



Defying Delhi's Enclosures: Strategies for Managing a Difficult City

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Defying Delhi's Enclosures: Strategies for Managing a Difficult City

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Abstract:

Reflecting wider debates on the city as a site of coercion and opportunity, Delhi is marked by the coordinates of both cultural nationalism and neo-liberal aspiration. The former positions the city as a site of cultural pollution, at times claiming 'western lifestyles' have contributed to gendered assault. In juxtaposition, Delhi's neo-liberal landscape positions the female body as a valued commodity, iconic of 'globalised living', embedded in discourses of autonomy and modernity. This paper will argue that these entangled cultural constructs have created a city of threat and discomfort that problematizes women's access, be it for livelihood or leisure, enclosing women within coordinates not of their making. Yet rather than acquiesce to this urban topology, the agency of the single, middle-aged, middle-class women in this ethnographic study extends our understanding of the agonistic relationships within urban space, and the capacity to negotiate them using practices of avoidance, deception, adaptation, defiance, and care, at times creating their own enclosures in the process that enabled access to the city. Age and class as well as gendered expectations impacted on the available resources and outcomes of these negotiations, revealing the diverse possibilities of urban living that can enable pockets of social and political flourishing even within a difficult city.

Key words: cultural change, Delhi, gender, agency, urban ethnography, everyday practice

Defying Delhi's Enclosures: Strategies for Managing a Difficult City

The presence of women demanding a right to access the city of Delhi for pleasure rather than approach it with fear, takes place within two entangled narratives of 'modernity' and 'tradition': the neo-liberal city and cultural nationalism. The need to shift from demarcating women's lives in this binary is acknowledged, however, these terms are regularly used in media discourse and everyday conversation in India as a means of describing cultural change, including within the narratives in this study. Seemingly juxtaposed, these discourses legitimate claims to authority through establishing a set of coordinates, that is, cultural markers that demarcate the position of women in the city; working to enclose the body, and governing mobility, comportment and access to public space. Yet, while there appear continuities in their (re)production, these coordinates, including tropes such as respectability, are neither immutable nor totalising. This study examines how women have developed strategies to manage the tensions between the city as a space of enclosure and autonomy: at times outwardly defying the coordinates of both neo-liberalism and cultural nationalism; at other times manoeuvring around the city by creating enclosures of their own. Reminiscent of Goffman's (1956) descriptions of performativity, they manage the risks associated with stepping out of place, of shifting and transforming cultural coordinates, through acts of avoidance, deception, adaptation, defiance, and care.

Analysing this agency at the intersection of urban and cultural change enables an evaluation of the potential of everyday practices to transform power relations that reproduce fear in public spaces (Koskela 1997). Presenting part of an on-going ethnography, including in-depth interviews, diaries, photo-elicitation and go-alongs with 15 single, middle aged, middle class women in Delhi (2013-16, www.hera-single.de), this paper captures their experiences of living, working and moving through the city. Some of the women I have known for many years, others I met for the first time; some I maintain an ongoing correspondence with while others are no longer in contact. These women signify transgression in their 'singleness', broadly defined as unmarried, divorced, and widowed, placing themselves outside the normative, 'respectable', framework of marriage and family. They are indicative of a

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3 modern subjectivity in their autonomy, yet not quite, given their age. At 40-60 years
4 old they were not part of the predominantly youthful representation of a post-
5 liberalisation generation, namely, the 'new Indian woman' (Butcher 2003). Yet it is
6 not only youth that drives cultural change. As Lamb (2010: 83) has argued,
7
8 'prevalent models of generation and social change fail to capture the complexity of
9 the lives and perspectives of the older generation and the workings of social-cultural
10 transformation' (see also Vero-Sanso 2016).

11
12 Aged subjectivity intersects with their self-designation as 'middle class'.
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14 Recognised as an heterogenous cohort with varying capacities for agency (Saavala
15 2010), in this paper the term refers to an 'ideological', 'symbolically authorised'
16 construct, rather than a strict economic demarcation (Radhakrishnan 2009: 200-1).
17
18 These women worked in the NGO sector, media, retail management, and education;
19 they were fluent in English, and travelled or had family overseas. These
20 characteristics suggest both financial and cultural capital that may absorb some of
21 the discomforts of the city but that can also reproduce a set of coordinates that
22 reinforce socio-economic, and I would add, gendered segregation (see also Roy
23 2011; Harriss 2006). Radhakrishnan (2009), for example, has argued that it is within
24 the discourse and practices of the middle-classes in particular that cultural
25 boundaries of respectability are maintained, while researchers such as Ghertner
26 (2014) and Anjaria (2009) point to the middle classes propelling the ordering of
27 space in Indian cities. However, for the women in this study, their personal and
28 professional biographies, and politicized self-reflexivity (discussed further below),
29 complicates the use of terminology such as Chatterjee's (2012) 'false consciousness'
30 to explain their diverse responses to the experience of Delhi: their participation
31 within, reproduction of, and challenge to the coordinates of both cultural nationalism
32 and neo-liberalism. The following section will outline in more detail how Delhi, and
33 women's presence in the city, is marked by these co-ordinates that enclose bodies,
34 before highlighting the strategic agency of these women in more detail. Thwarting
35 expectations and allying with them, there are possibilities and limitations placed on
36 women's capacity to both defy and create enclosures, as desire is met with the
37 necessity at times for invisible bodies in a crowded, unequal city.

38 **Delhi's enclosures: neo-liberalism and cultural nationalism in the city**

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3 Post-liberalisation of the Indian economy (1991), Delhi has followed an aspirational
4 Masterplan (Delhi Development Authority 2007) that has attempted to re-order it
5 within a framework of 'world class', 'modern' urban living (Srivastava 2015; Baas
6 2015; Bhatia 2014; Dupont 2011; Brosius 2010): clearing slum and squatter
7 settlements; separating residential and business premises; building strip malls and
8 business process outsourcing (BPO) centres on its outskirts as well as new
9 resettlement colonies for the displaced. Global brands are well established in the
10 city's media landscape. It has bid for and won international sporting events including
11 hosting the 2010 Commonwealth Games that hastened demolition and
12 redevelopment in central areas of the city.

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14 The presence of women in Delhi's public spaces has also become
15 increasingly inflected by neo-liberal repertoires of economic planning. The city offers
16 the possibility of transforming incomes and how women perceive themselves; 'as
17 bread winners rather than as housewives and/or as merely reproductive labour'
18 (Kaur, 2004: 16). BPO and retail industries have attracted a large female workforce
19 that now travels across the city to reach offices, call centres and mega malls. New
20 transport infrastructures, including bus and Metro, facilitate greater access to the city
21 for some (Butcher 2011). Representations of 'the new Indian woman' (Baas 2015;
22 Talukdar and Linders 2013; Lau 2010; Daya 2009), incorporating both 'Western' and
23 'Indian' markers, have become entangled with the neo-liberal discourse of 'choice'
24 (Lahad 2014), and the associated ideal of autonomous, independent subjects:
25 thinking of self before family; agentive, in charge of her own life; self-managing and
26 self-monitoring (see Pandey 2014; Belliappa 2013; Phadke et al 2011;
27 Radhakrishnan 2009). The media landscape values the liberalisation of the female
28 body as a commodity, positioned as iconic of modernity (Rathi 2016; Butcher 2003).
29 In this work of the body, she is 'urbanised as distinctly metropolitan' (Grosz, 1995:
30 242); her movement and presence signifies enjoyment of the city, of its freedoms
31 and pleasures, as a discursive and embodied symbol of the city's success (Kern
32 2010).

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34 The question remains, however, if such representations challenge entrenched
35 cultural habits and patriarchal norms that mark the city. Agency, in its embodiment
36 as the autonomous, independent woman, appears co-opted by discourses of neo-
37 liberalism (Chatterjee, 2012). Kern (2010: 214) argues that while cities may permit a
38 greater degree of freedom for women from roles experienced in regional or rural
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3 areas, offering new spaces of economic independence and leisure, it is an
4 'individualised, consumption oriented vision of "freedom" and gender equality'. In
5 addition, Delhi has long held a reputation as a difficult city for women with incidents
6 of sexual violence now receiving widespread media coverage nationally and
7 internationally (Battacharyya 2015; Butalia 2012; Narayanan 2012). The National
8 Crime Records Bureau (2015) reported 36,735 cases of rape between 2010-2014;
9 23.2% in Delhi. Delhi had the highest rate of crimes against women (169.1 per
10 100,000 female population), including rape, kidnapping, assault, insult, dowry death,
11 cruelty and trafficking, and as sexual crimes are widely underreported these statistics
12 are likely to be conservative.

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20 If there is an urban, and urbane, subjectivity for Delhi women it is still bound
21 by risks, embedded in vulnerabilities and unequal power relations, and reproduced in
22 contemporary moral panics centred on perceived cultural transgressions within
23 public space. Women's presence appears to create ambiguity, threatening cultural
24 disruption through generating a spatial and temporal schism between past and
25 present: in appearance, in comportment, in being out of place, in being single (i.e.
26 outside the family). The visibility of increasing numbers of women working in the IT
27 industry (Parikh, this special issue), or socialising in bars (Bernroider, this special
28 issue) has been deemed 'westernised' behaviour in media debates and the rhetoric
29 of Hindu cultural nationalism, including comments citing 'western lifestyles' as
30 contributing to rape in urban India (Times of India 2013). This material illustrates
31 Shome's (2016: 348) argument that 'the female body becomes a fulcrum around
32 which masculinist nationalist projects are assembled'. In this discourse, the city is a
33 site of pollution, visibly intertwined with a globalization synonymous with
34 westernization. The juxtaposition of imaginings of the female body as representing
35 the nation (Mother India), but needing to be re-placed within the 'westernised' neo-
36 liberal city, has rhetorically re-emphasised cultural tropes such as respectability in
37 order to calibrate the liberalization of the body: to restrict how, where, what time and
38 who with women enter public space (Phadke et al, 2011; Radhakrishnan 2009).
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3 As a result, I argue that the body's intentions must be monitored and its
4 capacities guarded. It must not be loose, in movement, speech, or dress, but rather
5 enclosed and positioned in space, as Young (1980) suggests, according to
6 coordinates not necessarily stemming from a woman's own intentions. This process
7 of enclosure can be engendered through fear and instrumental directive. The female
8 body deemed out of place has come under attack: from the banning of jeans and T-
9 shirts, to imposition of curfews in colleges (Choudhury 2017), the banning of mobile
10 phones (Al Jazeera 2016), to protests against 'dating' and public intimacy (Phadke et
11 al 2011), and violence directed against young women socialising in public space
12 (Swamy 2017). As noted by women in this study there is also the 'moral policing' of
13 family and friends, and their own internalised benchmarks that condition access to
14 the city.
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23 Inevitably the entanglement of modernity and tradition has led to
24 contradictions as emerging forms of emancipation are juxtaposed against extant
25 practices, and urban regimes work to circumscribe women's life-worlds in new and
26 old ways. Despite their increasing insertion into a neo-liberal framework of
27 independence, women are still expected to perform gendered roles within the home
28 and family unit, if at times adapted (Pandey, 2014; Belliappa, 2013; Waldrop, 2012).
29 While women appear desirable in Delhi's public spaces, demarcating modernity and
30 'world class' living, in reality this access appears conditional, as Phadke et.al. (2011)
31 argue, on manufacturing purpose related to respectable, non-sexualised
32 performances such as family activities or consumption, embodying the bulwark of
33 tradition in the face of change.
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41 However, posing the city as a dichotomous site of cultural coercion versus the
42 faux freedoms of neo-liberalism is problematic (Bondi and Rose, 2003). Gender is
43 one of a multiple set of power relations within urban space (age and class also
44 relevant to this study as noted above), and co-ordinates of modernity and tradition,
45 independence and respectability, are neither immutable nor totalizing. A growing
46 body of urban studies describes the neo-liberal city not as a coherent, universal
47 project but as 'a loose collection of urban logics and processes', just one set of
48 possibilities among others (McGuirk and Dowling, 2009: 6; Ong, 2011; Anjaria and
49 McFarlane, 2011). Similarly, coordinates of cultural nationalism can be contested,
50 both defiantly and quietly. As Radhakrishnan (2009: 200) argues, there are
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3 continuities 'in representations and practices of gender, class, and nation, but also
4 personal navigations that transform such constructs'.
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6 Therefore, the city can become a site of negotiation and invention, contesting
7 urban development and cultural norms as residents enact city life in diverse ways.
8 Respectability and autonomy can be redefined as city dwellers learn and relearn to
9 use urban spaces (Jiron et al 2016). As with Hansen and Verkaaik's (2009) 'urban
10 specialists', women maintain the capacity to mediate their presence in Delhi, shifting
11 between coordinates of respectable and irredeemable, 'modern' and 'traditional', as
12 the following narratives demonstrate. In this agency, these women were able to
13 monitor the inherent ambiguity of public space, reproducing, creating and defying
14 enclosures, deploying a skill set to manage self-exposure and necessary
15 negotiations, from home to the workplace, with family and strangers. The following
16 sections will outline in more detail this agency, noting first the co-ordinates of
17 enclosure, then the strategic, often everyday practices of avoidance, deception,
18 adaptation, defiance, and care that highlights their capacity to negotiate the city.
19 Their eluctable relationship with Delhi results in diverse outcomes as they monitor
20 the tensions between tradition and modern, negotiating with themselves as much as
21 the city, expressing both love and exhaustion, with the possibility that their fight for a
22 place within Delhi enables pockets of social and political flourishing.
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36 **The coordinates of a women in her place**

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39 I mean the conventional thing of a woman has to be ... like married, home,
40 child producer, home-maker (Saba).
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44 I think ... well definitely married, children for sure. That immediately confers
45 some kind of ... respectability (Yasmeen).
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49 A primary enclosure for women in Delhi is found within the hetero-normative cultural
50 coordinates of marriage and family, held in conjunction with expected practices of
51 respectable femininity such as: not smoking in public; not drinking hard liquor; and
52 dressing 'conservatively' (discussed below). The weight of these cultural coordinates
53 is captured by Saba, in her 40s, living alone and avoiding Delhi's public spaces as
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3 much as possible: 'the cultural pressure is so strong. You have to be a very strong
4 swimmer not to go down under that'.
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6 While the women in this study appeared to be 'strong swimmers', their
7 transgressions invoked censure in an attempt to enclose their loose, out of place,
8 bodies, including gossip, staring, derogatory remarks, threats, and 'moral policing'.
9 Their perception of what others think of them was often framed in terms related to
10 sexual promiscuity ('whore', 'slut', 'being available'), drawing in Bose's (2008: 35)
11 argument that a cultural view of 'progress', that it is 'necessary but demeaning, is
12 perceived as a moral degeneracy of the nation easily analogous with female sexual
13 transgression' (see also Puri 1999 for her discussion on the nation-state's production
14 of hegemonic narratives of gender and sexuality). In response, the single woman
15 must be re-bound, for safety as well as propriety, enclosed in a group to remove any
16 potential marker of sexual threat, as noted by Parvati, a divorced mother of two
17 daughters.
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28 ... everyone will stare at you in a bar when you enter. I always make it a point
29 to go with someone, always. I never like to go to any place alone. It's like
30 you're marked.
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34 Enclosures invoking respectability were commonly set by dress codes, with covered
35 breasts and lower hemlines a demarcation of the 'decency' that was a means to
36 avoid the disciplining gaze: there should be 'no cleavage', 'very little flesh showing',
37 no 'low necklines', nothing too tight. Adapting dress was indicative of the processes
38 of decision making necessary to navigate Delhi's public space: the need to know
39 what to wear at what time in which place. There is 'home clothing and outside
40 clothing', and 'loose clothing' for after dark. Aditi, a writer just turned 40, minimized
41 the time 'I'm exposing myself' in public space after 10pm if she is dressed 'sexily'.
42 Moving around the city required similar processes of decision making: when to take
43 the metro, an auto rickshaw, a cab or their own car; when to drive themselves, when
44 to have their own driver, a familiar driver from their local rank, or an unfamiliar driver;
45 what route to take; when to lock the doors; when not to wear jewellery. Women were
46 also less likely to move beyond certain temporal boundaries: not 'wandering around
47 at 3am in the morning' (Nandini); not driving at night, especially on unfamiliar or
48 isolated routes.
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3 Concerns for safety (and all the women reported some form of assault, from
4 harassment to attempted rape) informed the reproduction of coordinates of
5 enclosure when it came to monitoring daughters and nieces, including directives to
6 'wear another layer of clothing', 'to change at the club', to only use a familiar taxi
7 driver, or Kavita's advice to her niece, to 'not smoke in public'.
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13 I would certainly not want my niece to be smoking, you know, out
14 somewhere, but I'm okay to smoke, for myself it is okay. [...] Because she's
15 younger, and then the people, as it is because she's a young girl [early 20s]
16 people will look at her, and then if she's lighting up then she's asking for
17 trouble, so I tell her not to do it in public. I would certainly ask her to exercise
18 far more caution than I would for myself.
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25 Several noted that self-monitoring had become 'instinctive' (Esha), 'internalised' over
26 time (Jaya), 'it just has become a part of the way we are [laughter] [...]. I mean that's
27 a learning over the years' (Lakshmi), as their experience of the city 'thickens' (Jiron
28 et al 2016) with every daily encounter. Embodied adaptations included 'tightening'
29 up, carrying themselves in particular ways: with 'confidence', 'authority', or behaving
30 'menacingly' (Aditi). Age inflected this experience of living in Delhi as scar tissue
31 accumulated over time, directing mobility, comportment and the anticipation of
32 pleasure or caution.
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38 In addition to cultural coordinates, the poor physical infrastructure of the city,
39 its 'aggression', pollution, the 'unnecessary' traffic, created for some a desire for
40 enclosure, notably removing themselves from a 'chaotic' public space, as Draupadi
41 describes below. The result appears to be a contracting of geographies of familiarity
42 in this sprawling city that is increasingly adopting facades of securitisation and
43 militarization: neighbourhood gates that shut at night; security and blast barriers
44 around public buildings; metal detectors at malls and cinemas; military bunkers and
45 armed personnel in metro stations.
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53 ... it's a lot to do with being on the street. [...] just the getting there, the
54 battling for space. [...] I mean, ... for me it's not a walking city so I rarely
55 walk. I don't enjoy the pollution and the potholes and the difficulty in crossing
56 streets and, you know, all of that. So, I have actually narrowed down my
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3 radius significantly in terms of work and the areas that I visit. And that has
4 been going on, I would say, for 20 years now. So, I can live in a bubble in the
5 city within a certain parameter.
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10 For Draupadi, a divorced, single mother, in her 50s, her 'bubble', is primarily middle
11 class south and central Delhi, for work and leisure. This is familiar territory for most
12 of the women in this study, and they rarely moved beyond these wealthier enclaves,
13 malls and cultural institutions where 'like minded' people (if not actually known) could
14 be met. Saba, for example, avoids Delhi's 'brutal' public spaces. Her creative
15 practice and access to BBC Radio within her apartment reflects how she has
16 'shaped my life to accommodate my nature', which she describes as introverted. The
17 necessity of the withdrawal to a comfortable home space is reinforced for Saba by
18 the recriminalisation of homosexuality in India, but neighbourhoods are also
19 comfortable because they are bound by familiar relationships; the known taxi driver,
20 the known grocers, the knowledge that friends are never far away so that even if
21 they are single they are not on their own. Indicative of the possibilities of social
22 connection Delhi is a city in which relationships still matter. Despite an extensive list
23 of concerns and stories of violence, Parvati feels a sense of security in Delhi; it gives
24 her a 'safety net because I've been here so many years'.
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36 Even in a small park, er, next to my house, like I go to [the park] because I
37 feel comfortable there. Everybody knows me. I'm like a piece of furniture.
38 They will ask me, "Where have you been? Have you been unwell or
39 something?"
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45 While friendship networks are noted as being particularly important, even
46 relationships with strangers are not always fractious as Gauri finds in small acts of
47 kindness such as a thank you from a stranger after lending her a pen at the bank.
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49 This enclosure within habitual familiarity (including parks, cultural centres,
50 suburban clubs, friends' homes) enhanced a sense of comfort, but conversely also
51 reflected strategies of avoidance, particularly of those places where they
52 encountered: large groups of 'bragging type youths', 'louts', the 'leery', the 'drunks',
53 the 'crowded', 'conservative' places, where men outnumber women (particularly
54 those perceived as 'lower class' but also popular restaurants where business men
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gather), 'unlit', 'unoccupied', secluded places, after dark, polluted, and 'filth[y]', places that smell of urine, the marker of men using space inappropriately. To avoid those with different 'mind sets', and subsequent surveillance and judgement, particular events were also avoided, for example, 'couple parties' (Lakshmi).

Such withdrawal, keeping a low profile, not 'standing out' or not 'drawing attention', suggests invisibility within enclosures of their own making as a means to undermine constraining coordinates such as respectability. There is tension, therefore, in avoidance as a means of coping with the city, to manage its confluence of inequality and discomfort, but which also generates a negative freedom that reproduces gendered power relations (Koskela 1979). The body of the woman is made small at times, enacted as fragile rather than possessing the means to enact (Young 1980), as Lakshmi, an NGO worker in her 40s, notes: 'I think if you stood out like that there would be huge pressure, huge troubles'. This avoidance has the potential to be extrapolated into 'social extinction' as women fight the assumption that they do not desire access to the city (Wilson, 2001: 93).

However, despite acknowledging the 'brutality' of Delhi, several women, like Aditi, articulate a defiance in their relationship with the city, deliberately 'standing out', challenging any attempt to constrain her sexuality.

It's not all violent and clashing all the time. It's clashing and it's also making out at the same time, you know? It's both things. So the one half is what keeps us going I guess.

In negotiating what a good life might be (Davis 2009), a love-hate relationship with the city is engendered, as Draupadi explains:

Well, I've lived here most of my life, studied here, grown up here, negotiated the city, or at least a part of it, and loved it and hated it. [...] I don't like, sometimes, the aggression in the city and, at the same time, it's a city that affords you relationships. [...] So, you know, Delhi is not a black and white city at all.

The city provides new spaces for these women (coffee shops, cinema complexes, cultural centres), as well as offering anonymity (noted by Saba and Parvati in

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3 particular). It is admired for its green spaces, and the opportunities it has afforded,
4 particularly for those like Anisa, who came to Delhi as a student from an even more
5 conservative, parochial space in north India. Reminiscent of Pandey (2014) and
6 Belliappa's (2013) work, Saba describes the complexity of the relationship between
7 modernity and tradition, seeing young women now working 'everywhere' in the city,
8 from petrol pumps to baristas, 'going out of the house, working and living a different
9 kind of life', but noting that 'this destiny of marriage is unchanged'. This tension
10 inherent in cultural change results in a city in which 'you just have to keep
11 negotiating everything' (Anisa).
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19 **Negotiating the city**

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21 Despite the capacity for enclosure through withdrawal and avoidance noted above,
22 there was still a need to negotiate with the city and its crowds at some level: in public
23 space or at home with family, in the workplace or in public transport such as auto
24 rickshaws, with neighbours, landlords, and with themselves. This led to the
25 deployment of a variety of strategies to manage their positions of difference; from
26 defiantly challenging social norms to more quietly finding their way around things,
27 learning to live in Delhi, 'coping with it' through adapting communication styles,
28 dress, mobility, or utilizing deception.
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35 Such different approaches reflected personal values and disposition, and the
36 strength of support networks, including family. Parvati, for example, preferred to
37 'always be nice to everybody (...) like I will never pick a fight'. Aditi on the other hand
38 argued vociferously. These strategies were particularly evident in the search for
39 accommodation; an extremely difficult task for single women in Delhi that requires
40 particular negotiation skills as well as financial capital (see Bernroider, this issue).
41 Negotiation could be conducted using Delhi style communication as Madhurai, a
42 Punjabi from Gujarat, learned in her negotiations with landlords, adopting a
43 'sharpness' and 'astuteness' (a style that reinforced Aditi's argument that Delhi made
44 people 'aggressive and crude').
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53 If I say I'm Punjabi, they don't give me apartment. If I'm single, they don't give
54 me apartment. Erm, and if I'm working with an NGO, not at all. [...] So I have
55 to say I'm from Ahmedabad and I'm from Gujarat and ... I'm a researcher. ...
56 yeah, I have to manoeuvre ... I have to strategise differently. [...] So I
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3 learned, you know, I gradually learned the trick and the strategies, what
4 works ... and then I started selecting the places where the landlords are not
5 around. (...). Because that was also one intervention that ... I faced initially,
6 was, "What time do you come? What time do you go?" Because I used to
7 travel a lot and I ... my flights would arrive at late nights and ... you know, or
8 if I would go for a party I would come back late (...). And then if ... when my
9 ... my parents would come, the landlords would talk about how late I am from
10 my work or my party.
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18 Negotiations could be particularly tendentious in the workplace where for many
19 women they were required to represent neo-liberal coordinates as well as maintain
20 'respectability'. Conversations could be misconstrued as Rani, a senior manager in
21 her 50s, illustrated.
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26 At the workplace, suppose she talks and has a very ... you know intense
27 conversation about any subject, that is not ... the men in this country yet
28 don't know how to negotiate this space.
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33 The skills necessary to manage such interactions can be developed over time as
34 Parvati noted, arguing that her 'coping skills are getting better' and that 'there are
35 just things you can do, you know, that does protect you'. For example, she continued
36 to wear her wedding band and used 'Mrs P' on official documents, despite being
37 divorced for seven years. In doing so Parvati, and others such as Yasmeen,
38 speaking below (divorced, in her 50s and working in the media sector), highlighted
39 that a little deception is not a bad thing in a city like Delhi.
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46 When I just moved to this new house about five years ago and I was going
47 round for a walk a couple of months later and this woman asked me, "And
48 how are your sons?" and I said, "Er which sons?" so she said, "Your two sons
49 who are not here" (laughter) and I said, "No, this is my maid, I'm single and I
50 have no children". My maid had realised very quickly that if you were not
51 married and you don't have children, especially sons, then you are not
52 respectable. So she had not just made up a whole history for me (laughs)
53 and also conveyed it to the neighbours and failed to tell me! (laughter) And I
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3 thought even for her ... so we have to have these absent sons, so that we
4 are not just some wanton loose women.
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8 Disguise and deceit reassured those around them that everything is as it should be,
9 nothing has been transgressed. This performance appears particularly important in
10 perhaps the most fraught area of negotiation; within the family. As a point of tension
11 and care, shame could be skirted by avoiding direct confrontation, for example,
12 Anisa, now in her 50s, never openly stating to her father that she would not marry.
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16 Such actions, or deliberate lack of them, highlight the compromises and
17 diversity of responses made as part of the negotiations with themselves. Often
18 politicised, articulating an understanding of patriarchy, structural inequality and
19 injustice, they still grappled with processes of adaptation under conditions of
20 'westernisation', the subjective lines between 'modern' and 'traditional', and what that
21 entailed in terms of their choices. With contestation of cultural enclosures centred on
22 the body's appearance, comportment, its placement and acts of speaking out, many
23 of the women, like Jaya, a teacher, never married and now in her early 60s,
24 acknowledged sliding between gradations of respectability and enclosure in her
25 negotiations with Delhi.
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34 So I'm free to [wear revealing clothes] but I won't do it because my
35 upbringing or whatever you call it has been such that I'm traditional in my
36 ways. And that tradition then directs your life and it is inherited ... not
37 inherited but internalised so much that even given a chance you won't break
38 that.
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45 Even when the anonymity of the city facilitated the breaking of rules, out of sight of
46 the gaze of family, limits were still self-imposed; from decisions on sex to diet.
47 Kavita, from a strictly vegetarian south Indian Brahmin family, illustrates her
48 hierarchy of possible transgressions.
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52 I was drinking, smoking, having sex, oh god, doing everything that I was not
53 supposed to do. (...) I was being independent and short haired, and all of
54 that, it became synonymous with a certain kind of thing. (...) I was drinking
55 and doing all of those things, but I was not eating meat.
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5 For some, however, defiance and overt protest marked out demands rather than
6 negotiations, asserting a presence in public space in the process: from the mundane
7 (fighting for parking space, complaining about forms that ask for relationship status),
8 to Aditi's fight for the right to have 'random sex with whoever I feel like. Doing my
9 thing', and sometimes deliberately smoking extra cigarettes in public just to annoy
10 people. Kavita sparred with the auto driver in a battle of wills as he tells her to put out
11 her cigarette. Gauri bought beer at the local Club, despite the request from a male
12 member that the 'gentleman with them' buys the alcohol. Nandini refused to wear a
13 dupatta (a long scarf worn across the chest designed to cover the breasts). Parvati
14 carried pepper spray: 'Yeah, yeah. You put it in a ziplock bag and you just feel very
15 comfortable'.

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These battles inevitably take their toll. 'Exhausting' and 'tiring' are words many used to describe their relationship with the city.

"Should we complain? How should we ... ?" but you know sometimes you don't have the energy to negotiate yet one more ... (Hana).

There is relief expressed at being elsewhere where this constant negotiation does not have to take place: another city, another country, home or in another state of mind, developing 'detachment' (Saba), 'acceptance' (Madhurai), or staying 'aloof' (Lakshmi). Esha, a media professional in her 40s, has the capacity with age to ignore the stares and barbs, but also illustrates how this ability is enhanced by possession of a car in which she is enclosed for most of her journey.

I have no problems walking out in short skirts or whatever, going down and having five people ogle at me, it doesn't bother me. I get into my car, I go wherever I have to, I get out of my car, I come home.

For some, politicisation added to exhaustion, from their involvement in animal welfare, environmental, anti-racism, and anti-corruption campaigns, to everyday acts such as looking after stray dogs, providing water for local labourers, and maintaining green spaces in their neighbourhoods. However, these actions also demonstrate a

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3 care for Delhi; a pleasure in its parks, friendships and cultural life they struggle to
4 maintain in order to ensure pockets of social life that enhanced their love for the city.

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6 Mitigating circumstances modified these negotiations with the city, for
7 example, being a minority by religion, sexuality and/or singleness was an added
8 burden. Family made a difference, especially 'unconventional', 'bohemian'
9 childhoods, and, perhaps surprisingly, fathers. Several noted that they had particular
10 support from their fathers in their decision to remain unmarried or pursue a career
11 rather than a family even if sexual orientation or divorce was not overtly spoken of.
12 Other assets such as high value work or social networks could cover over perceived
13 transgressions and trump being an 'oddball' (Aditi) single woman. Class, that is,
14 socio-economic resources, afforded accommodation in more secure areas and their
15 own cars and/or drivers, enabling public transport to be avoided and blocking out
16 places of discomfort (see also Talukdar and Linders 2013). This capacity reinforced
17 a sense of self-enclosure as the private sphere was extended into the public through
18 the domestication of particular routes and spaces like shopping malls. However,
19 there was a sense that class was not a protection from the perceived violence of the
20 city, and non-monetary social exclusion could be just as painful (e.g. no longer
21 invited to 'couple parties').
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33 Age, however, was considered as offering a degree of protection. Grey hair
34 removed reproductive ambiguity, and brought with it an attitude of 'no longer giving a
35 fuck' (Kavita), suggesting a capacity to pick their battles, learning when to adapt and
36 withdraw when necessary. In the course of negotiations, over time there was the
37 finding of a balance between release and restraint, control and contingency, as
38 tradition and modernity was re-versioned in a process of 'imagin[ing] and re-
39 imagin[ing]' the nation (Radhakrishnan 2009: 204), and their place within it.
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46 **Conclusion**

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48 The women in this study illustrate the contradictions of cultural and urban change
49 that must be held within the body, and the diverse strategies necessary to manage
50 the constraints of a city governed by coordinates of both neo-liberalism and cultural
51 nationalism. In their agency they reproduced secure enclosures, as well as
52 contested them; negotiated safety and propriety, access as well as avoidance;
53 adapted practices, and voiced defiance. They fought to care for places and social
54 life, including a care at times instigated in deception, to save the face of families as
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3 well as protect themselves. Transgressive in their single, middle aged presence, they
4 made evident positions of difference and inequality, maneuvering through Delhi's
5 innumerable points of confrontation, re-versioning 'tradition' and 'modern', re-
6 negotiating respectable and irredeemable. As a result, their presence and choices
7 unsettled meanings, generated ambiguity and reflected the shifting boundaries of
8 subjectivity.
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13 Flexibility, therefore, appeared paramount: to compromise, to bend and twist
14 in order to absorb the friction and inevitable collisions in their fraught relationship
15 between actual space use and the imagination of urban possibilities. This agency
16 was facilitated by factors of class (private cars, secure accommodation) that allowed
17 corridors of comfort to be created. Their accumulated capital of age demonstrated a
18 'thickening' of experience as skills were developed and practiced over time, enabling
19 some to make demands on the city, on bureaucracy, on family, on neighbours.
20 However, choices to reinforce familiar personal enclosures that facilitated security
21 could at times come at the expense of wider access and visibility. The complex
22 history of violence against women in Delhi also necessitated at times a less visible
23 (single) self, the avoidance of particular places or minimizing the amount of time in it.
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28 In managing neo-liberal modes of living, expressions of cultural nationalism,
29 and perceived vulnerabilities, a dual role for enclosure is therefore apparent,
30 generating exclusion and procuring security, both physical and ontological, while
31 also enabling points of access to the city. Such strategies appear less than the
32 emancipatory imagination of an aspirational city, but given the realities of cultural
33 pressure described I would argue that creating or reproducing enclosures, to
34 differing extents, enables a point of protection from which the city can be accessed.
35 As Koskela (1997) found, courage can stem from first knowing an area well and
36 feeling comfortable there. In conclusion, the study highlights that either/or
37 dichotomies fail to capture the complexity of everyday experience, and can
38 misrepresent the lives of women who are not only and always bound by the
39 coordinates of tradition or modernity, of cultural nationalism or neo-liberalism.
40 Instead, the agency of everyday practices embodied the contested intersections
41 between cultural and urban change, as both the city and these women's lives reflect
42 the multiple transformations of India under conditions of globalisation.
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