

Sex Workers' Mobilization Challenging Indian Masculinities: The Case of Kolkata

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments:	2
List of Images	2
Chapter One: Introduction	2
1.1 Research Question and Structure:	2
1.2 Methodology:	2
1.3 Limitations and Scope:	2
Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework	2
2.1 Imagined Community:	2
2.2 Sex Work:	2
2.3 Sexuality:	2
2.4 Masculinities:	2
2.5 Gender Trouble:	2
2.6 Gendered Spaces:	2
2.7 'Othering' of Sex Workers:	2
2.8 Conclusion:	2
Chapter Three: Indian Masculinities and Sex Work	2
3.1 Anxious Sons of India:	2
3.2 De-sexed Wives:	2
3.3 Deviant Sex Workers:	2
3.4 Sex as Work:	2
3.5 Conclusion:	2
Chapter Four: Sex workers of Kolkata	2
4.1 History of Durbar:	2
4.2 Immoral Women to Workers:	2
4.3 Reframing 'Work' and 'Sex':	2
4.4 Capturing New Spaces:	2
4.5 Conclusion:	2
Chapter Five: Addressing Masculinities	2
5.1 Fighting The State:	2
5.2 Fighting The Discourse:	2
5.3 Closing The Gap:	2
5.4 Conclusion:	2
Chapter Six: Conclusions	2
6.1 Mobilizing on male territory:	2
6.2 Steep challenges ahead:	2
References Cited:	2

Acknowledgments:

I am grateful to Dr. George Kunnath for his supervision, advice and supply of sugary treats during our meetings.

List of Images

Fig. 1 Durbar at the Freedom Rally	35
Fig. 2 Komal Gandhar in Durbar's Sonagachi office	38
Fig. 3 Durbar Football League	43
Fig. 4 Durbar celebrating 'Bhai Phonta'	44

Sex workers' mobilization challenging Indian masculinities: the case of Kolkata

Chapter One: Introduction

Just before midnight on the eve of the new millennium in 1999, sex workers marched in a torch light procession through central Kolkata. They walked with their hands bound in paper chains and masks covering their faces. At the stroke of midnight they ceremonially broke off their chains, tore off their masks and burst out in unison to sing 'We Shall Overcome' (Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay, 2007). Over a decade later, their struggle for equality, respect and rights still continue. Rather than improving their rights, the dominant policy position in India has been to try abolishing sex work and 'rescue' women (Kotiswaran, 2012). This has not greatly changed the everyday reality of thousands of sex workers who remain in a life of poverty, illegality and social ostracization.

Sex work maintains a paradoxical position in Indian society. On the one hand there is great commercial demand for sexual services, but there is also an invisibilization of sex work as immoral and illegal. The image of a female sex worker is shrouded in mystery and they are presumed to be different to 'normal' women (Nag, 2005). The research puzzle this dissertation tries to answer is how this paradox is created and maintained and indeed how it can be challenged. I argue that at the heart of this paradox lie men and masculinities, a relatively understudied area within the gender scholarship about India. Indian masculinities seem to be creating this paradox by constructing an imagined community of virtuous wives and a virtuous India, whilst also sustaining a thriving sex industry hidden in the margins. A recent shift in this milieu has been sex workers collectively coming together and voicing a defense of their profession and personhood. They are trying to come out of the margins by publicly demanding worker's rights and respect for their work. They have begun exposing the paradox that masculinities try to hide.

My personal interest in the topic was ignited when I visited Delhi last summer and happened to read about a meeting of the All India Network of Sex Workers (Pandit, 2013). As a politically engaged queer Indian person, I could not help but feel a shared sense of also being part of the ‘other’ hidden on the margins. I was fascinated by their goal of trying to reclaim sexualities and challenge the dominant discourse. Within development studies sexuality is usually associated with controlling population or disease and not very often with sexual rights or women’s sexual autonomy. To me the sex workers’ mobilization appears to be a courageous struggle against a deeply embedded and powerful masculinities discourse. I could not find any other studies from India that looked at a masculinities discourse in relation to these mobilizations, yet the mobilizations critique and engage with Indian masculinities widely. Hence this dissertation attempts to address an important gap in the scholarship.

The aim of this dissertation is demonstrate how the sex workers’ mobilizations for rights, discursively and in practice, challenge Indian masculinities. To do this I will particularly focus on one mobilization of sex workers from Kolkata called Durbar and will analyze the various challenges they have surmounted to masculinities. This will be an interdisciplinary study bringing together anthropological literature on sex workers, masculinities and sexualities, as well as ideas from the political economy of India and feminist human geography. I will demonstrate that the Durbar mobilization provides a strong spatial, discursive, interpersonal and institutional challenge to the dominant masculinities discourse.

This research on sex workers’ mobilization in relation with masculinities is significant for various reasons. Firstly, within development studies, rights based mobilizations from India like domestic workers (Ghosh, 2013), street vendors (Naik, 2013) and indeed sex workers (Gooptu,

2000) are providing empowering spaces for participation and crucial lessons for development interventions and collective action.

Secondly, within the broader struggle against patriarchy in India, sex workers' mobilizations are an important group, alongside the LGBTQ movements or lower caste and tribal women's struggles, which have not been studied with reference to the masculinities discourse. Finally, although sex workers share in the informality and insecurity of over 90% of India's informal labour force, their symbolic marginalization as 'immoral' is a distinct feature which is rooted in patriarchal morality and masculinities. This dissertation will build on these symbolic and social differences in their marginalization and contribute to the existing scholarship on sexualities in India.

1.1 Research Question and Structure:

The main research question to be answered is: How are sex workers' mobilization challenging Indian masculinities: the case of Kolkata?

I will answer the main research question through three subquestions:

- 1.What is the significance of a masculinities discourse on sex work in India?
- 2.How do sex workers mobilize themselves in Kolkata?
- 3.How are mobilized sex workers of Kolkata addressing Indian masculinities?

The dissertation will begin with a chapter which reviews the existing literature and provides a conceptual framework of central concepts needed to understand the data. The data chapters will answer each of the three subquestions. Chapter Three explores the significance of masculinities for

sex work in India. Chapter Four will explain how sex workers from Kolkata mobilize and the challenges they face.

Building on these, Chapter Five will demonstrate the ways in which this mobilization has begun addressing and challenging the masculinist discourse in India. The final chapter will pull together arguments from the various chapters to answer the main research questions and offer some concluding remarks.

1.2 Methodology:

This dissertation will engage in a discourse analysis, framed within a larger literature review and empirical evidence from India. Primary data from Durbar's website, manifesto and journalistic accounts will be analyzed alongside its mobilization strategies and discursive practices. The aim here is to analyze important themes within Durbar's literature and its practices, which can then be analyzed with the existing theories and literature. Secondary sources such as academic books, journal articles and relevant qualitative data will also be identified and used in the analysis. This will be a deductive study wherein key theories will be identified in a conceptual framework and will then be tested with the data available. The hypothesis to be deduced is that the sex workers' mobilizations are challenging conventional Indian masculinities.

Indian masculinities in this dissertation are not only about individual male behavior, they are also about a masculinist discourse deeply embedded in the state and its citizenry. 'Sex workers' in this dissertation represent only brothel based female workers. Particularly in the case study for Kolkata, sex workers are poor, illiterate, low caste women, working in 'red light' areas and primarily catering to poorer male clients.

1.3 Limitations and Scope:

A theoretical limitation of this dissertation is its pro-sex work point of departure within the feminist debate about sex work. Given the limited space, an analysis about sex work as women's oppression is outside the scope of this study. Nonetheless, this dissertation will demonstrate that understanding the agency of women allows sex work to be legitimate work. Similarly, female sex workers based in brothels are the focus, which does not shed light on the thousands of male and transgender sex workers as well as street walking sex workers (Nag, 2006). The issue of human trafficking, often conflated with sex work, is also not addressed in this dissertation due to limited space, but the sex workers mobilization does campaign against it.

Given the particular focus on the city of Kolkata, this research is place specific and does not allow for generalizations about India, but nonetheless the discourse on 'Indian masculinities' has wider applications (Osella and Osella, 2006). Similarly, desk based research and a discourse analysis do not allow empirical testing of the data and analysis in this study. Indeed I could not find any data about resistance to the mobilizations or negative backlashes. Given the precarious nature of sex work in India, further ethnographic research around the issues raised in this dissertation can alone can further our knowledge.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

This section engages with existing literature to outline a framework of concepts used to answer the main research question. The central concepts I will use to analyze my data are theories about imagined communities, sex work, sexuality, masculinity, gender trouble, gendered spaces and 'othering'. The function of this framework is to demonstrate conceptual support for the analysis presented in the data sections.

2.1 Imagined Community:

The nation is an 'imagined' political community wherein unified fields of interaction and thought allow individuals to imagine their community (Anderson, 2006). These communities have to imagine themselves as limited and exclusive to create a sense of belonging to one particular community, which inherently also causes a sense of exclusion from another community (ibid).

In order for men and women to feel part of this imagined community, hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its fabric (Appadurai, 1996). The community needs shared images of uniform daily activities and shared beliefs to create a 'hypnotic confirmation of the solidity of a single community' (Anderson, 2006, 27). As will be demonstrated, this concept of an imagined community tries to frame India as a 'virtuous' country where sex work does not belong.

2.2 Sex Work:

Sex work is the provision of sexual services in return for a monetary payment (Kotiswaran, 2012). It constitutes sexual labour as a marketable service with an economic value. Like other forms of labour, sex workers enter into negotiated contracts with specific charges for specific sexual services, hence allowing for an overt transactional cost for various sexual acts (ibid). The term 'sex

work' emerged in the 1970's within the wider feminist movement to demonstrate the importance of women's work and sexual labour often rendered invisible under patriarchal capitalism (Kotiswaran, 2012, Phoenix, 2006)

In India, sex work remains a stigmatised profession for women which is illegal and places them at health and physical risk (Nag, 2006). However the number of brothel based female sex workers nationally is approximately 868,000 women (NACO, 2012). As an analytical category, it is the nature of sexual labour that frames sex work as distinct from other forms of manual and physical labour for women (Rajan, 1996, Nag, 2005). To understand the concept of 'sex' as work, complementary concepts like sexuality and gender need unpacking.

2.3 Sexuality:

Sexuality is an expression of sexual behavior that has specific meanings historically and in particular contexts. Foucault's (1990) work on the history of sexuality demonstrates that repression of sexuality originated with the rise of capitalism and a shift towards 'productive labour'. It was not that there was no discourse about sexuality, rather certain institutions like hospitals, religious organizations or governments became the legitimate makers of this discourse.

Foucault (1990) explains that a regime of 'power-knowledge-pleasure' created 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' sexual behavior which were guided by the invisible power of this regime. People who do not confine themselves to this regime breach the established norms and place themselves outside the reach of power, becoming 'divergent' sexualities (ibid). As will be demonstrated in the later sections, sex workers discuss sex in non-sanctioned settings and hence diverge from the established order.

2.4 Masculinities:

Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed gender identities that refer to how individuals see themselves or are expected to see themselves as 'men' and 'women' (Whitehead, 2001, Connell, 1995, 2005). These categories are not biologically fixed but are created in relation to each other to create a 'gender order' (ibid). Because 'men' and 'women' are created relationally, they have to encapsulate different traits to substantiate their different constructions. In male dominated gender orders or patriarchy, masculinity exists in contrast with complementarily subordinate femininity (Connell, 2005). Hence if 'men' get assigned qualities like rational or strong, women and femininities have to be complementarily subordinate by becoming emotive or weak (ibid). Men generally gain prestige, social control and material dividend from these patriarchal identities hence it is in their interest to maintain them (ibid).

The term 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to a particular idealised and aspirational image of masculinity which occupies and tries to sustain a leading position (Connell, 2005). Other forms of masculinities and femininities are subordinated and marginalised in relation to a hegemonic masculinity. Constant effort is required to hide the hegemonic control of dominant masculinities by embedding it as 'natural' or 'protective' (ibid). As will be demonstrated, hegemonic Indian masculinities create an idealised stoic male which sex workers complicate.

This logic is extended to a 'masculinist state' which becomes the site for hegemonic masculinities to operate under the guise of 'protection' (Young, 2003). This paradigmatically means that women become dependent and obedient subjects in the household and as members of the community and get 'protection' (ibid). The role of the male protector is strengthened because there is an impression of unity in the 'threat'. Imagining the threats to the nation and women as being

sexual allows for men and masculinities to become legitimate protectors (Alter, 2011). It will be demonstrated that sex workers are seen as posing these ‘threats’.

2.5 Gender Trouble:

Given that gender identities are constructed, to be accepted as a legitimate ‘man’ or ‘woman’ regular acts that are culturally, legally, socially and historically intelligible need to be performed (Butler, 1999). Similar to the discussion on sexuality, these acts are also defined by the hegemonic forces at play in a given setting (ibid). In patriarchal societies, men and masculinities control the discourse and give meaning to the category of actions that constitute a ‘woman’. Women who do not perform according to their prescribed gendered ideal start to create ‘gender trouble’ because their actions become unintelligible from the dominant position (Butler, 1999).

In patriarchal gender orders women are forced to follow a linear relationship between their body and its sexual behavior. An intelligible ‘woman’ has to create and maintain coherence and continuity between her gender and sexual practice (Butler, 1999). Institutions like marriage and monogamy are presented as the only legitimate domains for ‘being’ women and their sexualities are supposed to be expressed through and within these settings (ibid). It will be argued that sex workers in India cause ‘gender trouble’ and are not counted as ‘legitimate women’ because they deviate from the prescribed ideals.

2.6 Gendered Spaces:

A public/private dichotomy of space maps onto a constructed male/female divide of how men and women access or are expected to access spaces and perform their gender (McDowell, 1999). Public spheres are primarily the domain of men where they legitimately control space for work, loitering or socializing, whereas the private sphere of the home is the ‘appropriate’ domain

for women (ibid). This sanctioning of women to the domestic sphere compounds their subordinate position to men and disciplines women against the dangers of crossing these spaces (Ranade, 2007). Indeed, men and masculinities are threatened by women who cross their gendered space (ibid).

The body itself is also a gendered space. Women's bodies are understood as being closer to nature because of their ability to bear children and menstruate (McDowell, 1999). Men on the other hand are symbolically associated with culture and have the ability to transcend and be above nature (ibid). This difference between nature/culture feeds into the public/private division between men and women and justifies male domination (Ortner, 1974, Mckinnon, 2005). In public spaces, women's bodies are an object of constant scrutiny of the 'controlling gaze' of men (Derne, 2000, 143). These concepts are useful when analyzing the public mobilization strategies of sex workers around their sexualities which are meant to be private.

2.7 'Othering' of Sex Workers:

In patriarchal societies sex workers bring out invisibilized sexual labour of women by demanding that it be economically valorised (Pai and Seshu, 2014). This goes against hegemonic masculinities which try to privatise women's bodies and sexualities within patriarchal social arrangements (Bulter, 1999). Hegemonic masculinities require a subordination or at least a show of subordination to maintain their hegemony but sex workers start to pose a threat if they become too visible (Connell, 2005). They have to be invisibilized and distanced to give the appearance of internal cohesion and domination.

Similarly, exclusion of non-conforming behaviour is also required to maintain coherence of an imagined community (Appadurai, 1996). Hence it becomes important to push sex workers to the margins as the 'other' when they do not conform to the dominant narrative. Kakar (1996) concurs

that men create the 'other' as a reservoir to channel threats and anxieties about flaws in their domination. This also allows them to protect masculine control and obscure the 'other' as different and unrelated. The masculinist state too prefers to keep sex workers as illegal and a mysterious 'other' because they remain less visible and hence less threatening (Kapur, 2007). It will be demonstrated that challenging this 'othering' is central to the sex workers mobilization in India.

Similarly, the reduction of women to their sexed bodies allows the creation of the culturally ubiquitous idea of sex workers 'selling themselves' (Hardy, 2013). There is a strong sense that women engaged in sex work have no personhood or subjectivity beyond their sexual labour. This is indeed the dominant thinking in development institutions and government policies that aim to 'rescue' sex workers (Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998, Kotiswaran, 2012). As will be demonstrated in this thesis, demonstrating subjectivity and personhood beyond sex work raises some tough questions for hegemonic masculinities.

2.8 Conclusion:

My conceptual framework suggests that a masculinities discourse is conceptually linked to sex work. Female sex workers create 'gender trouble' by not complying with their prescribed subordinate roles and discussing sex in non-sanctioned settings. They are 'othered' in an attempt to distance them and to protect hegemonic masculine control. As this dissertation will demonstrate, sex workers publicly mobilizing in India attempt to address their 'othering' and break norms about gendered spaces and discourse, hence posing a challenge to conventional masculinities.

Chapter Three: Indian Masculinities and Sex Work

This section answers the first subquestion about the significance of a masculinities discourse for sex work in India. Hegemonic Indian masculinity create an idealized image of a stoic male as protector of women and the nation which sex workers begin to spoil. This section demonstrates how a masculinities discourse and sex work are closely linked.

3.1 Anxious Sons of India:

Since the 19th century, aggression and militarism were a crucial part of British hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995, 213). There was a general assumption that the colonising British were more ‘masculine’ than the colonised Indians. Indeed, Edward Said (2003) suggests that the ‘Orient’ was created as the weak, irrational, non-martial ‘other’ in contrast with the strong, rational Englishman. This was demonstrated in the way the British colonial officers mocked Indian men for being weak and non-martial (ibid). It led to the British labelling locals as ‘effeminate Bengalis’ while they remained ‘manly Englishmen’ (Sinha, 1997).

The nationalist response at the time was to fashion a more militarized Hindu male to fight for national freedom and protect ‘traditional’ India (ibid). Similarly, several scholars point out that contemporary Indian masculinities are also defined in relation to the nation and its threats (Alter, 2011, Derne, 2000). This is not to suggest that ideas of masculinity have simply transferred from colonial times to contemporary India, rather the point is that a dominant Indian masculinity is defined in relation to another.

In an era of neoliberal growth and globalization, Indian masculinities are constructed as a response to ‘western’ or ‘foreign’ threats and a sense of losing ‘traditional India’ (Osella and

Osella, 2006). As women become more economically empowered and visible in the labour force, previously exclusive male privileges become disturbed. Men have to start sharing income, space and status with women which challenges some of their basic identities of being breadwinners or strong. There is a fear that women's empowerment can lead to male emasculation (Connell, 2005). As demonstrated in the conceptual framework, one accessible way of checking these threats is by controlling women and their sexuality.

Indian women's bodies are a symbol of continuity and tradition, through which the nation is imagined (Chatterjee, 1993, Ray, 2000). It becomes the responsibility of its male citizens to control the female body in an attempt to maintain the male hegemonic status quo and prevent emasculation of the nation (Banerjee, 2005). An ideal Indian citizenship is created wherein all 'threats' to the imagined community and the individual are typified as hypersexual and uncontrolled (Alter, 2011). These male 'threats' against women/nation are further embellished through sociopolitical situations like India's tense international relations with Pakistan personified by a hypersexual Muslim masculinity (Anand, 2007) or non-Hindu and tribal masculinities (Srivastava, 2004) or Hindu nationalist imaginations about 'loose' western sexualities (Banerjee, 2005). Given that these 'threats' are imagined and sexual, there is no real way of addressing them and hence they have the potential to keep rising exponentially.

Within this masculinities discourse 'good' citizens and 'good' men are conflated to be protectors of women and the nation (Young, 2003, Kapur, 2007). By the same token, 'good' women are the ones that oblige to this 'protection' and the ones who reject it become 'bad' women (Young, 2003). In the case of sex workers, as will be demonstrated, they become 'bad' women because they reject male 'protection'.

3.2 De-sexed Wives:

Indian masculinities frame patriarchal marriage as the only legitimate domain for women to claim 'protection' and express their sexualities. Women are required to demonstrate virginity and chastity before marriage and an absolute faithfulness to husbands after marriage (Sinha and Slightholme, 1996). They have no sexuality of their own, only a de-sexed status as a daughter, wife or mother. Their bodies become sources for reproducing caste identities and maintaining hereditary transfer of wealth (Chakravarti, 2003). Indeed there are class and caste specificities about the type of control of women's bodies, but ethnographic work explains that not just poor men, but middle and upper class and caste men feel the need to control women's sexualities (Derne's, 2000, Osella and Osella, 2006).

In public spaces too, women's sexualities are controlled and kept in check. Men not only claim most public spaces like roadsides and street intersections; a hypermasculine bravado and horseplay in these spaces makes them inaccessible for 'honorable' women (Jeffrey, 2010). Men often talk about women in public spaces as 'goods' or 'mal' and approach them to start 'frank talk' (Jeffrey, 2010, 99). By extension, the safe and legitimate space for a woman in India becomes the private sphere of the home, strengthening the public/private dichotomy explored in the conceptual framework.

At the same time however there is a paradoxical desexualization of the male self and of the women in hegemonic masculinist discourse (Kakar, 1990, 144). Building on Foucault's work, the image of the ascetic, controlled patriarch is the 'appropriate' sexuality that the masculinities discourse tries to create. Alter (2011) explains this as 'semen anxiety' amongst Indian men which views sexual excesses as negatively affecting civic lives, strength and body. The sexually controlled Indian man is understood as superior to the sexually excessive 'Muslim' or 'Western' masculinities

(ibid). Similarly, women are completely de-sexed unless they are for exclusive male pleasure in patriarchal settings (Kakar, 1990). Building on Kapur's (2007) ideas from the conceptual framework, India is imagined as a 'virtuous' community where men and women are sexually controlled and 'pure'. As will be demonstrated, female sex workers sit uncomfortably within this de-sexed masculinities discourse.

This sexualities discourse in practice however applies different rules for men and women in India. Men and their sexualities maintain a privileged position because they are allowed to 'get away' with pre-marital sexual relations or other 'slippages' but women's sexualities are not allowed this (Sinha and Slingholme, 1996). Women who breach the norms are seen with fear as being 'too sexual' or unlike 'Indian women' (Kakar, 1990, Alter, 2011). The obsession with controlling women's sexualities, outlined in the conceptual framework, is also visible in the particular savagery Indian men show towards women's sexual organs when they feel women have deviated (Sarkar, 2001). Given these fears about women's realized sexualities, sex workers pose a particular threat.

3.3 Deviant Sex Workers:

The masculine fear about Indian women's realized sexualities frame the stigma around sex work. In India, sex workers have been conventionally viewed as 'different' or 'deviant' because they use their sexual labour for economic gain (John and Nair, 1998). They are not the de-sexed wives that discourse forces women to be. As explained in the conceptual framework, sex workers have to be imagined as alien to a 'pure India' because otherwise they begin to threaten Indian masculinities and its shared beliefs. Indeed, the masculinist state in India has so far been successful in keeping sex work illegal, informal and obscured in mystery (Kapur, 2007). As will be demonstrated, this mystified image is what the mobilizations are trying to address.

A distinction between reproduction and production has allowed women's sexual labour to be hidden as an extra market activity. Rajan (1996) argues that sex work remains obscured because the Indian state's wider organizational practices are structured by taking women's sexual labour for granted. This fragile cohesion between masculinities and women's sexual labour is disrupted by sex workers who attempt to valorize sexual labour. Pateman (1988) argues that modern capitalist patriarchy uses not just marriage, but also invisibilized sex work, as a tool to control women's bodies. Keeping it nonprofessional and highly sexualized allows sex work to remain lost whilst benefiting men and masculinities.

Male clients of sex workers also prefer to see sex workers as 'deviants' rather than providers of a service. Although I could find no studies about male clients from India, an anthropological study from Spain reveals that clients preferred to be seen as 'men' rather than 'clients' to maintain a gendered superiority (Hart, 1994). Using the term 'client' revealed the transactional element of sexual services and required a compromise from dominant masculine position where sex is part of a woman's gendered duty. Similarly, discussions about sex work were repeatedly focused on the 'immoral' women rather than male clients (ibid). Men deliberately explained sex work as not being legitimate workers to frame them as deviants whilst trying to invisibilize their masculinities.

3.4 Sex as Work:

The currently prevailing abolitionist stance in India stems from the viewing sex work as not legitimate work (Pai and Seshu, 2014). Much of the current discussion and policy interventions in India maintain a 'forced' or 'choice' dichotomy about sex work which does not allow sex work to be viewed as a legitimate economic option for women. Although an analysis of the various feminist positions on the matter is outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to note the falseness of the 'force/choice' dichotomy. Indeed it is this dichotomy that the mobilizations are trying to redress by claiming that they be viewed as workers not forced victims or immoral women.

‘Choice’ is an unhelpful term when understanding sex work in a developing country like India where domestic work, arduous construction work or sex work are not really ‘choices’ for women (Menon, 2012). Given the very few options women have, sex work is a legitimate form of livelihood for women in India. Indeed, this view was supported by the first Pan Indian Sex Workers Survey which found that 71% of the 3000 female sex workers interviewed claimed to have entered the profession ‘willingly’ (Sahni and Shankar, 2011). The previous occupation for most women before engaging in sex work was domestic work followed by daily wage labour. Most women claimed that they had tried other jobs before ‘choosing’ to be in sex work because it offered higher wages.

Exploring the agency of sex workers can also help better understand their position as workers. Indian sex workers use the term ‘dhanda’ or ‘business’ to describe their work and view it as a form of livelihood (Nag, 2005). They are able to create a ‘mental monogamy’ to sustain empowering relationships with lovers (Kotiswaran, 2011). Sex workers are also able to draw ‘emotional boundaries’ similar to those in professions requiring care and ‘emotional labour’ like nursing, social work or child minding (Chapkins, 1997). These abilities suggest that sex workers are exercising their agency, drawing boundaries and giving meaning to their work.

Similarly recent research in India is explaining how measures can be put in place to make sex work a more positive experience for workers. In her recent work, Doezema (2013) explains that when Indian sex workers have control over the terms of the service, can negotiate condom use, pick a comfortable space to work, negotiate rates and get support, a more positive overall experience is possible.

Indeed some studies with Indian sex workers go further to argue that sex work is empowering because women have more control over their bodies and are no longer routinely abused by men whilst doing manual labour or market jobs (Jaysree, 2009). As will be established in the next chapter, the mobilization of sex workers in Kolkata built on these arguments to demand their work be counted as legitimate work.

3.5 Conclusion:

This section has demonstrated the significance of a masculinities discourse for sex work in India. Sex workers work and live in a domain that is deeply embedded in a masculinities discourse about sex and which attempts to frame sex workers and their work as the deviant 'other'. This section shows that unpacking masculinities is crucial to understanding the way sex work is being obscured into illegality and immorality in India.

Chapter Four: Sex workers of Kolkata

This chapter answers the second subquestion about how sex workers mobilize in Kolkata. Their mobilization strategies and discourse touch upon previously hidden dimensions of 'sex' and 'work' deeply embedded by hegemonic masculinities. They are the 'other' rising against the dominant discourse.

4.1 History of Durbar:

From the start of the 19th century, India experienced a gradual decline in cottage industries forcing women to take up menial jobs before the 1881 Indian Factories Act allowed them access to factory work (Slingtholme and Sinha, 1996). This was the time when Kolkata's current red light area of Sonagachi, the largest red light area in India, started to take shape. At the time, sex workers in Sonagachi provided services for traders, migrant laborers and British soldiers (Chatterjee, 1992).

The British rule in Kolkata had a paradoxical stance on sex work wherein Victorian morality framed it as immoral, but cantonment prostitutes were made legally available for male soldiers (ibid). In the year 1879 there were 2,458 registered brothels operating legally in Kolkata alone because the British wanted to monitor sex workers to keep their soldiers healthy (Chatterjee, 1992, 13). Hence although officially despised, sex workers were kept on the margins to fulfill 'innate' needs of the soldiers (ibid).

Although some sex workers had historically enjoyed high status in India, like the highly educated devadāsī (Soneji, 2012) or culturally pioneering tawa'ifs (Oldenburg, 1990), the British officially classified all forms of sex work as 'immoral' (Chatterjee, 1992). Subjugated by the British, the Indian nationalist response to sex work, similar to the nationalist discourse on masculinities explored in the previous chapter, was to create an image about a glorious Indian past where women

were 'pure' and formed part of a strong nation (Kotiswaran, 2011). Hence sex work began to be pushed and invisibilized into the margins completely. In 1956, independent India passed the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act which made sex work illegal and still remains in operation.

In 1992, the Government of India launched a STD-HIV prevention program for sex workers in Sonagachi which sought to provide condoms and sexual health education. This effort was initially met with hostility and distrust from sex workers due to their historically precarious relationship with the state (Gooptu, 2000). To tackle this reluctance, the project was compelled to recruit sex workers with insider knowledge to become peer educators.

As peer educators, they visited brothels and encouraged other sex workers to attend health screenings and treatment. One year into this health project, the nucleus of a collective started to be formed because it created an unusual platform for sex workers to gather (ibid). By 1995 the Durbar Mahila Samaway Committee (Indomitable Women's Collaborative Committee) or Durbar was formed and became India's first self-mobilized collective for sex workers.

Today Durbar has grown significantly and runs fifty-one health clinics around West Bengal and has branches in every red light area of the state. It is India's largest sex workers' collective with a membership of over 65,000 sex workers and it helped create the All India Network of Sex Workers (Durbar, 2014).

Durbar's work in reducing HIV transmission has been regarded by the World Health Organization as a 'model' project and is widely considered one of the most successful HIV interventions in the world (Kotiswaran, 2011). Currently their primary campaign is to reclassify sex work as legitimate work, whilst demanding labour rights and respect for sex workers. As will be demonstrated, Durbar today poses a strong challenge to Indian masculinities and to understand this

transition from historical invisibilization to political activism, it is important to unpack the dynamics of the mobilization.

4.2 Immoral Women to Workers:

Before mobilizing through Durbar, sex workers had internalized ideas about the immorality of their profession, in line with the hegemonic masculine discourse outlined in the conceptual framework. In her interviews with sex workers of Durbar, Gooptu (2000) found that they saw themselves as victims, doing ‘dirty’ and ‘sinful’ work which robbed them of their honor. They had a lack of self worth and felt they had no social skills, sophistication, mental ability, or vocabulary to interact with ‘polite’ or ‘normal’ society (Gooptu, 2000). However through the Durbar mobilization, they had a fundamental change in attitudes and identity which eventually led to a change in these perceptions and consciousness (ibid).

The HIV project had an egalitarian organizational culture allowing sex workers an equal footing with non-sex working project staff (Gooptu, 2000). Sex workers held information about their industry that non-sex workers could not access. Similarly, non-sex workers provided sex workers information about negotiations with government administrators which they needed. Although there were slippages from this ideal, the opinions of sex workers were valued (ibid).

One worker explained that, ‘They (non-sex worker staff) had one quality. They treated us as their own...They did not despise us’ (Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay, 2007, 259). Hence in the microcosm of the health initiative sex workers began to see themselves as individuals with a voice which had value. They learnt to vocalize their opinions and gain a higher sense of demonstrative agency (ibid). As will be demonstrated, these became useful skills for challenging masculinities.

In 1995 sex workers demanded for an education program to make their health efforts more effective. In operationalizing this demand, the Educational Coordinator went far beyond his brief and initiated a dialogic process of learning because he wanted sex workers to reflect on their lives (Gooptu, 2000). In consultation with sex workers, a special literacy primer was compiled which used information affecting daily lives of sex workers (Gooptu, 2000). This move enabled discussions on a new sex worker identity, increased reflections about the body, sex, work, violence and rights (ibid).

Through the dialogic approach sex workers began asking questions about their condition, whilst developing intellectual and verbal skills for discussions and debate (ibid). They were now, much more than ever before, becoming capable of engaging in discussions using ‘polite’ language and complex new ideas (ibid). The next chapter will show how this shift had important consequences in challenging the dominant discourse.

4.3 Reframing ‘Work’ and ‘Sex’:

Durbar seeks to legally and symbolically challenge the ‘othering’ of sex workers, explored in the conceptual framework, by demonstrating that sex work is legitimate work. They explain that, “We, sex workers, provide sexual services to our customers. That is why we should be recognized as service sector workers. We demand worker’s rights” (Declaration, 2006, 259). They believe that in an economy that offers very few options for women, sex work is a viable source of livelihood which gets shrouded in a moralistic discourse. Given the tendencies of the masculinist Indian state to monopolize women’s sexual labour, this is an important reframing of ideas of sex and work which goes against the dominant masculinities discourse.

One important reason they give for recognizing sex work is the consequences it has for public health in India. Sex workers explain that, “Our marketised sex sector and our domestic sexual life

happens to be one continuous borderless territory. In this borderless sexual field, the AIDS pandemic will spread like wildfire. Several generations of Indians will die, due to the idiocy of a few” (Declaration, 2006, 261).

Confident from their achievements, Durbar believes it is the government’s best ally against HIV. Presenting their demands on a strong pragmatic base allows Durbar to tackle some of obscuring tendencies of the masculinities discourse around issues of women’s sexual autonomy, explored in the previous chapter. It is no longer just about sex worker’s working rights, there is pragmatic concern that the government cannot easily reject.

At the same time, however, Durbar addresses some deep rooted patriarchal notions about sexualities and morality. They build on the arguments about deviant sex workers presented in the previous chapter to explain women’s sexualities facing moral extremities in India, “A chaste wife is granted no sexuality, only a de-sexed motherhood and domesticity. At the other end of the spectrum is the fallen woman - a sex machine, unfettered by any domestic inclination or ‘feminine’ emotion” (Manifesto, 1997, 274). Hence they begin to break an important silence about women’s sexualities and demand for a more honest discussion about sexuality. In their manifesto they go further by demanding that they be viewed in their totality as persons rather than through a narrow masculinist logic about their sexual behavior (Manifesto, 1997, 268). They attempt to show that they are ‘legitimate woman’ and not the ‘deviants’ the discourse tries to distance.

Durbar’s reframing of sex does not allow men and masculinities to go unmarked either. They explain that under patriarchy, “sexuality - which can be a basis of an equal, healthy relationship between people, becomes the source of further inequality and stringent control. This is what we oppose” (Manifesto, 1997, 273) They discursively begin unmasking the paradox around sexualities that masculinities create.

4.4 Capturing New Spaces:

Through Durbar, sex workers are mobilizing in new spaces with confidence and pride. The conceptual framework explained that public spaces as gendered, however sex workers, seen as ‘fallen’ women, have an even more limited access to space (Gangoli, 2008). They are usually confined to streets at night and red light areas (ibid). Through Durbar however sex workers have been protesting around the city of Kolkata at various times of the day and hence reclaiming new spaces. Durbar’s initial efforts at mobilizing in public were ridiculed and belittled, but the sheer audacity of daring to be visible to a ‘society’ that had invisibilized them, spurred them on (Gooptu, 2000).

To cite two examples, in July 2012 Durbar organized a five day ‘Freedom Festival’ in Kolkata with a live video link with sex workers in Washington and a key note address by UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. It brought sex workers and academics from forty-two countries and caught wide media attention (Durbar, 2014). The Festival culminated in a Freedom Rally through central Kolkata during the evening rush hour with local and international sex workers marching holding red umbrellas and banners.



Fig.1 Durbar Freedom Rally. (Source: www.durbar.org/gallery)

For a category of working women that were once ashamed of their work and lacked self confidence, this is a strong assertion of a collective identity and presence. They confidently identify as sex workers who have a voice and a personhood, they also show that they belong to a global community of workers. Sex workers step out into new spaces and reclaim them, they are no longer confined to the margins of society. Indeed through this assertive display of confidence, they reverse the controlling gaze of men and break the mystified image of a sex work. They make a strong public demand for their rights.

On a more immediate level sex workers from Durbar have been protesting for their rights. In 2011 a sex worker was badly abused by her landlord in Sonagachi for being late with her rent because she had very few clients. She came to the Durbar office for support and an urgent protest was organized (Kotiswaran, 2011). By 3:00pm hundreds of sex workers and supporters gathered and marched to the landlord's house and later to the police station where the landlord was arrested.

Kotiswaran (2011) explains that a similar sight of sex workers grabbing the microphone and addressing large crowds in the middle of the day would have been unimaginable a few years earlier. Their sense of historic injustice spurs them on to fight and support each other. Through Durbar sex

workers seem to have an enhanced sense of courage and self-belief in their position and profession. As a collective, they are no longer afraid of approaching the police or other authorities for their rights. They have transformed their mindset and worldview and have come to believe that they have the potential and the rights to change things (Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay, 2007).

4.5 Conclusion:

This section demonstrates that the sex workers' mobilization through Durbar have evolved to become a strong and visible political movement for rights. They are collectively fighting their 'othering' by demanding recognition for their work and lives. They are reframing 'sex' and 'work' and are capturing new spaces and discourse through their mobilization.

Chapter Five: Addressing Masculinities

This section answers the third subquestion by demonstrating the various discourses and praxis of Durbar that address Indian masculinities. It will look at how Durbar engages with the masculinist state and its discourse, whilst closing the gap between them and 'mainstream' society.

5.1 Fighting The State:

Sex workers of Durbar have been mobilizing against the discourse of the masculinist state in several ways. To begin with, sex workers could not access government banks or register for voting cards because of their invisibilized identities (Usha, 2014). They faced severe economic insecurity given the informality of their work and a lack of insurance or savings. Hence they decided to start their own microcredit scheme in Sonagachi to develop some economic security and support older retired sex workers. They were clear that this would not be an initiative to rehabilitate or rescue sex workers with alternative jobs, but was only a safety net (ibid).

In 1992, Durbar filed an application for a ‘sex workers collective’, but it was rejected by the Government of West Bengal’s Department of Cooperation. They argued that a clause in the contract required ‘good morals’ of society members and hence sex workers would not qualify (Usha, 2014). Some government officials advised Durbar to register under a ‘housewives cooperative’ to avoid complications (ibid). However this was against Durbar’s ethos of improving sex workers’ image legally and socially. Hence they initiated an intensive campaign to lobby top government officials (ibid). Finally after almost three years of struggle, in July 1995 the Minister for Cooperatives for West Bengal intervened and agreed to remove the ‘moral’ clause and the first cooperative of sex workers in India was formed.

The Usha Cooperative has since become the most successful cooperative in West Bengal. Its saving and investments have allowed Durbar to build its own capital assets with land and properties, including their own building in Sonagachi. The cooperative now has an annual turnover of Rs 11.75 crores, a working capital of Rs 9.25 crores and one of the highest rates of return for a cooperative in West Bengal (over 90%) (Usha, 2014). Usha had 94 members in its first year, but by 2011 over 16,000 sex workers were saving through the cooperative. Some sex workers have gone on to acquire voter identity cards with the Election Commission of India because their Usha membership card is a recognized by the Commission (Bag, 2012).



Fig.2 Durbar’s cultural wing, Komal Gandhar, in their Sonagachi office (Source: Bag, 2012).

These changes and recognition by the state are significant for sex workers who have always been pushed to the margins and not offered any protection. Through the USHA collective, sex workers challenge the masculinist assumption that only 'housewives' are 'good' women and that sex workers are somehow bad. They successfully challenge this discourse by reinstating their identities and personhood as sex workers and forcing the masculinist state to acknowledge their category of work.

Through the struggle to initiate USHA, they have created a spiral of challenges which has equipped them with financial resource, physical space and an acknowledgment of their profession. As explained in the conceptual framework, sex workers pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinities if they are too visible. Indeed through USHA and their wider Durbar mobilization, sex workers cannot so easily be distanced and obscured.

More recently, their desire to boost confidence of sex workers has lead Durbar to open a Right to Information Centre in Songachi (Das, 2014). They opened the RTI Centre in March 2014 in an attempt to further increase awareness about government schemes and improve sex workers' access to information. This move presents another challenge to the masculinist state which denies them basic rights of a citizen and a worker. Through the RTI Centre, sex workers begin to challenge the state to provide them information about their denied entitlements, hence providing the potential for creating a spiral of further demands and challenges.

5.2 Fighting The Discourse:

Over the years, Durbar has grown in size and experience and has started taking on important discursive challenges. Two specific examples will evidence this point. An NGO running a school in Kolkata agreed to admit children of sex workers after some persuasion (Durbar Education, 2014). However the teachers at the school were teaching sex workers' children to work particularly hard to

rescue their mothers from sex work. When some mothers found out about this, they were deeply unhappy.

The teachers imbibed a masculinist position that sex workers are immoral and need rescuing. Before the mobilization, sex workers would not have been able to resist this discourse or address it in any effective way. However through Durbar they were confident enough to go to the school in person and challenge the teachers (Durbar Education, 2014). The teachers however fought back saying that felt they were doing their duty to the children and that they did not want to learn about teaching from sex workers (ibid).

Undeterred by this attack, sex workers took matters to the next level. They liaised with school superiors and managed to get the school temporarily closed (ibid). They then lobbied local politicians and organized a meeting which brought political leaders, sex workers and the teachers together. The strength and conviction of the sex workers managed to convince the political leaders to support their cause and the school teachers were forced to change their stance when teaching children (ibid). Sex workers successfully managed to address and challenge a commonly held masculinist discourse that mars their work and life as immoral. They defended their work and claimed back their honor. They also successfully reinstated their position as women and mothers who deserve respect and recognition. This incident is explained with pride on Durbar's homepage and acts as a testament to show how far the mobilization has come.

Secondly, sex workers from Durbar break an important silence about masculinities in India. In Durbar's manifesto (1997) they reveal their male clients not as strong stoic men, but as people who often express anxiety and loneliness. In their manifesto, sex workers explains that men are victims of the same ideology that oppresses them. Most men who come to them are poor and have anxieties and fear that they cannot address in their conventional positions (ibid). Given the dearth of

literature about men and masculinities in India, these claims in Durbar's manifesto cannot be empirically tested. Nonetheless, they break an important silence around men's anxieties.

Similarly, Durbar is enforcing condom use as a way of professionalizing sexual services and protecting the sexual health of workers (Manifesto, 1997). The reported condom use amongst sex workers in Kolkata has increased from 3% in 1992 to 90% by 1999 (Ghose et al, 2008). Durbar explains that men dislike condoms because they restrict the 'total' pleasure of the client, but they are empowering for the workers (Manifesto, 1997). This challenges the masculine assumption of having absolute control over a female sex workers body and sexuality. A few years ago this demand would have been unacceptable, but through mobilizing sex workers feel confident enough to deny male clients sexual services if they do not oblige (ibid). As argued in the conceptual framework, this poses a challenge to notions of male entitlement and gendered duty around women's bodies.

5.3 Closing The Gap:

Durbar has been closing the gap between 'mainstream' society and their own mobilization. They are building strategic alliances with male politicians and engaging with a wider sociopolitical discourse to create bridges. As demonstrated in the conceptual framework, keeping sex work hidden in mystery allows hegemonic masculinities to protect itself. However by closing the gap between sex workers and 'society' they are challenging hegemonic masculinities. Given the limited space, two specific examples have been selected from a variety of alliances to demonstrate this challenge.

Since 2010, Durbar has been organizing the Durbar Football League for children of sex workers. The aim was to empower their children to interact confidently and without stigma with 'mainstream' children (Durbar Sports, 2014). The teams required 50% sex workers children and the rest could be 'mainstream' children. Several important public figures have been attending these

events. In 2012 for example, the final match was attended by Indian footballer P.K. Banerjee and West Bengal's Minister for Sports and Transport, Madam Mitra, as well as several hundred spectators (Bulletin 14, 2012).



Fig. 3. Minister at the Football League (Source: Durbar Bulletin 14, 2012)

By successfully inviting and hosting top political leaders, they challenge the stigma that a masculinities discourse places on their lives. There is a negation of an inferior identity thrust upon them, and an endorsement of a new pride in a legitimate workers' identity, enhanced by associating with politicians. Sex workers seem to have usurped a logic of honor bestowed by the masculinities discourse, to create their own sense of dignity and honor. This challenges the masculinist discourse that restricts sex workers from developing a workers' identity and a sense of personhood.

Through the League, several children of sex workers have been selected to represent West Bengal at matches around India and one player (Fig.3) has been selected to train with Manchester United (Durbar Sports, 2014). By allowing 'mainstream' children to join the teams, Durbar is challenging masculine assumptions about sex workers being different and deviant. They go further to show that their children are like 'other' children too, indeed if not better. These attempts

challenge some of the mystification surrounding sex workers and form part of a deeper coercive power to challenge attitudes towards them.

Similarly, sex workers of Durbar have been symbolically involving politicians in their organizational culture to create an image of being moral Indian women. An example of this is Durbar's celebration of 'Bhai Phonta', a festival that honours relations between a brother and his sisters. In November 2011, the Mayor of Kolkata, Sovan Chatterjee, and the Minister for Labour West Bengal, Purnendu Bose, accepted Durbar's invitation and came to their office in Sonagachi (Bulletin 8, 2011). The politicians were symbolically welcomed as 'brothers' through a ritual which symbolically asked for their 'protection'.



Fig. 4. Bhai Phonta wit the Mayor (Source: Durbar Bulletin 8, 2011)

This event physically brought political leaders into spaces that were once considered disrespectful and immoral, hence challenging these assumptions. It also challenged the masculinities discourse which reduces sex workers to being nothing but their non-conforming sexualities. Through the symbolic act of becoming sisters, sex workers demonstrated their subjectivities and personhood much beyond their work. Building on Butler's idea of 'gender trouble' there is a strategic performance of being a 'sister' in accordance to the dominant discourse, but there is also a challenge by confidently remaining the 'deviant' sex worker.

During the same ceremony, in a remarkable gesture, the Mayor of Kolkata as ‘brother’ allocated health insurance cards to over one thousand sex workers gathered. He further promised ten thousand more health insurance cards for other sex workers. Given the precarious legal and social status of sex workers, this is a symbolic and tangible acknowledgment of their work and lives, as well as a closing in the distance forced between them and ‘society’.

For women who did not have any self confidence, this is also a reversal of power. Their mobilization through Durbar has become important enough for politicians to want to civilly interact with them and be seen to support them. These alliances with the male politicians and the masculinist state, symbolically and in practice, provide alliances which have not visibly existed before. By highlighting their personhood and multiple identities, sex workers perhaps cannot now be so easily ‘othered’ and pushed aside for not conforming to a hypocritical masculinist ideal.

5.4 Conclusion:

This section demonstrates that mobilized sex workers of Kolkata are successfully addressing some of the masculinist discourse which oppresses them. The state, its various apparatus and some political leaders now acknowledge sex workers as a category of workers and are being civil and encouraging towards them.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

This final section answer the main research question: How does the mobilization of sex workers challenge conventional masculinities: the case of Kolkata?

6.1 Mobilizing on male territory:

Sex workers mobilizing through Durbar are creating 'gender trouble' and providing a strong challenge to Indian masculinities. They attack the basic tenet of the masculinities discourse which maintains a paradox, wherein on the one hand women's sexualities are invisibilized, but on the other hand there is a large sex industry. This dissertation has revealed that this invisibilization of sex workers is not accidental in India. Rather, constant effort by men and masculinities attempt to hide sex workers away. Through their mobilizations however sex workers are fighting back.

This dissertation has exposed the multiple levels of the masculinities discourse that constrain sex workers. Through the Durbar mobilization sex workers are holistically engaging with this complex and contradictory process and are challenging it. Individual sex workers have come to challenge their prescribed self identities as sinful or dirty, by beginning to respect their own selves and their work. The patriarchal morality forced upon them is challenged as sex workers demand recognition for their services and claim workers rights. This change is revolutionary considering that this group of working women had resigned themselves to a life of shame. They have challenged and negated the masculinist shame associated with sex work and have gone through what Gooptu and Bandyopadhyay (2007) call a 'transformation of the heart'.

This new sex worker identity is publicly exhibited to challenge the social image of a sex worker as being a deviant. They collectively reveal themselves as women with names, children, knowledge and a voice, who deserve to be understood in their totality. By demonstrating their

personhood, much beyond their work, they fight back their systematic 'othering'. Their sense of self dignity is now challenging others, like the teachers from Chapter Four or the politicians from Chapter Five, to also show them respect. Similarly, they are challenging assumptions about their children; they have challenged the way schools accept and teach them, whilst also demonstrating that their own children are not very different from other 'mainstream' children. Through Durbar, sex workers are creating a coercive and symbolic challenge to their mystified image.

Through mobilizing, sex workers challenge the masculine sense of entitlement over their bodies by declaring their autonomy and claiming their sexualities as their own. They have become workers who earn a livelihood through their sexual labour and enforce condom use to keep their bodies healthy. By professionalizing and legitimizing sex work, they go against the masculinist discourse and challenge its attempt to keep it highly sexualized and nonprofessional.

Through Durbar, sex workers also challenge the hegemonic image of the stoic Indian male discussed in Chapter Three. The public visibility of sex workers and their sex industry, inherently reveals men as not being the sexually controlled patriarchs the discourse tries to create. Indeed, their mobilization challenges the very imagination of India as a 'virtuous' de-sexed community, where sex workers do not belong, because they reveal that they have and indeed continue to work on the margins. Collectively they do not allow for the invisibilization of their work anymore. They also challenge the 'strong' male image by revealing the anxieties and vulnerabilities that men bring to them. This begins to break a deeply embedded silence about male anxieties around not reaching aspirational ideals.

Their mobilization across various spaces and time begins to negate their confinement to red light areas and the night. They provide a spatial challenge to hegemonic masculinities by protesting and marching across the city of Kolkata at various hours of the day. Indeed they manage to challenge and reverse the male gaze in public spaces that tarnishes them, by celebrating their

profession and identity publicly and with pride for all to see. Metaphorically and in real terms, they are not confined to the dark or the night. They have become courageous political actors who are claiming new spaces which were once reserved for men and pose a significant challenge to Indian masculinities which have try to limit their access.

Similarly, through their mobilization sex workers have improved their institutional status within a masculinist state apparatus. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, Durbar has forced the state to acknowledge sex workers as having a valid profession and as a category of workers with rights. These developments provide a substantial challenge to the masculinist attempts which institutionally and discursively hide sex workers. The conceptual framework showed that sex workers do not fit the ideal mould of a 'good' citizen needing protection, hence this acknowledgment by the state begins to challenge the narrow confines of citizenship and open doors for many more potential challenges and gains against the masculinist state.

The involvement of public figures in various spheres of Durbar's work, challenges the stigma that is attached to sex workers and their lives. They negate an inferior identity and reveal themselves as being worthy of associating with 'respectable' people. Indeed, Durbar is now too important for politicians to completely ignore it. Given the historic invisibility of sex workers and their internalized ideas about shame in their work, these are major challenges successfully won against a masculinist discourse. Today sex workers are a political force that occupies physical space, has received some official acknowledgment, has financial resources and strong political alliances. Ever more than before, the sex workers of Durbar are challenging a conventional masculinities discourse and have the potential for transformative change.

6.2 Steep challenges ahead:

Many more challenges lie ahead for individual sex workers and their collective. The gravitas of their achievements and indeed their future challenges can only be understood when analyzed in reference to the masculinities discourse they are fighting. Durbar is one specific example of the many workers' mobilizations in India today. However successful mobilization like Durbar provide development scholars with many lessons about collective action and rights based approaches to development (Gooptu, 2000).

Similarly, the feminist movement in India, which still remains torn on the issue of sex work, needs to better engage and support sex workers' struggle for rights as women and workers. Specially considering that the abolitionist stance of the government, stemming from a deeply masculinist discourse, remains as a steep challenge ahead.

The achievements of the mobilization thus far are a source of encouragement and their struggles carry on. What is quite clear from this dissertation is that the masks and chains that the sex workers ceremonially break in the introduction, are masks and chains forced on them by a dominant masculinities discourse in India.

(9996 Words)

References Cited:

- Alter, J. S. 2011. *Moral Materialism, Sex and Masculinity in Modern India*. Penguin Press, London.
- Anand, D. 2007. *Anxious Sexualities: Masculinity, Nationalism and Violence*, *The British Journal of Politics & International*, Vol 9 Issue 2. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2007.00282.x/full> (Accessed on 22nd May, 2014)
- Anderson, B. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso, London.
- Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* University of Minnesota Press, London.
- Bag, S. 2012. *The new rhythms of Sonagachi*, *Livemint*. Available at: <http://origin-www.livemint.com/Leisure/zc6wRB1Jmj9cJKrSCLWP/The-new-rhythms-of-Sonagachi.html> (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)
- Banerjee, S. 2005. *Make me a man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- Butler, J. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, London.
- Chakravarti, U. 2003. *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Stree, Kolkata.
- Chapkins, W. 1997. *Live Sex Acts, Women Performing Erotic Labour*. Routledge, London.
- Chatterjee, R. 1992. *The Queens' Daughters: Prostitutes as an Outcast Group in Colonial India*. Michelsen Institute, Department of Social Science, Bergen. Available at: http://bora.cmi.no/dspace/bitstream/10202/380/1/R%201992%208%20Ratnabali%20Chatterjee-07122007_1.pdf (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)
- Chatterjee, P. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Connell, R. W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Polity Press. Cambridge.
- Connell, R. W. 2005. *Masculinities*. Polity Press. Cambridge.
- Das, S. 2014. *Now, an RTI centre for sex workers*. *The Hindu*. Available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/now-an-rti-centre-for-sex-workers/article5748685.ece> (Accessed on 17th May, 2014)
- Derne, S. 2000. *Movies, Masculinity and Modernity: An Ethnography of Men's Filmgoing in India*. Greenwood Press, London.
- Doezema, J. 2013 *How Was It for You? Pleasure and Performance in Sex Work* in Jolly, S. Cornwall, A and Hawkins, K. 2013 (eds) *Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure*. Zed Books, London.

Declaration, 2006. Why the So-Called Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of India Should be Repealed, Durbar in Kotiswaran, P. 2011. Sex Work. Women Unlimited, New Delhi.

Durbar Bulletin 8, 2011. Durbar, Kolkata. Available at: <http://www.nswp.org/fr/news-story/8th-bulletin-durbar> (Accessed on 6th May, 2014)

Durbar Bulletin 14, 2012, Durbar, Kolkata. Available at: <http://www.nswp.org/fr/news-story/14th-bulletin-durbar> (Accessed on 4th May, 2014)

Durbar Education, 2014. Available at: <http://durbar.org/html/education.aspx> (Accessed on 8th May, 2014)

Durbar Freedom Rally, Available at: www.durbar.org/gallery (Accessed on 4th May, 2014)

Durbar Sports, 2014. Available at: <http://durbar.org/html/sports.aspx> (Accessed on 8th May, 2014)

Foucault, M. 1979. The History of Sexuality. Allen Lane, London.

Gangoli, G. 2008. Hurt or Choice: Indian Feminists and Prostitution in Sahni, R., Apte, H. and V. Kalyan Shankar 2008 (eds), Prostitution and Beyond: An Analysis of Sex Workers in India. Sage Publications: Delhi.

Ghose, T. Swendeman, D. George, S. and Chowdhury, D. 2008. Mobilizing Collective Identity to Reduce HIV Risk Among Sex Workers in Sonagachi, India: The boundaries, consciousness, negotiation framework. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18455855> (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)

Ghosh, J. 2013. The Plight of Domestic Workers in India, MacroScan, Alternative Economic Webcentre. Available at: http://www.macroscan.com/cur/jan13/pdf/Domestic_Workers.pdf (Accessed on 5th May, 2014)

Gooptu, N. 2000. Sex Workers in Calcutta and the Dynamics of Collective Action: Political Activism, Community Identity and Group Behavior, UNU WIDER Working Papers, Vol 85. Available on: http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/previous/en_GB/wp-185/ (Accessed on 1st May, 2014)

Gooptu, N. and Bandyopadhyay, N. 2007. "Rights to Stop the Wrong": Cultural Change and Collective Mobilization - The Case of Kolkata Sex Workers. Oxford Development Studies, Vol 35, No 3. Available on: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13600810701514811> (Accessed on 1st May, 2014)

Hardy, K. 2013. The Socio-Economic and Legal Context of Body/Sex Work in Cohen, R. Hardy, K. Sanders, T. and Wolkowitz, C. 2013. (eds) Body/sex/work: intimate, embodied and sexualised labour. Body/Sex/Work: Intimate, Embodied and Sexualised Labour, Palgrave, London.

Hart, A. 1994. Missing Masculinity? Prostitutes' clients in Alicante, Spain in (eds) Cornwall, A. and Lindisfarne, N. 1994. Dislocating Masculinity. Routledge, London.

- Jaysree, A. K. 2009. The Vagina as a Site of Power and Playfulness, *Research for Sex Work*, Vol 11. Available at: <http://www.nswp.org/resource/research-sex-work-11-englishfrench> (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)
- Jeffrey, C. 2010. *Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India*, Stanford University Press, London.
- John, M. and Nair, J. 1998. *A Question of Silence?: The Sexual Economics of Modern India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi.
- Kapur, R. 2007. The Citizen and the Migrant: Postcolonial Anxieties, Law, and the Politics of Exclusion/Inclusion, *Theoretical Enquiries in Law*, Vol 8, No 2. Available at: <http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/til.2007.8.issue-2/til.2007.8.2.1160/til.2007.8.2.1160.xml> (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)
- Kakar, S. 1990. *Intimate Relations : Exploring Indian Sexuality*. Penguin, New Delhi.
- Kempadoo, K. and Doezema, J. 1998. (Eds) *Global Sex Workers, Rights, Resistance and Redefinition*. Routledge, London.
- Kotiswaran, P. 2011. *Sex Work. Women Unlimited*, New Delhi.
- Kotiswaran, P. 2012. *Dangerous sex, invisible labor : sex work and the law in India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- MacKinnon, C. 2005. *Women's Lives, Men's Laws*. Belknap, London.
- Manifesto, Durbar. 1997, in Kotiswaran, P. 2011. *Sex Work. Women Unlimited*, New Delhi.
- McDowell, L. 1999. *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Menon, N. 2012. *Seeing Like A Feminist*, Penguin Books, New Delhi.
- NACO, 2011. National AIDS Control Organization, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Available at: <http://www.naco.gov.in/upload/REPORTS/NACO%20Annual%20Report%202010-11.pdf> (Accessed on 1st May, 2014)
- Nag, M. 2005. Sex Workers in Sonagachi: Pioneers of a Revolution. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 49. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4417483> (Accessed on 1st May, 2014)
- Nag, M. 2006. *Sex workers of India: Diversity in practice of prostitution and ways of life*, Allied Publishers Private, New Delhi
- Naik, A, 2013. *Contextualising Urban Livelihoods: Street Vending in India*, National Association for Street Vendors in India. Available at: <http://nasvinet.org/newsite/uploads/Contextualizing%20Urban%20Livelihoods%20in%20India.pdf> (Accessed on 9th May, 2014)

- Oldenburg, V. 1990. Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow. *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 16 No 2, Available at: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00urdu/umraojan/txt_veena_oldenburg.html (Accessed on 4th May, 2014)
- Ortner, S. B. 1974. Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture? in Rosaldo, M. Z. and Lamphere, L. 1974 (eds), *Woman, culture, and society*. Stanford University Press, Stanford. Available on: http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org/old/class_text_049.pdf (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)
- Osella, C. and Osella, F. 2006. *Men and Masculinities in South India*. Anthem Press, London.
- Pandit, A. 2013. Sex Workers Meet to Demand Rights. *The Times of India*. Available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Sex-workers-meet-to-demand-rights/articleshow/21966951.cms?referral=PM> (Accessed on 17th May, 2014)
- Pai, A. and Seshu, S. M. 2014. Sex Work Undresses Patriarchy with Every Trick! *IDS Bulletin*, Vol 45. No. 1 Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1759-5436.12067/abstract> (Accessed on 9th May, 2014)
- Pateman, C. 1988. *The Sexual Contract*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Phoenix, J. 2006. *Regulating Prostitution: Controlling Women's Lives in Heidensohn, F. 2006.*(eds) *Gender and Justice: New Concepts and Approaches*, Willian, Taylor and Francis Group, London.
- Rajan, R. S. 1996. *The Prostitution Question(s): Female Agency, Sexuality and Work*. Centre for Contemporary Studies, Teen Murti House, New Delhi.
- Rande, S. 2007. *The Way She Moves: Mapping the Everyday Production of Gender-Space*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42. No, 17. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4419518> (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)
- Ray, S. 2000. *Engendering India*, Duke University Press, London.
- Sahni, R. and Shankar, V. K. 2011. *The First Pan-India Survey of Sex Workers*, Centre for Advocacy on Stigma and Marginalization, Mumbai. Available on: http://www.sangram.org/resources/Pan_India_Survey_of_Sex_workers.pdf (Accessed on 12th May, 2014)
- Said, E. 2003. *Orinetalism*. Penguin, London.
- Sarkar, T. 2001. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural*. Hurst & Company, London.
- Sinha, M. 1997. *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and The 'Effeminate Bengali' in The Late Nineteenth Century*. Kali for Women, New Delhi.
- Sleightholme, C. and Sinha, I. 1996. *Guilty Without Trial, Women in The Sex Trade in Calcutta*. Rutgers University Press, Calcutta.
- Soneji, D. 2012. *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India*. University of Chicago Press, London.

Srivastava, S. 2004. *Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes. Sexualities, Masculinities and Culture in South Asia*. Sage Publications Ltd, London.

Usha, 2014. Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Limited. Available on: <http://ushacoop.org/about.php> (Accessed on 9th May, 2014)

Whitehead, S. M. 2001. *The Masculinities Reader*, Polity Press: Cambridge

Young, I. R. 2003. The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1. Available at: <http://www.signs.rutgers.edu/content/Young,%20Logic%20of%20Masculinist%20Protection.pdf> (Accessed on 4th May, 2014)