The Art of Longing & Belonging

Kolam as a Reflection of Women's Complex Relations with Identity and Power in Contemporary India

A thesis
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Universiteit Utrecht

Thesis Master Cultural Anthropology

'The Art of Belonging'
Kolam as a Reflection of Women's Complex Relations with Identity and Power in Contemporary India

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December 6th 2013

Abstract

Based on short, but extensive, research, this thesis '*The Art of Longing and Belonging: Kolam as a Reflection of Women's Complex Relations with Identity and Power in Contemporary India'*, proposes kolam practices as a metaphor to understand how middle class women in urban India underscore some identity dispositions and play-down others, in order to find belonging in a society which is characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations and value systems. Just like the self-contained dots in a kolam, are part of a larger framework, illustrating the critical interplay between an actor and existing power structures, I will elucidate, through the narratives of several women, the complexities of intersectional identities as well as the role of power, as women are bound to the audience they are allowed to perform their identities to.

Acknowledgements

It's amazing how you can get so far from where you'd planned,
and yet find it was exactly where you needed to be.[1]

After five years of absence, my re-encounter with India, and especially with Tamil Nadu, was not only very instructive and inspirational for my research, being a student completely new to academia, but also on a very personal level. Just like a kolam can lead on a journey to wholeness, helping to discover the center within ourselves and beyond, my journey to India allowed me to heal parts of my being and become complete. I am greatly indebted to the many people who have helped and supported me along that journey. First of all I want to thank my supervisor Martijn Oosterbaan who guided me prior to and during the process of writing this thesis. Thank you for your support, unwavering patience and insightful feedback, which was essential to the completion of this thesis. I owe a special thanks to Quirine Vervloet. There are not enough words to describe how your unconditional support guided me to write down 'the story (I felt) needed to be told.' Your provocative questions and encouragement pushed my thinking into new direction and without your unreserved advice and assistance, it would have been difficult to finish this thesis. All the teachers and peers who I have been privileged to work with during my (pre)Masters course at Utrecht University, you allowed me to discover a new world which was unknown to me before, the world of academia. Furthermore I owe gratitude to all the men and women I have met during my time in India, who shared such an important of their lives with me. It is so true that 'home is where the heart is', therefore I would like to thank my 'Indian family', for providing me a home, away from home. A special thank you to my sister, brother and friends, thank you for always lending a sympathetic ear during my thesis troubles. My deepest gratitude is reserved for my parents, Dick and Jacqueline, who have always supported my crazy adventures. Without your unconditional love and dedication to support my dreams, I couldn't have completed this journey. Therefore it is to you that I dedicate this thesis.

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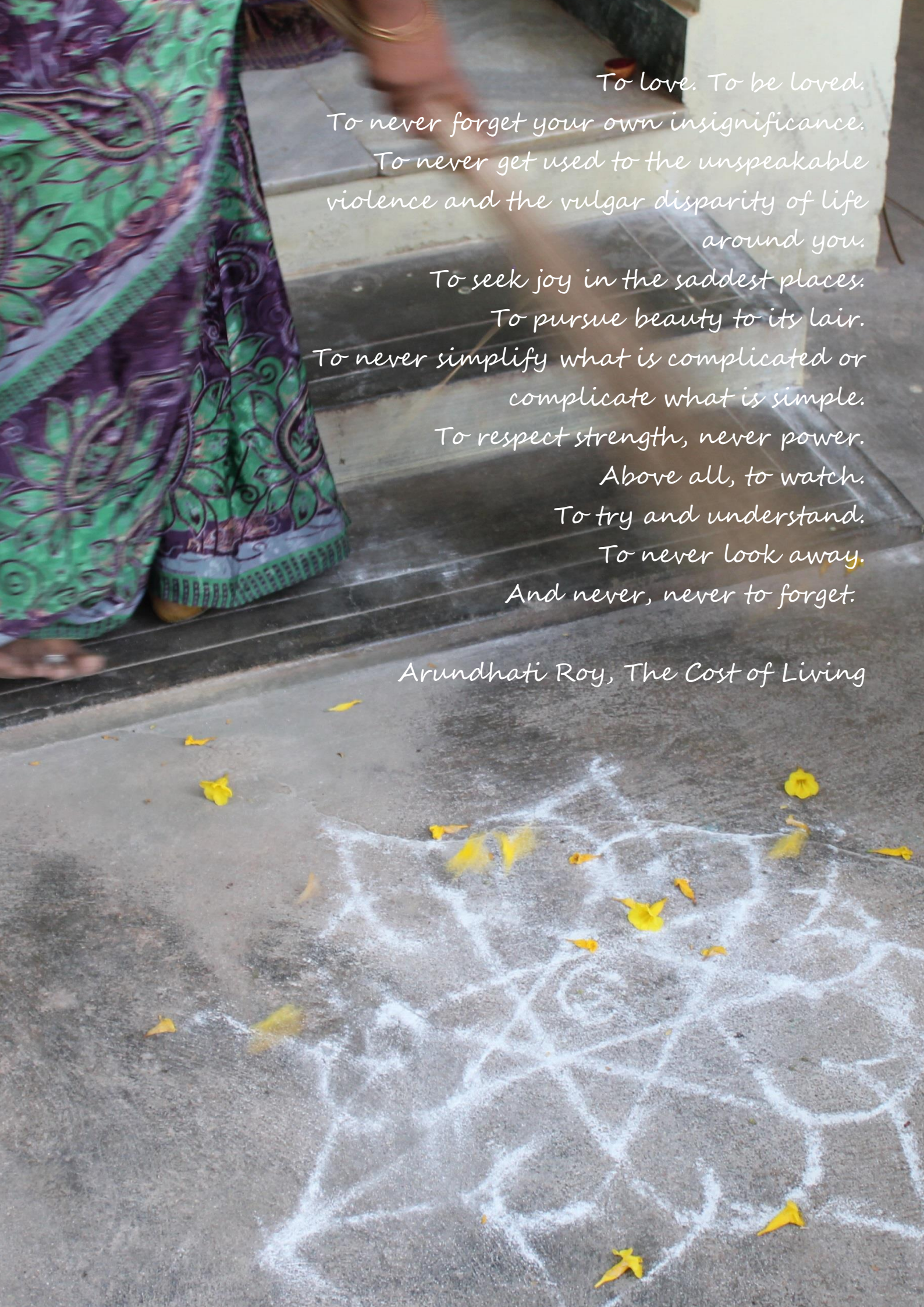
1 Sarah Dessen, What Happened to Goodbye (2011)
http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/382946-it-was-amazing-how-you-could-get-so-far-from, December 5th 2013



To love. To be loved.
To never forget your own insignificance.
To never get used to the unspeakable violence and the vulgar disparity of life around you.
To seek joy in the saddest places.
To pursue beauty to its lair.
To never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple.
To respect strength, never power.
Above all, to watch.
To try and understand.
To never look away.
And never, never to forget.

Arundhati Roy, The Cost of Living

Prologue

Where the hand goes,
the eye follows;
Where the eye goes,
the mind goes;
Where the mind goes,
is the heart
Where the heart is,
lies the reality of being[2]

The full moon is bright enough to lighten up the dusty street in Thiruvanmiyur, a residential area in the South of Chennai. At first sight the street seems to be deserted, only some street dogs are chasing each other and bark when a small boy on a bicycle passes them. But when I look closer, I see Maanisha sweeping her dusty doorstep. With a broomstick made of jute, she bends her body in a position which reminds of an asana, a yoga posture, to clean the dust and dirt off her doorstep. The next step of her cleaning ritual is to pour water on the street. Putting her right hand in a metal pot, she sprinkles drops of water onto the sandy street and uses her broomstick to make sure the doorstep is moistened by sweeping the water on the sand, which discolours to a darker shade of brown. Maanisha puts the semi-circular brown shell of an empty coconut, which is filled with a white colour powder, at the brick gateway on the threshold, in front of the two storey house. Her right hand disappears in the husk, putting some powder between her thumb and index finger. Again she brings her body into a position where her upper body is parallel to her legs, her head facing down towards the floor and her two feet are far apart, like an inversed V. '*The way you bend your body forward, actives the Mooladara chakra in your hip region',* Maanisha explains, '*from head to foot all the parts are given an exercise and so it is related to yoga.'*

[2] Bauhinia Adriana, The Mirror of the Gesture: Ancient Dance Treatise

From now on we take silence, as the kolam she is drawing, is perceived as a painted prayer in which Maanisha needs to concentrate to replicate the geometrical designs on the pavement in front of the house, to invoke the blessings of the Gods and Goddesses, but also to embody its rhythms and allowing herself to meditate and become introspective. Maanisha uses the powder to create a pattern of dots on the wet sandy road. Without any hesitation she creates a web of lines around the dots, joining them properly so the end of the line meets its beginning. In a rhythmic pattern she moves her hands quickly but steady. Her body comes back in an upright position to contemplate the perfectly symmetrical image. Maanisha walks up to the doorstep and threshold, where she draws some simple geometrical images and lines. Maanisha her task is completed, by drawing her kolam Maanisha has transformed the ordinary space in front of her house into a sacral space and this may provide auspiciousness and well-being for their families, as well as the immediate environment. Just like a kolam is affected throughout the day by the passage of persons, animals, wind, rain and vehicles, the researcher transcends him/herself by the experiences in the field.

Kolam

Traditionally, every day, before sunrise and sunset, the majority of women in Tamil Nadu, South India, perform the kolam practice as part of their domestic duties. Women draw their geometrical images, their kolams, on the streets at the entrances of their houses not just for aesthetic appeal but more importantly because of the belief in their ability to invite prosperity, exude sanctity and ward off evil forces. By drawing a kolam, women provide auspiciousness and well-being for their families, as well as the immediate environment. Therefore the kolam represents the concern for all living creatures and is an invitation to all, especially deities like Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity. Drawn in front of the house, its balanced appearance transforms the ordinary space into a ritual and sacred space, making the house into a home and affecting the mood in the surrounding community as it materializes the rhythms of life. The quality of the kolam embodies the skill, energy, knowledge and spiritual qualities of the maker and also interweaves gender identities to its objects. (Laine 2009, Naragarjan 2007, Thirumurthy 2012)

> The world of becoming gives cause for astonishment that comes from treasuring every moment, as if, in that moment, we were encountering the world for the first time, seeing its pulse, marvelling at its beauty, and wondering how such a world is possible. Reanimating the western tradition of thought, I argue, means recovering the sense of astonishment banished from official science Tim Ingold (2011:64).

When we follow Ingold's suggestion and let ourselves be astonished, like we encounter the world for the first time, it implies we need to let go of our analytical concepts to understand the world. Instead we need to move into a process which celebrates the impermanence of knowing and open ourselves up to understand the subtle and complex ways in which the experiences of people are sculpted. Through this narrative and the image of a kolam, on the previous page, as a daily tribute to harmonious co-existence and an auspicious welcome to visitors, I would like to welcome and invite you, the reader of this thesis, into the life's of the women (and men) who have shared their stories with me during my fieldwork. Through these dialogues and encounters with the 'Other' in the field arises understanding and one can become self-aware, as Rabinow (2007) explained.

As a kolam is defined by its state of transition balancing between different thresholds, my own process in the field were made up of different transitions, which brought about the whole scala of emotions and enabled me to reflect. Through these experiences I was able to change my perspectives and became aware that there are many possible ways that people can live their lives, though notions of freedom, equality and agency may differ from our own, and allowed me to understand how particular women are negotiating, subverting and reproducing dominant discourses in their search for acceptance and quest for belonging. Through these dialogues I could reformulate and negotiate my own understandings and bring a plurality of visions and perspectives into anthropological practice. As a story exists to be told, the teller exists to tell. And for women, whose stories for centuries have either been erased, or submerged, or appropriated by patriarchal structures, speech is power. Therefore by allowing women to tell their stories, and providing an audience to be heard, I sincerely hope that you will allow yourself to move both your mind and heart, and let their stories form 'a bridge between the otherness of the places and people described, and those who read it' (Laine 2009:24).

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Introduction

I remember it vividly, when Hamid, the father of my host family, collected me from Chennai Airport and how surprised I was, to witness the city's transformation. Since my last visit to Tamil Nadu, five years before, the city had transformed into the fourth most populous metropolitan area in the country, fast becoming home to a growing number of information technology firms, financial companies and call centres. Chennai, formerly known as Madras, is the major commercial, cultural, economic and educational centre in the South of India. International marketing campaigns describe Chennai, as the 'Cultural Capital of India' with its 'blend of tradition and modernity', known for its deep-rooted traditions and age-old heritage.'[1]

On our way to the small two bedroom apartment in Thiruvanmiyur, a residential area in the south of the city, Hamid drives his luxurious white estate car with ease through the crowded streets. Sitting on the passenger seat next to him, I observe luxurious European cars tearing right past cycle rickshaws and beggars, who sit in their dirty torn clothes on the corner of the busy East Coast Road, a two lane highway connecting Chennai with Cuddalore, a city located in the south of Tamil Nadu. Women walk in colourful *sari's* and the older men who accompany them, wear a traditional sarong, a *lungi*, combined with a blouse. The glass bangles on the arms of two women, tinkle together when they gracefully pass our car. On both sides of the road different food stalls exhibit a variety of local dishes, like the one-pot rice dish *Chicken Biryani*, which is prepared on the spot. Standing above the round cookers, the vendors of another food stall twirl dough to prepare *parotta's*, a layered flat bread, and steam small bright white rice cakes, *idli's*. When we cross the street, we pass a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant where a small group of teenagers in expensive jeans and t-shirts are enjoying their ice-creams. In this one street two different worlds come together and form a visible reminder that the global has entered India's local arena and transformed 'traditional' practices and values.

1 http://www.incredibleindia.org/travel/destination/chennai/chennai-introduction, retrieved September 9th 2013

When Hamid parks the car steps away from the three storey apartment building, my 'home' during the three months I would spend with my host family, we walk through the neighbourhood. In the scorching heat, I put my hands on my forehead to protect my eyes from the sun. When we cross the dusty road, we pass the local temple, where the woody scents of sandalwood and musk perfumed incense, mix with the flowery smells of jasmine, worn in the black shiny braided hair by the women who are praying to their gods and goddesses in their traditional *sari's, salwar kameez, churidar's* and *kurti's*. A family of cows is grazing between the trash, to find something edible to fill their stomach. At the same time young women, wearing jeans and t-shirts, ride past us on their *scooti's*, leaving a dusty cloud of sand around us when we pass the street to enter the gate which gives us access to the family's apartment. Hidden in a maze of small colourful houses and flats, the three storey apartment building, where Hamid, his wife Illaveni, and their daughters Radhika and Saaruji live, is separated from its immediate surrounding by a high wall. The sun outside is so bright, it takes me a few seconds to get used to the darkness inside the small hall, which leads to a narrow staircase. Hamid helps me to carry my heavy suitcase up the stairs, which seems like to weigh no more than a feather in his muscular arms, and I follow him upstairs. Every step displays a kolam as a symbol to welcome us into the building and into the lives of its inhabitants. I observe how colourful the sand drawings are, and how much effort and details is put into these little visual narratives.

Following the rhythmic sounds of Hamid's footsteps, I reach the third floor of the apartment building. On the spacious pink painted balcony of the two bedroom apartment, I observe tiles with a flower-like pattern which is interrupted by an old bicycle, a broomstick and a shoe rack with a variety of shoes, ranging from slippers to white sneakers. I place my own *chappels* (slippers) among the shoes of my host family and enter their house barefoot. While my eyes are adjusting to the dark and small living room, a kolam welcomes me into my new home, which I will share with Hamid, and his family. It is not the kind of kolam like the ones carefully created by young girls and women on the diligently swept stairs of the apartment building, drawn with rice flour or synthetic powder around a grid-like framework. Instead this kolam is produced in a factory and printed onto a sticker. Its sides are worn out by the many feet that have walked upon it when they have entered the house, displaying the art's ephemeral character,

disappearing under the feet of those who pass by. The ephemeral character of belonging, which is a 'process instead of a state, in which people become instead are' (Leach 2005: 302), reminds me of the ephemerality of a kolam affected throughout the day by the passage of persons, animals, wind, rain and vehicles. In this thesis *'The Art of Belonging: Kolam as a Reflection of Women's Complex Relations with Identity and Power in Contemporary India',* I will try to identify how individuals find belonging in a rapidly changing world, and kolam practices are proposed as a metaphor to understand how middle class women in urban India describe and identify themselves, and are described and identified by others, in a society which is characterized by change. In this thesis I will seek an answer to the question '*how does kolam, as a cultural and bodily practice, reflect the multiple, interconnected and complex ways women in India perform their identities and articulate social belonging?'*

A kolam enables women take care of their family and immediate environment and articulate specific Tamil values, like collectivism and altruism. Performing their kolam, as part of their domestic duties, enables women to rearticulate their identities and reinvent themselves through these 'performativities', as Judith Butler (1990, 1999) proposed. In Butler's thesis 'it is precisely our actions and behavior that constitute our (gendered) identity, and not out biological bodies' (Butler 1990 in Leach 2005: 299). In other words, identity is something we do, rather than simply something we are. And a kolam, as an external marker of a continuity of family habits, values and internal auspiciousness, allows women to participate in the creation of their moral status and a projection of that self-determined identity into the public sphere as it expresses social and political belonging to the audience concerned.

> Belonging, therefore, is not just about social locations and constructions of individual and collective identities and attachments but also about the ways these are assessed and valued by self and others and this can be done in many different ways by people with similar social locations and who might identify themselves as belonging to the same community or grouping (Yuval-Davis 2011: 7).

Like Yuval – Davis (2011) points out, belonging is a complex process as people may be positioned by others in ways that contrast with how they present themselves, as their

performances are interpreted in accordance with the own points of view of the audience concerned. kolam practices may reflect women's ambivalence to follow gendered expectations and proscriptions, since socio-economic dynamics have led to a significant transition in their attitudes towards career and family and may demonstrate the shifting subjectivities in which women 'claim [to] multiple aspects of the self at different moments or even at the same time and may resist being forced to choose among them' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

This is especially relevant in India's transformed environment, where people are being exposed to widespread changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations and value systems. And since women and men negotiate paid employment and domestic labour, and begin to occupy new ideological and productive roles, as a result of global feminization through flexible labour, family arrangements are being modified and re-conceptualized. Research indicates that despite India's impressive growth, as one of the world emerging national economies (BRICS), and the increased socio-economic developments for women, gender disparities remain persistent and old and new spheres of marginalization, segregation and discrimination are constructed[2]. In this transformed arena globalizing forces may contribute to a sense of fragmentation and uncertainty, as Bauman (2004) has suggested, since the traditional blueprints that many individuals have relied on in their societies, have been challenged, negotiated and revised. In these new and complex social environments, women are presented with new challenges and opportunities as they attempt to interact with others as they maintain and construct their (gender) identities individually according to the new surroundings available to them.

The new materials and forms used in kolam practices, like the sticker I observed in my host family, may reflect how kolam practices are constantly evolving in terms of material, techniques and style, but also how traditional family structures, especially in a middle class environment, are transformed and have changed women's traditional roles and replaced women's daily responsibilities. Given the fact that a painted or adhesive kolam will remain there for years, the new form is accepted as it may propagate a desire

3 The 'Gender Equality Index' (GEI), an initiative of the (UN) Human Development Report Office, measures gender disparities, by capturing the loss of achievement in relation to reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market participation, within a country, due to gender inequality. In 2013 the GEI ranked India 136th, at the bottom of the 186 evaluated countries.

to conform to a hegemonic and normative culture, but this implicates that women are no longer able to perform their gender, like Butler (1990) proposed, through performing their daily kolam. In this thesis I will describe that kolam can still serve as a discursive practice, and reflects how women experience the changes in their society and illustrate other ways they articulate their identities and social belonging. For example through clothing, women articulate their gendered performance in Tamil society. Women are expected to dress themselves according to the situation and audience they encounter and in these spaces other social categories like caste and class intersect, through these descriptions I hope to contribute to a more holistic understanding of the complexities women encounter, while negotiating belonging in Tamil Nadu. By underscoring some identity dispositions and playing-down others according to the spaces women inhabit, we can gain perspective regarding the complexities of intersectional identities as well as the role of power, as women are bound to the audience they are allowed to perform their identities.

Through thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) of everyday life conversations and perspectives on work, dress and cultural practices, I will put forward the narratives of my host mother Illaveni and her daughters Radhika and Saaruji, as I try to find an answer to the central research question of this research '*how does kolam, as a cultural and bodily practice, reflect the multiple, interconnected and complex ways women in India perform their identities and articulate social belonging?*' By describing their lived experiences I aim to bring understanding how women, who share behaviours, beliefs and language, are expected to operate and perform their identities in a multi-faceted world. Through their stories I will illustrate how social and cultural change in Indian society affects the social structures on which women have to construct their identities, and aim to exemplify that multiple axes and social categories intersect, and are made and re-made in interaction, as women negotiate their societal roles and places, within and without the family and home. Though the core of this thesis revolves around three individual (and shared) portraits of identity negotiation and belonging, based on the narratives of the three women of my host family, I will introduce other voices as well and through these dialogues, I aim to transcend the individual level, as subjects are shaped by the context in which they occur and in this process different axes of identity intersect on multiple and simultaneous levels

In chapter one I will describe how, and why, an intersectional methodology plays an important role to analyse that subjects are part of a larger framework in which historical, social and economic forces act on both individuals and communities. An important part of an intersectional analysis is, to promote self-reflexivity. Reflexivity acknowledges the importance of power at the micro level of 'the self' and our relationship with others, as well as the macro levels of society. Becoming self-aware that multiple truths exist and reflect on my own 'tacit' knowledge, and how this may have biased my research data, I was able to transform my own understanding of 'the truth' and acknowledge that my own multiple identities have shaped my experiences in the field, in unique and complex ways.

In chapter two I will explore how the concept of intersectionality is related to power. Inspired by Michel Foucault's understanding of power and Butler's thesis of performativity , I will demonstrate that the embodied performance of gender, caste and class are reproduced through kolam but also other cultural practices, which I will illustrate by describing how women dress and how these discursive productions can explain how social relations in Tamil society work, and relate to the production of social inequalities. Through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, I intend to show that though the occurrence of socioeconomic transformations may enable women to break gender barriers and develop new possibilities to establish their identities and climb the social ladder, at the same time these challenging societal forces may impose identity upon women in ways that reinforce hierarchy, gendered and social inequalities. By doing so I hope to accentuate the role of power in the construction of reality as well as the complexity of everyday practices in the lives of women in Tamil Nadu's society, by acknowledging that multiple dualities in Indian society coexist and continue to unfold and reinforce each other. Based on the experiences of Illaveni, my host mother, I hope to demonstrate how she constantly needs to construct and manage her identities in order to negotiate her inclusion, as a divorced and re-married middle class woman in contemporary India, to tackle forms of exclusion. As Illaveni will demonstrate, she has gained sufficient social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990a), in order to negotiate or cope within spaces where she feels unwelcome. But her case also demonstrates how the incapability's of her own daughters, to conform to a traditional practice like kolam, may

challenge family status and class belonging. Besides the narrative of Illaveni, I will introduce the voices of her daughters Radhika and Saaruji, neighbour Aananya (33 years old), family friend Kumar (25 years old) to exemplify that 'individual subjective experiences both shape, and are shaped by, social and cultural processes' (Holland 1997: 219).

In chapter three I will illustrate that a kolam practice may articulate the value of public discourses on social norms and gender roles, as a symbol of the maintenance of 'economic and gendered inequalities and the (anxiety of) loss of cultural traditions' (Das: 2002). On the one hand, women act as agents of feminine embodiment, through discourses of female embodiment, subjecting the bodies which they inhabit to regulating regimes of femininity, and therefore kolam practices could reinforce traditional gender relations and gender roles as Laine (2009) has suggested. On the other hand kolam empowers women who adhere to its ideals, gaining respect, being regarded as auspicious and have much more to say in their everyday lives. Focusing on both gender, caste and class I will illustrate the multiple and complex ways identities articulate together in and through domestic and public spaces, and how a common history, experience and culture is materialized by women drawing their kolams as an articulation of belonging. In this chapter I introduce Warshana, a friend of Radhika and Saaruji, and through their narratives, I hope to demonstrate that both homogenization, differentiation, continuity and change occur at the same time, negotiating between the poles of multiple dualities. This chapter thus demonstrates the subtle and complex ways in which a mother and her daughters are constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of, for example, gender, sexuality, caste, class, age and space and articulate multiple and fluid identities in the context of India's changing circumstances to ensure their inclusion (or exclusion) in an urban Indian society.

Chapter 1

Nothing is what it seems : analysing everyday complexities

In this chapter I will address the research question of this thesis '*how does kolam, as a cultural and bodily practice, reflect the multiple, interconnected and complex ways young women in India perform their identities and articulate social belonging*?, from a personal perspective and describe how multiple identity positions intersect and develop through the interactions with others, involving shifts and contradictions. And as I will try to demonstrate in this chapter, this does not just relate to the people I have researched but also to my own personal experiences, through unexpected encounters with 'The Other' in the field.

About the need to become self-reflexive

Feeling under the weather in a tropical environment raises a lot of questions to explain what may have caused this physical vulnerability. Was it a lemon soda with impure drinking water? Or the chicken, which was not as fresh as it tasted? The freezing AC in the movie theatre? The lack of sleep? An infected mosquito or other annoying bug? Or maybe the heavy rain, as Illaveni, my host mother explained? It's a strange feeling, not being able to judge whether your body perspires due to the scorching heat in the small bedroom, with a continuous temperature of 35 degrees, or due to a flu or infection. This makes me become fully aware of my own bodily vulnerability in this new and tropical environment.

When Hamid drops me off, after a short ride on his bike, I put my white slippers, which discoloured after one month in dusty Chennai into brown-grey mocha, outside the waiting room on the side of the road. A woman dressed in a sari, covered with a baggy dark blue blouse, is sweeping the dusty street. I walk upon the tiled stairs barefoot and enter the waiting room: a shed with plastic chairs in all colours of the rainbow. The space is packed with a variety of people. In contrast to making an appointment or an initial assessment, you pull a number and wait until it is your turn to see the doctor. An elderly woman with swollen feet sits next to three younger people who look pale, despite their dark tan. Most of the patients are coughing and sneezing. A man who sits on the opposite of the room, looks at me with a hypnotic gaze. It makes me self-aware that I can't blend in with the rest of the patients, despite conforming to the Tamil dress code, I am an outsider in this environment due to the colour of my skin, my height and blonde hair.

A small baby is lying naked on her father's lap with her small legs facing the sky and both feet with silver ankle bracelets making a tinkling sound every time they move. Judging by the movement of her belly, which is going up and down very quickly, her red and watery eyes and running nose, she must be in a much worse state than me. Her father is caressing the small baby girl and looks worried. On the right of the waiting room another father accompanies his (approximately) ten-year-old daughter. She has put her upper body against his shoulder as she sits next to him. The father gently strokes her hair, whispering comforting words into her ear. The fresh jasmine flowers in the hair of the girl next to me, mixes with the exhaust from the cars, bikes and auto rickshaws which

occasionally pass us by. Moments later an odour, that can be best described as a combination of patches and disinfectant, enters the space when the patient leaves the treatment room. Just like the familiar smell of a hospital, this gives me the confidence this is a place of healing. The assistant calls my number and I step into the treatment room, where a sign, 'switch off your cell phone and your worries when you leave this place ', brings back a smile on my face. After answering some standard questions, the doctor, dressed in a white overcoat and a big moustache which moves every time he asks me a question, quickly finds a diagnosis. Moments later I am at the pharmacy around the corner with a bag full of antibiotics, cough syrup, pain reliever and nasal drops.

On the back of Hamid's bike, on our way home, I think about what I observed in the waiting room and feel confused. Why am I surprised that the fathers, instead of the mothers, were taking on the nurturing tasks with their children, taking their small children to the doctor's office, and displaying their love and affection in the public sphere? Interpreting their behaviour as feminine, I wonder if this is actually a sign of male emancipation. When I arrive in the small apartment, Radhika and Saaruji are sitting in front of the big flat screen television, which hangs on the wall surrounded by framed images of the family's Gurus, a bold man wearing a white robe and another man who is slim, with a long pointed beard. Saaruji, the youngest daughter in the family, disappears into the kitchen to prepare me a chai. I lean against the kitchen counter and a little hesitant I reveal my experiences at the doctor's office, aware how easily one draws conclusions in relation to normative gender roles and stereotypes. Hoping Saaruji and her sister can fill in the gaps and redefine my perceptions I ask them, *'Is this a form of male emancipation or perhaps a sign that a shift in [gender] roles has taken place in India [nowadays the fathers take care of the children]?'* Both girls smile, when I share my musings. *'No, it is actually the opposite'* [of emancipation], they explain. *'In traditional middle class families, the lady will take care of the work and responsibilities inside the house, all the outside work [tasks which take place in the public sphere] on the other hand, is the responsibility of her husband. Even taking the baby to the hospital or doctor's office.* In contrast to my own interpretation that Indian men are taking on tasks which are traditionally associated with women, at least from a Western perspective, and interpret these developments as empowerment, Radhika and Saaruji perceive it as a reaffirmation

of traditional gender practices and spaces, as it prevents women to enter the public sphere and be confined to the private sphere. *'You know just like Aananya's family,* Radhika emphasizes.

Radhika, refers to the situation of Aananya, who lives next door of the apartment of my host family in the middle class neighbourhood, Thiruvanmiyur, in the South of Chennai. As a devout and educated Hindu woman Aananya never leaves the house without her husband's consent and is only allowed to wear a traditional sari. *'A good woman has to obey the rules'* Aananya explained. *'From a small age I learned I shouldn't be outspoken and go outside talking to strangers on the street. When I go outside and talk, people will talk badly about our family. Instead, my mother taught me, as a woman, you have to stay in the house and do your household chores.'* During the three months we were neighbours, we had many lively, friendly and respectful discussions regarding the huge differences in our lifestyles. Both aged thirty three, our age was one of the few things, at first sight, we had in common. Here I was, a single European woman, traveling alone in the world. To me, that was freedom. But to my new friend, Aananya, whose marriage was arranged at the age of 25, after she had finished her Master's degree and since became the mother of two beautiful daughters, her life mainly took place between four walls. *'My life centres around my children and husband. Actually I sacrificed my life for my husband and children,* she says proudly. *My life is fully sacrificed,* she emphasized. As it was hard for me to imagine that Aananya could find satisfaction in her limited world, without the freedom I was desperately seeking for, it was for her at the same time difficult to understand how I could choose to be out in the world alone, without the protection of my male kin to safeguard me. Instead of being envious nor thinking of her own life as inferior, fulfilling her daily tasks bound to the privacy of her own house as a homemaker, Aananya actually felt sincerely sorry for me. In her mind, the life of a single woman on her own, without the love and support of a large family or community, was perceived as lonely and difficult. Her reaction was not one of fear or ignorance. She was genuinely perplexed that anyone would choose this for herself.[3] Through Aananya's narrative I want to bring forward that one's subjectivity is shaped by one's own position based on race, class, gender, space and sexuality, and in the process of 'representing and defining identities and experiences that

3 Reflective notes, Auke Smit April 2013

lie outside the norms of the dominant culture' (Talwar 2010: 12), one should be aware and become self-reflexive on the intersecting processes in which power and inequality are (re)produced and resisted.

Embracing an intersectional framework

The reason to reflect on my encounters with Aananya, my sisters in my host family and the people I met in the local doctor's office, is to emphasize how our experiences and behaviours influence how different people perceive the same reality in a totally different manner and acknowledge that multiple dimensions and perspectives should be taken into account. The following first lines of a poem, inspired by the famous Indian parable '*The Blind Man and the Elephant'*, written by American writer John Godfrey Saxe, illustrates that same idea. It recounts how six blind men feel different parts of an elephant and draw conclusions about what they are experiencing. 'They are partially right, but they are all completely wrong' (Saxe 1881).

'It was six men of Indostan,

To learning much inclined,

Who went to see the Elephant (though all of them were blind),

That each by observation,

Might satisfy his mind! [4]

Like each blind man creates his own version of reality from that limited experience and perspective, I too had a unilateral, perspective regarding Aananya who I perceived as suppressed, or the men in the waiting room whom I interpreted as empowered because they were nurturing their children in the public sphere. Only through incorporating all individual perspectives, can we gain a holistic understanding of phenomena, just like the nature of the elephant. In this holistic understanding we need to become aware of the various phenomena we perceive in the field but also recognize that these phenomena are more complex and intersect different axes, which may not be visible at first sight. Therefore one needs to become reflexive and aware how one's own 'individual

4 http://blog.lib.umn.edu/lukkas/studiocritblog/John%20Godfrey%20Saxe.pdf, retrieved November 8th 2013

biographies and multiple identity positions can affect research findings' (Stanley and Wise 2010), as subjectivities may shift, and therefore multiple dimensions and perspectives should be taken into account. Therefore I have chosen to embrace an intersectional framework, which perceives the complex and multiple identities of women as intersecting rather than segmented. Instead intersectionality promotes the idea that social categories are 'co-constituting one another, to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place', instead of being regarded as a collective impact in which gender, race, sexuality, age and class are the sum of their independent effects' (Hancock 2007, Hankivsky & Cormier 2009).

The idea that multiple axes and categories intersect was originally used by Crenshaw (1989) to recognize the ways in which the experiences of Black women fell between the different discourses of gender and race. Though intersectional analysis has emerged as a major paradigm of research in women's studies and elsewhere, McCall (2005: 1772) has emphasized the 'complications of an intersectional analysis, in its limited range of methodological approaches', and indeed many researchers seem to struggle to analyse intersectionality in practice. In the next chapters of this thesis I will explore the articulation of intersecting identities through Butler's concept of performativity (1990, 1999), seeking to understand how women negotiate themselves driven by a need to become valued insiders in different domains of society (Bell 1999, Ratna 2013), by drawing on their oral testimonies to clarify the intersectional performances of identity in and through domestic, gendered and cultural spaces. Both performing a kolam and physical appearances of women in Tamil society, have a social significance and convey a message claiming a collective and cultural identity. Violating these codes and behaviours, can lead to a process of 'Othering' and exclusion from a collective class and caste identity.

By describing 'the complexity rather than the singularity of human experience' (Thorton-Dill and Zambrana 2009: 2), through the narratives of Illaveni, Radhika, Saaruji, in the next chapters, I hope to clarify how an intersectional framework can be applied to analyse the complexity and fluidity of the processes which accompany the construction of identities of young middle class women in a modernizing urban society in India. As I have tried to describe in this chapter, fieldwork consists of multiple complexities and dualities in both the lives of the researcher and the researched. It is argued that an

intersectional analysis is needed to analyse how individuals are part of a larger framework in which (for example) gender, race, class, caste, religion, education, life cycle, geography and marital status intersect and one needs to negotiate multiple identities. By embracing an intersectional framework I was able to examine these issues from many points of view, by acknowledging that people have many different roles and identities, not just the people I researched but myself as well. And in these processes both historical, social and economic forces are acting on both individual lives and communities. By rejecting the idea of fixed categories, we can acknowledge the fluidities and complexities in people's lives today in contemporary India. In the next chapters I will describe how Illaveni, my host mother, tries to negotiate the complex relationships between a woman and mother's objective roles and her subjective attitudes regarding these roles, which affect her overall life satisfaction and sense of identity in Indian society. Illaveni, the mother of Radhika and Saaruji, gives her perspective, as a mother of two daughters in their transition to adulthood, how she experiences the complex relationship of having an individual identity, in the changing social and cultural structures of an urban society, where a collective identity is negotiated to ensure inclusion and tackle forms of exclusion.

Chapter 2

Negotiating belonging (through performing gendered, class and caste identities)

In this chapter I intend to show that though the occurrence of socioeconomic transformations may enable women to break gender barriers and develop new possibilities to establish their identities, at the same time these challenging societal forces may impose identity upon women in ways that reinforce hierarchy and gendered inequalities. As women are expected to conform to a hegemonic and normative culture, in an environment where traditional cultural practices like performing kolam have been reconfigured, women seek other ways to articulate their gendered, caste and class belonging. As I will demonstrate through the value of an external appearance, women are expected to dress themselves according to the situation and audience they encounter, and in these spaces other social categories like caste and class intersect. By doing so I hope to accentuate the role of power and the complexity of everyday practices in the lives of women in Tamil Nadu's society, by acknowledging that multiple dualities in Indian society coexist and continue to unfold and reinforce each other and define if a women can find her inclusion (or exclusion) in different spheres in an urban Indian society.

Becoming what society wants you to be(come)

Sitting on the double bed of my bedroom, which also serves as a table and desk during my fieldwork, I hear the tunes of a song from the Tamil movie *'Vaagai Sooda Vaa',* a romantic drama like most Kollywood (the Tamil equivalent of Bollywood) movies, which Hamid plays on his Samsung Smartphone. While washing the dishes, Hamid is singing along, and moments later I hear a key unlocking the iron fence, signalling Illaveni is coming home from her yoga class. In contrast to Aananya, whom I introduced in the previous chapter and lives just a stone's throw away, on the same floor as my host family's apartment, Illaveni is not tied to her home and works together in a close partnership with her husband Hamid, to provide an income for her (self-described) middle class family. On her scooti (scooter), Illaveni travels the city in her sweatpants and t-shirt to visit her upper class yoga clients in the privacy of their own homes which are situated in Chennai's most affluent neighbourhoods. Illaveni, who has reached the age of 38, speaks a mixture of Tamil and English, and on her smartphone she regularly checks her Facebook account, keeping in touch with her male and female friends all over the world.

In contemporary India, with its quest for upward mobility, socio-economic developments have led to an increasing number of citizens who describe themselves as being 'middle class', just like Illaveni and her family. Living in an affluent suburb in Southern Chennai, separately from their families, Illaveni and Hamid have a considerable freedom to construct their lives in a way which others would consider to be non-traditional. Illaveni had travelled a long and difficult road, before she married Hamid, working very hard as the sole provider for her daughters for many years, to achieve a middle class position. Though 'being' middle class is foremost a qualitative category, since middle class families differ widely not only in economic terms and consumption practices but also in terms of status and values (Donner 2011), a common denominator forms the importance of family values and gender relations which can be understood in terms of public performances. Illaveni's quest for belonging, which I will describe in this chapter, is driven upon personal resources, and resources for the family, and acquiring self-acceptance rather than gaining acceptance from others. Illaveni's quest also lies in her wish to maintain her middle class status, which makes it complicated, since the

reproduction of class-based, middle-class identities, favor the role of being a housewife and stay-at-home mother in order to maintain an image of the perfect family, and Illaveni, as a working woman being exposed to a Western culture, may challenge these traditional values.

In the spaces of her home, Illaveni takes pride in her achieved (and ascribed) position and status she has reached among other middle class women in our apartment building. The women refer to her as a role model, and consult her on a regular basis for marital advice. Illaveni, tells me she perceives the subjugated position of Aananya with a certain ambiguity. *'Women create the problem'*, Illaveni emphasized, *'but it is also us [women] who can change that if we have the self-confidence.'*

> *You [Illaveni] can do anything, they [neighbours and friends] tell me, but I will tell them they can do the same. All women are poor, pity, they know everything, they have much qualities but they are not ready to come out. I am teaching them. I can only show them it is possible. We [women] have to be strong.*

Illaveni's self-confidence was not self-evident, '*when I was young I was not like this, but I became like this by experience*.' What Illaveni means with '*I was not like this*', relates to her empowered position. Illaveni divorced her first husband, a brother of her mother, whom her family arranged her to be married, at the age of fourteen and in this marriage her two daughters Radhika and Saaruji were born. After a life of poverty, violence and abuse from her former spouse, she decided to pursue a better life for herself and her two daughters and managed to climb the social ladder and achieve a middle class position. For many years Illaveni was financially independent, as she was the sole provider for her two daughters, as Saaruji remembers *'my mom was always working. She had a bad life and didn't have a normal life like normal ladies. Her only motivation was to come up in life.'* A few years after the divorce of her first husband she married Hamid, a man who is her junior. Quite rare in Tamil society, where the men mostly have a (much) younger wife. When Illaveni re-married Hamid, she decided she didn't want to lose her independence and strived for equality and respect, and succeeded to negotiate and reconstruct their gendered identities.

As a divorced, woman, Illaveni had to deal with the social and cultural stigma, since 'a middle class woman has a difficult time to return to the social order after a divorce' (Amato 1994:212), and still at this moment, due to the unusual composition of their family, their name has already been tainted, affecting not only Hamid and Illaveni, but also their daughters. Illaveni is always aware of her unusual position and feels she is living 'under a magnifying glass', in which she is assessed by her behavior to see if she can live up to the expectations a middle class position demands, balancing on the threshold of being included but at the same time being excluded from society.

> *My situation pushed me out of society, made me independent. Before I never realize I am strong, only when others tell me I realize I have power. Without my friends support I can't be strong, I don't want to ask support from my family. I will always take care of my family, that is my responsibility.*

Though Illaveni suffered hardship these experiences also made her very independent and powerful, and aware of her own strength. Which makes it difficult for her to understand why women devaluate themselves, *'girls in this society will make themselves [go] down, I am a woman I can't do it, they tell me. Why not?, I ask them. I didn't educate myself through formal education, but I have learned a lot and developed myself.'* Illaveni is very much aware that due to her marital status, but also as a working and independent woman, she challenges traditional family and gender arrangements and finds herself excluded from society. Violating a number of societal and normative expectations of different societal categories, Illaveni learned to find fulfilment by means of her otherness. But as Butler (1990, 1999) emphasises, there is no subject independent of frameworks of values that are set by external powers. Subjects cannot invent a completely original set of values out of the blue, because there is no subject prior to externally imposed values. Thus 'we do construct our own biographies, but from the resources available to us' (Brickell 2003:167). And therefore Illaveni needs to negotiate her identities according to the spaces she inhabits in order to find belonging, as I will describe in the next paragraphs.

Hamid came from a very traditional family, growing up in a small village in rural Tamil Nadu, which I was able to visit when I joined their family during a visit. '*His mother washes his father every day like a baby',* Illaveni is chuckling when she shares this story. And as I could observe as a guest in their house, Hamid's mother was not just taking care of her husband, but of all her guests, making sure everyone had enough to eat and drink, only eating after all the guest had 'filled their stomachs'. Even though Hamid's mother was an educated woman who liked to cycle, she was subjugated in her marriage because she was not giving herself *'importance',* I understood from Illaveni's words, confined to the privacy of her house. Illaveni was very different than her mother in law, but already having experienced an unhappy marriage, she wanted a different kind of relationship with Hamid: a partnership where both could collaborate and equally distribute the household chores. Since the couple lives in Chennai, separately from their in-laws, Hamid and Illaveni have the possibility to negotiate their individual gender roles, being husband and wife, though of course within the parameters of wider social conditions.

In the privacy of their own household, Hamid did not just wash the dishes, while singing-a-long to the Tamil song, like I described in the introduction of this chapter. Hamid was also able to sew and make alterations to the family's clothes, design jewellery and even polish Illaveni's nails and select her clothing when they go shopping. Raised in a traditional family, where his mother took care of almost everything in the household, and his father was treated like a king who didn't even need to wash himself, Illaveni asserted a degree of oppositional agency in her relationship with Hamid by reconstructing their gendered identities. In her opinion it was natural to share equally in their household chores, and though *'before [their marriage] he [Hamid] never did anything in the house, now we share the household chores, because I gave him a 'training ' after we got married.'*

'God never said this is typically for men and this is typical for women, humans have created that', Illaveni explained. In this quote she points at an important aspect, stressing that '*humans have created the idea that this is typically for men and this is typically for women*', in other words gender roles may be perceived as true, natural and obvious but are, as Illaveni claims, instead constructed. This idea resonates with Judith Butler's (1990, 1999) concept of '*gender performativity*', which challenges the belief that certain gendered behaviours are natural. Instead Butler argues 'it is precisely our actions and

behaviour that constitute our identity, and not out biological bodies' (Leach 2005:299). Butler does not deny physical difference, but she suggests that the interpretation of physical difference, and the social and political consequences of that interpretation, frames the lives that we live. In other words, perceptions of gender differ according to the group in which one is born and raised as one conforms to the picture that discourse draws of him or her. Of course this doesn't just relate to women but also to men. In contrast with Hamid, most men don't feel impelled to perform tasks which are considered feminine outside the privacy of their homes, for example by performing a kolam, as Kumar, a 25 year old family friend explained.

> *'I will help my mum and sister in the household. I can help with cooking. We [men] know all these tasks, not just cooking but also cleaning and making kolams, but we can't do them 'on screen' [openly]. We know all these tasks, and we will help and engage in this work. But in this society I can't do that openly. In the house I can help, if there is no one, no neighbors who can see me, I can make a kolam. But normally it is not acceptable to do these tasks outside the house.'*

Kumar points out how power works in Tamil society, by showing us how he is governed and regulated through the production of 'narratives of truth', as Foucault (1975, 1977, 1979, 1995) proposed. In Foucault's understanding, power 'is everywhere, and comes from everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1991; Rabinow 1991), as one is created through discourse and we can only understand ourselves in the terms that discourse allows. 'What is seen as general truth, as common knowledge, is instead naturalized through the workings of power' (Foucault in Boesten 2010:3), and therefore 'liberation might only be found in the deconstruction of particular oppressive narratives' (Kerkwijk 2013:1). Kumar needs to live up to expectations of society, which have established assumptions and expectations how to behave consistent to the ascription of gender appropriate roles in Tamil society. And though Hamid has no problem, performing typical 'feminine' tasks openly in Chennai, in their native environment Hamid and Illaveni are expected to conform to traditional gender roles, locating themselves between their own needs and the expectations of the

audiences they encounter in their daily lives, they become what society wants you to be(come), which resonates with a Foucauldian understanding of power and discipline, by forms of knowledge, for example through kolam and physical appearances, that proclaim 'truths' as a set of values and rules, regulating the behaviour of individuals (Foucault 1978, 1980).

Negotiating inclusion through dressing 'appropriate'

Living in the anonymity of a big city like Chennai, Illaveni and Hamid were able to build up a life for themselves and reconstruct their traditional gender roles. In one of our conversations with her neighbours and friends, Illaveni emphasized '*you have to be strong inside yourself*' and perhaps challenge the expectations of ´society'. At the same time she is aware of the importance of 'blending in' and negotiating her belonging in Tamil middle class society. A consequence of fitting in would mean, to give up her own identity and become what society wants her to become, positioning herself between her traditional and domestic responsibilities at home and her public selves.

When women compare their lives in India, with the freedom Western society offers them, is like a dream of independence,. Warshana, a friend or Radhika and Saaruji, tells me '*we have the mentality everything is easy in the west, I should have been born abroad because there it is easy.'* And with the increased mobility, this new generation has access to go abroad and experience life there:

> *'One of my friends went to study in the US. She is actually a media person from a rich family. There are many protections for her here in India, but now she is going out at night and coming home at three o'clock. She is very happy and enjoying herself. She told me 'only now I was able to know myself' You need to be free to identify yourself. In India you can only identify yourself in the family and dream of that freedom and independence. Here you can only cry.'*

'People have to give up their own identity, you have to be what society wants you to be. When I would go to Holland, I could do whatever I want, but here I have to adjust myself.'

Illaveni underscores *'here I have to adjust myself'*, and with *'here'* she refers to India, and more specific rural Tamil Nadu. In their accounts they perceives a distinction between India and the West, The Netherlands, as a space in which individuals, especially women are free of externally imposed values. But instead, in Europe, women face as well resistance when they do not fit into hegemonic gender ideologies which impose a social worth of a person. And though 'most men and women do not conform to the cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, yet these cultural expectations still serve as standards against which people judge themselves and others' (Basow and Rubin 1999:26), for example when women are highly educated and decide to stay at home and look after the children instead of contribute to society.

When Illaveni resides with Hamid's family, in rural Tamil Nadu, she encounters bias and finding inclusion is not as self-evident, as she experiences in her own community and neighborhood in Chennai, which could be explained by her unusual position as a divorced and remarried woman, and the 'shame' she brought over Hamid's family. Though Illaveni doesn't address that aspect, she is aware she *'has to be careful with their background'*, emphasizing

> *People will think of you as strange when you do different things. For example when I hold hands with Hamid in his birth [native] village, due to my eye problem, people will talk bad of me. Therefore I have to act. We can't make everyone happy, we have to be careful with our background. Other people have to give respect, we have to give respect to others. Especially elders. Gauvaram.*

In these spaces Illaveni needs to underscore some identity dispositions and playing-down others in order to give respect to her mother in-law, by articulating that she is willing to meet the expectations established in their household. Articulating and gaining *gauvaram*, a Tamil expression for dignity, prestige and respectability is very important to gain entry and acceptance, and therefore Illaveni prioritizes identity dispositions, which I would label as enactments of normative values in relation to an idealized Tamil femininity. By following traditional customs and abide by gendered virtues, for example performing a kolam, which I will describe in the next chapter, but also by other cultural practices like dressing appropriate. By meeting those expectations, Illaveni perceives her role in society

as an 'act', in which she knows how to behave and to 'play the game'. '*In some situations you have to perform another role',* Illaveni emphasizes. That a younger generation is aware of playing a role, Warshana, demonstrates, *'I talk so much and think so much. My family has no idea. I have to keep it inside. I have to act as if I am obeying everything. They don't know I go out and have a life outside the house.'* When I ask Illaveni why women need to act?, she replies *'everything is acting. Life here is like a movie, the world is like a stage, and we are all actors. We have no choice not to act. If you don't want to do that, you can't live here.'* Not a strange metaphor, when we perceive identity to be performed or acted out. And the space in which that performance takes place, a stage.

Though it is important to note that in Butler's 'performativity' accounts, identity appears to be the result of the repetition of acts, instead of the act itself. One way for women to perform their gendered, class and caste identities, is through performing their kolam, as an 'embodiment of tradition and cultural purity' (Gunewardena & Kingsolver 2007:39). But since a reconfiguration of contemporary kolam practices has taken place in Tamil Nadu, by using a painted or adhesive kolam, which needs to be applied once in many years, a decreasing number of women perform their kolam on a daily basis. Though most (Hindu) women in Tamil society are capable to perform their kolam, a growing amount of (middle class) women in Chennai have expressed that they only draw their kolam on special occasions. For example during Margazhi, a holy month for Hindu's in Tamil Nadu, women are expected to celebrate the festivities by performing their kolam, and an adhesive kolam or painted kolam won't be sufficient to be constructed as female, and in my suggestion as well other identities, since its occasional character lacks the,

> 'stylized repetition of acts . . . which are internally discontinuous . . .[so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief' (Butler 1990: 141).

In Tamil Nadu's transformed environment women are prescribed with other normative behaviours that construct their ideas of femininity. For example by dressing as a means to

represent their female identity, but also express their class and caste identities, as I noted in my diary in the field.

> *'Women always make sure they are dressed to perfection when they leave the privacy of their houses and enter the public sphere. It is quite a contrast, at home they are dressed in a nighty (a nightgown), with their hair tied together in a bun with chipped nail polish on their nails, smelly of sweat due to their hard work in the scorching heat. But when they visit friends or family or attend a function, the most beautiful saris are pulled out of their 'bureaus' (closets). From their earrings, bracelets, nail polish, make-up, flowers in their hair: everything is perfectly matched. And women take pride and joy to express their creativity and beauty like an actress on a stage, they perform their roles perfectly as a picture perfect daughter or wife.'*[5]

Illaveni is always aware when, how or why to perform her middle class role as a housewife or at other times as the empowered Yoga teacher. She seems to know which role is expected of her, negotiating different aspects of herself according to her audience. Not always being able to perform the empowered version of herself, she needs to satisfy her audience by performing a different role of femininity which she expresses in her behaviour, dress and speech. '*The way to dress is always an expression of your feminine identity',* Aananya explained and I will argue that besides their gender identity, the way a woman dresses allows women in Tamil Nadu to articulate their caste and class belonging.

When we went to visit their in-laws Illaveni consciously packed her suitcase with a more traditional attire to wear in Hamid's native village, instead of her usual outfit consisting of a salwar kameez and leggings or jeans and t-shirts. She is very much aware what is and what isn't appropriate, and she needs to adjust herself to her audiences. And in the household of her in-laws both Illaveni conforms to their traditional gender roles, which Illaveni expresses, by being confined to the private sphere of her mother and father in laws house, helping with some household chores like cooking, wearing modest clothes, not any make-up and more traditional (golden) jewelry.

5 Reflective notes, Auke Smit, March 22nd 2013

When Illaveni resides with her in-laws Illaveni is not as likely to feel accepted and valued, as she is in Chennai among her female neighbours who perceive her as a role model. *'You will always have to maintain your image in this society',* Illaveni says. According to the audiences Illaveni encounters, she uses and accumulates social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990a) in order to negotiate or cope within spaces where she feels less welcome.

As I tried to exemplify with her in-laws, but also in relation to the rich and higher class women, Illaveni visits in their million dollar houses in the affluent areas of Chennai. In these spaces her external appearance can devalue her social identity and status. According to Bourdieu (1990), 'a women's ability to 'pass' in these spaces is often dependent on whether they can have a 'feel for the game' or not, which means whether women can practice forms of behavior, dress and speech that match the hegemonic culture of that particular space' (Bourdieu 1990 Ratna 2013:5). This may explain why Illaveni was very nervous when she joined me to visit a *Women's Conference*, with high class and famous (Tamil) guests, like actresses and activists, held by the University, owned by one of one of her rich yoga clients. In this environment with high class educated women, Illaveni was like a fish 'out of the water', this explains why her need for the right outfit was very important. As Illaveni's dress may articulate status but also respectability, the purchase of a new outfit tailored to perfection with jewellery, accessories and make-up explains Illaveni's wish and her need to perform an appropriate identity in a space she has historically been excluded from, due to her (former lower class) position in society. Though Illaveni may be perceived by her neighbours as 'liberated' and a role model, in this new environment she needs to conquer her position and needs to develop her subjectivity between how she defines herself and how others define her and impose identities upon her.

According to his view, both men and women should confirm themselves according to the situation and perform their femininity in an 'appropriate' way. Butler (1990) explains that when performances create socially-identifiable meaning, people are constantly performing or doing gender at the risk of being assessed by others in accordance to the normative standards In her own words 'we end producing or performing the genders we anticipate' (Butler 1999:xv), we make ourselves into what we

believe we are, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading to intersecting inequalities. Illaveni's performance can allow her to feel included and valued in this space, and the right outfit is important, especially in Tamil society as external appearance intersects with social markers of difference, like class and caste. 'While issues of caste and class have been well identified and treated either as an issue of caste and gender or that of class and gender, there is little work that identifies an intersection that spans these identities' (Haritas 2008:33), I attempt to illustrate how an external appearance is an illustration of these intersecting identities.

Intersections of gender, caste and class

Kumar, a school friend of one of our neighbours, came to visit my host family to take his daily yoga class. Sitting in a lotus position on the sofa cum-bed in the small living room, on which the red velvet upholstery is covered with a striped cotton plaid, 26 year old designer Kumar is smiling but in his voice I sense a serious tone, '*I have no idea, to be honest*' trying to answer (or avoid) the question Hamid and Illaveni's asked him a few seconds before '*are you FC, BC or MBC?*'[6] In other words, to which caste do you belong? While we sip our cup of coffee, an awkward silence enters the room and makes me aware that even though the caste system is formally outlawed by the Indian constitution, it is still a salient feature in Tamil Nadu's social spheres, and as I will learn later as well religious and political, spheres. Caste belonging still influences social interactions, and therefore its importance should be underscored.

Radhika and Saaruji have confided in me that caste belonging isn't of much importance to their generation and have no idea to which caste their friends belong, but confronting someone about it, like Hamid and Illaveni did, '*is very rude',* Saaruji explained. '*You can't ask someone about their caste.*' Warshana, their friend whom I will introduce in the next chapter, underscores that same idea.

6 The caste system is divided in different classifications in an hierarchical manner, for example FC: forward caste, BC: backward caste and MBC: most backward caste.

I have known Radhika for six years and I have no idea to which caste she belongs to. It would be very mean to ask her which caste she is. Why you need the hell to feel bad to talk to low caste people. We need to break this [system]. Caste is even more important for most people than class. Some people can't come into the house, even in Chennai.

'*Our parents are caste minded, it is their mindset*', Radhika attempts to explain her high caste parents behaviour, and she gives me an example of their bias, as they didn't want to drink water or consume the food which was served during a wedding in rural Tamil Nadu, where a family member wed a man of lower caste, Radhika explained. '*Our parents have a lot of prejudices regarding lower castes, for example in relation to hygiene.'* In the rural village of Hamid's parents, caste identities were explicitly present, as there was a separated water source for families of the Dalit caste. But in a city, like Chennai, inequalities inherent in caste structures of power, are always much more implicit as I experienced in the narrative of Anisha's mother.

Anisha, a friend of Saaruji for example, is perceived with suspicion by Hamid and Ilaveni. Though Anisha's family is considered 'rich' and achieved a middle class status, she belongs to a scheduled caste, in other words she is a Dalit, formerly known as 'the untouchables'. Anisha's mother works in a call center and wears Western clothes and full make-up. Apparently her make-up was inappropriate according to Hamid and Illaveni, as they asked Saaruji '*if Anisha's mum was really a call centre dispatch, or perhaps a prostitute due to her extravagant way of dressing?*, which was perceived as inappropriate in relation to her caste and class. As Patel (2010) demonstrates in her research regarding women who find employment in the call enter industry, like Anisha's mother, Indian middle class families and Indian society, display(s) an anxiety towards women going out at night, earning a good salary, and being exposed to western culture. Working night shifts, entering the public domain and lacking the protection of her male kin to guarantee her safety goes against typical middle class norm, but also normative gender norms in relation to a Tamil identity.

Laine (2009:81) explains that 'women embody a notion of auspiciousness, well-being, new life as well as implying chaste behaviour', by expressing their feminine Tamil

identity. One could argue that female chastity is a politicized phenomenon in Indian culture representing a normative standard on how to behave but as well how to dress, and is rooted in Hinduism. Hinduism, with its inherent embodied hierarchical inequality, has, an emphasis on traditional gender roles. Especially since they promote 'ideals of Indian womanhood, and the worship of the Hindu mother goddesses in public spaces. 'In order to enter the masculinized reality of Hindu nationalism, many women are symbolically and practically shedding outer markers of their femininity' (Banerjee 2003:177). In the definition of that idealized image, women are perceived as the boundary markers of group identities by their 'embodiment of tradition and cultural purity' (Gunewardena & Kingsolver 2007:39).

Though both families, are Hindu and both belong to middle class, they perceive Anisha and her mother as inferior, due to their caste position. Aan intersectional approach can provide us understanding for the inequalities, exclusions and exploitations in the power system of India. 'While class is an achieved position, caste can be described as an ascribed identity. This is important, as they are not just categorically but foremost ontologically different. It is for this reason that one's class status can change with greater ease than one's caste identity' (Vijayan 2013). The moral judgments Hamid and Illaveni articulate in relation to the external appearance, implicate that the low caste position of Anisha's mother entails a set of behavioral expectations, in relation to gender, which Anisha's mother violates (Parish 1997). The way an external appearance is valued, can help us understand inclusion and exclusion in Tami society, but also relates to how issues of gender and social transformation in contemporary India are closely connected to the constraints of both class and caste, which I will exemplify with another scene from the field.

When we watch a current affairs debate TV programme on the Tamil Sun TV Network, which Saaruji and Radhika are watching while they are peeling onions. I observe several girls and young women, who debate about the occurrence of chemical attacks in Tamil Nadu's society. I can't follow the conversations on TV, but am more interested if it is true, one is able to see to which social class someone belongs based on their appearance. After almost three months, I still can't figure it out and try to observe carefully if the clothes really signal a different meaning. Luckily I can ask Saaruji and Radhika to help me

out. *'The more revealing the dress, the higher the [social] class',* Saaruji explains. *'Especially if someone is wearing a shawl, and the dress is high necked, changes are quite big the girls are coming from a lower class, because there a more traditional way of dressing is appropriate. Higher class women can do what they want.' 'By dressing 'appropriate' it shows the women's character',* as Aananya explained during one of our conversations. And what I understood was that a women should dress modest, without exposing too much 'flesh'. Illaveni confirmed that, *'in India exposing is not good. We make and wear modern clothes, but always decent, so you won't give the wrong impression.'* And that was not all, 'every occasion asks for a different kind of dressing', as Aananya explained:

> *When you go out for a party, I wear a designer sari, with embroidery and stones, churrida, or jeans and top. But when I attend a marriage, I will dress very traditionally. The sari is made of silk. There are also strict dress codes for a temple, a short top for example shows a lack of respect for God. Every occasion asks for a different dress code. If you will go for shopping, the dress should express the character. The way to dress shouldn't irritate others. It should show some decency.*

Though women have the freedom to express themselves through their clothes, they are expected to conform themselves to a normative framework, in which '*girls should confirm themselves depending to the situation. We have no restrictions, but girls should be aware of themselves, be aware how they carry themselves and how they carry their cultures',* as Kumar, a family friend, expressed. In Kumar's view we can discover 'a concern about the amount of western habits and values that could affect family life, which are regarded as uncontrolled and disrupting, threatening 'gauvaram' [dignity, prestige and respectability]', as Laine (2009:256) has expressed

Simply by observing women's clothing we can gain understanding how society owns, reproduces and maintains the established norms on a daily basis, which permits a woman in Tamil Nadu's society to be that what is acceptable within the relational framework of gender, age, class and caste, her personal background and the background of her interpreters at any particular moment. It could be argued that 'one's gender is

performatively constituted in the same way that one's choice of clothes is curtailed, perhaps even predetermined, by the society, context, economy, within which one is situated' (Salih 2006: 56).

In the way a woman dresses, one can perceive a distinction between two different types as Aananya explained, 'a *traditional woman, who wears sari's and golden jewellery and a modern women who wears a more westernized attire.'* And by articulating being a more traditional or more modern women, has implications how one is perceived in Tamil society, as we saw with Anisha's mother. '*In a more modern dress the chances of getting Eve teased* [a euphemism used in India for public sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. Eve teasing refers to the temptress nature of Eve, placing responsibility on the woman as a tease[7]], *are much bigger. Men will feel that you provoke them by dressing too much provocative and expose too much flesh', as Aananya explained.* And she illustrated this idea:

> *When others would see girls wearing very tight tops, men will look at them. They give the impression that they want attention. Tight and too low, the gents won't have attention for their work. Everyone in the office is very well developed, and dresses very modern. At the same time, the girls' cross the limits and then others will look at you, or tease you.*

Teasing is quite a big problem for girls, Aananya and other informants explained. Most girls and women I interviewed, had experienced some form of sexual harassment and by dressing appropriate their parents propagated it would ensure them a degree of safety, especially when they needed to use public transport or other public spaces where men and women could interact. Aananya expressed that when girls are dressed inappropriate they are given too much freedom by their parents and the parents should control their children. What this may exemplify is that in Tamil society a discourse is prevalent, which 'blames the victim' and subjects women to an idealized performance of femininity. Motivated by cultural and societal norms, this discourse may highlight the multiple and intersecting inequalities and discriminatory notions of gender that seem to persist in

7 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve_teasing, retrieved December 4 2013

Indian society. When I ask Kumar if it's true that women who are dressed accordingly won't be assaulted, he replies:

> *'I don't feel a girl who is wearing a sari, will be teased [assaulted] by men. The thing [women or girls] we view [see], makes us distract and change our minds. The girls don't give a wrong impression when they wear sexy clothes, but they give us an opportunity. Proper girls wearing sari's, won't have any problems.'*

Confronting Kumar with a recent criminal case, in which a young girl was raped and murdered when she walked back from the market with her mother, dressed in a traditional dress, he explains:

> *'From the hundred rape cases, just a minority who is dressed appropriately will be the victim of a rape case. The intention of rape is purely sexual. All the girls have freedom, I feel this freedom makes them expose too much and this gives problems. For example for the working girls who work in night shifts, or go out late at night, they put themselves in difficult situations and become easily targeted to sexual or physical abuse.'*

Aananya did agree, *'a girl in my college was dressed appropriate, but even still they teased her, she fell and due to a head injury she died. Her case was the first to get media exposure. And though boys will tease you as well when you wear an appropriate or more traditional dress, the chances and dangers wearing an exposing [revealing] dress are much bigger.'* As Aananya may illustrate, the way a woman dresses in Tamil Nadu is a reflection of her social identity and may stigmatize women who do not perform to a certain expectation.

When women violate traditional gender norms and perhaps reject an idealized Tamil femininity, which has traditionally been constructed as nurturing, caring and selfless, it can challenge their inclusion in Tamil society. Butler's thesis of performativity, which relies on Foucault's thesis of power and knowledge, offers a useful way to explore the articulation of identities through these gendered performances, and how these codes of femininity can encourage women to be submissive, obedient, and tolerant to legitimate abuse and accept male dominance as a natural, inevitable part of being a woman. Perceiving gender through a 'performative' perspective indicates the inherently

constructed nature of gender, but more important tries to find ways in which one can relate to femininity, suggesting that femininities appear within language and society as effects of norms and power relations. Butler does not deny physical difference, but she suggests that the interpretation of physical difference, and the social and political consequences of that interpretation, frames the lives that we live and emphasizes that prevailing culture provides the framework for the discourse concerning appropriate gender roles, defined and redefined in interactions as it is performed for different audiences. According to Butler's view, both men and women should confirm themselves according to the situation and perform their femininity in an 'appropriate' way.

Though Butler tends to privilege gender over other social categories, social class and a collective group identity, being Tamil, is an important part of the lives of the women concerned in this research. Like gender, being Tamil can also be perceived as a social construction that is made and re-made in interactions. The restriction to what one can be and desire to be, is what Butler calls normative violence, or the violence of the norm. Butler clearly views the restriction itself as violent, in her view it is violent to force people into a restricted body that obeys a normative framework 'shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex' (Butler 1999:164). And in Tamil society, violating norms in relation to gender, caste and class may legitimize men to perpetuate sexual violence and other social injustices.

Societal attitudes, cultural beliefs and institutional practices relate to norms, values and power relations which are reproduced within the privacy of the home. In this chapter I described how conforming to certain norms can establish belonging in Tamil society. Furthermore, it became apparent how these norms form a restriction for those who don't have sufficient social and cultural capital and how they negotiate and cope within spaces where they are unwelcome. Based on the experiences of Illaveni, my host mother, I hope to have demonstrated how she constantly needs to construct and manage her identities in order to negotiate her inclusion, as a divorced and re-married middle class woman in contemporary India, to tackle forms of exclusion. And in these performances, external appearances intersects with social markers of difference, like class, caste and gender. An intersectional analysis makes us aware of the intersecting

patterns of different social categories like gender, class, and caste and argues they are mutually constituting. In the next chapter I will address the multiple and complex ways identities are articulated in and through domestic and public spaces, and how a common history, experience and culture is materialized by women drawing their kolams as an articulation of belonging, and how the incapability's of Illaveni's daughters, to conform to a traditional practice like kolam, may challenge family status and class belonging.

Chapter 3

Kolam as an Articulation of Identity and Belonging in India

In this chapter I will narrate the experiences of Warshana, Radhika and Saaruji, three middle class women who live in Chennai, and exemplify how intersectionality draws attention to the ways in which the identities of these young women, as subject positions, are not reducible to just one, two or three or even more dimensions layered onto each other in an additive or hierarchical way. Instead I hope to demonstrate how power relations and inequality work in women's real lived lives and try to synthesize both structural and locational dimensions which create intersectional subject positions, constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, caste, class, and sexuality. Constantly constructing and managing their socially imposed identities, which are shaped, positioned and interpreted by discourse and performed in ways to conform to a normative framework. Kolam performances are proposed as discursive practices, which promotes a hegemonic Tamil femininity and can demonstrate how womanhood in India is ambiguous and complex as subjects need to negotiate different identities, laden with responsibilities and sacrifices, keeping both themselves, their families and society content, in an environment which is characterized by change.

Kolam as a discursive practice

In the small and dark hall on the third floor, four different apartments are hidden behind wooden doors. Radhika knows her way around and knocks with her knuckles, several times on the dark brown wooden door, where her friend Warshana (20 years old) lives. It stays quiet and no one seems to be at home. Next door to Warshana's house, the door is richly decorated with images of several Gurus, a garland of yellow plastic flowers and dried 'lemons' to prevent evil entering the house. The door of another apartment, on the opposite of Warshana's house, is ajar. The neighbor is curious and sticks her nose out the door, *'wait , I will call her'* she says in Tamil. With a bunch of keys, she taps on the door, a shrill sound echoes through the narrow hallway. *'Warshana, Warshana , you have visitors.'* A few seconds later we notice some fumbling on the other side of the door. Not much later the door opens with some squeaks and creaks and Warshana greets us with a sleepy face and a tousled head of hair. Warshana apologizes she overslept, after working a night shift in a call center for an US based 'trading company', it was after five in the morning she came home. Despite being tired, Warshana is welcoming and slides a few plastic chairs forward, in the dark and tiny three-room apartment, so we can sit comfortably.

While Warshana prepares *chai* in the kitchen to quench our thirst on this hot summer day, I observe how her family has created a small puja room, on the opposite wall of the small kitchen. In this place of worship, colourful pictures of Gods and Goddess are marked with kunkumam, a red coloured powder made of turmeric or saffron, in order to show respect and bless the deities in the form of a puja. A small altar to the dark Goddess Kali is decorated with flowers and some incense and a small clay oil lamp lights up the room. Half a coconut is placed on the side of one of the shelves, forming a storage for white limestone powder used to draw a kolam on the entrance of the small two bedroom apartment.

Warshana belongs to the majority of lower and middle class girls in Tamil Nadu who learned to draw kolams at an early age, nurtured by their mothers, aunts, and neighbors into the fine skills of drawing a kolam. In Tamil society, mothers are responsible to raise their daughters to become 'good' wives. Part of their upbringing is to teach them how to act, behave and dress appropriate and modest, like I illustrated in the previous chapter, but other cultural practices like kolam are also important. As Laine (2009:)

proposed, kolam can be understood as a performative process, as it continuously reproduces and contests local cultural morality in relation to gender, caste, class and a national identity, in a specific social environment.

Kolam exposes children to 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills' (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005:133). For parents, to transfer this part of Tamil culture to their daughters is important in their upbringing, because 'through these visual, multi sensorial, experiences one is able to understand how gender roles are performed within the privacy of the domestic sphere, as children will unknowingly take those concepts they learned on their doorstep and use them, later, to describe themselves and their surroundings (Pink 2004).

Observing and performing the practice of kolam, enables young girls to gain understanding how gendered relationships work in Tamil society. At an early age, mothers, aunts, and neighbors slowly nurture their daughters, nieces and neighbors in this activity. At first watching from the side-lines during the early years, girls begin participating when their fine motor skills are developed and coordinated enough to draw these magical images. Over time, mothers completely transition responsibility for this chore to their young daughters. In families with more than one daughter, the girls work together to create the kolam. The novices use chalk pieces or pencils to practice making the drawings until they become proficient. The powder can be easily wiped off to correct mistakes; repeated mistakes and wipes, however, can spoil the image. Therefore, girls capture, encode, and decode the image in their memory with much clarity before reproducing it on the ground. Radhika, Illaveni's eldest daughter tells me she can make a kolam, '*though just a little bit',* she stresses. Radhika learned to create kolam designs by '*looking at books.*' But it was actually her grandmother who was her biggest inspiration. '*She taught me two to three designs. My grandmother made small and quick, cute, designs. This took only five minutes. Though starting to learn this practice is quite difficult, but everyday practice will ensure that it will come by itself.'*

To Radhika, the most important motivation lies in the fact that '*positivity comes, when we make it perfectly it gives us a good feeling.'* Saaruji, her younger sister, has the same experience, '*entering the house, the kolam should be there, because it means the house is happy.'* Radhika adds, '*when you practice these practices good vibrations will come*

to the family'. I ask her if she can explain me the difference between a good and a bad kolam? '*A kolam has to be correct, in a good balance'*, Radhika explains. Both girls explain, you can 'feel' that. By seeing and observing a kolam, one engages in the practice and this relates to Pink's (2004) concept of 'sensory engagement'. Pink therewith argues that through these visual, multi sensorial, the observer engages in the process.

As a kolam is drawn with a single line that goes through all the dots to create an image, its continuous reiteration constructs girls and women as feminine beings, like Butler proposed with gender performativity. This learned behavior imposes a normative heterosexuality since the reproduction feminine identities in Tamil Nadu, favor the role of a mother in order to produce the perfect family. Which can be explained due to socio-economic developments, in which 'the family came to be seen as a haven in a heartless world, a source of support and security in an often impersonal and threatening social environment' (Lasch, 1979 in Bilton et al 2002:40). Assessing the quality of a kolam, objectifies its maker and embodies the woman's skills but also other feminine qualities. An excellently executed kolam is therefore an embodiment of a traditional Tamil femininity, while 'through drawing [kolams] the creative female capacity of the performer becomes embodied in the image' (Laine 2009:16). In other words women can articulate their female gender by performing their kolam, However it must be noted that gender performativity is not achieved through a singular performance, 'It is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals and dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' Butler (1993:12).

The idea that kolam performances can articulate the female gender, is challenged since an increasing number of families uses a permanently painted kolam or an adhesive kolam in front of the entrances of their houses, and a new generation is no longer nurtured in this activity or no longer value its importance. Radhika and Saaruji stopped drawing their kolam, when they moved to an apartment and legitimize discontinuing this practice *'because in flats nobody makes [kolams]'*(Radhika). When I speak to Aananya, and other neighbors in our apartment building, the women stress they don't make a kolam as a result of busy work schedules and space constraints, though most women are housewives and even have a domestic help who can draw a kolam, since these women

come from lower classes in which performing a kolam is still compulsory, even in a big city like Chennai.

The argument of having no space , can be refuted, as a very small, and simple, three dot kolam, can be drawn on a very small spot of the house. *'We put stickers instead',* Radhika explains. The use of artificial kolams, like an adhesive kolam, may be motivated as a compromise to endorse class, caste and gender norms. Because when a kolam is not present, neighbors or their community may perceive the family as inauspicious, and articulate that the family prioritizes Western and material cultures, instead of embracing a Tamil identity. A kolam is framed around a discourse of morality and respectability, and enables women to perform their kolam as an external marker of continuity of family habits, values and internal auspiciousness. By doing so it allows women to participate in the creation of their moral status and a projection of that self-determined identity into the public sphere.

'I*f my future husband appreciates it I can do it [draw a kolam], but not everyday. If he wants every day, I can put on stickers. It has to be my own wish, he can't force me*' Radhika tells me. By saying that *'a man can't force he to do something against her own wishes',* as Radhika emphasizes, it may implicate she is selfish by putting her own needs before the family, instead of providing love and care, as a Tamil woman is expected. Since a traditionally Tamil femininity has been constructed as nurturing, caring and selfless, like Aananya emphasized in the first chapter of this thesis, '*sacrificing her life for her children and husband',* it may clarify that women have a lot of responsibilities and their behavior reflects on their family and even community. Kolam practices provide an important 'daily performance in female's moral responsibility for their families and the surrounding community' (Laine 2009:85), as an articulation of a woman's domestic responsibilities at home and her own public self.

Being a Daughter in Contemporary India

Warshana, Radhika and Saaruji are outspoken and have quite an unusual and contrasting position in relation to the other women I have spoken to during my research, in a society where most (young) women obey their husbands, I ask the girls, if this has anything to do with how they are brought up. '*Perhaps',* Warshana replies. She explains how her

upbringing, and more specific how she perceives the performative maternal identity of her own mother, as conflicting with her own expectations of womanhood.

> *'My mother won't open her mouth, I used to scold her. It is her fault. Women make themselves the victim, they let themselves be ruled. Because they are afraid what society will think about them. I don't want to be like my mom. You have to be yourself, if you bother about others you can never reach your height. They will suppress you.'*

Radhika and Saaruji, on the other hand had an opposite experience with their own mother. *'Before she [got married] did whatever she want, she never asked permission. Seeing her like that, we want to become the same. She allowed us a lot of freedom',* Radhika tells me. In that situation, as an independent working woman she was not able to nurture her daughters in for example performing kolams, as Saaruji explains.

> *I can make a kolam. I know what to do with my creativity. I can copy them, but I didn't make them from a small age [when I was young]. My mom is from a village, where it is compulsory and expected. Even in Chennai they will ask you if you can make a kolam, if you are interested. But she never taught us, because she was working. She had a bad life and didn't have a normal life like normal ladies. Her only motivation was to come up in life.*

Radhika adds,*' because my mother don't practice them everyday, we forgot about it. I like to draw, and I like to practice kolams, but in our family it is not really encouraged to make kolams.'* But both girls underscore the importance of performing a kolam during festivities, o*nly during 'function time [during festivals] we do it, we make a kolam, during Diwali for example. My mother makes the design and we put the colors.'* Radhika tells me. *'We have seen [our mother] making kolam and we observed her and helped her with coloring during festivals.* Since their mother married Hamid, this situation has changed. *'Nowadays she is married, now someone takes care of her. She is dependent. She will ask permission. Restricted in the home, not allowed to do anything.'*

Modern lifestyles, traditional values

Though both girls confirm they are able to make a kolam, but don't practice it in their daily lives, their mother acknowledged her daughters can't draw a kolam (any longer). This won't just affect the girls personally, but it will affect the whole family, since kolam, as an articulation of a normative feminine Tamil identity, is located within the communal rather than the individual space, limiting women with many societal constraints. Warshana acknowledges that idea. *'When you don't [have or] make a kolam, people will judge you. People say Hindu's will have to do that. In Chennai people will not talk very openly, but people will speak behind your back.'* Since a kolam is a silent form of communication, which acts as an external marker of bodily states, '*due to a death or a women having her menstrual cycle* [which in Tamil society means being in a state of ritual pollution] *the family expresses they aren't welcoming the deities or others to enter the house',* Warshana explains. In other words, the absence of a kolam at the threshold of a house, may signal that the household is closed to the rest of the world.

When Illaveni fulfills the ideal of a traditional Tamil housewife and mother, as I described in the previous chapter, she will perform her domestic qualities by cooking, cleaning and performing a kolam. As a mother she is expected to raise her daughters in a similar matter, knowing to adjust themselves according to their audience. Though some of these objective roles, may be contrasting with Illaveni's subjective attitudes and the way she raised her children. Both her daughters are no longer able to perform a kolam, and Illaveni, as their mother, was responsible to nurture her daughters in this activity and therefore their incapability's reflect on her capabilities as a mother. *'I am shy to say my daughters can't make kolams. People with think I am a bad mother',* Illaveni emphasized. Laine (2009:392) confirms that idea, even when women are capable to draw a kolam 'if they appear or behave against the norms, they will be judged as having a bad character. They would be regarded as too proud, *timiru* and immoral.' In other words the impossibility of performing a kolam may engender typical feminine virtues in Tamil society, and perceive Radhika and Saaruji, lacking of concentration and patience, and other typical feminine qualities, which are needed to develop the practice.

As I have described, Radhika and Saaruji appointed to the fact that their mother didn't nurture them in this activity, which could explain they have lost their interest and

knowledge to perform a kolam and may have been encouraged by Illaveni's own ambivalence to follow gendered traditions and fulfil her socially imposed roles as a middle class woman in Tamil Nadu's society. *'I like traditional things, but I don't like traditional women. What's the use? If I have time I do a puja* [religious ritual performed by Hindu's as an offering to the deities]*, If I don't have time I don't, it doesn't give me tension.'* In a way Illaveni's daughters incapability's or unwillingness to follow traditional customs and abide by gendered virtues, may be a reflection of their mother's behavior, but at the same time Illaveni, is always aware she is part of society, a needs to perform a collective identity to ensure inclusion and tackle forms of exclusion and expects the same of Radhika and Saaruji. As I tried to demonstrate in the previous chapter, Illaveni prioritizes identity dispositions, as an enactment of normative values of a respectable femininity by following traditional customs and abide by gendered virtues, while her daughters don't seem aware of the value to be included in society or try to *'adapt to the expectations of the family and society and carry out our own traditions',* as Kumar, the family friend, expressed.

Illaveni is worried, her daughters behaviours may challenge their middle class position. Radhika explained '*If a girl has a good mind, she can make everything good. But when she has a bad mind, she can make anything bad. When a boy does something bad or good, it will only affect him. The girl* [on the other hand] *has a lot of responsibility,* [not just for herself, but for the whole family].' And one of these responsibilities relates to maintaining their middle class image, as Saaruji explained in the following quote:

> *If you achieve a certain [higher class] level in society you can do what you want. Middle class [on the other hand] is very difficult. You can't go up [higher class] and you don't want to go down [lower class]. You are stuck like a cat on the wall, you can't go anywhere.*

Though being middle class is foremost a qualitative category, since middle class families differ widely not only in economic terms and consumption practices but also in terms of status and values (Donner 2011), a common denominator forms the importance of family values and gender relations which can be understood in terms of public performances. Saavala (2012: 113) claims the 'Indian middle class is united by a discourse that posits the

loss of existing practices supporting 'traditional family values', as they pursue 'modernity' as a project.' In middle class families there is an 'persistent commitment to and anxiety about morality' (Arabindo 2012:814), and modern influences are perceived with ambiguity. Illaveni perceives modern influences as the reason that a '*younger generation loses respect. I teach good things for independence, but at the same time you need to give respect. Don't depend on anyone, but I don't mean foreign culture. Younger generation don't want to respect our traditions.'*

Butler's (1990, 1999) performative construction of identity can be helpful to understand the construction of collective group identity, like class, which relates to both gendered, religious and political discourses. And it is relevant to research how kolam practices relate to the construction of these identities. Kolam practices may help us understand that a woman in Tamil Nadu's society can only be that what is acceptable within the relational framework of her own personal background and the background of her 'audience' at any particular moment. By drawing their kolam, or making sure their house is accommodated with an adhesive or painted kolam, women can articulate an idealized Tamil femininity, which can be defined as the 'corresponding set of values and images held important for female adulthood' (Banerjee 2003:169).

As Illaveni demonstrated, in the previous chapter, she articulates her identities according to the audiences she encounters, and in these spaces different values dominate, values we could label as modern of traditional. Saavala (2012: 113) claims the 'Indian middle class is united by a discourse that posits the loss of existing practices supporting 'traditional family values', as they pursue 'modernity' as a project.' As modernity gives rise to ongoing debate among scholars, regarding our understanding what modernity really is, its complexity and multi-layered intersections are widely acknowledged. As Weber (in Habermas 1990) and subsequent modernists argued, tradition and modernity do not exist in a linear progression, people can be modern and traditional at the same time and modernity may well co-exist with tradition. Therefore modernity is not only 'after' tradition, although it is 'before' it when it comes to reaching the future, it is 'beyond' locality and acts as the 'wider context' for it' (Wade 2007:51). *'I am both traditional and modern'*, many women admitted during their interviews. The idea that both modernity and traditions exist at the same time, instead of separated in

dichotomies is explained by Wade (2007:55) 'we need to think about social change in a way that is non-scalar [non-lineair] and non-teleological [deontological], and perceive our world as not being separated into dichotomies. Global and local; tradition (and modernity) are ways of reading or construing processes of change, not just things that exist out there.

That modernization processes are very much complicated and layered, I experienced in the field, as well in relation to the kolam practice. We can understand kolam practices within the tradition and modernity paradigm, embedded within larger discourses surrounding religion, politics and gender. Warshana for example is able to draw kolams, and is encouraged in her household by her mother, father and brother to perform them, but emphasizes the scientific reason of the kolam, in relation to hygiene and its antiseptic properties. *'I feel I can only do it when it has any reason. A scientific reason. Few follow blindly and that is not good. You should think yourself.'* She argues the purifying qualities are the most important reason to make a kolam, and *'inviting the Goddess is not important for me',* she emphasizes.

Radhika also makes a distinction between the idea of being modern and traditional in relation to kolam practices, when she refers to women who perform their kolam twice a day are *'very traditional'*. And though the mechanically reproduced kolam design can be perceived as a reinvention of a traditional cultural practice within the setting of a modernizing society, it may make us aware that it remains part of local traditions that sometimes conflict with modern concerns and beliefs. These transformed kolam practices can as well elucidate, that men and women still hold their cultural and traditional views of the world while experiencing modernity in their society. According to Laine (2009) conservative Tamil elite has an interest to re-establish Tamil identity and tradition, and considers 'authentic' kolam images as a representation of pure Tamil-ness, of Tamil heritage. Since Hinduism is an inherent feature of Tamil identity, kolam practices and images represent the social and religious belonging and are considered an embodied performance of feminine, social and religious ideals. The religious symbols inherent of the practice, are utilized to facilitate the spread of Hinduism and a traditional ideal of femininity.

When ideals of equality become realities of inequality

Compared to the generation of their mothers and grandmothers, who experienced social pressure to get married in their early twenties and were not able to study or work, Warshana, Radhika and Saaruji have many more opportunities to get educated, find employment and express themselves in the public domains of society, something Illaveni could only accomplish in a much later stage in her life, after divorcing her first husband. Though the occurrence of socioeconomic transformations, for example by being able to divorce her first husband and finding employment, enabled Illaveni to break gender barriers and develop new possibilities for herself and her family, she is ambivalent towards giving her own daughters more independence. On the one hand she says:

> *I hope my daughters will follow this same path. My daughters have to stand on their own legs, I don't want them to become beggars for their husbands. They need to take care of themselves, like I do and did. I have never been dependent, I have always worked from the age of five.*

On the other hand, the statement '*my daughters have to stand on their own legs, they need to take care of themselves*' Illaveni seems to refer to a certain degree of empowerment she wishes for her daughters to experience within their future marriage, in the relationships with their husbands, and not as long as the girls live at home as their independence and decisions can impact the family's position. Illaveni is clear about the fact that '*when girls have freedom, the problem is that it can spoil their lives. That's why they need to be protected.*' '*If my daughters do something wrong, people will not say Radhika or Saaruji did something wrong, no they will say Illaeveni's daughters did something wrong. Their mistakes are my mistakes, I am the one who gets blamed. They will talk badly about me.*' And that was actually something the family had experienced, as a result of a premarital relationship, that one of the daughters has with a relative of her stepfather Hamid. The family was told '*she [Saaruji] was born from a bad stomach*', in other words the reputation of the mother was questioned. As a result of those events, both Saaruji and her sister Radhika were constantly questioned by their parents, as the mutual trust seemed to have disappeared. An implication of these accusations, for the relationship

between the daughters (as a representation of their families) and their parents was that '*parents need proof , proof that you are good. You need to prove yourself and others constantly that you are a good girl. That you won't make any mistakes*', as Saaruji explained. '*Parents are always worried and sometimes we feel like a burden. Being here can be horrible, not to be who we are. Living a fake life',* Warshana adds.

The way Illaveni's assesses her daughters actions, always seemed to relate to the prospect of an arranged marriage. According to Saaruji, an arranged marriage revolves around *'the status of the man, and the family. Instead that parents want the best husband for their daughters, they only look at material things not if the has a good heart', she says.* But besides someone's class status, caste is important as well. Warshana explains her parents see the value of caste foremost in relation to marriage. *'For society that is important. The caste problem will continue. As long as the arranged marriage is there. Even if I love a Hindu, they will ask which caste he will belong to. They won't say religion, they will say caste. If you are marrying a lower caste person your family and parents will reject you. You will become an outcast.'* It makes her angry that caste still has so much value in their society, especially because her boyfriend is a Christian, and she is aware, though they love each other for many years, they won't be able to build a future together. As she emphasizes, '*I stand for what I think and believe and have hope I can convince them* [her parents]. *But I can't reject my family. They gave me my life. And therefore I can't throw them. I need to convince them. But I can't stand alone. I need people around me, I need support. We should convince everyone.*

Marriage, or the prospect of a marriage, is always present in the lives of middle class families, and therefore not just an important part of the lives of the girls but even more of their parents, because in Indian society the parents will choose a life partner for their sons and daughters. '*Their only worry is to get us married', Warshana explained.* Recent research indicates that 'romantic love is a fairly universal concept, yet it is not universally considered an important factor in marriage' (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992 in Sorrell 2005:16). When a man chooses the right wife, a woman has to meet a lot expectations. When women can't perform a domestic and cultural practice like kolam, like Radhika and Saaruji, it doesn't just challenge women's identity (Laine 2009:383), but also family status, as it will reflect on their upbringing as Illaveni, expressed her daughters incapability's as a

personal failure. Radhika, the eldest daughter, confirms that idea, '*it is very difficult to build up a good name in society, especially for middle class families. It takes a lot of effort to build up a good name, to spoil a name on the other hand is very easy.*'

> *All boys have the expectations that girls have all the qualities. For example, Hema, our neighbour, she couldn't cook before her marriage. In the six months before the wedding would take place, she learned everything from her mother. If she can't do it, she will bring shame on the family. The parents don't want the family to be blamed.*

Illaveni experiences it as her responsibility that by raising her daughters to become 'good' daughters, they will eventually become 'good' wives, but if becoming a 'good wife', also meant becoming a 'happy woman', was questioned by Saaruji.

> *Girls have two lives, one with the parents and one with the husband. You should be happy with the parents, if you are happy with the parents you will have a terrible life with the husband. When you have a terrible life with your parents, at least you should have a happy life with the husband. If both are sad, really the life is a waste.*

This quote from Saaruji is significant, how she perceives her position as a daughter and in the future when she gets married, full of insecurity as the possibility is there she will encounter unhappiness. And this may have been re-affirmed by the stories of peers, who were already married, like their neighbour Hema, as Saaruji explained:

> *Even if they [the wives] don't like the husband, in an arranged marriage, they can't quit the marriage. For example Hema, her husband will never believe her. He is a mummy baby, his mother is jealous of the relationship and speaks badly about her. He was angry with Hema because she didn't get pregnant. She hated him for that. She had no choice, she had to sacrifice her life for her parents. They will only understand each other after their kids will get older. They have to stay together. This system keeps the girls like prisoners. Unfree.*

Illaveni and Hamid explained, as long as they have the responsibility for their daughters wellbeing, as unmarried girls living in a patriarchal society which they perceive as unsafe for women, Radhika and Saaruji are very much restricted to take care of themselves and move freely in the public sphere. Allowing women to be independent is not self-evident in Tamil society, as I learned through a variety of focus group discussions and individual interviews held during my fieldwork in which both men and women confirmed that women in Tamil Nadu's middle class society are raised to think of themselves as vulnerable because they are women. Women have expressed that they are taught to think that because they are treated accordingly. As Aananya explained, most men and women in India express a gender bias towards women to be left independent. Women have to be protected from, for example, sexual assault, and prohibited to connect with members of the opposite sex as their virginity may be questioned and family prestige is affected. So, at every stage of a woman's life, she is under the domination of a male member of the family. For example because men, like Hamid, tend to protect the women in their family, in ways they don't protect men and boys. Warshana interpreted this protection as follows:

> *Men always have the idea they have to protect the girls. Instead of letting you to work, they are more satisfied when the man works. [At] some point, men try to underestimate girls, they think they don't know anything. They don't want to empower them, it would challenge the relationship, they are afraid to lose their position. They don't want their power to go down. They say they protect the girl, but actually they are protecting themselves, their own manhood.*

Radhika and Saaruji argue their parents are only focused on arranging their marriages, '*they [Hamid and Illaveni] only think about us [Radhika and Saruuji] getting married. Instead when they would allow us to work and develop other skills we can learn and know so much',* Saaruji explains, as she perceives that their prospective marriages are a way to disempower Radhika and herself and a way for their parents to keep them under control.
In this specific example, we can perceive the expectations related to the gendered and class identities, as part of a Tamil femininity, intersect with age. Being a minor is a social

marker, which reinforces their other identities, for example being female, and gives them a transformed meaning.

In the case of Radhika and Saaruji, their stepfather Hamid feels responsible to protect the girls until he can transfer his responsibilities in favor of their husbands. He wants to protect his girls from getting a bad name, since this can have far reaching consequences especially since the basic rule seems to be that the family's reputation is the most important thing when daughters and sons are married. In other words, when the family prestige is questioned, this can affect the family's possibilities in the 'marriage market', and challenge their position in society. Radhika experiences the protection of her stepfather and mother in a more negative way:

> *They* [Hamid and Illaveni] *thinking only about us after marriage. When we go to work we know so much, they only think about us getting married. Because appa [Hamid] has a village mind. His mother went to college, she like cycling and studying. But she was not allowed to prove her intelligence. Now she can't do anything. She is finished, dead. That was Appa his example, he is doing the same as his father.*

The 'threat' and anxiety that their parents are arranging Radhika, as the eldest daughter, to get married, are a perceived reality for both the girls. *'Now you have to enjoy, because after marriage you won't have any freedom at all', as* Radhika explained me before What she refers to is her position as a college student, now she has to enjoy because after marriage she will need to sacrifice her own needs for her family. Both Illaveni's daughters are not looking forward to get married, by their parents, which can be perceived by their perspective on men and the inequalities they have experienced in most relationships in Tamil society. *'Men are brainwashing us. Convincing us. He can do his own thing. [instead] I want to be independent'* Radhika explains, and she indicates she prefers to stay single. Though Radhika is also aware that being independent is not an option for a middle class woman, with her background, but if she would marry she would need a husband who *'would allow me my independence',* Radhika explains. Though Radhika and Saaruji have hope their situation will change in the future, Warshana is more cynical *'It is never going to*

happen, that I can be myself. Even not in the future. It depends the man who I will marry, but I assume I will probably get the same life as my parents have.'

Even if women would resist this idea and explicitly combat it, for instance by telling people that they don't need their protection because they are resilient and strong enough to protect themselves, they still remain within the same framework of value, which make them understand themselves in terms set by the oppressive norms. As a woman rather than a man, as resilient rather than vulnerable, as strong rather than weak. Her self-understanding remains dependent on these distinctions. Radhika re-affirms that idea by saying *'I am not bold enough at this moment.'* With 'being not bold enough', Radhika refers to making her own independent decisions in her life. Like selecting her own clothes, which Hamid prevents her from doing, as he makes that decision. To gain experience to develop self-confidence, Radhika needs *'more experiences. I am thinking to work, to gain some experience. I would really like that. I would like to help in an orphanage and teach the children something and practice.'* By gaining confidence Radhika believes she can make more important decisions, in regard to a prospective marriage *'I feel when I find someone it has to be my decision. Even when they want to arrange a marriage I want to have a say in the decision.'* Warshana, expresses a similar reaction:

> *'They [my family] don't know I go out and my life outside the house. I am not settled and want to explore myself before I am getting married. I have not achieved anything.*

Though Radhika, Saaruji and Warshana are prohibited to make their own decisions, they don't perceive themselves as weak or unworthy, or as silent victims. Warshana explains,

> *The girls are furious inside, but we act normal. In the office I feel more empowered. I really want to work. That is my freedom. I feel better because I can be myself. They don't question me, like my parents do, they only ask questions regarding my work. People admire me, for who I am and how I identify myself. There I find my identity.*

'*When it comes to me, I live for myself. But when it comes to my children I would live for them',* she explains. That idea, that she lives for herself is contradicting to Tamil values, which promote collectivism and altruism, instead of individualism. Both girls are outspoken, talkative and bold, qualities which are perceived as 'difficult' by their mother. Though she has those exact same skills, she seems to be aware when or when not to perform them, in contrast to her daughters who seem to be less aware about the restrictions their society imposes. Illaveni expresses her concern about the progressive ideas of her girls, and their possibilities to get married with these attitudes, since 'a girl who is going to live in a joint family [which is the case in an arranged marriage] cannot be too independent or she will make life miserable for everyone (Nanda 2000:189). By ensuring that their daughters will be arranged to be married, Illaveni and Hamid can ensure endogamy: the idea that a relationship takes place within the family's own caste. An arranged marriage therefore encourages group solidarity and ensures greater control over group resources, and is as much a concern of the individuals, as it is of the families, and society as large. The idea of conforming to the expectations of society evoked resistance among Illaveni's daughters, and their friend Warshana, who experiences the values of society and fulfilling socially imposed identities, as following:

> '*Our parents live for society, they don't live for themselves. Instead culture is changing. They say culture is identity, therefore they don't want to lose* [their cultures and traditions]. *If you follow your culture you know who you are. Why should I follow their rule[s]? How is it possible to develop your own identity? We are society. We have to change.'*

But Warshana is aware, that she can't blame others, '*we shouldn't blame society, we need to think how the world needs to be, actually how our own house should be. People taught me different. Basic needs will never differ. If you can change yourself, you can change society. If everyone can think in this manner, everyone can change. That's why I chose journalism, we need power to change something and give our voice to the world.'*

In this chapter Illaveni finds herself in an ambivalent situation: on the one hand she is a proponent of gender equality and freedom for women, serving as a role model for both her neighbours but also for her two daughters. On the other hand she is a parent in a

society which expects women to fulfil their traditional gender roles and promotes inequality. Illaveni, is on the one hand struggling to accept her daughters seeking multiple identifications with others, outside the social structures, she is so aware of, 'play[ing] a role in either facilitating or blocking attempts to behave in an agentic manner' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Instead of choosing who you want to be in a particular social situations, Illaveni is aware she and her family are part of a larger framework in which gender, race, class, caste, religion, education, life cycle, geography and marital status intersect, and define if a women can find her inclusion (or exclusion) in different spheres in an urban Indian society. And due to her status as a divorced and re-married woman, who has achieved a middle class status, she is always aware to position herself according to her audience, aware of dominant ideologies pertaining to gender, caste and class differences. Illaveni explains, when she would allow her daughters freedom, and that freedom would enable them to make mistakes, it would reflect on the whole family and harm their position (and chances in the marriage market) in their society. Therefore the expectations related to the gendered and class identities, of her daughters, as part of a Tamil femininity, intersect with their age. Being a minor is a social marker, which reinforces their other identities, but more importantly they intersects with cultural markers of belonging and non-belonging.

Conclusion

'The art of longing and the art of belonging must be experienced in life'

Yogi Tea

In this thesis '*The Art of Longing and Belonging: Kolam as a Reflection of Women's Complex Relations with Identity and Power in Contemporary India',* kolam practices were analysed through a performative perspective, and proposed as a metaphor to understand how middle class women in urban India find belonging in a society which is characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations and value systems. Especially since 'identity itself is today no longer a fixed condition, but a continually re-negotiable site of individual expression, belonging offers an equally flexible concept that can accommodate the transitory nature of contemporary existence' (Leach 2005:12). In contemporary India, which has seen rapid socio-economic transformations, kolam can help women to identify themselves as being female, being Tamil, but also express their caste or class belonging.

By analysing both micro levels, everyday lives and local communities in both Chennai and rural Tamil Nadu, and macro levels, addressing imagined Tamil identity, caste and class belonging, I have argued that in the negotiation of their inclusion, women are, just like the self-contained dots in a kolam, part of a larger framework, in which gender, class and caste intersect. In these multiple spheres of influence, the critical interplay between an actor and existing power structures were highlighted. Trying to exemplify how both kolam practices, but also external appearances, are connected to an idealized gendered, class and caste identity, which may contribute to inequalities and oppression, I hope to have offered a perspective regarding the complexities of intersectional identities as well as the role of power, as women are bound to the audience they are allowed to perform their identities and need to negotiate between different identities, as every occasion demands a different way to act and dress. These intersectional plays of identity

are laden with responsibilities and sacrifices, keeping both their families and society content, because when women won't conform to these expectations, it won't just affect them personally, but it will affect the whole family or even the whole community, since gender relations and identities in Tamil Nadu are located within the communal rather than individual space limiting them with many societal constraints.

As feminist philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff (1991) argues, part of the problem of speaking for others is that none of us can transcend our social and cultural location. 'The practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for (Alcoff 1991:234). By using an analysis which acknowledges the dynamic, complex and multi-faceted realities women face in their everyday experiences in a world, characterized by change and uncertainty, this thesis tried to acknowledge that, what subjects are, what they may have suffered or still suffer, how they find belonging or what they long to be, is both multifaceted and contradictory, and is constructed along different power axes. In this sense, our longings, are related to our belongings in complicated and ambiguous ways . As I tried to demonstrate, the critical interplay between belonging and longing to be part and gain inclusion are inextricably linked, and social markers, like kolam and external appearances, can provide or prohibit access, as it may form a restriction for those who don't have sufficient social and cultural capital to cope within spaces where they are unwelcome. Based on the experiences of Illaveni, Warshana, Radhika and Saaruji, I hope to have demonstrated how women constantly need to construct and manage their identities in order to negotiate their inclusion, tackle forms of exclusion, as these social markers may distinguish insiders from outsiders.

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Appendix

i. Formal Interviews

Gender	Age	Area	Class	Marital status	Interview
F	38	Chennai: Thirivanmiyur	Middle Class	Married	20-02-2013 14-03-2013
F	19	Chennai: Thirivanmiyur	Middle Class	Unmarried	23-02-2013 10-04-2013
F	53	Chennai: Adyar	Higher Class	Married	23-02-2013
F	32	Chennai: Airport	Middle Class	Married	24-02-2013 17-03-2013
F	53	Chennai: Thirivanmiyur	Middle Class	Married	26-02-2013 18-03-2013
F	31	Chennai: Adyar	Higher Class	Married	03-03-2013
F	28	Chennai: Thirivanmiyur	Middle Class	Married	05-03-2013 15-03-2013
F	21	Chennai: Thirivanmiyur	Middle Class	Unmarried	17-03-2013 15-04-2013
F	25	Chennai: Besant Nagar & Bangalore	Middle Class	Married	18-03-2013 21-03-2013
F	17	Chennai: Saidapet	Lower Middle Class	Unmarried	20-03-2013
F	20	Chennai: Saidapet	Lower Middle Class	Unmarried	11-04-2013
F	18	Chennai: Saidapet	Middle Class	Unmarried	11-04-2013
M	26	Chennai: Saidapet	Middle Class	Unmarried	12-04-2013
F	36	Chennai: North	Lower Middle Class	Married	14-04-2013
F	30	Chennai: North	Lower Class	Married	14-04-2013
M	38	Chennai: North	Lower Middle Class	Married	14-04-2013
F	14	Chennai: North	Lower Middle Class	Unmarried	14-04-2013
F	?	Chennai: North	Lower Middle Class	Married	15-04-2013
F	17	Chennai Besant Nagar	Lower Class	Unmarried	15-04-2013
F	15	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class	Unmarried	16-04-2013
M	20	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class	Unmarried	16-04-2013
M	22	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class	Unmarried	16-04-2013

ii. Focus Group Discussions

Women's meeting Chennai (urban Tamil Nadu) 16-04-2013			
Gender	Age	Area	Class
F	40	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class
F	45	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class
F	27	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class
F	60	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class
F	25	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class
F	50	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class
F	43	Chennai: Besant Nagar Slum Area	Lower Class

Palani (rural Tamil Nadu)					
Women's meeting: 28-03-2013		Men's meeting: 29-03-2013		Women's meeting: 29-03-2013	
Gender	Age	Gender	Age	Gender	Age
F	38	M	50	F	65
F	38	M	62	F	40
F	38	M	51	F	43
F	37	M	59	F	47
F	55	M	59	F	40
F	46			F	44
F	22			F	59
F	37			F	51

iii. KCG Women's Conference

Theme: *'Passion and Purpose: We can, so we will!'*

Location: *KCG College of Technology, Karapakkam, Chennai*

Date: *March 16th 2013*

Panel discussions participants & quotations	
Elisabeth Verghese (chair)	• Every man is a success and no man a failure. Only through education we can empower women. • You can only find your purpose by following your passion • Our accomplishment is not complete without the empowerment of rural and underprivileged women •
Sharmistha Mukherjee (dancer)	• People's voice creates a platform for change • Follow your passion and reach your goals • We need gender sensitization with educational empowerment in order for women to fulfil their dreams. • We need to include everybody in our society , every member. •
Rachel O'Hara (vice Counsil US Embassy)	• Equally empowerment through political participation • Women's participation works best when people work together and put in their individual qualities. • No country can get ahead if it leaves half of the population behind (John Kerry) • We can, so we will. •
Gautami Tadimalla (actress)	• Don't become a victim of your own and others'expectations • Life is meant to be lived • The whole world is available to you • You are subjected to expectations from society, find what and what not to do. Only do it when you have the passion to pursue. • About empowerment through entrepreneurship: • Every woman is an entrepreneur • When you step forward and you keep your head up high, and all the passion you have, you are an entrepreneur. Whatever it is what you want, take your time, figure yourself out, do what is right, for all different kinds of women. •
Jane Ram (Radio DJ)	• Grow, flourish, breathe, be beautiful • Indian society is measured by marks and achievements. Do something different, stay true to your heart.
V.R. Devika (cultural activist)	• Gender bias in every class of society • We can't keep up with the development of society • Women are strong • The situation hasn't changed for women • Women fight every day to give their children a better life. • Please remember that everyone is like you and me • Her mother told her, she doesn't have to follow any rules. Listen to your own heart, break every rule. • Advise: others try to make you feel down, be safe and confident and don't care about others.
Sangeeta Isvaran (dancer, social worker)	• Women are an incarnation of temptation, we have to work hard to tempt other. A good woman does not look men in their eyes, we keep our eyes and heads down. (about a women covered in veils in Africa) • An artists had to train herself to observe other people, social workers and reformers from within. • Women cut themselves off the rest of the world, that really is the brainwashing • Passion and purpose isn't enough it is about empathy. • There are five kinds of energy, where the hand goes the arm follows, where the mind

	goes, the heart follows, intellectual, spiritual and emotional. • Sensory intelligence • It is a case of hierarchy, age, gender and caste. Don't put yourself in the role of a victim. Instead put yourself out there. Take strength and encourage young people and civil society today to develop. You have to develop.
Mowshimkka Renganathan (Founder Bhojan Atwes Foundation NGO)	• Our truest life is when we are in our dreams awake Henry Thoreau • Mowshimkka gave the example of the gender bias in society. In school there are 5 different relatives (mother, daughter, brother, grandfather and father) in one family. Students have to choose which task applies to which relative. In this example the mother is awarded the task of sweeping. • Girls think why study? I will become a mother. That's why we need to educate them and make them aware how precious and gifted they are. • An example of the gender bias, is that in one family the mental state of the mother is reflected through the health of the daughter. When she gets cancer, the mother doesn't want to invest in the health because it is only a girl. • Comfort zone (very small circle) and the place where all the magic happens (very big circle) • What's done to children, is done to society. • The children which are almost broken by the world become the adults most like to change it. (Frank Warren)
Kalki Subramaniam (transgender, Sadohari Foundation)	• Trans women have no glass ceiling, but a concrete one. We have to break that. • The love of the mothers is so important for children, this will influence the persons they will become in their futures. You will carry what your childhood has taught you wherever you go. • I am still a village girl, I have the spirit of my village in my heart, it defines the person I am today. • Break the narrow mindedness of gender, legalisation of transgender. We need equality for all India's citizens. There is a need to sensitize legal laws and services.
Maalavika Manoj (singer-songwriter)	• I don't see my work as a commitment • Comfortably moving out of your comfort zone • Be an entertainer • Every women is an entrepreneur, we don't realize it. •
CSS Latha (journalist)	• In this economy , every field is a tremendous competition, especially for women • Journalism is a field we have done very well for ourselves • The influence of the mother is visible in our think, in the way we have grown up • The impact of the women in this society starts at home • We must consider ourselves as the privileged class, instead as the underprivileged. • Don't allow men to dominate you. Why do you feel so small? • The glass ceiling is breakable • Don't have the attitude to let anyone face you down. Don't allow other to hurt you.
Ira Trivedi (novelist, speaker, Yogi)	• It is so difficult to be who you are today, especially for the Young Indian woman • If you obey all the rules, you miss out all the fun.
Shymalia Ananand (founder of Treasure magazine)	• Empowerment of women, equality • A woman's job is the most important job in the world • We need to educate our girls how to be independent, to have a say in their own household.