

4 Divine Markets: Ethnographic Notes on Postnationalism and Moral Consumption in India

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This chapter explores the connections between contemporary practices of religiosity and one of the most sociologically significant processes of contemporary Indian life: consumerism. The chapter builds upon other discussions that explore this relationship in different parts of the world (Stambach 2000; Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Oosterbaan 2009), as well as those which address India specifically (e.g., T. Srinivas 2010; Srivastava 2011). The discussion will proceed through outlining two ethnographic vignettes that illustrate the particular ways in which consumerism and religiosity are intertwined, while not being reducible to each other. In this way, the chapter seeks to interrogate two approaches to the study of religion, custom, and social and cultural transformation in India. The first of these concerns the so-called ‘Hindutva’ project of ‘restoration’ and purity that have formed staple topics in analyses of religious fundamentalism in India (see, e.g., Blom Hansen 1999; Bacchetta 2004). In these works, the idea of a return to a pure and untainted past is frequently represented as a reaction to processes of intense social and economic change. Hence, as Blom Hansen puts it, “To human beings experiencing social mobility, or a loss of socioeconomic and cultural status produced by urbanization or ‘minoritization’ the issue of identity—the urge to eradicate the doubt that splits the subjects – becomes more acute than in situations of relative social stability” (1999: 212). Indeed, the idea that an ‘inner’ Indian self is sought to be protected during times of change has become scholarly commonsense in a wide variety of studies. These include the contexts of ‘colonial modernity’ (Chatterjee 1993), postcolonial life (Singer 1972) and emotional life (Desjarlais and Wilce 2003). The ethnographic examples of this chapter seek to outline broader trends within Indian society where consumerism itself is the grounds for religiosity, rather than the latter providing a ‘refuge’ from the processes of social and cultural change. Further, the chapter suggests that that this produces a context that is not significantly about a search for a pure and singular self. Rather, it points in the direction of a split subject, where splitting

is not an act of enfeeblement but, rather, a strategy of engaging with a wide range of economic and social processes.

The second, related, perspective I seek to problematize is that which suggests that the relationship between old and new can be captured through discourses of denunciation regarding the decline of bonds of community and family life in the wake of rampant consumerism (e.g., van Wessel 2004). I will suggest that consumerism and its antitheses (however these are imagined) are easily reconciled in everyday life *through* recourse to consumerist discourses themselves.

My argument that religious and consumerist activities are intertwined – and that this, in turn, produces a market morality, such that markets become spiritualized and spirituality cannot be disentangled from the market – can be usefully discussed through comparison with an African example. Addressing Christian evangelism in northern Tanzania, Amy Stambach reports that they “today openly comment on the global ‘culture industry,’ and on the interconnections of religion and the world economy, with greater consideration than colonial missionaries ever did” (Stambach 2000: 171). Thus, during the twentieth century and continuing through the present, goods introduced to Tanzania by missionaries “held an attraction as signs of the free market and liberalizing economy” (Stambach 2000: 173). Even while Tanzanian youth used goods associated with Christianity in their daily lives, missionary activity that targeted them as objects of ‘reform’ articulated the message that “conversion could help revival participants manage consumerism and social strife” (175). However, the young believed that “by being called Born Again...they would become part of a global world of schooled and ‘church-educated people’” (175) and were keen to demonstrate their Born Again status through the use of consumer goods: T-shirts with religious messages, running shoes distributed by the churches, and similar commodities. This, as Stambach suggests, was the context of an unbridgeable divide between leaders of the evangelical movements and their young congregation. Consumption by converts “defies universal consumerist logic of rejection and participation and instead reflects a qualified, cultural involvement in commodity consumption” (2000: 177). That is to say, converts do not assign completely opposed meanings to spirituality and consumerism. As I will later point out, there are both similarities as well as differences between the situations Stambach describes and those discussed in this chapter. What is significant in each case is the intertwined nature of the relationship between consumerism and religiosity.

I wish to broach the relationship between consumerism and religiosity through two specific ideas. These are ‘postnationalism’ and ‘moral consumption.’ These concepts – on which see the next section – allow me to both make connections between the worlds of religiosity and consumerism, as well as position the relationship within wider contexts where the meanings of such terms as ‘state’, ‘citizen’, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ are contested. The two

concepts also seek to encapsulate certain perspectives that are present in a growing body of scholarship that tracks the relationship between relatively new engagements with the market among groups that have historically had limited access to the ‘world of goods’ (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). Speaking of a segment of Kolkata’s self-identified middle-class population, Donner (2011) points out that “amidst the excitement that the triumphant media coverage of the new ‘markets’ for the growing middle class suggested, the actual transformation of middle-class lifestyles was always evaluated in markedly ambiguous terms” (Donner 2011: 60). And, Geert de Neve suggests that newly affluent industrialists in the garment manufacturing town of Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu, even as they have plunged headlong into the processes of consumerism, “seek to locate themselves at the heart of what is locally constructed as an integrated and *moral* Tamil society” (de Neve 2011: 75; emphasis added).

This chapter focuses, then, on the relay between the desires and pleasures of consumerism, and those perspectives where it is positioned in an anxious relationship to its putative antitheses, religiosity and ‘tradition’. The relationship between religiosity, ‘community life’ and consumerism and “the construction of religious identity during a period of intense globalization” (T. Srinivas 2010: 329) concern multiple contexts such as changes in urban life and aspirations to engage with globalized identity projects (see also S. Srinivas 2001, 2008). I investigate some of these contexts through multi-sited ethnographic vignettes and connect these sites using the frameworks of ‘postnationalism’ and ‘moral consumption.’ In this way, I wish to demonstrate the wider applicability of these terms in explaining contemporary religiosity in India as it rubs against traditional forms of sociality, such as the family, and newer aspirations to be part of a consumerist world in the making. The argument I present here is similar to the one made by Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame who, in their discussion of the relationship between religiosity and the media, write that “despite the prediction of modernization theory that as mediating technologies of reproduction developed religiosity would lose its intensity and diffuse into modern secular sensitivities, many scholars of religion recognize...that the opposite has been the case” (Copeman and Ikegame 2012: 312).

Postnationalism and Moral Consumption

In this section, I provide a discussion of the two concepts I wish to employ as connecting threads between the different ethnographic contexts of this chapter. To begin with, the term postnational does *not* mean to suggest that the nation-state is insignificant as a context of analysis, or that we now live in a “post-patriotic” age where the most significant units of analysis are certain “post-national social formations” (Appadurai 1993: 411) – such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – that putatively problematize nationalist

and statist perspectives. Further, my deployment is also different from another recent usage, which posits postnationalism as “a distinct ethico-political horizon and a position of critique” and a concept “that can be instantiated by suspending the idea of the nation as a prior theoretical-political horizon, and thinking through its impossibility, even while located uncomfortably within its bounds” (de Alwis et al. 2009: 35). I use postnationalism to refer to the articulation of nationalist emotion with the robust desires engendered through new practices of consumerism and their associated cultures of privatization and individuation. I refer to it as *postnationalism* to refer to a phenomenon that is both different from classical descriptions of nationalism (e.g., Anderson 1983; Gellner 1997) but is, nevertheless, about sentiments that gather around the idea of the nation. It is a form of nationalism that comes *after* the period when the sentiment was elaborated through the vocabularies of personal and collective sacrifice, duty and valour. As I explain later, postnationalism grows out of a location within cultures of consumerism.

A fruitful way of approaching the topic – and providing concrete illustrative examples – is through an exploration of the contemporary politics of urban spaces in Delhi. I hope, through this brief digression, to not only establish the relevance of the idea of postnationalism to the discussion of this chapter, but also point to the wider contexts within which the theme ‘religion and the morality of markets’ is embedded. The following discussion seeks, then, to illuminate a context in which newer relations with the nation-state are being formed through changes wrought by the market and its effects.

In 1999, soon after being elected to office, Delhi’s erstwhile chief minister, Sheila Dikshit, “called for an active participation of Residents Welfare Associations [RWAs] in governance” (Ojha 1999: 1). The rationale for this was the “failure” of civic agencies to carry out their normal tasks. The chief minister’s secretary noted that the call to actively involve RWAs in urban governance heralded a new era, marking “the first step towards a responsive management of the city” (Ojha 1999: 1). Positing a distinction between the state and the ‘community’, the secretary further noted that the failure of civic agencies meant that “it’s really time for the community to be given direct control of managing the affairs of the city” (Ojha 1999: 1). Subsequently, the government decided to ‘empower’ RWAs to “take certain decisions on their own.” It was proposed that RWAs be given control over the management of resources such as parks, community halls, parking places, sanitation facilities and local roads. A more direct relationship between the state and RWAs was also mooted through the idea of joint surveys of ‘encroached’ land – that is, land that had been ‘illegally’ occupied, usually by slum-dwellers – with the possibility that all illegal structures would “then be demolished in a non-discriminatory manner” (Ojha 1999: 1). Finally, it was proposed that RWAs be allowed to impose fines on government agencies that failed to carry out their assigned tasks.

In 2005, the Delhi state government announced that it would raise the electricity tariff by 10 percent. A body known as the Delhi Residents Welfare Association Joint Front (RWAJF) was formed in the same year to agitate against the measure. The Front consisted of 195 separate member RWAs from around the city. The increase in power rates for domestic consumers was the second one since the state-owned electricity body was ‘unbundled’ in June 2002 as part of power sector ‘reforms’. As a result, three privately owned companies secured contracts for electricity distribution (Sethi 2005).¹ There was vigorous protest over the price increase and, in addition to the RWAJF, NGOs such as People’s Action and another group known as Campaign Against Power Tariff Hike (CAPTH) joined the campaign. Individual RWAs asked their members to refuse payment of the extra amount, while the RWAJF lobbied the government and organized city-wide protests. These gained wide coverage in both print and electronic media and, echoing Gandhian anticolonial strategies, the organizers were reported to have deployed “the ideas of ‘civil disobedience’ and ‘people’s power’” (Sethi 2005: 5). The parallels drawn between the Gandhian anticolonial moment and the present were even more explicit with the Convener of the RWAJF referring to the protests as “non-violent *Satyagraha* [resistance]” (Sirari 2006: 5). Eventually, the Delhi government backed down and the price rise was shelved. According to Sanjay Kaul, president of the People’s Action NGO, the success of the protest heralded the making of a “middle-class revolution” (Sirari 2006: 5). Kaul is one of many who has rediscovered and deployed anticolonial vocabulary on behalf of the ‘people’ at a time when the colonial era itself has become integrated into consumerist discourses through marketing strategies that invoke it as an era of genteel living and tastes. More recently, in the wake of the 2011 anticorruption movement led by the activist Anna Hazare, popular yoga guru Swami Ramdev invoked “Gandhi in calling for a ‘*satyagrah* against corruption’” (Copeman and Ikegame 2012: 318).

The circulation of the ideas of ‘civil disobedience,’ ‘*Satyagrah*’ and ‘revolution’, and the consolidation of the notion of a ‘people’ contesting the state, index a situation of classical nationalism, but there are significant differences that lead me to characterize this context as postnationalism. By this, I mean a situation in which the original moral frisson of these terms – provided by anticolonial sentiment – no longer holds. Indeed, in an era of post-Nehruvian economic liberalization characterized by consumerist modernity (Mazzarella 2003; Fernandes 2006; Osella and Osella 2009), the moral universe of the anticolonial struggle is no longer part of popular public discourse. As noted earlier, a colonial ambience is now the stuff of popular marketing strategies. For instance, the Spencer’s department store in the privately developed DLF City that borders Delhi (see Srivastava 2012) outlines its history through a

series of billboard-size sepia photographs placed at the entrance. The photographs – of fashionable European ladies shopping for fine goods at Spencer’s – are from the colonial period and represent an efflorescence of colonial chic in the Indian public sphere. Other contiguous sites include the five-star Imperial Hotel in central Delhi, its corridors liberally decorated with early twentieth century photographs from an imperial gathering to commemorate the coronation of King George V, and themed restaurants such as Days of the Raj and Sola Topee (the pith helmet that came to characterize Englishness), also in Delhi. The postnational context does not have a hostile relation to colonialism, and the earlier emphases on the ethics of saving and delayed gratification for the ‘national good’ – indispensable ideological accompaniments to nationalist ‘civil disobedience’ and ‘satyagrah’ – do not find any resonance in popular discourses on the role of the state or the duties of citizens. Given this background, postnationalism also refers to the changing relationship between the state and the middle classes. Hence, with regard to the RWAs, postnationalism indicates an era of the ‘gentrification’ and ‘re-spatialization’ of the state (Ghertner 2011: 526) such that the consumer-citizen becomes the key focus of policy debates. This is a significant shift from the ideologies of the Nehruvian-era developmentalist state that succeeded the colonial one, with the poor as its key focus (Gupta 1998). It may not be adequate to summarize what I have described so far as neoliberalism, as this concept is unable to account for the specific *national* histories that transform into postnational ones. Further, as my examples will demonstrate, it is unclear that the ‘enterprising’ subject of neoliberalism (Goopu 2013) is the same everywhere and that the issue of agency can be transparently captured through speaking of a universal neoliberal moment.

The most significant manner in which the postnational moment resonates within the politics of urban space concerns the repositioning of the language of anticolonial nationalism from the national sphere to the suburban one. This, in turn, also indexes the move from the ‘national family’ – an abstraction that sought to overwrite actually existing social and economic differences – to the nuclear and middle-class family as the object of state interest, and the translation of the notion of nationalist solidarity across classes to middle-class solidarity. Manifestations of a new consciousness of middle-classness can be found across a number of contexts including ‘urban beautification’ and slum demolitions (Baviskar 2006; Ghertner 2011; Arabindoo 2011), forms of leisure (Brosius 2010; Donner 2011) and marriage (Uberoi 2008). It is in this context that new urban forms that are key to notions of middle-classness – such as gated residential communities – require attention. The rapid proliferation of gated communities across India (Brosius 2010; Srivastava 2014) signifies not only major topographical changes but also broader discursive transformations

relating to family life, state, nation and citizenship. So, for example, gated communities in India have created a specific relationship between gender, consumerism and the morality of the markets. It is a relationship that – as I will discuss in the next section – speaks to the long history of anxiety about women in public through the question: How can the public woman belong both to the world as well as the home?

By moral consumption I refer to the context in which consumerist activity is glossed by explicit and implicit discourses on the possibility of exercising control over it. This is different from viewing it as a *threat* to established life-ways (van Wessel 2004). That is to suggest that contemporary contexts of consumerism indicate that long-standing cultural discourses of, say, the sacrificing and nurturing mother that *proscribe* ‘indulgent’ consumption are encompassed *within* acts of consumerism by women (see Donner 2011). Hence, female visitors to the Disneyfied (and hyperconsumerist) Akshardham temple complex in Delhi can move seamlessly between roles as consumers *and* devoutly religious persons precisely because the same space provides opportunities for both (Srivastava 2011). Masculine anxieties over female consumption at the complex are assuaged through a process of moral consumption whereby women take part in hyperconsumerism *and are also* able to withdraw to the realms of its putative antithesis, namely religiosity. Though these domains interpenetrate, each is imagined as separate. At the Akshardham temple complex – built along the lines of Florida’s Disney World and Hollywood’s Universal Studios theme park – religiosity is located on the grounds of consumerism and makes possible the relay between the two, in turn naturalizing the relationship between and consolidating the discourse of moral consumption.

I have explored this idea in relation to the contiguous publication of remarkably explicit articles on sex and sexuality with those on religious festivals and rituals in a variety of Hindi-language magazines geared toward women (Srivastava 2007). There I suggested that the magazines address a readership that views itself as taking part in moral consumption inasmuch as it can imagine itself as being able to move between modernity and tradition, rather than be determined by the former.

Postnationalism and moral consumption redefine the representation of the ‘people’ in a time of consumerist modernity.² They are relevant for this discussion on the relationships between religiosity and the market inasmuch as they constitute the grounds on which these relationships are naturalized, through the figure of the consumer-citizen. Just as the latter is able to recast the relationship with the state through consumerist discourses, he or she also reconfigures engagements with religion. The concept ‘divine markets’ seeks to capture the relationship with commodities “produced through an articulation between economic and religious practices” (Osella and Osella 2009: 215).

Gated Religiosity: Janmashtami Celebrations at Birmingham Garden in DLF City

The 3,000-acre, privately developed DLF City is located south of Delhi, immediately across the border in the Gurgaon district of the state of Haryana. DLF City was constructed by the Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) corporation, beginning in the mid-1980s. Its hypermalls, gated residential communities and corporate offices (occupied, among others, by call centres, business processes outsourcing companies and prominent multinational corporations) speak of an urban transformation that is also the making of a new, modern, middle-class, Indian self. DLF was established in 1946 by Chaudhury Raghvendra Singh, a civil servant and landowner. Until the mid-1950s, DLF had a significant presence in the private real estate market in Delhi. However, following the 1951 publication of a highly critical report of an inquiry into the functioning of the state-run Delhi Improvement Trust (established 1937), the government promulgated the Control of Building Operations Ordinance of 1955, leading to the establishment of the Delhi Development Provisional Authority. The Provisional Authority was, in turn, succeeded by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 1957.³ With the establishment of the DDA, opportunities for private real estate activity were severely restricted; even “while the DDA was in the process of preparing a Master Plan for the city, the government announced a freeze on all vacant undeveloped land within the urbanizable [sic] limits. . . . Establishing itself as the sole agency legally authorized to develop and dispose of land, the State [sic] left little, or no role for the private land developer” (Dasappa Kacker 2005: 72).

From the early 1980s, DLF began to acquire land in Gurgaon district in the bordering state of Haryana to re-invigorate its real estate business. After some initial hiccups (Gurgaon was considered too far away; there was much termite infestation; the local, largely rural populations were considered ‘threatening’),⁴ DLF’s townships, gated communities and office complexes proved an unprecedented success. Within a span of two decades, fuelled by changes in the economy since the 1980s, farming lands were turned into spaces of global commerce, malls and gated communities. The rapid expansion of the retail banking sector, which made it relatively easy to obtain home loans, was a significant component of the changes in the housing sector. Aggressive market forays by both state-owned and new private entrants (including foreign banks) sought to target “young and highly educated professionals who began their careers through the 1980s, [but] could not afford to own their own homes” (Khanna 2007: 107).

According to a recent report, the areas falling under the recently (2008) constituted Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (that includes DLF City as well as several other privately developed residential enclaves) contained roughly

1.2 million inhabitants.⁵ DLF City itself is divided into five ‘phases’ that contain independent housing; corporate offices; shopping malls; leisure facilities such as theme parks, food plazas and a golf course and, of course, gated residential enclaves. It also has a privately built metro rail system owned by DLF. DLF City is regarded in both scholarly (King 2004; Dupont 2005) as well as popular works (Jain 2001) as a key site for the making of contemporary cultures of transnational urbanism in India. Birgit Meyer notes in her discussion of religion in a mediatized transnational world that “in order to [be] experienced as real, imaginations are required to become tangible outside the realm of the mind, by creating a social environment that materializes through the structuring of space, architecture, ritual performance, and by inducing bodily sensations... [and further that] in order to become experienced as real, imagined communities need to be materialized as in the concrete lived environment and be felt in the bones” (Meyer 2009: 5). This section explores the relationship between religiosity and new contexts of urban life through focusing on concrete practices of everyday life as it unfolds in one particular gated community in DLF City.

Birmingham Garden (name changed) is one of the most prominent gated residential enclaves in DLF City. It has an active Residents Welfare Association (RWA) that organizes a variety of social and cultural functions. These include events relating to Republic Day (January 26), Independence Day (August 15), popular religious festivals such as Diwali and Holi, dance competitions, sporting events, consumer-goods fairs and a variety of religious rituals focused on women (such as *karva-chauth*) that have been popularized by Bollywood cinema. Apart from Christmas, which has taken on the form of a secular festival, no non-Hindu festivals are celebrated. Different kinds of worlds – religious, national and transnational – lie within the gates, and women are visibly a part of it.

The Janmashtami festival that celebrates the birth of the god Krishna is a popular event at Birmingham Garden. Celebrated “on the eighth day of the waning half of the lunar month of *bhadrapad*” (Hawley and Goswami 1981: 62), which falls during August and September, the festival has elaborate local roots that draw on kinship networks, relationships in the neighbourhood and religious ties. In the north Indian city of Brindavan (famed as the place where Krishna spent a great deal of his childhood), Janmashtami celebrations involve a variety of priests, performing artists (who enact ‘nativity’ plays) and lay worshippers, each group drawing on localized myths and resources. Janmashtami celebrations at Brindavan (similar to those in other parts of India) are also organized around acts of commensality – feasts and fasts – that further institutionalize community bonds through residents’ participation in a nonmonetized ritual activity (Hawley and Goswami 1981).

Since 2008 the festival at Birmingham Garden has been organized by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), founded in

New York in 1966 by Srila Prabhupada. Members of ISKCON who live within the complex took an active part in convincing the RWA to allow the organization to take over the festival from residents. In 2012, the celebrations began with a *bhajan* (prayer song) by a group of ISKCON devotees who sat on a large stage that faced several rows of chairs. A powerful sound system ensured that the singing reached all parts of the complex. To the right of the stage, there was a large screen. A laptop and video projector were used to project swirling colour images onto the screen. As the lead singer repeatedly requested that residents join the gathering, the crowd built to around a hundred, and a group of women, including one from a Birmingham Garden family that belongs to ISKCON, began to dance in an empty space in front of the stage. It was an improvised performance that followed the ISKCON 'street dance' pattern seen in many Western cities. The dancers exhorted others in the audience to join, and a few, all women, did so.

Soon after, two male ISKCON devotees joined the dancing. However, they danced to the right of the stage, away from the women. Then some other male residents from the complex also began a slow dance with this group. While the women danced in front of the *gharokha* (a tableau depicting Krishna as a child) in gestures of bliss and devotion – hands and faces raised to the sky – the men, perhaps appropriately, given the association between masculinity and technology, danced in front of the laptop and the video projector. Two specially attired girls came forward to dance to verses recited from the Gita, and an ISKCON devotee offered a discourse on the text. By then, the cinema screen was displaying graphics of flying machines, flaming arrows, a twirling globe and a variety of psychedelic animation. The ceremony was building to a crescendo. The women dancing improvised and also did Indian dances such as the *garba* and *gidda* popularized by Bollywood. The ceremony concluded with an *arti* (lamp) ceremony and the cutting of a 'Krishna birthday cake', which was then offered as *prasad* (sanctified food). The screen now showed scenes from cities in the United States where white American *bhakts* (devotees) danced, sang and spoke about their lives as 'Krishna bhakts'. The ceremony lasted three hours, during which the laptop united the Birmingham Garden space with an American one. The 'West' was in Birmingham Garden via a confident cosmopolitanism that could include within it a broader tableau of Indian culture. Especially notable was that this situation was unmarked by anxiety and angst regarding 'cultural imperialism' or India's colonial legacy. We ate our cake and dispersed.

The suffusion of local space with cultures of transnationalism also happens in other, more obvious, circumstances. One of the most common ways in which group interaction takes place at Birmingham Garden is around promotional stalls for consumer goods manufacturers. Every other week, a mobile van or a portable tent promoting a variety of goods can be found at different places within the complex. In August 2011, Honda advertised its newly

launched Jazz model by inviting residents to inspect the car, which had been parked next to a mobile information booth within the condominium complex. A young woman exhorted adults to “come down and see for yourself”, while children took part in dancing competitions and were rewarded for composing songs about the vehicle. Some days before, an electronic goods company had displayed its wares at the same spot.

A relationship with the market is fundamental to – even though it does not exhaust – the senses of space and community at Birmingham Garden. It generates specific types of sociality: of a space where women may publicly dance with men at Bacardi-sponsored Holi (the festival of colours) celebrations without encountering the risks of the sexual economy that is common in Holi celebrations. It is imagined as a liberal space where women may drink alcohol provided by Bacardi in public, conjuring a new public that is ensconced within a private space that is liberated from the dangers and ‘uncivilized’ nature of the old (Pow 2007). Expressions of the female body are a significant aspect of life within the gates (whether during Holi, Janmashtami, morning walks or other rituals, the female body is allowed considerable visibility in the public spaces of the enclave). In these spaces, children and adults sing, dance and experience the physical sensuality of commodities that come to them, transporting the aura of the showroom to their doorstep and becoming one with their domestic lives.

The preceding text describes the related contexts of postnational modernity and moral consumption. Gated communities are exemplary sites of the making of suburban religiosities in tandem with the consolidation of the suburban (middle-class) family as the focus of postnational consumerist modernity. That is to say, if national spaces, such as the state-run educational system and factory towns (Roy 2007), were once the imagined space of personal and familial transformations from premodern to modern subjectivity, that role now appears to have passed to the more intimate localities of domestic residence. The post-colonial era in India witnessed earlier periods when residential spaces *were* part of the state’s imagination of social life and change. Today, in contrast, the state loiters outside the home, and its relationships with domestic space are of a different nature. This has specific consequences in terms of new relationships between different kinds of spaces (domestic and public, for example), religiosity, gender and new notions of the self. Within gated communities, where the street is not the street, and, for precisely that reason, is the site of intense middle-class activity, public women both can be the guardians of tradition *and* take part in sexualized presentations of the self, rather than having to choose between the two (Phadke 2007). So, on the night of the Hindu festival of *karva-chauth*, traditionally attired women of Birmingham Garden pray for their husbands’ well-being, and, the morning after, they pace the condominium grounds on their exercise rounds dressed in latex clothing. Consumerism, here, is the grounds for the making of a moral middle class that is able to combine

‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ in appropriate measure. Women, in particular, are able to take part in consumerist modernity and return to tradition when required. Postnational consumerism provides the grounds for the making of moral consumption: for one must take vigorous part in consumerism in order to display one’s ability to withdraw from it. One must display modernity to remain traditional.

Between the Temple, Reality Television and Time Management: Young Men in Haridwar

If non-religious spaces such as gated communities act as sites of moral consumption, there are other, more explicitly religious contexts in which religiosity is itself an entry point to the world of material goods. This occurs through “a continuous balancing act between reaching out and staying apart, between embracing the world and staying aloof, between addressing and appealing to the public and imposing some kind of boundary through which believers are set apart” (Meyer 2009: 21).

Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyala (DSVV) is a private university located in the (Hindu) holy city of Haridwar in the state of Uttarakhand in northern India. It was founded in 2002 and is one of several educational institutions run by the All World Gayatri Pariwar, a Hindu religious organization founded by Pandit Ram Sharma Acharya (1911–1990) in 1958. Pandit Acharya was born in the village of Anwalkheda near Agra in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The headquarters of Gayatri Pariwar is Jyoti Kunj Ashram, also in Haridwar. The Ashram, like many others in Haridwar, is popular with pilgrims from around the country. Jyoti Kunj is a mini-city and contains temples and other religious spaces, accommodation for visitors, restaurants and dining halls, kitchens that prepare foods to be used during religious festivities, printing presses, administrative units that deal with domestic and international visitors and a variety of other offices. According to its website, “Spiritual refinement of the *suksma vata-varana* (subtle environment) has been the predominant focus of the mission and it has endeavoured a Yagya -based movement on the lines of the Vedic tradition to achieve this virtually impossible goal.”⁶ The current head of mission is the son-in-law of the founder of Gayatri Pariwar. He is also the chancellor of the Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyala, which is located on an eighty-four-acre campus, approximately three kilometres from Jyoti Kunj Ashram. The university was established under a special act of the state government of Uttarakhand.

I was first introduced to DSVV in March 2011 by Ankur Patel, who, along with his wife Malti, is in charge of distance education for the university. On my initial visit, Ankur arranged for me to stay at the Ashram. When I arrived at Jyoti Kunj on a cold January morning, the air was thick with smoke from a number of *havans* (sacred fires) that form part of rituals of ‘yagya’,

originally a Vedic sacrifice ritual.⁷ The havans were surrounded by devotees. Loudspeakers installed upon pillars blared chants that devotees were expected to repeat. Ankur told me that the yagya ritual at Jyoti Kunj has a very specific dress code: men are required to wear *dhotis* (an unstitched garment, tied at the waist and covering most of the legs) and the women must be in ‘Indian’ attire. Among the crowd of devotees were a number of European and Japanese women wearing loose-fitting ‘harem’ pants. I was met at the Ashram gates by Ashish Kumar Singh, who is a volunteer at the Ashram. He is in his mid-twenties and comes from the town of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. He has an engineering degree. Like many other volunteers at the complex, Ashish was wearing saffron dhoti–kurta.⁸ I checked into the Patanjali Bhavan (‘Patanjali Mansion’) guest house, named after the Sanskrit grammarian of ancient India. Ashish had become familiar with All World Gayatri Parivar (AWGP) at the age of thirteen when he became involved in some of their activities as a schoolboy. He is the only child in his family, so when he decided to join the organization as a full-time volunteer, his parents were unhappy with his decision. Now, he told me, they have reconciled with his membership.

Ankur Patel and his wife both have management degrees and earlier worked in corporate jobs in Bangalore. Malti’s family had long been part of AWGP, but Ankur knew nothing about it. Before marriage, they visited Jyoti Kunj in 2008. Shortly thereafter, they decided to get married at the Ashram, but then returned to their respective jobs in Bangalore. However, Ankur said, he realized that he was increasingly “missing something” in his middle-class corporate life. He and his wife decided to meet with the head of AWGP. They told him that they wanted to “give their time to the mission.” The head told them that, given their jobs, he thought that they might be able to spend only a short period with AWGP. Malti responded as follows: “If we decide, it will be forever.” Shortly thereafter they moved to Haridwar. Their families, they said, “were completely shocked.” Ankur tried to mollify his parents by telling them that he and Malti would get a salary of 20,000 rupees per month (approximately \$330) each, whereas they actually received a stipend of 700 rupees per month (approximately \$12). The stipend was recently increased to 1000 rupees per month. When his mother found out, she broke down and accused him of lying to her. His father supported him, saying, “He is not asking for any money from us and he is earning whatever he does with *izzat* [honor].” When Ankur and Ashish took me to meet the AWGP head, they touched their foreheads to his feet in a traditional sign of deference, and sat on the floor rather than occupy chairs. The same ritual is performed at the morning *darshan*, when the head and his wife (daughter of the founder of AWGP) ‘bless’ the large crowd of devotees who queue up to see them.

Ankur was my chief guide to the DSVV campus. The university vice-chancellor told me that the institution caters ‘mainly to poor students’,

including many from rural areas from states such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The university has nine departments, including Sanskrit, English, Indian History and Culture and Scientific Spirituality.⁹ The academic day consists of six hours of classroom teaching. DSVV offers certificate, diploma, graduate and post-graduate degrees in courses such as Holistic Health Management, Journalism and Mass Communication, Human Consciousness and Yogic Science and Applied Yoga and Human Excellence.

DSVV is located – along with many other such institutions – within a specific geography of the underfunding of provincial education. This sense of backwardness is keenly felt by the inhabitants of these spaces. They are marked not only by uneven development of educational facilities, but also by lack of confidence in them and a general sense that there is little of worth in an upbringing that is confined to the province. The following quote from an article by anthropologist Chaise LaDousa on schooling and the politics of language in Banaras (Varanasi) provides a succinct summary of this viewpoint:

Although most people living in Banaras send their children to the city's schools, a small number find it necessary to send their children away for schooling. The case of my neighbour [during the period of fieldwork] demonstrates that not everyone in Banaras focuses on medium differences within the city. Indeed, the neighbour believes Banaras to be unable to offer the kind of English that he sees necessary for success. (LaDousa 2005: 468)

Within this context of social and economic disadvantage, a tertiary institution, such as DSVV, that provides relatively inexpensive education is likely to be popular. However, DSVV is, in the first instance, a religious institution and its key aim is the propagation of Hindu identity. Irrespective of how this is imagined, this activity has raised the now relatively familiar concern regarding the “Hinduization” of education in particular and the public sphere in general (Sundar 2004; Chopra 2008). At first glance, DSVV's moral and physical geography would certainly seem to confirm such concerns.

To begin with, DSVV bases itself on the ‘gurukul’ model of education, the modern roots of which lie in the establishment of gurukul schools by the Arya Samaj movement in 1902 (Pandit 1974; Kumar 1993). Organized around ideas of gender segregation, strict hierarchy between students and teachers and the ‘timeless’ relevance of ‘ancient Hindu knowledge’, the schools were intended to return Indian education to its ‘ancient’ past through purging it of ‘foreign’ (i.e., Muslim and Western) influences. Within the (modern) gurukul movement, temple and religious life were central to the life of the student. The centrepiece of the DSVV campus is a temple to the god Shiva. Every evening, students gather at the temple to hear lectures on religion and morality delivered by teachers. This is followed by recitations by students of writings of Gurudev (‘the Holy Guru’), as the founder of DSVV's parent body (the All

World Gayatri Pariwar) is referred to. Following the recitals, there is discussion between students and teachers, during which the latter seek ‘clarifications’ on Gurudev’s writings. As in almost all other contexts, boys and girls sit separately and at the feet of their teachers. These activities are followed by fifteen minutes of meditation during which religious music plays over the public announcement system. The meditation period is common to the campuses of Jyoti Kunj Ashram and DSVV, and gates to both institutions are locked for fifteen minutes, during which everyone present is expected to meditate. Thus, the university and the religious Ashram are united as a single space and the distinction between secular and religious education is dissolved.

Given certain analyses of Indian religious and social spheres (outlined in the introductory section of this chapter), one interpretation of DSVV’s activities could be that they manifest the Hindutva project of ‘restoration’ and purity and a condemnation of the decline of ‘authentic’ Indian social and cultural beliefs. With respect to the concepts of postnationalism and moral consumption, however, I suggest that the case of DSVV provides another example of a different tendency in Indian society in which consumerism itself is the condition of possibility for increased religiosity. Furthermore, this context is not marked by a search for a pure and singular self. Rather, it signifies the *un-remarkable* consolidation of a divided subject that ranges across consumerist and religious subjectivities, encompassing both positions but determined by neither. It is also in this way that the Indian example, though apparently similar to the case described by Stambach (2007), differs from her Tanzanian case.

Stambach points to a tension at the heart of the relationship between consumerism and religiosity in the Tanzanian evangelical context. Discourses of gender and deference to authority and the strictly enforced austere routine of daily life at DSVV would also seem to position it in opposition to the pervasive practices of consumption, leisure, and individuation outside its gates. A student’s day begins at 4 A.M. and ends at 9:30 P.M., which is bedtime. In between there are multiple periods devoted to prayer, meditation, and activities such as ‘wandering through the levels of physical body, to sub-conscious and then super-conscious’, ‘music mantra’ and ‘submission of your whole work to god’. It is a rigorous daily routine, particularly marked by activities designed to produce ‘pure’ Hindu subjects, ‘recovered’ and corralled from the tumult of the outside world. ‘Time for entertainment’ consists of sporting activities and ‘cultural evenings’, which entail student performances based on exclusively religious themes.

One afternoon, as I wandered around the campus during the time set apart for ‘entertainment’, I came across a group of young boys huddled around their music teacher. The boys were all part of the *bhajan* (prayer) singing group and performed regularly at various public events at the university. The group is rigorously trained in *bhajan* singing, as that is the key form of musical

performance both at the DSVV campus as well Jyoti Kunj Ashram. This afternoon, however, they were attentively looking at the music teacher's phone as it replayed a recording of Bollywood singer Sonu Nigam's performance on a television musical reality show. Nigam displayed his virtuosity by alternating, in rapid order, between a 1950s songs, contemporary pop numbers, bhajans and Urdu ghazals. Santosh Singh, the music teacher, told me that that he wanted all his students to become as 'versatile' as Sonu Nigam.

I asked Santosh about the implicit institutional policy where the only form of musical training students allowed is in bhajans and other forms of devotional music. Would aspirations to be Sonu Nigam-like not undermine the "socio-moral discourse" (Stambach 2000: 171) that DSVV sought to propagate? And, did the students not risk "losing their material-moral-grounding" (Stambach 2000: 173) that lay at the heart of DSVV pedagogy? Santosh Singh appeared not to address my question at all. Instead, he said:

You know, I have studied music at BHU [Banaras Hindu University] and I can't even begin to tell you about the *sanskar* [ritually correct behaviour or a respectful manner] I learned there. We always touched the feet of our teachers and as we ascended the stage for a performance, we also respectfully touched our heads to the steps....

Try as I might, I was unable to draw him out any further, as he appeared to consider this an adequate response to my inquiry. After this, he and his students went back to watching the Sonu Nigam video. The reason for his apparent disinterest in engaging with my questions became clearer later on.

Soon after the aforementioned encounter, the registrar of the university sent word that he wanted to see me. When we met, the registrar asked if I might be able to do some casual teaching in DSVV's classes titled Essence of Lifestyle Management and Time Management. These, he said, were part of 'PD' (Personality Development) courses that DSVV had recently initiated. Some other nearby universities, such as the Garhwal University, he continued, had also expressed an interest in initiating these courses on their campus. Other subjects within PD included Ideal [sic] of a Successful Personality, Building Confidence through Public Speaking, Ideal Leadership, Developing Leadership Skills, Preparing Self Evaluation Chart and How to Become a Goal Achieving Personality. The courses, the registrar went on to say, were based on "the latest management theories as well global psychology principles."

There is, of course, a long history to the coupling of Western knowledge with Hindu-nationalist projects. These include 'proof' of the fit between 'ancient' Hindu principles and modern science (Chatterjee 1993; Prakash 1999), and specific demonstrations of the imbrications of "Ancient Precepts and Modern Teachings" with respect to sexuality (Pillay ca. 1940), and caste as a biological fact (Srivastava 2007). It is possible to invoke this lineage as an explanation for the contemporary situation, where an institution such as DSVV (and its parent

body, the Gayatri Parivar) combine the production of a Hindu subject with ostensibly global discourses of scientific management and personality development. I would like to suggest, however, that these identity projects differ from those characteristic of the era of 'high' nationalism that characterized the decades following independence from colonial rule. The most significant aspect of this is the decline of what might be called the anti-consumerist and pro-industrialization nationalism of the Five Year Plan state (Chatterjee 1993; Gupta 1998) and the subsequent incorporation of consumption as a way of life. Within this context, 'consumer-citizenship' forms the cornerstone of quotidian relationships between the state, citizens and private interests (Fernandes 2006; Roy 2007). Hence, in the case of agitation by RWAs against the electricity price hike cited earlier, the issue of how resources should be distributed among different sections of the population was most frequently articulated in terms of the difference between 'good' consumers (the middle classes) who were forced to subsidize 'bad' consumers (the slum-dwellers) who 'stole' electricity (Srivastava 2014). It is this aspect that plays out with a further twist in the case of DSVV.

Conclusion

DSVV is, as I have suggested, located within the twin contexts of Hindutva identity politics and non-middle-class (and economically disadvantaged) education. Practices of moral consumption within the campus are located at the juncture of these two aspects. The seemingly contradictory positioning of discourses of Hindu identity alongside global ones of 'personality development' that draw on management science and psychology and that many teachers and students saw as linking DSVV to the broader consumer culture was a frequent topic of discussion among teachers and students. And, just as frequently, it was the juxtaposition that was itself invoked as providing a coherent rationale, as well as a reason for why DSVV *differed* from other arenas of consumption. The juxtaposition, as the registrar once explained to me, 'proved' that DSVV provided training to its students such that they are able to take part in 'global ways' and yet 'return to Indian traditions' when required. This, he suggested, was what differentiated members of the Gayatri Pariwar from 'other kinds of Indians' who took part in consumerism, but were not in control of this activity. The latter were, I interpret him as suggesting, determined by their modernity, unable to withdraw from it at will and, hence, effect the seamless movement between globally sourced PD courses and locally developed Hindu perspectives. The latter aspect constitutes moral consumption. Further, as a final rung to my argument, moral consumption is also the making of a moral middle class that seeks to differentiate itself from other, historically prior, economically better off and 'Westernized' middle classes. Hence, moral consumption,

in the context of DSVV's relationship to the world beyond its gates, relates simultaneously to religious and class identities. It is also the context of the rise of new class fractions involved in the process of establishing 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) within contexts of postnational consumer modernity. Further, postnationalism and the production of consumer citizens is crucial to the process of class differentiation, as it is only through intensive participation in consumption that one proves one's ability to return to 'Indian' culture. This is what music teacher Santosh Singh meant to suggest, without stating it explicitly, when he juxtaposed the 'sanskar' (training in morally approved behaviour) gained at Banaras Hindu University with the world of reality television. Unlike the case of Tanzanian youth, who are warned off consumerism by Christian evangelists but take part in consumerism *despite* the proscription, in the Indian case, consumerism is both a source of anxiety as well as a solution to it. This, perhaps, is the most significant aspect of the postnational era.

While I mean to describe the ways in which consumer culture constitutes significant and indispensable grounds for the making of contemporary religious identities in India, I am not suggesting that religious life is completely determined by the latter. The key focus of my discussion is the manner in which the two should be seen as interwoven contexts. The divine life of markets and consumerist manifestations of religiosity provide us with a way of understanding aspects of social life "as a combination of piety and economic calculation" (Osella and Osella 2009: S204). This way of thinking about the relationships between market forms and religious lives is not, of course, unique to India. Fenggang Yang (2005) provides an account of young Chinese Christians who favour McDonald's restaurants as a meeting place for religious gatherings, interpreting the restaurant space as one of 'modernity and cosmopolitanism' (Yang 2005: 425). And, Daromir Rudnycky (2010) discusses an Indonesian context where "The creation of a spiritual economy involved elucidating and implementing a number of compatibilities in the ethical practice constitutive of both Islam and neoliberalism" (Rudnycky 2010: 23). While building upon analyses such as these (and others cited throughout the chapter), I have suggested that, for the Indian case, it is crucial to keep in mind an additional context that relates to the interweaving of consumer culture and religious life. This, I have argued, concerns the making of new class identities, located in the crucible of consumerist and religious activities.

DSVV and the gated localities of DLF City are, this chapter has suggested, sites that signify the making of a new relationship between markets and religiosity. In particular, they are contexts of an *explicit* dialogue that seeks to posit a contemporary Hindu identity whose religiosity is in tune with the cadence of neoliberal capitalism and whose neoliberalism is informed by the requirements of religious belief. This is the context – and the process – I have referred to as moral consumption. A significant background to this is what I have referred

to as postnationalism, an era that sees the consolidation of new class identities built around consumerism and a relationship with the nation-state that is, increasingly, mediated through private capital. This is in marked contrast to the situation that prevailed in the decades immediately following the end of colonial rule. Postnationalism and moral consumption, are, in turn, the overlapping contexts for the making of divine markets where consumers find solace through spiritualizing their relationships with commodities and commoditizing relationships with spirituality.

Notes

- 1 For a more benign view of privatization, see Kanbur (2007).
- 2 The articles in the recently (2013) published volume edited by Nandini Gooptu on *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India* traverse a territory contiguous to that in the present discussion.
- 3 The inquiry was constituted under the chairmanship of the leading industrialist G. D. Birla and the report came to be known as the Birla Report (BR). In blunt terms, it concluded that “the story of the Trust is the story of failure” (Birla Report 1951: 7); that its record of slum-clearance had been “meagre” (3); the Town Expansion Schemes had merely resulted in the “freezing” rather than “development” of considerable land areas (3); it had commissioned neither a “civic survey” nor a “Master Plan”; and its strategy of selling land to the highest bidder had only exacerbated the housing problem (4).
- 4 Interviews with residents of DLF City, November 2011–December 2012.
- 5 Sanjeev K. Ahuja, “11.53 lakh population: The Numbers Lie, Say Residents”, *Hindustan Times*, 10 August, 2010, p. 4. The website of the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon pegs this figure at 876,824. Citizens groups complain that the under-reporting allows the Corporation to escape its responsibility of proper provisioning of infrastructure.
- 6 www.awgp.org/MissionVision/Philosophy (Accessed 1 May 2014).
- 7 The Vedic period refers to the ancient era during which Hinduism’s oldest scriptures were composed. At the current time, right wing Hindu movements use terms such as ‘Vedic Hinduism’ to refer to a ‘pure’ form of religious belief and practice.
- 8 Saffron is the colour identified with both Hindu religious identity as well as right-wing religious groups that propound ‘Hindutva’ (Hinduness) as a political movement. See, for example, Basu et al. (1993).
- 9 The Scientific Spirituality course seeks to demonstrate the rational basis of ancient Hindu religious thought and its relevance in the current period. This builds upon a modern Indian preoccupation with establishing parity between western and Indian knowledge regimes and belief systems (see, e.g., Chatterjee 1993 and Prakash 1999).

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