SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN ASSAM: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF "MODERN INDIAN WOMAN"

By

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the concept of the "modern Indian woman" and women's lived experience of gender-based violence, particularly sexual harassment. The study suggests that due to their unawareness regarding sexual harassment, women tend to comprehend gender based violence as sexual harassment. Even if sexual harassment takes away women's autonomy to use public space, sexual harassment is normalized as a form of gender performance that hegemonic masculinity demands. My ethnographic study is based on Assam, a North-Eastern state in India, which is a relatively little explored area in India. This thesis is an extension to a study I conducted in 2015-2016 on the perception of educated youths on sexual harassment in Assam. While the idea of the 'modern woman' suggests that women move out of the home and gain education and employment, challenging the dominant discourse of womanhood created by nationalist leaders during the post-independence era, the constant fear of being sexually harassed takes away their motivation to move out of the private space. Using the postcolonial theories of Partha Chatterjee, Asish Nandy, Gayatri Spivak, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Maitrayee Chaudhuri, I investigate how women bargain their identity as a 'modern Indian woman'for sexual harassment in Assam. My research contributes to the debate about sexual harassment, showing how the popular discourse of the 'modern Indian woman' inflicts sexual harassment in the country, and how woman are creating their own subjectivities against sexual harassment.

Declaration of Original Research and the Word Count

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signed _____ (*Asha Lata Devi*)

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCING THE "MODERN INDIAN WOMAN"

Last week, drinking a sip of coffee in the university cafeteria, I asked two of my Indian male friends what they think a 'modern Indian woman' is in the contemporary era. One of the friends, who is from the Southern part of India, said, 'a modern woman' is a woman who is independent and has a capability to act accordingly with families and friends. Another friend, from Western India, said that a 'modern Indian woman', in contemporary Indian context, is a woman who is tied through chains and has learn to live through or break away from those chains, but who is not truly free at all. She is expected to negotiate with her traditional values as well as live an independent life. Today, sitting in front of my computer, recollecting the conversation I had with my friends, I asked the same question to my South Indian female friend from Kerala, in order to understand the general perception of the 'modern Indian woman'. The 'modern woman' for her is a woman who makes decision for herself and has the realization that she is also a political subject and has equal rights and responsibilities in the society as a man. A North Indian female friend from Uttarakhand said to me that a woman who tries to live her life according to her own terms and conditions is a 'modern Indian woman'. On the one hand, irrespective of the regional differences, both my female friends see independence and freedom as pivotal aspects that constitute within the concept of the 'modern Indian woman'. On the other hand, the idea of balancing independence and family values seems pivotal for the 'modern Indian woman' that my male friends perceive.

After this, I tried to search the image of the 'modern Indian woman' in my browser, and different results came up. Among all the images, there were some women in traditional Indian attire; some in an office with professional dresses; some images depicted a mother holding babies; and some were cooking and wearing an apron. This takes me back to my understanding of the 'modern Indian woman'. As a female student from India who has been

studying liberal arts for the last six years, I had no concrete answer for the question. The idea of 'modern Indian woman' is a concept which cannot be defined with a static meaning, as it changes due to the diversity of the Indian population. However, having read the literature for this paper, a 'modern woman' to me is an independent thinker who has her own subjectivity and the ability to decide how she defines her identity as a 'modern'. A 'modern Indian woman' should have all the rights that a man receives in the country. She should be free to have multiple subjectivities which should not limit her to one role.

At the same time, in India, in the wake of the 2012 December rape case which led to a more public discourse on gender-based violence and new laws regarding gender-based violence, there have been claims of women abusing these laws, leading to further difficulty for women who are actual victims of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment. *The Indian Express* newspaper reports that the Indian government said that "526 cases of sexual harassment of women at workplace were reported during 2014" (The Indian Express: 2015), and many cases goes unreported. Sexual harassment is one of the forms of gender based violence where physical damage cannot always be seen. However, it takes away the right of the woman to use certain spaces with the same freedom that men do. This idea of being sexually harassed takes away the autonomy of women's free mobility in the space which is occupied by men. Considering the general perception of the 'modern Indian woman' in the above paragraph, where freedom and independence seems crucial to be 'modern', can we call Indian women 'modern'?

Using an ethnographic study, in this paper I aim to investigate this question: who are the 'modern Indian woman'? And, in what ways does sexual harassment impact their daily lives and experiences? This ethnographic study primarily focuses on the women of Assam, which is a North-eastern province of India. Sexual harassment is crime that is prevalent in all parts of the country. However, there are fewer studies conducted on Assam (Dey 77: 2013). In

her study on sexual harassment at workplace in Assam, Paramita Dey finds that Assamese women deny the prevalence of sexual harassment at their workplace due to the lower level of awareness in the province, while women in other parts of India are speaking up against sexual harassment in workplace (Dey 81: 2013). When 'modern Indian women' move out of the home, the prevalence of sexual harassment that they are more likely to face has to be acknowledged in order to be addressed—as such, more studies should be conducted in Assam on sexual harassment. My study on Assam will also help to understand the perception of sexual harassment among women in Assam and to fill the gap in the existing literature on sexual harassment. As a result, this will allow for systematic examination of sexual harassment, providing insight for academicians, lawmakers, and the public in order to raise awareness regarding sexual harassment fill the gap of literature on sexual harassment in India.

My study focuses on different paradigms of sexual harassment, concentrating on the lived experience of Assamese women who are trying live up to the expectation of the idea of a 'modern Indian woman'. Due to the rise of globalization, different provinces of India are connected to each other as people move from one province to another for better opportunities. Thus, concept of the 'modern Indian woman' has less differentiation throughout the country. One the reason for this is the common source from which they learn about the idea of 'modern Indian woman', which is mass media. Mass media is equally accessible in all parts of the country (Channa: 2004; Derne: 1999; Ramasubramaninan et al.: 2003), and is a common medium to educate about sexuality in India (Derne 567:1999). Amidst the harassment that they face in the streets and workplace, women move out of the home in order to claim their own political subjectivity by attaining education and employment opportunities.

3

1.1. Modernity and the "Modern Indian Woman"

During the rise of nationalism in India, the idea of women's questions was also brought up in the main agenda of anti-colonial movement. Thus, it is pivotal to explore the idea of modernity as a concept during the rise of nationalism that gave the space for discussion of women's issues in post-colonial India. In this chapter, I first explore the existing literature on modernity as a concept highlighting both Western and non-Western understandings of modernity. This is followed by the question of women raised during the discussion of modernity in the nationalist project.

Different scholars have presented different views on modernity, which are based on different disciplines and contexts across nations and cultures. Thus, using a homogenous notion of modernity is not possible, especially to portray modernity in the non-Western world. This section will map the different understandings of modernity across nations,[1] including both the Western and non-Western context. First of all, I want to draw a distinction between modernity and modernization. Modernity is "a condition of social existence that is radically different to all past forms of human experience," while modernization is a "transitional process of moving from 'traditional' or 'primitive' communities to modern societies" (Shilliam: 2017). However, Robbie Shilliam defines these concepts through a specific disciplinary lens, that of International Relation. I will explore economic, historical and sociological definitions of modernity in the paper. The process of modernization is viewed as static and associated with industrialization and rational thinking by some scholars, who overlook different cultural contexts. Walt W. Rostow (1959) views modernity through the lens of Economics, where modernization transforms a traditional society to modern society, which occurs after industrialization and capital mobilization. This concept is widely studied in Developmental

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[1] I will particularly use the book, *Multiple Modernities* by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (2002).

Economics, which Non-Western scholars like Yoginder Singh (1973) criticize, adding more components to the definition of modernization. Rostow assumes that all the countries have to go through 5 stages of economic development. Firstly, preconditions of takeoff: the countries have to start developing agriculture, industries, technology in this stage. Secondly, takeoff, where everything is ready, and the country focuses on savings and investment. It increases skilled labor, technology and industries. Thirdly, the drive to maturity: a society effectively applies the range of modern technology to the bulk of its resources, and the expansion of industries slows down in this stage. Fourthly, the age of high mass consumption: here, the society ceases to accept the extension of modern technology. Public security, welfare and other facilities increase. Leisure activity for working class also increases in the fourth stage. Finally, beyond consumption: the population will increase due to high birth rates which will force the extension of society's resources and capital in this stage. Automobile ownership, suburban housing and investment will also increase (Rostow: 1959). Rostow seems to focus on economic development, connecting it to modernization. However, this model is static, which is not applicable for all the countries because of the colonial history.

Yoginder Singh (1973) criticizes this universal model of modernization which focuses on one sphere of development project in his book, entitled *Modernization of Indian Tradition*. He argues that modernization does not only mean technological advancement, but also is an advancement of people where they understand and utilize that advancement. "Modernization symbolizes a rational attitude towards issues, and their evaluation from the universalistic and not pluralistic viewpoint; when it involves emotional response to problems, orientation is empathetic and not constrictive; modernization is rooted in scientific world-view; it has deeper and positive association with levels of diffusion of scientific knowledge, technological skill and technological resources in a particular society" (Singh quoted from Levy Junior 61: 1973). Singh asserts that commitment to a scientific worldview and internalization of the

philosophical and humanistic view of science on contemporary issues are more important than the amount of technologies produced in modernization (Singh 61: 1973). Singh also highlights modernization in India, surpassing a monolithic understanding of modernity, which I will explain in the later part of the paper. Likewise, Bjorn Wittrock (2002) also surveys the history of modernity in his chapter, and challenges the universality of the discourse of modernity. In his chapter, *Modernity: One, None, or Many,* he suggests that the cultural and political agenda of modernity was developed first in Western and Central part of Europe. He asserts that the modern world emerged along with the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and political upheaval in the Northwestern part of Eurasian world, and it varied even in the European context (Wittrock 39: 2002). There was an empirically undeniable and clearly noticeable variation in institutional and cultural forms of the modern societal institutions from the start even in Central and Western European settings, which became apparent when these institutions were extended to other parts of the globe (Wittrock 58: 2002). Contemporarily, he sees modernity as a global condition, which now influences everyone's actions, interpretations, and habits across nations, even if variation exists in the civilizational roots across nations (Wittrock 38: 2002). The author ends with an assertion that modernity cannot be defined through a monolithic concept, even in the restricted European context (Wittrock 58: 2002).

In the similar manner, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (2002) introduces the term, "multiple modernities," in his book, *Multiple Modernities*. He questions the universality in understanding modernity. Unlike Wittrock, he challenges the Western discourse of modernity of 1950s. Eisenstadt's book provides contextual insight into different authors, challenging the conventional notion of modernity as he surveys the ideas of Bjorn Wittrock, Nilufer Gole, Sudipta Kaviraj, Dale F. Eickelman in his literature. Introducing multiple modernities, Eisenstadt questions the notion of modernity that assumes that all industrialist societies will converge one day and that asserts that this process of convergence has already started

6

(Eisenstadt 2002). Going against ideas of long prevalent theories regarding modernity that require substantial revision, he defines multiple modernities as a particular view of the history and elements of the modern era in the context of contemporary world that is so diverse (Eisenstadt 2002). He states that multiple modernities help to comprehend the present world by explaining the history of modernity and viewing modernity as "a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (Eisenstadt 2: 2002). One of the pivotal implications of multiple modernities is that modernization is not parallel to Westernization, and the Western notion of modernity is not a homogenous notion of modernity (Eisenstadt 2: 2002).

On the topic of Western discourse of modernity, Nilufer Gole (2002) adds a Non-Western understanding of the notion, particularly highlighting Islamic modernities. She emphasizes the critical issues of Islamist politics and its encounter with modernity. Gole asserts that there is a constant fluctuation between assertions of authenticity and the globalization of modernity, which creates a tension between identity and modernity—a tension which is more dramatic and notable in non-Western settings of modernity (Gole 92: 2002). She further explains that in non-Western contexts, traditions and memories are the source of social drama instead of cultural innovations (Gole 92: 2002). According to Gole, in Islamic modernities the idea of future-oriented progress and individual freedom is not seen, unlike and the Western modernity (Gole 92: 2002). Similarly, Dale Eickelman (2002) also challenges the Western modernity that is seen in human freedom and norms of rationality, which accepts secularization and excludes the Islamic world. He depicts the contemporary Iranian society, which is considered be to a place where there is no hope for creation of a 'civil society', in order to rebut the homogenous notion of Islamic society. In present Iranian society, religion and politics are woven together, as evidenced by the burgeoning ideas of youth, which do not always run parallel to the traditional ideas dictated by religious leaders (Eickelman quoted in Eisenstadt:

2002). Eickelman suggests that there is a change in the Iranian society as individual emancipation of men and women grows, transcending the traditional notion of religion (Eickelman: 2002). Thus, the notion of modernity, according to Eickelman, is a resistance towards the Western notion of modernity because the Western modernity advocates secularism, undermining religious forces and intellectuals (Eickelman 132: 2002).

Yoginder Singh sees modernity and tradition as a cultural process. He draws distinction between modernization and social change in a traditional society. On the one hand, modern values are grounded on science, rational thinking, evolutionary theory, and are universalistic and not limited to one cultural context. On the other hand, traditional values can have multiple forms that changes based on cultural context (Singh: 1973). Even though the process of modernization started with Western contact, different traditional institutions also got reinforced in the process, and modernization is not similar to Westernization (Singh 202 1973). In this regard, one of Singh's premises is similar to those of Eisenstadt, who views modernization and Westernization as different processes of social change. To draw a clear distinction between modernization and social change, Singh uses term like "Westernization" and "Sanskritization." The author refers to the concept of Westernization as a change that came to Indian society and its culture as an outcome of the British colonialism, occuring on multiple levels including technology, institutions, ideology and values (Singh quoted from Srinivas 9: 1973). However, Sanskritization is a process of cultural mobility in the social structure of India, where lower caste people tend to mimic upper caste people (Singh quoted from Srinivas 5: 1973). The process of modernization also creates tension between varieties of existing tradition in the country giving a new form to the existing traditions (Singh: 1973). Thus, modernization cannot be seen as complete eradication of existing traditions.

Similarly, Partha Chatterjee (1994) draws a distinction between the Western understanding of modernity and Indian modernity, terming it as 'our modernity'. Chatterjee

believes that uncritically mimicking Western modernity, without contextualizing the idea of modernity based on culture and geography, will lead to uncoordinated life (Chatterjee 140: 1994). He suggests that if universal modernity exists, then it involves teaching us to use the ways of reasoning in order to identify our modernity (Chatterjee 141: 1994). The history of our modernity is interconnected with the history of colonialism, and so it is always impossible to accept the universal domain of free discourse, free from the differences of race and nationality. Thus, we make a rigid assumption that, due to the significant involvement of modern knowledge and modern regimes of power, we always remain the consumer of universal modernity and we cannot be the producers (Chatterjee 146: 1994). This is the reason why Indian nationalists have been resisting universal modernity in order to create their own modernity, suggests Chatterjee (Chatterjee 146: 1994). He presents a dichotomy entangled around the idea of modernity. While the idea of modernity served as justification in the colonial project, perceiving colonial subjection of India as a mode to achieve enlightenment, nationalist projects use the idea of modernity to reveal discover imperialism as illegitimate (Chatterjee 510-151: 1994). Thus, Chatterjee believes that "the burden of reason, dreams of freedom; the desire for power, resistance to power: all of these are elements of modernity" (Chatterjee 151: 1994). One cannot escape power in modernity. Therefore, it is impossible to support or oppose modernity. Instead, one can find ways to cope with modernity, which can be beneficial or destructive, tolerant or violent.

Ashis Nandy (1997) conceptualizes modernity in the context of South Asia, focusing on European Enlightenment history and temporality, particularly in India. The modern self is defined through the hegemonic Western discourse, which is first defined by the colonial masters and then processed by the India educated elite, veiling importance of the history of ancient scriptures and folklores (Nandy: 1997). Nandy also criticizes the Western discourse of modernity that is imported in India, like other above mentioned authors.

Partha Chatterjee adds the discourse of women to the idea of community formation in *Whose Imagined Community?*" In his text on women and nation, Partha Chatterjee (1989) highlights the distinction of inner and outer sphere of the state in a more detailed way. He also explores the position of women in the national community designated by the Indian nationalists, who are known as the 'new woman'. He says that Indian nationalists of 19th century assert that it is important to promote material techniques of the Western civilization without abandoning the spirituality of the East, because the spiritual essence of national culture in the East is superior to that of the West. He also adds that this selective appropriation of the Western modernity becomes the ideological justification in the nationalist projects. The distinction of material and spiritual is associated dichotomy between inner and outer, where spiritual lies in the inner and material in the outer, and the spiritual side is seen as genuine identity in the nationalist project. This is where Chatterjee brings the nationalist notion of women's position into the discussion of national community. In the division of social space, women are the expected to be the representative of the inner world—that is, a household. This inner space is not affected by the Western material world (Chatterjee 121: 1989). Chatterjee asserts that a colonial state is not allowed to intervene in the inner realm to make changes, or transform the women into modern beings, and this task of making women modern is undertaken by Indian men (Chatterjee quoted in Menon 17: 2010). These women become 'the new woman' in a nationalist project, who are perceived as the epitome of spirituality, which do not include the women from the lower social class.

However, Suruchi Thapar (1993) builds on the construction of womanhood in nationalist project, adding a new notion for the women who do not fit in the category of the 'new woman'. These are the women who are termed as the 'common woman', and are constructed as the opposite of the new women. The 'common woman' is mainly the woman who has to move out of the home to earn a livelihood in the streets and, therefore, lacks the

characteristics like docility and submissiveness, unlike middle-class women (Thapar 83: 1993). These women are often termed as coarse, promiscuous and vulgar. Those who work as nautch girls, street-vendors, fisherwomen, and 'washer women' are few examples mentioned by Suruchi Thapar. These categorizations of women in the nationalist project limit women's choice: they can either be a common woman or a new woman, which mainly benefited nationalist male leaders because the homogenous categories of women helped them to marginalized women's political participations (Thapar 93: 1993).

Similarly, Maitrayee Chaudhuri (1999) presents the role of women, adding the political rights of women outside home according to the expectation of Indian nation-state. This role of women is shaped by the colonial history and nationalist movements. Even though they are given certain rights, women are confined within certain spaces. She argues that though India promotes individual's rights as a liberal state, women's individuality is always connected with 'family' and 'community', which is evident in three levels where Indian women are often viewed. These three levels where women are perceived by the state are women as agents and recipients of development, citizens, and cultural emblems (Chaudhuri 132: 1999).

Drawing on these concepts of women in national project, Harleen Singh (2014) provides a different dimension to the construction of women, one which is often underrepresented in national and colonial discourse. In her book, *The Rani of Jhansi: Gender, History and Fable in India*, Harleen Singh depicts the image of Laxmi Bai in a way which challenges colonial and nationalist discourse around Laxmi Bai and her femininity. The queen of Jhansi, Rani Laxmi Bai is represented as a brave warrior by nationalist discourse, and the colonial discourse perceives her as disobedient subject of the British Empire who is "a distillate of sexual and military malevolence in need of British marital and marital rule" (Singh 61: 2014). However, representation of Laxmi Bai in both discourses confirms the femininity of envisioned new women by nationalist leaders limiting women's identity associating with the

men in their lives (Singh: 2014). Singh presents the debate between this nationalist and colonial discourse of Laxmi Bai. She draws on the theories of gender in colonial space, particularly the presence of women in the public space during the anti-colonial movement.

Unlike the discussion of women in the nationalist project, Annie Nirmala M. (2015) explores the lives of middle class women in the 20th Century, who represents the 'new woman'. She argues that Indian middle class women are sandwiched between Indian tradition and modernity. While undergoing a battle between modernity and tradition, they tend to balance between their individuality and old patriarchal practices in order their find their space in society (Nirmala 2015). Using the work of contemporary Indian women writers, including Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal, the author analyzes the portrayal of Indian middle class women who negotiate between the modern beliefs and their traditional lives. Nirmala adds that these women battle resistance from traditional forces, triggering violence against them, which is often justified as protecting the honor of the family (Nirmala 2015).

1.2. Theoretical Framework

My thesis explores the concept of the 'modern Indian woman' and how gender-based violence shaped the lived experiences of young women in Assam province, India. I am interested in how my respondents embody the concept of 'new woman' as defined in the nationalist projects of post-colonial India (Chaterjee: 1989; Thapar; 1993). In this theoretical framework, I historicize the idea of the 'modern woman' using the framework of postcolonial feminism, particularly from India. Using a postcolonial lens, I also discuss public versus private space connecting it to the confinement of women and different meanings of public and private space.

Firstly, I am tracing the history of the construction of 'modern woman' framework. This was first highlighted through women's participation in the nationalist project: debates

concerning India's modernization efforts always raise the issue of the 'women's question' and what this meant for the rise of nationalism in the country (Chaudhuri: 2012). In modern India, nationalism is an institutional practice where social differences are constructed as well as performed in the name of formation of the nation-state, which is often gendered. Through social contests that are often violent and gendered, nationalism becomes constitutive of people's identities and nations are the institutions where social difference is created and performed (McClintock 61: 1993). Similarly, the nationalist discourse of India constructed womanhood so as to benefit the nationalist agenda, which women were expected to follow. To explain, women did not have say over it. Furthermore, this womanhood was constructed with consideration for the women from the upper and middle socio-economic groups in the context of India.

In order to understand the 'modern Indian woman', it is therefore pivotal to understand how 'modernity' as a concept in India is utilized within post-colonial debates about the 'nation-state' and 'nationalism'. As I discuss in the literature review, the concept of modernity in India is wielded as a form of resistance to colonial understanding of modernity, and thus the idea of modernity has become more crucial as the cornerstone of the nationalist project (Kaviraj: 2002; Chakrabarty: 2000; Singh: 1973; Nandy: 1997). In his text, Partha Chatterjee (1991) explores the idea of modernity through various aspects of nationalist projects, which tend to resist a western and colonial understanding of modernity. In taking up Benedict Anderson's seminal text *Imagined Communities*, Chatterjee offers a different paradigm through which to analyze Indian nationalism in *Whose Imagined Communities*?[2] Chatterjee suggests that Indian

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[2] Benedict Anderson suggests certain 'modular' forms of nationalism created by Europe and the America and are made available to other parts of the globe (Anderson quoted in Chatterjee 25-26: 1991). The former colonies are the consumers of modernity, and the Europe and Americas are the pivotal subjects of history of modernity (Anderson quoted in Chatterjee 26: 1991). This glorifies colonial enlightenment overlooking anticolonial resistance as well as misery of former colonies. Thus, the imaginations of former colonies are assumed to be paralyzed forever (Chatterjee 26: 1991).

nationalism is beyond the material, outside domain of the state, and is an inner and spiritual domain, which includes women and the family, culture, arts and language. This nationalism stands in sharp contrast to the imposed outer and material nationalism of the state as presented by Anderson (Chatterjee 30-31: 1991). As a critique to Anderson, Chatterjee also asserts that "if nationalism in the rest of the world has to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by the Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" (Chatterjee 25-26: 1991). If, then, the former colonies are the consumers of modernity, this means that Europe and the Americas are the pivotal subjects of histories of modernity (Chatterjee quoted from Anderson 26: 1991). This glorified notion of 'colonial enlightenment', overshadowing the fervent anti-colonial resistance and misery of Britain's former colonies, and in some sense coding former colonies as being forever paralyzed by this break with the center (Chatterjee 26: 1991). Thus, the concept of modernity in the former colonies is not necessarily one and the same idea that has been developed by the 'colonial project of modernity'.

Chatterjee describes Indian modernity as 'our modernity', and advances the idea that uncritically mimicking western modernity without contextualizing the idea of modernity based on culture and geography can only lead to an uncoordinated life, which cannot fit the context of India (Chatterjee 140: 1994). He suggests that if universal modernity exists then it is that which teaches us to use the ways of reasoning in order to identify our modernity (Chatterjee 141: 1994). The history of our modernity – in this case Indian - is interconnected with the history of colonialism. Therefore, it is always impossible to accept the universal domain of modernity that suggests freedom and rationality, which then influences the freedom of race and nationality in the country. Thus, we make the rigid assumption that, due to the significant

14

involvement of modern knowledge and regimes of power, we always remain the consumer of universal modernity and we cannot be the producers (Chatterjee 146: 1994).

Chatterjee says that Indian nationalists of 19th century assert that it is important to promote material techniques of the Western civilization without abandoning the spirituality of the East, because the spiritual essence of national culture in the East is superior to the West. He also adds that this selective appropriation of Western modernity becomes the ideological justification of the nationalist projects. The distinction of material and spiritual is associated with the inner and outer, where spiritual lies in the inner and material in the outer, and the spiritual side is seen as genuine identity in the nationalist project. This is where he brings the nationalist notion of women's position in the discussion of national community. Women's issues were not completely tackled because within the nationalist framework of 'new women' traditions were reformed. Furthermore, 'modernity' left its imprint in the lives of upper and middle class women through the education that these women were attaining (Chatterjee: 1994)

Chatterjee also asserts that the colonial state could not intervene in the inner realm to transform the women into the 'modern woman', and so this task is undertaken in large part by Indian men (Chatterjee quoted in Menon 17: 2010). These women become the 'new woman' in the nationalist project because they are perceived as the epitome of spirituality, and this idea of spiritual purity does not preclude women from lower social classes or castes. This idea of women's domestication in middle class families in India after colonization was also considered to be highly influenced by bourgeois middle class families of the West (Chaudhuri 281-282: 2012). To explain, the idea of women's confinement within the household is believed to have been adopted from the bourgeois middle class families of the colonizers. Colonialism thus played a pivotal role in reorganizing the spaces of women within the inner domain of the family and home because nationalist projects were controlled by educated elite and middle class Indian men who received their education for the most part in western countries, and carried back with

them new ideas about 'public' and 'private' as gendered domains. This then turned out to be 'national culture'.

If there can be considered a 'national culture' in modern-day India, Chaudhuri is clear that this is associated with the culture of middle class Indian families has in part become the dominant culture for the nation. This framing of the dominant cultural community as the new 'national' culture also marginalizes other communities because of the vast diversity within Indian culture, and of course, more pressingly, because of the pressure of the projection of 'national' culture as a resistance to colonial culture (Chaudhuri 281: 2012). As a result, marginalized communities like the members of lower economic classes and castes, get less space to practice their own culture, which they tend to perform within the inner domain of the household. Marginal communities uphold certain practices in order to preserve their cultural practices or local customs even when these practices involve gender discrimination or violence, such as practices of purdah system[3] and sati system[4], which have been continued in certain parts of India since the nineteenth century (Chaudhuri 281: 2012). Today, the dominant national culture idealizes women within this framework of 'new woman', even though it is evident that not all Indian women can possibly 'fit' this new ideal. Suruchi Thapar (1993) refers to another group of women as 'common women', and these are women who are constructed to oppose the 'new woman' concept. The 'common woman' is the woman who has moved away from home to earn a livelihood in the streets and therefore lacks key characteristics of the 'new woman', whose middle-class status is celebrated for its connections to docility and submissiveness (Thapar 83: 1993). These women are often referred to as coarse, promiscuous, and vulgar, and they work as nautch girls, street-vendors, fisherwomen, and 'washer women',

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[3] Social and religious practice of women's seclusion

[4] Burning widows among Hindu communities

16

to name a few examples of the kinds of small cottage-industry or subsistence work that Thapar lists in her book. This categorization of women in the nationalist project limits women's choices as either 'common woman' or as a 'new woman'. Over the course of that nationalist project, these categorizations benefited nationalist male leaders because the homogenous categories of women helped them to marginalize women's political participations (Thapar 93: 1993).

This framework of women's position in society oversimplifies the roles of women in Indian society, but the ideal of this composite creation of 'common' and 'new' woman has remained a core means by which women are categorized in contemporary India. The 'modern' became a tool for nationalists to gender the language of inner domain pertaining to women's new roles in upholding the moral compass of the new nation-state. This paradigm of the 'new woman' in modernity influences the construction of what I discuss here as the 'modern Indian woman'. In contemporary Indian society, Maitrayee Chaudhuri says that the ideal of the 'modern ideal woman' is the women who combines traditional qualities like domestic skills and an understanding of religious and ritual practice, with more 'modern' qualities like education and employment opportunities (Chauduri 278: 2012). Indian women can thus be 'modern', and yet they can still maintain their 'traditional' status, meaning that 'Indian modernity' is marked by the diversity of traditions. Chaudhuri asserts that men are, on the other hand, more likely to be described as 'modern' or 'traditional' based on their attitude towards women, while women are deemed 'modern' or 'traditional' based on their abilities to perform traditional tasks whilst also being educated and working to produce an income (Chaudhuri 278-279: 2012). Thus, the idea of 'modern' is highly gendered, where women are idealized as a symbol of traditions, but men are not. As a result, women are sandwiched between modernity and tradition in order to confirm the ideal projection of 'modern women'. Additionally, this idea of the 'modern woman' does not represent the diversity of the population of women in

India. For my thesis, I am using the concept as popular understanding of the 'modern woman' presented in academic and public discourse. I do not intend to overlook the diversity of Indian women by categorizing all of them within the framework of the 'modern woman', which is adopted from middle class families and does not acknowledge differences based on region, religion, socio-economic class, and caste in India.

Along with heterogeneity among Indian women, there is also no fixed meaning of 'inner domain'. Sara Mills depicts different interpretation of domestic space in colonial India, challenging the understanding of private space as a confinement of women, as understood by British women and men. The household in India, particularly households of elite Indians, is presented as a harem, which is perceived as the confined space of Indian women by the British scholars (Mills 141: 1996). This undermines the role of women, providing a monolithic understanding of certain space and practice due to the lack of inadequate knowledge of the British regarding public and private space of Indian women. This is because colonial powers were not allowed to intervene in the activities within the household in order to maintain the spirituality of inner domain.

Even though women were inside sphere of the home, they were tasting the idea of modern education and social reforms through men who were influenced by the material domain outside home, particularly through their husbands and fathers who are attained Western education. However, this reformation occurred for the women of elite families. The justification provided for women's confinement was their safety. Sara Mills (1996) asserts that the idea of trying to confine Indian women to the household was not initiated by men's fear of their own society, but because of the fear of sexual violence perpetrated by the colonizers. The justification of Indian women's confinement within the household shows the othering used as a tool to restrict women's movement. By definition, "othering" is the term used by Gayatri Spivak as a process through which the imperial discourse constructs its "others,"

which are their subjects, in order to define imperial powers. By doing so, they marginalize and exclude their colonizes (Ashcroft et al. quoted from Spivak: 2013)

However, the same public space, which was seen as a dangerous space for Indian women, was used by the British women for protection from their male counterparts. But, this idea of confinement was different for the women of the colonizers. Sara Mills says that the idea of women's confinement within the domestic sphere during the colonial era was not similar for British women in the colonies and in Britain as the British women also occupied the public space, unlike Indian women (Mills: 1996). Thus, the usage of space did not reflect gender relations only, it also reflected the complexities of other social relations based on class and nationality.

Different identities based on nationality and class intersect with gender, determining women's usage of outside space. The term "intersectionality" is coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, who defines intersectionality as the oppression that Black women face due to the intersection of race and sex discrimination (Crenshaw 1989). Intersectionality is a significant discourse of feminist philosophy that is triggered against the hegemonic knowledge production of the Western feminists, which overlooked the experience of colored women. Intersectionality is developed as a resistance or "push-back" to challenges non-white feminists faced in their work (Berger et. al 2009). Similarly, Sara Mills also transcend the British understanding of private and public space for women, highlighting other different factors that influence the usage of space.

However, what happens if the women who are not expected to be outside home move out of the home? Gender based violence, like sexual harassment, can be easily trivialized in the name of gender performance, and can be used as a tool of gender policing for the women who tend to challenge their confinement within the household. Here, gender policing refers to the responses to the violation of gender rules to promote conformity, which can come in the

form of violence or teasing (Wade et al. 2014: 71). India still holds on the patriarchal norms, which can also be another significant reason to sexually harass women, giving rise to fear that prevents women from moving out of the home. In patriarchal societies, women are expected to be in private spaces according to the socially constructed gender rules, which script how to behave as men and women (Wade et al. 2014: 61). I analyze women in public space drawing on Mary Douglas's theory of the "matter out place". Women in public space cross the boundaries created for them and as a consequence are subjected to sexual harassment as a violent form of gender policing. In her book *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas provides different meanings of dirt in different social contexts, where she uses the concept "matter out of place." She asserts that the meanings we give to things in the world (such as "dirt") come from our own culture's system of ordering and classifying. Our value judgments (good or bad) about these things are not natural or universally logical, but are culturally constructed. Things that do not fit into our classification system (that seem to fall between categories) can often be upsetting, sparking a strong reaction. This system is used to judge human beings, and can have significant real-world effects on people "in a marginal state" (those people who confuse our classification system when they are "out of place") (Douglas 1-3:1996). Moving out from private to public space, women surpass the boundaries created for them, and so they become "out of place" in the public spaces, creating threats to the men, who occupy public spaces according to their assigned gendered rules. As women are not in their assigned places, and are "out of place," men harass them to force them back to their places, which are private spaces. In other words, sexual harassment is way of gender policing for the women who do not obey their gender rules and move out of their private spaces.

In her study on the relationship between women's fear of violence perpetrated by men and their perception and usage of spaces, Gill Valentine (1989) asserts that women inhibit their usage of public spaces (Valentine 388-389: 1989). The author says that a woman makes her

own judgments regarding her safety when she is in an area beyond her local environment based on the preconceived idea that she upholds about the area and the area's occupants being unsafe for her. Social behavior that a woman receives from her physical surroundings also contributes to her judgment that the public space is dominated by men. This prevents women from using public spaces at certain times by igniting a fear of potential violence that they are more likely to face (Valentine 388-389: 1989). This fearful perception of public spaces is parallel to the context of sexual harassment in my study, although the author's study is based on the experience of the women in England. This fear might lead to victim blaming when a woman is sexually harassed on the streets or in public spaces, because she is not expected to use these spaces like men do. Victim blaming refers to the idea that women themselves provoke and deserve violence (Saroca 522: 2013). Thus, when women use public spaces and face sexual harassment, they prefer avoiding the spaces as a form of resistance over speaking out against harassment. The women who believe that they can walk safely anytime are also perceived as problematic, so there is little sympathy for the victims who face harassment or any sort of attacks for the violation of their bodies or of freedom of movement (Astbury 164: 2003). Hence, use of public spaces by women (or at certain times or in certain ways) is not accepted, and the women who do use these spaces are perceived as "matter out of place." Both men and women are located differently in providing different spaces in a gendered understanding of who belongs where.

This phenomenon of using violence to restrict women to the domestic sphere is also seen in the sexual harassment which is prevalent in India. Eve-teasing (another name for sexual harassment in the Asian context) is considered a weapon to weaken or to restrict women within domestic affairs, preventing their mobility in public spaces in patriarchal fabric (Kuruvilla 60: 2014). Women cannot claim the public spaces safely even in the urban areas of India, unlike men. In her study, based on Mumbai (India) and examining gender performance in public

areas, Shilpa Phadke et al. (2009) states that "despite the fact that in 21st- century global Mumbai certain women are both visible and desirable in public, particularly in their roles as professionals and consumers, women have only conditional access and not claim to public city spaces" (Shilpa Phadke et al. 2009: 186). Right to use the public spaces in India is still predominantly perceived as a man's right.

Along with patriarchal influence, claiming the public space can also reflect the colonized minds of Indians. Even if India attained freedom from colonial power, modern ideologies have highly influenced the lives of women, and colonial imprints can be seen in the consciousness of the colonized (Indians in this case). In his book, *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy explores the consequences of colonialism in the lives of the colonized, moving beyond the consequences in the economic and political spheres. Nandy discusses the cultural domination of colonizers in contemporary India, arguing that, apart from the physical impact of colonization in India, the thinking or cognitive processes of Indians are highly influenced by the colonizers, which is evident in their lives in postcolonial India and in their defense against the colonizers (Nandy: 1988). Influenced by the ideas of colonizers, therefore, sexual harassment is perpetrated by men predominantly to women in public spaces as a form of gender policing in order to restrict women's mobility in public spaces of India. The confinement of women within household reflects the colonial psyche of Indian middle class men, who were influenced by the concept of modernity. Thus, sexual harassment can become a form of gender policing, which might reflect the colonial impacts on the attitudes of Indian middle class men.

To sum up, the idea of "modern Indian women" is a concept that expects women to carry both traditional and modern ideologies within themselves, represented in popular and academic discourse. Women tend to negotiate with these both identities in order to create their space in Indian society, which challenges the idea of 'modern' understood in the Western

discourse. Moreover, I have also explored the idea of different meaning attached to space in colonial and postcolonial India, which is an outcome of patriarchy as well as colonialism. This public discourse of private and public space inflicts sexual harassment in Indian society.

The aim of my thesis is to understand the notion of the 'modern Indian woman' and different ways that sexual harassment has impacted the lives of the 'modern Indian woman'. I am concerned with understanding power relations, so I have developed a qualitative method that draws upon ethnography, in particular a feminist and postcolonial methodology from which I can begin to understand the subaltern subject. I conducted focus group with female students in three educational institutions in order to understand the ways in which women perceive sexual harassment and how they idealize the concept of the 'modern Indian woman'. I chose ethnographic research because this method enables me to comprehend hidden dynamics of the issues related to sexual harassment among my respondents, which I could not have comprehended with other research methods. Ethnographic research allows the researcher to enter into a social setting and also learn about the people who are involved in the research through observation and interaction (Emerson et al: 1995).

I use a qualitative research method because it helps researchers to understand invisible realities. Through conducting ethnographic field research, I tried to understand the notion of 'modern Indian women' through the lived experiences of women, discussed throughout their interviews. It also helped me to identify multiple factors contributing to the perception of SH among Assamese educated youth, with the help of focus group research technique to address this issue. Focus group technique provides a complex and detailed understanding of any issue by directly talking to people and sharing their ideas, concerns, opinions within a discussion with other participants. In that sense, Anita Gibbs asserts that "focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic" (Gibbs 1997). Focus group technique also provides a space to stimulate conversations on issues, which are

23

sometimes rarely discussed, like sexual harassment and gender based violence. For my focus groups participants, I created an opportunity to discuss the issue among themselves, where they have the freedom to agree and disagree with each other. They also get a space where meanings can be shared and contested from different perspectives (Shope 2006: 168). Hence, conducting focus groups did not only help me, but also potentially helped my participants. For instance, they told me after the discussion that they hardly used to give any thought to changes around them, and about gender based violence or sexual harassment before the discussion, and that they were not aware of the issue and the opinions of their friends regarding gender based violence.

I was particularly interested in conducting focus groups in educational institutions in Assam because there are no space for students to discuss issues related to sex in academic settings. For me, this research is also personal, since I spent my fourteen years of educational life in Assam, and have a first-hand knowledge of the kind of violence I discuss in my thesis. A study on sexual violence shows that harassment and violence are the normal part of everyday adolescent life in middle and high schools (Fineran quoted from Hlavka 337). Yet, most of the crimes go unreported, and are not discussed. As school students go on to join colleges and university in their hometown and sometimes outside their hometown, it is crucial for them to be aware of the reality of gender-based violence in India. It is also crucial to know their lived experience of modern India, in order to understand what perception and attitudes of gender-based violence they are going to experience as they enter the environment of colleges and universities. Further, schools, colleges and universities are more feasible way to reach educated youths than reaching them out in the public space or their home.

For this study, I have conducted focus groups at three educational institutions in the Sonitpur district in Assam (India), where Assamese is the official language. I conducted my

fieldwork with eight groups of four students. The first group was composed of the women ages fifteen to seventeen from twelfth standard from Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Assam. Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya is a central government residential school that enrolls students from different cultures and towns within Sonitpur district from sixth standard to twelfth standard. Due to strict rules and regulations, the knowledge that the students can access is strongly monitored, and their connection with the outside world is limited. They do not have access to the internet. The second group is the women ages fifteen to seventeen from twelfth standard of Biswanath College, a public college in Biswanath Chariali (a town), where students from different parts of Assam come for higher education. The educational exposure of students is not closely monitored in Biswanath College, unlike the first group. Undergraduate second and third year students are the third group of participants, from the same college, Biswanath College. They were the women ages seventeen to twenty one. The last group of participants were women ages twenty one to twenty three, pursuing their master's from Tezpur University, who are likely to have more information regarding sexual harassment while studying higher level courses. Of the two central universities in Assam, Tezpur University is the one where students from different parts of India come for their Masters education. Some departments of Tezpur University have integrated masters programs. From each educational background, including master's, under graduate and higher secondary, there was one group of science students and one of arts students. This particular type of sampling allowed me to explore their life experience regarding gender-based violence and the influence of educational background, social life and gender on the perceptions of gender-based violence among educated female youths in India. All participants of focus groups were staying in their respective institutions dormitory. The minimum educational qualification was twelfth standard and masters' level was the highest.

25

Before entering the field, I prepared my recorder, notes and met my note-takers to discuss their role in the study. I had a total of three note-takers, two of whom are my friends and of whom is my cousin brother. And all of them were well aware of the vulnerability of the participants and the significance my study. They played key roles in recruitment process of participants. My female friend helped me to conduct the focus group for all three educational institutions. As she was from Tezpur University, I started my fieldwork at her university. Initially, I discussed the study with the students of English department at the University because they are my friend's classmates. They agreed to help me for the entire study, and to recruit students from science streams as well, since I did not know anyone from science streams. The focus groups were completely voluntary, and many students did not open up at the beginning. When I start asking them about their perceptions on dating, they started participating actively in the discussion. I then asked the first part of the questions again. Discussing dating might have given them a space to feel comfortable with sharing their views on courtship, allowing them to share their views on love and relationships, unlike discussing issues like sexual harassment and gender-based violence. I then asked them about their perception of sexual harassment and causes of sexual harassments.

Janet H. Shope (2006) states that "reflexivity about one's social location and issues of representation keeps us honest about what we claim to know, what we cannot apprehend, and the limits of our disciplinary practices that rely on highly stylized discursive practice" (Shope 2006: 181). Initially, I was concerned about the fact that I had been away from Sonitpur and the educational culture of Assam for five years, where discussions of sex and sexuality is taboo. Moreover, I had not spoken Assamese regularly for almost five years. An Assamese teacher from my village translated focus group's discussion questions, which helped to initiate the discussion smoothly. To address my own potential biases and assumptions that this distancing of five years could have created, I researched and reflected on my understanding

26

and education on sex and sexuality in India before entering the field. This process helped me to establish a deeper understanding of the Indian education system and the lived experience of the respondents. In other words, this helped me to comprehend my identity as an outsider, allowing me to be reflexive about the cultural differences throughout the fieldwork. This further helped me to explore the strain between the theories and experiences of insiders and outsiders.

Based on my understanding of the region, I had expected that the students might not be comfortable talking about topics like sexual harassment and gender based violence throughout the process. They were even hesitant to utter the word "sex" during our conversation. However, it was not only the limited knowledge regarding sex education, as I expected, but also the power dynamics involved that shaped the outcome of the focus group discussions. For example, except for the Tezpur University students, all the participants were younger than me. This age difference became a barrier to open the smooth discussion about sex-related topics in the context of sexual harassment that I had hoped would develop. In order to tackle this issue, I initiated the topic of 'sex' multiple times.

1.3. Ethical Consideration

I have previously submitted this research to the Institutional Review Board at the Asian University for Women, since I started working on the topic during my undergraduate degree. I discussed the research with my supervisor, we decided it was not necessary for me to submit the methodology and interview material to another Institutional Review Board. I received an official letter of institutional consent for each educational institution where I collected fieldwork, and provided them with sufficient information about the study and its purpose. This helped me to gain credibility among the students. Since I had the permission from the college authority, I was extended permission from the warden of the hostels. I also took individual

informed consent from the students, leaving it completely voluntary on the part of the students if they wanted to participate in the study or not. Before conducting the focus group and distributing the surveys, I went through the topic of the study, participant information sheet, and informed consent form both in English and Assamese. Lastly, I informed the students of how I was going to use the information, and to ensure the participants' confidentiality by removing any identifiable details or names. Moreover, in all summaries and communication about the research, including the final research thesis, all names have been changed to utilize pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants.

One of the main challenges in conducting the fieldwork was scheduling the focus group discussions, since the students were busy with preparations for the finals exams, and I had to meet the students frequently after classes. Some students chose not to participate after the summer vacation even though they had committed to participate in the study. Another challenge that I faced was my unfamiliarity with people in the schools, colleges and universities, since I had been away from Assam for the past five years. Therefore, I had to rely on key informants to help me gain entry. My brother and my neighbors who were studying the same institutions helped me in the process. Secondly, my contacts through my internships and higher secondary schools helped me reach the educational authorities for the permission regarding focus groups. However, I struggled to manage a space for the focus group. As the college did not have any free space where no one would interrupt during the discussion, I conducted the focus groups with the women in Biswanath College in a college women's hostel. As a result, I had only hosteller women for the focus groups respective of their caste, religion and economic class, which provides less diversity to the study in terms of students being hostellers and non-hostellers for qualitative analysis.

28

CHAPTER 2
CONSTRUCTING THE "MODERN INDIAN WOMAN"

This chapter explores the concept of the 'modern Indian woman' and how gender-based violence shaped the lived experiences of young women in Assam province, India. I am interested in how my respondents embody the concept of 'new woman'[5] or 'common woman'[6] or 'modern ideal woman'[7] as defined in the nationalist projects of post-colonial India (Chaterjee: 1989; Thapar; 1993; Chaudhuri: 2012). The respondents seem to uphold the 'ideal modern woman' notion of contemporary India, where they sometimes conform to a nationalist understanding of 'new woman' and sometimes blur the distinction between 'common woman' and 'new woman'. They also tend to be aware of the regional and educational differences that are more likely to influence the idea of the 'modern ideal woman'. This categorization of women does not only marginalize other women and certain frameworks of womanhood, but also encourages victim blaming in the context of sexual harassment.

2.1 What is the "modern Indian woman"?

I first explored the history of the concept of the 'modern Indian woman', which still seems to be relevant to my analysis. Tracing this history will help me to understand what shapes the contemporary discourse and understanding of the 'modern Indian women'. During the rise of nationalism in India, the idea of the women's question was also brought up in the main

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[5] The women from upper and middle class become 'the new woman' in a nationalist project, who are perceived as the epitome of spirituality, which do not include the women from the lower social class (Chatterjee: 1989). They are the women are perceived as epitome of inner space or spirituality

[6] The 'common woman' is constructed as oppose to the 'new woman'. The 'common woman' is mainly the woman who has to move out of the home to earn livelihood in the streets, therefore, they lack the characteristics like docility and submissiveness, unlike middle-class women (Thapar 83: 1993). These women are often termed as coarse, promiscuous and vulgar, who work as the nautch girls, street-vendors, fisherwomen, and 'washer women' are few examples mentioned by Suruchi Thapar.

[7] Maitrayee Chaudhuri says that the ideal of the 'modern ideal woman' is the women who combines traditional qualities like domestic skills and an understanding of religious and ritual practice, with more 'modern' qualities like education and employment opportunities (Chaudhuri 278: 2012).

agenda of the anti-colonial movement. The wave of modernity touched the lives of women, resulting in the encouragement of women's education, the prohibition of child marriage, and the abolition of Sati system, widow remarriage. However, these reforms for women were limited to the women of Brahmin elite families, who were known as *Bhadromohilas*[8] of the society (Ghoshal: 2005). The nationalist supporters for women's education advocated the idea of educating women as one of the crucial nationalist agendas to strengthen women's traditional roles through education, which would make them efficient wives and mothers (Chaudhuri: 2012). These nationalist leaders from the elite families were the educated group of men who felt the need to educate their wives and reform the traditions, so as to make changes in the policies with their rational thinking that they attained from the Western education (Chatterjee: 1994; Channa: 2004). Thus, education and women's traditional values, mainly through language and dress, became the marker of modernity for women, which started from the inner domain itself. This created the 'new woman' in India, who fought for their emancipation along with elite western educated men. The policies and decisions of these revolutions for women have been monopolized by these elite groups (Channa: 2004). Therefore, it can be said that the creation of the 'new woman' did not really resolve the issue of women because of the diversity in the country based on religion, class, caste, and region.

However, this framework of the 'new woman' influenced the construction of womanhood in the 21st century. Due to the globalization, the women were required to support their families financially which increased the participation of women in labor force (Channa: 2004). This results in shift of the understanding of the 'modern Indian woman'. Women from the middle class then had to uphold the idea of tradition as well as modern ideals in order to find their space in the society (Nirmala: 2015). Modernity here signifies attaining education

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[8] Respectable woman

and seeking job opportunities in order to support the family, and tradition means performing and understanding the religious and traditional norms. While the women tend to embody "modern" identity through education and claimed their independence and the right to make individual life choices, they also carry the traditional norms in order to create their own spaces in a patriarchal society. To explain, women tend to negotiate with the traditional norms and their individuality in order to create their space in the society with patriarchal practices (Nirmala: 2015). This idea is parallel to patriarchal bargains. I use the definition of "patriarchal bargains" as Deniz Kandiyoti. Kandiyoti (1988) uses the concept of "bargaining of patriarchy" to present the way Sub-Saharan African and South and East Asian women negotiate with existing patriarchy within the household where these women make decision to deal with the oppression that they face as part of the system. According to Kandiyoti, "bargaining with patriarchy" is the method that women use to negotiate the problems they face due to the existing patriarchy in their daily lives, which demonstrates differences based on class, caste and ethnicity (Kandiyoti 1988). Likewise, the idea of the 'modern woman' in contemporary India also confirms the notion of women engaging in patriarchy bargaining, as Indian women who aspire to be independent negotiate with their traditions and culture for their emancipation.

The framework of the 'modern woman' is instilled in the society through popular media. Apart from the western education, the new culture of consumerism has highly influenced the lives of women in contemporary India through popular media, even if they stay within inner domain (Channa 41: 2004). Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1993) claims that the framework of the 'new woman' is constructed through the representation of women in colonial and post-colonial India in popular media, including fictions, commercial advisement, films, legal texts and journalism. The cultural representation of the 'new woman' is derived from educated, career-oriented women of urban India. In the framework of this 'new woman', a woman is "'new' in the senses both of having evolved and arrived to the times, as well as of

31

being intrinsically 'modern' and 'liberated'... And she is 'Indian', in the sense of possessing a pan-Indian identity that escapes regional, communal, or linguistic specificities, but does not thereby became 'westernized'" (Rajan 130: 1993). Rajan depicts the 'new woman' as the 'modern woman'. The identity of 'new' and 'Indian' are presented as dichotomous to each other when women are expected to uphold, because 'new' demands liberation and rational thinking, whereas 'Indian' demands upholding traditional value as opposed to the West. This is why women tend to negotiate their 'Indianness' with their 'new' identity.

The identity of 'new' demands change, while 'Indian' identity wants women to uphold nationalism, performing the politics of Indian gender, religion and culture. In the public construction of the 'new Indian woman', women are expected to retain 'Western' as well as Indian values (Munshi quoted in Daya: 2009; Munshi: 1998). Women are expected to negotiate with their Indianness and Western values. Shari Daya asserts that the academic and popular discourses that define the 'new woman' in contemporary India perpetuate a historically pervasive reductionism where women are constructed by corporeal traits, creating a boundary around the idea of womanhood that outcasts women whose bodily autonomy has been compromised through sexual assaults (Daya 97: 2005). In order to analyze my ethnographic study, my paper uses this popular discourse of the 'modern woman', where women aspire to be autonomous in their career and education, while sexuality and bodily autonomy are still perceived within the discourse of old patriarchy, in which women seem to have no control in the name of religious and traditional values. Even though this construct of the 'modern woman' creates a hegemonic image of womanhood in contemporary India, I base my analysis on this concept, and my respondents have sometimes confirmed and also blur the understanding of the 'modern woman'. Thus, this idea of the 'modern woman' is fluid, and I using the concept as popular understanding of the term presented in academic and public discourse. I do not intend to overlook the diversity of Indian women categorizing all of them within the framework of

the 'modern woman' that is adopted from middle class families. I acknowledge the differences based on region, religion, socio-economic class, caste of India which is missing in this analysis. However, the general perception of the 'modern Indian woman' is shaped through popular media of the country, which is highly consumed by Indians, irrespective of differences of region, religion, socio-economic class and caste in the country.

2.2. Constructing the 'modern Indian woman in the context of Assam

While some of the respondents from Assam live up to the expectations of the framework of the 'modern woman', some of them seek to challenge it, which blurs the boundaries between the binary concepts of 'modern woman' and 'common woman'. While these women seem to aspire to be educated and independent, they also uphold the notion of the 'ideal modern woman' in maintaining certain cultural traditions and skills that confirm their belonging in a 'modern ideal Indian woman' stereotype (Chaudhuri 278-279: 2012). The common elements that the respondents highlight in their discussion linking towards the framework of 'common' or 'new' or 'modern' woman are their dressing style, conditioning passivity, and education. While dressing style and conditioning passivity represent the cultural skills that 'modern woman' are expected to uphold, education represents the independent lives the respondents seem to achieve. However, they are seen negotiating with all the attributes. Even if the entire framework of 'ideal woman' including 'modern', 'new' and 'common' woman, when created, was a model of upper and middle class families, my respondents seems to idealize these model of womanhood, irrespective of their caste and socio-economic class.[9] The women who seems to stand out from this categorization seems to be sexually harassed, according to the general perception that came up frequently throughout the discussions. This is

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[9] My ethnography data does not have information regarding the caste, religion and class of the respondents. As the study was conducted in the educational institutions, the authority did not give consent to discuss their class, religion and caste.

parallel to the notion of gender policing.[10] As discussed by the respondents throughout the study, sexual harassment is trivialized in the name of gender performance, and seems to be used as a tool of gender policing for the women who tend to challenge the popular framework of womanhood.

2.3. Conditioning passivity and othering:

Firstly, the respondents seem to use 'othering'[11] as a strong tool to discuss sexual harassment. When they were asked what the causes of sexual harassment are, they tend to present different events that might cause sexual harassment, addressing the threat they face from the other men in the streets. Sumpa[12] says,

> Girls should not give more chance to other boys acting playfully and talking too much with them which may instigate sexual harassment believes (BA[13] focus group).

The respondent tends to uphold the idea of the 'new woman' who interacts less with men and does not get involved in anything that might be interpreted as promiscuous behavior. The respondents seem to create a pattern to interact with other men, believing if the criteria are not met, women are more likely to face sexual harassment. This idea of seeing other men as a threat confirms the idea of colonial consciousness that Ashish Nandy discusses in his book, *The Intimate Enemy*. Nandy asserts that the thinking process or cognitive process of Indians is highly influenced by the colonizers, which is seen in their lives in postcolonial India and in their defense against the colonizers (Nandy: 1988). The idea of saving Indian women from the British men was a justification for the restriction of women's mobility outside household (Mills

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[10] Gender policing refers to the responses for the violation of gender rules to promote conformity, which can come in the form of violence or teasing (Wade et al. 2014: 71).

[11] By definition, "othering" is the term used by Gayatri Spivak as a process through which the imperial discourse constructs its "others", which are their subjects in order to define themselves. By doing so, they marginalize and exclude their colonizes (Ashcroft et al. quoted from Spivak : 2013)

[12] Names of the respondents in this paper are their original name. They are pseudo names.

[13] Bachelors in Arts

34

1996), where the men from the other group are seen as a threat. This notion is embedded in the contemporary India, where the seeing the 'other man' as a threat is internalized by Indian women as reflected in the discussion with my respondents. Moreover, families seem to instill this idea of othering the 'other man' that women meet outside home. Binita conveys to me:

> If boys catcalled or tease us on our way home, our parents taught us to avoid such places. They taught us to avoid the streets where boys stay in a group (12th Standard Science focus group).

Many of the other respondents from this group also echo Binita's words: their families have also taught them that to avoid the places where boys tease them, because it might result in some form of sexual harassment. When the same respondents are asked about the different ways in which they resist sexual harassment, the idea of avoiding the places where boys are more likely to meet and congregate comes up frequently. This does not only reflect 'othering' that the respondents are conditioned by their families to avoid harassment, but also reflects the idea of submissiveness that their families are instilling in them. The families seem to regulate the behavior of their daughters, teaching them docility as a form of resistance towards sexual harassment. This again has interesting parallels to the concept of the 'new woman', where docility and submissiveness are key elements. Furthermore, the respondents are also taught that in the event that they are approached and harassed, they should be passive and seek help from male members of their families. Here, women are taught to view men as their protectors and to be dependent on men for their own safety. Minita states,

> As a form of resistance for sexual harassment, I would seek help, approaching to the people whom she knows like her brothers (BSc[14] focus group).

What I found is that by discussing instances of sexual harassment with the women, even in cases where they attended mixed colleges, the idea of being passive to any form of sexual harassment on campus is still upheld. Again, this highlights the continuity in the nationalist project of modernity, where nationalist leaders/men from the influence of outside/material

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[14] Bachelor in Science

domain are the protectors and saviors of women who belong in the inner domain (Chatterjee: 1991). While some respondents seem to learn passivity and docility, some respondents' ways of resisting sexual harassment contradict the idea of docility. Moni asserts,

> Sexual harassment can be mitigated if women unite and fight against the harassers in the street. They have to raise their voice. At any cost, they should not remain silent (BSc focus group).

What is evident, based on the interviews that I conducted, is that the women are given different kinds of advice on whether to combat sexual harassment or simply to remain passive in order to avoid being sexually harassed. The women in the MSc focus group are not taught to be silent or passive by their families, and they were intolerant towards any form of harassment against their person. These women did not fall under the construction of 'new woman', as defined by the nationalist leaders, but instead they might be described as constituting the 'ideal modern Indian woman'. Thus, there are inconsistencies between what is expected and projected onto women through the nationalist project versus what the women are 'taught' from their families and the kinds of models by which they live their lives and deal with men's harassment.

2.4. Women's dressing style:

Secondly, dressing style seem to be a prominent factor through which the 'modern Indian women' concept is framed. Discussions of women's dress are much broader and more in-depth in public discourse in India than I offer here – the women I interviewed seemed to have differing notions about what the 'modern woman' should wear. For example, Monashree says,

> Girls should take care of their dressing style like girls should not wear short dresses in village areas to prevent Sexual Harassment. They should wear traditional dresses (12th Standard arts Focus Group).

Here, it is evident that Monashree idealizes 'girls' through their dress in the context of prevention of sexual harassment, where girls are expected to wear 'traditional' dress and not

'modern' short dresses. Dressing style becomes the signifier of women's identity as a 'traditional' or 'modern' woman. What constitutes of 'traditional' dresses? India has 29 provinces and all the provinces have their own dress that they call it 'traditional'. Thus, 'traditional' dress becomes an ambiguous term. At the same time, if this dress code determines if the women should be harassed or not, then women are prone to harassment as there is no framework for the 'traditional dress'. Moreover, this also leads to another problem: victim blaming. By definition, 'victim blaming' refers to when women are sees as provoking and deserving violence (Saroca 2013: 522). While discussing reasons behind catcalling and whistling, a respondent not only differentiates the victim based on dress, but also puts blame on the dresses of the girls who wear short dresses. The respondent seems to believe that the dressing style of girls provokes boys to tease the former. Lina says,

> The girl who wears short dresses or is beautiful is teased by boys most of the time. There are few girls who pay attention when boys tease them then boys get chance to tease more (12th standard science focus group).

Here, the respondent seems to perceive teasing as complimenting beautiful girls who wear short dresses, instead of as something problematic. The term 'teasing' dilutes the severity of the problem, which I will elaborate in the next chapter. Other respondents from 12th standard science girls' focus group also seem to believe that the dressing style of girls provokes sexual harassment, differentiating dresses between 'modern' and 'traditional'. Short dresses also become a form of 'not decent' dress for them. Mini mentions

> Boys call a girl hot only when she wears shorts not with she wears decent dresses (BA arts focus group).

Here, the notion of 'good' and 'bad' is represented by what the girl wears. In other words, the type of dress a girl wears determines if the girl is decent or not, and it also determines the catcalling that she is more likely to receive. One of the aspects through which the 'modern

ideal woman' is evaluated is her dressing styles (Chauduri 278: 2012), and the women who do not confirm to the style are 'bad women' who deserve violence. Dressing style is a popular discourse used as a scapegoat to justify harassment that women face in India. In his televised interview regarding recent sexual harassment case in an Indian city, Bangalore, Home Minister of Karnataka[15] (a south Indian province of India) said that "Youngsters were almost like Westerners. They tried to copy the Westerner, not only in their mind-set but even in their dressing. So some disturbance, some girls are harassed, these kind of things do happen" (New York Times: 2017). The minister blames the girl for her dressing style as the cause of the sexual harassment that she faced on New Year's Eve this year. Along with the general public, when politicians and officials of India idealize women based on their dressing style, this ideology also influences decisions they make to mitigate violence based on gender. Dress becomes an easy escape for normalizing certain forms of violence, mainly sexual harassment.

The emphasis on dress is widely used as a form of victim blaming. Therefore, idealizing womanhood based on dress triggers victim. This idea of 'good' or 'bad' is a belief that is reinforced by the patriarchal beliefs that try to dominate women by policing their behavior, putting blame on them for the violence that women face in India. A patriarchal mindset refers to the mindset where men and women are brought up to believe that men are emotionally and physically more powerful than women, while women are weaker and vulnerable resulting in different behavioral pattern among men and women (Ghosh 2011: 104). This mindset tends to support rape culture in the country, encouraging violence against women. Ambika Kohli (2012) argued that rape culture, which includes misrepresentation of sexual violence against women and accusing victims for their way of dressing or behaviors in order to justify violence against women, is reinforced by patriarchal values (Kohli 2012:16). In other words, patriarchal values

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[15] Dr. G. Parameshwara

justify sexual harassment against victim, and victims' dressing style or behaviors are blamed for sexual harassment. This leaves less scope for the victim to seek help, encouraging the perpetrators to commit more crimes. Women themselves internalize and reinforce these norms and values. For example, respondents from BSc girls' focus group believed that certain women's behavior with boys, along with dressing style, provokes SH. Nira, Jotika and Minita say,

> Girls wearing "sexy type" dress like short dresses, if pass gesture to boys like being playful provokes men to harass women. Girls acting playfully are the main reason for men harassing women (BSc focus group).

Here, "sexy type" dresses and behaviors seem to be the mode that justifies the harassment, where respondents are not conscious about the fact that they are victim blaming. Certain dress codes become the determinant of sexual harassment that women are likely to face. It also shows that the respondents seem to believe that the women who conform to the dress code of the 'modern ideal woman' are less likely to be harassed, and women who do not conform to the dress code are deserving victims of sexual harassment. Idealizing women through their dressing style is a popular belief also internalized by the women that determines women's identity as 'modern' or 'traditional'. At the same time, the women who do not fit into that ideal image seem to face sexual harassment as an outcome of this idealization of womanhood in the country.

2.5. Attaining education

Thirdly, gaining education becomes one of the pivotal aspects that is raised during my interview by my respondents for idealizing the 'common' or 'new' or 'modern' woman. As all the respondents are from educational institutions, and they aspire to continue their education. Also, the respondents view education as a source of empowerment. Sweta, asserts:

Girls who are educated like us might be able to express if something happens to them like sexual harassment, but what about the girls of 3-4 standard. We know about it. Therefore, we need more workshops to prevent sexual harassment in the high school level (MA[16] focus group).

Sweta believes, like other women I interviewed, that education gives them the power to speak against sexual harassment. By advocating for education, Sweta creates a boundary between educated and uneducated women since she sees education as a mode of empowerment that provides women with the courage to speak up against sexual harassment. This again contradicts the idea of women trained to be docile. Women seem to see education as a source of empowerment. This supports the nationalist agenda in creating 'new woman', where they aim to educate the woman. However, the purpose of education as for the nationalist leaders and my respondents are not parallel. The nationalist supporters for women's education advocated the idea of educating women as one of the crucial nationalist goals to strengthen women's traditional roles through education, which would make them efficient wives and mothers (Chaudhuri: 2012). At present, the education seems to serve the purpose of women's emancipation, helping to raise awareness against sexual harassment and other forms of violence.

My respondents suggest educating women as a pivotal way to combat sexual harassment. However, gender inequality is embedded in the social system of the country. Therefore, education alone cannot empower women to speak up against sexual harassment. If the education system is also conditioning women to internalize gender discrimination embedded in the social system, education alone cannot empower the women. Instead, it will motivate women to maintain silence against violence. Thus, education that aims to breaks the stereotype and change the mindset of the people about gender discrimination and violence is essential. Along with strong legal support, and economic independence, education and

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[16] Masters in Arts

40

awareness regarding gender based violence is required to combat gender based violence (Sharma et al. 117: 2013). Even though the respondents seem to perceive education as a source of empowerment, it might not help the stand against sexual harassment if that education does not address the prevalent gender discrimination.

2.6. Negotiating 'traditional skills' and 'modern ideas'

My respondents seem to bargain the identity of 'traditional' and 'modern', which confirms the notion of the 'ideal woman'. All of the respondents that I interviewed live in women's hostels while they are studying at college and University, and these parts of the educational institutions also have their own rules and regulations. As the new 'inner domain', the women's activities within the hostel are closely monitored, and they lack the freedom to move out of the hostel. These respondents balance both 'traditional' and 'modern' in their daily lives much like women across the twentieth century who have battled between individual and traditional patriarchal practices in order their find their space in society (Nirmala: 2015). Similarly, by going out of the home in order to pursue their education, the respondents confirm the notion of 'modern'. At the same time, they uphold the notion of 'tradition' by being within the system where they are closely monitored by the hostels' authority. They also internalize certain teachings that they attained from home regarding docility and submissiveness. However, there is a strong inconsistency regarding the idea of resisting sexual harassment. While some respondents seem to be conditioned by their families and avoid sexual harassment, other respondents seem to speak up against the harassment. This trend throughout my discussion shows that there is not fixed framework for the 'ideal modern Indian woman'.

Thus, my findings also challenge the homogenous image of 'ideal womanhood'. During the rise of nationalism, the heterogeneity of women within the framework of 'new women' and 'common women' seemed to be overlooked. As the 'new woman' framework is a model adopted from the middle and upper class families' women, Suruchi Thapar (1993) tried to bring

women from other socio-economic class into the picture of the 'modern Indian woman'. Thus, she created 'common woman' for the women who are from lower economic classes. Similarly, Maitrayee Chaudhuri problematizes this homogeneity of the 'ideal modern woman' that is the model of middle class women during the rise of nationalism, saying it overlooked the regional and cultural diversity of the country (Chaudhuri: 2012). This idea of depicting a universal framework for Indian women represents the colonial consciousness of nationalist leaders who are educated in the West. Like the first world feminist discourse of third world women, where the latter is seen as homogenous, the nationalist leaders also homogenize Indian women to create a framework for Indian womanhood. Chandra Talpade Mohanty problematizes the Western discourse of feminism, asserting that the homogenous knowledge production regarding third world women by the Western women is arbitrarily constructed, overlooking the variation based on geographical or cultural and other differences of the third women (Mohanty 1988). Likewise, the framework of Indian womanhood also does highlight the diversity of Indian women.

To sum up, the idea of the 'modern Indian women' is associated with women's dressing style, their conditioned passivity and docility and their education. However, there seems to be inconsistency in these attributes. The inconsistency is more apparent on the ways that my respondents seem to resist sexual harassment. Thus, my study suggests that the framework created for Indian women as 'new woman', 'common woman' and 'modern ideal woman' are fluid. Also, they seem to negotiate their 'modern' identity with maintaining docility that is instilled in them by their families. My respondents seem to blur boundaries of these 'common' and 'new' woman ideals that were introduced by the nationalist project. The 'modern ideal Indian woman' does not seem to conform to any rigid framework. In the next chapter, I will explain how respondents who are the epitome of 'modern ideal women' perceive sexual

harassment and gender-based violence as a whole, and how they use these concepts interchangeably.

CHAPTER 3
THE "NEW INDIAN WOMAN" AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

This chapter explores perceptions of sexual harassment based on interviews that I conducted with groups of college-aged women that may be considered 'modern' Indian women. Here, I will show how the interviewees tended to use the terms gendered-based violence and sexual harassment interchangeably, due in part to their lack of awareness regarding sociological and legal ways of defining sexual harassment. Instead of addressing aspects of sexual harassment, the women that I spoke with prefer to discuss "eve-teasing," and, as a result, they tend to internalize "eve-teasing" as a normal gendered performance.

Definitions of sexual harassment differ globally according to legal and organizational structural gender policy, as do definitions of the various forms of this gender-based violence. In attempting to unpack the multiple dimensions of these forms of violence, Philip J. Corr and Chris J. Jackson note, for example, how the concept of sexual harassment is generally defined by two different aspects of this form of harm: the first is unwanted sexual attention and the second is gender harassment. When unwanted sexual attention occurs, the perpetrator requests sexual activity (involving different forms of physical contact and/or pressure on the victim to perform sexual favors), while gender harassment can include the perpetrator creating an intimidating or unpleasant working environment involving rude and sexist remarks. (Bennett-Alexander &Pincus 1985; Fitzerald. Gelfand & Drasgow, 1995 quoted in Corr et al. 2001: 527-535). Another definition, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which enforces federal laws in the US, is that sexual harassment can be any unwelcome form of sexual advances whether explicit or implicit, that creates a hostile working environment for individuals (EEOC quoted in Rucker et al. 2008: 425).

In India, the legislation on sexual harassment is defined in Act no. 14 of the 2013 legal code. The Act is entitled "The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace" (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) and was passed in 2013 (No. 14 of 2013). It states that any unwelcome behavior or acts - direct or indirect – that are sexual in nature are considered acts of sexual harassment. The law defines sexual harassment as any one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behaviors:

> i) Physical contact and advances; or
> ii) A demand or request for sexual favors; or
> iii) Making sexually coloured remarks; or
> iv) Showing pornography; or
> v) Any other unwelcomed physical, verbal or non-verbal conduit of sexual nature
> -   (The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace No.14 of 2013)

What is most relevant for the sake of this study is that the Act continues to omit guidelines on legislating against sexual harassment that occurs in public spaces such as on the streets and in shopping areas. It was this form of harassment that the women faced most commonly – small acts of sexual harassment faced in daily life. Furthermore, this form of harassment is minimized and commonly referred to as "eve-teasing" by men and women in India.

In the context of the South Asian continent, and specifically in India, "eve- teasing" is one of the most common forms of sexual harassment that young women face on a daily basis. 'Eve-teasing' is a common term used euphemistically to connote everyday forms of public violence experienced by women in urban spaces in India (Ramasubramanian and Oliver: 2003). By definition, "eve-teasing" includes forms of harassment like indecent proposals, vulgar comments, and unwelcomed gestures with different parts of the body including hands, legs, and also attempts to make physical contact (Kuruvilla 2014: 60). Likewise, in her study on SH, Deepa Ghosh (2011) defines eve-teasing as a term used to refer to all gender-based violence that impacts women in public spaces such as in the streets, public transportation, beaches,

parks, and cinema halls. Ghosh's definition of the term includes verbal assaults, such as passing unwelcome sexual jokes, non-verbal assaults like showing obscene gestures, whistling, winking and staring. Ghosh also includes "stares, comments or remarks, verbal abuse, suggestive songs (where lyrics target the victim), unwelcome touching that is sexual in nature, physical abuse- beating, flashing which is accompanied by masturbation- or an act of exposing one's genitals, etc." as eve-teasing (Ghosh 100: 2011). Ghosh argues that "eve-teasing" is a set of attitudes and behaviors that humiliate women and put them in a situation where they are both "a tease" and someone who deserves to be teased (Ghosh 100: 2011). "Eve- teasing" can go as far as physical assaults like pinching, fondling, and rubbing against women in public places ("Eve- teasing"; Stevens quoted in Ramasubramanian 327: 2003).

Despite the prevalence of the term and its meaning for Indian women, the Indian Penal Code continues to omit this term from inclusion as a set of punishable acts. The word 'teasing' itself dilutes the severity of sexual harassments, and it also suggests that there is a playful or non-threatening intention, which further minimizes the severity of the acts that are committed under the banner of 'eve-teasing'. In Hindi, the term used is "*cherchhar*" (teasing), and this also normalizes these acts within the fabric of heteronormativity, since it is one of the pivotal elements in what is often a courtship based on harassment and violence that is perpetuated by men against women, and employed in popular Bollywood movies in India. Ramasubramanian et al. (2003) suggest that "eve-teasing in Indian films is not generally portrayed as a crime that ought to be punished, but rather as an act of romantic love aesthetically woven into the narrative as fun and enjoyable" (Ramasubramaninan et al. 335: 2003). Sexual harassment thus becomes a product of gender performance that demands that men behave in certain ways that reinforce the gendered hierarchy. Sexual harassment is perceived as "an instrument that maintains a gendered hierarchy," (MacKinnon quoted in Hlavka 345: 2014) where men conform to expected gender roles in order to uphold their masculine identity (Merry 12: 2009).

Staring at women is likewise normalized in the name of gender performance on the part of men, and this is often commonly called 'girl watching'. In her study on sexual harassment, Beth A. Quinn (2002) focuses on how men tend to perceive certain forms of sexual harassment as a normalized form of gender interaction. Quinn defines 'girl watching' as a form of gendered play among men while they are in the company of other men, which is the product of masculine identities and implied as a key cause of the lack of empathy that is often exhibited publicly towards women who are victimized (Quinn 387: 2002). Therefore, staring at women in the presence of other men confirms Indian men's masculinity, which fulfills the requirements of hegemonic masculinity where certain men justify and normalize gender inequality (Wade et al. 1242014). Similarly, in India the idea of 'eve-teasing' through verbal assaults, making sexual jokes, whistling, winking and staring are normalized, and so these gender-based crimes are trivialized against women within the framework of masculine gender performance in the form of psychological and physical sexual harassment of women.

In her empirical study on eve-teasing in Bangladesh, Tahmina Islam (2012) found that the victims of eve-teasing start to feel "uncomfortable and insecure, less dignified, inferior, humiliated, angry, degraded, scared, traumatized or even loathing" (Islam 19: 2012). As a result, women tend to distance themselves from male friends in order to avoid 'eve-teasing', and restrict their mobility outside of the home in order to protect their safety. The patriarchal structure of the social system in India means that victim blaming is prevalent, and as Islam's study suggests:

> In most circumstances, within the strict patriarchal social system, usually girls are blamed by families as well as the society for the incidents of eve-teasing. Sometimes the victims of eve-teasing are even labeled as deviant both by the society and the family. As a result of eve-teasing, girls are forced to discontinue their studies, get married at their early age, and start a family life long before they are meant to do so. This situation is a drawback to women's empowerment in the society (Islam: 2012).

47

Thus the fear of "eve-teasing" also prompts parents to restrict the movements of these young women outside of the home, and it encourages the confinement of women within the expected inner domain of the home. As I have also discussed in my first chapter, the nationalist project has also reiterated this kind of divided-spheres rhetoric in Indian society, which has increased the difficulty for women of being independent in terms of education, living circumstances, mobility and safety.

A prominent theme that repeated throughout my interviews with these young women was how each individual perceived the differences or similarities between 'eve-teasing,' sexual harassment, and gender-based violence. Most notably, there was a desire to downplay 'eve-teasing' as a form of playful and less harmful joking on the part of men against women, which was not in all cases considered to be 'sexual' in nature. As one respondent, Minita, explained to me, "touching against girls wish or staring is sexual, but some people tease girls by singing or calling out different names in the streets, which is very common and it is not bad. If they use bad words then it becomes sexual harassment" (BSc. Focus group). Minita does not consider the act of men teasing, catcalling, or singing to women in public and without their consent to be 'harassment', but instead a form of non-aggressive 'teasing'. Similar responses were recorded with respondents from the MA, JNV and twelfth Standard Arts and Science focus groups. The women that I interviewed tended to want to trivialize these activities as a prevalent and recognized form of 'eve-teasing', and not sexual harassment. As Madhvi noted, "if someone is staring, whistling, or following, it is just eve teasing, not sexual harassment" (MA focus group). We can see from the above quote that Madhvi distinguishes 'eve-teasing' and sexual harassment, even though sexual harassment seems to have more negative connotations than does 'eve teasing'. This was a common occurrence across the interviews: respondents were far less likely to consider the sexual harassment that they faced as 'actual' sexual harassment.

48

'Eve-teasing' is associated with gender performance where hegemonic masculinity demands that men persuade or harass women into romantic relationships. While 'eve-teasing' is often viewed as normal and even romantic, it is only ever considered a moderate crime, much unlike the more serious crimes of rape or murder, despite the fact that it violates women's basic right to live in dignity (Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007; Chatterji, 2007). Sexual harassment is a form of gendered-based violence; however, sexual harassment and gender-based violence cannot be used interchangeably in the case of India. Sexual harassment is often normalized, but it employs both subjective and objective forms of violence. For the purpose of defining violence, I draw here from Slavoj Žižek's book *Violence* (2008), where he asserts that there are three forms of violence: subjective, objective and systemic. While subjective violence includes crime, murder, genocide and terror, objective violence includes racism, hate-speech, discrimination. Systemic violence, on the other hand, includes the potential catastrophic effects of economic and political systems. It is important to think of these layers of violence, since in the presence of one form of violence, the others are often are overlooked. If one form of violence is present, then the severity of two other forms is diluted in presence of this one form of violence, and thus their multiple layering effects cannot be perceived (Žižek: 2008). Žižek supports the need to unpack the underlying causes of subjective forms of violence (Žižek 1: 2008). The fear and terror that women face from sexual harassment in their daily lives makes it a subjective form of violence, whereas unequal power and gender hierarchies that intersect with multiple other forms of domination make sexual harassment also a form of objective violence against women in India

By definition, the European Institute of Gender Equality states that ``gender-based violence" (GBV) and ``violence against women" are used interchangeably because gender-based violence is perpetuated by men against women and girls, and because most gender-based violence is inflicted by men towards women and girls. Thus, violence against women implies

49

the exsisting power inequalities between men and women (European Insitute of Gender Equality). Howover, the definition seem to confirm gender binaries and perceive women within the discourse of victimhood, and a result, other forms of gender-based violence, where women are not the victim, can be easily overlooked and omitted by this definition. Sexual harassment also creates gender binaries, where women are perceived as victims. At the same time, Sally Engle Merry (2009) defines gender-based violence as violence whose meaning relies on the gendered identities of the parties located in specific sets of social arrangements, structures of power and meanings of gender (Merry 3: 2009). Merry argues that gender-based violence is one of the strongest elements of gendered structures of social arrangement where gender hierarchy is embedded within the system. By definition, the gender hierarchy is a social arrangement that emphasizes sex variations by providing higher status to one sex and thus creating incentives by which to define and protect social status based on sex (Berdahl: 2007). Perpetuating sexual harassment allows men to maintain the heirarchy of gender.

Like gender based violence, sexual harassment also demeans women's agency and individuality. Berdahl (2007) argues that by emphasizing social stratification and its impact on sexual harassment, it is evident that sex-based harassment derogates and humiliates individuals based on their sex in order for another individual or group of individuals to strengthen their own social status. One respondent, Rita, had faced this kind of humiliation, and she had as a result modified her behavior to try and avoid being harassed when she was out in public. As you can see from her account, the euphemistic form of 'eve-teasing' operates in much the same way as sexual harassment, where her female body parts are targeted by men in order to harass and humiliate her:

> During my Higher Secondary level's college, a group of boys used to call me extreme bad words, using euphemism for my breasts when I used to walk in the isolated streets from my way to coaching center. A stranger used to constantly follow me all through my way to home. I avoided going to that street because of the fear (MA focus group).

Rita's account echoed many of those from other respondents who reported that they had been catcalled and whistled at in the streets on a regular basis. However, in their accounts, the women tended to trivialize these acts performed by men in the language that they used to normalize acts that contributed to reducing the mobility and freedoms of women in public spaces. What was also interesting was the fact that these women are not likely to understand that many of the acts perceived as 'eve-teasing' can be legally challenged according to the Indian Penal Code, and especially with reference to "any other unwelcomed physical, verbal or non-verbal conduit of sexual nature" (The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace No.14 of 2013). Thus, the legal definition of sexual harassment seems to have much less influence on the social understanding of sexual harassment or eve-teasing. Also, by reducing the severing of the violence by referring to it as 'eve-teasing', women and men participate in normalizing these acts that ultimately reduce women's everyday freedom of movement and safety and dignity (Islam: 2012).

Even in cases where women seemed to be aware of the tensions between the use of 'eve-teasing' and sexual harassment, they seemed unaware of the potential consequences of buying into this coercive performance like acts of harassment, humiliation and physical violence as romantic act. In particular, there seemed to be a confluence of acts that were performed within a relationship and that might otherwise be considered harassment. One of the women, Kareena, spoke about what were perceived as being forms of harassment within a relationship, and she very clearly defines her boundaries for unwanted physical intimacy:

> If a girl feels uncomfortable being touched, or if the girl does not want to have physically intimacy in a relationship and the boy forces her to do so then she would consider it as sexual harassment (JNV[17] arts focus group).

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[17] Jawahar Navodaya Vidhyalaya (A central government residence school)

It is interesting that even though what she relates above might constitute crimes as serious as rape or attempted-rape in terms of unwanted physical touching, she continues to use the idea of 'sexual harassment' in relating these ideas during the interview. Other women made similarly worrying correlations between sexual harassments and acts that included rape, marital rape, child abuse, and physical molestation. Nishita and Rima in their group interview classified rape as a severe form of sexual harassment:

> Trying to getting close to a girl without her consent is sexual harassment, and rape is one of the severe forms sexual harassment, or forcefully getting very close to girl or pinching her on public buses is sexual harassment (JNV arts focus group).

Conflating sexual harassment as both non-physical and physical forms of gender-based violence, which can also include severe bodily harm caused by rape and sexual violence, indicates the general lack of awareness amongst young women in terms of identifying where the line is drawn between 'sexual harassment' and 'gender-based violence'. This is due in part to the inadequate information and education on this topic for men or women in schools and at the college-level. Furthermore, women even went so far as to include marital rape and the non-consensual filming of these rapes for the purpose of popular consumption in their definitions of sexual harassment. One respondent, Priyanka argued that:

> Sexual harassment can also happen between married couple, when the husbands does it forcefully, during domestic violence also sexual harassment happens, even the *Ojha* [18] forcefully does sex with girls, some even make porn out of it, all these fall under sexual harassment according to (JNV science focus group).

In her account above, Priyanka includes domestic violence and marital rape in her definition of sexual harassment, and furthermore her inability to engage publicly with the category of 'sex' meant that she used euphemisms in conveying the kinds of acts that can be

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[18] Witch doctor

considered part of harassment. She was unwilling to speak about the act of rape between husband and wife, indicating only that when the husband "does it forcefully," by which she means that he forces his wife to engage in sexual relations, then this can also be considered harassment (Priyanka: JNV girls' science focus group). Her categorization of this 'harassment' means that this act is downplayed and minimized so that it no longer can be considered a gender-based crime against the body of the woman in question. Since discussions of 'sex' continue to be taboo in India, women also lack the language with which to discuss openly the multiple and layered forms of violence that they face. Furthermore, this lack of language means that women who do try and engage these topics are considered to be "common women," and are regarded as vulgar and of a lower socio-economic (or caste) background (Thapar: 1993).

Women in India who converse on the topic of 'sex' are perceived (and accused) of being promiscuous. In his TEDx Talk (2013) on the topic, *"What if we had a culture of speaking about sex?"* Harish Iyer, an Indian LGBTQ activist and columnist, raised awareness against the stigma attached with sex as a topic of discussion by promoting the use of humor. Iyer began his talk by claiming that, "India loves this three letter word, the three letter word 'sex'. We love it so much that we don't speak about it, but we just do a lot of it!" (TEDx Talk: 2013). The discomfort that he addresses in terms of being about to open up a public discourse on the topic of 'sex' was also mentioned in my interviews when the women discussed "bad scenes" or "off scenes" (MA focus group). In this case, these are a reference to intimate scenes or scenes that show individuals engaged in sex acts. The mere mention of this topic made the respondents nervous.

Despite what seemed to be a tendency to internalize the shame attached with sex-related topics, the women were very clear in their responses that in order to combat sexual harassment,

53

there needs to be a campaign of education on topics related to sex and space, and not simply more advice on how to avoid being sexually harassed. As Binita notes,

> Students should be given knowledge regarding sexual harassment, and even family mainly should talk about sex related problems openly without shame in their home to prevent sexual harassment (BA focus group).

As her account indicates, Binita is aware of the fact that there is a lack of space for sex education in India, and she also places the responsibility on providing an education and awareness of sex on the family. Most of the respondents suggested that if it was possible to raise the awareness of sexual harassment, it may also be possible for sex to be less stigmatized in India, which would make it easier for women to engage in critiques on the topic, and to become part of a public discourse on harassment and sexual violence. Bandana echoed Binita's narrative in her account, where she promotes more sex-education earlier on in schools, and she even connects the lack of knowledge about the female body to the general lack of understanding about sex, and therefore about sexual harassment and different forms of gender-based violence:

> There should be some programs regarding sex education and sexual harassment in schools then students will learn about it. Videos regarding sex education should be showed so that students will know about it. Sex topics should be openly discussed in the family without any shame. I regret about not being able to know about it before. We got to know at 11th standard in our higher secondary schools. Our biology books of our classes in high school are not taught properly because no one feels comfortable to sex related topics openly. But if we get to learn through videos or workshops about sex and sexual harassment since our high schools then children will feel comfortable to share with their parents if something happens to them like sexual harassment (MA focus group).

When I was asked to reflect upon my experience of sex education in India, I realized that I was never taught about sex or sexuality in school or in the home. The only education on sex that I received from my family was when my mother said, "stay away from boys, and do not talk about sex openly because good girls do not talk about it." As my mother's response indicates,

there was no information provided on why I should avoid boys, just that I was to avoid then and to avoid discussing sex openly since this would make me a 'bad girl'. Moreover, my biology teacher in high school skipped an entire chapter related to human genitalia and reproduction, further highlighting that there continues to be no space for women to even discuss sex in India, let alone the idea of women having a "safe space" within which to engage the issues of sexual harassment that most women face. The justification for this silencing of discussion on sex and sexuality in India is to prevent society from becoming immoral and to curb the sexual desires and activities of unmarried youth. Thus, discussing sex and sexual reproduction is not common in schools, and sex education is entirely absent from school curricula (Economist 2013). Furthermore, teachers do not feel comfortable discussing these topics due to the shame associated with discussing sexual intercourse and human genitalia outside of the 'private sphere' or home. In an article from the *Hindustan Times*, Poulomi Banerjee stated that there is a strong discomfort about discussing any topic related to "sex" in India (Sex and Taboos You are a Bad Girl if You Talk about Your Desire: 2015). She criticizes the stigmatization of discussions of sex, where "the demarcation is clear: good girl vs bad girl, and the minute someone is vocal about sex or about her desires, for most, she crosses over into bad girl territory" (Sex and Taboos You are a Bad Girl if You Talk about Your Desire: 2015).

The historical conditioning of the connection between sex and shame in India is well documented in studies of British colonial legacy, and particularly those of the later part of the Mughal Empire. There is an ongoing debate in historical research on the topic that traces the shift from sexual liberalism in the nineteenth century towards more conservative attitudes towards sex by the twentieth century. This shift is perceived as being initiated at the time of Mughals in India. However, some historians claim that purdah[19] was also a status symbol of

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[19] Social and religious practice of women's seclusion

55

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higher class Indian women, which might have existed before the invasion of Mughals (The Times of India: 2007). On the one hand, arguments are made that conservative notion towards sex and sexuality might have come after the invasion of India by the Mughals. In other words, it is believed that the influence of Islam through Mughal rulers and Sufism transformed sexual liberalism to a more conservative approach, along with the spread the idea of the purdah system in India for the women of India (Chopra n. pag; Wikipedia: 2017). On the other hand, this shift towards sexual conservatism might be an influence of colonialization. The family lives of the middle class in India were highly influenced by bourgeois Victorian middle class families (Chaudhuri: 2012). This conservative approach towards sexual life might later on be stimulated by the imposition of Victorian values within the British colonies by colonizers. The perception of "having sexual desire was identified almost solely with men and women of lower classes, like prostitutes" in Victorian era (Pastor et al. Quoted from Degler). Thus, colonizers might have brought Victorian beliefs to their colonies, gradually starting to stigmatize sex and sexual desire in India. As a consequence, topics related to sex and sexuality started to be seen as promiscuous. The liberal attitudes of Indians towards sex and sexuality were condemned as "barbaric" and seen as a proof of inferiority of India (Chakraborty et al 251: 2013). Therefore, Indian society instilled the beliefs distinguishing "bad" and "good" women based on openness of women regarding sex-related topics, challenging the British understanding of Indian sexual liberalism. Thus, at present, the perception of having sexual desire or discussion over sex and sexuality being immoral might not actually be something that Indian have had since ancient times, but might be an orientalist discourse of sex and sexuality that was triggered during colonialism.

Considering sexual desire shameful might be the British and Mughal legacy to India, which is deep rooted in Indians' instilled concept that discussing about sex is shameful. As a result, women are trained to avoid topics related to sex. This could result in silences when

sexual harassment happens to them, and women might be reluctant to speak up against the sexual harassment they face. Thus, there seems to be ignorance surrounded around the discourse of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the country.

While the notion of the 'modern ideal woman' demands that women be educated and employed along with the religious and traditional skills (Chaudhuri 278: 2012), the fear and insecurity caused by sexual harassment and other forms of gendered based violence creates a hurdle to move out of the home and work or study. A recent study of labor-force participation of women in India shows that more than one third of the women who are engaged in household chores expressed their desire to work outside home, and the number increases to close to half within the most educated women of rural part in India (New York Times: 2015). One of the reason behind their inability to work is the prevalent traditional gender norms that seek to confirm "purity" of women by restricting their movements in the outside sphere in order to protect them from men other than their husbands (New York Times: 2015). Even though the respondents tend to trivialize certain activities that they face in their daily lives and are ignorant about the sexual harassment that they facing on everyday basis, they express the fear and insecurities that they face because of these activities. Also, due to the silence surrounded around gender and sexuality in the Indian context and casual attitude towards certain forms of sexual harassment, sexual harassment has been overlooked by them in spite of the prevalent laws and regulations in the country.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

The idea of the 'modern Indian woman' does not consist of any fixed attributes. My study has shown how sexual harassment is normalized as a form of gender performance that hegemonic masculinity demands, even if it takes away women's autonomy to use public space. Due to their unawareness regarding sexual harassment, women tend to comprehend gender based violence as sexual harassment. However, women negotiate their identity as 'modern Indian woman' and sexual harassment in Assam.

During the discussion, sexual harassment is less discussed within the discourse of gender-based violence by the respondents, while they tend to believe other forms of gender-based violence to be sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is perceived as a harmless form of violence, and is more associated with gender performance that a heteronormative relationship demands. If girls are catcalled and face eve-teasing, they tend to consider it as something boys perpetuate for fun. This attitude towards sexual harassment leaves less scope for the victim to gain justice against this crime.

My study also has provided a space for the students to discuss about sexual harassment, and reflect on their lived experiences of 'eve-teasing', which they tend to normalize. Sexual harassment in India is a broad concept, and much remains to be done in order to mitigate it before it more severe form of crimes like rape or murder are perpetrated. There is an immediate need of inclusion of topics related to sexual harassment and sex education in the educational curriculum and workshops during public gatherings in India. Most of the respondents also reported that education regarding sex and sexual harassment is not included in the academic curriculum, which they considered one of the pivotal ways to raise awareness among youths. In addition, there is also a need for a consistent amount of research in the field for drawing more comprehensive conclusions about perception of sexual harassment in India. This will help

58

to understand the existing ambiguity in the definition of sexual harassment and its consequences, which will further help the policy makers and activists to work on framing stronger laws and raising awareness against sexual harassment. Future studies could look at the students' perspective regarding 'modern Indian woman' and sexual harassment from different states of India, inclusive of both male and female students. For future studies, comparative studies can be conducted to see if culture and prejudice of different parts of India have any influence on their perception and how class/socio-economic status mediates these "cultural" frames of the 'modern Indian woman' and the sexual harassment that they face. In order to understand a variety of factors influencing respondents' perception, factors like caste, religion, ethnicity, educational background, and family educational background can be explored to investigate the perception of the 'modern Indian woman' and the different factors that shape their perception of sexual harassment.

My thesis on the 'modern Indian woman' and their experiences of sexual harassment in Assam contributes to fill the gap in the literature of gender-based violence in India, where the study is Assam is relatively less. In the field of sexual harassment, I have particularly linked the discourse of sexual harassment with the framework of the 'modern Indian women. This provides an insight to the idea of the 'modern Indian woman' framework, showing the fluidity in the concept itself and its adverse effect on the women who are idealizing this image of women. The adverse effect is sexual harassment which is less spoken about. This will enable the researchers, policy makers to critically study the underlying causes of sexual harassment in order to frame laws and make changes with a hope to mitigate sexual harassment. Moreover, this study has also broadened my horizon to comprehend the discourse of sexual harassment along with the idea of the 'modern Indian woman', which is fluid. Now I am also able to perceive the notion of the 'modern Indian women' more critically than before by reflecting on the purpose of the construction of the 'modern Indian women', which is gendered. Moreover,

I am more reflexive in understanding sexual harassment that women face in India than I was a year before when I conducting my study on perception of sexual harassment among educated youths. I am also aware of the colonial influence on our consciousness along with popular media that shapes the perception of the 'modern Indian woman', and how this is inflicting sexual harassment. I am more conscious and aware of my biases now and I think critically about the consequences of normalization of sexual harassment on the lives of women in contemporary India.

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