2010. Indian Institute of Advanced Studies: Shimla.

say this. Later the girl often admits that she 'has friendship' with the boy but she is scared to admit this in front of her family." (Sub Inspector, Rambagh Chowki, November 2019)

Here, we again see how policing by family and formal state structures like the police overlaps and how one reinforces the other. The police are deeply complicit in ensuring that women follow the norms and rules of the society imposed by their parents. The fear of parents finding out about the couple itself is indicative of why the couples choose to find intimacy in parks to begin with. Vartika for example often meets her boyfriend at Ram Bagh or Mahtab Bagh, because in other public spaces her acquaintances see her and inform her family immediately. Even in the park, she shared, 'if someone sees us, we have to hide' as these parks are notorious for being spots where couples meet to find intimacy. This is in spite of the fact that her family no longer objects to her relationship, and yet continues to monitor her whereabouts. She has found ways around this through clever tactics and finding spaces where they can find some privacy like public parks.

Romantic love, especially in my field site is looked down upon and discouraged so much that sexual and romantic relationships are only alluded to through an indirect vocabulary such as 'friendship' and sexual intimacy is denoted by '*galat kaam'*. In our conversation, Sub-Inspector Pushpender also articulated very clear notions of what he considers right and wrong. He stated that when he finds couples making out in a park, he warns them that 'what they are doing is *galat kaam (*wrongdoing)'. He further explained: 'if they are underage, then we tell them that they should at least become adults first…Even if both of them are consenting adults, there are some conditions and rules of a park as well – dos and don'ts. You can't go around doing lots of wrong things (*galat kaam)* because there are tourists, other visitors who also visit the park, so it's wrong. They are ruining the *mahaul* of the park' (PI, November 2019). Making out in the park, even by two consenting adults is thus considered 'wrong' and if caught, the couples are threatened by complaints to parents and charged a fine, which is usually in the form of a bribe without any receipt. This is because the sub-inspector believes 'parks have a certain decorum' and the *mahaul* of the park should not be sullied especially because Agra is a tourist city.

Undoubtedly then, the discourse against love marriage and alleged 'love jihad' has severe implications for women's access to public spaces. In a recent article, Tyagi and Sen (2020) similarly argue that love jihad acts as a 'regulatory mechanism over the mobilities of young urban women' and reorients the urban public sphere as per the 'gendered Hindu civil order' with serious implications for tenets of legitimate citizenship[139]. According to the authors, the discursive content of love jihad and

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[139] The authors unpack the case of Hadiya Jahan, a 24-year-old woman from Kerala who eloped and married a Muslim man, which was subsequently challenged by his father through a writ petition in Kerala high court alleging that Hadiya

the associated notions of infamy, stigma and honour fuels the anxieties of a Hindu civil order and makes allegedly 'unfriendly urban spaces' inaccessible to women. In the process, it feeds into the process of nation-making by constructing the idea of a 'good Hindu' as the ideal citizen despite the 'temptations of urban modernity' justifies violence by the ideal citizen for the sake of 'women's security and safety'. In doing so, it also 'marks out undesirable bodies in urban public sphere' like Muslim men, polices deviant couples, and shrinks the spaces available to women in the modern city (Tyagi and Sen 2020). In real terms, this means that women are not allowed to go to spaces associated with romantic love such as parks or cinema halls, and in extreme cases to schools and colleges.

According to Madhavi Menon (2018: 12), heterosexual love has been excessively policed and monitored in India because it is assumed that it is the site of sex as well as familial and societal transgression. Often, its discovery leads to public humiliation and fall in the family's name and honour. One of the sites where this desire is often made public are the public parks in cities. This is perhaps because, as Madhavi Menon writes, the topography of the park, with one foot in the wilderness of the jungles and another in the concrete structures of the city, with tall trees, bushes and boundary walls, alongside manicured trails and open benches, enables the public and the private to co-exist. The desires that get played out in the parks are both 'hidden from sight behind bushes' and yet visible to anyone who knows where to look or what to look for (Menon 2018, 173)[140]. A park is a public space where people go for jogs or walks, for picnics with friends and families, or to sit on benches. At the same time, parks can also serve as private spaces (or to be precise, some parts of the parks serve as private spaces) where couples can hide behind bushes to neck, kiss or have sex. Parks are then both public and private as they serve the dual function of providing openness and fresh air, and spaces or 'islands of privacy' (Illouz 1997) which absorb private pleasure. Parks make us confront that which is legislated to be hidden – desire and romance by couples who often cross caste and religious boundaries and go to parks in search of privacy, away from the prying eyes of their kith and kin, family and neighbours. In that sense, as Menon writes, parks are democratic – anyone who can't find a space elsewhere will find a space in the park for romance – be it husband-wife, client-sex worker, boyfriend-girlfriend,

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was forced and hoodwinked into eloping and converting to Islam. The case gathered a lot of national media attention after the High Court annulled the marriage and ruled in favour of Hadiya's father, denying Hadiya basic constitutional rights. The judgement was challenged in the Supreme Court which ultimately set aside the annulment and found the allegation made by her father to be false (Shafin Jahan v. Asokan K.M. Criminal Appeal no. 366 of 2018 in Supreme Court of India).

[140] I owe gratitude to Meghna Bohidar for pointing me towards Madhavi Menon's book and for sharing her own fascinating work-in-progress on public parks, cinema, and romance.

same-sex couples and so on (though as we will see in the next chapter, not all parks are democractic). Menon humorously terms this love for park and the preference to make out in park as 'parkophilia' (Menon 2018, 176).

Building on Menon's work and her own ethnography in Delhi and Mumbai, Bohidar (2021) similarly argues that 'away-from home' public-public and public-private spaces like malls, cafes, and beach fronts provide a space for lovers to 'express and perform love' away from the prying eyes and surveillance of family and neighbours and subvert parental and moral authority. Bohidar carefully unpacks the strategies that couples use to minimize visibility while performing intimacy in public spaces such as covering themselves with dupattas or umbrellas in order to avoid unwanted attention, gradually moving from benches to the bushes, and going to only those parks and areas within those parks where there'd be other couples as well. This is one way in which couples negotiate their vulnerability to the moral police state by building an unspoken solidarity with other couples, and in turn ensuring their safety (Bohidar 2021). I found similar concerns of anonymity and equation of parks as public spaces with zones of intimacy in my own field work in Agra as well, as is exemplified in my conversation with Vartika. However, what this also does is that it makes certain parks more notorious and heavily policed than others and leads to sticking together of certain parks with a certain affective atmosphere or *mahaul*. For example, in my field work, I also found that it's not considered 'respectable' to go to these parks especially alone by 'girls from good families' who are expected to marry as per their parent's wishes (in Khaliyai Mandi) as well as by upwardly mobile women with a certain social and cultural capital who instead prefer to hang out in cafés with their friends or partners[141], even as they find it increasingly difficult to anonymously navigate urban spaces due to 24x7 societal surveillance by acquaintances and family members.

Consider for example my conversation with Ankita, a 30-year-old microbiologist who lives in Taj Ganj with her parents. She usually meets her friends at one of the several new cafés that have opened on Fatehabad Road in Agra. Other times she goes to Sadar bazaar (a popular market with wide streets near Taj Ganj) or to the malls. When I asked her if she visits parks, she replied in the negative, because she believes the '*mahaul*' of parks is not good. Like the sub-inspector quoted above, Ankita believes that there are certain dos and don'ts that should be followed in a park and it is not the right place for expressing intimacy because, she argues, it is a 'public space' where all kinds of people go

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[141] In the last one decade, Agra has seen an explosion of café culture with new cafés serving coffee, fast food and continental snacks opening and shutting down every month – an area which definitely requires further inquiry and research.

including families, older people and women. According to Ankita, 'a certain decorum should be maintained in a public place like parks. If you are going to a park to hang out, talk or sit, then its *normal*. But every place has its limits. If you are going to a public place, you should try not to ruin the vibe or *mahaul* of the place. You shouldn't give an opportunity to anyone to raise a finger at you and you shouldn't do anything that ruins the name of the park. If you want to get intimate, there are other places you can go to.' (Personal Interview, October 2019, emphasis added). However, what these 'other places' are remains unanswered. Ankita herself has hardly visited any parks in Agra because of the sticky association of parks with intimacy on one hand and with policing on the other. She doesn't want to get associated with public intimacy or get into trouble with the police.

> "I don't go to parks because parks don't have a good atmosphere. For example I have heard that Subhash Park's *mahaul* has deteriorated over time…Couples go and do *these* things there…Police is also present there. If they see a boy and girl together there, they question them and ask them what are they doing. So there is all that *panga* there. We were specifically told not to go there when I was in college. And boys are also scared of going there because they don't want to take unnecessary *jhamela*…In fact, if you are just 2 or 3 people you'd think twice before going to a park in Agra because of policing and mentality of people – they assume things. So you can go anywhere but parks. I once went with a group of 20 classmates. We saw there were couples sitting in isolated spots at several places and behind the bushes in the park. So the vibe becomes like that. That park *mei aise hoga*. I don't blame anyone. But maybe policing is required." (Ankita, PI, October 2019)

Parks are therefore inaccessible because of the affective association between parks, *jhamela*, policing, and *gande kaam*. The *panga* and *jhamela* that Ankita is referring to is the fines and bribes that police take from couples who visit public parks in Agra. I also note that Ankita doesn't articulate intimacy or sexual relations, and instead uses '*vo sab kaam*' and '*aise kaam*' (all those and such activities) throughout our conversation. When I asked her what are the alternative places which couples can access in Agra, she repeatedly pointed to the new cafés: 'You will see lots of couples hanging out in cafés. People who don't want to get involved with police, they will not go to parks.' However, couples of only a particular class with social and economic capital can actually spend time in these sanitized, private cafés. Further, cafés perhaps do not provide the kind of 'islands of privacy' and solidarity that couples look for with its glass panes and open seating plan.

Conclusion

At the onset, I had not taken into account love and romantic relationships as a form of leisure in cities, and its role in shaping what I have called in the second chapter as affective citizenship. What this chapter however reveals that if 'women walk at midnight' can be characterised as a claim on affective citizenship, then quite simply, anti-love jihad campaign, moral policing, normalization of '*chhed-chhad*' and the resultant '*mahaul*' or affective atmosphere of risk and potential transgression

is its denial. As is evident from the preceding sections, love is transgressive and right to love and to find spaces for intimacy is also a crucial part of 'urban life', if there is such a quintessential thing.

This policing of love and the construction of a *mahaul* which prohibits women from accessing public and leisure spaces seems to be working at three levels – (i) individual, (ii) family and societal, and (iii) at the level of discourses and ideology. At the individual level, predatory patriarchal behaviour seems to be deeply internalised and normalised in Khaliyai Mandi amongst women across all ages. As the narratives discussed in the first part of this chapter suggest, women are complicit in policing themselves and their female family members.
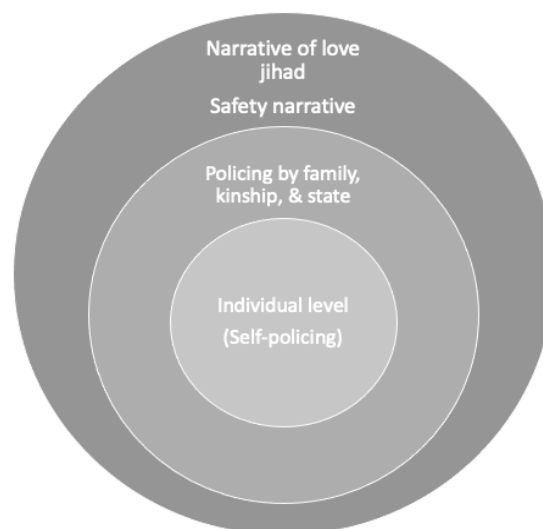
Layers of policing that work to limit women's mobility and choices

Interestingly, the *mahaul* may be *kharab,* but *dikkat*[142] *(problem)* can never be acknowledged because '*hum sahi toh sab sahi*' – there can't be a problem if you are right (or righteous), even when the atmosphere is bad and full of risks. This is perhaps because acknowledging *dikkat* will lead to further restrictions on mobility for women in the name of their 'protection' and 'safety'. What this means is that women have to ensure their own safety by following the rules and norms of accessing public spaces (such as avoiding certain places, times, and activities) because they *know* that the *mahaul* is *kharab.* If they do that, there is no *dikkat. Dikkat* only comes when women fail to negotiate the *kharab mahaul,* or transgress certain boundaries, or as Ruksana had put it '*kadam behek jaate hain'.* As a corollary, women from good families, who follow all societal rules don't have any *dikkat.* Family and kinship networks further ensure that women tow the boundaries established by the society and monitor their whereabouts. If women are spotted in public spaces with non-family members, they are censured not just by their kinship networks but also by organs of the state like the police and security guards. And in spite of all this monitoring, if a girl elopes for a love marriage, the police brings the couple back and uses the law against them. All conjugal relationships have to go through the family, which uses the legal system to maintain the status quo and penalises intercommunity relationships. Women's mobility and access to public spaces as well as leisure opportunities is thus severely curtailed.

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[142] During the course of field work, questions of safety were often interpreted to mean '*dikkat*' or active problem, which also highlighted the limiting scope of the safety framework to unpack women's access to public space in real-terms.

Yet, women are finding a way to walk at midnight in Agra as well, led by groups like Agra Heritage walks, though so far midnight walks have only happened a few times, with a mixed group of men and women. According to Neha (Agra Heritage walks, and walk leader of midnight walks in Agra) puts it, 'midnight walking (for us) gets more difficult because there are men in the group…If it was just women, the cop won't say anything, for the sake of political correctness. Also, because a group of only women is not seen as a threat...At max they will be patronising that they want us to be safe' (PI, November 2019) The decision for men and women to walk together in Agra at midnight should in fact be read in the context of excessive moral policing around inter-sex friendships and narratives of love jihad. Neha further explained how bringing men into this group triggers a lot of connotations around morality and character of the women who are walking, and begins to challenge mainstream assumptions and norms. In fact, ideological narratives and frameworks which focus on morality of women, nation's honour, love jihad, and more broadly women's safety can be understood as the third layer which gives justification to the monitoring of women's bodies, mobilities, leisure, and access to public spaces. It justifies and legitimises the control exerted by families, society, and even police on women's bodies.

The next chapter will unpack similar dynamics of 'bad mahaul' and safety narratives around women's access to public spaces in a different (yet similar) context of a low-income neighbourhood in Delhi, followed by Chapter 6 where I will bring together the various findings from each chapter to coherently unpack 'mahaul'.

Chapter Five

Parks, Gullies, and Safety in Delhi:

A Case Study of Kalyanpuri Resettlement Colony

Introduction

> "We want not only England but all parts of the Empire to be covered with Garden cities."
> Garden City and Town Planning Report 1907, cited in Anthony King (1977)

> In early and mid-twentieth century in India, the Europeans who pushed the "modernist categories of public and private were being constantly challenged by ways in which Indians used open space. The street presented…a total confusion of the 'private' and the 'public' in the many different uses to which it was put. People washed, changed, slept and even defecated in the open…To this Indian 'chaos', was opposed the immaculate 'order' of the European quarters." (Dipesh Chakrabarty 1992, 541)

Parks have been central to modern cities and urban planning as spaces for recreation and play, as sanitary buffers and 'lungs' of a city, and for communal gatherings. Planning historians like Anthony King (1976) have written extensively about the role of parks in the planning of modern cities in Europe, a vision which the Empire carried to colonial cities as well[1]. In India, colonial settlers, officials and architects created and consumed particular forms of urban settlements and urban nature such as the 'hill stations', 'cantonments', and colonial capital cities which were marked by sequestered and manicured parks and gardens, artificial ponds, or tree-lined avenues (Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2017, 10). However, these planning models were imported and transposed onto Indian cities without taking into account local practices and histories. Colonial and modern city planners were often insensitive to community sensibilities, traditional ideas, local practices, and rural-urban links regarding city planning. European urban planners instead sought to impose 'immaculate order' in colonial cities by modifying their physical environment, house forms, architecture, ways of living, and social behaviours (King 1977; Chakrabarty 1992; Datta 2015). As a result, modern urban planning in India resulted in significantly altering the relationship between spaces and bodies by inducing changes in people's behaviours and social practices. This was achieved through a

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[1] Even in medieval cities and towns, manicured gardens and open spaces were important in town planning as is evident from a cursory look at Mughal architecture. See, for example, Salim Javed Akhtar's work (2008) on Mughal gardens in Agra. However, the relationship between nature and society was much different in the pre-colonial period. See Bilgrami's work (2014) on enchanted view of nature.

combination of urban plans, legislations to uphold them, and new forms of infrastructure being superimposed on existing cities (King 1977; Datta 2012).

Further, colonial view linked urban planning with public health and a particular orderly aesthetics of city space. In the process, as Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, the 'disorderly' open spaces i.e., the bazaar and the streets of the premodern cities were rendered 'confusing', chaotic, and undesirable. This was done not only by the colonial planners but also by Indian nationalists for medical and political reasons who instead wanted regulated, clean, and 'modern' public spaces. Politically, bazaar was a place where rebellions, conspiracies and riots brewed. Medically, melas and bazars were seen as threats to public health as they were believed to breed epidemics, dirt and disease. Partho Datta similarly traces modern urban planning in India to nineteenth century pandemics, which resulted in strict regulation of bodies and spaces through urban planning and policy (2012, 2). The obsessive concern with health by colonial urban planners led to complete 'ecological transformations' in some cases – detached, individual housing units arranged in straight lines or around a garden, while completely overlooking the social, symbolic, cultural and political meanings of existing built environments and historical experiences of indigenous towns and villages (King 1977, 16)[2].

What is of interest here for us is that in writing about colonial urban planning and pre-modern public spaces, historians like Chakrabarty highlight the centrality of bazaars and streets in urban public life in India as the unenclosed outside as opposed to the 'enclosed inside'. According to Chakrabarty (1992), the bazaar and the street in Indian cities (unlike the modern marketplace), not only provided economic activity, transportation links, and subsistence of trades like cart and rickshaw pullers, entertainers, occultists, masons, barbers and tailors but also opportunities for recreation, social interaction, chance encounters with strangers, and possibilities of politics. David Arnold (2019) similarly underlines how the street in colonial India was also a political space, which provided opportunities for what he calls 'subaltern solidarities' to emerge, as is evident from instances of strikes by rickshaw pullers in early twentieth century in Madras or by municipal sweepers in nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Bombay. The city streets were an arena of mobilization for urban subalterns through chains of transmission and rumour. However, as Arnold further writes, the occupation of the street by subalterns was rarely secure and always marked by threat, precarity, ambiguity, negotiation with the everyday state,[3] conflict between different subaltern groups, and caste-based animosities. At

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[2] King (1977) further writes how the urban plans were accompanied by legislations and strict controls over behaviours to maintain order and discipline, ignoring the cultural preferences and social outlooks of the local societies in the process. Concepts like 'town', 'countryside', 'community' and 'neighbourhood' as understood in industrial Britain were uncritically transposed onto colonial cities without taking into account their cultural context.

[3] That is, the police, municipal health workers, vaccinators, sanitary officers and so on.

the same time, as this chapter will also illustrate, the street is a living space, a place where people gather for births, marriages, deaths and festivals, forging 'bonds of community' and a sense of locality in the process (Arnold 2019). They are also acutely gendered, though the gender question is conspicuously absent in the historical writings on the subaltern street.

Undoubtedly, as a living space, the streets and bazaars provided a leisure and a political space in precolonial and colonial Indian cities and towns. The main leisure activity of men at the time was '*ghoomna-firna*' in these bazaars and gullies (Chakrabarty 1992, drawing from Nita Kumar 1986). Repeated efforts were made by colonial as well as independent India's urban planners to clean up the bazaars, sterilize them, and replace these 'old pleasures' with new pleasures of capitalist consumption in modern marketplaces and regulated open spaces like manicured parks (Chakrabarty 1992). However, according to Chakrabarty, most of these efforts failed, leading to a situation where the old pleasures continued. Writing in 1992, Chakrabarty perhaps did not foresee the spurt of malls, sparkly metro stations, and recreation and theme parks in the post-liberalisation and globalisation period which the middle class would learn to consume so voraciously[4]. Nonetheless, as we will see in this chapter, old pleasures have indeed continued especially for those left out of the gains of capitalism and excluded from the malls as consumers (but included as workers). Labouring classes have continued to look for and find leisure in bazaars, chowks and gullies, and formed solidarities through these spaces. While Chakrabarty (1992) in his writing acknowledges that these leisure spaces – bazaars and gullies, and activities of '*ghoomna-firna*' are often limited to men, he does not venture to find out where do women then find similar opportunities for leisure and discursive politics. He instead simply generalizes that women are relegated to the 'enclosed inside' for reasons of supposed respectability and safety. Recent studies have reiterated the basic tenet of this finding that women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men do for leisure, loitering, and consequently discursive politics and more often than not have to justify their presence in public spaces (See for example Phadke et al. 2011). In that case, it is important to ask where do women from diverse backgrounds find opportunities for leisure, rest, solidarity, or chance encounter? Further, in recent decades, while women from middle classes with social and economic capital have found leisure in private-public spaces like malls and coffee shops, what about women from economically weaker or marginalized sections?

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[4] In fact, if Amita Baviskar's 2002 seminar paper, titled 'The Politics of the City' is to go by, 'modernists' who celebrated the 'order' can be easily replaced by middle and upper middle class in Indian cities today who are likewise 'confused' over the dirt and disorder of the street and use of open spaces by economically weaker sections. The paper takes us through a case where residents of a posh Delhi neighbourhood beat a man to death from a neighbouring squatter settlement for defecating in their colony park, which he thought was an open space meant for this purpose. Link: https://www.india-seminar.com/2002/516/516%20amita%20baviskar.htm

In Chapter 3, we encountered cots, placed in by-lanes and gullies of densely packed neighbourhoods, as the dominant leisure space especially for women in a low-income neighbourhood in Agra. Not surprisingly, I encountered similar spaces in a low-income neighbourhood of Kalyanpuri in Delhi as well. Interestingly, Kalyanpuri has close to 100 parks. And yet, it is not the parks but the cots in front of houses where people, especially women, congregate, sit or even cook, and it is the gullies where children play. The gully in front of their house is their extended 'inside', it is where the household spills over. But anything outside the gully is dangerous and perceived to be unsafe. An engagement with this theme led me directly to concerns of safety and the expanded notions of inside and outside.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first part will give a brief background of Kalyanpuri and background of my entry into the neighbourhood. The second part will engage with the parks and gullies within Kalyanpuri, and the third will explore narratives of safety circulating in the neighbourhood. In the process, I will demonstrate how unlike the dominant urban planning imagination which carves out separate zones of recreation or leisure such as parks for the universal urban subject, postcolonial urban subjects, marked by categories of caste, class, and gender have a different conception of parks and open and public spaces. The field work for this chapter was roughly spread over five months - December 2018, January 2019, and August-October 2019.

1. Kalyanpuri Resettlement Colony

Background and Profile

The following segment will briefly sketch the spatial and political history of Kalyanpuri and provide an overview of its demographic composition. Located in the East district of NCT of Delhi, Kalyanpuri is spread over an area of 1.93 square kilometres and classified as a resettlement colony. A resettlement colony in the scheme of Delhi's settlement areas is a colony set up to provide housing to households evicted by demolition or relocation of JJ (Jhuggi-Jhopri) clusters or unauthorised slums (Bhan 2016). A low-income neighbourhood, Kalyanpuri is mostly populated by rickshaw pullers, auto rickshaw drivers, fruit and vegetable vendors, and skilled informal sector workers like electricians, masons, plumbers and so on. Anecdotal evidence suggests that unemployment among youth is high in this area. Kalyanpuri also hosts a considerable number of migrants who came from rural areas and towns in Punjab, Bihar, and UP and settled here in houses on rent for better economic prospects. Kalyanpuri is densely populated with small, multi-story houses. The blocks 11, 12, 18, 19, and 20 in Kalyanpuri are classified as JJ clusters by government and planning departments. Several reports

bemoan that unplanned growth has 'encroached upon recreational areas' in Kalyanpuri (Detailed Project report prepared by DUSIB[5]).

Kalyanpuri and its neighbouring settlement, Trilokpuri came up during the resettlement drives when *bastis* at Turkman gate and Ashram were demolished, masterminded by Jagmohan and Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency (1975 – 1977) declared by Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Displaced families were given 25 square feet undeveloped plots with permanent tenure in Kalyanpuri and Trilokpuri in East Delhi. A 58-year-old woman who lives in Kalyanpuri's Block 11, for example, shared that her family was relocated here when the jhuggis near Ashram (an area next to Hazrat Nizammudin railway station) were removed (PI, September 2019). Another woman similarly explained that her family was shifted from Bhogal (another area near Hazrat Nizammudin railway station) to this *basti* in 1976. However, at the time, the area lacked drainage, water supply, schools, and electricity (Dayal and Bose 1977). This, some argue, reduced the status of citizens to 'poor clients' who were dependent on the vagaries and emoluments of the state and dynamics of local politics (Kesavan 2014)[6]. This became apparent when I asked local residents about the history of Kalyanpuri, and almost all of them explained how the 'government' or 'Indira Gandhi' 'gave' them plots to live here. A survey conducted by Council for Social Development (1990 as cited in Ali 2004) similarly brought attention to the poor status of infrastructure in resettlement colonies like Kalyanpuri, Trilokpuri and Khichripur including lack of household water supply and individual household toilets, and absence of solid waste disposal system. According to that study, a large number of squatters have emerged in these resettlement colonies in the open spaces reserved for parks, health and education facilities[7].

Kalyanpuri and Trilokpuri were also the sites of brutal anti-Sikh carnage in 1984 after Indira Gandhi's assassination[8]. The 1984 riots were referenced several times during my conversations and interviews with the residents as 'Indira-*kaand'* (or Indira-scandal). Even today, Kalyanpuri remains a volatile area, with skirmishes and antagonisms between different communities being commonplace

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[5] "Detailed Project Report on In-situ development of Kalyanpuri Slums". Developed by Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board and Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence. 2013

[6] Mukul Kesavan. "Thirty years after – The Trilokpuri riots in Delhi." The Telegraph. October 27, 2014. https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/thirty-years-after-the-trilokpuri-riots-in-delhi/cid/1600567 (accessed July 13, 2020). Also see: N.d. "Operation resettlement removes many an ugly scar from Delhi." India Today magazine. July 15, 1976. https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19760715-operation-resettlement-removes-many-an-ugly-scar-from-delhi-819246-2015-04-08 (accessed July 13, 2020)

[7] See: Banerji, Manjistha. "Provision of basic services in the slums and resettlement colonies of Delhi." *Institute of Social Studies Trust* (2005): 1-18.

[8] Some writers have linked the dependency on political patronage and the nature of Kalyanpuri as a resettlement colony where neighbourhood bonds couldn't be developed as the reason behind the brutality of the 1984 riots (Kesavan 2014).

and memories of conflict and violence still palpable. Currently, Kalyanpuri's ward councillor is from AAP. In the past, the seat has alternated between BJP (2012) and Congress (2002 and 2007). In fact, it was largely Congress's stronghold until 2012.

For this research I dived deep into two Blocks in Kalyanpuri – Block 11 and Block 15. This is because they give us a good snapshot of the neighbourhood and the inter-community and inter-caste animosities festering in the area, as well on the contested use of public parks in Kalyanpuri. Block 11 is mostly inhabited by Sikligar Sikhs and Punjabis and Block 15 is mostly inhabited by Jaats, Lodhi-Rajputs and Kolis. Notably, the residents of each block blame the residents of other blocks for perpetuating an environment of fear and violence. Let us take the example of my discussion with Shagun[9], a 30-year-old woman from the Lodh-Rajput caste (a marginalized caste group categorized as OBC) who lives in Block 15. When I asked her about the social composition of the Kalyanpuri, she explained with some emphasis that this area is largely occupied by '*kanjars*' and '*sikligars*' who 'snatch money, carry a knife with them', 'are dirty' and 'violent', and have 'ruined the *mahaul* of this place'. She directed these observations against 'the Punjabis in Block 11' who 'were given plots by Indira Gandhi' after they were removed from Ashram and resettled here. 'These Punjabis', she added, 'belong to the *sikligar* caste…which is an SC caste' and often 'indulge in fights and hooliganism' as well as 'drugs and narcotics'. She also hinted towards the links between unemployment and rising hooliganism in this area.

Sikligar is an urban de-notified tribe[10] which traditionally excelled in the art of weapon-making and sharpening swords and knives. They are variously included in SC, ST or OBC categories in different states. According to Meena Radhakrishnan (2007), Sikligar Sikhs living in resettlement colonies of Delhi are considered a part of the nomadic banjara community, though they have now adopted a largely sedentary way of life. Today, they are largely engaged in the informal sector doing casual wage work in the construction industry, rickshaw pulling, tailoring, and running small shops. Some of them have continued with their traditional occupation of making baskets, chairs, and cots with ropes and bamboo, casting household iron utensils, and sharpening knives by going door-to-door on foot or a bicycle.

It is noteworthy (although under-documented) that Sikligars and Labana Sikhs were a large proportion of those massacred in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi after the assassination of Indira

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[9] Names of all research participants have been changed in this chapter.
[10] Status of inclusion of de-notified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes among SC, ST, OBC. Ministry of social justice and empowerment, government of India. 2016
http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Status%20of%20Inclusion.pdf accessed July 13, 2020

Gandhi. Drawing from news reports and existing research, Radhakrishnan (2007) speculates that this was because, after their resettlement to Kalyanpuri, they had become owners of valuable land, leading to resentment amongst erstwhile land owners who belonged to dominant caste sections such as *jaats* and *gujjars*. In our discussion, Shagun (from Block 15) also wove in the 1984 riots to explain why Sikligaars now enjoy a position of power in Kalyanpuri[11]:

> "…earlier the *mahaul* was better. There wasn't this much violence. Then the Indira-*kaand* happened. People say…I don't know much, I have only heard (a few things). Initially, mostly Sikhs lived here - they were given plots here by the government…We have purchased houses here recently…When the Indira-*kaand* happened, the Sikhs sheltered the Sikligars. A lot of violence and killing was happening. Then they settled down here only… And they think they are *(trails off)* " (PI, August 2019)

Another resident of Block 15, Neelima, also from the Lodhi-Rajput caste, likewise shared that the younger people in Blocks 11 and Block 16 'have ruined the *mahaul* of the Kalyanpuri'. As mentioned, Block 11 is dominated by Sikhs and Sikligars. Block 16, on the other hand, is dominated by '*bhangis'*, a scheduled caste category traditionally associated with sweepers and those who handle and collect waste. According to Neelima, fights tend to break out frequently between people from Block 11 and Block 16 over minor issues because of rampant alcohol and drug abuse. Here, she added that 'some of the local women even sell alcohol from their homes in Block 11 late into the night'. As a result, '*yahan mahaul bahut kharab hai'* (the atmosphere is very bad here) (Neelima, PI, September 2019). Here, in addition to Sikligars, Neelima also derisively blamed the '*bhangis'* for ruining the '*mahaul'* or what I have earlier called the 'affective atmosphere' of Kalyanpuri. When I asked Neelima if this violent '*mahaul'*, alcoholism, and frequent crime bothers her or if she feels scared, she said that 'she is used to it now' since she has been staying here since a long time. Even then, she added, she does feel scared because the boys from Block 11 and Block 16 'do not spare anyone – if they spot anything (valuable) in the ears, hands or necks of women, they snatch it and run away because they need money for drugs' (sic). This, Neelima shared, can happen at any time of the day and no one raises a finger because everyone is afraid. 'The *mahaul* is such', she reiterated. As a result, women have to stay alert at all times (sic, PI, September 2019).

This *'mahaul'* and a fear of crime was palpable to me as a researcher every time I walked through the by-lanes and alleys of Kalyanpuri, perhaps more so after hearing multiple stories of snatching and looting. As we saw in preceding chapters, *mahaul* or affective atmosphere after all is fundamentally shaped by circulation and sticking of certain narratives, memories, and experiences. During my field work, I frequently witnessed loud verbal fights between neighbours or fist-fights

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[11] Other respondents similarly brought up the anti-Sikh riots (or the '*Indira-kand')* to explain the neighbourhood's demographic composition.

between young boys. Other women also told me during informal interactions that autorickshaws and taxi-cabs refuse to come to Kalyanpuri at night because of a persistent fear of crime and '*kharab mahaul*'. During the field work, my contacts in the community often warned me to leave the field before it got dark. As a female researcher, I often found alerting myself, ironically conscious of my own 'safety' while walking the streets in Kalyanpuri, and at the same time reminding myself to not give in to assumptions drawn from a few instances. For, during the same field work, I also witnessed quiet, peaceful afternoons, with women sitting on cots outside their homes in narrow lanes, vendors selling *samosas* and cutlets on cycles, and men quietly playing cards under shades of trees at street corners or parks (the gendered implications of which will be discussed in the next section).

Going back to the narrative of inter-community antagonisms, while women in Block 15 blamed Block 11 for violence, my interviews in Block 11 immediately revealed the caste-based biases in these narratives. Block 11 is indeed mostly comprises Punjabis, Sikhs, and Sikligars but women living in Block 11 expressed their own frustration with increasing violence in the neighbourhood, and blamed the men in their families for drinking. Manpreet, a woman in her 50s, for example, shared that women here are distraught because men abuse drugs, drink alcohol, and squander all their earnings. 'If the women object,' she added, 'they are beaten up and abused.' Her own son is unemployed and comes home drunk sometimes. She wants her daughter-in-law to work or open a small shop in order to contribute to the family's income. However, her son is opposed to it because he thinks this will bring shame to the family as the wife will interact with 'outsiders' and 'lose her honour'. This seems a common pattern in this area: young men shirk work and indulge in alcohol and drugs due to their easy availability, abuse their wives and mothers, and curb their mobility (Manpreet, PI, September 2019). However, Manpreet, and the other women I spoke to in Block 11 blamed the '*bhangis*' of Block 15 and 16 for '*galat kaam*' (wrongful activities) and for being a bad influence on men from their community. 'They (boys and men from Block 11) fell into wrong company', residents of Block 11 repeatedly pointed out at different points of our conversation. Manpreet, for example, stated that 'the *bhangis* and other people are the ones who indulge in fights and ruin the *mahaul* of this place. They take out knives in the smallest of skirmishes.' The mutual blame game and caste-animosity appears to follow a vicious cycle.

What is interesting to flag here is that the construction of '*mahaul*' and how women have to stay alert because of this *mahaul* is reminiscent of narratives from Agra's Khaliyai Mandi, where time and again, women blamed the *mahaul* as well as inter-community tension for their lack of access to public spaces. As we will see in this chapter, the building blocks that shape this '*mahaul*' or affective

atmosphere seem to be similar across different sites, though the specificity of Kalyanpuri stands out in its built environment and gendered politics of access to public spaces.

Entry point into Kalyanpuri: The Saathi Centre

The bulk of field work for this chapter was conducted between August and October 2019. However, I had established familiarity with Kalyanpuri and some of the research participants earlier through an NGO called Saathi Centre[12]. In 2018-2019, I conducted a participatory evaluation of the programs run at Saathi Centre to determine their strengths and weaknesses. This served as my entry-point into this neighbourhood. While its report was meant for the internal purposes of the NGO, I will briefly draw from the discussions and interviews conducted in December 2018 and January 2019 for the evaluation to introduce the Saathi centre and its functioning, with due permissions obtained from the NGO (Saathi Centre and ISST). Saathi centre has been operational at Kalyanpuri in its present form since 2006 and is located inside the Kalyanpuri Police station compound (though it does not have a direct affiliation with the police station other than the space the police have allowed them to use). Its key components include remedial classes for underprivileged children, counselling for youth and women, and use of Right to Information (RTI) act as a tool to advance citizenship rights and access to public service delivery. Apart from providing educational support, the centre also organizes interactive learning activities, life-skill workshops, hosts a library, runs a foundational computer literacy program, and counsels children and young adults with the aim of fostering 'responsible citizens' (Saathi Head, PI, December 2018).

In the process of working with the NGO I discovered how, over the years, Saathi centre has emerged as a safe and enabling space for children, adolescents, and young adults who continue coming to the centre for years at end. This is not just because they find the remedial classes to be helpful but because they find a voice within the centre, build friendships, seek mentors, play, and participate in extra-curricular activities. Such opportunities are lacking in their colonies and government schools. This was especially true for the girls from the community who could not find the time or space to study in their homes because of lack of space or the burden of unpaid household and care work placed on them. 18-year-old Naina, for example, shared:

> "During the holidays, I used to stay at the Saathi centre from 9 am to 5 pm. I don't feel like going home. We get engaged in household chores there. Here we are able to study, build friendships, talk. Mummy does not allow us to play. *Ghar pe toh bass kaam hi karte rehte hain. Copy toh khulti hi nahi hai.* (At home, I just keep doing work. I don't get to open my notebook). Here, we study for 2-3 hours and then play… It is also noisy at home. There is

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[12] Saathi Centre is a community centre supported and run by Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), New Delhi

only one room for everyone. Here (at Saathi centre) if we tell someone to not make noise because we are studying, then they stop." (FGD, January 2019)

This emergence of Saathi Centre as a safe space which provides opportunities for growth and leisure is enabled by the fact that parents of children enrolled at Saathi Centre feel safe in sending their children here, bolstered by its location inside the police station and its deep engagement with the community. A middle-aged woman who enrolled her son and daughter at Saathi Centre after hearing about it from her neighbours, for example, explained that she is never worried about her children when they are at Saathi Centre. 'Children are safe here, *thane ke andar hai, kisiki majaal koi kuch bol de? Bahar toh chhote bachhe bhi badtameezi karte hain* (it is inside the police station so no one dare say anything, outside even small children misbehave)' (FGD with parents, January 2019). Another parent in the same group discussion added that 'even if my children come back half an hour late from here, it does not matter because they are safe here, I do not worry. If they go elsewhere, then we stop them.' (FGD with parents, January 2019). The Saathi Centre's staff also acknowledged the centre's role in providing a safe space to children, a space to 'voice their opinions, feelings and thoughts' (Saathi head, PI, December 2018), and an enabling environment away from the environment of drug-abuse and violence otherwise prevalent in these areas.

One activity that children themselves enjoy the most at Saathi Centre is an opportunity to regularly play outdoor and indoor games. Parents too want their children to play outdoor games at Saathi Centre due to lack of safe spaces to play in their neighbourhood. One parent, for instance, exclaimed, 'where can the children play in *jhuggi-jhopris*, there is no space, only houses, and…parks are located far away'. Moreover, she added, '*ilaka bhi sahi nahi hai, chori hoti hai. Sharab khule mei hoti hai, kuch bache pakad ke bhi le jate hai'* (the area is not good, there is a lot of crime, stealing, drinking in the open, some children even get kidnapped) (FGD with parents, January 2019). The point that young boys and girls need a space to play and that space is available at Saathi Centre was unanimously expressed by both parents and students. Another parent for example said that 'boys still get a chance to play outside but where else can the girls play?' (ibid). However, the open space inside the centre is quite limited and is also used by the police to park impounded vehicles. The centre's staff has earmarked a small area as the 'park', with some saplings, a few swings and a bench, but are sceptical of children running around in this area lest they fall and hurt themselves. The staff is also sceptical of intermixing of boys and girls freely during games because the police has been moral policing the adolescent children and has occasionally taunted the staff members for encouraging apparently licentious behaviour.

The teenagers and young adults indeed find opportunities for leisure, frivolity, and even occasional romance in the centre. Karishma, a 22-year-old Community Mobiliser at Saathi Centre, for example, conceded that 'the centre provides a space for young boys and girls to meet their friends without any restriction because otherwise their parents do not allow them to go anywhere else' (PI, August 2019). Karishma lives in Kalyanpuri, and herself is a former student at Saathi centre. However, the old guard of the centre is sceptical and believes that these kind of inter-sex interactions and friendships need to be regulated to ensure that the NGO does not get a 'bad name' in the community or lose the community's trust. Their goodwill is based on improving the educational and life skills of students (Staff discussion, March 2019). This has led to some level of moral policing at the centre by the older staff members. The boys and girls are often segregated into different batches for classes[13] as well as different slots for extra-curricular activities and workshops even when they could be held together. This conflict and moral policing is symptomatic of the societal attitude towards romance, love, and freedom of youngsters. However, in this chapter, I will focus on how the centre provides a 'safe space' for self-expression to young boys and girls and the community's relationship with leisure spaces such as public parks. For, it is in this safe space that children and young boys and girls came together in 2018 and articulated their demand for a space to freely play inside the centre. However, due to limitations of the centre itself in terms of resources and space, Saathi Centre filed an application under the RTI Act seeking information on maintenance of public parks in Kalyanpuri so that more spaces become available and accessible to children in the neighbourhood. The next part of the chapter will discuss this RTI and the condition of parks in Kalyanpuri, followed by an exploration of existing leisure spaces and activities for women in this area.

2. Parks, cots, and gullies

Status of Parks in Kalyanpuri

Kalyanpuri has a number of parks and open spaces, as the map given below illustrates. Other than the Sanjay Lake Park (marked 'A'), and Indira Gandhi Mahila Park (marked 'B') that one can see on the left, every block seems to have a park in the middle, and smaller parks on the edges. On the map, one can also see the Saathi centre's location on the main road (bottom right, marked 'C'), and the location of Blocks 11 (marked 'F') and 15 (marked 'E'), facing each other – the two main sites of interviews for this study. However, the reality is different on the ground. The Sanjay Gandhi Lake Park and Mahila park are considered too big and unsafe for children and women. They appear desolate and devoid of much activity during the day, and I did not even venture to enter them alone. They are

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[13] This is also necessitated by different school timings for boys and girls in the local school.

also a 10–15-minute walk away from the residential blocks as well as the Saathi centre. The parks inside the blocks, although physically accessible, have been reduced to spaces for disposing garbage, hanging clothes to dry, sometimes gamble, or store rubble or other construction material. They are not used to spend leisurely time or to congregate as urban publics. The only exception to this is perhaps the Ambedkar Park on the top right corner (marked 'D') of the map, which is relatively well-maintained. If one walks from the Saathi centre towards Block 11, one comes across small community parks after every few steps. However, in some places these are used for setting up a small temple instead with a make-shift tent in the middle of the park. Some parks are entirely transformed with tin sheets barricading them from all sides and the area transformed into makeshift homes by what the government narrative calls 'squatters'. Not surprisingly then, children and women find it hard to find spaces to play in or gather at.
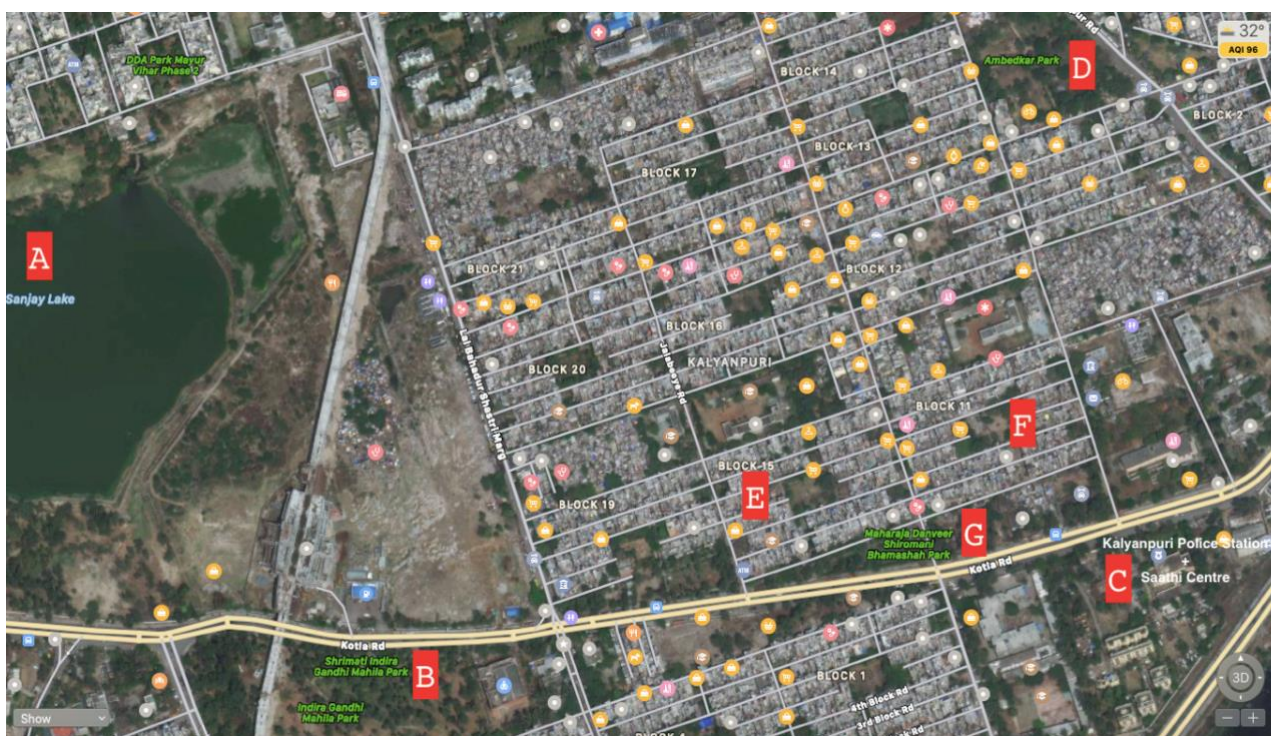

Figure 3: Satellite image of Kalyanpuri (Google Maps) Accessed July 2020

As already mentioned, the Saathi centre has used the RTI as a citizen empowerment tool since its inception. In its initial years, the community centre used the RTI as a tool to demand better facilities for children at government schools, implementation of admissions for EWS (economically weaker section) children in private schools, better implementation of public distribution system, and access to other public services. As per RTI rules, government officials are bound to give a reply to an application seeking information under the RTI Act within 30 days of a request failing which an appeal can be filed with a higher authority. This information can then be used for demanding accountability by

government functionaries. One of the RTIs that Saathi filed in 2018 was on maintenance of parks in Kalyanpuri, after children expressed their need for a safe space to play[14]. According to Rajeev, a 32-year-old full-time teacher at Saathi Centre currently leading the RTI advocacy there, while the neighbourhood parks are inaccessible due to encroachments, poor maintenance, and '*kharab mahaul*', the government schools don't have parks either because the grounds there have been tiled and used by teachers to park their vehicles (PI, July 2019).

Initially, the RTI application was aimed at improving the Sant Nirankari Park in Block 11 of Kalyanpuri (marked as 'G' in Figure 3), which is at a short distance from the Saathi Centre on the main road. At the time of application, it was lying open 'like a maidan', which had never undergone 'beautification', and was being regularly occupied by *'a-raajak'* (anarchical/illegal) people (RTI no. 77/2018, filed by Saathi centre, dated July 15, 2018). As per Rajeev, the park is used once every few months for a '*bhandara*' (religious feast) and after each feast, the left-over food and plastic plates are left strewn across the ground until the next event. In the interim, '*banjaare-type* people' (nomads) install tents on the ground and squat there for 10-12 days at a stretch where they bathe, defecate, and cook, making the park filthy in the process (PI, July 2019). One can read a clear detestation for nomadic communities in this interview who perhaps do not have a space in a modern city. The staff at Saathi hoped that if the horticulture department took note of this relatively big open space and started maintaining it, it could become a park for the children and adolescents who came to the centre for sports and games.

The RTI sought information on the number of gardeners appointed for the park, their names and phone numbers, funds spent on the park's upkeep between 2016 and 2018, supervision record of the park by assigned officer, and an estimated date when the park will be ready to be used by people. In the reply, the Horticulture department stated: the gardener responsible for the park does not have a mobile; while the park is duly supervised by a designated official from time to time, no record is maintained of the same; no funds have been spent by the horticulture department on this park between 2016 and 2018; and the park will be beautified under the AMRUT[15] scheme in 2018-19. However, Saathi centre found the reply to be unsatisfactory and filed an appeal next month which was heard in December 2018. In the hearing, the following order was passed:

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[14] One of the stimulus that led children to articulate this need clearly was a public space mapping exercise that Saathi Centre conducted with children which was followed by a street play on lack of access to public parks.

[15] Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) scheme was launched in 2015 to establish and improve basic infrastructure in cities such as water supply, street lights, and sewage disposal. See: http://amrut.gov.in/content/ (accessed July 27, 2020)

"Sant Nirankari Park should be cleaned immediately, the garbage should be cleared, and if there is any illegal activity going on in the park, then FIR should be immediately lodged. A daily record register should be maintained for all the activities done by the appointed gardener(s) and a register should also be maintained for supervision visits conducted by officials." (Horticulture Department, East Delhi Municipal Corporation, Order no. 2018/290, dated 5/12/2018)

I interviewed Rajeev seven months after this order was passed and visited Sant Nirankari Park after the interview. To my dismay, the park still appeared disorderly with a lot of garbage strewn all over, and a few cows grazing. One boundary wall was completely broken and covered with household garbage[16]. As already mentioned above, the smaller parks in Kalyanpuri were likewise 'encroached' upon for religious purposes or to contain the spill-over of household activities. Rajeev explained:

"Out of 10 parks listed in a block, you will only find 6 or 7. Others have vanished! In some parks a temple has come up - an idol was placed and it became a *mata mandir*. In some others, there is a *gurudwara* now. And these religious things can only be removed with government's permission. And there are no trees in these parks. Not even one…There are more than 100 parks in Kalyanpuri but only 6 or 7 can really be called parks. People think that whatever area of the park falls in front of their house, it is theirs. In the remaining area, they throw their garbage. They will keep their house and the area of the park right in front of their house clean. Sometimes I think even I should encroach it (*kabza kar lun*) and set up a shop for free! (*laughs*)…The Ambedkar Park is an exception. It's quite developed. It has grass, trees. But children can't play there. They are not allowed to play on grass. People can only sit on grass…The Sant Nirankari Park should be maintained. It is just across the road so we can take children there to play. But it does not even have a gate." (PI, August 2019)

We find out a number of things in this narrative. Firstly, according to Rajeev, a large number of parks have been encroached upon for religious purposes. These 'encroachments' can only be removed now after government's permission because of a long history of contentious nature of religious sites in India. Every time an inter-community conflict breaks out, it is the religious sites that are almost always attacked[17]. At other times, the removal or threat to a religious site becomes the very reason for triggering a violent reaction between communities with a long-standing history of conflict. Scholars like Sushmita Pati (2017) have written about spectacular religious sites such as the *Hanuman Mandir* in Delhi to demonstrate how such religious structures and their sacralisation also become instrumental in the *kabza* or illegal occupation over public land in Delhi. In her research she found how such sites come to be used as a defence mechanism by business owners and vested interests against land acquisition or demolition of illegal structures by the government. In Kalyanpuri, other

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[16] I also note that my observation of the park was imbued by my own sensibilities of what a park in a city '*should*' look like. This, I surmise, is based on my own contemporary understanding of urban public spaces shaped by the dominant discourse on urban planning.

[17] As witnessed as recently as February 2020 during Delhi riots. See for example: Naomi Barton. "Delhi Riots: Mosque set on fire in Ashok Nagar, Hanuman flag placed on minaret." *The Wire.* Feb 25, 2020 https://thewire.in/communalism/delhi-violence-mosque-set-on-fire-in-ashok-vihar-hanuman-flag-placed-on-top (accessed July 27, 2020)

than '*kabza*' for religious purposes by placing an idol in parks, parks have also been 'encroached' upon by people as an extension of their homes to store things, dry clothes, or to set up a small shop/shack. This '*kabza*,' as I will demonstrate in this chapter, should be closely read along with the nature of the housing within Kalyanpuri, and people's urban-rural links and sensibilities. It is thus important to ask - why have people 'encroached' upon these parks? Are parks and green areas not important for them as leisure spaces? I want to problematize the idea of encroachment itself to argue that what the state narrative classifies as encroachment is perhaps, in some cases, the 'normal' way in which residents seek to use open public spaces. Perhaps, for example, religious places, instead of inert parks are more identifiable for citizens of Kalyanpuri as public spaces. Similarly, using the open space of the park in front of their houses to store their extra belongings or drying clothes serves more utility for families living in 25 square feet houses than a vacant, enclosed 'park' with a boundary wall.

The other aspect that we discover from Rajeev's narrative above is that children are not allowed to play in parks like the Ambedkar Park because it has well-kept grass. This is counterintuitive because generally, grass is actually considered safe for children to play on. This however, is representative of a common belief among urban residents in Delhi in particular where 'beautified' parks are made inaccessible for children by gatekeepers of the park[18]. Only the adults can then enjoy these parks for that utopian leisure characteristic of modern cities: walks (Also see: Baviskar 2018). In fact, in 2011, the Delhi High Court chided an RWA for refusing access to parks to children and humorously called it a 'selfish giant'.[19]

In any case, taking note of these 'encroachments', Saathi Centre decided to file another RTI in May 2019, this time seeking information on maintenance of all the parks in Kalyanpuri, total number of parks, budgets allocated to and utilized for each park, and beautification activities undertaken (RTI no. 15/2019, dated 20/05/2019)[20]. In response, the horticulture department provided a list of all the parks in Kalyanpuri. As per the list, there are a total of 103 parks listed in Kalyanpuri and Khichripur, which together comprise Ward no. 8 in Shahdara district, East Delhi. In Blocks 11 and 12 of

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[18] See for example: Sanskriti Talwar. "Nehru Nagar: Parks ornamental, children not allowed to play." *The New Indian Express*. June 9, 2018.
https://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/2018/jun/09/nehru-nagar-parks-ornamental-children-not-allowed-to-play-1825964.html (accessed July 27, 2020)

[19] Abhinav Garg. "Don't be a 'selfish giant'; let kids play in park: HC to RWA." *Times of India*. April 28, 2011.
https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Dont-be-Selfish-Giant-let-kids-play-in-park-HC-to-RWA/articleshow/8104149.cms (accessed July 27, 2020)

[20] Simultaneously, he also published two short articles in local newspapers to spread information about ill-maintenance of public parks. The use of RTI as a citizen empowerment and advocacy tool here requires a separate, careful study in itself. See: Rajeev Kumar. "लगातार बर्बाद हो रहा है पार्क" *Navbharat Times*. Aug 23, 2019 and Rajeev Kumar. "पार्क में हो रहा क़ब्ज़ा" *Navbharat Times*. Apr 4, 2019.

Kalyanpuri itself, which is a dense and narrow strip of area, there are a total of 16 parks listed. On average, there is one gardener or guard allocated for each block. However, there is no one allocated for around 36 parks in blocks 15 to 21. Out of the total 103 parks in Ward no. 8, 45 parks have been encroached upon for religious purposes (which the reply significantly terms as '*dharmik kabze wale park*') ranging from Gurudwara, Kali mandir, Shiv mandir, Valmiki mandir, and Masjid, listed as being inside the park. The reply then goes on to say that 'no investigation has been done regarding these encroachments because religious encroachments can only be removed after due permissions from Delhi's home ministry' (Horticulture Department, East Delhi Municipal Corporation, Reply to RTI no. 16, dated 29.05.2019). The RTI reply also reveals that while Rs. 40,000 was allocated for park development for Block 11 of Kalyanpuri in 2018-2019, none of it was spent. A budget of Rs. 6,75,974 allocated by the central government under AMRUT for development of parks in 2018-19 has also not been utilized. The reply also gave an update on maintenance and upkeep of the Sant Nirankari Park and claimed that it is being maintained regularly, the debris and garbage is being cleaned out every month, and no illegal activities have been found during the supervisory visits to the park (ibid), which ran contrary to my observations in the field.

While the development and maintenance of parks and their infrastructure is important, one of the impediments to accessing parks that came up in interviews with several women and young girls was bad *mahaul*. One is left wondering whether the infrastructural changes and maintenance will simultaneously induce a change in the *mahaul* or affective atmosphere, making it easier for children and women to access these parks, enhance safety, and reduce these so-called encroachments. While there are no clear answers, and one can only speculate, it might be helpful to unpack the attitudes of girls and women living in Kalyanpuri towards public parks. The following section draws from interviews as well as informal conversations with young female volunteers at Saathi centre, their friends, and parents of children who visit the centre.

Women's access to and relationship with parks

Seema is a 21-year-old woman, who migrated to Delhi in 2006 with her parents from a village in Bhojpur, Bihar. Her father worked as a vegetable vendor in Delhi until he migrated back to the village due to health problems. Seema stayed back with her elder brother (who works at a ration shop) in a rented flat in Block 11 in Kalyanpuri to finish her education. She graduated with a B.Com. degree in 2019. To meet her personal expenses and contribute to the family's income, Seema has been teaching tuitions and volunteering at the Saathi Centre for the past three years for a small stipend. Like Rajeev, she reiterated that most parks in Kalyanpuri have been encroached upon (*kabza kar rakha hai):*

"There are a lot of parks in Kalyanpuri but they are all encroached upon. Someone has made a temple, someone has done something else…There is a sardar man who has completely encroached the park in front of my house. He grows vegetables in it. And no one dare say anything. He'll be ready to fight…I don't know why Sikhs here think so highly of themselves. Like everything belongs to them. The entire lane in a way belongs to them. If a fight breaks out, they take our knives, start beating each other…There are mostly Sikhs in my block…In another block, people have put *jhuggis* in the park, against the park's wall. No one objects. Because they will kill them, beat them, threaten them. Police also do not do anything. They instead take bribes from the Sikhs to not interfere…As a result, children also don't have a place to play. They feel scared. So they play in the lanes and gullies." (PI, September 2019)

Seema sounded resigned while narrating this and rolled her eyes in frustration a few times. Once we place her comments in the longer history and context of Kalyanpuri, one can speculate that perhaps the assertion that Sikhs hold on to their assumed right to public spaces so aggressively might have something to do with the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984. However, Seema's frustration with Sikhs who 'think so highly of themselves', 'start beating each other' and 'encroach upon the parks' seemed to come from a place of being denied the same spaces herself, and feeling threatened by the hypermasculine presence of men from a particular community. As a result, Seema does not visit parks often even though she would like to. During our conversation, she said that she used to go to Ambedkar Park in Block 18 to run because she wanted to lose weight. 'I really enjoyed running in the mornings', she shared. However, she discontinued because she was stared at which made her uncomfortable and scared: "If you run, they stare. If you do yoga, they stare…If you go in the afternoons, you will find men playing cards in the park or drinking, so I feel scared," she stated (PI, September 2019). As we talked some more, she told me that there should be guards and gardeners to look after the parks regularly, so that they are not appropriated by people who drink and gamble. 'Such people who drink and gamble should not be allowed inside parks', she said, highlighting the competing interests and politics of access that characterise parks in Kalyanpuri.

After this, Seema and I walked through Kalyanpuri blocks 11, 13, 16 and 18. We started our walk from the Kalyanpuri police station, crossed the road, and entered Block 11. She showed me one park on the left, which I would have completely missed if it was not for her. I saw two shops– a pan shack and a cycle repair shack on one of the boundary walls of the park facing the road. On another wall, there was a small temple, jutting inside and occupying almost the entire area of the park. The ground was barren with some garbage littered in one corner. A few steps ahead, there was another small park. Here, on one side, clothes were drying on synthetic ropes blocking out the view of the ground. In the remaining space, 5-6 men were squatted on their heels and playing cards. As soon as we entered the park, the men turned their eyes towards us, making us feel extremely uncomfortable. The park was almost covered (visually) from all sides, reducing visibility, and we left within a few seconds. We then walked further ahead and Seema pointed out another park to me. This small park

again lay in utter disarray with rubble on one side, garbage in another, and a few clothes drying on ropes (See Picture 19). We turned a corner and entered Block 12 where again we saw small parks occupied partially or completely by a religious structure (See Picture 5.1, Appendix B), men playing cards, garbage, old furniture, and rubble scattered across the park (See Picture 5.3, Appendix B), and lines of drying linen. In one particular lane, to an uninformed eye it would look as if the park really is a part of the line of houses as the area of the park lying in front of each house is used as a personal veranda by the households with cots and chairs lying out and linen drying, all tightly jammed together. In another case, the entire side of the park has been cordoned off using tin sheets with families using it for residential purposes (see Picture 5.2, Appendix B).

Picture 19: Neighbourhood public park, Kalyanpuri, Delhi. September 2019. Picture by author.

During our walk, Seema and I were careful not to loiter outside or inside any park lest we be seen with suspicious eyes[21]. Sometimes, I felt the need to come up for air when walking through these narrow lanes which were brimming with activity. Household activities like cooking and eating, drying clothes, or *papads* often spilled onto the street and the parks. We finally emerged out of these lanes and reached Jalebi chowk, a busy intersection with a few eateries and shops. From here, we walked towards the Ambedkar Park which can be described as being greener, bigger, more open, and sanitised of encroachments and garbage. However, when we reached the park (roughly around 2 pm), we saw some men huddled together playing cards who started gawking at us as soon as we entered.

Later that week, I met Karishma, another volunteer at Saathi Centre and asked her similar questions about the parks in Kalyanpuri. Karishma lives in the neighbouring Trilokpuri and has been associated with Saathi Centre for 5 years. She joined the centre to learn computer skills when she was in the 11th standard and then started volunteering here after she finished school. She was pursuing a Master's degree in Social Work at the time of this field work. Karishma's father works as an informal contractual labourer in the construction sector. On the issue of parks in Kalyanpuri, Karishma echoed what I had heard from Seema, adding that the situation is similar in Trilokpuri as well: 'Parks in this area are completely encroached upon. Someone makes a mandir or something else. People who live in my lane have occupied the park. They raise hens and cocks there and organize cock-fights. If we enter the park,

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[21] Later, I felt conflicted walking back through these lanes alone, especially after hearing countless stories of snatching and assault. I could feel the gaze of men and I was hyper-aware of my position as an outsider.

they make us leave. Children can neither play in the lanes, nor in the park in the colony. And they cannot go to parks which are further away because their parents would be worried and not let them go. It is not safe' (PI, September 2019). When she was in high school, Karishma used to often go to Mahila Park (women's park, marked 'B' in Figure 1) with her friends to 'eat there, sit, and talk', especially in the mornings during summer vacations. 'We also used to swing on the swings there and have fun', she recalled. However, as she grew older, her mother started discouraging her from going to the park as 'it was far away and big'. She also recalled how boys used to stand on the park's boundary wall and peep inside when she'd go there with her friends. She finally stopped going to the park two years ago after an untoward incident:

> "One day, some boy passed a comment. He used some abusive words while standing atop one boundary wall. And then he started showing us his private parts. So, we stopped going that side. And we warned others also not to go towards that side of the park. Now I don't go to that park at all." (PI, September 2019)

Mahila Park is a relatively big park and as the name suggests, it is exclusively reserved for women. However, this has not stopped itinerant men and boys from climbing on the walls to leer inappropriately at women, making it a 'risky' affair to even go to an all-women's park. Sharing its boundary with the main road on two sides has exposed the park to the gaze of unfamiliar men. I did not feel safe or free to venture inside the park alone during my field work and none of my research participants agreed to accompany me either. Because of her bad experience in accessing this park, Karishma understandably feels scared in going there now. Nonetheless, she added that there should be well-maintained parks in every area or block 'with grass, plants, and trees' because people can then go there 'for fresh air, to spend some alone-time, and meet and talk to other people' (ibid). Neeta, a shy 24-year-old girl who runs a small shack selling packaged snacks outside her house in Block 11, similarly told me she does not go to parks because she is scared to go alone. She used to go to parks earlier, when she was younger, but 'only in the mornings, never in afternoons and evenings because it is not safe for women; there are more men around that time' (PI, September 2019). Nonetheless, she would like to be able to go to parks again, she expressed, because they give her an 'opportunity to walk, take in fresh air, walk on cold grass, and play with friends' (ibid).

Middle-aged and married women do not access these parks either. For example, Neelima, a 38-year-old woman who lives in Block 15 told me that she does not go to any park because 'gents drink and gamble there.' In fact, she added, she does not go anywhere much, not even for *sair* (stroll). Neelima, like everyone else, told me that there are numerous small parks in each block of Kalyanpuri but no one goes to these parks because '*vo ghoomne layak nahi hain*' (they are not worth roaming around). A temple has been constructed in a park near her colony, and in the remaining area, 'drug

addicts sit all day and gamble'. She further added that the *mahaul* is not peaceful which is why children are also afraid of playing in the park. They instead play in the gullies. Ambedkar Park is the only exception where a lot of women go for 'morning walks'. Some older women 'who do not have to do household chores' go there with their grandchildren in the mornings and evenings. However, Ambedkar Park is also rife with risks:

> *"*In the afternoons, you will only find men playing cards in different parts of the park …Just a few months ago, a young woman went there at 5 am to exercise. Some boys entered the park and tried to drag her. When she yelled, they got scared and left. It was winter that time, so it was still dark. I had started going to the park that time - that is when I met her. She told me she only goes to the park when it's daylight now. This is how it is here. You cannot trust any person, any time here…I don't go to any park now. No one goes. Who has the time?" (PI, September 2019)

'Who has the time' was in fact a common reason cited by several women, from different class backgrounds and geographies in Delhi and Agra in my interviews with them on public leisure spaces and activities. For example, Rekha, a 32-year-old lawyer who lives in a posh, gated neighbourhood of Vasant Kunj in South Delhi, similarly dismissed my questions on use of public parks or green areas by saying that she does not get the time (PI, August 2019). Initially, I found it hard to reconcile this apparent lack of time to go to public parks with the fact that these women do spend time on leisurely pursuits like sitting on the platform outside their house with their neighbours (in case of Neelima) and spend time in cafes and malls (in case of Rekha). This lack of time, however, is merely a placeholder for lack of willingness to go to a park, which perhaps is only a symptom of the failure of parks to serve as open and welcoming spaces for women. Somehow parks are reduced to a space for 'morning walks', what Amita Baviskar calls a 'quotidian urban practice' of those with sedentary lifestyles (2018, 51). Experiences and stories of harassment in a park circulate and work to deny access to public parks to women because of a sticky and reiterative association between parks and *kharab mahaul*. These affective emotions of fear and cautionary tales circulate sideways and backwards by repetition.

Nonetheless, like Karishma and Seema, Neelima stated that ideally, well-maintained parks must be there in each block as they can serve as 'a space to organize functions and feasts', or simply as a 'space to sit and soak the sun on a *khaat* (cot) in winter'. However, she added, that is not possible right now because people whose houses face the smaller parks do not let others use the park. They instead want to use the park to store their own stuff. Once, Neelima recalled, when renovation work was going on in her house, she herself kept some construction material in the park. The woman who stays in front of the park started fighting and made her remove the material. This aside, the parks are always dirty and no one comes to clean them, she concluded (PI, September 2019). Here, we start seeing how the binary between modernist planning of parks and its rejection by the postcolonial subaltern urban

citizen is actually not very neat. While there is a certain tension between modernist categories like 'leisure', 'encroachment', and 'parks' and the subaltern use of open public spaces, there are also overlaps in practice. The reality on the field is messy and escapes neat theoretical categories. Men and women in Kalyanpuri, it seems, want parks and open spaces but perhaps do not imagine them in the same way as modernist planners.

As Baviskar (2018) has pointed out recently, most discussions on urban public spaces have focussed on conflicts between dominant bourgeois conceptions of space or planner's visions on one hand and its defiance or subversion by the poor or marginalized on the other (for example, Kaviraj 1997). In recent years, discussions have also encompassed gendered nature and exclusions of public spaces. One area that has escaped as much academic scrutiny is age-based discriminations when it comes to access to public spaces as is evident from policing of young couples in public parks (Baviskar 2018, 53), restrictions on children from playing on grass, as well as intra- and inter-community conflicts. As we saw in Chapter 4 on love in Agra, young couples often seek out public spaces like parks for 'islands of privacy' to escape family surveillance and find opportunities for romance. However, they have to deal with social disapproval, harassment by police, and moral policing by vigilante groups. In Kalyanpuri as well, while young women do not access parks on their own, it is where they seek possibilities of romance. A few girls, for example, on condition of complete anonymity, told me that they sometimes go to a park in the neighbouring area of Mayur Vihar with their boyfriends, while telling their parents that they are stuck with their tuition classes. They have to make sure that they go to parks outside their own neighbourhood. They cannot risk being seen by their neighbours or acquaintances as that will invite heavy penalties from their parents. Seema for example told me: 'Couples usually go to parks when they have to spend time together. But they will be caught if they go to parks in this neighbourhood. Someone will spot them. So, they go a bit further away. I don't know where. But they go to an area other than their own because they are scared. If I am spotted even with a male friend or an acquaintance, for example, people start gossiping and assume that we have an affair. So, girls want to avoid being seen.' Similarly, when I asked Karishma that where do couples meet in Kalyanpuri, she immediately replied: 'Phase 2 in Mayur Vihar. It has a nice market and a nice park. They feel comfortable sitting in that park. My elder sister used to go there to meet her boyfriend. Even I went with her a few times so I have seen couples there.' A down-side to this is that parks also become notorious as places where one only finds couples necking under bushes and trees, and as a result, even girls hanging out with their friends are seen suspiciously.

Vinita, a 34-year-old community mobiliser at Saathi Centre who lives in a relatively better-off neighbourhood of Vinod Nagar told me that she likes going to parks with her friends but becomes

uncomfortable if she is spotted by her neighbours or relatives who then question her. When she was younger, her mother used to tell her not to go to parks because 'such things happen there'. By this, Vinita surmised much later in life, she meant that 'couples go to parks, kiss and all, and... that is unacceptable in a public place'. Vinita herself is not comfortable with young couples visiting the parks for romantic dalliances. She finds public displays of affection inappropriate, especially when there are 'bade-buzurg' (elders) in the vicinity. At the same time, Vinita conceded that couples perhaps need a space for their relationship to unfold, and that is why they go to parks: 'how else will the affair happen! I understand, its feelings, it's their age, but when they kiss and all in parks – I find it a bit strange and uncomfortable', she explained[22]. However, Vinita added that not many couples go to parks anymore because of fear of harassment and robbery on one hand[23], and blackmailing and vigilantism by the police on the other.

Gully-life: Cots as leisure spaces

If parks are not used as leisure spaces and possible sites of formation of urban publics by women in Kalyanpuri, are there other such spaces that one must explore? Much like Khaliyai Mandi in Agra, I found middle-aged and older women in Kalyanpuri seated on 'khaats' (cots) and 'chabootras' (platforms) outside their houses, within the lanes. This section explores these spaces through interviews and group discussions conducted with women in Block 11 and Block 15.

In Block 11, the 'khaat' outside the house is the main space for leisure for women. However, invisible strings hold the house and the khaat on the road together; the cot cannot be placed out of line of sight from the house. The boundaries of inside are extended to the gully, which is at once a space for encounter with strangers and neighbours, and an extension of one's home with activities like cooking food and drinking tea spilling out into the gully. Anything outside the gully, however, is a clear 'outside'. Interestingly, talking about leisure with women here was a challenge. Leisure is never acknowledged but dismissed, as 'time-pass' and 'faltu-time' or 'faltu-kaam'. If it is 'faltu' then it is not worth talking about. Observations about leisure here are therefore based on personal observations and immersion, and not just oral interviews.

I first met Chanchal and Poonam on an early afternoon in September 2019. They were sitting on khaats outside their homes in a narrow lane (roughly 6 feet wide) in Block 11. After exchanging some

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[22] This idea that couples should not express love in the presence of elders out of deference and respect perhaps has to do with the fact 'grandparents' are often seen as asexual beings. See, for example, Madhavi Menon's book, 'Infinite Variety: A History of Desire in India' (2018) where she seeks to find desire in unexpected places, and in that vein, has written a chapter on desire amongst grandparents.
[23] She narrated an incident here wherein a young couple were looted in Sanjay Jheel Park by a man who was on drugs and threatened to harm them with a blade.

pleasantries, I sat down next to Chanchal, a 65-year-old woman from Baraut in UP, with a strong hoarse voice and grey hair. Right in front of us Poonam Kaur, a 58-year-old burly woman was sitting on a chair outside her house, combing her hair. The first thing I noted was the narrowness and smallness of everything in terms of size. As a resettlement colony, the houses are extremely small in Kalyanpuri. As a result, household chores invariably slip out in the lane – ranging from cooking food on coal stoves to drying clothes in the public park and lounging on a cot on the street. As I sat next to Chanchal on the cot, I saw a young woman chopping vegetables, sitting on her doorway. Her mother-in-law was lighting up coals for a *chuhla* (stove) on the road (see Picture 20; woman in blue on the right). There were very few men in the vicinity at this hour. It was 12'o'clock in the noon. A few children were playing cricket down the lane, and a few vendors crossed us selling samosas or offering to sharpen knives on their cycles.

Picture 20: A snapshot of an afternoon in Block 11, Kalyanpuri, Delhi. September 2019. Picture

I started talking to Poonam and Chanchal together. Poonam Kaur has been living in Kalyanpuri ever since it was settled. Her family was settled here from the Ashram area. She belongs to the Sikh community and her extended family stays in Ludhiana in Punjab. Even though she was born and brought up in Delhi, she told me about her links with Punjab with some pride. Her husband was a contractual labour in the construction industry and she used to give massages to children earlier, but they have discontinued working now due to old age. Her son now works as a contractual labourer and her daughter runs a snack stall with her husband in Mandawali[24]. Chanchal also grew up and then married in Kalyanpuri, but she was also quick to tell me that she is 'originally' from UP. This underscoring of the ties with a small town or a village in other states was quite common in this field site, indicating to us a split sense of belonging perhaps. Chanchal's husband passed away a few years ago and she lives with her sons and their families now. Her granddaughter goes to Saathi Centre for remedial classes. When I asked Chanchal how she likes Kalyanpuri, she said:

> "It is good. But it depends on how you stay and adapt…See, if you are good, then everyone is good *(aap sahi toh sab sahi)*. We don't get involved in any fights. Fights break out all the time here. We stay away. People are mad

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[24] Her daughter-in-law ran away a few years ago, leaving a daughter behind, because 'she felt suffocated in Kalyanpuri'.

here. People drink a lot and abuse drugs. Boys fight over alcohol. And over women. No one has any tolerance these days. This is how it is." (PI, October 2019)

'Aap sahi toh sab sahi' -- a refrain I had heard multiple times in Agra's Khaliyai Mandi came up organically again in a different yet similar context. If Khaliyai mandi was marked by Hindu-Muslim tensions, Kalyanpuri, as noted in Section 1, is marked by Sikh-Hindu and inter-caste tensions. Chanchal admitted that she does feel scared by the frequent fights in Kalyanpuri, and that is why she does not allow her sons to loiter anywhere. As she put it simply: 'they go to work, come back on time, and then stay indoors because even if someone else is starting a fight, whoever is outside gets caught. The police do not care and catches anyone in sight while the person who started the fight escapes.' That is why, 'my children do not step out here', she reiterated with some pride (PI, October 2019). Chanchal buys the vegetables for her family herself from the Kalyanpuri market, which is in fact the only place she ventures out to:

> MT: Do you go out of the colony much?
> Chanchal: Yes, to the Kalyanpuri market. We get everything in Kalyanpuri market – clothes, vegetables – everything. That's our *sair (stroll)*. I don't go anywhere else.
> MT: How do you spend your free time?
> Chanchal: I just sit here. *Time pass ho jata hai* (time passes). But the younger lot does not like to sit out like this. My daughter-in-law and son keep urging me to come inside, eat food inside because they fear what if a fight breaks out suddenly. If a fight breaks out, I move my cot inside. But I like sitting here. I don't like sitting inside the house. *Mann nahi lagta.*' (PI, October 2019)

Leisure or time pass, is then found in sitting on the cot outside her house, talking to her neighbours and 'passing' time. Chanchal does not like sitting inside the house, even though there is a risk of getting caught in a fight outside. She likes the openness the lane provides. Hoping to understand this further, I asked Chanchal that what is it about sitting outside that she particularly likes. Just then, Manpreet, another neighbour in her late 50s who had been preparing a coal stove outside the adjacent house jumped in and explained to me:

> **"See, we are from villages (*gao-desh ke*). In villages, we had huge open spaces, so we always used to sit outside, cook outside, sleep outside. Our grandparents and parents stayed like that in villages. And now we live here. But they always told us, do not sit indoors, sit in the open**. In the villages, we did not even have doors on our houses. When you sit in the open, you get winds from all four directions, it feels nice. We would cook outside and eat outside. We would sit on the cot, keep cooking, eating, and munching. Look, my *chulha* is almost ready. Now I will cook on it, and eat here itself. We have a cooking gas stove inside but I do not like cooking on it. It is not the same". (Manpreet, PI, October 2019, emphasis added)

Manpreet, who has roots in Ludhiana (Punjab) was fanning the coals on the *chulha* (stove) while talking to me. She remembers her village-life fondly, where she always used to sit, cook, eat, and sleep outside, in the open, where you could get wind from all directions (sic). She is used to the openness of the outside. As a result, even in the city, she prefers conducting everyday household

activities 'outside' – even though the outside now is a narrow lane surrounded by two-three storied buildings on both sides with very little circulation of air. Upon hearing Manpreet, Chanchal agreed wholeheartedly: "yes, most of us in this lane are from Punjab (where) we used to cook outside and eat outside…when we sit outside, the lane also brightens up (*raunak lag jati hai),* it feels good to sit outside.*"* She further added that sitting outside also enables her to know what is happening in the lane: "who knows what is happening behind closed doors, who is troubled by what? In other places people sit inside their homes, with their doors closed all the time. You would never find out what is happening with them, if they are okay or not." (sic, PI, October 2019). Sitting outside on the cot is also important for sociability and for keeping the lane active. It also seems that it is a quiet way for older women to keep an eye on domestic troubles in other households, and to have each other's backs. Gender-based domestic violence is common in Kalyanpuri, and perhaps by ensuring that at least during the day the lane is not *sunsaan* (desolated), these women are **forging important bonds of support**. Poonam also joined the conversation here and shared that she lived in Laxmi Nagar for a while but did not like it because 'everyone stayed inside their homes and no one talked to one another.' Chanchal agreed and added that same is the case in Bhogal where she earlier lived. 'Everyone stayed inside their houses, even if someone died. No one would sit in the gullies; they stay indoors or come out till their balconies,' Chanchal said. When I asked them if they would like to live in a colony like Laxmi Nagar or Bhogal - now which has broader streets and better infrastructure, both Poonam and Chanchal laughed, and said that perhaps their children might be able to stay there but they would feel very enclosed. It is the small grain and sociability of the gully-life that Poonam and Chanchal enjoy and which gives them a sense of openness (*khula-khulapan*) and community.

When I asked Poonam if she ever goes out of Kalyanpuri, she replied with a languor typical of an early winter afternoon: 'where will we go, where can a poor person go, everything costs money'. Not even to parks, I asked? Here, Chanchal replied again, while Poonam nodded along: 'No, we do not get that much time. We do not go to parks. There are a lot of parks near our house here. This park *(vaguely pointing to the left direction),* that park *(vaguely pointing to the right direction)*. There is a park just 5 steps ahead, see that is a park.' This lack of time as the reason for not going to parks seemed to me, at first, at odds with the idea of 'passing time' and 'time-pass' that Chanchal and Poonam were embodying, sitting on their cots. Further, the park that Chanchal was pointing towards was actually a muddy or perhaps barren ground, with a make-shift tent in one corner and old discarded furniture like chairs etc. in another corner. The boundary walls were broken and clothes were drying in another corner. When I remarked that people's belongings are lying in the park, Poonam jumped in defence: 'what to do, people keep some of their stuff in the area of the park which falls in front of their house.

Recently, construction was going on in our house, so we also kept all extra supplies in the park. There is no other space. Houses are so small. So, everyone uses parks for multiple purposes' (PI, October 2019).

While older women do not go to parks and instead spend their leisure time on cots in the gullies, or go to neighbourhood market, what about younger and middle-aged women? When I asked Chanchal whether her daughter-in-law steps out much, she responded with a resounding no. Her daughter-in-law only goes to visit her brother and nowhere else on her own. According to Chanchal, 'if a woman goes anywhere alone, it is a risk, which is why our children do not step out on their own. We do not step out, we do not feel like going anywhere.' 'In our society, women stay at home', Poonam added, with an air of finality. However, within the gully, there is no problem:

> Chanchal: She (daughter-in-law) can go out in the gully. Even at night, we sit outside in the gully till whenever we want. *Koi dikkat nahi hai* (there is no problem).. I sometimes sit until 1.30-2 am. My children go off to sleep; I keep sitting or I stroll in the lane when I cannot sleep. There is no problem within the lane…As soon as a fight breaks out, or we hear noise, we go inside. We have to!

> Poonam: Yes, within the lane there is no problem. But we do not go outside the lane. We do not have the courage! Who will go out to stroll outside in the jungle! For us, everything outside this lane is a jungle.

Anything outside the gully is then 'jungle', the untamed, unenclosed *bahar* that Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) similarly identified, which is not accessible to women without risks. In Kalyanpuri's case, as per Chanchal and Poonam, the *mahaul* is dangerous for both men and women because of hooliganism, violence, and thievery.

I went to Kalyanpuri again a few days later and decided to walk through Block 11 once again. Poonam Kaur was not sitting outside that day, but Chanchal was sitting at her usual place on the cot outside her house and drinking tea. I drank some tea with her, chatted about her well-being and then moved on to talk to Manpreet, who was chopping mustard leaves to make the quintessential hearty Punjabi dish of *sarson ka saag* eaten during winters in some parts of north India. It was late October, there was a slight mid-afternoon chill in the air, and this was the first *saag* of the season for Manpreet. We started talking about how will she cook the *saag* – it will simmer on the *angeethi* (coal stove) for 3-4 hours and will be ready only by dinner time. Her daughter-in-law, Manju, who was sitting on a cot opposite the house was breastfeeding her 6-month-old son. Manju's older son, aged two, was sitting on the concrete road, and playing. The lane, once again, felt like an extension of the home. Once Manpreet went inside the house, I started talking to Manju. She told me she is from Ballabhgarh but has been brought up in Kalyanpuri, though in another block. She got married 5 years ago. She generally likes Kalyanpuri, because 'all facilities are easily available here – schools, doctors, etc. – everything

is close by as compared to Ballabhgarh where everything was far away' (PI, October 2019) Her husband works as a contractual labourer in the construction industry. Just as we began talking, Manpreet came back out and took over the conversation. Manju did not participate in the conversation this point forth and covered her head with her dupatta, quietly helping Manpreet with whatever she needed.

In our last conversation Manpreet had declared with pride that she is from Ludhiana and how life there is vastly different from life in a city like Delhi. So, I began by asking her if she misses Ludhiana. 'Of course I do, it's where my in-laws live. I am very attached to Ludhiana, I like it better than Delhi,' she exclaimed. This is because 'it has a lot of open area, with 100-yard plots, nice houses, happy families, and most importantly, *achha mahaul'*. This is in stark contrast to Kalyanpuri where houses are a mere 30 yards in area and fights break out often. According to Manpreet, 'there is a lot of affection, sociability, and love between people in Ludhiana whereas Delhi is full of ruffians, goons, thieves and thugs who do not have any shame or respect.' Further, she added, she has to keep her doors locked in Delhi (unlike Punjab). If she even leaves a garbage can outside her house overnight, it is gone by morning because the '*bhangis* and *banjaare* take it'. In Punjab, on the other hand, 'one can leave their car, motor, utensils, everything outside and go off to sleep, nothing will happen.' Her biases towards other communities and scheduled caste groups in particular became apparent further when she explained why the *mahaul* inside her gully in Kalyanpuri is still relatively better than outside:

> "It is alright inside the gully. But outside, it is very bad…Those boys are from another community, from *bhangi* and *chooda* castes. They take drugs and create a nuisance. We do not know them. We are familiar with the boys in our lane. This entire block is of sardars. No one amongst our community would do all that. But there are people who spoil good people also and get them habituated to drugs and alcohol. They tell them to take *ganja, beedi*, alcohol…The *mahaul* here is such. *Bhangi, choode, chamar, musalman* – all kinds of people live here and if you fall in their company, then you will also pick up bad habits." (PI, October 2019)

Because of this 'bad *mahaul'*, Manpreet and her family do not move around Kalyanpuri much unless necessary. In fact, she repeated that 'we do not go anywhere' several times, as a matter of pride. When I asked her about women's safety in particular in Kalyanpuri as compared to Ludhiana, she fell back on the now familiar maxims of how it all 'depends on you' *('apne upar hota hai')* because 'if you are good, then everything is good' (*hum ache toh sab achha hai)*. That is why, she stated, 'girls here do not step out at all'. Her daughter and daughter-in-law do not even go to the market alone, she told me with some pride. Instead, it is the older women who go to the market to buy vegetables (*'hum badi-budi auratein hi jaati hain')*, and even they ensure they return home 'on time' (which for Manpreet is around 8 pm). 'We do not go anywhere after 8 pm, never, not at all, nowhere', she stated. In Manpreet's family, women of reproductive age are protected at home or chaperoned everywhere due to fear of

harassment by men from other communities who are often inebriated or high on drugs. Nonetheless, Manpreet added that she likes visiting places of worship in and outside Delhi as they make her 'feel calm and at peace.' Places of worship are then legitimate places of leisure.

After talking to Manpreet, I walked to Block 15, which is across the road from Block 11 to meet a few women there. Block 15 was significantly different from Block 11 in terms of its gully life. I did not witness a lot of activity on the street itself here, other than a few women who were sitting on concrete platforms outside their houses, talking casually. There was a park in the centre of the block but it was partially covered by construction material and old furniture with a muddy ground. After a short walk around the area, I met Shagun, a 30-year-old woman who has been living in Kalyanpuri since 7 years, and her 38-year-old neighbour Neelima, who has been staying in Kalyanpuri since 20 years. I had met Neelima a few times before at Saathi Centre as well. Neelima's husband works as an electrician and Shagun's husband sells cotton candy on a cart. Both Shagun and Neelima are from a village near Aligarh in UP and still identify with that village as their 'original' home. Neelima's parents have a 5 bigha farmland in their village and two cows. Sensing a deep sense of attachment they have with their village, I asked them if they ever miss it, and Shagun instantly replied that she misses her village a lot. She explained: 'everything is nice in the village, we can just pluck fresh vegetables from the farms, get fresh milk from the buffalo. We drink that milk and make buttermilk and ghee out of that'. Hearing this Neelima nodded and added: 'Yes, we get fresh vegetables there, nice sunlight, air, openness. We do not get that here. There is a lot of difference between a village and a city. There are so many diseases in the city, but not in the village. The city folks keep falling sick.' (PI, October 2019). Neelima and Shagun, thus, associate the city with 'disease' and overcrowding and the village with openness and fresh produce, indicating that **they still carry the imagination of a village with them while living in the city**. Even so, they prefer living in Delhi because 'all facilities are easily available' and schools and healthcare are better here (Neelima, PI, October 2019).

Neelima's daughter, Priya was 16 years old at the time of field work and used to go to Saathi Centre for remedial and computer classes. Priya had joined Saathi Centre when she was in class 5th, and has grown to be a confident girl, Neelima told me beaming with pride. In comparison to other girls her age in this area, Neelima shared, 'she has learnt how to step out, be street-smart and confident; she can easily buy groceries and go to the market. She went to Sarojini Nagar with her friend the other day to buy new clothes for Diwali. She asked my permission and I let her go. I told her to roam around a little (*ghoom aao zara)*, she should see the outside world. I just told her to come back on time which she did. There are so many girls, otherwise, who do not step out at all because they are scared'

(Neelima, PI, October 2019). I recalled that Priya was indeed particularly vocal and articulate when I had conducted group discussions with adolescent girls enrolled at Saathi centre.

This narrative was different from what I heard from the older women in Block 11. Neelima and Shagun worked for a factory in Noida a few years ago where they were responsible for assembling machine parts. They left that job because of varying shift-timings. However, it is perhaps because Neelima has been a part of the urban working class and feels comfortable in navigating the city on her own, that she wants her daughter to have the same confidence. It is also interesting that for Neelima, as long as Priya 'comes back home on time', it is acceptable for her to roam around. When I asked Neelima what does 'on time' mean to understand the temporal boundaries of this access, she said that she wants Priya to come back home by 5 or 6 pm at the latest because after that it gets dark. This is because, she explained, 'after all, she is a girl and we feel scared if she would come back alone after dark'. This, she attributes to the *kharab mahaul*:

> "There is no immediate threat, but one does feel scared. We are her parents after all. And you look at the *mahaul* these days. We hear about girls getting abducted and then they do *those* things with them… That is why we tell Priya to come home straight after her tuitions. Inside the gully it's fine, she can stay out till 7 or 8 pm also, but not outside. Because this is our own area, we know all the kids here. Outside the gully, all kinds of people are there. If someone is under the effect of drugs or alcohol, he would not spare anyone - not even their own mothers or sisters. So, we feel scared for her…Otherwise, I do not have any problem. If we are out of vegetables, I go till the market even at 9 pm or 10 pm with my husband. There is no fear. If I go alone, then it is scary. Because the *mahaul* is such." (PI, October 2019)

Shagun also added here that the *mahaul* is bad and 'anything can happen', with a grim look on her face. Here, we see similar notions emerge of 'inside' the gully versus 'outside' the gully vis-à-vis the safety of young women. Familiarity with people in the neighbourhood seems to have created enclosed enclaves of safety, outside which 'anything can happen', especially after dark. Neelima herself does not go to the market unescorted after dark, because as she put it, 'there is a lot of crime in Kalyanpuri' leading to a '*mahaul*' which makes women feel scared. Later in the conversation, she added that even installation of CCTV cameras has had no impact on this *mahaul* because those who want to steal or harass, will break the cameras before doing so. Neelima herself has faced '*chhed-chhad*' several times by boys who are her daughter's age. 'Some boys do not even respect age, they are so insolent. But if someone passes a comment on me, I give them an earful', she exclaimed.

According to Neelima, the *mahaul* has deteriorated even further in recent years because now 'girls elope or have affairs at the age of 16 years' and 'lose their way' (*bhatak jate hain)*. Recently, she recalled a girl in Priya's school eloped with a boy who does not earn and married him. 'Such is the *mahaul* here, so we have to counsel our children constantly', she said with disapproval. According to Neelima, it is because of this '*mahaul'* and the risk of elopements that some parents marry off their

children at the age of 16 or 17 years. However, because the legal age of marriage is 18 years, parents now refrain from doing that and 'let the girls study as long as they are on the right path'. Much to Neelima's disappointment, some girls register at college and then 'misuse this freedom' to 'roam around here and there'. At this point, she declared that if at any point she will feel that Priya is 'going on the wrong path', she will stop her education and marry her off. Clearly, romantic relationships are a taboo and it is believed that affairs logically lead to elopements. This trajectory of affairs leading to elopements perhaps itself has to do with the fact that romantic relationships are discouraged and penalised, leaving no space for a healthy exploration of attraction and sexuality amongst teenagers. Neelima herself got married at the age of 16 years and believes that good girls respect the freedom they have been 'given'.

Neelima and Shagun themselves do not go out much, because as Shagun said, 'they do not get the time'. However, they often sit on the platform or the steps outside their house (like we sat for this interview), or their neighbour's house, which allows them to take some fresh air and chat. In winters, Neelima takes a mat to the rooftop of her building and sits there, peels peanuts, and catches up with her neighbours who likewise sit on their rooftops on winter afternoons. 'We like sitting on the roof or our doorstep, it is a good time-pass,' Neelima said, much like the women in Block 11, who sit on their cots to pass the time.

3. 'It is not safe, anything can happen': When, where, and why?

"Women were not protected then. I remember the rules, rules that were never spelled out but that every woman knew: don't open your door to a stranger…If anyone whistles, don't turn to look…Now we walk along the same street…and no man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. No one whistles…There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it."

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood (1985: 34)

Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, written in 1985, is a dystopic novel narrated from the perspective of a woman whose role has been reduced to that of a reproductive carrier under a newly formed totalitarian state. The main character, Offred, does not face the same public harassment (or what is colloquially called 'eve-teasing' and '*chhed-chhad*' in many parts of South Asia) any more as she is protected by the new rules. In that sense, she is safe. At the same time, her movement and actions are severely restricted. She has to follow the state's and society's rules and fulfil her prescribed role in order to continue enjoying its protection. So even as she has freedom *from* harassment, she is not free. The novel is a scathing satire on the many 'freedoms' that women have or do not have, and the expense at which these freedoms are 'granted'. Unfortunately, it is also the truth for many women even today.

As we saw in some of the narratives above, women are safe as long as they are good girls, stay inside their homes or their *gullies*, 'respect the freedom' that has been granted to them, and do not venture out unescorted into the untamed urban jungle especially after dark. They must take measures to ensure their own safety. As a result, they can only participate in urban life sporadically. In Kalyanpuri in particular, '*mahaul*' or what I have earlier translated as 'affective atmosphere' seems to be a key determinant in women's safety and mobility. Given the focus on safety vis-à-vis women's access to public spaces, let us go back to interviews conducted with young women of Kalyanpuri to unpack these narratives further and understand their everyday experiences.

I met Seema for another in-depth interview in late October 2019[25]. It was a sunny day and we decided to sit outside on a bench in the small garden inside Saathi Centre. She was wearing jeans and a sleeveless top that day, something unusual for young girls in Kalyanpuri who generally wear salwar-kurtas or other body-covering clothes. When I complimented her clothes, she told me that when she was growing up and developed breasts in her adolescence, her parents and her elder brother did not want her to wear jeans and tops because they were worried that people will stare at her or gossip about her. However, she was steadfast in her decision to wear what she likes and fought with them until they gave in. We talked at length about the challenges she faces while navigating urban spaces, and how she negotiates them with conviction. Yet, I sensed fear in her tone and her words repeatedly. '*Darr toh lagta hi hai*' (of course I feel scared), she added several times during the conversation. As mentioned above, Seema migrated to Delhi from a village in Bihar when she was quite young. Nonetheless, she still fondly remembers the village life – how they had a cow in the village, how she used to accompany her elder sisters in cutting grass to feed the cow, getting water from the *neher* (stream) to cook on the *chuhla* (coal stove), and collecting firewood. She still visits her village once or twice a year. In comparison, however, she likes Delhi better because 'it has more facilities like hospital and school in close proximity as well as NGOs like Saathi Centre which help out' (PI, October 2019). And yet, she felt safer in the village. She explained: "Whenever I step out in Delhi, I feel scared. There is some fear inside me. Of harassment, teasing. This thing is not there in the village." This is because in Delhi, she shared, 'people comment a lot and try to touch you or brush past you in the bus, someone will keep their hands on you like this (*places her hand on her breast*), or will touch you here or there'. When this happens, Seema usually shouts, hits or pushes back the aggressor who then retreats or runs away.

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[25] At the time of follow up interview, Seema was making plans to shift to Bangalore for a year-long, fully-funded career-development fellowship program for underprivileged girls and confided that moving to Bangalore will give her the freedom which she could not experience in the restrictive environment of Kalyanpuri because '*mahaul* is such'.

However, this retaliation comes with its own set of risks. Often, she has been warned by people around her to not retaliate otherwise she will face even more harm:

> "This one time, I saw someone stealing a mobile phone from an old man's pocket in the bus. I yelled and slapped him. He got off the bus and ran away. But then the conductor told me that I should not have hit him because now it will become difficult for them to ply the bus on this route. That man might come back to stab the conductor or the driver in revenge, or catch me and beat me up. And no one will say anything…He said that is why we keep our heads down. They [bus conductor and driver] do not say anything because they have to make a living. This happened again where I hit someone in the bus who was trying to touch me. And again, the bus driver scolded me saying, now that guy will hit me back." (PI, October 2019)

Seema started using public transport more actively after she finished school and started going to college. Since then, she has faced public sexual harassment (or *chhed-chhad)* numerous times and tried to navigate this treacherous landscape with grit and courage and standing up for herself by 'slapping or pushing back' the assaulter. Nonetheless, these instances and consequent warnings and iterations of how the aggressor might hit her back or stab her have instilled fear in her. After all, this is how emotions circulate – through accumulation of memories and trauma in our bodies and repetition of warnings. The work of constant repetitive public harassment is perhaps precisely to generate this 'affect' of fear which at best, makes women's bodies hyper-alert in public spaces, and at worst, denies them access altogether.

Neeta, a 24-year-old woman in Kalyanpuri shared a similar experience of public buses and other public spaces in Delhi because of which she severely restricts her movement. She shared how 'men touch you here and there in buses and while girls who are sharp answer back, others who are shy or scared, quietly endure it'. She feels very scared especially after 5 or 6 pm in the evening because 'anything can happen – rape, harassment, comment-*baazi'*. All this *'chhed-chhad'*, she added, happen openly in Kalyanpuri even during the day and no one says anything because if anyone would object, they will be beaten up instead. As a result, Neeta ensures she is home before it gets dark and does not even go till the neighbourhood market alone unless it is crowded. For Neeta, the fear of the outside and of night is driven and heightened by stories she has heard of rapes, sexual harassment, and abductions. As a result, she avoids any place or time which is *sunsan* or desolated, echoing a sentiment expressed by several women from different backgrounds who believe that crowded spaces are 'safer', even if inconvenient. 22-year-old Karishma[26] similarly talked about her experiences of eve-teasing in Delhi. When she was younger, she told me, she faced a lot of *chhed-chhad* while commuting to school.

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[26] Karishma is 'originally' from a village near Aligarh in UP but was born and brought up in Kalyanpuri in Delhi. Her brother is around 30 years of age and used to actively police and restrict her movements until recently. Lately, her mother has started supporting her decisions, making her brother take a backseat, and that has significantly improved Karishma's confidence and mobility.

Chhed-chhad here includes sexually explicit, uninvited comments, staring, and groping. However, while telling me about these instances she added that '*chhed chhad* and *comment-baazi* are commonplace not just in Kalyanpuri but all of Delhi, and that is why she ignores it; it happens all the time'. She then simultaneously downplayed her own experience of public sexual harassment. Public sexual harassment or what's labelled as 'comment-*baazi*'[27] and *chhed-chhad* is in fact not just tolerated but is often normalized as harmless, commonplace and a form of playful habit that boys indulge in for fun. Girls are advised to 'just ignore it'. The result of this problematic watering down of public sexual harassment is that women end up policing their own mobility and access to public spaces while normalizing deeply violative behaviours. In Karishma's case, while earlier she largely ignored such comments, working as a community mobiliser at Saathi Centre and attending gender-based workshops changed her attitude and now she does not let *comment-baazi* slide.

While Neeta does not step out or venture into perceivably risky situations to stay safe, others like Seema and Karishma have worked out strategies to navigate the urban space. They go to market and college together, and run errands together whenever they can which not only ensures they are 'not alone' outside but also gives them a chance to spend time with each other, thereby deepening their friendship. It also puts their parents at ease to know that they are accompanied by each other. They do not like shopping in Kalyanpuri market, but instead go to Sarojini market whenever they can[28]. Seema, for example, told me that she feels 'awkward and strange in Kalyanpuri market because it's too crowded' and instead prefers Sarojini Nagar because 'it is accessible by metro, offers good clothes within our budget, and it is fun'. They also sometimes go to Mayur Vihar Community market with other friends to eat snacks or hang out[29]. Other than this, they meet at Saathi Centre or at each other's houses.

While it seems that Karishma and Seema are able to access public spaces to a great extent, this access is premised on various strategies that they additionally adopt to ensure their own safety. Seema, for example, always keeps her phone close to her when she is walking in the city. After sunset, she maintains a careful distance from people around her, watching and measuring her every step. When she was in school, she used to carry a blade with her which she stopped carrying only towards the end

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[27] 'Baazi' translates to a match or a game. When comment-baazi is used as a term to indicate public sexual harassment, it trivializes its intensity. It also indicates the dominant attitude towards sexual harassment that it is merely done in jest and for fun by boys, it is a habit, and somehow, that makes it legitimate. This problematic watering down of sexual harassment is not unique to Kalyanpuri. For an interesting paper on 'baazi' as a social frame to understand excess and habit see: Katyal, Akhil. "Laundebaazi: Habits and Politics in North India." *Interventions* 15, no. 4 (2013): 474-493.
[28] Shopping in Sarojini nagar emerged as a popular leisure activity for several girls I interviewed. Sarojini Nagar is a street market in South Delhi where one can buy trendy and fashionable clothes for a bargain. It seems going to Sarojini nagar instead of Kalyanpuri market is as aspirational thing for a lot of girls in this context.
[29] Mayur Vihar is a relatively posh area neighbouring Kalyanpuri.

of college because she felt it might accidentally hurt someone. Karishma always carries a sharp-pointed pen with her at all times so that she can hit back any aggressor using the pen's nib. She has never really used the pen in this way but having it handy makes her feel secure and safe. Further, when she conducts community visits in different blocks of Kalyanpuri, she covers herself up using an additional scarf so as not to draw any attention towards herself. At night, Seema and Karishma intensify these precautionary measures. Let us look at the interview with Karishma, for example:

> "At night I only step out within my own gully sometimes to take a stroll. Within my gully, I don't feel scared even at 11 or 12 at night. It feels really nice at night. I like strolling at night, it's dark, the wind feels nice. And it helps in digesting food also! And night is the only time when we can say things in our heart. That's the only free time. Because we are busy the entire day. Then night is the only time you have for your own self. You can play, or meet your friends." (Karishma, PI, October 2019)

Thus, much like middle-aged and older women in Blocks 11 and 15, Karishma feels comfortable in taking a stroll within her gully at night. In fact, she enjoys the night, articulating poignantly that 'it is the only time you have for your own self'. The temporal boundaries created by a modern, capitalist city mandates day-time as time of work, leaving night as the only time to find leisure. However, outside the gully, Karishma feels scared, and the same darkness and quiet which she enjoys inside the gully make her anxious. The fear of the unknown is palpable:

> "I do not go out (of the gully) at night because I feel scared, it gets dark. If I am outside after dark, I feel anxious about how will I reach back home. Darkness scares me. I don't know why. My mother always asks me to come back home before dark. Because someone might say something. So now I also feel uncomfortable and anxious when I see darkness. Sometime back there was a news that children were getting kidnapped. Maybe it was just a rumour but rumours assume such massive proportions here. My mother hears all this and gets worried. This one time I was returning from my sister's place at 9 pm and my mother got really angry. But till 9 pm, I do not feel that scared. After that I do. It gets desolated after that. So, I feel scared…about heinous crimes, not so much about eve-teasing. *Chhed-chhad* is commonplace even during the day." (PI, October 2019)

I asked her what scares her about night in several different ways. Each time she replied that it is the darkness, it is the possibility of a heinous crime, and because it gets desolate (*sunsan)* at night. Her fear of the darkness itself seems to be emanating from the narratives and warnings that surround her and are passed down to her. Seema similarly explained that she does not step out at night after 9 pm because she is scared that 'something wrong might happen' (*kuchh galat ho jayega)*. For Seema, this fear comes from what she has seen in news and has heard from people in the neighbourhood regarding 'cases' (of violence against women) that happen at night. This has inculcated a '*khauf*' (terror) in her (sic). The desolation at night amplifies these emotions for her: 'if someone would kidnap me, then no one will even hear my screams, it is so secluded at night'. 'Anything can happen', she concluded. 'Anything can happen' in fact was a recurrent theme throughout this project.

I probed Seema some more to understand what is it that can happen and this fear of the unknown. In a very nuanced manner, Seema put her finger on the realization that safety is actually a 'feeling' just like fear is a 'feeling'. A place can make you 'feel' safe or scared through its infrastructure like absence of street lights and through past instances of harassment faced by oneself and by others:

> "When I go someplace, I do not actively think whether it is safe or unsafe. It is a '*feel*' that comes…Since the beginning, girls are cautioned to not go too far from home because '*something might happen*'. Girls always have some fear inside them. I agree that something bad *can* happen after evening. But this fear really settles inside you. So, I am always careful about where I go, when I go, with whom, why. I think through it all…If you go to a desolate place, you will 'feel' a bit scared, that, what if someone does something. If it is dark and there is no light, then I avoid taking that street...We have heard so many instances [of harassment] that the terror [*khauf*] is inside us now. What if someone throws something at me which makes me faint or lose consciousness? This terror came from listening to people, to cautionary tales, to news. Recently, the sanitation worker of Saathi centre was robbed like this. She was wearing small gold earrings, some kid came and threw something at her, she lost consciousness and woke up to find her earrings gone." (PI, October 2019; emphasis original)

Thus, safety is a feeling much like fear and is shaped by repetition of certain narratives, warnings, and lived experiences. As a result, women have to plan their mobility decisions within the framework of these emotions or feelings and warnings. The burden of past and collective memories is aggravated by pressures from family members to adhere to dominant social norms. So, while Seema now feels confident in navigating the city on her own, her '*ghar-wale*' (family members) often do not 'allow' her. In fact, until a year ago, they used to actively police her movements and restricted her from going anywhere or meeting anyone other than for 'legitimate' purposes. They would object even if she would go to her friend's place. They were afraid that 'something wrong' (*kuch galat kaam*) might happen. In this sense, perhaps they were also actively trying to control her sexuality:

> "My *gharwale* would not allow me to roam around with my friends at all. They said if you go you will be following your '*man-marzi*' (your heart's wish). So sometimes I lied, told them I am going for tuitions and went to roam around with my friends instead (*laughs*). This one time, I went for a birthday party with a male friend. My mother found out! She called me up and asked me to come home immediately. When I went home, she slapped, *thrice!* I don't know what she was so upset about. She was afraid that we must be doing some '*galat kaam*'. They see and hear all this around them. So, somebody might have said something. But I am quite stubborn, I continued going out…Now sometimes I go back home around 8 or 9 pm also. They still ask me my whereabouts but do not say much." (PI, October 2019)

Note here how '*man-marzi*' or following your heart's wish is looked down upon. Young girls are expected to be 'good girls' and comply with norms laid down for them if they want to continue enjoying access to education opportunities. They must not 'roam around' without purpose, not interact with boys, and come home directly after tuitions. We saw a similar attitude in my conversation with Neelima as well regarding her 16-year-old daughter. Inter-sex interactions are heavily policed, labelled as '*galat kaam*', and lead to character judgements, heated fights (or in Seema's case above, slapping),

and even possible ostracization by family members. Love marriages are a taboo[30]. As one would expect, boys and men do not face the same degree or kind of restrictions and policing. Karishma for example at one point expressed in frustration how her mother is much more lenient towards her brother as compared to her. She does not question her brother's whereabouts who gets complete liberty to roam around any time. According to Karishma, this is a result of 'patriarchal thinking'[31] as 'boys are the ones who are involved in crimes and should be stopped, not girls' (PI, October 2019).

Conclusion

The fear of violence and harassment in Kalyanpuri is palpable, resulting in considerable restrictions on women's access to public spaces. As we saw in this chapter, the urban experience of women like Seema, Karishma and Neeta is shaped by several factors. One thing that stands out in their narratives of safety versus fear is the construction of '*kharab mahaul'* – a term that we came across in Khaliyai Mandi and night-space as well. In Khaliyai Mandi we saw how the riverbank has become a space rife with risk and a *kharab mahaul,* where women, especially of reproductive age do not go. Similarly, women and girls in Kalyanpuri do not venture into public parks as their *mahaul* is bad. The riverbank in Khaliyai Mandi and the parks in Kalyanpuri have become spaces where itinerant men drink and gamble. This *kharab mahaul* is also shaped by circulation and tireless repetition of cases of violence against women and warnings like 'anything can happen' and 'something bad/wrong might happen'. This results in 'sticking' and intensification of certain affects with certain places and times (Sarah Ahmed, 2014). Other than such repetition of warnings, scholars like Degen and Rose (2012) also argue for the role of memories in shaping our sensory experience of the city. As the narratives above suggest, personal and collective memories of violence and bodily violations have also contributed to women's urban experience in Kalyanpuri. These memories tend to get accumulated in our bodies, as a result of which we internalize the restrictions on our mobilities and leisure opportunities. I will come back to this interrelationship between memories, human subjectivity, experiences of safety, and '*kharab mahaul'* (bad affective atmosphere) in the next chapter, bringing together insights from the three case studies.

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[30] This came up tangentially in several interviews conducted in Kalyanpuri but I did not pursue this line of enquiry in its entirety.

[31] She used the term, '*pitra-satta soch',* reminding us of her position within Saathi as someone who has attended workshops on unpacking gender and patriarchy.

What this chapter also suggests that if fear and threat of sexual harassment closes off some possibilities of participation in cities for women, women also find ways to navigate this terrain and find alternatives. So, if women and girls cannot or do not go to parks, they use the gullies (and cots) or a local community centre (like Saathi Centre) for 'time-pass'. It is in gullies and local centres that they form intimate bonds and their own alternative public (or perhaps what Nancy Fraser (1990) calls feminist subaltern counter-publics). Additionally, young girls adopt different strategies to navigate urban spaces which ranges from carrying everyday objects like pens or blades for self-defence to lying to their parents when meeting friends, going to parks and markets outside their residential neighbourhood to escape societal policing and gaze, or articulating their demand to play at their local NGO.

Other than the discourse on safety versus. fear, there are a few other strands that stand out in this chapter regarding public parks and urban planning. In Kalyanpuri, much like in Khaliyai Mandi, urban and rural ways of life seem to co-exist. Middle-aged and older women prefer socializing, sitting, and even cooking in the gullies because it gives them a sense of '*khullapan'* (or openness) even when the gullies are enclosed from all sides with limited ventilation. The household spills over outside, partially out of compulsion as the houses in Kalyanpuri are merely 25 square feet in area and partially as a way of life. People do not just retain a memory of the village but a way of life in the small grain and sociality of the street even when the built environment does not facilitate that. In the narratives we also saw how the respondents carry a romanticized imagination of the village with them while living in the city – in the village, they could cook outside and sleep outside, and get winds from all directions[32]. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the use of the street as a public space is not alien in Indian cities. Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) and David Arnold (2019) for example have written about the centrality of bazaars and streets in urban public life during the colonial period. However, in this chapter we also see a new category emerging – that of the 'gullies'. The gully is not the same as the street that Chakrabarty and Arnold write about, neither is it the same as the home. For women, sitting in the gully is safe and leisurely, anything outside it, is full of risk – it is the untamed jungle. The gully is an extension of the home, and of the street. It is a liminal space between the two. It is, in that way, an 'enclosed outside' especially for women. Here, Chakrabarty's binary categorization of 'unenclosed bahar' and 'enclosed andar' falls short when looked at from a gendered lens, it falls short. For women, it is in the '*enclosed bahar'* i.e. the gullies where they gather and form solidarities.

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[32] Practices of caste-based and gender-based discrimination in the village were conspicuously absent in these narratives.

What also stands out is that Kalyanpuri has a relatively short history, with most families settling here in the 1970s or later after they migrated to the capital or were resettled. In that case, perhaps, making religious structures in parks is not just a way to encroach upon public land but is a way to grow roots and familiarity in a place. In similar vein, the use of parks as an extension of one's home instead of an inert public leisure space is perhaps closely tied to the persistent urban-rural linkages that are common in the neighbourhood as well as the nature of housing itself. In some instances, we also saw how people use community and kinship ties from the village to live in the city because sticking to one's community ensures access to resources as well policing of women. It is interesting to note here that resettlement colonies like Kalyanpuri came up in the 1970s under the urban planner, Jagmohan who was deeply modernist in his approach. Jagmohan was the DDA Chairman in the 1970s during the national emergency, during which time he was a crucial part of the city's restructuring. A lot of demolitions and resettlement during that period were done under his 'modernist vision'. In several of his writings he has extolled modern planners like Baron Haussman and Le Corbusier and underlined the importance of planned colonies and parks to transform cities (Pati 2014). However, as we saw in the introduction to this chapter, the challenges of transposing modernist visions developed in the West onto colonial and postcolonial cities are well documented.

Planning historians like Partho Datta (2012) for example alert us to the specificity of the purportedly universal experience of western urbanization and the modernizing models put forth by western planners for colonial cities. Datta uses the example of an urban planner, Patrick Geddes, to throw light on the contested dynamics of modern planning. Patrick Geddes was an articulate and noticeable challenge to the dominant urban planning wisdom during the colonial period. He made a strong case for being sensitive to local civic cultures and urban practices of pre-modern India and wanted to retain the socio-historic core and principles that characterised Indian cities, making his approach 'culturally informed' (2012, 5). In particular, he championed local heritage and Indian building traditions which were marked by functionality over form, use of native materials, sensitivity to local weather conditions, and dynamic use of public spaces and streets. This made his approach starkly different from his contemporaries who envisioned 'garden cities' and grand 'colonial capitals' which assumed an empty canvas, completely discounting local realities, contexts, practices, and architectural forms of Indian cities (much like postcolonial planners like Jagmohan). Further, and what is of particular interest to us, is that he celebrated intimate spaces of the family, community, and neighbourhood. In that vein, based on the gender-segregated society and strict norms of 'indoor' and 'outdoor' (*andar/bahar)* that he observed, he advocated for 'purdah gardens' for women, and preservation of 'chabootras' (platforms outside houses) to nurture neighbourhood sociability (Datta

2012: 7). For Geddes, 'open spaces integrated into community life had more chance of surviving than parks, the sanitary 'voids' that modern planners tended to prefer, premised on the negative concept of a space that was just to be left empty' (Datta 2012: 17). This modernist vision of parks being essential to urban life and treating the city space as a blank canvas continued well into the post-colonial planning period in India. However, if Kalyanpuri was planned (or re-planned) keeping in mind local cultural practices of sociability, which in fact are centred around the bazaar, the gullies, and the chabootras, there might have been seamless open spaces interspersed with trees, instead of cordoned off parks which ultimately are being neglected by the municipality and people alike, and not used by women and children in particular.

Critical literature on parks and their planning notwithstanding, it is still widely believed that an ideal city must have some tamed spaces of nature for modern city inhabitants, as I discovered when all my research participants affirmed that they would like well-maintained parks in Kalyanpuri even though, they added, they still might not use them as much due to lack of time or inclination. Parks are seen as symbols of refined urban living, spaces of immersion, action, and use (Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan 2017, 19). In fact, parks have also been used to stage public action in the form of protests, rallies, or demonstrations in postcolonial settings. In India, for example, as recently as 2019, parks gained a renewed rigour and presence in Indian cities like Delhi during the anti-CAA protests described in Chapter 2. In the last decade, parks have also served as grounds for staging ephemeral but strong gender-based campaigns such as Meet to Sleep[33], Park *mein* PDA and Why Loiter to claim unrestricted and unpoliced access to open public spaces like parks for women. Parks, among other urban geographies, have also been at the centre-stage in conflicts over rights to the city, as is written by urban geographers like Don Mitchell (2003). Parks then are also implicated in human actions, social sentiments, and politics of exclusion. By bringing parks to the centre-stage in this chapter, we in a way also circle back to the questions of right to the city and women's access to public leisure spaces that we began with, albeit from the lens of urban poor.

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[33] As I have argued elsewhere, when women gather to sleep in public parks (as part of Meet to Sleep campaign), it is simultaneously a leisurely activity, a form of recreation, and a mode of protest.

Chapter Six

Unpacking Urban Order and Affective Atmosphere

Introduction

माहौल // māhaul [(A.) *mā ḥaul*], m. what changes: mood, atmosphere; environment (of one's upbringing).
– The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary[34]

One of the early challenges that I encountered in the PhD research project was how to theorize an empirical term that emerged throughout my field work and literally translates to 'atmosphere' – *'mahaul'*. However, 'atmosphere' was an inadequate translation of this term. **Mahaul seemed to be more about a particular quality of the urban order and the feelings that this atmosphere generated** – fear, safety, anxiety, freedom, relaxation and so on.

In existing studies, *mahaul* has been varyingly translated as moral atmosphere, socio-spatial atmosphere, environment, or ambience. In one study for example, lack of '*padhai ka mahaul'*, is translated as educational environment and is described by research participants as lack of opportunities for educational advancement, absence of infrastructural support like electricity and schools, lack of good tutors and the defused effect of educational status of neighbouring children. However, the paper then does not engage with this construction of *mahaul* or what it means beyond this initial description (Jeffrey et al 2006). In a more recent paper, Dyson and Jeffrey (2018) bring into focus the role of the narrative of *mahaul* in shaping prefigurative action in the North Indian context. Here, they acknowledge that *mahaul* is not easily translatable into English. They note that people use the word *mahaul* not just to describe factors such as an environment of collaboration, cordial relations, and physical infrastructure such as electricity, healthcare, and education, but also to describe the affective resonances of a place. Here, perhaps, they come closest to understanding what *mahaul* is. In yet another study which builds on Jeffrey et al's 2006 study, *mahaul* is translated as socio-spatial environment (Ganguly 2018). Ganguly in her study of a Dalit settlement in Delhi explores how a socially marginalized community constructs its *mahaul* and perceives it as instrumental in shaping their educational outcomes. According to Ganguly, *padhai ka mahaul* is a result of the nieghbourhood's environment as well as the '*ghar ka mahaul'* which is shaped by social, cultural and economic capital

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[34] Accessed from Digital Dictionaries of South Asia. Link: https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/mcgregor_query.py?qs=माहौल&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact

of working-class and poor Dalits. While giving keen attention to social and cultural disadvantages and how they constitute an unfavourable educational atmosphere, Ganguly however seems to underplay the affective quality of *mahaul*. Another study that touches about the moral aspect of *mahaul* highlights 'the everyday experience of insecurity in a Muslim neighbourhood in Delhi amidst the increasing economic and social segregation of Muslim communities' (titled Private surveillance in working-class, Muslim neighbourhoods of Delhi by Thalia Gigerenzer (presented at IIHS Annual Research Conference, 2020) [35]. In this study, *mahaul* is translated as 'moral atmosphere'.

While each of these translations are context-specific and emerged from deep empirical work, none of these seemed to capture the multiplicities that this word entailed in my field work. Whenever I probed my research participants to unpack what this '*mahaul*' is that determines their access to the city, the answers were evasive or repetitive – 'it is like that', 'you feel it, it is in the air', 'it is just that, it is not good, there are all these men you know', 'one feels scared but I cannot explain why', '*aaj kal mahaul hi aisa hai',* 'even on well-lit streets, there is a sense of danger', 'on deserted roads, there is fear, because of the today's *mahaul'* and so on. Confronted by these narratives, I realized that existing frameworks are perhaps inadequate to understand the urban order and its *mahaul*. Following Rancière's conceptualization, in my M.Phil. dissertation I defined urban order as a set of implicit rules which establishes roles and functions, and modes and forms of participation and exclusion in a city. These rules determine what Rancière (2004) calls 'distribution of the sensible' and the division between what is visible/invisible, audible/inaudible, sayable/unsayable, and perceptible/imperceptible. This distribution and redistribution of the sensible is essentially a spatial experience (Rancière 2004, 13). However, it seems we need to revise Rancière's conceptualization of 'distribution of the sensible' to focus more on the perceptible and affectual instead of what is visible or audible because *mahaul* is also about what is felt but cannot be expressed or represented, and not just about what is seen/unseen or audible/inaudible. Simultaneously, we also need to revise existing understanding of *mahaul* as something 'moral'. In this chapter I attempt to go beyond Ranciere's conceptualization by bringing in insights from affectual geography to understand what this *mahaul* means and how it shapes access to urban life and citizenship.

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[35] Link: https://web.archive.org/web/20210428100911id_/https://iihs.co.in/knowledge-gateway/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Urban-ARC-2020-_Conference-Proceedings.pdf#page=187

Through this research project, I argue that the *mahaul* or affective environment is constituted by the following elements:

i. social norms and established codes of behaviour,

ii. circulation of affect through recurrent narratives and histories,

iii. embodied and subjective practices, memories, and experiences, and

iv. materiality and infrastructure (which in our case is shaped by dominant policy narratives of safety and order).

Together, I argue, these nodes which are deeply interlinked with each other shape right to the city and affective citizenship. The first half of this chapter engages with the first three elements which are intricately woven together– social and behavioural norms, circulation of affect of fear, and embodied practices which navigate these norms and affects, using narratives from the field as well as theoretical insights from affectual and feminist geographers and urban theorists. This is followed by a discussion of the safety policy wherein I argue that the mainstream rhetoric of safety as security is a limiting framework in defining access to urban spaces and urban publics, as it actually works to restrict women's mobility and in turn, curbs their access to urban publics, re-enforcing an affective atmosphere of fear. I then argue that what we need instead of safety in order to ensure right to the city and civic and discursive participation for women is substantive freedoms and capabilities. Here, I bring in Martha Nussbaum's capability approach to argue that the dominant *mahaul* which breeds a fear of violence and risk severely impede women's capabilities and freedom, and in the process denies them right to participate in urban life.

1. Conceptualizing Affective Atmospheres

In chapter 1 and 2 we saw how there is no space for abandon and leisure in the city for women, especially at night because of an underlying fear and an overall '*mahaul',* where 'anything can happen'. In fact, several women across different field locations categorically stated that they do not step out at night, cut-shorting any further conversation on desire and leisure. Any question on why is night scary elicited similar responses about night being desolated, secluded, and unfamiliar and its *mahaul* being *kharab*. But the question remained – what is it that makes the night and its *mahaul* unsafe and non-conducive to women's access? In the first two chapters, we also saw how the Women Walk at Midnight collective is trying to shift this experience of the night. Walking in different neighbourhoods, with different women, and within different socio-political contexts meant that the experience of walking at night and how the bodies of women *felt* shifted or changed each time. This

was a result of a shifting assemblage of the neighbourhood's geography and *mahaul,* emerging socio-political context, and presence and absence of other people – iterant men on bikes and cars, sex workers in certain markets and red-lights, ice-cream vendors, auto rickshaw drivers, police vans, security guards and so on. What is noteworthy is that even after walking with women at midnight, repeatedly, in different neighbourhoods, several participants of WWAM admitted feeling alert or even scared at night, even as their notions of what is risky and what is not shifted over time. 'The alertness does not go away', as one woman stated. We also saw that the ability to take the risk to walk itself was made possible by access to certain social and material conditions.

Interviews with women across the three field sites also revealed how the fear of the night is accompanied by omnipresent narratives about how the night is a dangerous time, a time of evil and ghosts, and the circulation of advises and warnings about safety at night:

> "I have grown up with the same *nuskhe* and warnings that everyone else has. So, you imbibe the general notion of darkness and sun down and equate it with danger… Darkness hides things...Human beings are more alert at night because one entire faculty is taken away that is sight…You are always cautioned about the night, the dangers of the night, and how the night brings out the underbelly and darkness in people. It is like the lack of light gives the opportunity to people to behave in conniving, contriving, violent ways…There is a perception that people are worst versions of themselves at night. And you are a more vulnerable version of yourself. I definitely imbibed all that. And I am also afraid of ghosts [which] takes on several meanings. From the shadow of the tree to some sound to a constant fear of somebody opening the door. It is always unseen, unknown, it is a latent danger. Not an active one, because we cannot see it...Everything looks different at night. The city feels different at night. People's faces feel different at night…For me it was always a sense of '*what if*'. It is always possibility of violence rather than the violence itself. Violence also happens. But the anticipation is far more scary" (Mallika, WWAM, PI, October 2019, emphasis original)

During our interview, Mallika (34-years-old, WWAM) admitted with candour that she is afraid of darkness and of ghosts because it signifies the unknown and unseen. The 'possibility' of violence is scarier than actual violence because of the warnings she has received about the night. As a result, she is always alert and scared at night. Her narrative suggests that there is a certain quality of night which gives way to imagined and real pleasures, risks, and fears. The distribution of the sensible – what is seen and unseen, audible and inaudible, and perceptible and imperceptible shifts at night, impacting the established order and the overall *mahaul*. The fear of ghosts and unknown entities combined with threat and narratives of violence together make the night an unwelcome space. Another factor that makes night scarier for a lot of women is lack of people. Karishma and Seema from Kalyanpuri resettlement colony (Delhi) for example stated this several times that what makes the night scary for them is that it is desolated. Absence of people makes them believe that any untoward incident can happen and no one will be there to help. Neeta similarly explained:

"I do not go out after 5 or 6 pm. I feel scared that what if someone does something. [Like?] Rape and all. I feel very scared. Here the *mahaul* is such. Everything happens here openly. Eve-teasing (*chhed-chhad*) and all. I see that every day. And no one says anything…Every one comments, the moment you step out. So, it is best not to step out. I do not know about the rest of Delhi, but in this *basti* this is how it is. I have never stepped out at night. Because there are fewer people out and about at night, so anything can happen. *koi chhed de, kuch bol de*. Why take that risk?" (Neeta, 24-year-old, Kalyanpuri resident)

Thus, for Neeta similarly, it is the *possibility* of violence, violation, eve-teasing, and even rape that makes the night inaccessible. After weighing the risk of facing harassment, she decided to not step out after night fall at all. As I will argue in this chapter, it is the 'sticky association' of danger, fear, and violence with night, secluded streets and desolated areas, and between memories of violence or harassment and certain kind of spaces – spatial and temporal, that makes the idea of leisure at night and accessing public spaces freely at night a scary proposition. Night is also strongly associated with morality and honour. Time and again, politicians, government officials, and police officers have raised questions on a woman's moral character for stepping out at night and 'inviting trouble'. In fact, as recently as January 2021, a National Woman Commission member shamed a rape victim for stepping out late at night[36]. During my M.Phil. field work as well, several police officers and constables – male and female – had expressed that women from 'good households' do not step out late at night as 'night is a time for *nishachars'* (nocturnal beings). Some respondents had even victim-blamed Jyoti Singh (Nirbhaya gang-rape victim) for being out at night to watch a movie. This assemblage of night space is then held together not only by amplification of instances of violence at night and a narrative of fear, but also by norms around morality and official state policing.

According to Williams (2008), night spaces are socially mediated. Williams builds upon and departs from Lefebvre's conceptualization of 'night time spaces' as spaces where 'day's prohibitions give way to profitable pseudo-transgressions' (cited in Williams 2008, 515). Instead, he seeks to theoretically frame night within a **socio-spatial-theoretical framework** in order to explore the social and political control as well as resistance at night through counter-hegemonic practices. He demonstrates how night and darkness deterritorializes or destabilises the society, and how the society re-territorializes the night through surveillance and lights. In doing so, Williams spatialises time and temporalizes space in order to fully understand night's relationship with social order and disorder. As conversations cited above indicate, darkness indeed has been associated with supposedly harmful behaviours. With faculty of sight taken away, night hides something, and threatens the rational order

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[36] "'Badaun Rape Victim Shouldn't Have Gone Out Late, Alone': Women's Commission Member". 8 Jan 2021. The Wire. https://thewire.in/women/badaun-rape-victim-shouldnt-have-gone-out-late-alone-womens-commission-member (accessed Jan 11, 2021)

of the society. It has come to be associated with darkness, risk, and unruly elements. This darkness however also allows the possibility of transgression and anonymity, criminality and love, rebellion and non-normative behaviours -- things otherwise not possible during the day (Williams 2008, 518). However, night is also 'reterritorialized', argues Williams, and social control is reimposed through strategies of surveillance – cameras, observation post, police vans, street lights, security guards, and so on. This gaze deployed by surveillance techniques becomes internalised and pervasive and we comply with norms and social codes we are expected to comply with even in the absence of overt surveillance and panoptican tools and strategies. Simultaneously, the night provides an opportunity to defy these social codes, an opportunity to not be 'seen', surveilled, or gazed at because of the darkness. This opens up the possibility for transgressions and subcultural behaviours otherwise deemed inappropriate by society.

In Kalyanpuri (Chapter 5), several young and middle-aged women stated that they do not step out for leisure even during the day because the '*mahaul'* is '*kharab'* (bad). This is attributed to gambling in parks, public harassment, crime, and because of explicit curfews imposed by older women on younger women. In chapter 5, we saw that such decisions on where to go, when, with whom and so on are informed by women's past experiences, memories, and common or shared knowledge of threat of violence, recurrent narratives of violent crimes, rumours of kidnapping and elopements, notions of respectability and morality, and assumptions about the darkness and risk. Built environment like street lights, functional public infrastructure, access to justice system, leisure spaces conducive to open access etc. itself do little to facilitate access. At the same time, we saw that women do find ways to navigate the urban terrain through a combination of tactics to ensure their safety and navigate risks. Women and young girls carry pens in their hands while walking down a crowded road and are careful of how they dress, always alert on who is passing them by from behind. Young women gather at local community centres or find leisure in running errands together, while middle-aged and older women sit in the gullies, cots, platforms, and rooftops to form intimate bonds and 'pass their time'.

In Khaliyai Mandi in Agra, we saw that women do not access the riverbank as a leisure space because of gambling and an unconducive *mahaul*, they do not step out at night, sometimes not even go to school, and do not go to parks or leisure spaces alone because of the possibility of transgression by love and rumours of love jihad. One woman in Khaliyai Mandi told me her daughter does not go to school because 'she is afraid of crossing the bridge over the river alone'. The bridge, as I discovered, is scary not only because it has no pedestrians and is inadequately lit, but also because several young women have jumped off the bridge in the past after they got involved in '*galat kaam'* (wrong activities). This, as I later discovered, was an allusion to love affairs with men that the family did not

approve of. 'Crossing the bridge' then meant not merely a literal act but also a metaphorical one. The fear in Khaliyai Mandi is then not merely of the unknown and of violence but also of transgression. This fear was expressed to me in terms of fear that their 'daughters will lose their way' (captured in the phrase, '*bhatak jayegi*'), fall in love with 'inappropriate men', and cross the boundaries of caste and religion placed on them. To avoid this, women and young girls are stopped from accessing public spaces and leisure opportunities, apparently in the interest of their own safety.

Such explicit sanctions placed by family members on young girls work along with implicit and deeply internalised sanctions to restrict women's mobility and participation in urban life. Notions of being a 'good girl' from a 'good household' and responsibility of upholding the family's honour and morality further entrench these sanctions and restrictions. Often, I heard the phrase, '*achhe ghar ki ladkiyan aise kharab mahaul mei bahar nahi jati*' (girls from good households do not step out in such bad *mahaul*). However, participants found it difficult to define this '*mahaul*', what is it and what makes it bad, suggesting to us its non-representable affective quality. At the time of editing this chapter, news was coming in regarding how a Muslim teenaged boy in Bijnor, UP, was jailed for going out for pizza with a Dalit girl under the newly promulgated anti-love-jihad and anti-conversion law in the state[37]. Leisure is then suspect because it is an opportunity to find love and transgress boundaries upheld by the society. Ironically called the '*pyar ki nagri*' (city of love*)*, the *mahaul* in Agra instead breeds a fear of love. Further, eve-teasing and public sexual harassment is rampant and even more acute in Agra than Delhi but underreported and underplayed, because the onus of sexual harassment is placed on women, as evident in the oft-repeated phrase, '*hum sahi toh sab sahi* (See Chapter 4)*.* If women are eve-teased or harassed, and decide to complain about it, they are faced with questions regarding their own whereabouts and friendships. Finally, if leisure is a risky proposition in Agra, leisure at night is almost an impossibility.

Mahaul then is infused with multiple meanings and is not static. Often when the research participants talked about *mahaul,* they alluded to a place's affective quality and circumstances. The Oxford Hindi-English dictionary defines *mahaul* as a mood, atmosphere, or environment that changes[38]. Understood this way, what is noteworthy is that *mahaul* can change. It deteriorates and improves. Further, *mahaul* is not shaped by infrastructure alone. Instead, it is shaped by a combination of factors - infrastructure, materiality, memories that people have, and their actual embodied

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[37] Ananya Bhardwaj, "UP Muslim teen meets Dalit girl for Pizza outing, lands in jail under anti-conversion law." December 23, 2020. The Print. https://theprint.in/india/up-muslim-teen-meets-dalit-girl-for-pizza-outing-lands-in-jail-under-anti-conversion-law/572473/ (accessed Jan 7, 2021)

[38] Accessed from Digital Dictionaries of South Asia. Link: https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/mcgregor_query.py?qs=महौल&searchhws=yes&matchtype=exact (last accessed on November 10, 2021)

experiences. It generates certain 'affects' and can be moral, educational, safe, unsafe, endearing or risky which in turn facilitates or curtails certain activities. In that case, ***mahaul* perhaps can mostly accurately be translated as 'affective atmosphere' or a socio-spatial assemblage of norms-practices-affect-materiality.** However, what is affect? And how does affect encompass aspects of infrastructure, memories, and embodied experiences?

Drawing from affectual geographers and feminist geographers such as Pile (2010), Thein (2005), Degen and Rose (2012) and Ahmed (2004, 2010, 2014), I understand affect as a transpersonal capacity of the body. It is relational, subjective and inter-subjective. It is corporeal i.e., related to the body and yet non-representational. In other words, it is a sensory field which is not always representable, identifiable and consciously articulated (Pile 2010; Miller and Laketa 2019). More importantly for us, as Ahmed argues (2004) affect works by circulation and accumulation over both time and space. It does not reside in one object or subject but is shaped by contact between bodies and objects, and bodies and spaces, even though particular histories might make it *seem* that it resides in particular objects or subjects. Understood this way, night-space is then not inherently scary, nor are public parks, but certain histories lead to sticking of certain emotions with certain spaces. Let us look at Sara Ahmed's conceptualization more closely to unpack this claim.

According to Sara Ahmed (2004), affect exists on the boundaries between bodies and the world. She shows how affects or emotions such as fear and hatred are generated when different figures stick or adhere together. These emotions move sideways and backwards, they circulate, and expand via circulation. Affect then works like capital: it 'does not reside positively in the signs or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation' (Ahmed 2004, 120). In other words, it is a result of circulation and accumulation of affective value between objects and signs: 'the more they circulate, the more affective they become, and the more they appear to "contain" affect' (ibid). In such affective economies, emotions accumulate over time and accrue more value. One of the ways in which this happens is through temporal proximity and repetition of sticky words and language. To exemplify this, she points to the recurrent use of 'refugees' and 'swamped' together in headlines in UK with reference to asylum seekers invoking a sense of intrusion by large number of unwanted elements. To use an example closer to home, we see use of 'naxalites' and 'infested' together in politics and media narratives in India, invoking a similar sensation. In these cases, as Ahmed writes, 'words generate effects: they create impressions of others as those who have invaded the space of the nation, threatening its existence' (Ahmed 2004, 122). In the process, hate circulates between bodies, differentiating some from others. She then uses this model of hate and circulation of hate between bodies to conceptualise

and understand fear. She argues that fear is about that 'which is approaching rather than already there'. Fear is not contained in one object, but is in a relationship with the object, and is heightened by an object's approach. Think about night. Is night intrinsically scary? Is it the approach of night or darkness that invokes fear? Or is it the sticky and repetitive association of night with danger and risk that makes it scary?

Importantly, Ahmed argues, the movement of fear is shaped by multiple histories or she puts it, 'fear opens up past histories that stick to the present' (Ahmed 2004, 126). **Objects thus become or come across as fearsome because of circulation of signs of fear and a history that sticks**. Fear does not reside in the subject or the object but circulates. It slides between bodies, objects, and signs, sticking temporarily to certain bodies. One can likewise argue that the **affective atmosphere or *mahaul* gets constructed as bad, *kharab*, and scary when certain feelings of fear and threat get 'stuck' to certain hours of the night or certain physical spaces such as certain parks through particular histories and narratives of violence.** These perceptions of fear and safety then determine women's decisions about mobility and how they navigate and experience urban space (See for example Valentine 1992; Pain 1997; Boni and Rose 2003). News about brutal rape cases, bolstered and repeated through voyeuristic media coverage becomes a reason to advise women to stay inside homes and restrict their access to the city, discounting the risks and cases of assault that happen inside homes. Fear then sticks and circulates. Notions of 'fear' of violence and feeling scared was a recurrent theme that emerged throughout the field work for this project. It was obvious and palpable in utterances such as '*darr toh lagta hi hai*' (of course one feels scared) and '*kuch bhi ho sakta hai*' (anything can happen). Fear in fact emerged as a prime characteristic of the '*mahaul*' of urban public space in several interviews. See for example:

> "Whenever I step out here in the city, I feel scared. There is some fear inside me…people also warn us – to be careful, to be alert. *Gharwale* also tell me – do not go here, do not go there. *Kuch ho gaya toh* (what if something happens)…There is a *khaunf* (terror). What is someone catches hold of me, makes me smell something and I lose my consciousness. Then what? This *khaunf* came from things I heard, saw, some things that happened… *Darr* (fear) is deeply settled inside me…And see you also get to know when someone is looking at you, following you, touching you in that way…So I maintain distance." (Seema, 22-years-old, Kalyanpuri, PI, September 2019).

Here we see not just a circulation of fear but a premonition of harm. Seema is thus scared in public spaces and so she maintains her distance and avoids certain spaces and times. This deeply engrained fear got built through constant circulation of warnings as well as personal and collective experiences. I notice that she uses the word '*khaunf*' (terror) in addition to '*darr*' (fear). I also notice that her narrative was broken, full of pauses, jumps, and reflections. She articulated a premonition of harm – *kuch ho gaya toh*. What this suggests to us that the affect or emotion that is circulating is not

just fear, but also perhaps, hatred towards women, and an atmosphere which 'terrorizes' women, which the women sense and react to.

Mallika, a 34-year-old theatre artist who has lived in middle class and upper middle-class neighbourhoods in Delhi and started Women Walk at Midnight collective, similarly shared at length how her experience of the city has been mediated by fear, harassment, and a premonition of harm. Because of her embodied experiences of facing harassment in public buses during college, she started associating certain bus routes with a feeling of being violated, feeling unsafe, and memory of molestation. This feeling stayed with her even after a decade and disallowed her abandon and carelessness. As she put it, 'as a woman, I can never not be alert, I simply do not have the abandon with which men can sit or walk in a public space in Delhi'. With time, she found ways to negotiate fear, carefully weighing her risks, desires, and purpose to make decisions on how to navigate the city. At times, she drapes a dupatta around herself, being acutely aware of the gaze on her body. Other times, she avoids going out at night alone, because she is scared of the possibility of assault or robbery or anything else, captured in the oft used phrase – '*kuch bhi ho sakta hai*'. However, in our discussions she also moved from '*kuch ho gaya toh*' (what if something happens) to '*kuch ho bhi gaya toh kya*' (even if something happens, then so what) – a journey not many women make; a journey that I, as a researcher on women's safety and freedom, has not made, with our bodies still being deeply tied to notions of dignity and bodily integrity. This is perhaps because she is able to make a difference between fear that is 'passed onto us by others' (sic), and fear that is shaped by our own experiences. She navigates this fear by taking 'different risks on different days' (PI, October 2019).

Let us go back to the case study of Women walk at midnight to also remind us of the shifting *mahaul* at night. As we saw in chapters 1 and 2, the experience and 'affect' of walking at midnight varied immensely with the neighbourhood of the walk, the social and political context at the time of the walk, the number of people who walked and so on. Some walks like those in Dwarka and Munirka were described as 'liberating', 'safe', 'joyful', and 'fun' due to a significant number of women joining from local areas, familiarity with the walking route, and the overall 'mood' of the walk. Walks on landmark days like Nirbhaya anniversary (16 December), Women's day (8 March) and Independence day (15 August) felt safer. Most women who participated in 16 December and 14 August walks recalled feeling confident, invincible, free, and joyous: 'The feeling changes – we walk with *chaud',* one woman exclaimed when discussing these particular walks. '*Walking with chaud'*, literally translated as walking widely. On symbolic days, we walked with our bodies at ease, arms relaxed on our sides. Our bodies occupied the space more freely, as opposed to walking with alertness, with arms on our chest. Some walks like those in Shahdara and Vasant Kunj were remembered as scary and

punctured with hypervigilance due to lesser number of participants, unfamiliar areas, or presence of groups of men on otherwise secluded streets. In these cases, we walked close together, and were alert of each passing bike and car, making careful mental notes of number plates and our surroundings. Walking with WWAM for a year also changed my own relationship with the night, as it did of several other women. The walks served to demystify the night for participating women and made them reflect on how unsafe they otherwise feel.

Studies around women's experience of fear in public space or gendered geographies of fear emerged in 1980s and 1990s, the most prominent of them being Valentine (1989) and Pain (1997). Valentine[39] argued that women often develop extensive mental maps of places that are fearful or places where one might face assault through a combination of their past experiences and information relayed to them through family, parents, or other women in the form of advises or warnings, and media reports and images circulating about violence (Valentine 1989, 386). Seen through the lens of affect, this fear sticks, circulates, and accumulates. Delhi gained the ill-reputation of being rape capital due to constant circulation of incidents of rape and sexual violence in media, especially after the 2012 gangrape incident and subsequent Nirbhaya protests, which in turn exacerbated the fear women had about public space in Delhi. Valentine further argues that young girls are also 'socialised into a restricted use of public space' through the fears their parents articulate for them vis-à-vis certain places and times and restrictions on mobility and spatial access that are placed on them in comparison to boys. Fear thus not just moves sideways, but also backwards in time, through certain histories and memories. Others like Pain (1997) have similarly mapped women's geographies of fear of violent crimes to argue how geographies of fear impose constraints on women's mobilities and use of urban space, and how spaces get constructed into 'safe' and 'dangerous'. Undoubtedly, fear of violent attack is one of the most significant constraints that determine women's freedom of movement and mobility in cities. It translates to virtual curfews regarding not stepping out after certain time after which it is perceived to be risky or dangerous, not stepping out alone, a persistent state of hypervigilance when navigating urban spaces, and deployment of a range of tactics to cope with the risks. As we saw in this research study, these tactics include avoiding secluded areas, not wearing certain type of clothes or make-up to avoid attention, avoiding eye-contact, covering certain body parts, staying on the phone when walking on the road, avoiding certain places and times altogether, and slouching and covering their breasts with their hands or a bag when walking in public spaces to 'avoid' harassment. **These strategies are based on advices women have received from those around them, from dominant norms around**

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[39] Valentine's work is seminal for highlighting the spatial aspect of fear that women develop of public spaces.

femininity, safety, and respectability, narratives on what is safe and unsafe and their own embodied experiences.

Sidra, a 26-year-old assistant manager at a state bank, born, brought up and now working in Agra, for example told me that she always tries to be back home by 8-8:30 pm, otherwise her parents worry. She has never been out at night alone in Agra because she feels uncomfortable and unsafe after 9 pm, a feeling, she acknowledges, that is deeply engrained in her without a clear reason. If she is returning home after 8-8.30 pm, she makes sure not to take a desolated road and informs a friend about her whereabouts. Even though driving her own scooter gives her a sense of control, she remains tense and alert throughout the journey, until she reaches home. Other women from small towns also articulated how having a personal vehicle like a bicycle or scooter when they were in school and college enabled them to enjoy freedom of mobility in their cities, albeit with caution. For example, Sasmita from Bhubeshwar recalled that 'having a scooty as a teenager gave her a lot of confidence to break rules, to be out till 10 pm, and not be dependent on anyone because she knew she could reach home on her own', though she always made sure her scooty always had a full tank, reminding us once again of the strategies women continue to adopt to navigate the city (WWAM hangout, November 2018). What is notable for us is how such experiences, feelings of fear, and the constant need to stay vigilant in public spaces is what shapes women's relationship with the city and its public spaces, instead of leisure, discursive participation, and abandon. In a meet-up organized by WWAM for women to talk about their relationship with the night and public spaces, participants also recalled instances of unknown men masturbating in front of their houses or colleges, and instances of being catcalled or groped in public transport, and how such experiences made them feel unwelcome in public spaces in general. As one participant put it, 'those experiences stay with you and gradually you start believing that you are unwelcome outside the confines of your house'.

32-year-old Sasmita for example shared how when she first came to Delhi, she was scared because of the constant narrative of how unsafe the city is, and the instances that have happened like Nirbhaya. As she put it, 'you are scared because something happened to someone else' (WWAM Meet-up, November 2019). For similar reasons, Eeshta (Vasant Kunj resident, 24 years old) shared that she feels safer in a city like Bangalore than in Delhi (which is her hometown) precisely because she does not know enough about Bangalore and does not have the same framework of fear and knowledge of incidents, as opposed to Delhi where she knows about a lot of incidents that have happened with her friends or acquaintances (PI, October 2019). Similarly, Seema (Kalyanpuri resident, 22-years-old) feels more unsafe in Delhi than in Bangalore, though her reasons are different – she feels policed and constrained by her family in Delhi whereas in Bangalore she feels 'safe and free'. However, these

narratives and experiences vary immensely. For 25-year-old Abhi, who grew up in Bangalore, Delhi is a much safer city, a city where she feels freer and through WWAM, also walks at night – something that she never did in Bangalore. In fact, she never steps out in Bangalore at night without her family. This indicates that the narratives of threat of violence are combined by each individual's own experiences of a space and meaning-making as well as policing by family and society that determine how safe and free they feel.

According to Pain (1997), such constraints and experiences emerging out of fear of violence leads to deeply engrained and socialized behaviours about everyday life. This was reflected in the present study in the form of oft-repeated phrases by women such as '*hum sahi toh sab sahi*' (if we are good, then everything is good) and proud assertions such as 'women of our household do not step out':

> "I do not think the city is safe. That is why do not let my daughters go out. Riots break out instantly. Someone says something and it escalates. Anything can happen…If two drunkards are standing, I feel scared even passing them by. What if they catch hold of my hand, and do something, the fear is there…And people also talk. My daughters I growing up now. If I make them run any outdoor errands, people say my daughters roam around outside. So, they do not step out. They do not even *want* to step out…*Mahaul* is also such." (Ruksana, 36-year-old, Khaliyai Mandi, Agra, PI, November 2019)

> "All this happens a lot in Delhi. Not here…Our daughters and daughters-in-law do not step out. Also see, *hum sahi toh sab sahi*." (Mrs. Chaudhury, 60-years-old, Khaliyai Mandi, Agra, PI, October 2019)

What these narratives also suggest is that while Sarah Ahmed's work is important to understand how affect sticks and circulates, and the role of particular histories and recurrent narratives in amplifying certain affects, it is also important to take into account other factors when unpacking 'affective atmospheres' or *mahaul*. Feminist geographers like Thien (2005) and Degen and Rose (2012) have made important interventions in affectual geographies to argue for **the role of emotional subjectivities, everyday practices enacted in physical spaces, and past memories in determining how affect works** and urge us to pay attention to specific assemblages of bodies-practices-infrastructure. Work by geographers like Degen et al (2010) and Miller (2014) brings to focus the intersection between subjectivity, affect, body, and infrastructure and how that is constitutive of everyday space.

According to Degen et al (2010), the physicality of the city and our everyday embodied life both interact to shape our experience in the city. In other words, they argue that the experiential fabric is constituted both by (i) physical, technological and material texture of the city and the design of the material or built environments; and (ii) corporeality, bodies, and everyday embodied life of people. While ANT studies emphasize more on the former, Degen et al (2010) draw our attention to the latter and explore how bodies exert agency via practices in urban environment. According to the authors,

people are 'affected' by the materiality in variable degrees and this variability is a result of their own agency, purposes, worldviews and as they argued in another paper (Rose et al. 2010), their past memories and experiences. Their findings regarding varying practices of different individuals in the same urban built environment 'contradict some of Latour's assumptions that as the body engages repeatedly with the world, it keeps learning to be affected' (2010, 68). According to Latour, our bodies learn to be affected in certain ways by the built environment around us (for example – it learns fear, alertness etc.) Degen et al (2010) however suggest that this affect is variable and is shaped by the practices adopted by individuals. Affect is then not static, but is a result of our practices and memories of those practices. **In the case of women's relationship with urban spaces, even though fear sticks due to recurrent narratives and experiences, this 'affect' of fear and alertness and consequently the affective atmosphere or *mahaul* can vary, change, and be subverted with varying practices and experiences. In this vein, one can argue that collectives and actions like Women Walk at Midnight, Why Loiter, and Meet to Sleep have a strong potential to change the affective atmosphere of the city and of the night, by replacing fear and risk with familiarity, fun, solidarity, and endearment. The practices or the activities** undertaken by such collectives, and their recurrence becomes important, because they **can transform subjectivity**, or what Degen et al (2010: 73) call 'embodied awareness' which in turn mediates the ways in which built environment affects the body. Similarly, everyday practices and tactics adopted by women to find spaces and opportunities for leisure and community in the gullies, rooftops, and courtyards also (re)shape the affective atmosphere. Practices are the 'switch-point between bodies and built environment' (ibid: 73). Because these practices are multiple and varied, the embodied awareness or subjectivity and the ways in which bodies are effectuated is varied and diverse. Affectual encounters thus exceed affects created by built environments and a place's spatial technologies[40]. This insight is the most important take-away from the literature on affect and feminist geography.

Drawing from this literature and the ethnography conducted for this study, I argue that '*mahaul*' or affective atmosphere is a combined result of (i) norms and codes of behaviours, (ii) circulation of affect through recurrent narratives and histories, (iii) embodied practices and experiences, and (iv) built environment and dominant policy discourse of safety and security-oriented solutions like CCTVs. *Mahaul* is a socio-spatial formation, and varies with social context, spatial context, and various other elements. More importantly, it is ephemeral, loose, and contingent. **It can shift with shifts in one or more of these elements**. In other words, affective atmosphere or *mahaul*

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[40] To further understand this, see Jacob Miller's 2012 excellent theorization of 'Malls without stores' which draws from Delueze and Guttari's 'bodies without organs' theorization.

is located in specific materialities, practices, and dominant narratives and norms, and social and geographical context which is culturally contingent and cumulative (Shaw 2014). **Together, social norms, embodied practices, histories and memories, infrastructure, and policy environment, invokes certain affects and form an assemblage of affective atmosphere or *mahaul* which determines the urban order.** While we have discussed the first three elements in detail, I will now turn my attention to the fourth element – built environment and the dominant policy discourse of safety and security that plays a fundamental role in shaping this *mahaul*.

2. Safe/Unsafe: Policy and Infrastructure

While it is important to analyse the dominant norms, narratives, practices and experiences in shaping urban order and affective atmosphere, we also need to bring it into conversation with **policy narratives, planning logics, and resultant built environment** in order to understand its repercussions for democracy, public sphere, and citizenship for women. Several scholars have written about the relationship between built environment and experience of everyday life (for example Setha Low 1995) and about assemblages of body-practice-environment (Degen, Rose and Basdas 2010). More recent works by scholars like Miller and Laketa (2019) underline for the role of politics of built environment and architectural design along with situated embodied subjectivities and social differences (or what they call 'geographies of difference') in shaping affect. Others like Desai et al (2018) have examined the relationship between gender, poverty, residential location, city's structure, and public spaces to argue how urban planning and design leads to women-unsafety. They attribute this to hostile local environments shaped by absence of women-friendly street corners and infrastructure like streetlights, as well as through macro or city-level socio-spatial formations which adversely affect women's social and economic lives and mobility in the city.

The Indian state's response to a culture of fear and violence has been an over-emphasis on safety and security, so much so that now safety has become the overarching logic that determines women's access to any public space. 'Women's safety' has become a clarion call, and the all-encompassing solution to gaping gender disparity and denial of equal access to public space to women. Especially since the 2012 gang-rape case and the subsequent protests (Nirbhaya agitation), political parties have included 'women's safety' in their election manifestoes, speeches, and rhetoric through infrastructural interventions such as installation of close circuit television (CCTV) cameras and street lights. Citizen groups and organizations like Jagori have also come forward demanding safety for women in public spaces. The messaging on women's safety and protection is ubiquitous in Delhi, with government information and campaign material on the subject slapped across Delhi buses, metros, and

autorickshaws. The Delhi government has undertaken several initiatives for women's safety. Some of these initiatives are installation of CCTVs in public places, installation of panic buttons in buses, and introducing 'bus marshals' to be placed in all government run buses in Delhi. Even the courts have not left any stone unturned to fuel this narrative of safety and has given out instructions to the Delhi government to deploy female constables in plain clothes in different parts of Delhi, fill police vacancies to strengthen the force, utilize Nirbhaya fund, and take other necessary steps to make Delhi 'crime free' for women.[41] Many of these steps are laudable and necessary.

In 2014, the Delhi government also launched a 'safe Delhi' campaign along with Women's Commission of Delhi (WCD) to enhance state accountability towards women's safety in public spaces. The key achievements reported on WCD's website[42] under this campaign include passing of orders to remove jurisdictional barriers for complainants of gender-based violence, self-defense trainings in schools and colleges, training of 1500 marshals to be deployed in DTC buses, maintenance of street lights and installation of lights in 40,000 dark spots (as found in a study by UN Women and Safetipin), identification of crime hotspots and installation of CCTVs and intensive patrolling in those areas, setting up of women help desks and support centres, and panic buttons on smart phones[43]. In the 2020 assembly election manifesto, AAP further reiterated the same promises as catch-all solutions to women's access to public space[44]. In some campaigns, men and boys have also been made part of the discussion, albeit in very limited ways. For example, the AAP-led Delhi government asked all male students of schools to take a pledge to behave well with girls[45]. The nature of this action is itself tokenistic with little action or effort towards long-term behaviour change. For improving safety of women in public transport, the government also promised to install CCTVs, panic buttons and GPS devices on existing DTC buses, without explaining how the data so collected will be used. In a conference titled 'Safety for She' (November 2019) organized by a few NGOs to discuss policy issues related to women's safety, Kailash Gehlot, Delhi Minister for Transport proudly declared that 'Delhi is going to be the city with largest number of cameras, and each street will be under surveillance. New

[41] 'Delhi HC lists out steps for women's safety.' *Economic Times.* November 30, 2019. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/delhi-hc-lists-out-steps-for-womens-safety/hcs-suggests-slew-of-directions/slideshow/72305623.cms (accessed July 20, 2020)

[42] 'Delhi Safe Cities Program.' Department of Women and Child Development. GNCT Delhi. http://www.wcddel.in/UN_Women_4SafeCiti.html Accessed July 20, 2020.

[43] 'Three important initiatives on women's safety conceptualized by the WCD Ministry to be launched tomorrow.' Press Information bureau. Feb 18, 2019. https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1565108 (accessed July 20, 2020)

[44] Soni Mishra. 'AAP Manifesto promises women safety, better healthcare.' The Week. February 4, 2020. https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/02/04/aap-manifesto-promises-women-safety-better-healthcare.html (accessed July 20, 2020).

[45] 'Delhi government in 2019: Arvind Kejriwal doled out freebies, worked towards ensuring women's safety.' Financial Express. Jan 4, 2020. https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/delhi-government-in-2019-arvind-kejriwal-doled-out-freebies-worked-towards-ensuring-womens-safety/1812774/ (accessed July 20, 2020)

buses are equipped with 3-4 CCTVs and a panic button which will send an immediate message to transport centre or command centre of Delhi police in a bid to make buses secure by creating deterrence.' He also added that providing bus marshals in buses has already stopped eve-teasing and pick-pocketing on several routes. However, when asked who will be monitoring the data collected by CCTVs, and if these steps will lead to inadvertent moral policing and surveillance, he chose to not give an answer and simply dodged the question by saying 'no comments' (Personal Notes, Safety for She Conference, November 2019). Unfortunately, the entire policy narrative around safety is currently surveillance-centred. Often infrastructural components like CCTVs are outsourced to third party companies, with flimsy or absent laws on data protection. In the past, CCTV footage of couples collected by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) network has been leaked for voyeuristic ends[46]. Buses and metro stations are also spaces for romance for some couples, especially those who do not have any other space to be together due to strict social and family norms. Ubiquitous CCTVs then also take away this possibility and curtail women's access to public space with respect to romance.

As a result of this policy thrust, Delhi became one of the most surveilled cities in the world in 2021 with 1826 cameras per square mile, as per a report by Comparitech[47]. The Delhi government celebrated this news with aplomb[48]. Many commentators have however expressed concerns regarding this move towards hyper-surveillance. Most of these concerns are organized around three points – (i) invasion of privacy and absence of data protection laws, (ii) bias and gaps in technology, and (iii) effectiveness of CCTVs to enhance women's safety. In a particularly well-researched paper where the authors center data justice, Aayush Rathi and Ambika Tandon (2019) unpack the subjective experience of surveillance to argue how the gaze of CCTVs is mediated along the axes of class and gender. More importantly, they bring fore the questions of data ownership and privacy concerns regarding CCTVs. In their work they also discover how "video surveillance...is used to enforce cultural behavioural norms by punishing deviance' and removing 'expectation of (any) privacy' in public spaces (2019, 14). Urban citizens do not have the right o disengage from surveillance systems (Rathi and Tandon 2019). Another recent paper by Jai Vipra (2021) at Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy[49] highlights how predictive policing and reliance on CCTVs and facial recognition technology in Delhi can disproportionately target

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[46] Saurav Barman. "Delhi metro orders probe as footage featuring couple is leaked." The Indian Express. August 3, 2019. Another instance – "Another MMS of couple at metro station surfaces." The Hindustan Times. July 24, 2013.
[47] Paul Bischoff. "Surveillance Camera Statistics: Which cities ave the most cctv cameras." Comparitech. May 17, 2021. Link: https://www.comparitech.com/vpn-privacy/the-worlds-most-surveilled-cities/ (last accessed November 1, 2021)
[48] Sarah Khan. "Is Delhi's heavy surveillance making women safer?". The Diplomat. Oct 16, 2021. Link https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/is-delhis-heavy-surveillance-making-women-safer/ (last accessed November 13, 2021). Also see: "Delhi tops in World Cities in terms of CCTVs per sq. mile: CM". The Hindu. August 27, 2021.
[49] Link: https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Use-of-Facial-Recognition-Technology-for-Policing-in-Delhi-compressed.pdf

Muslims due to inherent biases. Others have questioned the effectiveness of CCTVs and underlined the lack of studies linking CCTVs and prevention of crimes against women. Even when they are functional, CCTVs are 'responsive' in nature i.e., they help in post-facto solving of crime rather than preventing crime. There have also been concerns about real-time and effective monitoring of cameras, patchy recording, and functionality and maintenance of equipment. In such a scenario, as Ashali Bhandari writes, it is important to question the 'dependency on digital infrastructure to solve socio-technical challenges' such as women's safety in cities[50]. Furthermore, as we saw above, women's experience of urban space is mediated by the *possibility* of crime, everyday sexual harassment and a certain *mahaul*.

In this context, commentators and urban planners have been demanding a shift towards a rights-based approach to enhance women's access to city through women empowerment and development of built environment that facilitates access and inclusive public spaces (Bhandari 2021). Urban planners have pushed for mixed land use, 'eyes on the street', well-lit streets and neighbourhoods, walkable streets, and designing cities from the women's perspective. Sonali Vyas for example, who is the program head at Safetipin, argues that cities should be made 'safer by design' through enabling infrastructure such as last mile connectivity, proper lighting, and a proper redressal mechanism[51]. In light of concerns of privacy and data protection, collectives like The Internet Freedom have urged the Women and Child Development Ministry to 'reconsider its decision to invest massive resources in large scale video surveillance projects and consider supporting alternatives such as street lighting, better civic amenities for women, counselling facilities, gender sensitisation in educational institutions etc.' They argue that CCTV cameras should only be installed in areas where it is necessary, after conducting an assessment of likely harms and its impact on privacy, and within a statutory framework of data protection[52]. Rathi and Tandon (2019) similarly argue that it is important to institutionalize robust transparency and accountability measures for use of CCTVs as well as period appraisal of all such datafication initiatives. As they rightly point, more often than not, it is the 'mythologisation' of CCTVs as an all-encompassing solution that drives political and public support for CCTVs and not their actual use and impact. Steps therefore need to be taken for synchronisation of efforts within law enforcement departments for better use of CCTVs.

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[50] Ashali Bhandari. "Feminist perspectives on space, safety and surveillance: improving a woman's right to the city." The Wire. Mar 8, 2021. https://thewire.in/women/feminist-perspectives-on-space-safety-and-surveillance-improving-a-womans-right-to-the-city

[51] Sarah Khan. "Is Delhi's heavy surveillance making women safer?". The Diplomat. Oct 16, 2021.

[52] https://internetfreedom.in/women-deserve-both-privacy-and-safety/

This critical literature on CCTVs and securitisation notwithstanding, some of the efforts by the Delhi government are perhaps laudatory and well-intentioned. However, invariably, they put the onus on of safety on women – to report crime, to learn self-defense, to press panic buttons (and to panic), to stay alert, to be careful, to avoid risks, to take precautions, and to only access places with sufficient lighting and CCTVs. As Meher Soni (2016) argues, these 'solutions' actually put the responsibility of being safe *on* women, it makes it her responsibility to be hyper-alert in public space and press a panic button in a bus or on a phone when in danger[53]. These policies do little to address the socio-spatial formations that yield feelings of 'unsafety' and fear in the first place. More problematically, in mainstream policy discourse, women's safety has largely been reduced to 'security' and 'surveillance'. In several press conferences and PR activities, the AAP-led Delhi government has overwhelmingly equated increased CCTVs and securitisation with enhancement of women's safety[54].

When I asked women what makes them feel safe or unsafe in the city, and what can the government do to facilitate safety, many of them questioned this over-emphasis on CCTVs. For example, for residents of Kalyanpuri like Karishma and Vinita, CCTVs hold little value and do nothing to prevent crime, and neither does the police. In fact, Karishma stated that the presence of police makes her even more scared because the police always tends to place the onus of safety on women:

> "I do not know about CCTVs. Criminals will not spare the CCTVs either. They will cover the cameras, or break them, or cover their own faces…and police does not support us either. In fact, if police is there, I feel even more scared. The police themselves think that girls should not step out. They ask us to be careful with our purse and phones. But it is their duty to make us feel safe. They instead warn and alert us. If you go to them with a case, they do not listen. They just take bribes." (PI, September 2019)

Other respondents similarly dismissed the efficacy of CCTVs and argued that 'unless the people change and the *mahaul* changes, these measures will have little effect'. By people, perhaps they mean the experiences of their own bodies which are deeply entangled with practices of other bodies. For example, for Seema, a 22-year-old resident of Kalyanpuri, Delhi unless people and attitude of the police changes, no amount of infrastructural intervention will make her feel safe. She stated:

> "People have to change. And police has to change. If we complain to police about street-harassment, the police says, 'the guy must know you; you might be in a relationship with him; or have some past animosity.' The police instead raises all these questions and accuses us…They take bribes…And in Kalyanpuri, even if you will put CCTVs here, people will smash them. Won't the hooligans and thieves find out about the cameras? They will and then they will destroy them." (PI, September 2019)

Similarly, for Rekha, a 34-year-old lawyer from Allahabad who is practicing law in Delhi, interventions such as provision of CCTVs and GIS tracking have little value for her, because 'they do

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[53] Meher Soni. "Rethinking the Challenge of Women's Safety in Indian cities." ORF Online. October 20, 2016. https://www.orfonline.org/research/womens-safety-in-indias-cities/ (accessed July 20, 2020).
[54] https://www.shethepeople.tv/news/three-lakh-cctv-cameras-delhi-womens-safety/

nothing to prevent harassment, and only come in handy once a complaint has been registered and taken up for inquiry'. The latter, unfortunately, she stated, depends on the police force which is understaffed and discriminatory and instead questions women for being out at night to begin with. For her then, infrastructure is not the solution:

> "Giving me infrastructure is not going to make me safe. Infrastructure is last on that pyramid. If I have a guarantee that I will not be subjected to all that (harassment), then I will step out. You can say that you have installed a fountain and a CCTV, and that is why I should step out now but if four people are going to eve-tease me there, then I will not go, no matter what the infrastructure is." (PI, October 2019)

It is well-established that CCTVs do not reduce crime, they can only be used post-facto, after a crime has been committed, and even then, their efficacy is dependent on how the recording is used. They can instead lead to unwanted surveillance, further controlling women's mobility, a point underlined well by Mallika (34-year-old, WWAM):

> "What can CCTVs do? They do not make me feel safe. Instead, they put fear on me, that the camera is watching everything. It is not just looking at thieves, it is looking at everything. It is also looking at where am I going, when am I coming back. Everyone is getting surveilled. And which thief has run away because of a CCTV? He finds ways to circumvent it. It only perhaps helps later in solving crimes. But it is not a preventive measure." (PI, October 2019)

One infrastructural intervention that women do seem to agree upon is provision of street-lights at night. Karishma for example, stated that if parks and streets are well-lit, then she will not feel scared in accessing them, or going for a stroll even after dark. Then, she added, perhaps her parents will also allow her to go out. Otherwise, she would be scared – 'what if people abduct me? That fear is there!' (PI, September 2019). Mallika who lives in a largely upper middle-class neighbourhood of Vasant Kunj similarly stated that good lighting is helpful and so is more women on the streets. In addition, she also argued that active neighbourhoods and localised events which brings communities together and makes the night-atmosphere livelier will go a long way in changing the city:

> *"Good lighting always helps. A well-lit city feels like a safer city. There should not be too many dark dingy corners…Secondly, a lot more women on the streets will help… I also feel, as a policy, city has to be see, maybe once a month, an all-night something. Neighbourhoods have to be far more activated. Maybe an all-night fair (mela) in every neighbourhood, every month should happen. We need to cultivate that culture. Like old Delhi has a proper night life. There you will see women out on the streets at 12-1 am also."* (PI, October 2019)

Several policy initiatives on making cities safer for women have revolved around installation of street lights and CCTVs, perhaps in a bid to control the night-space, and regain the sight or visibility that darkness takes away. According to R. Williams (2008), governments, private players, and communities always try to 'reterritorialize' the night to better control it. This is achieved through three strategies - channelling and illumination which determines which places are 'appropriate', safe or respectable at night; marginalization and night-time curfews to keep people in check at night; and

exclusion and spatial segregation by creating barriers and protected enclaves (like gated societies). Together, these strategies implement the social codes of conduct as an 'explicit set of spatial practices and discourses' to ensure 'safety and security'. This re-territorialization results in night spaces which are gendered, classed, racialized and sexualized. In the process, some areas are left on their own, which permits what Lefebvre calls 'pseudo transgressions' – activities which are otherwise deemed illegal or immoral to emerge (for example, sex work soliciting and cruising is informally permitted in certain areas of Delhi at night as observed during night walks in some areas of Hauz Khas and Dwarka). This is accompanied by 'countervailing pressures from social groups' which seek to once again deterritorialize the night and social order or create 'counter-spaces' (Lefebvre 1991, cited in Williams 2008, 525).

What I also realized through the course of field work for this research is that the state makes the surveillance techniques – CCTVs and street lights seem like desirable and essential tools to ensure safety, especially women's safety, making women dependent on these surveillance tools to feel safe. Something about the night, and about the transgressive nature of darkness itself is then taken away; the possibility of rebellion denied. And when a rebellion does happen, the state instead uses these very same tools – street lights and cameras – deployed for our safety – against citizens by taking them away, case in point being the protest outside JNU campus described in Chapter 2, and other instances of protest marches by students against university fee hike throughout 2019 when street lights were switched off to detain protestors. The darkness that Williams writes about which can facilitate 'counter hegemonic practices by marginalized groups' is itself also used by the hegemonic state to suppress dissent. Darkness then is not one thing or the other, and street lights are not the black-and-white solution to the problem of safety. By employing darkness to suppress resistance, and hence representation, darkness, instead of street lights, become the tool to re-impose order. This is important because this suggests that the solution to safety concerns should not be surveillance precisely because what the state gives, the state can also take away. Some women likewise problematized the easy relationship between lighting and safety. Sasmita (32-year-old, WWAM volunteer) for example stated:

> "We have had lights for a long time. And it was to facilitate us to do things even when sun is gone…We used to have power cuts in my city every day from 7 to 8 pm. It was a pleasant feeling, it meant *chai-pakode* and the entire family coming together to chat under the moonlight…It has become about safety because we think that if there are lights, then nothing will happen. And that is not entirely true. Theoretically, I do not think we should attach safety and lights. When it is too bright, it takes away the joy of experiencing the night and the peace it brings. If morning is all about working, job, mundane, night is about pausing, relaxing, taking a break to think, because you cannot do all those things in the morning, take a pause to think, introspect, hold hands, and to be able to do things which you are probably shy to do not because the society is stopping you but because darkness provides some comfort." (Sasmita, WWAM Meet-up, November 2019)

Here, Sasmita brings out a different perspective on darkness and night-space, one which is not associated with threat of violence and fear, indicating once again that night itself is not scary, but it is its sticky association with fear through norms, narratives, experiences and memories that makes it feel scary. In the above excerpt, Sasmita also underlined the more romantic sides of the night and darkness – how it enables love and romance, friendships and community building.

What stood out to me was that instead of hard infrastructural changes alone, women argued for a change in 'mahaul', more number of people on the streets, and a change in behaviour and attitudes of people. For Karishma for example (Kalyanpuri), safety comes from having people around in public spaces. A crowd makes her feel at ease in public space, she explained, otherwise, she feels 'uncomfortable'. She extends this logic to night spaces as well and suggests that if there were enough people out at night, then 'the mahaul will change automatically', 'crime will reduce', 'night will not feel so secluded', and 'I will not feel as scared' (sic, ibid). Similarly for Eeshta, who grew up in the same neighbourhood of Vasant Kunj as Mallika, having more women access public spaces, especially at night, will allow her to 'feel' safe, whereas encountering groups of men at night makes her 'feel' scared. Later in the interview, Eeshta also shared that while infrastructure such as lighting and presence of police barricades make her feel safe at night, other safety mechanisms installed by the government such as CCTVs and emergency buttons in metros and buses does little to enhance her feeling of safety.

The narratives were not vastly different in Agra. Vartika (18-years-old, Khaliyai Mandi) for example stated that 'until the mahaul changes, and people change, nothing will improve here', when asked about what can be done to make the city safer. The focus thus was on behaviour change among people and a change in 'mahaul' for women to feel safe and not so much on government initiatives alone. For Sidra (26 years old, Agra) likewise, ultimately, it is the people that make a space safe:

> MT: What are the things that make a space safe for you?
> Sidra: (thinks for a bit) "I think, people. If there are enough people around, then I feel comfortable, though not entirely safe because you still don't know – anyone can come anytime…And see Agra is a small town. You know one out of 20 people at any place and that makes me feel better…I know who to reach out to in case of an emergency. Though the flip side of this is also that I feel constantly watched. My whereabouts are constantly reported to my parents…We don't need CCTVs here – enough people are there to do that job (laughs)!" (PI, October 2019)

Thus, for Sidra, even as familiarity with the people and spaces enhances her safety in Agra, it also works to curtail her mobility due to constant surveillance. As she comically puts it in the end, CCTVs are not needed for any surveillance in Agra because the people are enough to do that. Perhaps safety understood as security does not sit well with freedom to access the city. Women often expressed that while they feel safe as long as they follow certain rules, avoid certain places, return home on time etc,

they do not feel free. Like Sidra, they feel watched, reported on, and policed, albeit safe, much like how Offred feels in Margaret Atwood's dystopic world in The Handmaids Tale.

Yet, as already argued, in the current mainstream policy discourse, the overarching concern of safety is limited to questions of security and surveillance infrastructure like CCTVs. In real terms, the preoccupation with 'security' becomes a way to sustain the exclusionary urban order. It determines where and when can women go, and where can they not, which places and times are 'safe' and secure, and which are not. The immediate question posed to women is often that 'if it is not safe, then why venture out unless it is necessary'. Safety narratives today hinge on a dichotomy between safe: unsafe and necessary: frivolous which mandates having a respectable purpose for putting oneself in 'unsafe' environments. Safety as a governance strategy then becomes exclusionary and protectionist. The question that we must ask is whether 'safety' alone is what is needed to transform power relations and empower women? If empowerment is understood as a shift in power relations, then I argue that the mainstream understanding of safety does little to enhance women empowerment as it fails to shift or reconstitute the dominant affective atmosphere of fear. Instead, it takes away power from women and vests it in the state, denying them freedom and agency in the process. It suggests that women are safe as long as we only access spaces that are deemed safe by the state, and take precautions that are mandated for our 'own security'. As the narratives from this research demonstrate, this constant preoccupation with what is safe and what is not is not conducive to freedom.

Feminist scholars like Ratna Kapur and Shilpa Phadke have likewise argued that seeking safety is an unviable feminist strategy contained in conditional access of certain sections to limited places. Safety implies that only women who are *worthy* of respect, and pass the 'test of patriarchal morality' can be protected (Phadke 2007; Phadke, Khan and Ranade 2011). Women's safety in popular discourse is usually taken to mean sexual safety and absence of sexual harassment and assault, even though women are also at an equal risk of robberies and accidents. This focus on sexual safety, argue scholars like Phadke et al (2007) and Desai et al (2017) is a result of excessive focus on women's honour and arises out of a need to control women's sexuality and respectability, and to keep her away from unwanted relationships. This is something we witnessed in the case of the love-jihad narrative in Chapter 4. Other scholars like Aparna Parikh (2018) have likewise explored the interlinkages between safety concerns and notions of convenience and respectability, and household and social factors that women working at call centres in Mumbai take into account when navigating urban public space at night and making decisions about urban mobility. Parikh's research suggests that safety measures taken by call centres for nightshift female employees are tantamount to considerable surveillance and strict control over the routes women take to home, and limits their choices and freedom, leaving little

room for leisure, loitering, and detours. She also finds that in some offices husbands are asked to 'vouch to escort their wives homes' in order to exempt them from mandatory company transportation. Such all-time chaperoning leads to seamless control and denies any possibility for fun and loitering. Further, she found that having company's transportation seems to legitimise these women's presence at night. This further demonstrates the pressures women have on them to not appear 'frivolous' or illegitimate occupiers of public spaces. Unfortunately, as Parikh reminds us, policy decisions on safety often privilege women's respectability over other factors like convenience or desire to socialise. Company policies also repeatedly focus on increased surveillance whether by CCTVs by local government or strict rules by call centre employers for female staff with night shifts. As Parikh argues, these companies also internalise the notions of respectability, and equate it with safety. This is why, I argue, safety narrative, when equated with notions of security and respectability, is a limiting framework and only works to re-impose urban order. It leaves little to no space for purposeless wandering, socializing, and more importantly, civic and political participation. As Phadke et al write, "the discourse on safety does not keep women safe in public; it effectively bars them from it." (2007, 1512).

Note here, that in all the interviews and narrative, **the emphasis is on a 'feeling' of safety** – on how a city 'feels' safe, or unsafe, or how lighting or other people can make a space 'feel' safer or freer, even as this feeling remains inadequately described, reminding us once again, the affective nature of 'safety' like fear. If we understand safety as affect, we will also understand that it cannot be a result of simply changing the infrastructure. **Like fear, this feeling of safety will also have to circulate and accumulate, and will be determined by embodied subjectivities and varied practices.**

In any case, we will achieve little if we set aside the safety discourse altogether. What we instead need to do is decouple the idea of women's safety from 'security' alone and think of safety as a complex socio-spatial-affectual concept. The safety discourse was initially rooted in feminist research. Several research studies have pointed to a combination of factors and socio-spatial formations that led to absence of women's safety in cities today. For example, Kalpana Viswanath and Surabhi Tandon Mehrotra's (2007) argue that gender, social class, age, occupation and marital status together determines women's access to the city and city's public space, and determine safety and unsafety. They advocate for the 'safer community model' which involves mixed land use, mixed social use, street vendors and presence of local grocers as eyes on the street act as a safety valve, and activities to build safer public spaces. In this article, and in their action research work in the last decade, they have also advocated for 'safety audits' as an important 'tool of resistance and collective action' and to identify infrastructural issues for women's safety. They call for locating safety and safety audits within

a rights-based framework and advocate for women's safety as a basic right of urban citizens. Other scholars like Davis and Edwards (2007) and Parikh (2018) have likewise articulated safety from violence against women as a right.

The issue of women's safety and safe cities first came to the fore in policy discourse in 1980s but it was not until the 2000s that it really gained traction. Caroline Moser (2012) traces the 'safety' discourse in policy debates and writes that it was the 2002 Montreal Declaration and 2004 Bogota Declaration that first brought 'safety' to the foreground and outlined strategies for national and local governments, international organizations and NGOs to promote women's safety. These strategies included developing women's partnerships and networks including NGOs and collectives at different levels, guaranteeing women's right to the city by improving their civic participation and right to land and property, and guaranteeing their right to move freely and to access basic services; conducting women's safety audits as participatory tools, and promoting economic development for women and gender responsive budgeting. These strategies are quite different from what is advanced in mainstream policy discourse today in India for 'women's safety'. According to Moser, there is a broad consensus now that unsafety and insecurity negatively affects women's freedoms, mobility, access to public and private spaces etc and that interventions are needed to tackle concerns of women's safety. At the same time, she adds, it is important to take into account questions of exclusion, poverty, identity and agency, and reflect on whether issues of safety affect all women equally. Scholars like Carolyn Whitzman (2008) have similarly argued that women's safety is not a standalone issue but is interrelated with multiple factors.

Women's safety in public space has gained a centre-stage not just in policy circuits but also in NGO-sector in India in recent years. While earlier the focus on women NGOs in India was domestic violence and violence in private spaces and workspaces, attention has now shifted to violence against women in public spaces as well in the last two decades. Centre for Social Research, a well-known women's rights organization has conducted multiple police trainings and developed a police training manual to ensure more responsive policing[55] as a step towards women's safety. Safetipin conducts 'safety audits' to assess how safe different public spaces in cities are and identifies parameters that ensure safety using two apps – 'my safetipin app' which crowdsources data on different neighbourhoods and 'safetipinNite' which is used by Safetipin to determine availability of key parameters like lighting, openness, visibility, etc. at night. The safety audit is based on a total of 9

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[55] "Seminar on 'Making Cities Safe for Women: Engaging the Police and Measuring Women's Safety in Madhya Pradesh'". CSR India. nd. https://www.csrindia.org/making-cities-safe-for-women/ (accessed July 20, 2020)

parameters – lighting, openness, visibility, security, people, walk-path, public transport, gender diversity, and feeling of safety. Based on its learnings and work, Safetipin developed a safety index for cities with a focus on gender in 2019[56]. The index focuses on parameters to measure safety of women in public spaces, how gender-friendly cities and their public spaces are, and how a city behaves towards a woman based on infrastructure. The index has grouped its parameters into four categories[57]:

- **Land use** which includes built-to-open area ratio, recreational spaces, public parks, area under gated community, mixed use, permeability of built space etc.

- **Public transport** including availability of public transport, last mile connectivity, reservation of seats for women on public transport, percentage of female employees in public transport and so on

- **Public infrastructure** like footpaths, streetlights, pedestrian crossing, street vendors and hawkers, availability of toilets and night shelters.

- **Security** through public-police ratio, police competency, and CCTVs

Infrastructure then seems to be emerging as a crucial building block for women's safety. Here, what is noteworthy is that this index recognizes security (which is enhanced through police competency and CCTVs) as only one node of a complex environment. Unlike the dominant policy discourse, it does not reduce safety to security alone. It instead describes women's safety in terms of 'gender-friendly cities' which have public parks, mixed land use, good public transport with last mile connectivity, female employees in public transport and police, and enabling infrastructure such as footpaths, streetlights, and toilets. Unfortunately, currently the infrastructure and urban planning in our cities is gender-blind at best. As Kalpana Viswanath, (founder of Safetipin) argued in a conference, for right to city to be meaningful for women, 'we need to move beyond the neutral able-bodied man for whom everything is designed.' As she further argued, 'women do not have the same opportunities to work, move, and to leisure as men…Enabling circumstances are to be made for women to be able to participate in city life at par' (Safety for She Conference, November 2019).

According to Rwitee Mandal, Senior Program Manager at Safetipin and author of the 'Guidelines on an Index on Gender Friendly Cities', infrastructure is very important to improve women's access to the city. According to her, 'it is the hard infrastructure which gives you confidence.

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[56] This index was discussed at length at a 'Safety for She' Conference organized by The Asia Foundation and Safetipin in November 2019. https://asiafoundation.org/2019/12/09/the-asia-foundation-hosts-safety-for-she-conference-with-safetipin-koica-and-csr/ accessed October 4, 2020

[57] Rwitee Mandal. "Guidelines on an Index on Gender Friendly Cities: A Study by Safetipin." n.d. https://safetipin.com/report/guidelines-for-an-index-on-gender-inclusive-cities/ (last accessed January 14, 2021)

I want to access my city the way I want, without being restricted. Infrastructure helps in doing that' (PI, December 2019). Indeed, women do need adequate infrastructure to freely access the city today. Correspondingly, such an index which comprehensively measures and provides guidelines on how this infrastructure can be used to advance 'safety' and make cities gender friendly is valuable. However, here it is important to remind ourselves that infrastructure also is one node in the complex social-spatial-affective formation of *mahaul*. The other nodes, as discussed in previous sections, are **practices, norms, and past experiences and memories, which *along with* infrastructure and policy discourse generate an affective atmosphere which determine a woman's access to and participation in a city.** More importantly, an approach which focuses entirely on hard infrastructure misses to understand that safety is also a 'feeling', it is also a kind of 'affect'. This affect is a sum total of past experiences, memories, practices, embodied subjectivity, and circulation of affect, just like fear is.

Understood this way, we will achieve little if we reject the safety discourse altogether. What we need is a more agentive, participatory, and nuanced conceptualisation of what safety means, what safety can achieve, and what do we need to ensure equal and free access to cities and its public spaces. In the last section I will argue that for the dominant affective atmosphere to shift, we need to re-look at safety from the lens of capability approach.

3. Capability and Freedoms

As argued above, the dominant *mahaul* or affective atmosphere works to enforce certain notions about femininity and respectability, and restricts women's choices and independence. I would like to take these arguments further and argue that such fear works to **diminish women's freedom by denying them material and social environment essential for equal access to public space and urban life.** An atmosphere of fear along with a limited, security-based understanding of safety negatively impacts the quality of urban life and reinforces dominant political relations and patterns of exclusion. Simply put, a woman dependent on the state's and family's protection and security for her 'safe access' to public space is not free to enjoy leisure or actively participate in political relationships. But why is leisure important to begin with?

Here, I want to bring in Martha Nussbaum's capability approach. Nussbaum posits a set of capabilities that all humans need as fundamental entitlements of all citizens. These include: capability of life and health, bodily integrity and freedom to move from place to place, capability of sense, imagination and thought including access to education and freedom of speech, capability of emotion

which is overpowered by fear and anxiety, capability of forming affiliations, participating actively in social and political life and exercising control over her environment including employment and property, and capability to have meaningful relationship to the world of nature and enjoy leisure, laughter and levity (Nussbaum 2005). According to Nussbaum, the fear and threat of violence and actual violence adversely interferes with every capability on her list.

In one paper (2005), Nussbaum emphasizes the importance of two capabilities in particular: (i) practical reason and (ii) affiliation, and argues that together they can bring women together in solidarity, spurring reflection and action on their condition. According to Nussbaum these two capabilities can help in approaching violence against women at a deep level which requires new forms of deliberation and affiliation. It is important to point out here that capability of affiliation needs recognizing the why, how, and where women can and do come together i.e., physical spaces and avenues for forming affiliations and holding deliberations. It requires, in simple terms, public spaces and opportunities which facilitate affiliation, deliberation, and participation in public life. This is why, I argue, it becomes important to study politics of leisure and public spaces in a city when making an argument for gendering the right to the city from a capability perspective. In this study, leisure served as an important entryway into exploring access to urban public spaces, right to the city and concerns of women's safety. More importantly, the capability to fully access public leisure spaces and leisure opportunities is deeply tied with the capability to participate in citizenship and discursive democracy and claim right to the city.

Quite simply, public leisure spaces are spaces where the community can come together. It includes parks, streets, squares, and spaces at the margins – i.e., spaces between buildings, on the sides of the roads, stairs of metro stations, and chairs on a bus stand (Alison Brown 2017). It is where celebrations and festivities take place, the mundane, everyday life is lived, and a place for registering dissent and staging protest. Various rights have been fought for and staged in parks (See Don Mitchel's work), streets and squares have been used as a leisure space but also as spaces to express dissent (for example anti-CAA protest in India 2020 and Tahrir square protests). These leisure spaces and opportunities for leisure are then deeply political and implicated in any struggle over rights. When men and women gather at squares or parks to protest, often they are also transforming and claiming public leisure spaces. However, public leisure spaces are also exclusionary spaces. In recent years, this exclusion has further intensified with increase in number of shopping malls, closed off parks, gated-societies and so on (Brown 2017). **While public leisure spaces continue to be important for city's public life and collective social capital, avenues for non-consumptive leisure are fast shrinking in neoliberal cities across the world. As Hemingway (1996) argues, consumptive leisure does not**

support discursive democracy. Hemingway undertakes a critical analysis of freedom in leisure by exploring social practices and historical evolution of leisure, and the disjunctures between principle and practice of leisure and how specific social, economic, material contexts shape human experience of leisure and freedom in leisure. As Hemingway argues, leisure is not apolitical, asocial or disembodied; it is political, social and embodied. It is gendered and this gendered experience shapes the actual range of freedoms available to individuals (Hemingway 1996; Fraser 1989; Nussbaum 2005). Others like Heather Mair (2002) argue that while studies have suggested that increase in commodified and consumptive leisure has moved the society away from viewing leisure as a way to build communities or engage in discursive politics, there are exceptions if one looks closer at demonstrations and protests around the world. In her work, she assesses leisure activities that are 'deliberately public and challenging to hegemonic power structures' in the form of protests, demonstrations, and public rallies. She calls this civil leisure and argues that it claims public spaces for political, social, economic discussion.

Leisure is also fundamentally linked with other capabilities. It allows and is at times made possible by mobility and freedom of movement. It also facilitates a certain mapping of the city and its resources. It is an opportunity to build solidarities and friendships, and it is a chance to discover and, in the process, own up the city. Seen this way, obstacles to leisure are symptomatic of systemic obstacles or impediments that women face when accessing the city. On the flip side, one can argue that if there are no internal and external obstacles to accessing leisure, then it is likely that there will no obstacles to women's access to city spaces for legitimate reasons like work and education either. More importantly, following leisure scholars like Hemingway (1996) and Mair (2002), I argue **that leisure should be linked back with its civic and discursive foundations to unpack its potential for 'radical democratization of the society' and enhancing citizenship.** The spatial and temporal spaces where leisure activities manifest are no doubt plural, political and gendered. Through this research I argue that it is important to center women's experiences of urban public spaces and leisure opportunities when discussing formation of urban publics and exercise of urban citizenship. Further**, leisure, and capability for leisure understood through Nussbaum's lens, should be the benchmark for safety policies**. If a woman can feel leisurely in a space, then that space is safe, not just for women, but for a whole range of marginalized sexualities. In similar vein, Women need more avenues for non-consumptive leisure to translate leisure into political and discursive participation. As Scraton and Watson (1998, 135) write, 'leisure spaces and places can be both sites for the production and reproduction of structural relations and where counter and contradictory discourses are developed. They can be sites for inclusion and exclusion.'. While power relations may structure leisure, leisure

activities can also evade authority by finding ways to go beyond regulatory norms and means of control.

Nussbaum sees all central capabilities including capability for leisure, recreation and affiliation as potential areas of freedom. For Nussbaum, the capabilities approach is stronger than other approaches to measure human progress. While the human rights approaches are valuable as they attach intrinsic importance to the entitlements it specifies, capabilities approach goes a step further to argue that **spelling out an entitlement or right also requires that a person is made capable of exercising that right and choosing that function** (Nussbaum 2005). Therefore, it draws attention to impediments to actually accessing human rights.

Now that we have established why leisure is important, let us look at what do we need to ensure practice of, and opportunities and spaces for leisure. After arguing for the central capabilities that are needed as fundamental entitlements to ensure a life worthy of human dignity, Nussbaum makes a case for 'combined capabilities'. By this, she means (i) internal preparation for actions and choices, and (ii) external circumstances that make that action and choice possible (Nussbaum 2011). Thus, to secure a right to political participation is not enough, it is important to put women in a capability to exercise that right if they so desire. This would mean removing impediments in their life which stop them from leaving home like threat of violence (Nussbaum 2011, 30). This would also include an overall social and political condition that facilitates women's political participation. Similarly, securing an abstract and vague right to the city is not enough. One must ask what material and social conditions, and internal and external capabilities do women need to actually exercise this right?

To take this argument further, as per capability approach, a city which promises to women the right to safety, but does nothing to solve the problem of violence and address the impediments and factors that prevent women from feeling safe, has failed to secure women this right in the sense of capabilities. Similarly, let us look at right to the city framework. A right to the city in Lefebvre's sense means right of inhabitants to the production of urban space and lived experience in it, right to participate and influence decisions that shape the city and its *oeuvre* (i.e. urban fabric), right to physically access and use urban space in everyday life, and right to urban life (Lefebvre 1996; Purcell 2002). Understood this way, **right to the city means nothing for women unless women have the capabilities to exercise this right and participate fully in the city as equal citizens without impediments**. More fundamentally, **I argue that these impediments do not just include economic or material aspects like inadequate infrastructure but an affective atmosphere of fear which is a**

result of certain narratives, norms, threat of violence, and practices which stick together and circulate, which together impacts all of the major capabilities of women and leads to unfreedom.

Women need both material and social conditions to exercise their capabilities for freedom, leisure, and accessing public space. Capability for leisure and recreation requires the existence of public spaces suited to needs of women's leisure as well as normalization of the idea of leisure for women. It also requires an affective atmosphere or *mahaul* which breeds freedom instead of fear. Capability approach is thus concerned with what can a woman actually do or be, about the resources present or absent, and how do they enable or disable her functioning. Here, I also want to add the aspect of *mahaul* or affective atmosphere and its role in enabling or disabling fulfilment of certain capabilities. As the narratives from this project suggest, how do a particular set of circumstances in the city make women 'feel' – whether they feel safe, scared, fearful, or relaxed in an atmosphere also determines their access to the city. This *mahaul* or the affects generated by particular circumstances, as I have argued above, is a sum total of past memories, infrastructure, corporeal experiences, and circulation of certain narratives and histories. If we want to ensure women's capability to leisure, recreation, affiliation, and consequently political and discursive participation, we also need a conducive *mahaul* through enabling infrastructure, circulation of alternative discourses, formation of new memories and new experiences, and practices which will shift the *mahaul* and in the process, enhance their internal and external capabilities. Re-shaping the *mahaul* and enhancing women's capabilities is fundamental to what I have earlier termed as 'affective citizenship'.

Public spaces need a conducive affective atmosphere for women to participate in urban life and exercise their citizenship. However, currently, the affective atmosphere in cities like Delhi and Agra is not conducive to participation in urban life for women and work needs to be done at each of the nodes discussed in this chapter – social norms and narratives, everyday embodied practices, and policy and infrastructure to enhance women's capabilities and freedom and shifting the affective environment. **I argue that instead of 'right' to safety or right to the city, what is needed is 'capability' to participate in urban life equally, without threat of violence.** This capability can be enhanced by shifting the affective atmosphere.

Finally, I argue that when women exercise these capabilities of bodily integrity and freedom, imagination, forming affiliations, participating actively in social and political life, and finding recreation, leisure and levity despite a non-conducive *mahaul* and physical and social conditions, **politics happen**. As Ranciere argues, politics happens when the excluded speak up, become visible, or audible (or become perceptible) in opposition to the dominant order. Politics challenges assumptions

of equality and consensus and politicizes exclusions made by the established order. More specifically, I argue that urban feminist collectives such as *Women walk at Midnight* which claim open urban spaces and public leisure spaces challenge the dominant urban order, reconstitute affective atmosphere, and in the process claim affective citizenship in the city.

Conclusion

The primary research question invoked at the beginning of this research was concerned with the politics of the physical and temporal access to leisure spaces and opportunities that women from different social locations and geographies have or do not have. The preceding chapters threw light on this research question through in-depth, multi-sited ethnography of three case studies – night as a leisure space with 'Women walk at midnight' (WWAM) collective in Delhi, riverbank and politics of love in Khaliyai Mandi in Agra, and public parks and gullies in Kalyanpuri resettlement colony in Delhi. The methodology employed for this study combined participant observations, in-depth interviews, group discussions and 'walking' along with analysis of local news reports, crime data, policy documents, and existing literature. This allowed me to unpack the nuanced histories of particular spaces, how subjects from different socio-economic backgrounds experience as well as disrupt public spaces, how inclusions and exclusions work, and how leisure spaces get conceptualised and accepted, rejected or subverted. In the process, the chapters presented here gave us clues regarding the different elements that constitute the urban order and its affective environment (or *mahaul)* which in turn determines women's experience of urban life. In the final chapter, I delved further into these elements and conceptualised what constitutes '*mahaul'*. The narratives captured on the field, and reproduced here in the form of quotes to highlight the rich texture of everyday urban life, can be read and re-read not just to understand women's experience of the city, but also to understand dynamics of caste and community conflicts, work and leisure, social and political histories, and shared identities.

This study also engages with crucial questions on the relationship between urban leisure and public spaces, politics of citizenship, and the ways in which women reconstitute the material and affective urban order through various tactics. These tactics range from walking with feminist collectives like WWAM which directly challenge and reconstitute the night-space to everyday tactics such as leveraging enclosed open spaces like gullies and courtyards within one's neighbourhoods (or what adapting Dipesh Chakravarty's conceptualisation I call 'enclosed outside') to find leisure, build social bonds, and navigate urban life. These tactics are constantly confronted by the strategies[58] of the state and the society which work to re-impose and maintain the urban order. The latter, as we discovered in

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[58]Note here that this study uses de Certeau's understanding of tactics and strategies. *Tactics*, according to de Certeau are different from strategy. While strategy presumes control, power and order, tactics belong to the realm of the everyday which disrupt schematic ordering produced by strategic practices. In other words, tactics are everyday practices that disrupt the established order (de Certeau 1984).

the chapters, include social and moral norms, policies to ensure 'safety', embodied experiences, and narratives of '*kharab mahaul*' that circulate, stick, amplify and reify.

In this concluding note, I want to bring the reader's attention to three distinct yet overlapping themes that this study delves into – leisure, affective citizenship and *mahaul,* and urban planning. In doing so, I hope to inspire the reader to revisit some of the narratives shared in the previous chapters and to expand their existing understanding of categories of 'leisure', 'citizenship' and 'urban'.

Leisure

First, I want to come back to the question of leisure. One of the starting points of my research project was politics of feminist and gender-based collectives which were unfolding in public spaces like parks (like Meet to Sleep and Why Loiter) and streets (like Women walk at Midnight and Blank Noise). Activities and demonstrations by these collectives were centring right to leisurely pursuits like loitering, walking together, sleeping in a public park, and so on. In the process, they were challenging dominant gendered norms which mandate purpose and respectability for women when accessing public spaces. In this context, I wanted to focus on public-public spaces (as opposed to private-public spaces) like parks, streets, and riverbanks, and use leisure as a lens to find possibilities of discursive and radical politics.

In the process, one of the crucial things that this study does is to think critically about non-commodified or non-consumptive leisure from the perspective of marginalized sections in South Asian cities including women and urban poor. Leisure scholars have defined leisure along three principal axes: time, activities, and attitude of mind (Cloke 2000, cited in Mair 2002). In practice however, these are intricately inter-linked. In low-income settlements like Khaliyai Mandi (Agra) and Kalyanpuri (Delhi), leisure is understood as *faltu*-time or 'time-pass' – phrases which are used both as a noun (to describe a certain time of the day), and a verb (to describe an activity). *Faltu*-time or leisure is perhaps best described as slow time, a time without a strict structure, a time with flexibility. It is time when one can sit on a cot outside one's house, cook *saag* on a coal stove, peal peanuts, and have tea. It is a time to slow down, and perhaps rest, but also to exchange advices, life-lessons, and gossip, and keep an eye out on your neighbours to help them in cases of disputes. It is when issues of sexual harassment and elopements, and marriages and schooling are discussed. Interestingly, this *faltu* time is usually available only during the afternoons, when the men of the community are away at work. Further, even in this supposedly *faltu* or leisure time, women take up household work like chopping vegetables or piecemeal paid work but not with the same urgency as they perhaps do in non-*faltu*-time. Thus, despite being described as *faltu*, it is not wasteful time and can instead be best described as 'useful idleness'

(Kazim 2018) where leisure and work often co-exists. What is also notable are the **public spaces** where this *faltu*-time unfolds. Women in Kalyanpuri and Khaliyai Mandi do not typically sit indoors or go to planned or designated leisure spaces like parks or riverbanks in their *faltu*-time. Instead, they sit in the courtyard, the gully, or the *chhat* (terrace). It is where they place a cot or build a platform and congregate with women from the neighbourhood. These spaces, though physically outdoors are simultaneously enclosed by the infrastructure of the gully or the courtyard, and access to them is typically determined by caste and religious affiliations and fault lines within the neighbourhood.

Nonetheless, the flexibility and slowness of *faltu*-time as well as the spaces where it unfolds is important for women as it allows for an opportunity for solidarities to emerge and conditions for discursive democracy to be realized. *Faltu*- or leisure time is when women come together and form their own 'deliberative enclaves' (Mansbridge1994) or 'counter-publics' (Fraser 1990) in enclosed yet open public spaces. Theorists of deliberative democracy like Jane Mansbridge argue that democracies should provide enclaves to citizens to discuss and deliberate their concerns (Mansbridge 1994). Mansbridge defines deliberation in public sphere as "mutual communication that involves…reflecting on preferences, values and interests regarding matters of common concerns" (2015, 27). Deliberation is reflective, inclusive, and non-coercive. It does not necessarily result in a decision, neither is it a mere discussion (ibid). Towards this end, there should be public spaces where deliberations can take place on what is good for the society. After all, it is by coming together in courtyards and lanes that some women in Khaliyai Mandi articulated a demand for renovation of Gandhi Smarak (memorial) which many of them now use for morning walks or where their children now attend '*sanskar* classes', even as the neighbourhood remains mired in inter-community tensions. Similarly, in Kalyanpuri, it is in the gullies that women discuss and deliberate on cases of domestic violence and inter-community disputes, and warn each other about spaces and times which are supposedly risky. Further, it is by coming together at NGO-run local community centres that adolescent boys and girls and their parents started articulating their demands for better maintained public parks.

Leisure and leisure spaces are not apolitical, asocial or disembodied; they are political, social, and embodied. Leisure is also gendered and shapes the actual range of freedoms available to individuals (Hemingway 1996; Fraser 1989; Nussbaum 2005). Leisure activities have the potential to disrupt and challenge hegemonic power structures, re-imagine urban life, and facilitate deliberative democracy. At the same time, these are also spaces where power and control is asserted. While sitting within the gully or the courtyard is 'safe', anything outside is constructed as dangerous, transgressive, and risky especially for young and unmarried women.

In fact, for young unmarried and married women in these low-income settlements, leisure opportunities are fraught due to several layers of policing – deeply embedded patriarchal norms at an individual level; intense moral and physical policing by family, kinship, society, and the state; and construction of an overall *mahaul* which is so *kharab* (bad/corrupt) and unsafe that any woman who accesses this *mahaul* also runs the risk of becoming corrupt. The constant repetition of warnings about *mahaul* and safety leads to palpable anxiety in the society about unmarried women crossing societal boundaries, having fun in 'unsafe' environments, and losing their honour in the process. In Khaliyai Mandi, the *mahaul* is so risky that young unmarried women do not access public spaces even for apparently legitimate purposes like school and college. In Kalyanpuri which perhaps has the benefit of being located in a metropolitan city, young unmarried women are '*allowed*' to use public spaces by their families, but *only* for legitimate purposes, and with temporal and spatial conditions. Much like Offred in Margaret Atwood's dystopic world of The Handmaids Tale (1985), women are safe as long as they follow the rules of the established urban order and 'respect' the freedoms that they have been 'granted'. At the same time, as we saw in this study, young women cannot be caricatured as unthinking passive recipients of societal norms. In Kalyanpuri for example, if leisure for the sake of leisure is not acceptable, then women find opportunities for leisure in everyday 'legitimate' activities like running errands with neighbours, travelling to school or college with friends, or enrolling at the neighbourhood NGO to find a 'safe space' to come together. In Khaliyai Mandi similarly, some women claim leisure by asserting their choice in love and marriage, while others use the cots in the courtyards as their leisure spaces where they get together with their friends in the neighbourhood, or go for a walk on the riverbed when water recedes.

The third aspect of leisure that comes forth in this thesis is its temporality and night as a socially constituted space. In a diurnal society, day is constructed as the time for work, and night as a time for relaxation, rest, and perhaps leisure. Darkness allows the possibility of transgression, anonymity, leisure, criminality, love, and non-normative behaviours -- things otherwise not possible during the day (Williams 2008, 518). Many women during the field work for this project shared how they perceive night to be a time when they can slow down, talk, think, and relax. However, what happens when night-space is overwhelmingly perceived as dangerous and 'unsafe'? Women in Kalyanpuri and Khaliyai Mandi categorically stated that they do not step outside their own gullies and neighbourhoods after nightfall because the *mahaul* is *kharab*. This cut short any conversation on leisure at night. When I tried unpacking the elements that make the night scary, I was repeatedly confronted with narratives of crime, of '*kuch bhi ho sakta hai',* and of transgressions. Darkness has long been associated with supposedly harmful behaviours. There is a certain quality of night which gives way to imagined and

real risks and fears. In this context, finding leisure at night is not easy, especially for women. Many women who walked at midnight with WWAM faced harassment and eve-teasing on their way to the walks or during the walks. Several women could not walk even when they wanted to because of lack of public transport at night, or because they felt it was unsafe or risky.

The reason WWAM started was precisely because women felt they are unable to walk or find leisure at night in the face of heightened anxieties around safety and morality. It revealed how the mundane act of walking in the city at night can be intensely political and gendered. Through this case study, I discovered how walking at night with a group of women can become a means to tackle fear, find pleasure, come together with a women's collective, and simultaneously build our individual relationships with the city. Following performance scholars like Rebecca Schnieder (2001), I understand WWAM as a performance-protest which intervenes in the world by repeatedly performing the mundane act of walking. In the process, it forms an oral archive in the form of a performance that remains, echoes, and leaves its traces on gendered bodies as well as on the visual map of the city. It creates embodied and affectual shifts in the body by forging new memories and experiences and it 'redistributes the sensible' (Ranciere 2004) which constitutes the dominant urban order. The feelings and affects of freedom, joy, pleasure, endearment and solidarity generated by walking at midnight in the face of risk and denial start sticking by repetition and circulation (Ahmed 2004) and in the process begin constitute the *mahaul*.

This brings me to the second main theme of this study – that of *mahaul* and affective citizenship.

Mahaul and Affective citizenship

"Given our wings, our blinkers, it's hard to look up, hard to get a full view, of the sky, of anything…We have learned to see the world in gasps."

The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood (1985, 40)

In 1998 in the town of Leeds, Scraton and Watson (1998, 128) found how a fear of 'something might happen' among young women determines their access to urban public spaces. In addition to 'fear' of public spaces, they found structural determinants such as financial constraints, health, mobility, and gendered constructions of caring which determine women's access to public leisure spaces in a postmodern city. Even though divided by two decades and 4000 miles, my research in Delhi and Agra reveal a network of similar determinants like gender norms, social context, physical and temporal restrictions on mobility, care-work, perceived and actual security level etc. and a fear of 'anything can happen' which shape women's access to leisure and public spaces. This fear makes it

difficult for women to get a full view of the sky and they learn to experience the urban life in gasps. The 'mahaul' of the neighbourhood and the city overwhelmingly determines women's access to leisure opportunities and public spaces, and consequently their right to the city understood as participation in social and urban life.

In each case study, and corresponding chapter, I encountered and attempted to unpack this term, 'mahaul'. The mahaul at night, at the riverbank, of the basti, and in public parks varied to some degree but seem to have similar building blocks. In each subsequent chapter, we learnt something more about this mahaul, how it is constituted, what it allows and denies, and its impact on women's urban citizenship and participation in the city. For example, in Chapter 3 we saw how the riverbank in Khaliyai Mandi (Agra) is a space with risky and corrupting mahaul, because of which women do not venture there. It is instead a space where iterant men drink and gamble. We also saw how this narrative is itself punctured along lines of caste and religion. Familial norms and kinship networks work to ensure that women do not transgress the boundaries placed on them, and the prevalent mahaul re-enforces these boundaries by punishing women who do. Women have to ensure their own safety by following the rules of social conduct and norms of accessing public spaces (such as avoiding certain places, times, and activities) because they know that the mahaul is kharab. Good women from decent households do not venture into this corrupt or risky mahaul, lest they themselves are corrupt or bad. Acknowledging 'dikkat' or problem also means acknowledging that one stepped out in the risky mahaul, which in turn can result in denial of access to public spaces altogether. Through repetition of maxims like 'hum sahi toh sab sahi', the onus is singularly put on women. This is further complicated by narratives of 'love jihad', elopements, and moral policing as we saw in Chapter 4. All conjugal and romantic relationships have to go through the family, which uses the legal system to maintain the status quo and penalise intercommunity and transgressive relationships. The dominant discourse against love marriage and alleged 'love jihad' thus also works to regulate the mobilities and choices of young women. Warnings about sexual harassment and inter-community elopements by romantically-involved young couples circulate, stick, and amplify determining women's access to public spaces.

In Chapter 5, we saw how the kharab mahaul of Kalyanpuri has likewise curtailed women's access to public spaces, especially parks and streets outside one's own gully due to a fear of violent crime, drug abuse, and of women 'falling astray'. This kharab mahaul is shaped by circulation and tireless repetition of cases of violence against women and warnings like 'anything can happen'. In the process, emotions like fear circulate and translate into certain practices as an affective response to the environment, leaving little to no space for other emotions such as pleasure and joy. This results in 'sticking' and intensification of certain affects with certain places and times resulting in an overall

mahaul ('affective atmosphere') or a set of circumstances which has an affectual quality. This *mahaul* is also shaped by personal and collective memories and experiences of violence which accumulate in women's bodies as well as by dominant and recurrent narratives and discourses.

Taken together, this narrative of '*kharab mahaul*', risk, safety, love jihad and normalization of '*chhed-chhad*' (eve-teasing, or more precisely, public sexual harassment) makes the affective atmosphere of the city unconducive to women's discursive and democratic participation and consequently citizenship. Here I argue that citizenship is not limited to being enumerated and identified; it is not just about tangible aspects such as economic, social and political rights and duties. It is also about, more fundamentally so, a sense of belonging and participation – aspects which are hard to quantify. I call this intangible aspect of citizenship as affective citizenship. Drawing from theories of affect and circulation of affect, I argue that this affective citizenship is a quality of citizenship which is always a work in progress. It is akin to a map of the different affects in different subjects that the experience of citizenship entails. It determines perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, and consequently discursive participation. In the process, it creates the very borders between different subjects and communities. If we understand affective citizenship as such, then collectives like Women Walk at Midnight and Why Loiter can be conceptualised as a claim to deepen this citizenship. They are a bid to shift the affects generated by the established urban order in the female subject, and in the process, inflect and re-make urban space and shift its *mahaul* through new memories, experiences, and claims. Similarly, everyday practices and tactics adopted by girls and women living in low-income settlements to navigate the exclusionary *mahaul* of the city and find enclaves for leisure and discussion can perhaps be characterised as claims on affective citizenship. If women and girls cannot or do not go to parks, they use the gullies (and cots) or local community centres to come together, form intimate bonds, and their own alternative publics.

In simpler words, affective urban citizenship means a sense of belonging to the city at the level of everyday experience and feelings. By arguing for affective citizenship, this study makes an important intervention in the scholarship on citizenship to argue that we must pay attention to its affective qualities, and to the *everyday* spaces where citizenship is actually practiced and experienced, and not just access of certain goods as legal and social citizenship. Finally, this affective citizenship needs a certain *mahaul* which enables women's capability for discursive political participation. To re-constitute this *mahaul* or affective atmosphere, we need to work at the various nodes which shape this *mahaul.* This includes social norms, narratives, practices, and infrastructure. We also need to expand our current understanding of safety-as-security. The mainstream policy emphasis on safety, securitization and infrastructural design is based on the premise that infrastructure can manipulate

affect and sensory experience of the city. However, by centring women's experiences, narratives and life-histories, this study argues for recognizing the role of subjectivity, memories, and historicity in shaping emotions and affectual experience of the city. For affective urban citizenship, what we need is not safety (as security), but substantive freedoms and capabilities.

Understanding the urban

Lastly, I want to touch upon the specificity of urban planning and experience in postcolonial cities. In recent years, urban theorists and anthropologists have argued for a turn towards the Global South to decentre urban studies and rethink its discursive field. This will allow us to develop more situated accounts and theories of urbanism, rooted in the experience of cities which are otherwise relegated to the periphery of academic research (Robinson 2016; Roy 2009; McFarlane, Silver and Truelove 2017). This also entails developing vocabularies and frameworks to explain the diverse experiences of the Global South. Sociologists like Amita Baviskar (2018) have similarly argued for paying attention to historical specificities, social context, and a city's hierarchies and allegiances. The present study takes this agenda seriously and engages with specific histories and micro-contexts of urban neighbourhoods. In the process, it seeks to make an important contribution towards postcolonial urban thought.

In Khaliyai Mandi in Agra, we encountered people's tense relationship with the river and riverbank. Through various narratives by men and women, we discovered the deeply intimate relationship that the neighbourhood once had with the river. Questions about riverbank made people reminisce about its lost sacrality, rituals of bathing and fairs during Kartik month, and stories of leisure and *udham-bazi.* At the same time, we encountered narratives of how the riverbank is now full of filth and garbage, a deteriorating *mahaul,* and a risky space for women. At some point, it seems that the sacred nature of the river got undone, perhaps due to processes of urbanization, postcolonial development and extraordinary events like the 1978 floods. What is notable is that while the Agra Development Authority has made several proposals to revive the riverfront and Mughal gardens, we found that these plans seem to be disconnected with people's everyday relationship with the river and the river's historicity.

In Kalyanpuri resettlement colony in Delhi, we once again witnessed people's fraught relationship with public parks and the role of Delhi's political history in shaping inter-community conflicts and access to public spaces in the area. In Kalyanpuri, a large number of parks have been encroached upon for religious purposes as well as for personal uses. Here, I problematized the idea of encroachment itself to argue that what the state narrative classifies as encroachment is perhaps, in some

cases, the 'normal' way in which residents seek to use open public spaces. Perhaps, for example, using parks for religious purposes or to store extra belongings or to dry clothes is more identifiable for families in Kalyanpuri who live in 25 square feet houses. The '*kabza*' then should be read closely with the nature of housing in Kalyanpuri as well as with specific history of Kalyanpuri which was resettled in 1970s, and was caught in the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. Perhaps, displaying religious structures is also an attempt to grow roots or claims of legitimacy in the neighbourhood – an idea which needs much more research. However, at the same time, it is because of this '*kabza*' and a bad *mahaul* that women in Kalyanpuri do not access public parks but instead gather and sit in the gullies in front of their houses. We saw a similar phenomenon in Khaliyai Mandi as well. The gully and courtyard in front of their house is then their extended 'inside', or rather their 'enclosed outside'. It is a liminal but safe space, away from the otherwise risky *mahaul* of the nieghbourhood and the city.

What also stands out in this research are the particular histories of the neighbourhoods under study and their relationship with modernist planning. Resettlement colonies like Kalyanpuri came up in Delhi in the 1970s during the National Emergency. The planners in-charge of these resettlement colonies carried with them modernist visions of urban life, inspired by colonial modern planners. As is widely written about, colonial and modern city planners imported and transposed western planning models onto Indian cities, which sought to impose immaculate order onto otherwise chaotic cities. These plans often prioritised manicured parks and gardens, artificial ponds, or tree-lined avenues. In the process, they ignored community sensibilities, traditional ideas, local practices, and rural-urban links characteristic of pre-modern Indian cities (King 1977; Datta 2012; Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan 2017). They did not take into account socio-historic building principles, local heritage and weather conditions, and dynamic uses of public spaces and streets which allowed for an intimate relationship between the family, community and neighbourhood (Datta 2012). Instead, colonial and postcolonial modern planners treated cities and neighbourhoods like an empty canvas.

A deep dive into urban life of Khaliyai Mandi and Kalyanpuri from a gendered lens suggests that open spaces which are integrated into community life are more valuable for local communities than enclosed, sequestered 'parks' and sanitized 'riverfronts'. This means planners need to move away from the idea of negative concept of space that can just be left empty. For people in Kalyanpuri, the house, gullies, local park, and chowk are not necessarily discrete spaces, but exist on a continuum of inside/outside. Urban planners therefore must take into account local cultural practices of sociability when planning such neighbourhoods. Further, localised studies for urban planning and planning of public spaces also must address the gender question and not end up creating sanitized public spaces only for the able-bodied cisgender man once again. However, public parks also hold immense value

in a modern city. Many research participants across field sites affirmed that they would like well-maintained and more importantly, accessible parks in their city. Parks have also been used to stage public action in the form of protests, rallies, or demonstrations in postcolonial settings and are implicated in struggles over right to the city. In that case, perhaps urban planners need to re-think and re-imagine the particular *forms* of the park and how they can become spaces of immersion, action, and use.

A final point that I want to underline in this concluding note, and which can open up avenues for future research, is the urban-rural links in my field sites. Both Khaliyai Mandi and Kalyanpuri emerged as spaces where the urban and rural ways of life seem to co-exist. On the one hand there is Agra - a city which is still intimately connected with a rural lifestyle while simultaneously competing to be a global tourist and heritage city. Until a few decades ago, the broader area under which Khaliyai Mandi falls was characterised by a rural landscape and land-use pattern, with its location on the eastern riverbank. On the other hand, there are mega cities like Delhi, with Kalyanpuri as a relatively new urban neighbourhood. Much like in Khaliyai Mandi, the middle-aged and older women that I met in Kalyanpuri prefer socializing, sitting, and even cooking outside in the gullies because it gives them a sense of '*khullapan*' (or openness). The household often spills over outside, partially out of compulsion as the houses are small and partially as a way of life. People do not just retain a memory of the village but a way of life in the small grain and sociality of the street even when the built environment does not facilitate that. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the use of the street and bazaars as a public space is not alien in Indian cities (Chakrabarty 1992; Arnold 2018). However, this study re-looks at this dynamic from a gendered lens and centres the role of gullies and courtyards in women's urban public life, which are not the same as the streets that postcolonial scholars have otherwise written about.

Scholars like Gururani and Dasgupta when writing about a need for 'South Asian urbanism' underline three factors which have together determined urban development trajectories in India -- (i) a predominantly agrarian context, (ii) history of colonisation and partial industrialisation, and (iii) postcolonial development ethos. Instead of solely focusing on the urban, they draw our attention towards changing agrarian dynamics and social relations to understand urbanization and argue that the 'urban and rural are materially and symbolically co-produced' (Gururani and Dasgupta 2018, 42). In the process, they call out urban theory for failing to engage with the rural and instead make a distinction between urbanization as a process and urban or rural as spaces produced by urbanization. In doing so, they urge us to not ignore the agrarian question and examine 'if and how societies become completely urbanized'. If we are to take this argument seriously, then we should ask if Khaliyai Mandi in Agra,

or Kalyanpuri in Delhi, are completely urbanized? What would 'complete urbanization' mean in the first place? If the spaces produced by processes of urbanization are experienced as entangled in both urban and rural, then what can one say about 'public spaces' within these geographies and how they are gendered? More specifically, what is an essentially *urban* public space? These are all questions that this research merely touches upon.

To conclude, this research tries to fill important gaps in literature and expands our existing understanding of gendered access to urban spaces, urban planning, and citizenship. It centres gendered politics of public-public (as opposed to public-private) leisure spaces such as parks and streets and pays close attention to the lived experiences of women. The study also makes an important contribution towards studying infrastructure and material environment through the lens of affect and subjectivity. In the process, the work bridges gaps between different disciplines – political science, human geography, sociology, gender studies, and urban studies. More importantly, this study contributes to a growing body of research on South Asian cities and small cities, their public spaces, and their material and affectual politics, from a gendered lens. It also urges us to re-think our existing conceptions of urban planning and urban space. A case study of a collective like WWAM also provides us with interesting insights into the night-space in the South Asian context, expanding our understanding of 'night' outside the frame of consumption and night time economy. Moreover, the study tries to expand our thinking about leisure - both as an activity and in terms of leisure spaces (temporally). Finally, by centring and unpacking the *mahaul* or affective atmosphere in Indian cities, the research unpacks the emotional texture of urban experience. In the process, it also opens up the safety discourse by bringing into focus concerns of capability and citizenship. It is hoped that insights gleaned from this study become important resources for policy makers to re-think questions of urban planning, leisure, and women's safety and provide material and provocations for future researchers to take on new lines of enquiry rooted in South Asian experience.

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Appendix A:
Primary Sources

Primary Data

- Google form data, WhatsApp chats, and meeting notes of Women Walk at Midnight collective

- Itmad-ud-daula (Agra) Police station crime register, Women exploitation records 2017 – 2019.

- RTI no. 15/2019, dated 20/05/2019 filed by Rajeev Kumar, Saathi-ISST, Kalyanpuri Delhi and Reply to RTI no. 16, dated 29.05.2019, by Horticulture Department, East Delhi Municipal Corporation

List of Interviews, Group Discussions, and Participant Observations

Note: In the thesis, in-depth Interviews are referenced as Personal Interview (PI) with date; inputs from group discussions and informal conversations are referenced as 'Discussion' with date; and other participant observation notes are recorded as 'Field notes' with date.

Name	No. of Participants	Type	Age	Linked with	Date
Shahdara Midnight walk	2	Participant Observation + discussion with Ratika*	28 - 30 years	Women walk at Midnight	23 March 2019
We walk at Midnight Team meetings	7	Meetings -- participation notes from 8 meetings	22 - 35 years	Women walk at Midnight	March - December 2019 (once every month)
Pitampura Midnight walk	1	Participant Observation + discussion with walk leader	25 years	Women walk at Midnight	25 May 2019
Vasant Kunj Midnight walk	1	Participant Observation + long discussion with one participant	30 years	Women walk at Midnight	29 June 2019
Hauz Khas Midnight walk	2	Participant Observation + discussion with Ilina and Nabiha	24 years	Women walk at Midnight	14 August 2019
Eeshta Malhotra	1	Interview	24 years	Women walk at Midnight	26 September 2019
Nisha*	1	Interview	34 years	Women walk at Midnight	28 September 2019
Malviya Nagar Midnight walk	2	Participant Observation + discussion with two participants	24 - 28 years	Women walk at Midnight	28 September 2019
Meghna Singh	1	Interview	23 years	Women walk at Midnight	15 October 2019

Mallika Taneja	1	Interview	34 years	Women walk at Midnight	17 October 2019
We walk at midnight Hangout	10	Meeting with past participants of midnight walks		Women walk at Midnight	16 November 2019
Shweta Pasricha	1	Interview	24 years	Women walk at Midnight	14 November 2019
Shaheen Bagh Midnight walk		Participant Observation		Women walk at Midnight	18 January 2020
CAA Protest Site Shaheen Bagh	2	Participant Observation (from several visits) + discussion with two women	30 - 50 years	Protest / Shaheen Bagh	15 January 2020
CAA Protest Site - Zanana performance		Participant Observation		Protest / Jamia	24 January 2020
CAA Protest Site – Hauz Rani	2	Participant Observation + discussion with two women	30-40 years	Protest / Hauz Rani	24 January 2020
Rekha	1	Interview	32 years	Delhi / Vasant Kunj	27 September 2019
Mala Malhotra	1	Interview	50 years	Delhi / Vasant Kunj	3 December 2019
Ameena Talwar	1	Interview	40+ years	Delhi / Vasant Kunj	10 December 2019
Saathi NGO Staff members	5	Group Discussion with Amita, Sarita, Kamlesh, Kanika, Sneha	24 - 60 years	Delhi / Saathi/Kalyanpuri	5 January 2019
Adolescent Girls at Saathi Centre	4	Group Discussion	14 - 17 years	Delhi / Saathi/Kalyanpuri	18 January 2019
Parents of adolescents at Saathi centre	4	Group Discussion	Over 40 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	25 January 2019
Rajeev Kumar	1	Three rounds of Interview	32 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	July 2019; October 2019; November 2019
Karishma*	1	Three rounds of Interview	22 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	January, September, and October 2019
Vinita*	1	Interview	34 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	6 September 2019
Seema*	1	Three rounds of Interview	22 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	January, September,

					and October 2019
Neeta*	1	Interview	26 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	9 September 2019
Walk around Kalyanpuri		Transect Walk with Shanti	-	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	9 September 2019
Block 11 Group Discussion (Poonam and Chanchal)*	2	Group Discussion	50-65 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	18 October 2019
Block 11 Manpreet*	1	Interview	62 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	20 October 2019
Shagun* (Block 15)	1	Interview	30 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	20 October 2019
Neelima (Block 15)	1	Interview	38 years	Delhi / Kalyanpuri	20 October 2019
Dinesh Kumar	1	Interview	48 years	Delhi	3 September 2015
Mridu Kamal	1	Interview	32 years	Delhi / Take Back the Night	14 October 2015
Safety for She Conference		Seminar notes		Delhi	18 November 2019
Rwitee (Safetipin)	1	Interview	~40 years	Delhi	30 December 2019
Anju	1	Interview	42 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	5 October 2019
Ramvati	1	Open-ended discussion	52 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	6 October 2019
Jagdish	1	Open-ended discussion	78 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	6 October 2019
Vartika*	1	Interview	18 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	7 October 2019
Agra Heritage walks	3	Group Discussion with Neha, Tahir, Anal, Kaleem	28 - 34 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	8 October 2019
Chaudhary Aunty Khaliyai Mandi	1	Interview	65 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	25 October 2019
Rakesh (Vartika's Uncle)	1	Interview	52 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	25 October 2019

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Women at Kali ka Bada	3	Group discussion (Khala, Mubina, Unidentified female discussant)	30 - 60 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	30 October 2019
Ruksana Mombatti wali	1	Interview	34 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	5 November 2019
RSS Pracharak/ Shyamlal School Teacher -Shashtri ji	1	Interview	56 years	Agra Riverbank/Khali yai Basti	7 November 2019
Agra Midnight walk	4	Participant Observation + discussion with Ayushi, Shreya, Raunak, Tahir	25 - 45 years	Agra midnight walks	26 October 2019
Neha	1	Three rounds of interview	34 years	Agra Heritage walks	June, October and November 2019
Sub-Inspector, Rambagh Chowki	1	Interview	45 years	Agra	7 November 2019
Police constables	3	Group Discussion	25 - 40 years	Agra	8 November 2019
Sidra Shakeel	1	Interview	26 years	Agra	24 October 2019
Ankita*	1	Interview	28 years	Agra	28 October 2019

*Names changed

Appendix B

Pictures

Note: All pictures taken by author during field work

Picture 1.1: Women gathered at Shahdara metro station for a Midnight walk, Shahdara, Delhi, March 2019

Picture 1.2: Women walking towards Welcom metro station, Shahdara Midnight walk, Delhi, March 2019
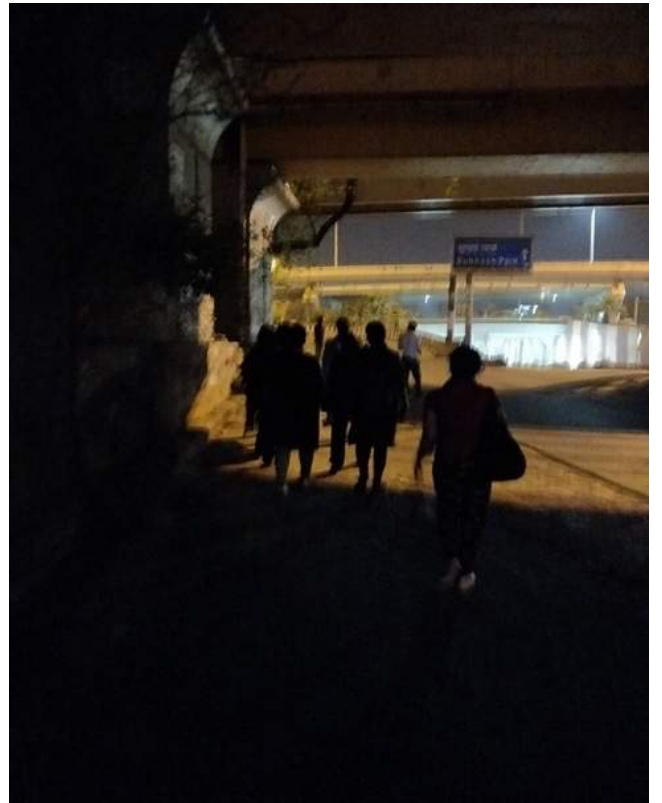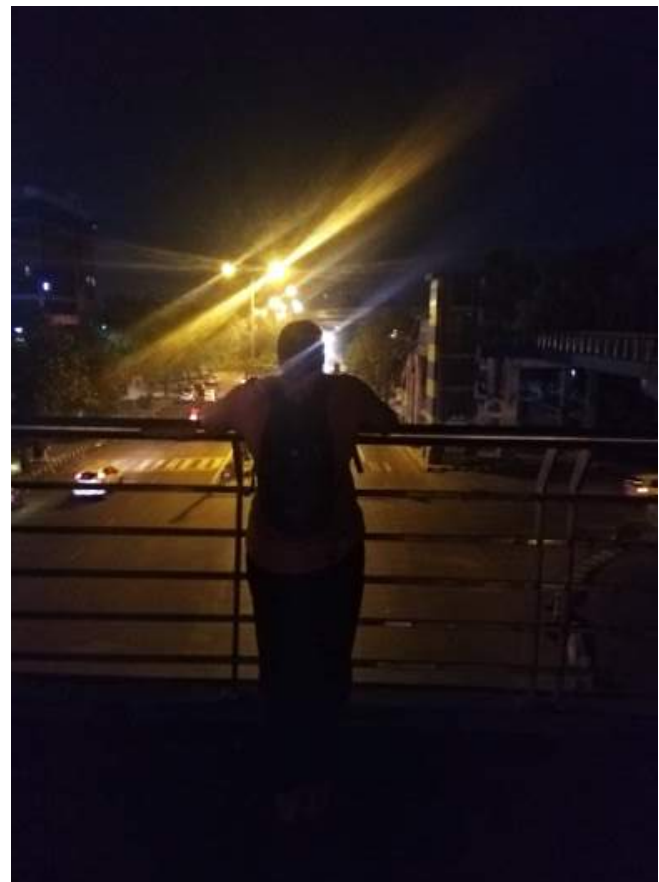

Picture 1.3: Underpass before Welcom metro station, Delhi. Midnight Walk, March 2019

Picture 1.4: Women gathered at an Ice cream stall in Pitampura, Delhi during a midnight walk. May 2019

Picture 1.5: Garbage dhallan in Pitampura, Delhi with a painting of Guernica. Midnight walk. May 2019

Picture 1.6: Foot-over bridge outside NSP Metro Station, Delhi. Midnight walk. May 2019

Picture 1.7: Women gathered at Malviya Nagar Metro Station, Delhi for a Midnight Walk. September 2019

Picture 1.8: Women resting at Malviya Nagar market, Delhi during a Midnight Walk. September 2019

Picture 2.1: Calls to speak out ('bol ke lab azaad hai tere', a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz) painted on the tar road and on the foot-over bridge in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi. January 2020

Picture 2.2: Graffiti on the outer walls of Jamia University, Delhi, depicting women of Shaheen Bagh, January 2020

Picture 2.3: Graffiti on the outer walls of Jamia University, Delhi, depicting Jamia students like Ayesha Rena standing up against police crackdowns, January 2020

Picture 3.1: Khaliyai Mandi, Agra. Picture taken from the end of the road near the riverbank. On the left: walls of Gandhi Smarak. October 2019.

Picture 3.2: Handpump in the courtyard in front of Prithvi Mandi, Khaliyai Mandi, Agra. October 2019

Picture 3.3: The cot where Vartika and I sat during the interview and where I often found her through the field period. Khaliyai Mandi, Agra. October 2019

Picture 3.4: The lane where Ruksana lives, Khaliyai Mandi, Agra. October 2019

Figure 3.5: Art Installation by the riverbank supported by Rakesh Jatav's house's back wall. Khaliyai Mandi, Agra. October 2019

Figure 3.6: Picture taken during the program by Agra Heritage Walks in Khaliyai Mandi, Agra. On the right: shack for goats. October 2019

Picture 5.1: Tent for religious purpose inside a neighbourhood public park, Kalyanpuri, Delhi, September 2019.

Picture 5.2: Park boundary cordoned off using tin sheets. Kalyanpuri, Delhi. September 2019

Picture 5.3: Rubble stored in a neighbourhood park. Kalyanpuri, Delhi. September 2019