

CHAPTER FIVE

Locating the public sphere

Introduction

In 1941, a local scholar felt able to say that “with the exception of political events [i.e., nationalist agitation], the general public is more interested in Municipal administration than with any other topic” (B. Singh, cited in Freitag 1989a: 16). This chapter is not wholly concerned with Municipal affairs, although my account will touch on these. Instead, it asks where and how this ‘public’ comes to be constituted and what ‘public’ means in this context. I argue that tea shops (*chay ki dukan*) are a primary arena for the construction of a public (but not exclusively political) sphere. However, I suggest that such shops, and the activities of their customers, cannot be understood in isolation from women and the home. Therefore, in line with the approach of the preceding chapter, I illustrate the relationship between the print-orientated, male space of the tea shop and the emergence of local television which broadcasts a similar range of ‘affairs’ to the home. The intention is to generate a sense of movement, both of bodies and information, between the house and the outside, between the worlds of women and of men.

The chapter begins by discussing the tea shops in the city. Although tea shops are a prevalent feature of North Indian life, their place in society has yet to be studied. They are central sites for the consumption of newspapers and the production of views, arenas of sociality and nodal points within communicative networks. Tea shops have an important place in the political and social life of the city. Public opinion is generated in such centres, and they could provide one of the major points of entry for an anthropology of politics, although this is not the objective here. Instead, I want to highlight their “world disclosing role” (Calhoun 1992: 34).

This chapter seeks to locate the public sphere through newspapers, their readers and the tea shops they visit. The concept of the public sphere is used advisedly and in a limited sense. Habermas (1989) identifies the public sphere as a specific historical formation, which arose in eighteenth century Western Europe with the transition from absolutist to more democratic forms of government. It signifies a sphere between the state and civil society in which (male) individuals could join in rational-critical debate bearing on matters of state authority and, by so doing, form public opinion. Coffee houses in urban centres were, according to Habermas, central sites where such activity occurred and so in this, and other respects, tea shops represent these dimensions of his original formulation.

Habermas' public sphere is a male sphere whose existence is premised on the exclusion of women, and strict public and domestic distinctions. In line with recent reappraisals of the original Habermas thesis (cf. Calhoun 1992), particularly from a feminist perspective (cf. Benhabib 1992), this chapter seeks to put women more firmly in the analysis. Therefore, I explore the impact of local television on women's access to public opinion, and visual access to events in what is predominantly male public space.

What has become clear is that, in the context of television, a wider consideration of public and domestic space in Varanasi is required. A Municipal 'anti-encroachment' campaign in the city, an event which forced people to confront various conflicting ideas about public/private and inside/outside, and was itself highly televised, is used to guide this discussion.

Tea shops: the discussion markets and their connections to the home.

As I grew to be more comfortable in my surroundings, but increasingly frustrated by my inability to gain repeated access to the domestic sphere, I turned towards tea shops.

Throughout my time in Varanasi, it was clear that if I wanted to know what was happening in the city then tea shops were a good place to frequent. Tea shops became, in short, my way into the city: places where I could get to know and be known, somewhere to break a journey through the city, drink the hot, sugary *chay* and indulge in 'butter slice', toast thickly covered with butter and black salt.

Tea shops, as hubs of communication, discussion and media consumption, are much more than places to stop for tea. They are a place to pick up a piece of newspaper and with it some of the concerns of the day¹. As Poddar writes of *adda*, (a sort of private *salon* in Bengal), so the same can be said of tea shops: "all questions connected with local politics, social reform, education, literature, religion, metaphysics, jurisprudence, political economy, scientific outlook, theories of state and of society...and the future shape of India" are discussed (cited in Hannerz 1992: 208). The range of topics, and the depth to which they are pursued, depends on the tea shop. Some are renowned for political discussion, and as meeting places for members of particular parties. Others, located in commercial centres such as Chowk, embrace more mercantile topics. All are arenas in which "cultural scanning" occurs (Hannerz *ibid.*), where issues are located, discussed, debated (often fiercely) and experiences are related and employed in the construction of perspectives. It is in such sites that understandings, of any topic, are exchanged. The newspapers themselves often refer to these communicative arenas in a way which stresses the transaction of meaning, in what are referred to as 'discussion markets', *charcha ke bazaar*.

Most tea shops have at least one newspaper, which is bought by the owner before being physically and discursively dissected by his customers. The paper is split and read quietly or aloud to those present. Topics of conversation are often cued by a prescient or 'hot' (*garam*) story; on other days conversation drifts haphazardly without being focused on any one issue or story in particular. Regulars barely consider themselves as customers, instead they refer to

the shops as clubs in which they are members. Their commitment to these clubs is illustrated by the distances that some travel to visit them: they are often geographically removed from their places of work or residence. The centrality that they have in men's lives, the friendships and community embedded within tea shops is borne out by the length of time that they spend there on any single day.

Shops rarely take a name, other than that of the owner who is treated akin to a patron of the activities which are associated with his shop. Since the primary ingredient in tea is milk, and members of the Ahir², or cow-herding community, are best placed to provide this, most shops are owned by them. If patronising a shop frequently is akin to being a member of it, then most shops represent something of a broad church. Distinctions between the 'members' were rarely made, except in terms of rhetorical skill, debating prowess, some type of informational expertise or general sense of *jouissance*. In this respect tea shops constitute a nodal point of the public sphere in the Habermasian sense, where there is an equality of status. What matters is less the identity of the speaker but the perceived quality of his argument or opinion (cf. Habermas 1989; Calhoun 1992).

It may be as well, at this juncture, to briefly describe a tea shop and cast a glance over the newspaper items which concerned the fraternity of tea drinkers and debaters within it.

Kali's tea shop.

Situated not far from Harishchandra ghat, one of the two cremation ghats in the city, Kali's tea shop is open almost twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. It is run by his three

¹Gupta (1995) and Herzfeld (1992) are two anthropologists who have looked at the place of newspapers in local politics and discussion.

²Ahirs, in the current atmosphere of low caste self-empowerment, are now referred to, and refer to themselves, as Yadav.

sons on a shift basis. Many customers remember when it was run by their grandfather, after whose death Kali took charge. Now that his sons are old enough to manage the shop he devotes more time to his water buffalo, which provide the shop's milk, and to the enjoyment that he sees as his right at this stage in life.

Covering the walls of the shop are calendar posters of the Hindu pantheon, as well as 'pop art', including pictures of Madhuri Dixit, many young men's heart throb. After a *Diwali* clean and repaint, a frame of Congress party photographs was hung in the centre of the shop and a new sign indicating available products posted. Inside there are fans, basic tables and chairs. Discarded pan leaves and cigarette ends litter the floor, along with bits of well read newspaper.

Mice scamper along the picture frames, hugging the wall until they reach the safety of an unseen corner. In one corner milk is stored or simmered on a huge gas ring. A radio is tuned into *Vividh Bharati*³ or the broadcast of *Akashvaani* in the city. Outside a deep hole full of coal burns day and night. Along the outside length of the shop is a low seat, covered in sackcloth. In the morning, when the sun is still low, people sit outside, exhorting wandering cows to move on and stray dogs to move.

Inside voices can be heard, rising and falling, reflecting the intensity of the current conversation. Greetings are made, chairs offered and pieces of newspaper sought after. Young children entrusted to their elders are entertained, doted upon. Boys are sent out to get *pan*, with reminders about what it should contain. Orders for tea (Rs.1) and toast (Rs 5) are placed and reconfirmed: *Pani le ke aao,*' requests a man spitting the remainder of his pan outside, *'phir chay pila do'* ; "bring water, then serve me *chay*".

³Akashvaani is the popular name for All India Radio (AIR), which arrived in the city in 1962. Vividh Bharati (VB), the commercial division of AIR arrived in Varanasi in 1993 (Govt. of India 1996: 46, 57). Radios, especially tuned to VB, are a common feature of tea shops providing popular 'surround' sound.

Between eight and ten in the morning the shop is busy. If debate and discussion is of particular interest or interminable the appointed hour of work may slip past unnoticed. There is a paper shop nearby which delivers papers in the surrounding two *mohallas*⁴, though I never saw any visitor to Kali's shop buy a paper there before coming to the tea shop. A few have a paper delivered to their home but this represents something of an unaffordable luxury for most. For most, as their wives concur, 'their tea shop' or 'hotel' is where they get to read a paper.

Since many of the customers at Kali's shop are involved in aspects of the sari trade they work in proximity to each other and leave en masse. Often this requires some encouragement or a reminder that enough time has been wasted. The Hindu merchants, with whom these sari workers have both close personal and business relationships, can stay longer and often retire to a *pan wallah* across the street before finally setting out to work. For these sari weavers and printers Kali's is a place to talk shop.

Young men often arrive slightly later, forming the second shift of the day. Most are either un- or under-employed and the imperatives of work impinge less on their daily routine. They often come in briefly to check the cricket scores or inspect the film listings. The same group of men hover around the barber shop down the road which has a television on display for customers and others. For them, these shops offer a base: a place to meet, chat or arrange a trip to the cinema. Most are encouraged, or feel obliged, to stay out of the house rather than remain at home during the day. However, their presence there later at night is not welcomed by their parents. This shop and the barber's down the street are locations for passing time (*time pass karna*) with their friends. Both are places around which they gather to survey the

In view of my argument in this chapter, it can be noted that televisions are very uncommon in tea shops, although sometimes they are temporarily installed for a big cricket match.

⁴ The shopkeeper reported that he delivered 200 papers to 150 houses in the area. These include 35 copies of Aaj and Dainik Jagan (30).

passing scene as they themselves become part of it, which is not to say that they are fruitlessly 'hanging out'⁵:

The young men...idling on the corner, in a little group clustered round the shop...moving about...singly or in twos or threes in the early hours of the morning when all good men are asleep, see, talk, observe, gossip, keep silent, plan, spy, share secrets, confer, organise, pass on messages. They build up their own store of 'secret knowledge', which is part of a kind of underlife culture and covert challenge to authority...[T]hey form a dense network of relations and information and in doing so a means by which families can keep in touch with the crucial minutiae of daily life (Gilsenan 1982: 122).

The attractions of a tea shop are many. It is a roof over one's head, and a place to meet friends. For those who cannot afford a paper, tea shops represent a place to take a break, read and chat idly, or animatedly, with friends. For those who cannot read, the local tea shop is a place to be read to, to stay in touch. A tea shop offers escape from work and home, and represents a vantage point from which to view the world. But, like the boys who observe passing life and become part of it, those who engage with the world that the newspapers and discussion provide, disclose and also create their world.

⁵Young men such as these often form clubs which meet informally for cricket or in a more formal sense to organise neighbourhood festivities which are left to those their age, e.g., the *Holika* fires on the night before *Holi*, *Id Milan* and Saraswati puja. This particular group's club was called the 'The Great Sporting Club', and contained c.20 members, both Hindu and Muslim.

Plate 6: 2. Passing time at the barber shop.

An impressionistic survey of newspaper content.

The front page of *Dainik Jagran* leads with a picture of bathers at the *sangam* (confluence) in Allahabad, 35 lakh people are reported to have been present. In the capital, the CBI have questioned Sita Ram Kesri for the third time. In Varanasi, the Korean ambassador and the Vice Chancellor of BHU discuss possibilities for academic co-operation. Two die in a collision between a Maruti and a truck on the Grand Trunk road. Adverts alert readers to special prices for refrigerators on the occasion of *Id Mubarak*. According to the World Bank, India's economy could overtake China's by 2006. In the Braj region preparations are underway for Holi, meanwhile Arafat and Netanyahu discuss many issues during a two hour meeting. The owner of a famous *thundai* stall in Godaulia dies, as a mark of respect her shop remains closed. With the BHU student association elections approaching political activities intensify. In Bhelupura, a Hero Honda motorcycle was stolen. At the *Shiv Sena* offices in Kammachha the committee for liberating the Gyanvapi temple meets today. On the fifth day of free medical camps in the city, 4402 people are treated. A plea has been made by Sri Pannalal Yadav, BJP representative of Shivala ward for street cleaning to be performed and street lighting maintained. High school and Inter-college examinations begin today. Details of civic arrangements for *Maha Shivratri* are announced; shopkeepers are implored to keep their stores shut. The next day photographs show devotees queuing to take *darshan* at Gyanvapi. The government is soon to take a decision on the recommendations of the 5th pay commission report. In memory of Prof. Gopal Tripathi a chair in

Chemical Engineering is established at BHU. The former irrigation minister and senior BJP leader, Om Prakash Singh said that to establish a healthy and strong society school children must be given *sanskarik* education. In England, George Gardiner has left the Conservative party. A rickshaw driver is beaten up at Sigra roundabout by some passengers unseated in a traffic accident. The Congress in U.P claims that the BSP (Bahujan Samaj) has betrayed the Dalits by joining with the BJP. The Congress blames the Samajwadi Party (which refused to support Mayawati when she asked the UF (United Front) to back her claim to be Chief Minister), and thus forced the BSP to seek the support of the BJP. "Holi is celebrated in a subdued fashion because of the terrible high prices". A large quantity of fake Levi Strauss jeans is seized by representatives of the company in Colombia. The student elections get underway at Kashi Vidyapeeth University. An article reports that an American company has taken out a patent on the names of various rices that sound like Basmati (e.g., Kasmati, Texmati, Jasmati and Kismati). An editorial discusses the Indo-Pakistan talks and the progress of the prohibition movement in Andhra Pradesh.

The articles detailed above are merely a random selection. Some would have been discussed in Kali's shop, others not. Editorials and the business pages were never the subject of more than occasional fleeting glances. In other tea shops, noted for their highly literate clientele or political inclinations, these detailed commentaries, couched in Sanskritic Hindi, were more likely to be taken up for discussion. At Kali's, the lottery numbers were more likely to be read than share prices. Since many of the customers at Kali's shop were Muslim, and their first language Urdu, it was often the shorter, more local articles which were the focus of attention. The refined, *parishkrt*, language of the print media was beyond their grasp, but where they faltered, educated Hindu regulars had little difficulty. The newspaper resembled an à la carte menu, providing suggestions for daily discussions in which the concerns of those present were

aired. References which were not fully understood, or contexts alluded to but not described, could be explained by other customers.

On 15th April 1997, a fire raged at one of the sites housing pilgrims in Mecca. The day that the news broke, customers in Kali's tea shop took up this story, trying to piece together what was given in the papers with their own knowledge of what might have happened. One man, to bolster the opinion that he had just expressed, quoted a small statement from the paper: "of those killed most are from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh". This was of no small concern to those present, some of whom had relatives or friends who were taking part in the pilgrimage. The number of Indian pilgrims who had departed was debated, as was the question of how many pilgrims in total were in Saudi Arabia. One man present began a diatribe against the organisers, accusing them of treating Indians as second class citizens, reminding his fellows that their ill-conceived preparations had killed Indian Muslims before when a bridge collapsed. Another argued that the Saudi Arabians must not be blamed, and went on to talk of the telephone calls that a friend's relative had received from a *Haji*, reassuring him that all was well. Conversation drifted on to more general discussion about the Haj, and Indian government organisation of the Indian Muslim participants in it.

Anon, those still present started to trade their understandings of Saudi Arabia: how hot it was, how expensive it was, how every place was air-conditioned, that no *dhal* and rice is available, only meat. The organisation of the *Kumbha mela* followed and one participant noted how one day of bathing took two years of planning, and that the chief organiser for the *mela* at Haridwar in 1998 was the former District Magistrate of Varanasi. "Where is the *mela* held?", someone asked. An answer followed, but no one knew where Ujain was. Through ill-remembered twists and turns the conversation moved on to London, and its wealth. Everyone expressed disbelief when I told them that some people live in cardboard boxes outside shops, that they have no homes, that not everyone is wealthy.

I understood better the process through which, as a group, people in tea shops such as this construct understandings of the world, when six months later, on hearing a man say everyone in London was rich, another retorted, "No, brother, in London some people live in cardboard boxes...ask him". My position as an interlocutor between cultures was most clearly felt in Kali's shop. Indeed it often felt like I was the subject of an ethnographic account being written by its customers. I was used as spokesman for 'the West' just as I was using tea drinkers at Kali's as spokesmen for Varanasi. This sensitised me to the process of dialogue that is crucial in such shops, both between people and between the home and the shop. I was often asked to explain things seen on television or account for one representation of the foreign (*bidesh*) which conflicted with another. However, although I was probably the most unusual (and longstandingly unusual) customer that Kali's had seen, I judged that the role foisted on me, and that I foisted on others, was entirely typical. If someone has experience of something that others do not have, the tea shop is one place where people expect this to be shared, for the increased knowledge of all. All the customers, in their own way or inimical style, and at different times, 'disclose' or relate the world as they know (or see it). Others can reconstruct or re-evaluate their understanding of the 'world' accordingly. I like to think that, through such a dialogical process, those at Kali's shop learnt as much from me as I learnt from them.

Reading in groups not only offers occasions for explicitly collective textual interpretation, but encourages new forms of association, and nurtures new ideas that are developed in conversation with other people...[G]roups often form because of a subtext of shared values, and the text itself is often a pretext (though an invaluable one) for the conversation through which members engage not only with the authorial 'other' but with each other as well (Long 1993: 194).

The single most noticeable fact about all tea shops and their clientele is the highly shared nature of the activities within them. Neither newspaper reading, nor the discussion this engenders, "is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull" (Anderson 1983: 35). The single newspaper is shared, the stories or issues worked on as a group and concomitant meanings, if not agreed upon by all, approximate to something of a consensus. This is not to

argue that all who enter into debates have similar perspectives on the issues they confront, nor that interaction between people and news simply confirms prior ideas about the world. Tea shops are important as arenas in which meanings are not confirmed, or restated, but also created out of the clash of perspectives. The fact that tea shops represent something akin to clubs or public *salons* should not be taken to mean that they represent sealed off information networks (cf. Herzfeld 1992: 100).

The poetics of debate and discussion suggest that this vigorous process of meaning making, of perspectival alignment, is informed by differences in the life situations of participants. Elder members of the community in Kali's tea shop would try to dominate discussion, addressing young men as *beta* (son) as they outlined their views on a topic. The views of particular men were always sought, by young and old alike. The content of statements *and* the rhetorical flair with which they were delivered were judged. Those that could truly 'do things with words' had their contributions greeted with cries of "*sahi kah rahe hai*", "too true, precisely". Seniority was judged by experience of the world, and the ability to transmit this wisdom in an erudite and/or comic fashion was highly regarded. It is here that young men learn about the world, and accumulate the skill required to transact their understandings in such arenas.

Kali's tea shop was one of the less political I visited. It was not apolitical, but politics was less discussed than more quotidian issues such as health, work, family, local activities and protests, and comings and goings in the *mohalla*. "We are all brothers here", it was often said, and politics was viewed as potentially divisive to this sense of family cohesion. Health, poverty and the cost of living were issues which would often predominate; topics not seen as amenable to political solutions but rather as things to discuss as 'brothers', friends and fellow sufferers. Politics was auxiliary to the concern of securing *roz roti*, (lit. daily bread, a living). In other tea shops, customers at Kali's would reason, intellectuals had time for such affairs, we must feed our family first.

An annotated waste bin, at a well respected and frequented pan shop near Kali's tea shop, lampooned the politics of the city and men's complete existential involvement in it: on each side of the metal container a theme of recent local discussion, particularly the Municipal *atikraman hatao abhiyan* (anti-encroachment drive), was satirised in verse. One side mirrored, with just a hint of sarcasm, the sense that undue attention to politics can be counterproductive:

Politicians and political discussion causes damage to the mind.

Please do not have faith in them.

Politics in the community.

Kali's tea shop is broadly representative of many across the city in which party politics is not foremost on the agenda of the clientele. It is also typical of a more general characteristic of tea shops pertinent to my discussion here which is that tea shops act as a filter through which the city passes into houses. As primary sites for the consumption of print media they provide a crucial means through which local stories, issues and events pass from the public sphere into homes. As sites for the congregation of 'private people', tea shops are where more domestic affairs filter into the public sphere. Ideas and news flow into, and out of these shops, carried in both directions by men.

As places in which perspectives and understandings are traded, they are sites for the production and consumption of views on the world. Tea shops service a huge range of personal, social, political and professional networks, through which somebody like myself, with few contacts, little local knowledge and a desire to know what was moving the city, could become orientated. While tea shops provided me with an important window onto the world of Varanasi, they also do this for their more permanent customers too.

The world that tea shops reveal to men is taken home or repatriated by them and does not remain the exclusive property of men. One repeated criticism of the Habermasian public sphere has been its drawing of discrete boundaries between the public and private worlds. Feminist criticism (e.g., Benhabib 1992) has pointed to the public sphere, in his model, as similar in nature to the Greek *polis* which existed only by exclusion of women. However, discussion in Kali's shop repeatedly drew on insights from domestic life, in which the opinions of women were recounted and considered. In a topographic sense, tea shops are exclusively male, but discursively they include women and their opinions. Further, perspectives created in this public sphere may be taken home, but are likely to be returned to the tea shop the next day, with a domestic viewpoint included.

I have suggested that tea shops are often sites of organisation for local politics, of a community, interest group or party. However, while men's total existential absorption in the field of politics is highly regarded by some, others view politics with more suspicion. The presence of Hindus and Muslims at Kali's may be key here: politicians, rather than people, were more likely to be blamed for creating divisions between religious communities, and politics was treated as a necessary evil rather than an end in itself. In this way, men at Kali's tea shop shared a perception of politics that was often espoused by women: namely that politics is an activity marginal to the everyday pursuit of sustenance and security and one which created a violent and divisive society rather than ameliorating these features.

Prabhudatt, a close friend, once commented, when I reported that I had seen the bullet-riddled van of four university leaders who had been shot dead with AK 47s, that I was lucky to be getting a sense of what the city was really like. His wife, Pintu, angrily retorted that this was not a good thing. Neither that it had happened, nor that I should see it, should be considered a matter of 'luck'. Just a few days later, I was sitting in a restaurant across the street from Kali's when a 'bomb' (a bundle of army thunder flashes) was thrown into the shop. The assailants escaped by scooter, as a huge crowd assembled round the shop. Prabhudatt was concerned for my safety, but again commented that I was getting closer and

closer to a more realistic view of the city. Pintu claimed that, in reality, the city was not always like this.

Describing a holy city such as Varanasi as a violent and highly politicised one is, as the disparate responses of Prabhudatt and Pintu attest, either to portray it how it is, or to stress the unsavoury at the expense of the sacred. A catalogue of murders, kidnappings, the dismembering of a *sadhu*, of small incendiary devices, shootings, of student protests ending in violence and death could be made. Allied with it might be a short account of the politics of the state during my fieldwork, in which President's Rule endured for almost nine months, until the unlikely alliance of the low-caste Bahujan Samaj party and high caste BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) was forged. More locally an account would mention the power of local 'dons' or Mafia chiefs, especially in the anarchic eastern fringes of Uttar Pradesh. Some would say that Mafioso like Om Shankar Tiwari are more powerful than any elected politician; few would disagree with the contention that it is often difficult to distinguish between politicians and local dons. Both have armed protection, the MP's is provided by the state, the don's by *goondas* (thugs), both are rich and their gains ill-gotten. The nexus between money, power, criminality and politics is a recognised feature of public life. The discourse of corruption (Gupta 1995) is all pervasive.

This world of politics is, to some extent, that of men. This is not to argue that women do not care, either about local or national political developments (indeed a good few I talked with were more eloquent on these matters than men). It can be argued, however, that the structural position of the sites in which these debates occur, around *pan* vendors and in tea shops, which are exclusively male, serves to exclude women from this field of activity. This exclusion, and the often unsavoury outcome of politics, serves to legitimate women's disavowal of the activity of politics in general and the locations in which it occurs. Women were likely to decry the shops as places where men wasted time and money, discussing issues which had only tangential impact on the day-to-day concerns of a family. Some might

express resignation that they could do little about, and certainly not question, the amount of time their husband spent in his tea shop or chewing *pan*.

However, the flow of information is far from one way. Although the gendered nature of the 'discussion markets' excludes women, they are busy in similar communicative labours during their day. A portrait of neighbourhood life that depicts women sitting talking on their doorsteps and men labouring over local or national politics would be reproducing a European contrast between "(male) rationality and (female) gossip" (Herzfeld 1987: 96). This distinction suggests that significant social change occurs from the outside in, through the activities of men organised in the public sphere. Moreover, understandings of gossip as the very opposite of authenticated fact, obscure the sense in which the discussions of men and women are processes through which meaning is authorised. Both seek to authenticate the nature of occurrences and determine their meanings. The value and implications of such activities need to be differentiated from their factuality. Attention should be drawn to the understanding they generate, not to their veracity.

Women are also transacting meanings as they move between houses on social calls or whilst running errands. They can keep the household informed about neighbourhood activities or events, and the movement of prices in the market. In fact, women's control over daily household expenditure indicates a high degree of interaction in the economic sphere. And, since they are privy to the women's side of the world, they can offer a significant commentary from this perspective which would otherwise remain unknown to men. Men often refer to women's discussions as gossip (*gap karna*) albeit with a recognition that their own discussions (*charcha*) could be similarly construed by women. The activity of talking is, they admit, relatively similar whether men or women spend their time doing it⁶. The key difference between politics and neighbourhood affairs is, in the end, that of scale (Herzfeld 1992: 96):

⁶McGregor (1993: 306) defines *charcha* as discussion, gossip or rumour. Whilst men would define their chat as 'discussion', women seem, on the basis of this definition, justified in suggesting that it may be no more than gossip or rumour.

men's discussions are more likely to cover topics of national and state affairs, which makes them more prone to represent their activities as of greater significance than women's.

The outside as space and category in Varanasi.

As Papanek has noted, in societies in which some form of *pardah* system operates, the male fieldworker is likely to experience far less role flexibility than one who is female (1973: 290). Paradoxically, freedom on the outside for men results in a relative lack of access to the household sphere, whilst women are able to operate with some degree of freedom both within and outside the house. My orientation towards tea shops like Kali's was a direct result of experiences of this nature and continued contacts with such shops gave me access to one world. It was clear however that household access was required and, although some introductions occurred through Kali's shop, these were rather limited in their results. I employed the help of a female research assistant through whom some lasting family contacts were made. In time I located households in which sons, brothers or fathers (in law) were present during the day and who lessened the threat that a young male (from outside, *bahar*) presented.

The nature of this problem, and the process through which it was (partially) overcome, was itself a means of gaining insights into the discrete and complementary nature of the private and public spheres. I grew to have some understanding of women's lives within the household, and on their interactions with the world outside it. Papanek identifies a gendered division of labour as a crucial aspect of the 'separate worlds' in a system of *pardah*. Further, she argues, this creates a great interdependency between men and women (ibid.: 293). One aspect of that interdependence, signalled above, is that of creating and nurturing links between the household and the outside. For men, consumption and discussion of news in tea and *pan* shops form social and information networks. Women too are crucial in initiating and

sustaining inter-household relations (Werbner 1990: 126) through their close contacts in the neighbourhood. These might be across rooftops as they work during the day or further afield as they run errands away from the house.

Purdah, which in a broad sense relates to status, task allocation, social distancing and the maintenance of moral standards (Papanek 1973: 292) operates through two domains: the inside and outside. Status can be achieved through secluding women and moral standards maintained by disallowing the opportunity for them to be breached through exposure or social mixing. It is clear that some thing, or some people, need protecting from “forces originating elsewhere” (ibid.: 315), and that, through such protection, status and morality can be safeguarded. The elsewhere is the significant aspect of this formulation, a sphere which for men and women, and Hindus and Muslims, is differentially defined and evaluated.

While it is commonly assumed that *purdah* in Islam stresses kin *vis-à-vis* the outside, and for Hindus avoidance relations between affines (ibid.: 302), the picture is more complex. Varanasi is a syncretic city in which *purdah* operates in relation to “the outside” for both Hindu and Muslim. Seclusion from this generalised outside is significant for both communities, while for Hindu women relations of avoidance are important too. Moreover the degree to which *purdah* is kept is difficult to comment upon, being dependent on definition. Some might term movement around the city veiled as maintenance of *purdah*, others might employ stricter criteria. Accordingly, Muslim women wearing a *burqa*, and therefore able to move about on the outside, could be seen to enjoy greater mobility than many Hindu women I knew, who very rarely left the precincts of their house.

Therefore we need to recognise two points. First that *purdah* is not a monolithic, monovalent institution. It can have a massive range of meanings, for men and women, across class, caste and religion. It is an institution that can be welcomed or resisted. In Varanasi, some women questioned the dominant male ideology that limited their freedom to leave the house alone,

pursue education or careers, (without this threatening their, or their family's, honour). Others expressed gladness that through seclusion they were delivered from the discomforts of the outside. A Muslim woman who noted that "we work outside so that we can keep *pardah*" was expressing the paradoxical nature of women's experience of the outside. Excursions outside to pursue employment provide the means for remaining inside at other times; a means to an end. Secondly, and this is a context of a later chapter, *pardah* is founded on the "notion of one person, or group of persons, embodying important attributes of another person or group of people" (Papanek *ibid.*: 317). Women assume an iconicity in articulating the status, standards and values of their men.

The allocation of living space that *pardah* represents is often writ large in public spaces. At many cinemas in the city there are separate queues for women, enabling the purchase of tickets without the pressures and crush of the men's lines. At public events, e.g., a *lila* (religious play), a whole section of the space for the audience will be marked out, quite specifically for women unaccompanied by men. During *Durga Puja*, the marquees through which thousands of people pass to take *darshan* are divided down the middle; one side for men, the other for women. Through such spatial divisions it becomes possible for women (accompanied or otherwise) to participate in ostensibly male spaces.

In such public spaces at certain events the safety represented by the house is replicated, a "symbolic shelter" (Papanek 1973) is reproduced. Spatial divisions between men and women are maintained. In more quotidian contexts, the public spaces of the city can represent a much greater threat for women. Here divisions between men and women are maintained through tacit but unstable agreements and are therefore more easily compromised. Many with whom I spoke knew of women who had been molested, 'eve-teasing' is the local euphemism, nearly all worried for the safety and reputation of their daughters, even when accompanied by a brother or friend. One had had a gold chain snatched just outside a major temple in the city, by a man speeding past on a moped. Men are often represented by

women as salacious, leering or downright violent. In the most vehement of statements they are no better than the packs of stray dogs that roam the city: *dogla*, cross-breeds or bastards.

The claim that “as public spaces grow more violent, disorderly and uncomfortable, those who can afford it consume their spectacles in the company of their friends and family, on television” (Breckenridge 1996: 10), is one that has considerable implications for women. During an earlier research project in the city I had been aware of the impact of satellite television services on women’s consumption of films. Cinemas are, as the existence of a separate ticket queue for women reiterates, male spaces in which a place for women must be clearly inscribed. The availability of film channels provides scope for film-watching without the necessity of venturing into the hot, crowded and often irksome public arena of a cinema. Some cinemas, notably those that are more expensive, are favoured by young women over the less salubrious picture halls. One mother noted that the abundance of films and *filmi* programmes on television had actually resulted in the opposite tendency to that described here. She described how her daughter, in her third year at BHU, was not always content to watch films at home. Instead, she wanted to go straight to the cinema hall rather than waiting for a film to be broadcast on Zee Cinema. This, her mother added, was a trend for “girls these days”, girls who “even watch Star TV”.

Others have more restricting parents, or would never think to ask permission to visit the cinema with a group of girlfriends. For them, and their older counterparts, whose mobility is more limited, electronic media such as the telephone (Papanek 1973: 321) and televisions or VCR, can de-link social situations from their physical locations (cf. Meyrowitz 1985). The telephone, for the young women I knew, was an important medium that sustained information networks and helped maintain bonds of sociality across the city. Often, when visiting households, the phone would ring, a teenage girl would grab it, and begin an animated conversation about a planned cinema trip or the previous evening’s episode of *The Young and the Restless*. Indeed the phone was often used to arrange surreptitious viewing of

this programme by those in whose homes it was explicitly banned. For young men of a similar age, more sustained and open access to information hubs such as tea shops provided analogous lines of communication to those that a telephone can provide for women. Telephones, VCR and television (particularly where cable connected) are media which can provide access to information and films without the necessity to leave the 'symbolic shelter' of the house.



Plate 5: 2. The male public sphere. Men gather for the results of the 'Lucky Draw' at the site of the Machchodari Durga puja *pandal* (marquee), Visheshwarganj, 19. x. 97.

Space, gender and televisual leisure.

The introduction, on the local Siti Channel, of programmes that brings news from around the city and telecasts of musical and other events, was significant in that it opened up the household to a far greater range of news and views (discursive and visual) from around the city. I found that men, but especially women, greeted this development with enthusiasm. The commencement of daily local news programmes has created fresh avenues for communication between the house and the city.

The events that are packaged into the nightly news shows are neighbourhood festivals, press conferences, political meetings, reports on crime stories or perhaps a demonstration. These happenings are the primary material of newspapers and the sites of their discussion: *pan* and *chay* shops. They are most often organised, attended, perpetrated and celebrated by men. Festivals, of a neighbourhood or more city-wide significance, (e.g., *Durga* or *Saraswati Puja*), are often organised by men's associations (cf. Sarma 1969) and, although such festivals are not exclusively 'male', men predominate and a rather over-enthusiastic masculinity pervades. Some neighbourhood processions or performances do not begin until after dark and continue into the night: the presence of women would not be advised by men or women. On one level, therefore, an exclusion operates through the gendered nature of outside space. While arrangements are often made for women, and this allows for their attendance, my impression was that they do not attend such events in great numbers⁷.

Any of the various events broadcast on Siti Channel may not be attended in person for an entirely different reason. They might be those of a specific community, religion or caste group, political party or neighbourhood committee at which, unsurprisingly, few 'outsiders'

⁷In Varanasi there is such a huge range of events that any generalisation about their gendered nature is obviously problematic. Those unwilling to accept my strictly segmented account might consider Nita Kumar's comment on the type of events she attended: "I was the only woman in the whole gathering of

are to be found. They are events with a small constituency which find greater prominence within an electronically extended public sphere.

Lolark Chhat, which is celebrated by women who are infertile, was one such festival which received coverage on Siti news. The events take place around the Lolark tank but extend along a one kilometre stretch of road to the *Kina Ram* ashram in Sonapura (cf. Parry 1994: 289 n3). Along the road are encampments of people from the city and environs, food stalls and vendors selling requisite items. It is a large event but, according to Kumar (1988: 130-3), significantly less of a *mela* (fair) now than in the past. Those who have no need to go to the festival, or live far from this southern area of the city would ordinarily have little or no contact with it.

Siti Halchal, on this day, gave viewers a long and quite intimate degree of contact with *Lolark Chhat*. The intensity of the action at Lolark *kund* (tank) and the crowds along the street formed the centrepiece of this news item. This festival is a complex example because, notwithstanding its quite narrow constituency, it was once the occasion for a huge *mela*. What we see therefore is not only increased access to such a festival through television, but also the sense in which its 'publicness' grows in other ways even as its *mela* is less well patronised.

An earlier chapter prefigured the type of access that television might create, albeit on a national scale. It is entirely plausible to suggest that the funeral of Indira Gandhi was the first cremation that most women in Varanasi had ever seen, since (except in some Punjabi communities) they remain at home while men take the corpse to the burning *ghats*. What television effects in such circumstances is, in the words of Meyrowitz, a transformation of "the traditional relationship between physical location and access to social information" (1985: 61).

thousands" (1988: 242). For further reflection on the 'perils' facing women, and female fieldworkers, at such events see also her fieldwork memoirs (1992: 179-84 and *passim*).

It is no longer necessary to be somewhere to have access to what is happening there. On a more everyday basis, the news, views, sights, spectacles and festivals that are more easily available to men around the city are provided to women through television. This is particularly significant in an environment of seclusion, where social information is available in particular locations, access to which is controlled by gender. Women who were previously excluded from such physical and informational sites can participate in the newly shaped public arena created by local television. Television of this nature denies the difference between public and private worlds.

The news and views sifted and collated by men in tea shops, although to some degree always shared, are now available to women at home. It is likely that when a man has not been to a far-off *mohalla* in the city that his wife will not have been there either. And, although a report on the local television news may reach both men and women, it is by women's reckoning at least, of greater significance that they have access to such things because "*gents log* (people) could go there anyway". Local television unhinges gender from the question of access, allowing contact with events that are either temporally, geographically or socially off-limits. As one woman described it: "Those places you cannot wander to, those places you can see sitting in the house". We might term this, after Williams (1974), the development of 'privatised mobility'.

When I asked the manager of Siti Cable about the impact of his services in the city he responded in a similar way. He acknowledged that "what today people are talking about, spreads to the cross-roads where people carry on discussing it. We [Siti Cable] carry it into the house and, because of this, people sitting at home receive a lot of information". There are obvious dangers in over-stretching the potential local television offers for women's participation. It would be unwise to suggest that women are granted, through coverage of such events or discussions on television, total access to such public (or male) sites and they are therefore participating in this sphere of activity on a par with men. However, their access to

these events, its vicariousness notwithstanding, is viewed as a significant and much welcomed addition to their lives.

While, as I have shown, there are perceptions of crowds and public spaces which can be marked as those of women, negative evaluations of outside spaces might be viewed as more widely shared by some (but not all) men and women. Several male residents of Ravindrapuri colony noted how they did not go to *melas* or *lilas* because they did not like the crowds. And their thoughts on this were mirrored by others who said that they *only* went for their children. It is significant that cultural transmission, rather than the fun of the event and its crowds, were the reason for going at all. Kumar, talking of one *mela* in particular but more generally of the *melas* today argues, "the 'public' crowds, and open gatherings are all negative concepts now, a reversal of the situation illustrated by the major *melas* of the past" (1988:135-6). However, it is possible to argue that in general perceptions of crowds have undergone some transformation, and following Kumar, that crowds and their participants are likely to be seen as lower class entities. It is therefore necessary to consider the relationship between television and ideas about the outside.

Crowds outside, televisions inside.

An early comment about television in *Aaj* offered a 'serving suggestion' for this domestic technology, which is particularly evocative in its construction of the outside as somewhere from which children need liberating, and its insinuation that the cinema is not worthy of the family's time and money:

Only television saves the children of the house from wandering here and there. Only television gathers the family in one place and entertains them, saves them from the cinema queues (*Aaj* 25. viii. 84).

It seems clear that an account of television viewing must incorporate a sociology of the spaces in which it occurs. As an earlier chapter maintained, this should include the house, but also questions of urban space in general. Television viewing, as the prophetic comments in *Aaj* suggested, is an activity that does stop children 'wandering here and there', and for many families that tendency is something to be utilised. Television is also likely to gather the family in one place. The decline of cinema halls in the city, and the lobbying by the threatened film industry in the years since satellite arrived suggests, as *Aaj* had foretold, that watching films at home *en famille*, is less of a struggle than taking the family to a crowded picture hall. It can also be, although *Aaj* did not foretell this, substantially cheaper⁸.

Walking along the streets and alleys of Varanasi, people are accompanied by a range of sounds. One of the most consistent is the sound of television, and when many houses are watching the same programme progression through the alleys is marked by a continuous aural wallpaper. The occasional cries of children in reaction to what they are seeing or squabbles over what will be watched further add to this televisual soundscape.

Commentary on the popularity of the televised *Ramayana* (e.g., Lutgendorf 1995) is notable for its inclusion of one single, if rather transitory, effect. That is the sense that a curfew had been imposed on the cities and towns in which it was being watched. The empty roads, deserted shops and tea stalls stood as testament to the way in which this serial drew people around sets, provoking a contrast to the usual activity of the city. What these observations draw attention to is the impact that television can have on outside spaces, or put it another way, what outside spaces look like when people are inside watching television. This is not to suggest that television has created a televisual ghost town of Varanasi, far from it, but to point out that domestically orientated leisure activities draw people off streets into homes. Further

⁸ The cheaper cinema halls in Varanasi e.g., the Abhay (Assi) charge Rs.10 per ticket, more expensive halls like the Vijaya (Bhelupura) or Tuxsal (Cant.) upwards of Rs.25-30. With transport and refreshments the cost of a household trip could easily exceed that of a monthly satellite connection.

it leads us to ask what meanings the domestic and public spheres may have in terms of leisure.

For the writer in *Aaj*, as for other families we meet in the next chapter, the fact that television can draw one's children closer to the house, and prevent them becoming *awaaras*⁹ (vagrants or wanderers), is something for which to be thankful. For older members of the family, there is reassurance that children can be accounted for. It is no longer necessary to guess where they might be and to conclude, embarrassingly, that they are in others' houses watching television. As Gita, a woman in Shivala made clear, her household's decision to take a cable connection, was one that involved more than increased programme choice:

We did not take our connection immediately. First it was in the houses of all our neighbours. The children would leave their schoolwork [unfinished] and go to these houses to watch it [cable]. I did not like it that they were in other peoples' houses watching cable television, especially because they had not done their work. 'Whose house are they in?', I would ask, 'Not mine'. After that I said that I did not want the children going outside (*bahar*) and that they should stay in the house (*ghar me rehna chaiye*). So I went to a neighbour's house and watched it for three or four days, accepted it and took a connection.

Given the quite critical reaction that satellite television has elicited in Varanasi it is significant that a woman will readily take a cable connection rather than let her children wander the streets in the after-school hours. It is a remarkable statement of the meanings the outside can have for someone with teenage children. Her commentary is not just about 'the outside' but also about children and later chapters takes up the topic of children and television in more detail. Here it seems important to consider in more detail various perceptions of the outside, and this requires that we ground such ideas more clearly within the historical and cultural context of Varanasi and its spaces.

⁹ This is itself a *filmi* allusion, being the title of a famous Raj Kapoor film.

Reclaiming and rethinking city space.

Sudipta Kaviraj's (1996) analysis of how, in colonial and post-colonial Calcutta, the western distinction between public and private was mapped onto that between 'the home' (*ghar*) and 'the outside' (*bahar*), argues that these concepts have different meanings for various sections of Calcuttan society. The home "was a realm of security, stable and repeated relationships which did not usually contain surprises", the outside "was not a hospitable world. It was full of strangers, and consequent unpredictableness and threats of predation of all varieties" (ibid.: 46). He demonstrates how the Bengali middle class rose to the challenge of appropriating 'the public' as an arena in which political associations could be formed, older familial networks supplemented by personal friendships and "the prospects of self-making" (ibid.). What emerged, as the two sets of categories were mapped onto each other, was a reconfiguration; the production of "displacements" between the private/public and inside/outside distinctions.

Kaviraj then traces this complex conceptual genealogy through an urban space, the park. In the earliest stages of the development of the city the park represented, he argues, the public as something opposed to the private house, and also a monument to civic culture. The parks, usually surrounded by middle class housing, were middle class spaces. Vendors of snacks were allowed to 'trespass' to service the needs of those who used them, and they were frequently the sites of neighbourhood festivals and cricket matches. The later massive expansion of population in Calcutta led to ever greater intrusions on these privately public spaces, and what emerges is the notion of a soiled public (ibid.: 55). Shops and stalls began to encircle the parks and they became more plebeian. Beautification and upkeep became less of a concern as the park became a "collective property of the poor" (ibid.: 58). Kaviraj then traces the trajectory of the idea of the outside as it met with that of the public, and how the concept of public subsequently underwent transformation as it became less civic and more 'public' i.e., peopled by the mass. What his essay lacks is an examination of the concepts of 'private' and 'home' as the idea and nature of the public/outside changed. By tracing the

progress of an anti-encroachment campaign that was launched in the city by the Municipal authority and by thinking about aspects of daily practice this lacuna can be filled.

Aaj reported in November 1997 that “in the city these days in every alley and street corner there is only one topic of discussion (*charcha*): “In which area will encroachments be removed today or in which areas were encroachments removed yesterday?” (7. xi). The chief city official had launched an anti-encroachment campaign (*atikraman hatao abhiyan*) with two key objectives: to remove encroaching structures from public space and begin a cleaning or beautification drive. The public, shopkeepers and householders, were enjoined to remove any part of their buildings which they knew to be encroachments. They were warned that if they failed to take action themselves then corporation workers, and heavy machinery, would do the work for them. Some substantial buildings were pulled down, vendors in *gumtis* (wooden stalls) were moved away, steps linking shops to the street removed and in the colonies walls removed and gardens reclaimed. Public space, which had become private through its appropriation in the construction of houses, shops and gardens was repossessed.

Over the following weeks¹⁰, as reports in *Aaj* attested, the campaign was almost the only topic being discussed in the city. Playing on the similarity of the official’s name, Har Dev Singh and the Banarsi slogan of praise for Shiva, *Har Har Maha Dev*, these cries could be heard all over the city: “*Har Har Har Dev Singh*”. The papers and the populace both agreed that something rather fundamental was occurring. People could be seen, both day and night, cleaning the gutters/drains (*nali*) running past their shops, or supervising workers who were pulling down parts of their buildings that encroached. They were even cleaning out their own drains, a job usually carried out by Harijan sweepers.

Chay shops, stalls, and other landmarks simply disappeared overnight. The landscape of the city was transformed. People commented that roads had almost doubled in width, others

¹⁰The anti-encroachment drive was still in operation, and very much in evidence in December 1998, although it was widely accepted that it was running on a low level of political support.

“seeing after many years that there were indeed drains lining the street were surprised: arrey, there was a drain here!” (*Dainik Jagran* 8. xi. 97). The city, some said, had become like Paris, others were reminded of London. Writers to the local press congratulated the official on giving birth to a civic culture. Others recommended further improvements that could be made at a city or local level. Furious debate raged, aligned along political and economic axes: where would it stop, was it fair to the poor, what about Luxa police station which was an encroachment, how would erstwhile stall holders make their living (*roz roti*)?

The campaign to both remove encroachments and clean up the city was launched as one of necessity. Roads which were clogged by stalls, protruding shops and houses and their steps had to be cleared, the administration argued, as a matter of hygiene and efficiency. However, the immediate product of this triumphantly civic campaign, as the widespread and hot discussion (*garam charcha*) indicated, was much more complex. By compelling residents of Varanasi to give back to the city the space which they had sequestered, and to refrain from throwing rubbish onto the street, the campaign was obliging people to reconceptualise the distinction between home and outside, of public and private. It was asking people to see the outside as both their own and public property. The ‘governmentality’ of the Municipal Corporation (MC) confronted, often quite brutally, a variety of views about the nature of public and private space in Varanasi.

Although this campaign was primarily focused on clearing away encroachments on public space, it connects with ideas about a soiled public and the masses towards which this chapter has progressed. Attention to the anti-encroachment drive can help us crystallise some aspects of the complex, ambiguous and contradictory ideas about the outside in Varanasi that it threw out. There were some who, in the face of the MC campaign, denied that filth was a problem in the city. For others, the campaign was welcomed as a belated attempt to inspire civic responsibility. Some areas of the city had more to gain or lose than others from the

inexhaustible Har Dev Singh. Residents in Ravindrapuri colony were aghast to lose their gardens, others feared that they would lose their livelihoods.

The Municipal view, supported by some householders, that the streets of Varanasi had become clogged up by illicit buildings was a reflection of a perception that the outside was clogged by people, and a particular type of people. Clearly ideas about rubbish on the streets, and the nature of crowds, vary among different sections of the city's population. For some, as Kumar suggests, the throwing onto the street of rubbish, and the general filth this precipitates, is "beyond any considerations of stench and garbage" (1988: 243). Similarly, for some the crowds that the festivals and celebrations of the city precipitate are part of the glory and attraction of such events. Conversely, for those who supported the anti-encroachment campaign, rubbish on the streets and the masses who people the public spaces of the city could be equated. A man in Shivala had written on his wall "Please don't throw rubbish here. Those who throw rubbish are dogs", and this request and proclamation accords with the views of those who saw the men on the streets in similar terms, as half-breeds or bastards (*dogla*).

On the basis of my experiences working with aspirant or middle class families, and following Kumar (1988), I have suggested that the perception of crowds as rowdy, rough and in some sense the undesirable feature of many events, is one that is quite strongly felt. I have been concerned to link this perception to the televising of events in Varanasi in two ways. The first is that for women especially, but for others as well, local television can offer novel access to events which might otherwise have gone unseen. It also provides access within the home and thereby removes the need for physical participation in events. In another way, I have suggested that events which are decreasing in size are granted a new sense of publicness through their televising. Both these ideas are clearly related to ideas about the outside as a space and a category and inform peoples' perceptions of leisure in the city in the age of television.

Kaviraj is correct to point to the relationship between ideas about the home and the outside, although he leaves the home out of his analysis. The focus on houses and gardens which was central to the anti-encroachment campaign suggests that attention to either sphere must be complemented by a discussion of the other. The sequestered city space which the MC campaign sought to reclaim reiterates several points made during the course of the previous chapter, one is the scarcity of land and its importance for maintaining a living. Secondly, where houses and gardens were on 'public' space, these were not only taking something that was not theirs, (which was the view underpinning the MC action) but making more resolute statements about their need for a increased private space. These statements are intimately related to ideas about the outside and cannot be separated from them. The growing domestication of leisure, the viewing of films in the comfort of the home, and vicarious participation in city events through local television, are a reflection of ideas about both the home and the outside.

One resident of Ravindrapuri colony, whose garden was being removed, offered Har Dev Singh a bribe of Rs.150,000 to desist, such was the price he was willing to pay to maintain his increased private space. Friends, whose resources were far more meagre, revelled in Har Dev's reply: "Pay someone Rs.50,000 to shoot me and save yourself Rs.100,00 (a *lakh*)". In the increasingly "violent, disorderly and uncomfortable" (Breckenridge and Appadurai 1996: 10) city, those who can, attempt to find a place which is their own, and in which they can find 'ontological' and physical security (Giddens 1990). This is one of the contexts of the following chapter, which focuses on houses and homes.

Har Dev Singh, with whom I spoke as I took my final train out of the city, concurred with many others who had expressed the opinion that 'something had to be done'. In other words, the growing disorderliness of the city had rendered it dysfunctional and unattractive. This was a view which indicated that so many notions about what was private and what was public were attempting to coexist that some administrative dictate was required to clarify, at least in Municipal terms, what was what.

That “in the alleys and street corners of the city” such a diverse range of perspectives on the anti-encroachment campaign could be found was indicative of the fact that the outside was where these debate were being conducted. The nature of the public sphere of Varanasi was being debated in the public sphere. However, viewing the campaign’s progress on local television with people and the discussions I had about it with householders, confirmed the sense that what may begin outside the house finds its way, through electronic or other media, into the house. Just as the *atikraman hatao abhiyan* had sought to clarify the issue of private and public, so the debates around it pointed up the indivisibility, in spatial and informational senses, of the private and public spheres.

Conclusions

This chapter has sketched out the ways in which the worlds of men and women are both discrete and complementary, and how media inform or transform this relationship. What emerges are different perspectives on it that mirror the social and geographical landscape of their adherents. The idiom of perspectives is a suitably visual and spatial one to employ, and stresses the simple but important point that “things look different depending on where you see them from” (Hannerz 1992: 65).

We have seen how, in the tea shops, perspectives are all important. Customers offer, debate, re-examine and reform their own and others’ perspectives. What local television provides, to continue the image, is an amplification of the perspectives and the ability to see them through another medium at social and geographical distance from where they are generated. In this sense, what I have described is a localised version of what many commentators, particularly Meyrowitz (1985) and those more concerned with television and globalisation have argued: television provides a new doorway into the house, it is a purveyor of elsewhere. By drawing on an extreme example of such transformations in access to events outside the home, the

funeral of Indira Gandhi, as well as more daily events in the city, I have illustrated that from a national and local perspective, television can substantially alter the nature of participation which might be otherwise controlled by factors such as gender. Tea shops have a 'world disclosing role' in which the activities of men are crucial. Local television builds on and informs the activities of these communicative sites and allows for the disclosure of world to the home and thereby increases the participation of women in a notionally male public sphere.

This chapter has illustrated some of the processes and their implications when the 'elsewhere' is in the city; somewhere to which gender or social identity restricts access. This is not to argue that women, or indeed any others who now enjoy local television in Varanasi, were ever totally lacking in the information or knowledge that Siti Cable and CTV now provide. Where links to it were more attenuated, television now transmits of knowledge beyond the contexts in which it is generated. In light of Rosaldo's (1974) argument that women's status is lowest when the domestic and public sphere is strongly differentiated, it could be suggested that in as far as local television has further eroded such a distinction, the women in Varanasi I spoke with have good grounds for welcoming the introduction of local television.

By drawing on an event which was intimately connected to ideas about the home and outside, which consumed the public assembled in the tea shops and reached home through local television, I have argued for the necessity of approaching the sphere of home and outside through appreciation of both categories. Although the anti-encroachment campaign was directly concerned with rubbish on the streets and buildings standing on 'public' space, I have argued that parallels can be drawn between ideas about these encroachments and householders' attitudes to the world beyond their door. Television, particularly when it is local, has been shown to provide resources for shifts in ideas about the home and outside. The next chapter, which concentrates on the domestic sphere, builds on these insights and prepares the way for attention to television viewing within the house.