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Introduction

Masculinity, Modernity, Urbanity

Introduction: Men in Cities

From July to August, many parts of north India witness the *kanwariya* pilgrimage activity that relates to the worship of the god Shiva (Figure 1.1). Pilgrims collect water from the River Ganges and bring it back to their local Shiva temples. The water is carried in containers that are slung on shoulder contraptions that are known as *kanwar*s. From being a relatively small-scale affair, over the past decade or so, the pilgrimage has grown to one that involves several million participants.

Tented encampments are set up along the various pilgrimage routes. These serve as night shelters and offer food, sleeping and toilet facilities. The camps are sponsored by a variety of bodies such as market-traders' organisations, village groups, urban 'residents'' welfare associations (RWAs) and private businesses. They are also sponsored by caste-specific associations. The encampments are usually set up on public land, and there is state support in building the boundary walls, hiring the tents and regular spraying of disinfectants. Increasingly, as I observed during the pilgrimage period in 2019, they are guarded by paramilitary and police personnel, in the light of what their organisers describe as 'terror threats'. The police play a significant role in the organisation of pilgrimage activity, including creating safe passageways and directing traffic around the pilgrim routes.

The *kanwariya* procession is an urban ritual par excellence, and I open with this vignette in order to provide an ethnographic example that captures the most significant themes of this book. While the pilgrimage might have

Figure 1.1 *Kanwariya* pilgrim, Gurugram, Haryana, 2019
Source: Author.

an ancient lineage, its place in contemporary times should be understood as part of the processes of the present. Shiva devotees marching along lanes, streets and highways, with security provided by the state, and food, water and rest facilities by a variety of neighbourhood organisations, tells us a great

deal about relationships between masculinity, the city, religious identities, the state and new cultures of modernity.

We should begin with the idea of the entangled nature of urban processes (a theme explored in Srivastava 2015). In this context, a religious event, beyond its dimension as an aspect of subaltern 'protest' (V. Singh 2017), is also a window into an understanding of the nature of masculine presence in the city. Though women have also begun to take part in the pilgrimage, their numbers remain miniscule. Such large-scale public presence of women marching across cities – even in the cause of religious practice – would be considered both morally reprehensible and against gender propriety. This goes to the heart of the book's discussion of the nature of public spaces and urban ones in particular. Indian public places are significantly male, with men of all classes and other backgrounds exercising a monopoly over them. The *kanwariya* procession reinforces certain notions of masculinity and men's 'right' to public spaces. It naturalises the idea that men may have a right to public spaces in a way that women do not.

Second, there is a relationship between public spaces, *Hindu* men and the state. The annual march of the *kanwariya*s is part of a larger trend where the state allows certain kinds of disruptive public activities but not others. Consider, for example, a recent case in the city of Gurugram (which is also a district and was earlier known as Gurgaon) in the state of Haryana. Earlier a largely rural area, Gurugram lies on the southern borders of Delhi and, since the 1980s, has been a site of intense, privately sponsored urban developments, including offices of multinational corporations, shopping malls and gated residential communities (Brosius 2012; Srivastava 2015).

Since the 1980s, as the district became both increasingly urban and industrial, it attracted a large number of working-class migrants, many of them Muslim. There is, however, an inadequate number of mosques in the city to cater to their needs. Of the twenty-two mosques in Gurugram, just two are situated in localities that are easily accessible to its *new* Muslim population that is unable to travel far from its places of work; the businesses Muslims work for are mostly owned by Hindus, and they are unlikely to get regular permission to take periodic breaks from work. Further, there has been significant hostility to constructing mosques that are accessible to worshippers. Both Gurugram's majority population – Hindus – and the party in power at the state level (the Bharatiya Janata Party) have stymied efforts to build new mosques (Dey 2018). The nature of urban development

in Gurugram has created an environment where Muslims have no choice but to offer prayers in the open.

On 20 April 2018, when a large number of Muslim men were offering *namaaz* in a vacant plot of land in the village of Wazirabad in Gurugram, the prayers were disrupted by members of a group known as the Sanyukt Hindu Sangharsh Samiti (United Hindus Campaign Committee). Soon after, the police registered a case against six men belonging to the organisation. On the following Monday, the United Hindus Campaign Committee organised a demonstration, seeking the quashing of the case against its members and delivered a letter to the chief minister of the state of Haryana with the demand that *namaaz* on public land in all parts of Gurugram must be banned as these were pretexts to (eventually) illegally occupy these lands and convert them into Muslim places of worship. The protestors also argued that the worshippers had shouted anti-India and pro-Pakistan slogans following the prayers.

As distinct from the case of the *kanwariya* pilgrims, Muslim men who seek to utilise public spaces for worship are not just thwarted by (Hindu) public opinion and the state but also stigmatised as populations who might both subvert public and national order. As the *kanwariya* and the *namaaz* episodes graphically illustrate, different kinds of men – in this case, Hindu and Muslim – occupy public spaces in different ways. And that – in this particular case – it should lead us to reflect upon the intersection of class (middle-class Hindus have opposed new mosques as they fear it may lead to declining land values), religious identity, subalternity and state action. I explore these particular themes in Chapters 5 and 7 that explicitly focus on the entanglements of religion, masculinity, the city and the state. This is a specific example of the multiple entanglements – of class, religion, consumer cultures, gender and urban processes, among others – that form the book's focus.

This book explores how cultures of masculinity define cities and how urban relations of dwelling, mobility, togetherness, work and leisure are affected by the ways in which men inhabit the city. It also investigates how men's identities are shaped by city-living and demonstrates that 'masculinity' and the 'city' are historically intertwined topics. Drawing upon historical analysis, ethnographic research and writings on popular culture, this book brings together two topics that have great bearing on contemporary forms of sociality but are not usually discussed within the same analytical framework, namely the cultures of masculinity and those of the city. While

there have been writings on gender and the city – primarily focusing on relationships between the city and women (Phadke 2007; Massey 1996) – there is comparatively little sustained focus on the relationship between men, masculinity and urban spheres (but see Baas 2020; Chowdhury 2019; Osella and Osella 2006; Srivastava 2007).

This lacuna needs to be addressed if we are to understand gender as a *relationship* and the ways in which rapidly expanding urban spheres both shape it and are affected by it. This book is, then, an exploration of men as gendered beings, the specific social character of Indian cities and the ways in which these two contexts, taken together, narrate the social life of Indian modernity. In this way, also, it seeks to move away from frameworks of 'planetary urbanism' (Brenner and Schmid 2015) in order to demonstrate that *localised* historical and ethnographic focus is a crucial tool for understanding how specific spaces and populations become entangled in processes that unfold at national and transnational levels. To *not* begin with the messiness of particular places is to end up with universal theories regarding cities and their lifeways, a universalism that implicitly favours theoretical and analytical preoccupations of the Global North (Schindler 2017).

To study men as gendered beings is to explore relationships of power among genders. This way of understanding masculinity is also an exploration of the naturalisation of the category 'man' through which men have come to be regarded as both un-gendered and the 'universal subject of human history' (O'Hanlon 1997: 1).[1] The ways of being men deserve scrutiny to understand the processes through which the exercise of power is made invisible and unquestionable. This aspect is increasingly being explored in both academic and activist contexts around the world (Kulkarni 2019).

Before proceeding further, however, it is important to say something about the terms 'masculinity' and 'patriarchy' and the relationship between the two.[2] Masculinity refers to the *socially produced but embodied ways of being male*. Its manifestations include manners of speech, behaviour, gestures, social interaction, a division of tasks 'proper' to men and women, and an overall narrative that positions it as superior to its perceived antithesis, 'femininity'. For masculinity to be positioned in a relationship of superiority to feminine identity, however, it is a key requirement that the latter be represented as possessing characteristics that are the binary opposite of the former. In this sense, 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are not simply opposite and equal categories, such that (as is frequently asserted) 'each has its own sphere of activity' (Srivastava 2018: 35). Rather, they stand in a hierarchical

relationship to each other and the 'feminine' acts as a *complement* to the masculine, being defined in a manner that produces masculine identity as a superior one. Finally, in this context, dominant or 'hegemonic' masculinity (Connell 2005) stands in a relationship not just to femininity but *also to those ways of being men* that are seen to deviate from the ideal. It is in this sense, then, that masculinity possesses both external (relating to women) characteristics and internal ones that relate to 'other' men.

We need also to differentiate the linked concepts of 'patriarchy' and 'masculinity'. Patriarchy refers to a *system* of social organisation that is fundamentally organised around the idea of men's superiority to women. Within this system, even those who may not approximate to the male ideal (such as homosexual men) still stand to benefit from the privileges attached to being men. Though it is difficult to posit simple definitions of 'patriarchy' and 'masculinity', we might say that patriarchy refers to the systemic relationship of power between men and women, whereas masculinity concerns both inter- and intra-gender relationships. And, while it cannot be argued that under patriarchy *all* forms of masculinity are equally valorised – in 1870, the colonial government in India sought to register all *hijra*s and *zanana*s (that is, non-castrated transvestites) and to make them ineligible to adopt a son or act as guardians to minors[3] – there is nevertheless an overwhelming consensus regarding the superiority of men over women. So, we might say that whereas patriarchy 'makes' men superior, masculinity is the process of producing superior men. This book is about the struggle to be 'superior' men in the city.

The ideas of 'making' and 'producing' are crucial to the study of masculinity, for they imply the historical and social nature of gender identities. Further, the fact that masculinity must consistently be reinforced says something about the tenuous hold of gender identities. Following from this, masculinity is *enacted* rather than expressed. When we say that something is 'expressed', we assume that it 'already exists'. Rather, as we will see in the book, it is produced through the acts of building and rebuilding, consolidation, representation and enforcement of masculine identities. This does not, of course, imply that existing formations of masculinity do not also contain instances of men's deviation from the dominant mode (see, for example, Chopra 2003); rather, it suggests that we still need to be attuned to whether such deviations disrupt existing frameworks or find ways of operating within them.

Of those recent discussions that have foregrounded enactment as a significant aspect of gender, the one that relates to 'performance' has been

particularly influential. The theoretical discussion on gender as performance (or enactment) owes much to the work of Judith Butler (1999), who has sought to move the discussion of gender and sexuality from notions of 'depth' to 'surface'. Butler also argues against the separation of 'gender' and 'sexuality'. She suggests that '[t]he regulation of gender has always been part of the work of heterosexist normativity and to insist upon a radical separation of gender and sexuality is to miss the opportunity to analyze that particular operation of homophobic power' (Butler 1999: 186). These ideas – performance, the yoking of gender and sexuality within the same analytical framework – are important and will be discussed in different contexts in this chapter.

While a productive context of thought, it is also important to recognise the limits of 'performativity' as a framework of analysis. For, as Blackwood and Wieringa (1999) point out, '[a]lthough performance theory is interested in unravelling the workings of gender, it cannot explain how people of different races, classes, and cultures and in different historical periods experience their bodies and their sexuality' (Blackwood and Wieringa 1999: 14). In other words, gender identities on the ground must account for the social and historical contexts within which 'performing' subjects are nurtured, and this requires a more nuanced understanding of what makes the 'everyday'.

Keeping in mind the above, this book is organised around an approach that seeks to explore how cultures of masculinity shape and are shaped by urban processes across *several* performative contexts of everyday life. That is, what are the different sites where enactments of masculinity impact upon the city as a social agglomeration? The discussion unfolds through identifying the specific social and historical processes that produce the urban 'everyday' as far as performances of masculinity are concerned. The contexts that are explored include elite nationalist imaginations of the city and modernity during the early twentieth century; the manner in which poor men negotiate the city as a site of desire and aspirations of social mobility; masculinity, religion and urban life; sexualised visions of the city in popular culture texts – such as Hindi language pulp fiction – that circulate as quotidian fantasies of the city as a site of thrill, danger and the 'necessity' of men's control over women; and representations of the political leader as a global masculine type who will lead a previously emasculated nation to future economic and cultural glory.

The discussion of the book is committed to the idea that a significant aspect of understanding social relationships – such as class, caste, gender, sexuality and power – lies in exploring relationships between social identity

and space. Our everyday lives – played out through a variety of freedoms and constraints – unfold upon and through specific spaces. Homes, offices, parks, shopping malls, streets, footpaths, bazaars – those threads that bind cities – are crucibles of urban social life. Additionally, spaces have a dual nature: they are both sites upon which different identities find voice and also sites of the formation and consolidation. That is, spaces are both objects and processes (Lefebvre 1991). So, for example, the home is commonly understood to be the domain of women, but it is also the space that defines the kinds of activities women may take part in. Similar arguments can be made for the other spaces I have listed earlier.

The city, as I have argued elsewhere (Srivastava 2015), is a series of entangled spaces. Rather than 'a collection of independent realms – the slum, the up-market gated community, the shopping mall, the "resettlement colony"', cities consist of 'a series of interconnected spaces and processes' (Srivastava 2015: iv). Imagining the city as a series of linked spaces, the book explores how several such connections – between the home and the street, family and public spaces, religious and non-religious contexts, for example – bear upon the topic of masculinity and produce lived social realities. These, as the book outlines, consists of the ways in which men in cities – nationalist leaders of another era, subaltern men, men as consumers and 'heads' of the family, those who belong to 'Hindu fundamentalist' organisations and others whose fantasies of the city are mediated through pulp fiction and 'footpath pornography' – imagine relationships between masculine cultures and urban cultures.

The key departure the book offers from other studies of masculinity (or masculinities) is the way it foregrounds the city as the *mise en scène* of the making (and un-making) of masculine cultures. Urbanisation in India is a vibrant site of an extraordinary cultural, social and economic churn, a context of new forms of both masculinities and anxieties about their place in the unsettling of hierarchies that cities can frequently produce (on articulations of masculine anxiety by 'men's rights activists' in India, see Basu 2015 and 2019).[4] This book captures these processes through an interdisciplinary and intersectional methodology that aims to provide an accessible account of masculine modernity.

But why focus explicitly on masculinity? Is not 'gender' a productive enough term? Gender has come to be seen to offer a means of renewing feminist discourse by encouraging a more relational approach to masculinity and femininity, as against the marginalisation inherent in the project of 'women's studies'. It also allows the investigation, problematisation and

interrogation of masculinity, equally with 'femininity'. Notwithstanding these enabling possibilities, however, 'gender' tends to be used, in popular as well as academic discourses, as a synonym for 'women', its relational aspect obscured and the invitation to interrogate masculinities largely ignored. This book proceeds from the position that the study of masculinity is important in that it 'is simultaneously a place in gender *relations*, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture' (Connell 2005: 71, emphasis added). Further, as the historian Rosalind O'Hanlon has pointed out, '[a] proper understanding of the field of power in which women have lived their lives demands that we look at men as gendered beings too' (O'Hanlon 1997: 1).

As several recent events show, there are significant reasons why we should study the different ways in which men occupy and shape cities. Urban spatial transformations – that might give off an air of a new world of possibilities – are, in fact, circumscribed by wider social norms that continue to affect how women, for example, are regarded. Gender continues to be a site of expression of 'Indian traditions' and 'morality' (see, for example, Bernroider 2018 on single women as tenants in Delhi), and it is important to understand how these concepts play out in relation to the city and the manner in which its spaces are affected by the politics of masculinity. While the city may be the grounds for the unfolding 'modern relationships', such ideas circulate in contexts 'where descent, succession and inheritance are in the male line; post-marital residence is "patrivirilocal" ... and authority resides with the senior males of the family or lineage' (Uberoi 2008: 245). What is the extent to which urban environments are contexts where the strictures of gendered behaviour are undone, and under what conditions do they continue to remain in place?

The brutal rape and violence inflicted upon the young woman known as Jyoti Singh in Delhi on 16 December 2012 is one of the several events through which we might think of relationships between city and gender. The twenty-three-year-old Singh was returning from a multiplex in a shopping mall and was accompanied by a male friend. As is the case with many young single women who migrate to large cities to pursue a better future, Singh worked in a lowly paid job (a call centre) in order to raise finance to train for the profession she hoped to enter, in her case, physiotherapy. The potential risk she was exposed to as a single woman in the city was magnified by the fact that someone of her background may not have been able to afford private

transport for a late-night journey and opted for a public bus instead. She was raped and violently beaten by the bus driver and five of his companions. Two weeks after the assault, Singh died of her injuries. On the one hand, the city offers potential freedoms to women; however, on the other, the public woman is also the object of suspicion, harassment and violence. Singh's death stimulated a vigorous public debate over women's 'safety' in public spaces which, in turn, led to a variety of measures designed to ensure such safety. Chapter 6 analyses the safety discourse and its entanglements with cultures of masculinity in the city.

Masculinities, Public Spaces and Their Cultures

Relationships between space and human life provide significant insights into the nature of social relationships. However, spaces also have identities, and when we think about cities, in particular, we are led to reflect upon the significance of two relatively recent ideas in human history, namely the 'public' and the 'private'. Whether or not the public–private categorisation has existed in all societies across time, it is certainly true that the idea that each gender has a separate sphere to which it 'naturally' belongs has become part of modern common sense.

Increasingly, through several processes of modernity, the different-spheres-for-different-genders perspective and the public–private distinction has tended towards convergence. Scholarship on the topic has approached the issue in different ways. Given the historical specificity of the Indian situation – its systems of distinction and hierarchies, the colonial experience and the interplay between the two, for example – it is unlikely, however, that writings that address the European experience (Habermas 1987; Sennett 1976) can capture local complexities. Also, in 'classical' discussions on the topic, the relationship between gender and space has tended to be sidestepped (Fraser 1992; Pateman 1989). Both in terms of the dimensions of historical and contemporary specificity and gender, it is important to formulate our understanding of the Indian situation in terms other than those that might have been true of the European case, while nevertheless borrowing from scholarship on these contexts.

Let us begin with the idea that the categories of the public and the private play an important role in the beliefs we hold about how society works and *should* work. It is commonplace to understand certain spaces (say, the street)