

Women's Lives, Women's Stories:  
Examining Caste Through Life History Interviews in Baroda

Dissertation

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By

Varsha Sanjeev Chitnis

Graduate Program in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:

Mytheli Sreenivas, Advisor  
Jill Bystydzienski  
Amy Shuman  
Shannon Winnubst

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## **Abstract**

This project rethinks caste by incorporating the voices and experiences of upper caste women. I use life history method to examine the intersections of caste, class and gender in the lives of Marathi-speaking, upper caste women in the city of Baroda, in Western Indian state of Gujarat. In examining these life history narratives, I identify domesticity as one of the central organizing principles of both caste and gender, and examine the linkages between gender, caste, sexuality and labor as aspects of the ideology of domesticity. I argue that caste-based inequalities are sustained through the normalization of domestic relationships and domesticity, and call for the incorporation of the institutions of the family, marriage, labor, sexuality and domesticity within the purview of caste and anti-caste theories in contemporary India. In emphasizing the importance of domesticity to the sustenance of gender and caste hierarchies, this project draws attention to the political nature of domestic spaces and relationships.

## **Dedication**

Dedicated to the memory of  
My grandmother, Leela Chitnis and my aunt, Hemalata Bendre,  
who inspired this project

and

My grandfather, Govind Keshav Chitnis,  
historian, author, thinker, and a lifelong inspiration.

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## **Vita**

1997.....	B.A. Political Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
1999.....	M.A. Political Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
2001-2003 .....	Teaching/Research Assistant, Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology, Gandhinagar
2004 .....	Ph.D. Political Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
2004-2006 .....	Assistant Professor of Political Science, Gujarat National Law University, Gandhinagar
2006-2008 .....	Visiting Research Scholar, Levin College of Law, University of Florida
2008-2014 .....	Graduate Research and Teaching Associate, The Ohio State University



## Awards

Dr. Gordon P.K. Chu Memorial Award for International Travel: The Ohio State University, 2011-2012.

Elizabeth D. Gee Grant for Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Research: The Ohio State University, 2011.

University Research Fellowship for Ph.D.: The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, 2000-2001.

## Publications

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## Fields of Study

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## **Introduction: Rethinking Caste and Caste Epistemologies**

Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organising principles of the brahmanical social order.

-Uma Chakravarti<sup>1</sup>

[T]he way we understand the political present is framed as much by the categories of analysis we use as they are by socio-political events and processes.

- Anupama Rao<sup>2</sup>

This project is an attempt to rethink caste by incorporating the voices and experiences of upper caste women within the epistemology of caste. Using life history interview as a method I examine the ways in which caste is experienced by Marathi-speaking upper caste, middle-class women, specifically women from the Brahman and Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu (CKP) castes in Baroda (Vadodara), Gujarat. In examining the intersections of caste, class and gender vis-à-vis the lives of these women,<sup>3</sup> I identify domesticity as a central tenet of both caste and gender hierarchies and argue for its incorporation within the theories of caste in India. The ideology of domesticity informs the ways in which both caste and gender hierarchies are organized and sustained. Accordingly I posit it as a function not only of gender but also of caste and class. The chapters in this dissertation investigate the various meanings, implications and significance of domesticity and the domestic as evidenced in the life history narratives of my participants. My research attempts to understand the role of the discourse of

domesticity in the interplay between caste, class and gender. How does domesticity function as a way of sustaining upper caste privileges as well as gender subordination for women? To what extent and in what ways does the binary of domestic/non-domestic affect women's autonomy and agency in both these spaces? What roles do caste and the family play in the creation of public and private spaces for (upper caste) women? How do they negotiate the restrictions that domesticity places upon them with the specific gender and caste privileges available to them? In what ways do they attempt to rethink and redefine domestic space and domestic relationships? What does such rethinking contribute to the discourse on domesticity and more broadly to a rethinking of caste? These are some of the questions around which the subsequent chapters are built. I argue that the incorporation of upper caste women's voices can alter the ways that caste has been understood and theorized. In recording the voices of women (quite literally) I highlight the importance of women in understanding caste structures and caste ideologies.

### ***Why Upper Caste Women? Gender and Caste Epistemology***

Before proceeding any further I want to clarify that I use 'upper caste women' not as an essentialized subject position but rather to mean "women of the upper castes." To that extent I use it as a shorthand to refer to those women who consider themselves belonging to upper/higher or *savarna* castes. Their epistemic contributions are derived not from their subject position as upper caste women, but rather, from the ways in which they understand and define themselves vis-à-vis caste and gender in their narratives; from the subjectivities they construct for themselves in these narratives. Here I draw on feminist scholarship to make a distinction between subject position and subjectivity.

Leslie Bloom (1996, 194) has defined subject position as “sociocultural categories, such as ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation.” On the other hand, subjectivity refers to an understanding of the self that is often influenced by our subject position. Bloom argues: “As individuals, we can choose to accept and use them [the above-mentioned sociocultural categories], subvert them or resist them. They are socially constructed, unstable categories; however, they profoundly influence our subjectivity because of the importance of language and social interactions in the production of subjectivity” (1996, 194 n.4). In her examination of “nonunitary subjectivity” in women’s narratives, Bloom (1996) argues that a nonunitary or fragmented self does not imply “a loss of self” but rather allows the possibility to investigate the understanding of self as historically located and culturally produced. Thus, I examine in this project, the ways in which the subjectivities of these *savarna* women are contextualized within the structures of gender and caste, and what these can contribute to an analysis of gender, caste and class in India. An emphasis on subjectivity rather than subject position allows me to resist essentializing these experiences within the category of “upper caste women” (Scott, 1991)

This work is theoretically and historically situated within anti-caste scholarship and Dalitbahujan<sup>4</sup> feminist activism and scholarship. Therefore, this work can be considered as an extension of and a response to the arguments made by anti-caste scholars like Rege (2006) that the feminist interrogation of gender and caste requires *all* women to be attentive to the histories of gender, caste and class. Thus, I begin this

section with an examination of the contributions of Dalitbahujan and Dalitbahujan feminist discourses to the epistemology of caste.

As highlighted in the epigraph above, gender and caste are the twin pillars on which the institution of upper caste patriarchy has thrived in India. Feminist engagement with caste and gender has opened up new lines of inquiry with regard to the role of caste in sustaining women's subordination, and of the centrality of women to the sustenance of caste. Feminist scholars like Uma Chakravarti (1990; 1993a; 1993b; 1995) provided the theoretical ground for an examination of caste and gender hierarchies in India. In her exploration of caste in ancient India, she argues that the ideological construction of womanhood, predicated upon the control and regulation of female sexuality, has been central to the caste system (1993a). Similarly, during contemporary time female sexuality and gender norms have been used to create gendered spaces, and to mark the boundaries of caste (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1991). However, until the early 1990s caste was not a matter of critical concern within the feminist movement and scholarship in India.<sup>5</sup> The lower caste political movements that began in the mid-1980s and which had successfully reformulated caste as a political identity by the 1990s (Menon 2004), as well as the rise and visibility of Dalit feminism (activism and theory) impelled a rethinking of caste, class and gender. Anti-caste and feminist discourses began to unravel the problematic nature of the secular citizen of India who had remained unmarked by caste and class. The Indian women's movement had been successful in creating a gendered subjecthood for women; however this subject of feminist politics had remained unmarked by caste and class (Tharu and Niranjana 1994; Rege 1996; Rao 2003; Menon 2004). At the same time,



Dalitbahun discourses also challenged the epistemology of caste by arguing that there had been a distance between theoretical understandings of caste and the ways in which it was experienced by the caste subalterns. This elision was visible in both anthropological works like that of Louis Dumont (1970) and sociological explorations on caste. M.N. Srinivas (1962, 5), for instance, makes a distinction between “caste at the political level and caste at the social and ritual level” in order to emphasize the difference between “caste as an endogamous and ritual unit, and the caste-like units which are so active in politics and administration in modern India.” Such distinction between the ritual and the political erases histories of anti-caste movements, which have resulted in the rise of caste identity in politics. In her study of the emergence of the Dalit political subject, Anupama Rao (2009, xi) begins her book with a refutation of this division between theory and politics: “It [the book] is an account of how the stigma of being ‘untouchable’ was redefined as an identity about historically specific forms of suffering and exclusion, and of how this identity eventually became politically powerful.” Drawing on anti-caste activism in Maharashtra, she explores the journey through which Dalit became a political and social identity – her book is an account of *becoming Dalit*.

Similarly, when Andre Beteille (1996, 45) contends that “what people mean by caste in day-to-day life is different from the meanings it has in the traditional literature, or from what people consider to be its traditional and orthodox meanings,” he is pointing to the exclusion of lived experiences from the theoretical and dominant understanding of caste. However, it is this hegemonic understanding of caste that is visible as “theory” in academic and scholarly writing, while the “popular” understandings of caste and caste

identity that have been made visible through ethnographic work are “relegated” to the domain of the empirical.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, what is posited as epistemology of caste remains the worldview of the political and economic elite who perceive epistemology as divorced from empirical fieldwork. The cultural hierarchy in academic scholarship that relegates empiricism to the level of non-theory thus replicates the hierarchy of castes (Guru 2002). Put differently, the distance between theory and empiricism vis-à-vis caste is the distance between upper and lower castes. Not only has this resulted in the marginalization of Dalit activism and scholarship, but it has also marginalized feminist scholarship as presenting the worldview of women alone. Thus the subject of caste epistemology is rendered neutral, abstract and unmarked, while simultaneously retaining its upper caste and masculine orientations. A consequence of such marginalization is the absence of these views from what are seen as “canonical” works on the subject. For example, Rege (2006, 1-2) observes that Indian sociology has confined the study of caste to villages, and rituals and rites, and in the process has suggested the superficiality and irrelevance of caste to urban life. Similarly Kalpana Kannabiran (2001) argues that “caste as a knowledge system in sociology has tended to follow the well-worn path of a ‘depoliticised’ social anthropology, creating sharp disjunctures between social practice and knowledge systems.” This has created a distance between what is seen as “caste” and located in society and social institutions (that which is theorized), and “the *politics* of caste” which is located within anti-caste activism. Caste epistemology thus represents the hierarchy of theoretical/academic knowledge (and its production) over lived experiences.

In the early 1990s, caste identities remerged in the public sphere as powerful political identities. Nationalist modernity had rendered “the public expression of caste illegitimate” by projecting it as “the ‘other’ of the modern” (Rege 2006, 31). Such forced regression of caste to the private sphere (as a thing of the past and hence unsuited for modern democratic institutions) in independent India made caste-based inequalities and injustices invisible and irrelevant.<sup>7</sup> According to Rajni Kothari (1994), one of India’s foremost scholars on caste and politics, the rise of caste in politics represents a failure of the processes of democratization, secularism and the discourses of development in India.<sup>8</sup> The rise of caste in politics also points to the inadequacies, Kothari (1994, 1589) argues, of the “ideological models of dealing with oppression of the poor and the discriminated sections of society.” This political visibility of caste represents a decline in reliance on the state for improving one’s socio-political and economic conditions, and taking the task into one’s hands by forging a new identity based on caste. In addition, issues like the anti-Mandal agitations<sup>9</sup> and the debate over the Women’s Reservation Bill<sup>10</sup> also highlighted the interconnected of gender and caste to Indian feminism (Tharu and Niranjana 1994; John 2000; Menon 2000).

The new scholarship that emerged out of Dalitbahujan activism provided a new theoretical and philosophical framework for the rethinking of caste. The existing framework was inadequate and “irrelevant” as Kothari (1994) argues, because although it was expected to explain the oppression and deprivation of the lower castes and classes, it was devoid of the voices of people from these classes. That is, the epistemology of caste was drawn from the worldview of the dominant castes, wherein the caste system was

explained as (voluntary) division of labor, or as associated with rituals, customs and practices, which justified not only the division between castes but also the hierarchy among them. However, when lower caste voices began to be inserted into these epistemologies, they highlighted one of the key elements of the caste system: violence. Violence as a means of ensuring socio-political and economic domination has been salient to the caste system, but was never identified as such within the dominant perspectives on caste. It is only with the spread of Dalit activism and the exponential rise of Dalit as a political identity, that violence has been inserted into caste epistemology and is understood “as a dominant mode of sociality between castes” (Rao 2011, 615).

In this regard the contributions of Dalit feminist<sup>11</sup> discourses have provided crucial insights for a rethinking of caste epistemology. Dalit feminism illustrates the impossibility of a caste position that is also not simultaneously classed and gendered. As Rege (2006, 3) contends, since the early 1990s Dalit feminist critiques have “challenged the conceptions of ‘genderless caste’ and ‘casteless gender.’” Gopal Guru (1995), a prominent Dalit intellectual described the rise of the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) in 1995 as a response to the limitations of both feminist and Dalit movements in addressing the issues facing Dalit women. He identifies their need to “talk differently” as a “discourse of dissent” which highlights Dalit women’s unique social location that subjects them to two forms of patriarchies simultaneously – “a brahmanical form of patriarchy that deeply stigmatizes Dalit women because of their caste status, as well as the more intimate forms of control by Dalit men over the sexual and economic labor of “their” women” (Rao 2003, 1). Rao (2003, 5; emphasis in original) argues that

Dalitbahujan feminists, drawing on their experiences, call for “the re-examination of *gender relations as fundamental to the broader ideologies of caste*.” Such reexamination is important in order to understand the changing contexts of gender inequality and sexual subordination in the light of the constantly changing and multiple forms of caste patriarchy. It also suggests the need to move beyond mere inclusion and rethink how gender relations are “inflected by multiple and overlapping patriarchies of caste communities that produce forms of vulnerability that require analysis” (Rao 2003, 5). Reexamination of gender relations also impels a rethinking of the ideological constructions of gender and its material consequences as experienced by women. It demands the reexamination of caste vis-à-vis labor and sexual economies. I identify two interrelated ways in which Dalitbahujan feminism has contributed to the rethinking of caste epistemology: first, by highlighting the daily experiences of untouchability, survival and economic deprivation; and second, by emphasizing sexual violence as integral to both caste and gender subjectivities.

The first important way in which Dalitbahujan feminism has contributed to a rethinking of caste is by emphasizing the divide between “caste as an ideology” for the upper castes versus “caste as material reality” for lower castes. While the first and second waves of Indian feminism focused on issues of status/position of women, Dalit feminism highlighted the survival aspect of caste. Dalit women’s lives exemplify the concurrence of caste and class in India which has pushed them to the margins of the society (Malik 1999). Thus, issues of daily survival like fetching water, providing food for the family, and challenging the cheap and easy availability of arrack are more pressing than the focus

on status, position or access to opportunities as seen in the early initiatives of the Indian women's movement (Rege 1996). In other words, survival and subsistence are more important issues for Dalit women than childcare or healthcare – which are more important to upper caste and/or urban women (Malik 1999). Moreover, although untouchability has been outlawed by the Constitution, the practice of untouchability still afflicts Dalit women's lives. Dalit settlements are located on the periphery of the village; they are denied access to wells in the village, their access to common grazing lands is restricted by upper caste members of the village, and furthermore such exclusions are backed by threats of violence (Sonalkar 2008).<sup>12</sup>

In addition to struggling for daily livelihood, Dalit women also bear the unequal burden of domestic labor within their own families. Some of the problems that Dalit women face daily are lack of access to water, fuel sources, and sanitation facilities, which in turn result in humiliation and instances of violence (Malik 1999). Thus, while caste determines the division of labor in society based on the relations of production, it is important that this division also be understood in terms of the *sexual division of labor* and the *division of sexual labor* (Rao 2003) – the latter having been occluded within “mainstream” feminist concerns. As Rao (2003, 5) argues, “The symbolic economies of gender and sexuality and the material reality of economic dispossession of Dalit women therefore need to be viewed together.”

But economic concerns alone do not characterize Dalit women's existence. Rege (1996) observes that the second wave of the Indian women's movement readily recognized the divide between upper caste women's concerns – for example sexual

violence – and lower caste women’s issues which were seen as centered on economic deprivation and survival. Dalitbahujan feminism called attention to the falsity of this divide by demonstrating the connections between untouchability, economic deprivation and caste based violence against women. Sexual violence had been at the forefront in the agenda of the women’s movement since the 1980s, but Dalit feminism argued that caste-based sexual violence should be viewed in a category of its own. Caste-based sexual violence works to hide the sexual humiliation that women face, while at the same time “normalizing” it as an aspect of caste hierarchy. In examining the sexual politics of caste in Sirasgoan in Maharashtra, Rao (2009) argues that acts of collective sexual violence aimed at women of the lower castes like rape, and the stripping and parading of women, are specifically gendered in their intent. However, its categorization as *caste* violence obfuscates its gendered nature. Rao (2009) contends that such intimate form of violence is central in the production of the stigmatized existence of lower caste women. She further observes that this “uncertain status of sexual violence as caste violence [is] derived from the structures of caste patriarchy that justified it, and from its association with practices of secrecy and intimacy” (Rao 2009, 222-3). Thus sexual violence serves “a pedagogical function in socializing men and women Dalit and caste Hindu alike, into caste norms” (Rao 2009, 234). For Dalit women this means a reiteration of stigmatized existence along the lines of both gender and caste, thereby creating sexual violence as central to a gendered Dalit experience. Furthermore, since the maintenance of caste hierarchy is contingent on gender hierarchy, caste status, which is determined through “manhood,” is defined through the control of women (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1991).

Thus, ultimate social control can be illustrated through the control of women of other castes. Sexual violence thus, serves a central function in the maintenance of caste hierarchy. Thus, Rege (1996, 35) argues, violence cannot be seen as “either a ‘caste’ issue or a ‘gender’ issue, but it must be located in the links between the two.” These insights from Dalit feminism challenged (upper) caste epistemology by unraveling the inadequacy of the existing categories of analysis: here, gender and caste. Highlighting the relationship between feminist knowledge production and feminist practice Rao (2003, 6) contends, “The dialectic relation suggests that the way we understand the political present is framed as much by the categories of analysis we use as they are by socio-political events and processes.”

However, even as gender became imbricated with caste and class in feminist debates, it soon became evident that it was “lower caste women” who became encumbered with caste while “upper caste women” still remained an unmarked gendered category. In other words, the “burden of caste” (as an identity and an epistemic position) was borne only by lower caste women. In her critique of the epistemological and pedagogical practices in sociology, especially feminist sociology in India Sharmila Rege (2006, 3-4) strongly argues,

This lack of engagement cannot be dismissed easily; either by the savarna [upper caste] feminist justification of being ‘frozen in guilt’ (what can ‘we’ say now, let ‘them’ [lower caste and dalit women] speak) or by a resigned dalit feminist position that sees a ‘fit case of identities and ideological positions’ (brahman and ‘upper caste’ women will be brahmanical). The former assumes that caste is solely the concern of dalit women and bypasses the need for all women to



interrogate the complex histories of caste and gender oppression. The latter resigns itself to assuming the impossibility of transcending caste identities, thereby amounting to a slippage between brahman and brahmanical and non-brahman and non-brahmanical.

Thus although, as Guru (1995) argues, Dalit women have been identified as having unique epistemic advantage in challenging both gender and caste, it is also important to stress that the omission of upper caste women's subjectivities from the understandings of caste leads to familiar patterns of difference and domination that restrict the burden of caste to lower caste and Dalit women. Furthermore, it is also important that female subjectivities (like all other subjectivities) be identified as multiple, fractured and shifting. For this reason, an upper caste female subject position cannot be seen as either essentialized or essentializing. And it is through denouncing this essentialism that feminist theory can envision alternate realities that challenge both gender and caste patriarchies.

In addition, acknowledging diversity in the subjectivities of upper caste women enables us to see the diversity in Dalit and lower caste subjectivities, such that the "lower caste/Dalit woman" does not become "the authentic" representation of victimhood of both caste- and sexist patriarchies. I illustrate this by drawing on the recent case of the rape and murder of two lower caste teenage girls in Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh. Outrage against this rape poured out in journalistic media, on social media and in the form of several protests across the country. However, in a poignant essay written on the website *Savari* (founded and authored by "adivasi, bahun and dalit women") Shurti Herbert (2014) indicated that not only did the media and the protestors (both online and

on the streets) wrongly identify the girls as *Dalit* (they belonged to the lower caste Maurya community), but also that the fact of their murder was overridden by protests against their rape. Quoting rather lengthily from Herbert (2014):

What does this mean – this immediate identification of any oppressed community with Dalit, and highlighting only rape in what is a case of both rape and murder? This is a conscious erasure of the identity of the girls, and nothing but a great lie is being perpetuated in the name of the dead. Any genuine engagement would have been based on the simple basic fact – of doing justice to the girls, to the lives they lived and the experience they underwent by locating them honestly.... What this misrepresentation also indicates is that many writers and protesters are eager to put the victims in an analytical category, apparently for the sake of writing and protesting. This exposes a lack of investment of thought into the facts surrounding the case. That the narratives remained unchanged despite the actual facts being available show a clear unwillingness to engage with caste-atrocity beyond a peripheral level, an unwillingness to locate the history of this violence in the Indian society, and an eagerness to protest at the cost of erasure of the lives of the girls and the history of the community. These ways of opting for convenient and easily available analytical frameworks show nothing but disinterest in having an honest engagement with caste atrocities.

Therefore, if on the one hand, “upper caste woman” still remains an unmarked subject position, on the other, the lumping of all lower castes and classes as *Dalit* threatens to erase the specific histories of gender and caste atrocities. Thus, it is not that upper caste women’s voices have not found a place in feminist theorizations but rather that these experiences have not been contextualized within the histories of gender and caste. As

Rege (2006, 4) argues, “A large part of the feminist discourse of experience [in India] has been an autobiography of the upper caste woman, her conflict with tradition [as represented by a caste society] and her desire to be modern.” To recast upper caste women as agents encumbered by caste is to establish both authority and responsibility. If they stand to gain from the caste system that privileges them, they are still inextricably entrenched within the same patriarchy that is upper caste. Furthermore, as Rao (2009, 9) argues, there is a disconnect between caste epistemology and the “existential lifeworlds” of caste subalterns. This disconnect also extends to those aspects of the “lifeworlds” of upper caste women that have been made invisible and/or irrelevant to an upper caste masculinist caste epistemology.

Identifying the *gendered* subjectivities of upper caste women has enabled feminist scholars to examine the patriarchal elements of caste and women’s challenges to them. However identifying the *caste* subjectivities of upper caste women will enable us to investigate the ways that women benefit from and participate in the perpetuation of caste especially vis-à-vis lower caste men and women. It can also provide insights into the ways in which these women might pose a challenge to the caste structure. Do the challenges posed by upper caste women to (upper) caste patriarchy in any way change or alter the nature of caste? Does their complicity within familial and caste patriarchies affect caste and gender patriarchies for women (and men) of the lower castes? Insisting on both gendered *and* caste subjectivities of upper caste women enables us to address these questions. These questions also provide insights for rethinking the epistemology of caste that has ignored such intersectional subjectivities of upper caste women. More

broadly, conceptualizing upper caste women as subjects of both feminist *and* caste politics also lends itself to the rethinking of difference and domination in India.

### ***Research Method and Caste Epistemology***

In using life history as a method, I argue that methodology is an important aspect of the questions I am posing in this project. In identifying the lacunae in the epistemology of caste, I contend that directing adequate attention to the ways in which caste is approached is equally important. In other words, challenging the *ways* in which knowledge around caste has been produced and institutionalized is as important as challenging the *content* of that knowledge. Thus, life history is more than a method in this project; I use it as an epistemological tool. By “epistemology of caste” I mean the ways in which or the processes through which theoretical understandings and knowledge about caste are produced and circulated. When I say that my use of life history method is significant as an epistemological tool, I posit that the method itself has the potential to change the course and context of understandings of caste. This work challenges the binary created between theory and empiricism in Indian social science by combining method with epistemology (Guru 2002; Kannabiran 2001; Patel 2006). I argue that the life history narratives of my participants actually provide a way of rethinking caste and as such should be accounted for within the understandings of caste. It provides the means of translating experience into epistemology.

Life history method provides a counter-discourse to the dominant narratives of history. As personal narratives, studies in life history are based in critical traditions like Marxism, feminism, subaltern studies and queer theory, and challenge the universalized

and generalized nature of epistemology. Used as a feminist method, life history bridges the epistemological gap between the subject and the object, and calls attention to the processes of power that are involved in the production of knowledges. It recognizes the possibility of multiplicity of knowledges while also challenging the hierarchy and hegemony that characterize such knowledges. Moreover, the narrative structure of life history interviews allows for subjectivities that are in flux and for a fluid self that is constantly in the making during the process of narration. According to Richard Bauman (1986, 2), narratives are “doubly anchored in human events” and are “keyed to both the events in which they are told and to the events that they recount”. In this manner, life history straddles two temporalities and provides the opportunity to explore the relationship between the narrative, the narrated event, and the narrator: even as the narrator recollects the details of a past event, the narrative is determined by how “she experiences, remembers and interprets historical events” at the present moment (Maynes et.al. 2008, 3). In her use of autobiography or life stories in the examination of “why women’s labor eludes worth and value” Mary John (2013) has similarly noted the distinction between the narrating and the narrated self. Furthermore, personal narratives emerge in particular historic and institutional contexts and are rooted in “culturally specific narrative conventions” (Maynes et.al. 2008). Thus life history seeks to contextualize and historicize both the narration and the narrator’s subjectivity. In the context of this project, exploring my participants’ subjectivities within the structure of a narrative enabled me to contextualize their life stories as historically located and culturally produced and performed acts, which might be cast in a different mold if told to

me at another time and place. That is, in the process of narration my participants are able to reflect on their past as well as participate in the construction of the self that is presented before me in the interviews.

At the same time, as Arnold and Blackburn (2004, 4) argue, life his/stories are not the imaginings of the minds of the narrators but rather “meaningful explorations of life which reveal emotional and social realities that otherwise elude identification and explanation.” Similarly in her examination of the life of aging widows in Bengal through life stories, Sarah Lamb (2001, 20) states that “life stories are interesting and valuable in themselves because they constitute a unique kind of encapsulated performance by which an actor is involved in the meaningful creation of a life world.” Life history thus provides the opportunity of investigating a “socially embedded self” which is described through “culturally specific narrative forms” (Maynes et.al. 2008, 2). In telling a “meaningful” story about her life and her past, the individual is involved in the process of making sense of the world around her. Life history also provides the individual with a platform to critique some of the “broader social and cultural systems” (Lamb 2001, 20). The narrative structure allows my participants to incorporate critiques – of caste, gender and familial hierarchies – within the “story” of their lives. Furthermore the use of reported speech within the narrative format facilitates such critiques by shifting the authority away from the narrator while still posing a challenge to the existing structures of inequality. Thus, as a performative act, it allows for a multiplicity of voices and authority within the narrative. Therefore, on the one hand, the performative aspect of the narrative enables women to establish their agency within the narrative and the narration; on the other hand,

it also allows for contradictions within the narrative. Almost all of my participants began their life story by prefacing that they had had extremely ordinary lives and that they doubted they could contribute anything to my study. However, this apprehension is hardly evident in their narratives and in their creation of their own subjectivities. Their authority over the narrative as well as over their telling of it (the narration) comes across prominently. Nevertheless, such apprehension about the value of women's words and their lives is not unfounded. When I was interviewing Malati Kulkarni at her home, the upstairs neighbor stopped by to take a look at the renovations that were being done in her kitchen. Mrs. Kulkarni's husband, Shyam Kulkarni, introduced me to this neighbor and briefly told him about my project, and that I was interviewing his wife. To this, the neighbor reacted by saying that I should be interviewing Mr. Kulkarni instead. Shyam Kulkarni is an author, a prolific speaker and a stand-up comedian known for his wit and satire, although I did not know this at the time of the interview. He is a regular contributor to the CKP caste magazine *Utkarshvrutta*. Thus, according to their neighbor my interview with Malati Kulkarni was futile and he implied that she would not have anything worthwhile to contribute. Furthermore, as one journalistic article recently suggested, women's voices, opinions and knowledge are seen as secondary, indeed incompetent and ineffective when compared to men's (Chemaly 2014). While recommending that I interview Mr. Kulkarni (I did ask him about his life later) the neighbor did not bother to understand what my project was really about. Instead both women (Mrs. Kulkarni and I) were expected to heed to his words irrespective of the relevance of his advice/opinion. Thus life history was even more useful to my work than I

had originally anticipated. Life history gave women voice and authority, and a way of legitimating their experiences and opinions. To me it provided a way of exploring how women's subjectivities are created through social processes and highlighted the relationship between the individual and larger social institutions.

Epistemologically, life histories provide the means of accessing the knowledge that can be acquired only through "intersubjective and dialogic process" (Maynes et.al. 2008, 9). Therefore it values silences, reluctance, hesitation, and non-verbal communication as signs of emotionally difficult or taboo subjects (Maynes et.al. 2008). Accordingly, I have highlighted the contradictions and silences in these narratives as valuable resources for examining the workings of gender and caste patriarchies. At the same time, it was interesting to note that my participants constructed a specific subjectivity for themselves by comparing and contrasting themselves with other subject positions. Furthermore in emphasizing the distinctness of each narrative, I also argue against the possibility of a generalizable or universal theory of caste. The unique though overlapping narratives also suggest the infeasibility of a generalizable "upper caste female subject position." And while this project calls for encumbering upper caste women with caste, rather than creating an identity category for upper caste women, it complicates the possibility of such identity by emphasizing the flexibility and transience of subjectivity and the instability of identity. In this context I argue that it is precisely this non-universality of experience and subjectivity that contributes to the epistemology of caste. That is, since experiences of caste differ, understandings of caste should be able to account for and explain these differences. Moreover, as V. Geetha (2001, 163) has



contended, the translation of experience to epistemology (vis-à-vis modernity in her argument) is always “mediated, recognized, named, defied and challenged in specific ways and through particular means.” Thus, experience is not a “pure” or “raw” resource that can be used to define and redefine epistemology. Rather, as the narratives and my analyses of them suggest, the process of translating experience to epistemology is one that is constructed and mediated. The process is thus both phenomenological and epistemological.

Furthermore, even as I identify domesticity as a common feature in the lives of my participants as upper caste women, it is important to note that the context and extent of this ideology differs in each individual case. The question to consider, then, is what accounts for these differences? What are the conditions of gender, caste and class compositions along with other factors like education, employment, and cultural and religious inclinations that create these differences? And how can these be incorporated within the present understanding of caste? Life history as a method acknowledges the instability of categories of analysis, and allows for their reconfiguration. The use of life history method gives me an opportunity to stretch the contours of the existing categories of analysis (i.e. gender and caste in this context) and to examine the fluidity of selfhood and agency of women within the discursive and material structures of the caste system.

### ***My Participants***

I interviewed ten women for this study. My research participants ranged from 50 to 84 years of age. The oldest among them, Usha Mule, was physically so fit, independent and active that she gave the impression of being in the early 70s. The choice

of participants in this age range was deliberate. On the one hand, these women were able to contribute to the histories of women's lives during early post-independence India; on the other hand, as Paralikar perceptively pointed out in her interview, women of this age are in a better position to assess, criticize and challenge caste, family and/or patriarchy. For this reason, they provide important insights from the perspective of upper caste women who both benefit from their caste status but are also able to reflect upon the limitations that patriarchies of caste, class and family have imposed on them – even when they do not acknowledge them patriarchies.

I used the snowball sampling method for selecting participants for this research. My first participant, with whom I had been in touch before I went to India for the fieldwork was Shubhangini Patankar.<sup>13</sup> I have known her to be a socially active, vocal and dynamic woman, who has also been involved in various women's and feminist activities in Baroda. She is often invited to speak on women's issues and is a member of the *Mahila Mandal* (Women's Group/Association), and *Matru Vatsalya* (Mothers' Association), and an active member of the CKP caste association of Baroda. She is a prolific essayist and a poet and her articles on women's events and issues often appear in the CKP caste association monthly *Utkarshvritta*. She has been on the Board of Directors of the *Bhanumati* Stores (a women operated self-employment store in Baroda which sells freshly prepared snacks and food items), and is the only woman on the Board of Directors of the CKP Co-operative Bank in Baroda. As a part of these various organizations, she has been very vocal in expressing issues and concerns surrounding women's lives and often draws people's attention to the ways in which patriarchal practices have been

naturalized in her caste culture as well as in “Indian” culture. This has led to her being labeled a “feminist” (*strivadi*), which is used as a criticism against her. When I asked her if she is a feminist, she replied that if stating the truth about patriarchy and pointing it out to people makes her a feminist then she accepts being one. Given her involvement in such multifarious organizations and associations she became the perfect person to refer me to other prospective participants. Through her I was introduced to Sushma Marathe. When a friend of mine came to visit me and learned of my project, she referred me to Aparna Athale. Kalpana Paralikar had been known as dynamic woman on my father’s side of the family. Her education and her headship of the Department of Home Science are visible in her personality in the form of confidence and authority. She is also known as a frank and assertive woman who is not afraid to speak her mind. These traits are also seen in the interview and are discussed in detail in the chapters. However, I was not aware of her “multi-cultural” background vis-à-vis caste and she turned out to be the “perfect” candidate who challenged caste in her own ways, as well as “survived” within the caste structure.

Snehalata Raje was my aunt, my mother’s older sister. She was 18 years older than my mother and passed away in March 2013. My interview with her was partially a result of my mother’s and her husband’s gentle insistence that as an accomplished woman in her own right, Raje would have much to contribute to my insights. And she did. Her experiences of growing up, of her education, of her work, marital life and her participation in the spiritual organization *Sri Sathya Sai Seva Samiti* (in which she was an

office bearer for years) have indeed lent much to my analysis of gender vis-à-vis upper caste women.

I first met Shubhada Korde (who is my father's aunt) in the context of finding the books of Anandibai Jayawant, a Marathi writer from Baroda. Anandibai, who was my grandmother's aunt, had lived with Korde and (late) husband (who was Anandibai's nephew) until her death in 1984. Although I did not find any of Anandibai's written work in Korde's home – she showed me a couple of paintings by Anandibai (portraits of Korde's father-in-law) – she did mention her own volunteer work in the *Mahila Sahakari* Bank (Women's Bank) in Baroda, which was founded after the Women's Day celebration in Baroda in 1975. I was intrigued and decided to interview her. She further directed me to Usha Mule and Malati Kulkarni, both of whom had served with her on the Board of the *Mahila Sahakari* Bank. She also introduced me to Saroj Mujumdar. I initially met with Mujumdar in the context of finding Anandibai's books. Mujumdar's grandmother-in-law Akkasaheb had been a lifelong friend and patron of Anandibai and Korde suggested that I might find her books at the Mujumdar home (which I did). But while conversing with Mujumdar, I realized that she had had a dynamic life, and I asked to interview her at another time. Later, I was also able to learn more from her about Akkasaheb's life and her friendship with Anandibai.

I was referred to Shobhana Deshpande by my uncle (Snehalata Raje's husband), who is a member of the CKP Senior Citizen's Association. He brought home a flyer one day for a talk by three accomplished women about their careers, which was being organized by in commemoration of the organization's Women's Day. The title of the

program read: “A talk by and discussion with CKP women who have achieved acclaim for their social activities” (my translation from Marathi). Deshpande’s address and telephone number was listed on the program which helped me contact her. She agreed to participate in my research. And although my intent was to interview women from Baroda, I realized at the beginning of the interview that she had spent her entire life in Mumbai before moving to Baroda after retirement. Her interview provided me with insights on women’s paid work and the relationship between domesticity and space, as I discuss in Chapter 4.

In terms of their caste status, five women are from the Marathi-speaking Brahman communities, while five are from the CKP community. Three women are high school graduates, although one of them, Sushma Marathe attended a three-year Diploma course in Electrical Engineering but she was married before her final examination. Her mother-in-law did not allow her to take the finals as a result of which she could not graduate from the course. Two participants are college graduates, and four have a post-graduate degree. Two participants have an additional degree in Education and are teachers in schools, while one has a doctorate in Home Science.

All of them identified as belonging to the middle-class. Ray and Qayum (2009) make a distinction between the “old” middle-class and the “new” or “emerging” middle-class. Drawing on William Mazzarella’s work, they observe that that the old middle-class which characterized a newly independent India could be defined as “Nehruvian civil service-oriented salariat, short on money but long on institutional perks” (Mazzarella cited in Ray and Qayum 2009, 14). This middle-class was largely comprised of the upper

castes; such formulation of the middle-class also meant that there was an overlap between caste and class. The upper castes, who formed the social, cultural, political and/or economic elite under late colonialism, now sought to reap in the advantages of independence. Education and employment, usually in the public sector, were seen as the goal and the lifeline of this middle-class. By contrast the “new” middle-class emerged in a post-liberalization India, which “derives its power not from the state but from the market” (Ray and Qayum 2009, 14). It comprises of those young people who grew up in a liberalized India and have benefited from the educational and employment opportunities granted by a neoliberal economy. In fact, Ray and Qayum (2009, 14) argue, this new middle-class is “not technically in the middle of the class spectrum” but rather falls within the “top 10 or 15 percent in terms of income distribution.” I follow this division to characterize my participants as those who formed the old middle class. In referring to the middle-class during contemporary contexts, I mean the new middle-class. However, in terms of the ideological formulations of femininity and domesticity, I identify an overlap between the old and the new middle-class. Both these classes, during their respective times, have played key roles in discursive cultural formations. To that extent, the middle-class does not simply represent an economic category, but also a socio-cultural identity.

My participants all live in different parts of an expanded Baroda city. Four of my participants still live in the heart of old city, specifically in the Dandia Bazaar and Raopura area. The rest have lived in central/old Baroda but have now moved towards the periphery which was supposed to be middle-class suburban Baroda. However the

expanding nature of the city has also landed these regions not on the outskirts but rather as integrated within Baroda city. Furthermore, all of them live in middle-class neighborhoods in urban and suburban spaces. In addition none of these neighborhoods are exclusively Marathi-speaking ones. The dominant population in these neighborhoods is mostly middle-class Gujarati-speaking. Furthermore even though Dandia Bazaar and Raopura have a dominant Marathi-speaking population (due to its proximity to the administrative center of the Gaekwad), the adjacent areas comprise of Gujarati *pols*<sup>14</sup> and Muslim *mohallas* (neighborhoods).

The duration of the interviews ranged from 58 minutes to 3 hours and 15 minutes. The narratives are comprehensive and integrated. I have divided portions of the interviews into different chapters for thematic coherence but the chapters like the narratives are intertwined. Often a single incident from one of their narrative sheds light on multiple aspects of domesticity such that it would be difficult to restrict its scope to one single chapter. Thus the chapters, following the narratives themselves, are designed to flow into each other such that although they make distinct arguments, they also bolster the arguments and observations made in other chapters. Furthermore, although I interviewed ten participants, it was not possible or feasible to incorporate all narratives into this work. While all of the narratives are equally compelling and interesting, their intense and comprehensive nature prevented me from accounting for all of them. I have not used the full narratives of Usha Mule, Malati Kulkarni, Shubhada Korde and Saroj Mujumdar in this work although I draw upon a few instances from them.

### ***Historicizing Caste in Western India***

This work is not without limitation. One of the major lacunae in this study is the absence of the voices of upper-caste Maratha women. As Prachi Deshpande (2004, 7) has noted the Maratha-Kunbi castes are “the politically dominant, upper-caste group” in Maharashtra.<sup>15</sup> Baroda also has a significant Maratha population, and given the history of the dynastic rule of the Gaekwads, a sizable “Sardar” population. However, the absence of Maratha voice in my work stems partially from the fact that my method of seeking participants was snowball sampling. My familiarity with the CKP community led me to two of my participants who then introduced me to others. (Malati Kulkarni was born in a Maratha family and married her CKP husband Shyam Kulkarni. However, in her narrative she alluded to the fact that she did not consider her natal family upper caste.) On the other hand, the lacuna is also indicative of the types of social formations along the lines of caste in Baroda. When I went to Baroda for my fieldwork, I was in search of women who have/had been active socially, outside the home, whether in paid employment or in other socio-cultural activities. The fact that I was not pointed in the direction of any woman from the Maratha caste indicates the ways in which women’s groups and informal associations are constituted along the lines of caste. Shubhangini Patankar, in her observations on the composition of the *Mahila Mandal* in Baroda, for example, notes that a majority of the women in this association are Brahmans of different denominations, followed by CKP; there are only a handful of Maratha women.

The history of tension between the Brahmans (especially the Chitpavan Brahmans) and the CKPs or the Prabhus is evident in historical literature and in the



narratives of my participants: both note in different ways that upper caste status for the CKP community was sought by comparing themselves with Brahmans. Historically, since the CKP or Prabhu was a community with “literary skills” that matched that of the Brahmans, an order issued by the government of the fifth Peshwa (1772-3) “commanded” the Prabhus to “behave like Shudras” (Fukazawa 1968, 41-2). This according to Fukazawa was one of the ways in which the ruling Peshwa Brahmans ensured their high caste status – “by forbidding lower castes to imitate usages and customs only practised (sic) by the former”<sup>16</sup> (42). For the Prabhus, this meant chanting of Puranic but not Vedic prayers, visiting only Shudra temples, using the word “*dandavat*” (I prostrate before you) – as against the word “*Namaskar*” that was used by Brahmans – as a greeting among the community and to the Brahmans, not having a member of the Brahman communities as their servant, and *not* forbidding widow remarriage. Fukazawa (1968, 42 n.9) also notes that like other lower castes the Prabhus were also prohibited from having the sacred thread ceremony (*janave*), but it was re-allowed in 1797.

The CKP caste gained social, economic and political power through appointments in Maratha states like Baroda and Nagpur, where the ruling Gaekwad and Bhosle, recruited CKPs in key administrative positions, instead of Brahmans (Gordon 1993, 145).<sup>17</sup> According to Susan Bayly (1999, 71), in the process of caste formation during the eighteen century, the CKP caste Kayastha or Prabhu (rulers) and claimed high caste status “through the adoption of certain other highly regarded social markers, especially restrictive marriage practices.” Bayly argues that the “firming up of caste boundaries” during this period saw a shift away from those practices of community affinity that were

“relatively loose and open in previous centuries.” In addition, castes like the CKP “sought to stabilize their ‘caste’ status by seeking service in the colonial revenue bureaucracies” (Bayly 1999, 71).

During the colonial rule, administrative policies and politics like caste-based census gave an opportunity to many middle castes to consolidate their status as higher castes.<sup>18</sup> For instance, preparation for the census of 1901, the then Provincial Superintendent of Census, Bombay Presidency, R.E. Enthoven, wrote to the Secretary of the CKP Social Club of Poona, sending him copies of “certain ethnographic questions” pertaining to the caste “in connection with the census of 1901” (CKP Social Club 1904, Appendix 26). Accordingly, the CKP Social Club prepared a report that was submitted to the Provincial Superintendent of Census in September 1901. In 1904, the findings of this report were published under the title *Ethnographical Notes on the Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu* by the Chairman of the CKP Social Club, T.V. Gupte. The format of the document is in the form of questions and answers, the latter being responses gathered from the community and presented in a coherent form to the questions sent by the Provincial Superintendent’s office. The questions submitted by the colonial government appear to be both thorough and varied – ranging from inquiring about the origin of the caste, its sub-groups, and the rituals specific to the caste, to an inquiry about the age of marriage, practices of polygamy/polyandry, views on widow remarriage, inheritance, and prevalence of “tribal” customs. The rationale behind such questions was to enable the government to determine the social status of the community, *by gauging how much the customs and lifestyles departed from the established Brahmanical form of life*. For

example, H.H. Risley, the brain and the force behind the “social precedence” format of the 1901 census, “virtually equated ritual with social precedence” and observed how the status of certain castes has been favorably altered by adopting the practice of infant marriage and by prohibiting the remarriage of widows (Carroll 1978, 244). This is also evident in the *Ethnographical Notes* in its emphatic negation of the practice of widow remarriage and the lack of “tribal customs” within the community. More interestingly, the CKP trace their roots to the mythological story of Parashurama and his vow to eliminate all Kshatriyas from the face of the earth. Parashuram (to whom the Chitpavan Brahmans trace their origin) agreed to spare the unborn ancestor of the CKP on the condition that he puts down the sword and picks up the pen; in other words, give up the “true” nature of the Kshatriya (warrior) caste and adopt the practices of the Brahmans.<sup>19</sup> The tension between the Brahmans and the CKP is thus traced not only to history but also to mythology. I have examined elsewhere (Chitnis 2010) that the various stories of the origin of CKP caste and its rivalries with other social groups in Western India, which were a part of the oral tradition of the community, came to be crystallized as history with the publication of such documents as the *Ethnographic Notes*.

Interestingly, the *Ethnographical Notes* expresses ambivalence towards caste *per se* and its relevance in “modern” times, and also denouncing the reification of caste identities in a “modern” society. However, this concern is overridden by the possibility of potential gains by establishing a “permanent” high caste status for CKP. The document thus recounts the many ways in which CKP lifestyle overlaps with upper caste, especially Brahman, lifestyle. At the same time, *Ethnographical Notes* makes sure to explicitly

spell out its distinction from the Kayastha castes in other parts of India. It emphasizes that while some Kayasthas in other parts of India were of “mixed race” (hence stigmatized for being a Kayastha), the CKP were “pure” Kshatriya. This might be a reason why CKPs are seldom referred to as Kayastha but rather as Prabhus or CKP. The publication of *Ethnographical Notes* can be viewed, in this context, as a means of “institutionalizing” the upper caste status of the CKP community.

Such institutionalization also meant that the distance created between CKP and other non-Brahman castes was crystallized in social memory. Thus, in the narratives of the participants the distinction between Brahman and CKPs as upper castes and Marathas as culturally lower castes comes through. For instance, talking about caste in the Marathi-speaking communities, Raje reified the caste hierarchy per the *varna* system, by identifying Brahmins as upper-caste, CKPs as middle caste and Marathas as lower caste. But, she said, since many of the rulers of smaller kingdoms were Marathas, on account of their courage and bravery, they consider themselves to be upper castes. In addition, those who were appointed to important positions within the court of Maratha kings, and called *Sardar*, also consider themselves to be upper caste. Inadvertently, Raje explained the ways in which upwardly mobile classes have been able to negotiate a higher caste status (Bayly 1999).

This is then the historical context within which the CKP community gained social, economic and cultural capital enjoyed by the CKP caste in Western India especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Brahman castes had enjoyed cultural and social privileges but in the non-ritualistic/non-liturgical and political

contexts they now had to compete with castes like the CKP for key administrative positions. In the princely state of Baroda the CKPs held many key positions and positions of proximity to the Gaekwads which also led them to be more prosperous than Brahmins. Thus when Paralikar's mother who was a CKP and the daughter of a Diwan (treasurer) in the Gaekwad administration, wanted to marry a Brahmin man, the family objected to her marriage to a "poor" and "lowly" Brahmin. The concept of caste hypergamy, that is the social acceptance of the marriage of a man with a woman who is lower in the caste hierarchy, is thus overturned in this case. Although the Brahmins were ritually higher than the CKPs, the better economic conditions of the CKPs on account of their positions within princely and colonial administrations created different kinds of boundaries and hierarchies between these communities. In Gujarat, the CKPs also had to compete with similarly placed Gujarati scribal castes like the Nagar Brahmins. It is against this historicized hierarchy of castes that I examine the narratives of my participants in this project.

### ***Situating Baroda within the History of Gender and Caste***

The use of Baroda as the location of this study also needs to be contextualized in its past as a princely state, where discourses of gender and caste "reform" took a somewhat different route than similar discourses in colonial India (Bhagavan 2003; Zutshi 2009). The study of princely states occupied a marginal position within South Asian historiography until recently. During colonial rule, princely states were those provinces that were not under the direct rule of the British but were indirectly governed by various colonial policies. In a review of the scholarship on princely states Chitrlekha

Zutshi (2009) observes that this new turn in South Asian historiography both challenges the binary of direct versus indirect rule vis-à-vis British colonialism, and extends the boundaries of conventional historical research to include “anthropologic and ethnographic fieldwork.”<sup>20</sup> She discusses the work of Sibohan Lambert-Hurley<sup>21</sup> and Angma Dey Jhala<sup>22</sup> as examples of the study of gender in princely states that acknowledge women’s agency, which Zutshi identifies as “the most understudied area in princely state historiography” (Zutshi 2009, 309). Drawing on the existing scholarship on Princely Baroda (Bhagavan 2003), I argue that the discourses around the “reform” of gender and caste were different, although not disconnected from, colonial India.

The most significant aspect of Baroda’s history as a “modern” state was vis-à-vis education and caste-based “social reforms” instituted by Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1881-1939). Sayajirao was recognized as an illustrious ruler and a “progressive” Baroda under his rule was seen as a model state – an ideal against which modernity in British India and other princely states was measured.<sup>23</sup> Bhavagan (2003, 50) observes that in 1904 Sayajirao began a “campaign of comprehensive reforms that would, he believed, either uplift and strengthen his people or lead to his reprimand [from the British government], the latter exposing British hypocrisy, and both striking at the heart of colonialism.” He (2003, 58) describes his reforms as a process of *reclamation*: “the possession and usage of Western practices in a structurally altered Indian way such that the transboundary object was no longer foreign but native.”

Sayajirao is credited with a number of social, political, economic and cultural reforms (Sergeant 1928; Bhagavan 2003; Doctor 1936; Date n.d.; Mehta 1993/4; Codell

2003) including the establishment of the Baroda College, the creation of museums and collections, a strong library movement followed by the creation of multiple libraries, abolition of untouchability, creating a modern banking system (Bank of Baroda), and establishment of local bodies of governance. However his most significant reforms were related to education. His speeches from various platforms suggest, and his biographers note, that he saw education as a means of “uplifting” the “masses” from the trenches of superstition and backward thinking. He saw elementary and higher education as the only means to rid the country of ignorance and take it unto the road to progress. Furthermore, he saw education as necessary for both the elites and the masses. In 1893 he initiated a pilot program for free and compulsory education of all children (under 10 for girls and under 12 for boys) irrespective of caste, class, status and gender.<sup>24</sup> After the success of this pilot, he declared a statewide operation of the program thus making Baroda the “first territory of either native states or British India to provide free schooling to all its citizens” (Bhagavan 2003, 53). The early rationale for female education, like in other parts of the country under direct colonial rule, was social reform: educated women alone could be compatible partners for educated men, as well as enlightened mothers to their children. However he did not consider female education as a second-rung priority. In a memorandum in 1885 he declared, “Women regulate the social life of a people and men and women rise or fall together” (Sergeant 1928, 208). Accordingly he endeavored to create equal opportunities and “same educational advantages” for males and females. He did face opposition to women’s education and made efforts to overcome these “prejudices” against female education. Furthermore, to facilitate female education, he

also started Women's Training College in 1893 to train female teachers. Many of these trainee teachers were "young widows" who had few other options of employment. The Government sponsored the cost of their training in the form of scholarships. However, as expected, there was more resistance to female education from some castes/classes than others. Sergeant (1928, 208) notes, "Some of the Hindu castes, notably the Prabhus, and the Nagar and Deshastha Brahmans, show[ed] a fair approach to female equality with males in the matter of literacy." Some other communities, like those involved in agriculture and those who observed the *purdah* for women were more reluctant and opposed to the idea of compulsory education of women. Being cognizant of such resistance, Sayajirao stated: "It is not necessary that they should send their girls to Government schools. All that they will be expected to do is to educate their girls and boys to the standard fixed by the Government from time to time" (cited in Sergeant 1928, 200). However, even as he exerted to manage the opposition and relaxed the rules and the penalties for not attending schools, he firmly believed that this would change with the "gradual spread of enlightenment." Sayajirao's vision was that the elementary education to the masses would create a demand for higher education which was also an important element of progress in his view.

He was also a pioneer in starting special schools for people of those groups that were deemed "untouchable." The first schools for the "untouchables" were opened as early as 1883. However he found it difficult to find (caste) Hindu teachers to teach in these schools and depended on Muslim and Christian teachers (Keer 1954; Yagnik and Seth 2005). In 1903 in his address to the Arya Samaj in Lahore, he invited the Arya



Samajists to come to Baroda to become teachers at the schools for untouchables “instead of criticizing Muslims and Christians for proselytizing their ‘brothers’” (Mehta 1993/4, 406; Yagnik and Seth 2005). In 1907 he opened hostels for the students of “untouchable” castes and also instituted scholarships for them (Gaekwad 1989, 112; Yagnik and Seth 2005). Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar was the recipient of one such scholarship that enabled his education at the Elphinstone College in Bombay and later at Columbia University where he got his M.A. and Ph.D (Zelliot 2002; Yagnik and Seth 2005). When the Kala Bhavan was opened in 1890, he admitted “members of the artisan and the ‘untouchable’ castes – much against the wishes of the high-caste Hindus” (Mehta 1993/4, 404).

Various scholars have attributed different reasons for Sayajirao’s attitudes towards the education and social uplift of the lower castes and classes. Makrand Mehta (1993/4), for instance, argues that as a little boy living in the Kalvane village, he had seen his family participate in the anti-Brahman movements initiated by Jyotiba Phule and by the Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur. Others like his biographers attribute it to his “Western” education and to his interactions with the West on his tours abroad. It is important to note that he was born in 1863 and in 1883 when he started the first schools for “untouchables” he was a young man of 20 years, who had ascended the throne only two years ago in 1881. This speaks to his conviction about the role of education and its importance to social reform which was firmly established in his mind from a young age.

Furthermore, even as educational reform was spreading in most centers of British India, he was intensely critical of the direction of education in these regions and considered his education policies different from those being implemented in British India.

When asked, time and again, he had identified the free and compulsory education program as his most successful reform. His biographer Philips Sergeant (1928, 203) notes Sayajirao's criticism thus:

He points out that learning has been an historic tradition in India, and that under British rule it has been an easy task to get a "literary caste." He has seen, however, the evil as well as the good side of this, which has caused him more and more to aim at imparting a practical character to the education of his subjects...Some would keep education for the few, he says, to help in the preservation of the caste system. His idea, on the other hand, is to educate *upwards*. "Give the mass of the people elementary education, and the demand for more follows." (Emphasis in original)

Education for him, thus, was also a means to strike at the root of discriminatory practices that characterize the caste system.

The upper castes especially benefited from these policies of the state, and their upper caste status became linked with their adoption of certain "progressive" practices like education of girls (despite their relatively early marriages). It also enabled the formation of social clubs for women, of formal and informal women's associations, and other similar opportunities for women to associate outside the home. The library movement and its success also granted women access employment opportunities like working in the library. For instance Shubhada Korde notes that her family was very poor which was unusual for a CKP family. In fact her poverty and simplicity in attire and behavior was met with a range of responses from neglect to scorn, criticism and ridicule from other CKP women. Her family's poverty compelled her mother to gain

“respectable” employment in a library where she stacked books. The emphasis on education for social reform was one aspect, but the upper caste also saw education, in princely Baroda and in postcolonial India, as a way to secure a middle-class status. This sentiment is echoed in most of the narratives I examine.

The impact of these reforms is also seen in the life histories of my participants. Aparna Athale tells an interesting story about her grandmother’s education and her subsequent employment. Athale’s grandfather passed away when her mother was in school. Her grandmother’s marital family disowned the widow and her children and left them to fend for themselves. Athale’s grandmother and mother both studied together in evening classes at schools for women, made possible by the efforts of Sayajirao. They graduated high school together, continued with primary teachers’ training and entered the teaching profession together. Her grandmother had to work because she had three young children to take care of. Instead of depending on someone for help, she decided that she will get educated and get a job. Athale believes that her family’s social and economic status improved because of education.

Similarly, Anandibai Jayawant, a Marathi author from Baroda was widowed at the young age of 15. However due to the Government’s policy of compulsory education, most girls were educated through the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. As a result, after returning to her parents’ home in Baroda as a widow, Anandibai continued to read and later began to write. She is known for her novels on social issues, but also wrote travel literature, poems, children’s stories and historical novels. I discuss the life and writings of Anandibai in Chapter 5.

Furthermore as some of my participants note, Baroda continues to be cited as “progressive” and “modern” especially when compared to similar smaller cities with large Marathi-speaking populations.<sup>25</sup> In this context it could be said that the policies of Sayajirao are seen as having influenced a positive shift in the mindset of people at least with regard to gender. It is for this reason that Kalpana Paralikar categorizes Baroda as a place which is more “open” vis-à-vis gender and sexuality, especially in the intermingling of the sexes when compared to similar places in Maharashtra. Whether less privileged women and men see Baroda in this way is arguable; however upper caste women did reap certain benefits of the policies of Princely Baroda. At the same time, Shobhana Deshpande, who spent her life in Bombay and moved to Baroda only after her retirement, reads the place in a different light from Paralikar. She contrasts her lower caste and working-class neighborhood in Bombay with her conservative-minded upper caste, middle-class relatives in Baroda. At the same time, it is important to remember (as I examine in Chapter 4) that Deshpande’s experience with lower caste mill workers in Bombay is mediated by her status as an educated upper caste woman working as a teacher.

This brief historical background of Baroda as a modern, progressive city provides insight into the nature of discourses on reforms surrounding education, women and caste. It also forms a backdrop that afforded upper caste Marathi women access to education, employment, recreation and mobility in non-domestic spaces. At the same time, feminist historical work has not been successful in/on Baroda for lack of archival information (past personal communication with Nandini Manjarekar). Life history narratives thus

provide an opportunity to historicize the discourses of gender and caste in the region. However, as my participatns' narratives suggest women still struggle against the structures of gender especially within marriage and the family. It is in context that I examine the discourse of domesticity in the next chapter as an important tool of analysis for the study of gender, caste and class in Western India.

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<sup>1</sup> Chakravarti 1993

<sup>2</sup> Rao 2003

<sup>3</sup> While caste can be defined as a cultural/social category and class as an economic category, due to the ideological and material foundations of the caste system, there has been a significant overlap between caste and class, especially towards the bottom of the hierarchy, such that the lowest castes were also the most economically disadvantaged. Thus, caste and class had been used to imply a combined "social hierarchy" especially in feminist theory (Liddle and Joshi 1986, 7). While policies like reservations (affirmative action) or quota have allowed some upward economic mobility to lower castes (and classes), there still exists an overlap between caste and class. For instance, Dalit scholars have argued that for Dalits, caste cannot be imagined outside the context of economic deprivation, and that caste is the basis for their economic deprivation. Therefore, even as caste and class form two distinct categories of social difference, the overlap between the two in the context of lower castes in India, has rendered them two sides of a coin. Nevertheless, the entry of a lower caste community into a higher class has enabled the social negotiation of that community to a higher caste status (see Bayly 1999).

<sup>4</sup> The term Dalitbahujan is made from two words Dalit and Bahujan. Dalit refers to the political identity of those who stood outside the caste system and were considered "untouchable." Dalit literally means crushed or broken and was used by Ambedkar (to counter the Gandhian term Harijan meaning "people of God") to indicate the realities of their existence. Bahujan or "masses" is used to refer to the lower castes within the caste system. They were not considered "untouchable" since they provided many of the essential services to the upper castes but were exploited and denigrated socially, economically and culturally. The term Dalitbahujan has emerged out of the united struggles of the peoples who at the bottommost rung of society. I use the term Dalitbahujan feminism to refer to both the feminist activism and scholarship *by* Dalitbahujan women, as well as to the historical scholarship *about* Dalitbahujan women.

<sup>5</sup> Although many feminist scholars and activists from the upper castes have argued that caste had always been integral to women's movement in India, and that the movements against violence against women also included a critique of caste patriarchy (see Datar 1999), Dalitbahujan feminist scholars have argued to the contrary. The second wave of Indian feminist movement, for instance, did not account for the differences in "access to and control over labor, sexuality, and reproduction by castes, classes and communities" (Rege 2000, 494). I follow Dalitbahujan feminist scholarship to make this argument. For a critique of Datar's position see Rege 2000. For an overview of the issues involved in this argument see Rao 2003, Tharu and Niranjana 1994.

<sup>6</sup> A few important feminist examples of such ethnographic work that have highlighted the different meanings and significance of caste and caste identities are Kalpana Ram (1991), Susan Wadley (1994), Karin Kapadia (1995), Anjali Bagwe (1995), Patricia and Roger Jeffrey (1996), Helen Lambert (1996), Maya Unnithan-Kumar (1997), Sarah Lamb (2000).

<sup>7</sup> This has been highlighted by anti-caste movements and Dalit scholarship, which has resulted in the visibility of caste in politics and the politicization of caste identities. Lower caste/classes coalesced around

the history of injustice and inequalities that have been variously institutionalized in India. However, as a result of the growing social and political visibility of the lower castes, especially as contenders for employment and other resources, higher castes have also felt the need to politicize their caste identities, firstly to distinguish themselves from lower castes, and secondly to challenge the 'privileges' that lower castes have in the form of reservations and quotas. In addition, restructuring of caste has also included the claiming of higher caste status by demonstrating upper-caste values, which are represented on the bodies and expressed through the sexualities of women. See Unnithan-Kumar (1997), Rao (2009), Rege (2006).<sup>8</sup> Kothari (1994, 1598) contends: "The long-held assumption that as the project of nation-building gets under way and democratic rights are extended to the people, that as the development process also gets under way and more and more people and communities benefit from it all and the sources of poverty, unemployment and human misery are eliminated, and that as the productive forces get unfolded and the dialectic of history gets working, there will be no need for 'parochial' structures of caste, community, tribe and various feudal vestiges and that people will enter into new relationships of a more secular and political kind. These assumptions have since been belied."

<sup>9</sup> The Mandal Commission, set up in 1973, had recommended (in 1980) affirmative action in favor of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes OBCs. In 1993 the Government decided to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission by reserving seats for caste and class subalterns in education and public employment. This decision was met with massive protests from the upper castes and middle classes.

<sup>10</sup> Women's Reservation Bill proposed to reserve one-third seats for women in all representative and legislative bodies. The debate surrounding this Bill was on account of the lack of attention to the intersections of gender with caste and class. While the "upper caste parties" like Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party supported the Bill, parties with lower caste and class backing challenged it by contending that the Bill was designed to change the caste composition of the Parliament in favor of the upper castes.

<sup>11</sup> I use the term Dalit feminists to refer to both women who identify as Dalit and those scholars/activists who might not be Dalit but are working from a Dalit feminist epistemic position to challenge upper caste structure.

<sup>12</sup> But Dalit women have also noted the inconsistency in the practice of untouchability: while concerns of ritual purity are raised by upper castes while extracting water from a public hand pump or in certain instances of sharecropping, untouchability does not seem to be an issue when lower caste labor is needed in upper caste fields, or in instances of intimate sexual violence. The indispensability of lower caste labor to upper caste profits makes untouchability irrelevant to that extent (Malik 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Patankar is my mother's niece (although she is much older than my mother) and my third cousin. But she is almost like my aunt and I have always seen her so. In fact I call her "*mavshi*" (aunt: mother's sister) rather than "*tai*" (older sister).

<sup>14</sup> Pol is a specific kind of residential architecture found in urban Gujarat. It is characterized by a number of houses on both sides of a narrow alley and is usually protected by a gate or entrance. The residents of a pol are usually affiliated by caste, kinship or profession. See Harish Doshi (1991).

<sup>15</sup> Prachi Deshpande (2007) has discussed the emergence of Maratha as an identity in Western India. She observes that the term "Maratha," which was used to denote the Marathi-speaking soldiers in the army of the Muslim rulers in the Deccan region, was consolidated as a Kshtriya identity during the 17<sup>th</sup> century following the formation of an independent Maratha kingdom by Shivaji.

<sup>16</sup> Fukazawa (1968, 38-42) also describes the "code of conduct" imposed on the Yajurvedi and Samavedi Brahmins by the Chitpavan Peshwas.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon (1993, 49) also notes that the Deshastha Brahmins and Prabhus "completely dominated the middle and lower levels of the central bureaucracy" of the Deccan kingdom of Bijapur under Sultan Ali I during the sixteenth century.

<sup>18</sup> Historians of India have already noted the role of the colonial census in the formation of the caste system in modern India. For instance, see Cohn (1984), Dirks (2001) and Samarendra (2011).

<sup>19</sup> This legend, traced back to the Renuka Mahatmya of the Skanda Puran, and repeated in several other publications including the Bombay Gazetteer, Thana Volume 1882 and in writings about the caste by other

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CKP writers, tells the story of Parshuram and his legendary resolve to annihilate all Kshatriyas. According to Renuka Mahatmya, Parashuram is the son of a Brahman father, Jamdagni and a Kshatriya mother, Renuka (and therefore a Brahman by birth). In fulfilling his vow, he kills the king Sahasrarjun and Chandrasen, but discovers that Chandrasen's wife is pregnant and has taken refuge with Rishi (Sage) Dalabhya. Parashuram goes to Rishi Dalabhya and asks him for the king's wife, whom he intends to kill. Dalabhya agrees to hand over the queen to Parashuram, provided the latter spares the fetus. Parashuram agrees to spare the unborn child on the condition that the child gives up the sword in favor of the pen. The CKP caste is assumed to be descended from this child. The word Chandraseniya thus refers to the descendants of (king) Chandrasen

<sup>20</sup> Zutshi identifies two trends emerging within this scholarship: "first, works that focus primarily on the politics of the states, including their administrative structures, laws, and the reform measures undertaken by their governments, while assessing their impact on ideas such as nationalism and communalism, mostly with a view to comparing them to similar developments in British India. And second, works that focus primarily on the movements among key social groups within the states, such as peasants and women, with a view to endowing both their people and their rulers with some agency" (Zutshi 2009, 302).

<sup>21</sup> Lambert-Hurley, "Historicizing the Debates over Women's Status in Islam: The Case of Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum" and *Muslim Women, Reform, and Princely Patronage*.

<sup>22</sup> Dey Jhala, *Courtly Indian Women in Late Imperial India*

<sup>23</sup> In his analysis of Sayajirao's reforms along the lines of "the modern" Bhagavan has examined how this modernity was a form of reclamation that was used as "a tool of resistance" against the British, which also made him a heroic figure for the nationalists. Bhagavan (2003, 66) observes, "The Gaekwad had methodically resisted the British by recovering 'the modern' and by associating it with and sheltering known nationalists, and, as a result of these two acts, by generally encouraging an 'imagining of the Gaekwad' as the epitome of both the 'Indian ideal and progressive' and 'Indian resistance'. Still, the Gaekwad was always cognizant of the fine line he walked between action and deposition..."

<sup>24</sup> Although he also stipulated that it was necessary to consider the caste and religious prejudices of people, and especially be sensitive to those who followed the purdah for women.

<sup>25</sup> I compare Baroda to other similarly smaller cities because metropolitan cities like Pune and Mumbai in Maharashtra continue to be seen in a different league altogether.

## **Chapter 1: Gender, Caste and Domesticity**

This chapter lays out the context within which I examine the narratives of my participants. The intent of this project, as discussed in the introduction, is to examine the contributions of upper caste women's voices to the epistemology of caste. In examining the life histories of these women, I realized that there was an important and recurring overlap in their narratives: the preponderance of the discourse of domesticity in their lives. This includes the ideological imposition of domesticity as the ideal for these women and their experiences within and struggles with these compulsions. It also includes their critique and rethinking of the domestic – of domestic relationships, domestic space and domesticity itself. In terms of caste epistemology, their experiences provide an important addition to the rethinking of caste by making domesticity central to upper caste women's subjectivities. This is not to say that women in lower castes and classes are not burdened with domesticity but rather that as an ideology it affects upper caste women's lives in very specific ways.

The incorporation of lower caste women's voices in caste epistemology has highlighted the need to consider their sex- and labor-based exploitation as central to an understanding of caste. While lower caste experiences underscored the importance of violence in the maintenance of caste, lower caste women's experiences foregrounded the



impossibility of the separation of caste-based and gender-based violence (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1991; Rege 1996; 2006; Rao 2003; 2009). In a different vein, the inclusion of upper caste women's experiences draws attention to the ways in which domesticity is naturalized and normalized for women within the structures of caste, and the ways in which it is used to normalize gender and caste hierarchies. I contend that domesticity is a function of *both* women's labor *and* women's sexuality. Thus domesticity for upper caste women has always been constructed upon their distinction from lower caste/class women. The idea of chaste upper caste wife and mother is constructed upon the difference between her sexuality and that of lower caste women. Idealized domesticity also invokes images of women's chastity and fidelity within marriage. Similarly middle-class domesticity is contingent upon the paid domestic labor performed by lower class women. At the same time, domesticity in the context of caste also utilizes upper caste women's labor in different ways. It tethers women to the family and caste such that women's experiences both in the domestic and the non-domestic spheres are mediated by the discourse of domesticity. In addition, the labor expected from upper caste women in the continuation of caste-related rituals has also been an important aspect of domesticity for upper caste women. Akin to other parts of the world, the ideology of domesticity has been an important aspect of gender hierarchy and it operates in specific ways in the context of caste as I discuss in this project. Domesticity has been central to the construction of upper caste, middle-class "ideal womanhood." Therefore, paying attention to the discourse of domesticity enables us to interrogate the imperceptible ways

in which institutions like caste, the family and marriage continue to create inequalities for women.

In this dissertation, I understand and define domesticity as a specific heteronormative gender code that implies women's relentless and undivided *devotion* to the domestic. The "domestic" includes the household and the family, especially the husband and children. Sometimes domesticity requires being attentive to the needs of the extended family as well. Often it demands the ritualistic following of familial, gender and relationship hierarchies. Women are expected to draw their identity from domesticity: a good cook, a good homemaker, a good mother, a good wife, "a domestic goddess." I identify domesticity as a way of institutionalizing social hierarchies: determining the relationship of women of the higher/middle echelons in a society to the home has been an important way in which superiority over the lower strata – whether in the context of race, class, caste, religion or nationality – has been attained. As I briefly discuss in this chapter, domesticity and the home lie at the heart of most discourses of difference and domination. Accordingly, I examine the connections between upper caste female subjectivities and the ideology of domesticity within the context of caste as system of discrimination and domination. In doing so, I am able to point to the ways that women have posed implicit and explicit challenges to gender inequalities within the caste system. I am also able to identify the ways in which they are able to benefit from both domesticity and caste. But more importantly, in identifying domesticity as an important element of caste, I argue that it needs to be accounted for within the theories of caste. Being attentive to domesticity enables us to investigate the political aspects of domestic

spaces and relationships. In the context of caste, domesticity allows us to problematize the ways that caste continues to be reproduced through these domestic spaces and relationships. Another important clarification I make at this point is that I do not posit domesticity as unique to the caste system or argue that its function within the caste system is different from its function in other social systems like race or religion. Rather, I suggest that just as it has been central to imperial expansion and racial formations, domesticity has been important in the institutionalization of caste differences. It is therefore important from a feminist perspective to acknowledge domesticity as central to the system of domination that is caste.

### ***Caste, Class and Domesticity***

#### *The Ideological Foundations of Domesticity within the Caste System*

The construction and normalization of domesticity for upper caste women can be seen at both ideological and material levels. At the discursive level, the control of caste and the family over women's sexuality and labor was accomplished through the creation of ideals for women which ensured their subordination within the family and servitude to the husband. In her pioneering work on gender and caste in ancient history, Chakravarti (1993a) identifies the ideology of *stridharma* (duties of a woman) or *pativrata* (duties of a faithful wife) as a powerful means in the subordination of women under Brahmanical patriarchy.<sup>1</sup> She (1993a, 583) argues that “*partivrata* the specific dharma of the Hindu wife ... became the ideology by which women accepted and even aspired to chastity and wifely fidelity as the highest expression of their selfhood.” The ideology of *pativrata* worked at creating and maintaining the hierarchy of gender; at the same time

this ideology was used to create social distance between castes. Caste purity was associated with both sexual purity and ritual purity of women. Therefore, the greatest fear of caste patriarchy was upper caste women bearing the children of lower caste men. Since women were “regarded as gateways – literally the points of entrance into the caste system,” men from lower castes had to be “*institutionally* prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher castes” (Chakravarti 1993a, 579; my emphasis). This social distance between upper caste women and lower caste men under ancient Brahmanical patriarchy was ensured by guarding the sexuality of the former. Upper caste women’s compliance in this system of subordination was achieved through the “ideology of ideal womanhood,” “economic dependency,” “class privileges for and veneration towards compliant women” and “the use of force” whenever required (Chakravarti 1993a, 580).

The *pativrata*dharma implied a form of servitude towards the husband (and by extension towards his family). However in the performance of such domesticity upper caste women had to interact with men and women of the lower castes who provided various forms of labor within the domestic space – like cleaning utensils, washing clothes, cleaning the living spaces – and outside – such as vendors of various kinds and those collecting and disposing garbage. Upper caste domesticity potentially provides spaces for the intermingling of castes and classes and thus it was even more important that the social distance between castes was maintained through the ideology of *pativrata*. Caste-based division of labor and ascriptions of “pure” and “impure” work also aimed at “substantiating the status of upper caste women and determining their relation to lower

caste men and women” (Sangari 1993, 8). Prescriptions of ritual purity and caste purity were also embedded within *pativrata*dharma. *Pativrata*dharma was the shorthand used for ensuring that women maintained the boundaries of both gender and caste.

The ideology of the *pativrata* was reconfigured with changes in gender ideology, for example during the social reform and nationalist movements in pre-independence and through modern domesticity at various points in post-independence India. However, I argue that the ideology of *pativrata* or fidelity and subordination to the husband has been an integral aspect of the ideology of domesticity in India. That is, domesticity is defined in terms of the primacy of women’s relationship to the domestic space but also to domestic relationships, especially to the husband. Wifely fidelity and the primacy of her relationship with her husband thus are important elements of heterosexual domesticity (see Rinchin 2005). Ritualistically, nothing has been as ideologically potent as the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness vis-à-vis marital status especially for women. The linguistic use of *saubhagyavati* or *suhagan* (“the fortunate one”) to refer to married women indicates that being married alone is the state of being fortunate or auspicious. While a woman who is not married is looked upon with pity, the one who has lost her husband is considered unfortunate and inauspicious, and deliberately avoided in worships and rituals that are celebratory. Chakravarti (1993b; 1995) has explored the ideological constructions of Hindu widowhood which stigmatized widowhood while appropriating the sexuality and labor of the widow for the household. Widowhood, especially among upper caste Hindus, was often seen as “a state of social death” which according to Chakravarti was on account of the widow’s “alienation from reproduction

and sexuality” (1995, 2248). Thus Chakravarti (1995, 2248) observes, “The widow’s institutionalised marginality, a liminal state between being physically alive and socially dead, was the ultimate outcome of the deprivation of her sexuality as well as of her personhood.” She lived within the household but was not a part of it, mainly because she had no significant ritual functions attached to her body, sexuality and self. But since her sexuality was no longer bound to and by marriage, she was seen as a potential threat to the moral order. In the absence of a husband she was “an outsider [who] no longer belonged” within her marital family (Chakravarti 1995, 2248). Thus, symbolic and ritual ways of marking a widow ensured that her sexuality remained unproductive and under the control of the members of her marital/natal family.

#### *Caste and Women’s Labor*

At the same time there was another important aspect of the widow’s existence in the Brahman household: her labor. Married women’s labor within their families was recognized as an aspect of their love and care and which, in turn, gave them some semblance of status in the family and in the society. But in the context of widows, there was no reward for the labor that they were expected to perform at home. And while upper caste widows’ condition was a cause of much concern within the social reform discourse, masculine thought and writings on the subject highlight the preoccupation with their sexuality and the denial of motherhood. Contrarily, widows’ writings on the subject highlight the dire state of the “material and existential conditions of widowhood” (Chakravarti 1993b, 130). Drawing on the writings of widows about their lives Chakravarti identifies a paradox between the descriptions by the widows of their

“‘excess’ of pain” and their description by others as non-feeling and not-existent beings. In both their natal and affinal homes, the common conditions that marked most widows’ lives were “economic precariousness,” which was combined with “drudge labor,” “the lack of dignity” and the “absence of control” over their own lives (131). Furthermore, unlike other women, widows were seen as free from “other” concerns like “birth pollution...feeding and child care” (134). Thus, they formed a separate category of consistent and always available labor. Even when they were ill, they were accused of feigning sickness to escape work. Since they were dependent on the household for maintenance they had to accept such accusations without much resistance. In addition, since they were not encumbered with conjugal relationships or a “fixed place in the family,” their labor was also seen as “mobile.” Widows were “sent from one household to another, wherever and whenever the need arose” (135). They were used to replace the labor of deceased wives or in bachelor homes, often cooking for a group of men who had moved away either for education or for work. Chakravarti notes that during the nineteenth century, “the careers of many professional young men, who came to constitute an important segment of the middle-class, were built upon the free labor of widowed women of their families” (1993b, 135).

An important category of women’s work vis-à-vis domesticity that combines women’s ritual and physical labor is food and food preparation. As Leela Dube (2001, 159) observes, “Food constitutes a critical element in the ritual idiom of purity and pollution [and]...[t]he task of safeguarding food, averting danger, and in a broad sense, attending to the grammatical rules which govern the relational idiom of food, falls on

women.” In addition to being responsible for the physical labor involved in the actual cooking of food, women (across castes) are also made responsible for the ritual and symbolic principles related to food. Notions around purity, auspiciousness and avoiding the “evil eye” influence women’s work in process of preparing and distributing food. In addition, the ritualistic preparation of food involves practices related to the “maintenance of the required level of purity of the body, the division of space for practice of cooking and consumption of food, and the preservation of traditions in regard to caste-linked prescriptions and proscriptions about different food” (Dube 2001, 159). Women are also similarly restricted in the consumption of certain food items as prescribed by their particular caste and/or family. Widows are expected to give up enjoyable foods and consume only the little portion that is required to sustain their bodies. In this manner, food involves a rich and complex array of relationships between women’s physical and emotional labor and caste and gender based rituals.

Caste endogamy also has specific prescriptions for women vis-à-vis food. Dube (2001) notes that if a woman has married into a higher caste, then she might be allowed and required to cook everyday food but might not be allowed to cook for ancestors during related rituals. Similar restrictions are imposed on menstruating women who are not allowed to touch cooked food. For instance, Marathe told me how she had to observe the rituals around menstrual pollution in her marital home even when there was no one else to take care of the household responsibilities while she was “sitting aside.” Her sister-in-law had moved out of the family home and her aging mother-in-law could not help her much. Her husband took care of their daughters’ needs but he could not cook.



Nonetheless her mother-in-law insisted that she observe the “sitting aside” and they ordered food from a nearby “lodge.” When Marathe finally told her mother-in-law that she could no longer “sit aside,” the latter was not happy and said that they would be cursed because they were eating food cooked by a polluted woman. However, although menstruating women could not cook food that did not preclude their labor in the preparation of uncooked food. For instance, while observing ritual pollution, menstruating women would clean/pick “enough rice and lentils during these three days to last the family for a whole month” (Kosambi 1998b, 88).

As the recent feminist scholarship on domesticity has suggested, the home is the place where the inequalities of caste, class and gender are reproduced and played out (Sangari 1993; Ray and Qayum 2009; John 2013). In their examination of domestic servitude in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum (2009, 3) posit the home “as a site where relations of class, gender and caste/race are produced and reproduced through the particular labor practices of domestic servitude.” They argue that the domesticity of the middle-class (and mostly the upper castes) is contingent on the availability of domestic “servants” and this relationship is institutionalized in what they call “domestic servitude.” The division of labor within this institution of domestic servitude is important because “[h]ome is not a jute mill, an apparel sweatshop, a company office, a rice paddy, or a street stall ... [and therefore] this distinction inheres in both the nature of the labor and the site of labor” (Ray and Qayum 2009, 3). Within the framework of domestic servitude, the home as the site of paid labor complicates both emotions and labor. At the same time, as Ray and Qayum (2009) observe, the formation

of the middle-class in contemporary Bengali society is dependent on the presence of “servants” to perform household labor. To this extent the ideological force of domesticity on upper caste women does not translate into demanding physical labor even though emotional investment within and ritual labor for the domestic is mostly expected of them.

Kumkum Sangari (1993, 6) has highlighted the intertwined relationship between labor and ideology vis-à-vis domesticity. Similarly, I argue that due to the connection between labor and ideology, women’s domestic labor cannot be seen in abstraction from the ideology of domesticity that instructs most aspects of women’s labor. In addition upper caste women’s physical and emotional labor within the family also needs to be read in conjunction with the ritual labor expected of them in accordance with their caste status as I examine in Chapter 3. Furthermore as Sangari (1993, 8) contends, domestic labor is also the site where the ideological construction of “good” and “bad” women takes place, based on the “direct, indirect or inverse utilization of [women’s] labor.” However the nature of these discourses changes when domestic labor is performed by an upper caste women within her home, or by a lower caste/class woman in others’ homes, or when upper caste women hire and oversee the labor of lower caste/class women, because the same ideology cannot justify and glorify women’s labor in these varying social circumstances and contexts (Sangari 1993, 11). Even the goal of women’s labor differs by caste and class: while upper caste women’s unpaid domestic labor or their hiring of other women’s labor is geared towards “family status production,” lower caste/class women’s unpaid *and* paid labor is “essential to the bare existence of the family” (Sangari 1992, 12). The question that Sangari poses in this context is about the “double

evaluation” of the labor of lower caste/class women, who provide paid domestic service in the homes of others but have to perform similar functions, albeit unpaid, within their households. Sangari (1993, 11) asks, “[D]oes [this] make the (re)production of ideologies of service more tense and volatile or fragile as compare to women who only labor inside the home?”

The ideology informing women’s labor is also related to the changes in patriarchal requirements vis-à-vis women’s labor, as discussed by Prem Chowdhry (1993). The requirements of agricultural economy in rural Haryana have necessitated the participation of women in agricultural activities. At the same time, gendered norms of femininity and domesticity have required women to be secluded and out of sight. The solution to this dilemma is found in redefining the practice of *ghunghat* (veil/covering of the head and face) that women have to observe while working in the fields. *Ghunghat* has enabled the appropriation of women’s labor in the fields without changing the unequal gender norms and rights both within and outside the household. At the same time such redefinition of the *ghunghat* has helped cast the veiled woman, who represents the “ideology of plain living and austere eating” as central to the “*dehati*” or rural culture (91). She is considered as the “sole custodian” of the rural culture the loss of which threatens “the collapse of the entire rural social fabric” (91). The *ghunghat* thus seeks to create a private space within the public sphere of agricultural work. And even though the “spatial logic of seclusion” and “sole involvement in domestic labor” (Sangari 1993, 13-14) is restricted to women of upper castes and classes, the ideology of domesticity informs the ways in which seclusion is redefined to benefit a patriarchal economy. At the

same time, withdrawal of women from wage or agricultural labor outside the home has been the first sign of upward economic mobility of a family. Meanwhile women's capital producing work conducted within the home like "artisanal work, informal sector activities, home based piece work/production in informal sector or petty family enterprise" (Sangari 1993, 13), as well as tutoring (academic or in arts and crafts) is seen as an extension of domesticity and therefore equally low in value. In addition, the predominance of domesticity and of priority given to domestic work affects the ways that educated, professional women also experience paid work. I discuss this issue in detail in Chapter 4. In a contemporary context, Smitha Radhakrishnan (2009) has argued that tensions created by liberalization of the Indian economy and the massive entry of women in the field of IT (Information Technology) were addressed by reviving the ideal of "respectable femininity" by young educated professional women. This concept of respectable femininity is built on the discourse of domesticity and defines women's first priority as the family: "Family comes first, job second." According to Radhakrishnan (2009, 202), "The women who maintain a job outside the workplace [by working from home or on the weekends] while still upholding the norms of the family, then, maximize their symbolic capital and are best able to enact respectable femininity." Thus even in contemporary India idealized womanhood is defined in terms of domesticity; but in the context of increased economic independence and authority of women on account of their jobs, this ideology identifies the "symbolic capital" associated with domesticity in ways different from the earlier generations. The "right" of "choosing" family over profession/career/job is placed within the domain of women's autonomy whereby

patriarchal investment in maintaining the unequal physical labor and care work within the home remains unacknowledged and unchallenged. It is for these reasons that being attentive to domesticity not only in the context of gender but also in the context of caste is important for a feminist epistemology of caste. Domesticity is important to a feminist understanding of caste also because despite the efforts of patriarchal practices to seamlessly meld the ideological and material aspects related to women's domestic labor, women and their lives have always posed challenges to these processes. It is within these spaces that alternate understandings of caste and gender can be located and retrieved.

### ***Historicizing Domesticity***

#### *The Emergence of Domesticity as an Ideology*

In much of the feminist literature domesticity is contextualized within the division between the private and the public (i.e. the home versus market/politics) in the context of bourgeois modernity. Feminist scholarship has also demonstrated that despite this so-called separation, the domestic sphere has had profound influence on and, in turn, has been heavily influenced by the public-political sphere. In her work on domestic fiction, Nancy Armstrong (1987) argues that the institutionalization of domesticity was an important way in which the cultural hegemony of the middle-class was established in England. She challenges the separation of political and cultural histories by contending that cultural endeavors like the domestic novel/fiction were central to the political and economic accomplishments of the bourgeois class. She observes that the emergence of domesticity as *the* ideal of women and the rise of the “domestic woman” were a result of competing ideologies in bourgeois England, and that the “female was the figure, above

all else, on whom depended the outcome of this struggle” (Armstrong 1987, 5). Consequently contrary to political histories that cite “individual as male” and the feminist critiques of this position, according to Armstrong the “modern individual was first and foremost a woman” (8). For it is through the creation of the “new female ideal” – centered on the domestic woman – that middle-class cultural hegemony was secured both in the domestic and the political domains. Working class resistance to bourgeois supremacy was defeated by the construction of the domestic woman whose virtues were constantly pitted against working class culture. Armstrong (1987, 8) notes, “It took nothing less than the destruction of a much older concept of the household for industrialization to overcome working-class resistance.” Soon works on fiction, and sociological and historical studies had “established modern domesticity as the only haven from the trials of a heartless economic world.” Thus, the rise of domesticity, which Armstrong links with the rise of domestic fiction, has been key to political developments in industrialized Europe.

Similarly, in their study of the changes in family structures in England, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall (1987) observe that changes within familial structures and in domestic relationships were part of the broader social changes taking place in Britain. They identify two specific periods during which the ideology of domesticity was reformulated and established: first during the 1790s and 1800s with the consolidation of evangelical religious ideology, and second during the 1830s and 1840s following the changes brought about by the industrial revolution. They observe that by 1840s most middle-class women had been accommodated within “a domesticated life in their

suburban villas and gardens” and the home was recast as “a bedrock of morality in an unstable and dangerous world” (Davidoff and Hall 2002, xiv). Changes in patriarchy freed men from the authority of their fathers in the context of their family lives, and from their patrons in the context of their occupations, and brought about new forms of patriarchy that established the authority of the man over his wife and children. Gender was thus recast and norms of masculinity and femininity became aligned with the public and the domestic sphere respectively.<sup>2</sup>

In the American context, Glenna Matthews (1987) has examined the relationship between women’s work and the ideology of domesticity which determines the value attached to women’s labor within the home. She observes that in 1750 the American colonial home was important in terms of production because consumer goods were not available and everything had to be cooked, prepared and stitched at home. However within the gendered hierarchy and the division created between “male public activity and female private passivity” the home and the women performing domestic chores were not considered of any significant value (Matthews 1987, 4). But by 1850 there was an emergence of the “ideology of domesticity” and the household and women came to be at the center of cultural debates. The American Revolution played an important part in centering the home and the role of women in the newly formed “nation” and this “public recognition” changed the denigration of domestic work of the earlier era. The rise of cook books, home manuals<sup>3</sup> and domestic fiction targeted at women accompanied the rise of the “cult of domesticity.” Built on the idea of the home as pure and innocent in comparison to the corrupting outside world, this literature took a positive view of both

the household and women's tasks within it. Consequently, as Matthews (1987, 6) notes, "...domesticity was both more elaborate and more valued, and this, in turn, meant that the housewife had access to new sources of self-esteem." Emphasis on citizenship and the role of mothers in the creation of ideal citizenry accorded further importance to the role of women within the household. "Motherhood" became a political function, a public responsibility.<sup>4</sup> In addition the emergence of companionate marriage also gave women more "influence or autonomy within the family" (Matthews 1987, 10). However as Matthews argues, this new kind of motherhood (and wifedom) was emotionally "more intense" and more demanding than previous periods. But it also gave women a sense of fulfilment and self-esteem as Matthews gleans from the letters and diaries of women from this period. Similarly Thomas Foster (2002, 7) observes that despite their association with the private sphere of the home domesticity provided women with "a source of agency." And even though the lives of some middle-class women were characterized by hard and relentless work, Matthews (1987, 34) observes that "...for the first time in American history, both home and women's special nature were seen as uniquely valuable" and the home came to occupy a central place in political, religious, emotional and social discourses. Later with availability of "domestics" who "helped" women with housework, "housewives began to devote more time to housework of a ceremonial nature such as fancy needlework or holiday baking, secure in their ability to turn the more mundane tasks to servants" (Matthews 1987, 96). Such domesticity facilitated the transcending of the domestic ideology beyond the home and more women began to engage with issues of "social reform" outside the home.<sup>5</sup> From the perspective



of middle-class white women in the United States, then, the mid-nineteenth century represented what Matthews (1987, 35) calls the “Golden Age of Domesticity.” This golden age also saw the proliferation of domesticity as an ideology from the West to other parts of the world through colonial projects. The overall spirit of these projects was to universalize bourgeois or middle-class values while at the same time to “naturalize the relative privilege of white, middle-class women within the culture of domesticity” (Foster 2002, 8).

### ***Imperial Expansion and the Domestic Ideology***

Amy Kaplan's (1998) work on domesticity helps unravel the relationship between imperialism and the ideology of domesticity. While feminist theory has been successful in identifying and challenging the idea of separate spheres and the ideal of domesticity associated with it, Kaplan argues that the dichotomy between the domestic and foreign which played an important role not only in justifying imperialist expansion but also in constructing the ideal of domesticity has been left largely uninvestigated. She (1998, 582) contends, “When we contrast the domestic with the market or political realm, men and women inhabit a divided social terrain, but when we oppose the domestic to the foreign, men and women become national allies against the alien, and the determining division is not gender but racial demarcations of otherness.” Thus she argues that an aspect of the “cultural work” of the ideology of domesticity was to “unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home” (582). She also links domesticity with the process of *domestication* which implies “conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien” (582).

Domesticity is thus made intelligible in the form of “civilizing mission.” The ideology of domesticity thus functions both within and outside the domestic, visualized as the home and as nation. Contrary to the idea of that domesticity is “anchored” to the home, Kaplan (1998, 583) argues that it is “more mobile and less stabilizing; it travels in contradictory circuits both to expand and contract the boundaries of home and nation.”

Judith Walsh (2004) similarly notes the centrality of domesticity to colonialism. However in looking at domesticity from the perspective of the colonized rather than the imperial powers, Walsh argues that the ideological transformations taking place were mutually influenced; the interactions between the colonial powers and the colonies affected the conceptualization of domesticity in both the metropole and the colony. Thus the domestic discourse that emerged in the nineteenth century was “created through the dialogue and dialectic of metropole and colony and within each” (Walsh, 2004, 13). According to her, this became the “globally hegemonic discourse on domesticity” (2004, 11). Walsh observes, “Over the course of the [nineteenth] century, as this discourse grew in global influence and significance, traces and variants of its ideological and practical concerns could be found in advice literature and other writings on home and family life published in England and the United States, as well as in colonial settings as diverse as India and Africa” (Walsh 2004, 11).

The civilizing mission justified colonial interference in every aspect of the lives of the colonized people. Citing Jean and John Comaroff, Walsh (2004, 13) writes, “No usage was too unimportant, no activity too insignificant to escape the stern gaze of the civilizing mission...The basis of universal civility was bourgeois domesticity.” One

aspect of the expansion of domestic ideology was to emphasize a neat and orderly home spatially. But “domesticity as civilizing mission” also meant that it touched other more intimate aspects of domestic life including birthing, breast feeding and experiencing motherhood. The ideological importance of domesticity, wherein the nation was recast as the home, is especially significant for women who now formed the heart of both the home and the nation. Thus, we see that European women became actively involved in various activities of imperial expansion in the colonies. Nancy Rose Hunt (1988) has examined how Belgian women became involved in changing the patterns of breast feeding by organizing “maternal and infant health programs” in the Belgian Congo. One of the programs *goutte de lait* (drops of milk) listed as its purpose the reduction in “infant mortality in the colony by *teaching* African women the ‘art’ of child rearing, cleanliness and hygiene, and to struggle against harmful ‘errors and prejudices’: the supplementary feeding of infants from birth and the ‘superstition’ forbidding postpartum sexual relations” (Hunt 1988, 403; my emphasis). The responsibilities of white women vis-à-vis domesticity transcended the thresholds of both their home and their nation in the context of colonialism. It is interesting to note that this program was initially met with skepticism by “some doctors, missionaries and colonial officials” (403). However, in 1920 the colonial administration recorded “population loss, infertility and low birth rates” which had begun to affect the “industrial labor requirements” in the colony (403). It was then that the efforts of Belgian women in *goutte de lait* began to be appreciated and encouraged.

Such reactions of panic created by depopulation (and the lack of labor) in the colony mirror the reactions to population decline in France, England and Belgium, and were addressed by similarly emphasizing the role of the mother and calling for changes in child rearing practices. Anna Davin (1978) has examined the impact of the decrease in population in imperial Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the kind of discourses it evoked leading up to the creation of the image of an ideal motherhood. According to the “enthusiasts for empire” the future of the British Empire depended on the “the power of the white population” (Davin 1978, 10). If Britain was not able to adequately control its territories on account of a lack of population to contribute towards it, the fear was that other “rival master-races” would overtake Britain in colonial conquests (10). Thus, children came to be identified as “a national asset” and as belonging to nation. And in this context mothers had a special and important role to play. Davin (1978, 12) observes:

Middle-class conventions of the time took for granted that the proper context of childhood was the family, and the person most responsible the mother. So if the survival of infants and the health of the children was in question, it must be the fault of the mothers, and if the nation needed future citizens (and soldiers and workers) then mothers must improve.

Women’s domestic responsibilities were thus linked with nation-building and nationalism as “the national problem of public health and of politics” was sought to be resolved by transforming the role of the mother (13). This also meant that the most important function of a woman within the family was not that of a wife but that of a mother. Davin observes that the reasons cited to encourage young women to marry had changed between 1860s

and 1914. The emphasis on finding a partner who would support, protect and help women during the earlier period was replaced by an emphasis on “reproduction of the race, the maintenance of social purity, and the mutual comfort and assistance of each married couple” during the latter time (Davin 1978, 13). These changes in the ideology of the family and domesticity were also accompanied by changes in the law and in education that sought to support mothers and children.

In order to increase the rate of population growth motherhood had to be made rewarding and desirable for women. And thus by employing some of the tropes already available in the ideology of domesticity and the conceptions of womanhood, motherhood came to be redefined: “Motherhood was to be given a new dignity: it was the duty and destiny of women to be the ‘mothers of the race’, but also their greatest reward” (Davin, 1978, 13). Mothers had to be instructed in the correct ways to bring up their children and were made solely responsible for their children’s rearing such that “neighbours, grandmothers, and older children looking after babies were automatically assumed to be dirty, incompetent and irresponsible.” Thus Davin (1978, 13) concludes, “The authority of the state over individual, of professional [doctors, nurses, health visitors] over amateur [mothers], of science [e.g. medicine] over tradition [e.g. traditional child rearing practices], of male over female, of ruling class over working class, were all involved in the redefining of motherhood in this period, and in ensuring that mothers of the race would be carefully guided, not carried away by self-importance.” In this sense and to this extent the ideology of motherhood affected all women irrespective of class in imperial Britain. Upper- and middle-class women who were educated and often employed were

seen as not embracing motherhood completely. On the other hand working class mothers were assumed to be “ignorant, or at the very least irresponsible” (Davin 1978, 14). Both these concerns surrounding motherhood and in essence womanhood came to coalesce around the new ideology of motherhood during imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

*“The Reading Woman” and Domesticity*

Both in the metropole and the colony, the increase in women’s education, the rise of the “reading woman” and the growth of print culture were of significance in the creation of the discourse of domesticity. Print culture played an important role in establishing the cultural hegemony of the middle-class in England and America. And one of the focal areas of this hegemony was the (re)conceptualization of womanhood along the lines of middle-class values. Two main types of literature were central in the institutionalization of domesticity: domestic fiction or domestic novel and advice literature or domestic manual. The increasing popularity of the domestic novel also led to the increase in the number of women writers who explored the genre with vigor and sentimentality. Their lived experiences provided interesting vantage points from which they drew inspiration and became prominent writers (Armstrong 1987).

Similarly domestic manuals, cookbooks and advice literature including columns in women’s magazines and journals provided significant avenues for the consolidation of the ideology of domesticity. In England, the printing of such books directed especially at women followed the long tradition of the printing of religious books and conduct manuals for families. Some of the early and notably influential publications of England were *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* started in 1852 and *Mrs. Beeton’s Book of*

*Household Management*; in the United States Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* became "an immediate best-seller" (Walsh 2004, 20) and "was used as a textbook in women's seminaries" (Tonkovich 1997, xiii). Tonkovich observes that the *Treatise* "outlined a rationalized system of domestic management designed to elevate housework to the status of profession, establishing the seminary-educated domestic women as the manager of subordinate and illiterate domestic underlings" (1997, xiii).<sup>7</sup> Similarly Sarah Josepha Hale, Fanny Fern and Margaret Fuller gained popularity and become "some of the nation's [US] earliest professional writers" (Tonkovich 1997, xv). Thus on the one hand the ideology of domesticity tethered women to family and the home (emotionally if not physically); on the other, it provided women like Beecher unprecedented acclaim as writers.

Similar and parallel processes were seen in British India. The "reading Indian woman" came into being in India only after the 1860s when "print literature, print capitalism and a reading (male) Indian public were well established in the urban centers of British India" (Walsh 2004, 21). I discuss the issues of women's education and its relationship with domesticity in the following section. But as more upper caste, middle-class Indian women gained access to literacy and education, advice literature in regional languages and in various formats became commonplace in India. The issues that these writings addressed included "child care and household management, ...how to purchase and arrange furniture, how to hire servants, and how to use Western eating utensils" (Walsh 2004, 23). Articles also included suggestions on how to dress appropriately, how to manage servants, how to manage relationships with in-laws and the husband, health

and hygiene, and advice like never to engage in gossip or sit idle. Emphasis was placed on efficiency, order, cleanliness and frugality as well as on women's spirituality, docility, "superior moral qualities" and establishing the domestic as the domain of womanhood. Initially written by men, these domestic manuals and magazine columns were later authored by women (Walsh 2004). More importantly, domestic manuals were key instruments in the shift of domesticity from old to new patriarchy. The new patriarchy centered on the relationship between the husband and the wife while seeking to undercut the authority of the family, especially that of older women. The domestic sphere had been reimagined along with women's role in it and these social and political discourses were central to the institutionalization of domesticity in its new form. The synonymy of femininity with domesticity within the new patriarchy, however, had not only remained unchallenged but was in fact strengthened by adding spirituality and nationalism to the equation.

Conversely, because the domestic had been established as the domain of womanhood by nationalist and revivalist discourses, this advice literature functioned to make women adept in domesticity. This ideology of domesticity as a part of the civilizing discourse then travelled back to the imperial centers where the poor and the working class, likened to the uncivilized of the colonies, had to be "domesticated." Thus, rather than a one-directional influence from the metropole to the colony, the discourse of domesticity flowed both ways to edify domesticity as the defining element of an ideal or "true" woman. It is hardly surprising that this womanhood was created by comparing



middle-class (and upper caste in India) women to working class (and lower caste) women.

### ***Social Reform, Nationalism and the Discourse on Domesticity in India***

Encounters with colonialism and the onslaught of criticisms that were central to the civilizing mission brought to the forefront debates over “women’s condition” in India. Initial endeavors at addressing the problems facing women as identified by the colonial administration and government included efforts at “social reform.” These social reform measures were initially spearheaded mostly by educated, upper-caste and elite men who also often had the opportunities for English education. Most of these issues and the debates surrounding them – these debates can be characterized as the struggle between the old and new patriarchies – concerned women’s sexuality and gender relations especially within the family. The focus of course was on the women of the propertied class and upper caste. Bannerjee (2002, 100) argues that these efforts at social reform were a way of bringing upper caste women “within the purview of ‘civilization’, ‘progress’ and utility.” Often in these contestations between colonial and indigenous patriarchies on the one hand and between the old and the new patriarchies on the other, the concern was not about “the Indian woman” as it was about what constituted a “civilized” *India* (Carroll 1983; Mani 1990; Sinha 1995). And since the interest of the largely upper caste nationalist patriarchy was to control upper caste female sexuality, the upper caste woman became symbolic of the nation as well as of the burden of the nation.

By the end of the nineteenth century the incipient nationalist movement in provinces like Bengal and Bombay was beginning to respond to colonial domination and

the changes in material conditions, both of which had led to a loss of authority of the propertied classes and the upper castes. In Bengal, the efforts of “liberal reformism, missionary initiative and state legislation” had begun to challenge social inequality and injustice including gender inequalities (Sarkar 2001, 15). The impetus for the education of girls and women as well as of “peasants and low castes,” and the movements against Sati and for widow remarriage, for instance, threatened the “caste, educational and gender privileges” of elite Bengali men. Consequently the nationalist discourse that grew out of this discontentment of the elite represented their anxieties about the loss of privileges (15-16). As Tanika Sarkar (2001, 16) argues, “Class anxieties were expressed as anxieties about the collapse of an entire social order of privileges, most powerfully articulated through the motif of loss of caste and the loss of virtue in women.” As the spotlight focused on upper caste women and their lives, social, cultural and political activities began addressing the family and relationships within the family as well as the place and nature of an ideal domestic life for women. However as historians have noted the changes sought by these movements were “symbolic rather than substantive” and upheld the “[f]undamental elements of social conservatism such as the maintenance of caste distinctions and patriarchal forms of authority in the family [and] the acceptance of the sanctity of the *shastra* (ancient scriptures)” (Chatterjee 1990, 235). Nonetheless, the emerging new literature began addressing these issues by portraying the lives of upper caste women in plays, novels, essays, tracts and domestic manuals (Walsh 2004).

### *Women's Education and Domesticity*

Among these concerns was the lack of education, both literary and domestic, for women. While domestic manuals and women's magazines attempted to educate women on domestic matters, the movement for women's literacy education, at least initially, also emphasized the role of educated women as compatible wives and adept mothers, and therefore as central to the project of nation-building. Before the establishment of formal education for women, Forbes (1996, 36) notes, female education was informal and was restricted to women from propertied classes and upper castes who "often studied classical or vernacular literature as 'a pious recreation.'" Early efforts for female education by missionaries did not get much success. But the opening of government schools which had the support of the local social and political elite, as well as schools started by reformist religious organizations like the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society generated an interest in female education among the upper castes. According to Forbes, the early demand for educated women was created by the rise in the number of educated men who wanted educated wives because "[u]neducated wives (or wives who were educated only in the vernacular and traditional subjects) would split the household into two worlds" (1996, 60). In addition to seeking the companionship of educated wives, men also supported female education so that "women [could be] in charge of social reform while men pursued politics" (Forbes 1996, 60). Masculine anxieties caused by women's education vis-à-vis the structure of gendered power were assuaged when "female educators promised to graduate 'professional housewives'" (Forbes, 1996, 61).

Educationists like Maharani Tapaswini in Bengal and K. D. Karve in Bombay held that the purpose of women's education was to create "better wives and mothers in a *modern* world" (Forbes 1996, 54; my emphasis). Thus modernity became intrinsic to the shift in the ideology of domesticity. Contrarily Pandita Ramabai "wanted to make women capable of supporting themselves," an idea that did not appeal to the upper castes and higher classes who were "unwilling to contemplate economic independence for their wives" (Forbes 1996, 54). Jyotiba Phule and Lokhitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh who challenged the existing caste and gender regimes and whose emphasis on female education was to be able to unshackle women from the yoke of Brahmanical patriarchy also faced intense opposition and violence from Brahmans in Maharashtra (P. Rao 2007).

Parimala Rao (2007, 2008) who has examined the nationalist responses to women's education in western India observes that popular nationalists like Bal Gangadhar Tilak were able to recast the issue of women's education and their opposition to it in nationalist terms. Contrary to the earlier/"traditional" opposition to women's education based on religion, Tilak argued that women's formal education, especially in the English language was antithetical to the spirit of nationalism. He also argued that since women were already burdened with domestic and reproductive work, adding education to their list of responsibilities would impede their "natural" duties as wives and mothers. According to Tilak, "English' education had dewomanising impact on women, which denied them a happy worldly life" (cited in P. Rao 2007, 309). He also argued that teaching "Hindu women" to read and write would "ruin their precious traditional virtues and would make them immoral and subordinate" (cited in P. Rao 2007, 309). Opposing

him reformers like M. G. Ranade, G. K. Gokhale and G.G. Agarkar viewed women's education as a means of liberating them (especially widows who were not allowed to remarry) "from certain fixed ways of life and modes of thought" (P. Rao 2007, 310). In response to women being admitted into Calcutta University, Tilak complains: "The unwelcome and mischievous process of *unsexing* has already commenced. The aspirations of our so-called educated females have been directed from their *natural* and *legitimate* channel and have rendered them ambitious to usurp the position that naturally belongs to men" (cited in P. Rao 2008, 142; my emphasis). The use of the term "unsexing" here is significant for it implies a loss of femininity: since the domestic is seen as central to the definition of womanhood, the increasing distance between women and domesticity signifies to Tilak the threat of loss of femininity in women. However, P. Rao (2007) points out, the poor Brahmans in Maharashtra did not support Tilak's orthodox views about women's education being a threat to the "Hindu household" because they saw, in women's education, opportunities for employment and additional income. There was thus, disconnect between the discourses of nationalism put forth by Tilak and the goals and ambitions of the upper castes which wanted to bolster their status into the middle-class.<sup>8</sup>

Reflecting on similar debates over female education (about its content and purpose) in mid-nineteenth century Bengal, Malavika Karlekar (1986, WS25) observes that these debates were "faithful reflections of those prevailing in Britain where there was growing discussion on suitable kinds of education for women." "Scientific" theories which were used to inscribe racial inferiority on the colonized were also employed to

inscribe sexual inferiority on women in England. Thus women's brain was not seen capable of involving in the same kind of educational pursuits as men. Furthermore there was always the concern that women's "primary responsibility ... of bearing and rearing children" would be compromised if women gained education (Karlekar 1986, WS25). Karlekar contends that in India as in Britain "the historical roots of prejudice against the expansion of women's education in certain areas lay in a basic conviction that there was something special about a woman's nature, which would be destroyed by excessive exposure to education" (1986, WS25). In colonial Bengal, as in other parts of colonial India, the fear was that education of women would "make women feel negligent of their families and lax in housekeeping" (Karlekar 1986, WS26).

However, contrary to conservative fears that educated women would abandon domesticity or domestic chores, domestic responsibilities (and the ideology of domesticity) seemed to have been an integral aspect of the lives and subjectivities of educated and professional women in colonial India. For instance, in her study of the life of the first Indian female doctor Kadambini Ganguly, Karlekar observes (1986, WS27) that even amid her busy schedule and medical practice,

Kadambini took time off to run the house and supervise the cooking of meals which included a special menu for her husband's older sister who had remained an orthodox Hindu.<sup>9</sup> While going from one patient to another in her horse-drawn carriage, she occupied herself by making yards of fine lace.

But Karlekar notes that her domesticity (she was "a mother of five, and a responsible housewife") and its semblance did not prevent Hindu orthodoxy from criticizing her. The *Bangabasi* ("Resident of Bengal") journal published a tirade against Kadambini

“accusing her for being a whore” (Karlekar 1986, WS27). Her advancement as a medical doctor and her success as a “woman of science” combined with her unabashed participation in nationalist politics made her a bad role model for women according to orthodox Hindus in colonial Bengal. By this logic, domesticity and women’s professional career were seen as incompatible, indeed antithetical. Kadambini’s husband, Dwarkanath Ganguly, along with his friends Sibanath Shastri and Nilratan Sirkar responded to such libel by taking legal action. Karlekar (27) notes,

Ganguly felt it necessary not only to defend his wife, but also the point of view that women needed to be liberated from superstition and taboos (sic). He was successful, and the editor of the journal Mohesh Chandra Pal was found guilty. He was fined one hundred rupees and was also sentenced to six months imprisonment.

On the one hand this struggle was an ideological fight between the orthodox Hindus and the Brahmos (who criticized the practiced Hindu religion and its emphasis on rites and rituals); on the other it was also a struggle between the opponents and the proponents of women’s education and women’s “liberation.” What is interesting, however is that like other ideological contestations during this time, this struggle is also cast in the language of ideal womanhood which is played out in terms of women’s sexuality. Thus while the editor of *Bangbasi* attempts to discredit Kadambini by alleging her of being immoral, this immorality is predicated upon, as Ganguly’s critique notes, the freedom that Kadambini enjoys. David Kopf (1979, 126) quotes the Brahmo journal *Indian Messenger*:

The logic [of Hindu orthodoxy] is that maintenance of female virtues is incompatible with their social liberty. Every woman may enjoy freedom.

Therefore a vast majority of them are unchaste.

The response from Ganguly then is to challenge these allegations by firmly placing Kadambini (and other Brahmo women who enjoyed similar freedoms) within domesticity. In challenging the allegation that women's freedom is causing them to lose "feminine virtues" Ganguly contends that these women are not "unchaste" *because* they are embedded within domesticity. Thus Kadambini's respectability is reinstated by highlighting her domesticity including the fact that she is a mother of five (both Kopf and Karlekar note this). Incidentally both the proponents and the opponents of women's education during this time presume that increased education *will* lead to increased freedom for women; for the opponents this implies social catastrophe, while for the supporters it represents a new and better social order. Either way domesticity becomes central to both the champions and denouncers of women's education.

Moreover, even the content of women's curriculum was a matter of concern and contestation. For the social conservatives, the only way education for women could be seen as successful and favorable was when that education was used to align women within the changing patterns of patriarchy in India. Thus education could be useful only to the extent that it made women compatible enough to be able to converse with their husband – but not thinking enough to have independence of thought – and to be good mothers. Interestingly, prominent educated women in colonial Bengal like Kadambini Ganguly, Jnanadanandini Tagore (wife of the first member of the Indian Civil Service),



Priyambada Bagchi (a graduate of the University of Calcutta) and Radharani Lahiri of the Brahmo Samaj, emphasized the centrality of the home to the lives of women. For instance, Tagore believed that “feminine success lay in the ability to be a competent wife and mother”; Bagchi who wrote for the journal *Antahpur* (“The Home”) recommended education for women in order “to be more feminine in orientation”; while Lahiri argued that “despite all that women learned ‘housework is the most important.’” Lahiri also believed that “a woman must ‘also learn child care, because nothing is more important to her than this’” (cited in Karlekar 1986, WS28). Karlekar observes that due to the prevalence of this outlook on women’s education, the founding of the Victoria College for girls by Keshub Sen (a prominent Brahmo leader) found much support from men and women alike. The purpose of education for women in his view was to prepare them for “special duties.” He argued that “to give women ‘the same education [as men] and make them solicitous to earn fame and titles are both wrong and resulting in evil’” (cited in Karlekar WS28). Suspicions towards women’s sexuality, and the fear of the freedom and independence of women – in other words, the fear of dissociation of “the domestic” from femininity – lay at the heart of these discourses on women’s education.

#### *Nationalism and the Discourse of Domesticity*

Meanwhile, the growing nationalist movement brought in a different dimension of women’s domesticity into the limelight. The movements for social reform had addressed women’s conditions by demanding legislative actions on the issues in question, which involved direct engagement with the colonial government. On the other hand, as Partha Chatterjee (1990) has argued, nationalism “resolved” the “women’s question” by

removing it from the purview of the public-political discourse and attempted to confine it within the domestic – in the sense of both home and the nation. In the struggle between colonialism and nationalism, Indian nationalism had to create a self-identity of a people and a nation capable enough to challenge the ideology of colonialism and civilizing mission that justified it. This identity was created through a selective appropriation of the liberal ideas that characterized the West and certain “values” that were associated with Indian “tradition.” By creating a dichotomy between inner/outer – home/world – the nationalist discourse had at its heart an ideology of domesticity that was given a new flair for the changing times. Akin to the post-industrialization discourse on domesticity in Europe, nationalism constructed the sphere of Indian “independence” within the home. Where the home was considered a haven from the corruptions of the outside world in the European context, in the Indian setting it represented a site of freedom. In the nationalist discourse the home also came to represent the moral/spiritual superiority of India over the West. The outside world dominated by Western power and ideas represented materialism. And while it was important for India to “learn these superior techniques of organizing material life and incorporate them within their own culture” (Chatterjee 1990, 237), it was equally important to assert the spiritual superiority that India had over the West. In the dichotomous relationship between the home and the world, the home came to represent the moral virtues that were seen as intrinsic to India. Furthermore, this dichotomy was also gendered such that the domestic was made synonymous with the feminine and women came to represent the moral and spiritual superiority of India. Thus, the gendering of the home/world dichotomy had specific implications for the redefining

of Indian womanhood during this time period. The creation of the modern Indian woman or the “Bhadramahila” (gentlewoman) in colonial Bengal is seen as the culmination of such reconceptualization of womanhood for “the ‘modern’ world of the nation” (Chatterjee 1990, 241). “Virtues” like modesty (“decorum in manner and conduct”), spirituality, chastity, self-sacrifice, submissiveness, devotion, kindness and patience (Chatterjee 1990, 247) were made central to the definition of modern womanhood. Furthermore the *Bhadramahila* also had to be educated but not with a view of competing with men in the public-political spaces. As Chatterjee notes (1990, 247), “Education ... was meant to inculcate in women the virtues – the typically ‘bourgeois’ virtues characteristic of the new social forms of ‘disciplining’ – of orderliness, thrift, cleanliness, and a personal sense of responsibility, the practice of skills of literacy, accounting and hygiene, and the ability to run the household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world.” Middle-class women’s role within the domestic sphere thus became central to adjusting to a new social and economic order brought about by colonialism. And to that extent, the ideal Indian woman was different from the “Western woman” whom the nationalist discourse had marked with materialism and competitiveness with men. On the other hand, it was also important to contrast the *Bhadramahila* from the lower class or “common” woman who was defined as “coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous [and] subjected to brutal physical oppression by males” (Chatterjee 1990, 244). The “new patriarchy” as represented by the (upper caste) middle-class was contrasted with both the colonial patriarchy and the “traditional indigenous” patriarchy. And although women

were not physically confined to the domestic sphere anymore under the new patriarchy, the changed gender and social relationships that characterized it were established on the edifice of the home and on women's role within the domestic sphere. Thus, Chatterjee (1990, 247) argues that nationalism's emphasis on "female virtue" as the hallmark of femininity "made possible the displacement of the boundaries of 'the home' from the physical confines earlier defined by the rules of purdah (seclusion) to a more flexible, but culturally nonetheless determinate, domain set by the differences between socially approved male and female conduct." It was acceptable for women to venture into the public spaces previously inaccessible to them as long as they manifested femininity in their thought, speech and conduct. Women's behavior in public spaces was seen as an extension of their domesticity. In other words, the ideology of domesticity informed the ways in which middle-class women were expected to behave in public or non-domestic spaces.

An important way of expressing respectable femininity was also through dress and behavior. In her examination of "discursive organization of sartorial morality" in colonial Bengal, Himani Bannerji (2002) observes how the refashioning of women's attire became an important aspect of the modernizing attempts of nationalism. In the construction of new womanhood, the debate around "reformation" in women's clothing was centered on the notion that there was a "relationship between the inner and outer selves of women" and that women's clothing becomes an important "moral signifier of her social role and thus of ...the culture of their *samaj* (society) or class" (Bannerji 2002,

103).<sup>10</sup> The domesticity with which nationalism had encumbered women needed to be depicted in their outward appearance as well as through their homes.

It is also in this context that a new field of study directed at women, Home Science, was developed and established in India. According to Mary Hancock (2001) this field brought about the “nationalization of domesticity” in colonial India. The impetus for its inception was provided by the debates taking place around the definition of appropriate femininity which needed to be stabilized within domesticity and “modernized” for the changing times. The debates on women’s bodies, behavior, clothing, accessories and education as well as those about an ideal domestic sphere that were occurring during this time led to the establishment of Home Science. As a field of study, it was aimed at creating a particularly nationalist woman. Hancock (2001, 880-1) observes, “As formulated in British India, Home Science amalgamated the curricula of Home Economics, taught in the United States, and Domestic Science (or Domestic Economy), taught in England and British India, but recombined elements of both to create a new discipline appropriate for a nationalist pedagogy.” The curriculum combined scientific home management – which focused on measurement and nutrient analysis of food, scientific understandings of health and hygiene, and the use of scientific methods of “observation, measurement and prediction” – with moral prescriptions from Hindu scriptures.<sup>11</sup> What is interesting according to Hancock is that Home Science was backed by many Indian feminist nationalists. In her study of Home Science in the Madras Presidency, Hancock finds that the “Madras-based Women’s India Association (WIA) initially took the lead by sponsoring Home Science instruction informally” (Hancock

2001, 891). The WIA was instrumental in carving a “feminist nationalist subjectivity [which was] critically engaged with both internationalist feminism and local cultural nationalisms” (891). The organization later employed Home Science in its “social reform” projects involving “destitute, widowed, and delinquent women” and as a part of their “slum improvement” programs. The instructions included “needlework, domestic economy, mothercraft and hygiene” as well as food and nutrition (892). In the programs involving abandoned women and prostitutes the focus was on “rehabilitative measures” like “time-discipline, behavioral restrictions, medical attention as needed, basic education, and training in handicrafts” (892). These women were housed in a dormitory type residence and supervised by “European and Anglo-Indian matrons.” The final envisioned goal for these women was the procurement of a job as “domestic servants, often in the homes of the mostly upper-class members of the WIA” or to pursue higher education and become teachers (892). Home Science was thus thought of as an instrument to bring about the changes that nationalism was envisioning at the time. Interestingly it was employed in conjunction with other reform measures in Madras. For instance, when legislation prohibiting the *devdasi* system was introduced in 1929, one of the measures of reform was the marriage of women who had served as *devdasis* to men from other communities. In this context, Home Science was seen as a way of making *devdasis* into “chaste housewives or deferential maidservants” (Hancock 2001, 893-4). Nationalist feminist enthusiasm for Home Science was a way of expanding middle-class sensibilities to women of all castes and classes in a bid to bring about “nationalist modernity.”

### *Domesticity and/as Spiritual Nationalism*

The discourse of domesticity underscoring the field of Home Science was particularly influenced by Gandhian politics and philosophy. The rise of Gandhi's leadership in the nationalist movement added another dimension to the definitions of femininity and domesticity. Gandhi's image as a father-figure and his broad appeal among the elite and non-elite alike (although he did have his detractors) saw the participation of women in the physical public-political sphere in unprecedented numbers (Kishwar 1985; Patel 1988). At the same time, feminist scholars have critiqued his use of femininity as passivity and submissiveness in his social and political thought and activism. On the one hand, he saw women "not as objects of reform and humanitarianism but as self-conscious subjects who could...become arbiters of their own destiny" (Kishwar 1985, 1691), on the other hand, he located women's strength within their inner spirituality, their propensity for self-sacrifice and unconditional love. The strength of a woman was in her "purity and chastity" which could "disarm even the most beastly of men" (Kishwar 1985).<sup>12</sup> His appeal to men was to adopt these feminine virtues, but he often also expressed that men were incapable of such selflessness, thereby elevating women to the position of moral superiority. This moral superiority was drawn from women's role as caregivers and homemakers. Thus, Gandhian philosophy defined femininity in terms of domesticity.

An interesting and important feature of Gandhian views on womanhood was that he decried the overemphasis on marriage in women's lives. He wanted women to serve their fellow country people – serve humanity instead of serving one man (the husband).

He encouraged women to forsake marriage and give themselves to the service of the society. He lamented that many young women withdrew from the public-political sphere as soon as they graduated from schools and colleges. He commented: “Every Indian girl is not born to marry. I can show many girls who are today dedicating themselves to service, instead of servicing one man” (Gandhi cited in Kishwar 1985, 1694). However remaining unmarried meant forgoing sexual relationships because Gandhi believed that it is only within marriage that sexuality and sexual desires should find fulfillment. Even within marriage sexual relations should be minimized and emphasis should be on service and compassion. On marriage he opined:

Marriage is a fence that protects religion. If the fence were to be destroyed, religion would go to pieces. The foundation of religion is restraint and marriage is nothing but restraint (cited in Kishwar 1985).

His dichotomous understanding of male and female gender and sexuality prevented him from challenging the inequality within marriage, as well as the inequalities of power that women faced in society. However, his emphasis on social reform and service as the meaningful engagement of feminine energy found profound resonance among the upper castes. For instance, Shubhangini Patankar’s father was not averse to her higher education or to her involvement in “social work” activities outside the home, but was extremely resistant to her engagement in paid employment. To this extent, Gandhian philosophy was successful in breaking the public/private dichotomy as it related to the women’s active involvement in non-domestic/public spaces. But, much like the discourses on upper class white femininity in Europe and the U.S., and much like the



nationalist discourse preceding him, Gandhi burdened women with domesticity in the public sphere. That is, women's involvement in the public sphere had to be similar to their responsibilities in the domestic sphere, characterized by love, service, sacrifice and selflessness. It is important to note this shift in the public/private division because my participants were able to access many public spaces which were formerly unavailable to women but at the same time they were always encumbered with domesticity in ways that men were not. Anandibai Jayawant's writings raise these questions in a fashion similar to feminist challenges.

Gandhi's success as the leader of Indian nationalism popularized his ideology of women's domesticity and their essential spiritual nature. As a result of his emphasis on social service and his linking of service with spirituality/religion, women's participation in both nationalist activities and in spiritual activities/organizations – outside the physical domain of the domestic – was seen as an extension of, indeed integral to their domesticity. It became an accepted part of women's domestic responsibilities such that women faced little resistance to their involvement in such activities outside the home. Spiritual and (Hindu) religious nationalism thus became accepted spaces for female participation. Conversely, the domestic space also became an important part of the practice and spread of spiritual and religious nationalism for upper castes. In the aftermath of nationalist and Gandhian reconfiguration of femininity, domesticity was no longer a synonym for confinement to the home. This is of significance in the context of my work in general. The upper caste women whose lives I examine here are no longer

confined to the domestic sphere, yet their lives are inseparably linked to the household and the family.

I argue that even when upper caste women began entering the “capitalist marketplace” as workers, the ideology of domesticity (as function of gender) continued to influence the division between men and women. Often domesticity for women necessitated participating in paid labor as the experience of Snehalata Raje indicates (discussed in Chapter 2). Domesticity for her was about performing her duties as a daughter-in-law vis-à-vis household chores while also bringing in her wages for the sustenance of her large marital family. Such ideas about domesticity and domestic responsibilities that she embraced as essential to her femininity rendered her dependent on her father-in-law and her husband for money for such things as buying a cup of coffee at the workplace, or buying undergarments or the ticket/railway pass for travel to work every day. Thus, my contention is that women’s involvement with activities outside the domestic sphere like education, paid employment, social (reform) activities, and spiritual activities are not contrary or contradictory to but rather congruent with, the ideology of domesticity.

It is also important to acknowledge the reconceptualization of femininity along Hindu/Aryan/Vedic lines in the Hindu revivalist and Hindu nationalist movements. These movements realigned domesticity with spiritual and religious nationalism which created new spaces for women in the non-domestic sphere and which were sources of a new kind of identity for women. This nationalism should also be seen as an extension of the ideology of domesticity whereby the home is equated with the nation, thereby

legitimizing women's activism for the benefit and improvement of the latter. Just as domesticity functioned as an important instrument in the reconfigurations of race, class and caste, it was employed in the reconfiguration of India as a "Hindu nation."

The foundation of "neo-Hinduism" was laid by Dayanand Saraswati's Arya Samaj in late nineteenth century (Agarwal 1995). The myth of a golden Aryan Hindu culture that had degenerated on account of Muslim and British conquests captured the imagination of upper caste Hindu elites struggling with powerlessness in the face of colonialism. The female body and femininity were beyond doubt at the center of such reconceptualizations, for this golden past was the time when women were free and powerful (Chakravarti 1990). Vivekananda, another important figure in the Hindu revivalist movement, attributed the condition of India to "Hindu passivity" and called for a masculinization of Hinduism (Agarwal 1995, 38). But it is Savarkar who is attributed with "constructing the political categories of Hindutva and Hinduness, as quite distinct from the traditional religious term Hinduism" (Agarwal 1995, 40). Savarkar modernized Hindu into a political identity, employed especially in relation to Muslims<sup>13</sup> in India. In Savarkar's discourse fury is directed towards the Muslim, who is cast as the racial "other" of the Hindu and defined as "a voluptuously lustful rapist" of Hindu women (Agarwal 1995, 37). The reconfiguration of femininity (and of masculinity) in this context, and in contradistinction to Gandhian philosophy of love and non-violence, becomes "the denunciation of non-violence and impotence" (Agarwal, 44). In this discourse, the arbitrarily created image of "the tolerant Hindu" is contrasted with the "ferociously intolerant 'Other.'" The suggested recourse is for the Hindu to become

“equally ferocious” and to give up the “perverted virtue [of] misplaced chivalry to enemy womenfolk” (Agarwal 48). In the Hindutva discourse a virtuous and morally superior womanhood is predicated upon an unworthy “Other” womanhood that lacks agency. The “ferocious” Hindu woman is impelled to rise against the enemy, which in this case is defined as the Indian Muslim. Thus Amrita Basu (1995, 159) has identified two ways in which women/womanhood in Hindu nationalism differs from earlier mobilizations of women: “First, a number of women enjoy greater prominence in Hindu nationalism than have women in the nationalist movement. Second, the female leadership of Hindutva movement does not advocate pacifism.” As Kaplan (1998) has argued in the context of imperialism, in the Hindu nationalist discourse also the domestic is made synonymous with the nation. Domesticity for women is not simply limited to the household but rather embraces the nation. The enemy who is seen as hurting the nation then becomes a personal enemy and retaliation is justified. Unlike the pacifist symbols of *Sita* and *Sati*, Hindu nationalism invokes the image of *Durga* (a warrior avatar of the goddess). Feminist scholarship on women’s activism within right-wing Hindu nationalist organizations and political parties has examined the various kinds of gendered imagery and symbolism, as well as the “agency of women” in these movements (Basu 1995; Sarkar and Butalia 1995; Bedi 2006; Bedi 2012; Bannerjee 1996; Sen 2007). Hindu nationalist discourse has thus recast (mostly upper cast) Hindu women as “avenging angels and nurturing mothers” (Sethi 2002). This reconceptualization lends a vivacity and agency to women in a way that creates a revolutionary domesticity for them. Thus women’s participation in violence against Muslims and often against the lower castes is

not seen as a transgression of their domesticity but rather an integral aspect of it. Feminist scholars have also noted the tensions for feminism when women's agency is actively involved in instances of violence and racial discrimination. These are the same kind of concerns that Inderpal Grewal (2006) has noted in the context of "security moms" in neoliberal United States. Building on the division between the public and the private, the neoliberal state encumbers private citizens with their own security. The perceived threat from non-white peoples in the U.S., particularly from men of color and from "Islamic terrorists" has created a conservative discourse around motherhood and security. Grewal asks, "How to explain such subjects in the twenty-first century, which brings together a nationalism that produces women as mothers, a conservative feminism, and new forms of racialization and deracialization?" (2006, 28). In the context of liberalization and globalization, the creation of these feminine subjects is a result of the redrawing of the ideological and political boundaries of "home and homeland." In other words, these subjects are created by the operation of biopower and biopolitics. Grewal (2006, 31) observes,

By making the mother into both the subject and the agent of security, motherhood becomes governmentalized. However, the increasing power of the religious right and the control of reproduction suggest that this subject is also the focus of sovereign and disciplinary power, producing domestic subject-citizens whose empowerment coincides with the needs of the nation and the state....[S]ecurity enables domestic space to expand rather than simply contract, resulting in the production of national and imperial subjects.

The reworking of domesticity in this context expands the domain of the private such that “self-protection and the mother’s protection of the family becomes a part of governmentality.” In a different context but through similar reconfigurations of home and homeland, and the perceived threat to both – and thus especially to women who are identified both with the home and homeland in essentializing ways – the role of domesticity and the “domestic woman” is expanded beyond the threshold of the household, and violence *by* (upper caste Hindu) women in public spaces is not only made acceptable but indeed admirable.

It is important to acknowledge the significance of Hindutva thought and its reconstruction of womanhood because a large number of Marathi-speaking upper castes in western India, especially Brahmans are particularly influenced by the right-wing Hindu philosophy of Savarkar and the right-wing organization RSS (*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*). Along with the Gandhian model of womanhood (the sacrificing albeit autonomous woman), the Hindutva ideal of womanhood (the action-oriented strong woman) has also played an important role in the reconceptualization of femininity in India. And while both these ideals locate womanhood within domesticity, they have provided a way for women to transcend the physical boundaries of the home in different ways. Since spirituality and religious activity is considered an aspect of the ideal feminine, women like Sushma Marathe used it as an opportunity to get out of the confines of the household as set by her mother-in-law. The first activity in which she began participating outside the home, after years of her marriage, was *bhajan* or devotional singing. While I do not suggest that she did not actually enjoy it or that she

used it exclusively as an excuse to get out of the house, it provide her the opportunity to step out of the household. It was an unquestionable activity that she could attend without offending the sensibilities of her dominating mother-in-law (who herself, paradoxically participated in many religious as well as social activities). Similarly, Marathe and Saroj Mujumdar are members of *the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti* (National Women's Service Organization) a right-wing Hindu women's organization which was founded by Laxmibai Kelkar as a women's counterpart to the RSS but unaffiliated to it. Mujumdar has been a leader in the RSS for many years. She explains that the three guiding principles of the Samiti are *netrutva* (leadership), *maatrutva* (motherhood) and *kartutva* (work/action/duty). The women who symbolize these qualities and are used as role models are Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi (for leadership), Jijabai, the mother of Shivaji (for motherhood) and Ahilyadevi Holkar, ruler of Indore (for work/action/duty).<sup>14</sup> Despite the leadership of these women and their contributions to society in other fields/ways, the emphasis is on motherhood and domesticity. In following the footsteps of these role models, the participation of the *Samiti* women in activities outside the home – either in the form of leading the nation or in the form of “social service” – becomes an aspect of their domesticity and domestic responsibility. That is, the domestic is never removed from the definition of femininity; rather the definition of the domestic is expanded to include these other aspects. Similarly Raje's participation and leadership in Sri Satya Sai Seva (service) Organization is not viewed by her as an aspect of distancing herself from domesticity, but rather as integral to it. Thus in its association with the nation, religion and spirituality are also recast as a part of the domestic responsibilities of women. On the

other hand, such conflation of nationalism, religion and domesticity also allows women to access formerly inaccessible spaces and opportunities for association.<sup>15</sup>

In this chapter, I have attempted to outline the historical and ideological framework of domesticity which undergirds the experiences of upper caste women in my research. In the following chapters I examine the relationship between the domestic/domesticity and gender and caste.

Chapter 2 examines the overlap between the family and caste in ideological and life history discourses. It explores the conflation of caste with family and the significance of such “domestication” of caste to women’s gender and caste subjectivities. I also explore the role of the family and caste in constructing specific contexts of domesticity within which women experience the privileges and disadvantages of caste and gender.

Chapter 3 investigates the relationship between marriage and domesticity. I shift the focus of marriage vis-à-vis caste from endogamy to desire and labor, which I argue are integrated within and cast as aspects of women’s domesticity. I call for identifying the connections between women’s physical, ritual, emotional and sexual labor in order to investigate how upper caste women’s labor is employed in the sustenance of gender and caste patriarchies.

In Chapter 4, I explore the division between the domestic and the non-domestic along the lines of the public/private dichotomy. This chapter sheds light on the ways in which the ideology of domesticity encumbers women with specific norms of femininity in public or non-domestic spaces. Drawing on women’s life histories, I view this as an



aspect of the institutionalizing of gender, and examine the ways in which women have engaged with, critiqued and redefined the domestic in their lives.

Chapter 5 takes a different route by examining the centrality of domestic space and domestic relationships to the preservation and recovery of women's histories. I highlight my experiences of trying to recover the life and locate the written work of Anandibai Jayawant, a Marathi writer from Baroda and my great grand-aunt. After I had maneuvered through conventional archives and libraries in search of her work, I finally located some of her books in the private library of Saroj Mujumdar, whose grandmother-in-law Akkasaheb Mujumdar was a lifelong friend and patron of Anandibai. I explore the significance of personal relationships and the centrality of the domestic space in the preservation of women's histories.

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<sup>1</sup> Recently Janaki Abraham (2014) has made the argument in the context of caste-based endogamous marriages that anxiety over female sexuality, which scholars like Chakravarti and anti-caste activist-thinker like Jyotiba Phule and Pandita Ramabai had identified as characteristic of the upper castes, and which prompted Chakravarti to label it "Brahmanical" patriarchy, is not limited to the upper castes alone. Thus Abraham argues for renaming it as "caste patriarchy" instead.

<sup>2</sup> Davidoff and Hall (2002, xvi) note that although the idea of separate spheres had become "the common sense of the middle class" it was "always fractured."

<sup>3</sup> The first American cookbook, Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery* was published in 1796. Catherine Beecher's immensely popular *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* was first published in 1841.

<sup>4</sup> The high status of women within the ideology of domesticity, according to Matthews (1987, 92-3) was on account of republicanism, "a blend of religious and political precepts" which implied "believing in the individual's efficacy, not only to direct his or her own life but also to contribute to the national well-being by being a good citizen."

<sup>5</sup> Matthews (1987) also argues that the value that was associated with women's work as heralded by the discourses of domesticity in the 19th century began to wane and by the 1950s women's domestic work began to be seen as non-work. Domesticity had been denigrated such that women's role in the home was labelled as "just a housewife" and which led to Betty Freidan's exposition on the "problem that has no name." As Matthews (1987, xiii-xiv) remarks, "In 1950, the suburban, middle-class housewife was doubly isolated: physically, by the nature of housing patterns, and spiritually, because she had become merely the general factotum for her family. She was a cog in the economic machine, necessary for the maintenance of national prosperity but overlooked in discussions of the gross national product."

<sup>6</sup> Contrarily, such recasting of femininity, motherhood and women's moral authority especially vis-à-vis the colonized also granted women in Europe the opportunity to generate feminist discourses around the social

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and legal subordination of women (Burton 1994). In creating a feminine Other and by positioning themselves as superior and more privileged, for instance, British women were not only able to participate in non-domestic spaces of colonial expansion but also demand more rights for themselves vis-à-vis gender patriarchy in their home country. Burton (1994, 83) observes, “The chief function of the Other woman was to throw into relief those special qualities of the British feminist that not only bound her to the race and the empire but made her the highest and most civilized national female type, the very embodiment of social progress and progressive civilization.”

<sup>7</sup> According to Tonkovich, women writers of advice literature like Beecher or Sarah Josepha Hale, far from propagating “mere” domesticity for women, were actually “domestic theorists and proponents of higher education for women.” While Hale has been criticized by feminists as the one responsible for institutionalizing “True Womanhood” along the lines of “peity, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” Tonkovich argues that much of Hale’s journalism was directed at increasing the legal rights of white, educated, middle-class women.

<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding these oppositions by conservatives like Tilak, it is also important to note that efforts for women’s education in western India were advanced by educationists like Karve, Ranade and his wife Ramabai, and Jyotiba and his wife Savitri Phule.

<sup>9</sup> Here we see that Kadambini’s successful balancing of work and domestic life is made possible by the availability of domestic help. She has to supervise but the actual labor is performed by other, presumably lower class, women.

<sup>10</sup> In another interesting analysis Mary Hancock (2002) has observed that inspired by the Gandhian principles of “economic self-sufficiency and limited consumption” nationalists began questioning “the moral necessity of much of the jewelry and silk clothing favored by privileged, upper-caste women.” Such “refashioning” of women however, “challenged the local styles of feminine praxis.” Hancock (2002, 878) argues: “What was understood among upper-caste Hindus as womanly beauty and auspiciousness was produced and maintained through bodily modalities, such as giving, receiving, and wearing gold jewelry and silk saris. These transactions were important means by which relations of affection and authority among family members were constituted. A woman’s refusal to enter such circuits, or her modification of them, had the potential to generate conflict of the sort that could compromise family honor as well as the woman’s own reputation and autonomy. Hence, even the seemingly innocuous gesture of refusing a mother-in-law’s gift of silk sari could carry nationalist implications thus making the home and family sites of nationalist struggle.”

<sup>11</sup> Ann Gilchrist Strong who was the founding member of American Home Economic Association helped set up the Department of Home Science at Baroda University during 1917-1920. She authored special books to be included in the curriculum that combined scientific home management with precepts from Hindu moral codes (Hancock 2001, 886-8).

<sup>12</sup> Kishwar (1692) notes that Gandhi “repeatedly dismissed the more situationally relevant Rani of Jhansi [who fought against the British in Revolt of 1857] symbol in favor of a combination of [the mythological] Sita-Draupadi symbol” which valorized “women’s spiritual and moral strength.” This symbolism was essential because it also fit into his philosophy of non-violence as he “stressed the superiority of women’s suffering and self-sacrifice rather than aggressive assertion and forceful intervention to protect their interests and gain power.” But as Sujata Patel (1988, 378) argues it is important to note that Gandhi’s “reformulation” of femininity is “mediated by his class, caste and religious ideologies” and that his normative understanding of women – what women should be – is influenced by these factors. Patel contends that the Gandhi was not oblivious to the contradictions in his own thought and that he tried to resolve them over time.

<sup>13</sup> Aggarwal (1995, 46) criticizes the Hindutva discourse that “while other racial groups are not defined in religious terms, the various ethnic groups owing allegiance to Islam are transformed into one single race, that is Muslim.”

<sup>14</sup> Mujumdar explains the significance of these women as role models: Jijabai epitomizes motherhood because it is on account of her grooming that Shivaji became a great Maratha ruler. Laxmibai was widowed, with a child, at a young age and she must have been only twenty when she led her army against the British in the Revolt of 1857. She thus displayed leadership of both her family and the society.

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Similarly Ahilyadevi Holkar, the ruler of Indore, maintained her kingdom with chastity and strength during a time when all the neighboring kingdoms were tumultuous (“*arajyak*”). And even though a large part of India was ruled by Muslim rulers or by the Christian British, Ahilyadevi’s letters and messengers found safe passage anywhere “from Kashmir to Kanyakumari.” Most importantly she established her authority and status through purity (*saatvikta*).

<sup>15</sup> I draw this preliminary argument from my experience within the Sri Satya Sai Seva Organization the activities of which allow women to stay away from home for long and odd hours without it been seen as inappropriate or transgressive. I plan to explore some of these aspects of the relationship between gender and religious patriarchies in a future project.

## **Chapter 2: In the Family: The Construction of Gender and Caste Subjectivities for Upper Caste Women**

It had been only a couple of days since my interview with her, when I ran into one of my participants, Dr. Kalpana Paralikar at a wedding reception in Baroda. Paralikar, who is a relative of a relative, told my mother that she had enjoyed the interview experience very much. Turning to me she said by way of giving feedback and advice that in the course of my interviews I would find that CKP<sup>1</sup> women are more vocal and not afraid of speaking what is on their minds, even if it is against the family and community. She remarked that I would find Brahman women more conservative in expressing their views against the family and against their caste: CKP women are bolder.<sup>2</sup> While candidly sharing her life story with me in her interview she also mentioned that it was easy for her to share her experiences and her opinions because she was older and had accomplished her ambitions. She suggested that younger women would not be so open about expressing their feelings and opinions with regard to the family and caste because they are still embedded within and in a way invested in these institutions. She thus points to a lack of similarly unmediated agency for Brahman women and younger women to challenge the family and caste as patriarchal institutions. These statements highlight the relationship between caste, womanhood and acceptable female behavior especially for upper caste

women. In identifying her own active agency while also denying or rejecting similar agency of women of other castes and age categories, Paralikar places herself in a subject position that enables her to question, challenge and attempt to restructure both the family and caste.

This chapter explores the place of the family in construction of gender and caste subjectivities of upper caste women by examining the life history narratives of three Marathi-speaking women of Baroda. The family, which is literally the domestic sphere, plays an important role in institutionalizing domesticity for women vis-à-vis both gender and caste. I examine this relationship between family, gender, caste and domesticity. I argue that in the exercise of gendering caste the family is an important tool of analysis. I also attempt to center the family in the investigation of caste and in the rethinking of caste epistemologies. What are the discourses that inscribe specific gender and caste roles for upper caste women? In what ways does the family mediate gender, caste and class identities for these women? How do women understand and respond to these identities? How do they understand and define their own gendered and caste subjectivities? What can a focus on the family contribute to the existing understanding of caste? I look for the answers to these questions in the life history narratives of upper caste women. In analyzing the life stories of my participants, I employ the family as an important tool in the analysis of both their subject positions and their subjectivities as upper caste women. The family is a site on which the dynamics of caste and caste identity are played out.

Since family is also central to the processes of the construction of gender (Dube 1988), I examine the trilateral relationship between the family, caste and gender, and

identify the ideology of domesticity as being at the heart of this relationship. How do these women situate themselves as gendered vis-à-vis the family? In what ways do the shifts in the family structure affect the changes in their subject positions? How do they define the family and how is their definition closely linked with their identities as upper caste women? In answering these questions, I posit the family as an important tool for the analysis of gender and caste in India.

### ***Gender, Caste and the Family***

The importance of the institution of family to the system of caste is well acknowledged within the scholarship on caste. Family is regarded as the basic unit of caste within which young children learn the customs and practices of their own caste. It is also within and through the family that they learn about the existence of social hierarchy and social distance (Mandelbaum 2007). Ursula Sharma (2005, 69) observes that in the marriages that were “arranged” keen attention was paid to whether the incoming brides were “familiar with the ritual and occupational practices of the caste they both belonged to, [to ensure that they would] contribute to their reproduction in ways appropriate to their roles as wives and mothers.” The close connection between the family and the caste has been explored by scholars like Leela Dube (2001), Prem Chowdhry (1997, 2007) and G.N. Ramu (1977), among others. An important distinction of these studies is that unlike the earlier works on the family in India which focused on theoretical and scriptural explanations and examinations of the nature and structure of the family in India, Dube, Chowdhry and Ramu examine the realities of daily life as experienced in and through the family. In her examination of the relationship between caste and women Dube (2001, 15)

argues that since women experience their daily life largely within the family, the “centrality of the family and the household in their lives cannot, therefore, be overemphasized.”<sup>3</sup> Chowdhry’s work on gender and violence in North India explores the close relationship between caste honor and family honor in the context of inter-caste marriages in northern India. Her examination of the family and/or caste perpetuated violence that follows inter-caste marriages highlights the overlap in the patriarchal interests of the family and the caste. Furthermore, in cases where the family does not object to a marriage that is forbidden by the rules of the caste, the larger caste community comes to stand in for the family and punishes the couple for their perceived transgressions. In a different vein, G.N. Ramu’s (1977) empirical work examines the complexities of caste and family life in urban India. He identifies “family centrism” as an important feature of Indian social structures which echoes Beteille’s (1992) argument that the importance of the family has been replacing the importance of caste in India. However contrary to Beteille’s observation that “in important domains in contemporary India caste exists as a social fact but not a social institution,”<sup>4</sup> Ramu rejects the then widespread belief that the importance of caste in urban India was in decline and argues that caste affiliations are still a source of benefits, status and identity for people in urban South India.

In a different context, Craig Jeffrey has identified the nexus between family, kinship and caste in the informal power network in Uttar Pradesh. He argues that “rich farmers belonging to the intermediate Jat caste” (2000, 1013) in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh have been able to augment their social and economic power by placing their

relatives within the police and the government bureaucracy. He points to the importance of not only the family but also the kinship network in raising the profile of this caste within the informal political network of the region. He also attributes the “prevailing system of arranged marriages” as one of the ways in which “opportunistic male heads of households” enhance their political contacts and thereby their social and economic status. The result is the increased “vulnerability of young women” because “patriarchal strategic considerations [are] paramount in the choice of a husband” (Jeffrey 2000, 1029). There is also a continued emphasis on “culturally ascribed notions of femininity” in the context of these marriages. In this manner, the hierarchy of gender and gendered relations are important aspects of the linkages between family and caste.

The premise of this chapter is that contrary to the experiences of lower caste women, who face sexual and economic violence in public and private lives on account of their gender *and* caste, caste is not a significant source of discrimination or disadvantage for upper caste women in the public or non-domestic sphere. Even where it is a source of disadvantage, for instance when young girls are not allowed to pursue education or careers, the restriction occurs within familial spaces rather than public spaces. This is to say that upper caste women experience caste mostly in and through the family or the domestic sphere. Often the space of the domestic extends beyond the family to include caste or kinship communities. But while I posit the family as an important tool of analysis of caste and gender, I am not in any way arguing that the family is a private institution. It has been argued for long in feminist theory that far from being a private entity, the family has been at the center of public discourses on gender, sexuality, the nation, and



citizenship (see Sreenivas 2012). Furthermore, by theorizing the family as a private institution, mainstream political and social theory had occluded the political and politicized nature of the family (Okin 1989). Rather, as Carle Zimmerman (2005, 57) argues, the family must be understood as a “bifocal private and public social system,” where the boundaries of the divide are extremely porous and tenuous making it a highly contested and complex social institution. In a bid to examine how caste functions in the lives of upper caste women, this chapter focuses on those aspects of the family that are private/ized and thus excluded from the understandings of caste.

### ***Caste and/as the Family***

There are four important ways in which gender, caste and the family appear interconnected in the narratives of my participants. The first way in which this relation manifests itself is in the form of slippage between the family and caste such that caste transforms into a surrogate family and the family as a basic unit of the social structure of caste is called upon to function as representative of the caste culture. Secondly, I examine the ways that women’s membership in the family and the caste community is controlled, regulated and negotiated by others, and where members of the family and caste act as gatekeepers to women’s membership therein. Thirdly, I examine the ways that the caste and class status of my participants determine their access to resources and opportunities both within and outside the family. The final aspect of this relationship explores the centrality of their family, caste and gender identity to their subjectivities. These four aspects also point to the different ways in which the ideology of domesticity operates and the ways that these women interact with it.

These observations loosely correspond to the aspects of the family and caste as defined by Leela Dube (1988) and Andre Beteille. Beteille (1992, 13) identifies the institutions of the family and the caste as “not merely a set of social arrangements but also the ideas, beliefs and values by which those arrangements are sustained.” In other words, both the family and caste, along with being ways of organizing social life, are also normative institutions that define the rules and values along which social life and relationships are organized. Similarly, Dube highlights two aspects of the family beyond its structure and demography. According to her the family is also defined through a set of rules, which govern “recruitment and marital residence, and the normative and actual patterns of rearrangement of the family” from one generation to the next (Dube 1988, WS11). A second, more material aspect of the family structure includes the actual distribution of entitlements and resources among members of the family, like “apportionment of family resources, gender-based and age-based division of work, and the conceptions of, and training for, future roles of male and female children” (Dube 1988, WS11). In other words, the role of the family is both structural and normative – it provides “moral codes” alongside defining “organizing principles” which together determine the access to membership within the family. I understand both the family and the caste as social institutions and as normative structures that determine the distribution of privileges, entitlements and economic and social resources among its members. It is in this context that caste and the family ideologies overlap to the extent that women’s membership within each is regulated, controlled and negotiated. The narratives of my participants highlight that there is a close relationship between women’s access to

membership within the family and the caste. Often such access (or its refutation) is a matter of struggle for women. The family and the caste determine the ways in which women “belong” or “should belong” to the community. Moreover, membership within the caste is also deeply contingent on one’s appropriate membership within the family.

To illustrate the overlap between caste and the family, I begin with a discussion of a 2009 Special Issue of *Utkarshvrutta*, the monthly magazine of the CKP caste association of Baroda. In the introduction to this Special Issue entitled *CKP Vivah Visheshank* (Special Issue on Marriage), the editor Dilip Khopkar (2009) writes:

Every caste community has its own unique identity. This identity is defined through the many aspects of the community’s life: how the people of the caste live, how they behave, what kind of food they eat, what deities they worship, and how they celebrate their festivals. The community within which all families equally preserve the particular ways of life of the caste emerges as a unified, loving and strong community. Only an emotionally strong and unified caste community can achieve collective progress. And it is only through the collective progress of caste communities that a nation progresses. Therefore for national progress, it is important that each state, region and caste community becomes emotionally, intellectually, and financially progressive, and for this the first step would be to foster a unique caste identity.

As Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhus, we also have a unique caste identity, and our own set of customs, practices, rituals and beliefs. We have our unique ways of celebrating festivals. This special issue has been compiled with the intention of acquainting families, which are scattered in today’s age of divided families, with our customs and practices, so that we are able to celebrate our festivals in a

proper manner. In doing so, we aim not only for a unified and strong CKP community but also for a prosperous nation....This issue is presented with the hope that we are able to celebrate our wedding ceremonies – that mark the beginning of our family lives – with joy, and without falling into the traps of ill omen and superstition (1; my translation from Marathi).

This introduction to an issue that bears the burden of instructing CKP families in the customs and rituals associated with CKP weddings raises several significant points. The statement makes it clear that the family is not only the basic unit of a nation, but also a pillar of the caste community. For a strong caste identity, it is important that every family follows the prescribed norms of behavior and be diligent about the customs, practices, rituals and beliefs of the caste community. It also alludes to the fact that in today's age of "nuclear" families, it is possible that the younger families have no elders to instruct them in the proper code of customs and rituals. The caste association thus adopts the role of a surrogate family that fulfills the need to continue the transmission of caste practices from one generation to the next. The contributors to this Special Issue are middle-aged and elderly men and women who consider it their duty to transfer the caste practices to the younger generation. These older adults thus perform the role of the elders of the family by instructing the young in the ways of life of the CKP caste. In this context, the caste (or at least the caste association) assumes the place of the family. Moreover, the transmission of cultural codes to the younger members of the caste is done by appealing to a unique caste identity. By participating in the customs and behavioral practices of the caste, one can not only be a member of the community, but indeed be proud of belonging to the community. The editor's introduction suggests that to "properly" "belong" to a caste

community, one must follow the prescribed caste practices within the family. Furthermore, it also clarifies that doing so is not regressive or against “modernity” because these prescribed caste practices have no place for “ill omen and superstition.” Rather, he adds, the Special Issue should be seen as a starting point for discussions about adapting to “the changing times, to changing circumstances,” and for “furthering modernity” within the caste (Khopkar 2009, 1).

Such appeals to a caste identity can be seen as one of the responses to the diminishing importance of caste for urban, educated and professional class of people. The CKP caste boasts of 100% literacy,<sup>5</sup> and sees itself as “modern” and “progressive.” In an informal chat with me at the office of the CKP caste association in Baroda, Dilip Khopkar, who is also the President of the caste association, professed his hope that the CKP community becomes a model for the middle-class in India. Referring to the Special Issue on Marriage, he said that times were changing and “we” should change too. Both the Special Issue and his conversation with me suggest a shift in the perception of caste as a private/ized institution. Indian nationalist and reformist discourses had pushed both gender and caste concerns within the realms of the family in response to the colonial criticisms which defined discriminations based on caste and gender as evidence of a lack of modernity and morality of Indian populations (Chatterjee 1990; Malhotra 2002). Moreover, since there has always been a close connection between caste and gender hierarchies (Chakarvarti 1993; Rao 2003) the “privatization” of one resulted in the “privatization” of the other. For instance, Anshu Malhotra (2002) has highlighted the centrality of gender to the reorganization of caste, class and religion in colonial Punjab.

While “acquiring appropriate modernity” was a way for higher castes to consolidate their power within the context of colonialism, this project required a reorganization of community life that also ensured the establishment of their middle-class status. However being “modern” also implied that caste, which had been marked as a sign of a premodern identity, could not to be addressed in the arena of public discourse, but rather had to be sorted out in the private domain. One of the ways in which the changes in caste were addressed in the private sphere was through a “renewed emphasis on the regulation of the conduct of women” (Malhotra 2002, 2). Caste was reorganized to correspond to the emerging middle-class status through a renewed control over gender norms for women within the family. By confining caste to the family, this discourse sought to privatize caste, such that despite its continuance in everyday life, it could be shielded from political debates and public scrutiny during the struggles for social and political dominance. A reorganized family life, based upon the notion of ideal womanhood, was seen as the cornerstone of a restructured caste to correspond to colonial modernity in colonial Punjab.

However, Khopkar’s views in both the *Vivah Visheshank* and in conversation with me suggest that if a caste community is able to achieve appropriate or adequate modernity and “progress,” caste can not only come out of its hiding as a private identity, but indeed be a source of pride and inspiration in the public sphere,<sup>6</sup> even as the family continues to be burdened with the continuation of caste culture through certain practices and customs. Thus instead of refuting caste, a good ideal for contemporary times, according to Khopkar, is to change with times by upholding certain values of the caste

culture while giving up and changing the retrogressive ones. Some of the ways in which the CKP caste in Baroda measures its “progressiveness” is in terms of the level and access to education to members of the community, entry into professional careers, tolerating intercaste marriages, and even allowing those women who have married outside the caste to retain their caste membership if they so wish and through the perceived status/condition of women (measured similarly by access to education and employment). One of the important ways in which the attitude of CKP caste has changed is in terms of caste membership for women by accepting women from other castes who marry into the CKP community, while also retaining the membership of those women who marry outside the community, and even extending membership to the children of these women.<sup>7</sup> However it is important to note that the decision of “allowing” women into a caste is still controlled by the male members of the community. For women “belonging” to a family and a caste is often a matter of struggle. In the following pages I examine the various aspects of this struggle for belongingness within the family and/or a caste community.

Each of the three narratives I examine in this chapter explores and often complicates the relationship between the family, caste and gender. The narratives relate to one or more of the four ways in which gender, caste and class seems interconnected with the family. In challenging the CKP caste identity that has been offered to and often imposed on her, Kalpana Paralikar also challenges the notion of caste itself. She identifies the family, rather than caste, as the repository of culture and as she questions the value of changing a woman’s identity after marriage, even within the same caste, she

challenges the unifying impulses of caste communities that strive for a unique identity on the basis of a unified caste-based culture. Sushma Marathe's identity oscillates throughout the narrative between a harassed and unhappy daughter-in-law and a strong, inspiring and encouraging mother. Her narrative illustrates the ways in which women act as gatekeepers to family membership and thus to domesticity for women, and how Marathe herself challenges this by ensuring equitable membership for her daughters even though she herself struggled to secure the same. Her narrative also reflects on the gendered expectations of upper caste women vis-à-vis motherhood and work. Her advice to her daughters resonates with a striking contrast from what she had wanted for herself in her life but could not achieve. Finally, Snehalata Raje's narrative charts her life and its struggles that are a result of self-imposed rules and norms of behavior. Her description of herself as a strong and fearless woman often contradicts her initial life where she chose to quietly bear everything in her marital home for the sake of maintaining marital and familial harmony. Her relentless work, both paid and unpaid, in her marital home eventually affected her health. Both Marathe's and Raje's narratives also highlight the compulsions of domesticity for women and its relationship with caste and class status. Domesticity and appropriate femininity thus become the context within which gender and caste subjectivities for upper caste women are realized. It would be important to note here that except for Paralakar who makes explicit connections between caste and gender, my other participants addressed the issue of caste in more indirect ways by embedding it within the narratives of events from their life. All the same, the connections that I make in this chapter between family, caste and gender, especially in the narratives of Marathe



and Raje, are my readings of their life histories. Caste as a privilege and a status undergirds these histories which I have tried to highlight in my analysis.

***Kalpana Paralikar***

“I was born to a Brahmin, in a Brahmin family, to a Kayastha mother, and I am married to a Kayastha man, so I don’t know which caste I belong to [sic].”

Paralikar’s narrative reflects the mosaic of cultures and experiences that mark her family and her life. Paralikar was born in 1940 in Baroda to a Brahman father and a CKP mother. She had a step-mother who was Irani<sup>8</sup> and two half-sisters and a half-brother. And even though her step-mother had not converted to Hinduism or adopted Hindu ways of life, Paralikar’s mother accepted her as a part of their family and they lived within the same household. Although initially she was not academically inclined at all, Paralikar has a Ph.D. in Home Science. She taught at the M.S. University of Baroda and retired in 2002 as the Head of the Department of Home Science and the Dean of Continuing Adult Education. As a part of her academic research she worked with women and with NGOs (Non-Governmental/Non-Profit Organizations) in the rural areas around Baroda. After retirement she served as a consultant for seven years to an NGO in a tribal area in Gujarat, where she helped start an institute which trains personnel working in rural areas and helps develop project proposals for funding. She also started her own academy, RUDRA (Rural Urban Development and Research Academy), although she is not very invested in it now. She still helps people who seek her assistance in developing projects or establishing training centers, but she does not advertise the academy much. She has several publications on the issues of women and development, and is popular in many

scholarly circles, especially in Baroda. Her views, therefore, reflect her experiences as a professor at a university, as a warden of the university hostels, and as an academic who has been aware of the early literature on caste in India. Her demeanor is also indicative of the authority that comes with these various experiences as well as with being an accomplished woman well regarded in her family and community.

On the day of my interview with her, as I explained the objective of my research project, among the first things she mentioned was the difference in the approach towards caste between her children and “other Paralikars.” When I prodded more about this point, she explained that both she and her husband had been university teachers for over 40 years. They lived in the housing facility provided by the University for its faculty members. It is there that her children encountered different cultures. There were residents from different parts of India, and in fact very few of them were even Marathi-speaking. This, according to Paralikar, had a great impact on her children, for they did not feel the need to identify according to their caste (as CKPs). Moreover, they also celebrated all festivals with equal zeal. Her children studied in a school run by Christian Missionaries which meant that they prayed in the Church every morning and celebrated all Christian holidays in school. In addition, even the hierarchy that existed within the University came to be mitigated somewhat in the residential quarters, where her sons were friends with the sons of clerks and peons. Some of these children also went to the same school as her children and so the caste identities became insignificant – if not eliminated – for her children. By contrast, her elder sister-in-law insisted that her children go to a Marathi school and learn Marathi, even though (perhaps especially because) they lived in

Gujarat.<sup>9</sup> This affected them adversely when the demand for English education and literacy suddenly became important. When Kalpana Paralikar's nephew came to Baroda to get a Master's degree in Social Work, he realized that he was paying the price for his mother's insistence on a Marathi education, for he failed to secure admission into the Social Work program at M.S. University for two consecutive years, until he was comfortable with both the English language and the cosmopolitan culture of the University. Paralikar also attributes the intensely cosmopolitan culture of Baroda for the weakening of caste and religious boundaries. Her other sister-in-law lived in Jogeshwari, a suburb of Mumbai, and her parents lived close by. As a result, her children were only surrounded by the sister-in-law's natal family and did not even know their extended Paralikar family until they were adults and began visiting on their own. She describes such upbringing as "*koop manduk vrutti*" or the perspective of a frog in a well, who thinks that the well is the world until it jumps out of it. According to Paralikar, her and her husband's attitude towards caste differentiates them from other upper caste families who insist that their children associate more with members of their own caste and/or linguistic groups.

Such instant association of caste with the family, with the socialization of children within the family, and the differences between the same extended family vis-à-vis caste points to the ways in which Paralikar perceives caste as expressed through the family. Her insistence on the importance of "multiculturalism," as well as the insignificance of caste identities might be rooted in her experiences as being part of a family that could not be/did not identify as a singular caste category. In addition, the experiences of her

mother, her step-mother and her father with regard to caste and the family has resulted in her complex relationship with caste, as an identity and a social system. As mentioned above, her father had another wife, whom he had actually married before his marriage to Paralikar's mother. She explains the conditions that made it possible for her father to marry an Irani girl without much resistance from his family, even though she had different religious and cultural values. Her father was the youngest in the family and having lost his mother at a very young age was raised by his eldest sister-in-law. Thus, his family was very lenient towards him with regard to his social and sexual behavior, and placed minimal restrictions upon him. His father's family was originally from Pune but had moved to Baroda. He studied in Baroda and then in Pune, where he met Paralikar's step-mother and married her. However, even before they got married, she had declared that she would not come to live within a Brahman household, because having lived in Pune, which had a predominantly Brahman population,<sup>10</sup> she was aware of "how women were treated in Brahmin [sic] households." According to Paralikar, the (Maharashtrian) Brahmins of Pune are very orthodox and are infamous for their eccentricities. They are also known to be very patriarchal and still continue to look down upon women. Women are considered important only to the extent of their reproductive functionality. Only older women would gain some status within the family/household, but until the mother-in-law or other older women were active within the household, the rest of the younger womenfolk had no significant worth or respect in the family. During her time in Pune, Paralikar's step-mother had witnessed the daily humiliation that was a part of women's lives in Brahman families and therefore she told her husband that she

did not want be a part of his family. Her husband had accepted her wishes. On the other hand, Paralikar's mother liked her father and wanted to marry him. Finally, since his first wife would not come to live with the family, he decided to marry Paralikar's mother because she loved him.<sup>11</sup>

Akin to her father's situation, Paralikar's mother had also lost her mother at a very young age and was raised by her sister-in-law (eldest brother's wife) with her children. However, since she was motherless, she had the sympathies of the family and was allowed more leniency than other women of similar age. Her father was the Diwan in the Court of Sayajirao Gaekwad of Baroda. The family thus occupied a high social (i.e. caste-based), economic and political status in Baroda. Therefore, when Paralikar's mother, who was in love with her father, declared her decision to marry him, she faced intense resistance from her father and her brothers. They could not accept her marrying a poor, lowly Brahmin. One of her brothers, who was an officer in the police department even threatened to kill her and her lover. Despite these threats she married him but the cost was her ostracism from the natal family for years. Paralikar remembers that as children she and her siblings never visited their uncle's home even though they lived in the same city. It was only after her grandfather passed away that her uncles' antagonism declined and her mother was allowed a reentry into her natal family home. The male kin, in this instance, acted as gatekeepers to her mother's membership within her family.<sup>12</sup>

The extent of women's "belonging," of membership in a family and in caste communities have often been controlled and defined by males. The following narrative which contrasts an instance from Paralikar's life with that from her mother's depicts the

tenuousness of the boundaries of caste and challenges the role of men as its gatekeepers.

Years ago Paralikar was invited to preside over the *Akhil Bharatiya Kayastha Prabhu*

*Mahila Parishad* (All India Kayastha Prabhu Women's Conference) in Ahmedabad.

When the chairperson of the organizing committee came to her house to request her, she

asked him several times: "Do you want me to come? Are you sure you want me to

come?," to which the organizers replied, "Why are you asking this? You are one of our

best CKP ladies." She accepted the invitation and as she took the stage at the Conference,

which included both male and female participants, as well as officers of the caste

association, she said:

What a destiny! A girl who is brought up as a Brahmin, gets married to a CKP at

the age of 25 and can qualify to be the President of the Conference! ... As a child

I remember there was a similar conference in Baroda and my mother wanted to

attend it. She only wanted to attend it. She didn't want to sit on the dais, she

didn't want to chair a session...but she was refused entry – she kept on knocking

[on the door] – [but] she was refused entry by her own relative who was the local

convener [of the conference] ...and I still remember how disturbed she was ...

What are you trying to do? By culture, am I a CKP? How am I a CKP? Just

because I married a CKP? Or I am a CKP because I was born to a CKP mother!

Who am I? What is my identity? Why am I here? And I kept on asking the

organizers, 'Do you want me?' and [they] never realized why I am asking him.

So I want to ask all of you. You are all wise and learned who have gathered here.

The cream of the CKP community is here [today].

By this time in her speech, she heard soft sobs. One of the female organizers told her that her talk had touched the many CKP daughters who had married outside the community were there to attend the Conference. Paralikar was amazed and asked, “Wow, are they allowed to attend?” The organizer replied, “Not only are they allowed to attend, several of them are presenting their views.” Paralikar asked the organizer for the liberty to call upon the *Maahervashinis* (married daughters)<sup>13</sup> before the *Saasurvashinis* (daughters-in-law). Hearing this, the women in the wing now began crying even more uncontrollably. Paralikar inquired the reason for their tears: “It’s because you called us *Maahervashinis*,” was their reply, to which Paralikar reasserted their status as daughters of the caste. She told them that she was an outsider – a “*Saasurvashin* but not a CKP.” So she declared from the dais on that day that she was not a CKP. She was born to a CKP mother, and was married to a CKP. But she did not claim the CKP caste identity for herself on that day.

Later, while compiling the report on the events at the Conference, the organizers approached her with the request that they wanted to exclude the part about her mother not being allowed into the CKP conference from the final report. Paralikar retorted that she would allow her speech to be published only in its entirety. If they wanted to edit portions out, they should leave out her whole speech: “I don’t care even if you don’t [publish/include the speech in the report].”

The self-assumed task of men as guardians of women’s access to the community is seen in both instances – Paralikar’s and her mother’s – as they determine who can be included within the caste group. While Paralikar’s mother wanted to retain her

membership in the CKP caste – as evidenced by the fact that she wanted to attend the CKP conference – she was denied entry to the conference, which at that moment symbolized the caste community. Her exclusion from the conference signified her exclusion from the caste. Moreover, the fact that her own relative denied her entry is not only pertinent but significant in this discussion on the relationship between family and caste. For a woman who had “transgressed” caste boundaries by marrying a non-CKP, it was only appropriate for her male kin to restrict her entry into the caste, just as she had been denied entry into the family. On the other hand, Paralikar is not only “allowed” entry but also formally felicitated for being “an exceptional CKP lady,” despite her own indifference. Who then, gets “claimed” as a member of the caste? Under what circumstances? Paralikar’s staggering social stature as a Ph.D., Professor and Head of Home Science at the M.S. University of Baroda, and as the Dean of Continuing Adult Education was a central reason for the CKP caste bestowing membership upon her despite her own ambivalence. Such “claiming” of well-known or powerful women as a part of a caste community is also seen in other instances. For example, in a collection of essays on the history and society of the Chitpavan Kokanastha Brahmans (Dikshit) published in 2003, Pandita Ramabai is listed among the most prominent Chitpavan personalities.<sup>14</sup> However, identifying Pundita Ramabai as a Chitpavan Brahman completely ignores her history of personal and political struggles against the Hindu caste society and her eventual conversion to Christianity. The gendering of caste histories thus needs to account for women’s relationship with and struggles within and against caste as well as the family, through which caste is expected to be upheld and continued.



In this context, Paralikar's defiance of an imposed caste identity should be read as her resistance against the fact that women do not get to choose their own caste and family affiliations.<sup>15</sup> In the end, she openly declared, from the stage that is honoring her for being an accomplished member of the CKP community, that she declines the CKP identity. "I am a *Saasurvashin*," she said, "but not a CKP." Furthermore, the employment of the terms *Maahervashin* and *Saasurvashin*, which are used to describe a married woman's relationship within a family – whether it is her parents' home or her in-laws' home (never her home!) – within the context of caste membership further illustrates the overlap between the family and caste. The use of these terms to define women's relationship with the caste community points to a slippage between the family and the caste that is not incidental in Paralikar's narrative. Since the Ahmedabad event, she has been invited several times to preside over similar conferences and she says that her reproach toward the community has been same every time: "She is your daughter. Any woman who is groomed as ... a member of [your] family, just because she marries, suddenly she becomes nobody in your own community? What kind of custom [do] you have?"

In an interesting argument Paralikar also challenges the primacy of caste and instead emphasizes the importance of the family as a set of cultural values. Challenging the practice of changing of the [first] name of a woman upon marriage, which was a fairly common practice in Marathi-speaking upper castes, she told her mother-in-law: "How do you expect a 25 year old woman, just by sake of changing her name ... can you change her *sanskar* (norms of behavior/culture), one which she is born with, she has

cultivated for all these years? Just because you change [her name] from Nalini to Shobhana, Shobhana has changed? She has become a Paralikal?” Here Paralikal defines both the family and the caste as a set of *sanskar*, and argues that even though women’s membership in a family might be ensured by changing her name, it does not change her upbringing, her family (and caste) culture, which is expected upon marriage. The practice of changing of the first name was seen as a way of erasing the past identity of the woman in a bid to make her a part of her new family. In this context, even if the caste remains the same, Paralikal’s argument suggests that the culture might be different. The ways of everyday life might be different even within the same caste. The family thus defines the primary set of values of behavior and sexuality.

This argument might indeed be the source of the insecurity that is seen in the *Vivah Visheshank*. The lack of a shared culture across families within the same caste might lead to differences in values which undercuts the project of a unified caste identity. Therefore, appeals by the CKP caste association for unified caste identity can also be seen as a way to replace the primacy of family with caste vis-à-vis a set of values that is determined by the caste.

While Paralikal’s narrative depicts the uncertainty of her caste identity and her indifference towards “belonging” to either a family or a caste community, Sushma Marathe’s life depicts a struggle to belong to and to be accepted as a part of her affinal family, especially in the face of discrimination by her domineering mother-in-law.

### ***Sushma Marathe***

“As a woman you *have* to adjust in life. If a woman wishes to see her conjugal and family life running smoothly she has to make compromises and adjustments, because men are excited easily. So women have to be the calmer and saner in the family.”

Sushma Marathe was born in Baroda into a Kokanastha Brahman family and was 60 years of age at the time of the interview in November 2011. She is the fifth among six children in the family of three girls and three boys. Her respect and admiration for her parents and especially her father came through strongly in the interview. Her father had a double MA and was a *Sahityacharya*. He taught English at the Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya in Baroda. Unfortunately, his income was not proportional to his wisdom, although she mentions that she and her siblings had a comfortable life growing up. As children they did not feel a lack of anything in their lives. She indicates that today’s luxuries are false and shallow. When she was growing up, the meaning of happiness and content was different. She reminisces about how they enjoyed everything imaginable at that time: fresh fruit in every season, nutritious daily food, and the occasional ice creams. However, unlike today, she says, they did not have 25 items of clothing, nor did they feel the need. They each had 4-5 outfits and were very content within that. Today, she opines, there is much money and material goods but no contentment.

Her mother Shardabai Joshi (née Abhyankar) was also highly educated for women of her time. She had taken her Intermediate Examination (equivalent to high school), and led a very active social life. She was a member of *Mahila Mandal* and *Bhagini Samaj*, two prominent women’s groups in Baroda. She was also a good *Kho-Kho*

player. Accordingly, the children were also groomed to pursue education and were granted the freedoms that were required for this.<sup>16</sup> Marathe was studying for a Diploma in Electrical Engineering and was in the final year of the program when she was married. She could not graduate because her mother-in-law forbade her from taking the final exams. Her regret at not being able to finish her Diploma and her resentment about this towards her mother-in-law kept reappearing throughout the interview.

Marathe's narrative revolved around two main themes: her mistreatment by her mother-in-law, and her encouragement to her daughters. She portrays herself in one part of the narrative as a woman who had been severely wronged by her mother-in-law. However, even as she sees herself as victimized in a sense, her story also depicts her strength of forbearance as well as the courage to stand up against her mother-in-law at times. In other parts of the narrative, she comes across as the strong and encouraging mother who stands by her daughters, often shielding them from her mother-in-law's rules which she had to obey. I read her life story as a representation of the ways in which women's membership and status within their family/ies are controlled and regulated. Marathe's membership and status in her affinal family was determined by the terms and conditions set forth by her mother-in-law, an important aspect of which was the birth of a son. Since Sushmtai does not have a son, her status within the family, in the eyes of her mother-in-law was always tenuous. Furthermore, her mother-in-law also set terms for Marathe's daughters' status within the family. On the one hand, her daughters' membership and status were based on the belief that as women they are seen as only temporary members of the natal family (Dube 1988, WS-12). On the other hand, the fact

that Marathe did not have a son also created constraints upon their membership. Thus, Marathe's narrative is an illustration of the balance she had to maintain between securing her own status within the family and ensuring it for her daughters.

Marathe was married in May 1972 at the age of 21/22. Her mother-in-law was not happy about the alliance because the Marathes were considered a wealthy family of significant repute in Baroda and she had hoped for a daughter-in-law from a similarly wealthy family. However, a well-known astrologer in Baroda had informed Marathe's father-in-law that their son was destined to marry Marathe. On the other side, her parents urged her to marry because she had *Mangal*<sup>17</sup> in her horoscope and it was better to marry sooner rather than later. When she got married, she was in the final year of the three-year Diploma course and the only thing remaining was the final examination and practical demonstrations. Both she and her parents wanted her to take the exam. However, her mother-in-law strictly forbade her from going for the exam, because she believed that a woman's first duty was towards her family (and her children). Moreover, Marathe did not need to work outside the home, so why bother with completing her education? Marathe still regrets that she was not able to complete her education, but her only solace is that by marrying at that time she was able to alleviate a part of her father's responsibilities. She had wept uncontrollably when she could not take her examination but no one could dare to contradict her mother-in-law's declarations. Even her husband did not support her or ask his mother to let her go for the exams.

This was only the beginning of long years of restrictions and harassment. The main reason for her mother-in-law's harassment, according to Marathe, was that she bore

three daughters and no son. Marathe had two sisters-in-law. The eldest also had three daughters and no son, but they had moved away from the family and lived in a separate household. The second sister-in-law had a son and two daughters in that order. Therefore, her mother-in-law always favored the other daughters-in-law over Marathe. More than a few times during the interview, Marathe mentions – once with tears in her eyes – that when her youngest daughter was born her mother-in-law did not come to visit her in the hospital for eight days. However, this was only one way in which she regulated Marathe's status within the family. Marathe says that her mother-in-law ruled the household (she uses the word "*satta*" which means rule or dominion): "If she called a donkey a dog, we had to call it a dog. We could not contradict her even though we knew better."

Her mother-in-law also monitored and controlled the daughters-in-law's access to the outside world and to people outside the household. They were prohibited from mingling with male visitors to the house. The mother-in-law would talk to them and entertain them in the living room but if Marathe tried to talk to, say a visitor who was a friend of her husband's, she would point out disapprovingly: "You are too bold." The same was true for female visitors, albeit for a different reason. Many of Marathe's friends were employed, and they visited her in the evening on their way home from their jobs. One day a couple of her friends were visiting her and Marathe was talking to them while simultaneously taking care of the evening chores in the house. Her mother-in-law returned home from attending *bhajan* (devotional singing) around 7:30 pm, and began criticizing them for visiting at such a late hour. After this incident, her friends stopped

visiting her in her home although they were cordial and friendly if she ran into them outside her house. She contrasts this behavior with the environment of her natal family. She had never had any trouble talking to boys/men. In fact in her field of electrical engineering, often communicating with male colleagues had been useful to her.

Her mother-in-law also controlled her natal family's access to her. Marathe mentions that her parents and her brothers did not visit her for 16 years except if they had any important work or a message to deliver. Whenever they visited, her mother-in-law began dwelling on how much she had expected from them during the wedding and how they had failed to live up to her family's expectations. Marathe mentions that her parents had done the best they could in terms of the ceremony and the gifts. When her eldest daughter was born, according to customary practice, her natal family had to bear the cost for the naming ceremony (*baarsa*). At that time, Marathe's natal family was going through some personal troubles including a tough financial situation. Her brother had come over to request of her mother-in-law if they could invite only the immediate family and the closest kin to the ceremony, a request which she immediately rejected saying that everyone in her extended family had to be invited. Eventually Marathe's parents paid for an elaborate ceremony but it was the lack of understanding and empathy on the part of her mother-in-law that Marathe laments. Moreover, outside the household, her mother-in-law was very well-spoken and polite and people would have found it difficult to believe that she controlled her daughters-in-law in this fashion. In addition, she was also socially very active and was a managing member of a women's cooperative, Bhanumati Stores, in

Baroda. However, she was not in favor of having her daughters-in-law step out of the house. She did not allow her daughters-in-law the same freedoms that she enjoyed.

Marathe first stepped out of the house for recreational reasons when her youngest daughter was more than 5 years old. She began going to the Bhanumati stores and participating in *bhajan mandals*. She also joined a *Bhishi*.<sup>18</sup> But she made sure to take care of her household chores before she left for these activities. Her mother-in-law would leave the house every day at 3 p.m. for *bhajans*. Marathe would make tea for her father-in-law at 3:30 p.m., while her daughters were still at school. She would make tea for her daughters and keep it warm in a thermos, and lay out snacks for them on the table before leaving the house. She would duly return before 7 pm to take care of the evening chores. But her mother-in-law still resented her going out. Later, Marathe began attending the *Sanskar Mandal*, which focused on the teachings of the Bhagwad Geeta and celebrating all Hindu festivals according to scriptures. She also attends the Gyan Bhakti Mandal where they read and discuss literature associated with Hinduism like *Mahabharat*, *Geeta*, *Dyaneshwari* and various commentaries on these texts. She is also a member of the *Rashtriya Sevika Samiti*. However, she makes it a point to mention that she is able to join these groups and attend their meetings only because her daughters are grown up and her responsibilities have diminished over the years. She also regrets the fact that she was not allowed to have a paid job outside the house. She feels that her education was wasted since she could not use it for anything except for tutoring her daughters until high school.

The juxtaposition of her life with that of her daughters is visible in many instances in the interview. In one way, she wanted to make sure that her daughters' access to family



membership was not affected or restricted by her mother-in-law's prejudice against her. She made sure that the things that had been inflicted upon her did not extend to her daughters. Before her marriage, she did not know the ritualistic "sitting aside" during menstruation. Her natal family had been very "forward thinking" in these matters and she and her sisters were never asked to follow the rituals of purity associated with menstruation. When she had her first menstrual period after marriage, she woke up and began her daily chores. Her mother-in-law started screaming and asked her to not touch anything anymore. She was not allowed to touch food or water. She was not allowed to sleep in her own bed or even use a mattress; she was expected to sleep on jute bags or a mat but she firmly refused. She told her mother-in-law that she would not be able to sleep without a mattress and so she was given one. However at that time, it was possible for Marathe to "sit aside" because her sister-in-law lived with them and they would take turns taking care of the household chores when one of them was menstruating. Ten years later, when her sister-in-law had moved away to a separate household, her mother-in-law still expected Marathe to follow the ritual. She did try and they ordered food from a nearby lodge but being the sole caretaker of the family "sitting aside" became more and more difficult for her. Her mother-in-law had also aged by then and could not be useful around the house but still expected Marathe to observe the ritual. Finally when Marathe refused to follow the norms, her mother-in-law used to taunt her by saying that they were all going to hell because they were eating food that was prepared by a "*vitalshi*."<sup>19</sup> However even though she had to go through this, or perhaps because of it, she did not allow her mother-in-law to impose these rules on her daughters. In the situations where

her daughters were involved, she found the courage to stand up to her mother-in-law even more so than for herself. For example, even though they had electric mixer-grinders at home, her mother-in-law insisted that Marathe use the stone slab and muller for grinding chutneys and corn for *makai cha kees*, a corn delicacy. She remembers that she had used the stone slab and muller even when she was pregnant. Thinking about it in retrospect sends shivers down her body that it could have cost her the pregnancy. However, when her mother-in-law asked Marathe's daughters to use the stone slab for grinding, she firmly put her foot down that her daughters would not be involved in such drudgery, and that since electric grinders were available, her daughters would use those instead.

In her interview, Marathe cast her relationship with her daughters in terms of encouragement, inspiration and giving them the opportunities that she herself did not have. However, the following instances from her narrative also highlight the contradictions in her expectations for and from her daughters. On the one hand, she emphasized their education and freedom both within and outside the house. However, she also insisted that they be trained to take care of household work. She encouraged them to study – an opportunity that she did not have after marriage – but she also made sure that they know how to take care of household chores efficiently: “You many have ten servants at home, but you should know how to do those chores. Only then will you be able to guide them, and not be fooled by them...Even if you are educated, you should know how to take care of the household.” She also encouraged that they learn other things like how to drive a car which Marathe herself was not able to do. When her second daughter had to go to London to be with her husband, she was pregnant and had to take care of all the

formalities on her own. She describes her daughters as “*koshat rahilelya*,” that they grew up in the cocoon of a protected life and were ill-informed of the hardships of the outside world. Therefore her daughter was at first hesitant and apprehensive about doing everything on her own, from going to the consulate for a VISA to travelling to London. But Marathe encouraged and advised her thus: “You have a brain, and eyes and a mouth and you are educated. [You shouldn’t be worried] if you have to go alone.” Sadly, the daughter’s in-laws offered her no support and Marathe mentions that it could have been a cause of friction between Marathe and her new family. Fortuitously, Marathe’s sister was in Mumbai at that time and she was able to accompany Marathe’s daughter to the consular office. When her daughter was on her way to London, Marathe encouraged her again: “You are educated; you can read the signs for directions. And always ask the “right” [kind of] person [if you need to enquire about anything]. That way you will never be deceived.” Her daughters tell her even today that they can now travel anywhere without fear of being cheated because she has taught them well.

While her own access within both the domestic and public spaces was severely restricted by her mother-in-law, Marathe’s advice to her daughters, as I read it, reflects her concern of securing her daughter’s memberships within the family, the larger caste community and within the outside world. Her guidance to her daughters and her molding of their behaviors and characters, as seen in these following instances, sought to prepare her daughters for the domestic and public life that was denied to Marathe. As I discussed above, Marathe did not allow her mother-in-law to impose those rules and norms on her daughters that she had had to observe during much of her marital life. In doing so, she

tried to secure her daughters' membership within her family which especially in the absence of a son could be seen as significant. It is interesting to note that in this process of "securing" family membership for her daughters, she had to negotiate between challenging certain caste and/or family norms (like the taboos around menstruation and leniency in household labor) and conceding to them (by requiring that they become well-versed in household chores as well as regulate their sexualities and behaviors in non-domestic spaces). While daughters are seen as temporary members of the natal home, the relationship with a daughter for an urban "nuclear" family might not cease to exist or even necessarily diminish after the daughter's marriage. But by ensuring that the daughters are well-versed in household work in addition to being well educated, Marathe is also making them viable candidates for marriage within their caste.<sup>20</sup> It can also be seen as a way of ensuring their membership within their marital families. Another way of reading her insistence that they are adept in housework, especially in her encouragement to them in other matters, is to make them independent. As discussed above, she also prepared them to set foot in the outside world by giving them the opportunities that she herself did not have. And even though she has not ventured outside much, especially to foreign countries, she feels that she has trained them adequately. She had also taught them how to successfully negotiate the norms of morality with access to public spaces. She did not restrict their freedom of movement and association. In fact, her daughters had many male friends and would often go out with them in a group, especially during the festival of Navaratri. But she always advised them that they should know the limits of their association with men and that if some male showed too much interest, they should

know when and where to “cut him off.” She used to tell them that it is alright to dabble in the latest fashion trends, but only when and if they suit us: “If you [choose to] wear a revealing outfit and if someone teases you, do not [you have no right to] cry.” Thus Marathe feels that it was her duty as a mother to equip her daughters to stay out of harm’s way because the burden of modesty and morality is on the woman herself. Moreover given the porous boundaries between the public and private realms, often the distinction between ensuring the daughters’ membership within the family and that in the outside world overlapped. For instance, her mother-in-law, as a way of regulating them, prevented them from going outside. But at those times, Marathe stood between them and told her mother-in-law firmly that her daughters will go out, and that she trusted them completely so she needn’t fear about their behavior and sexuality.

However, she also acknowledges that there was an upside to her mother-in-law’s restrictions on her, especially with regard to not working outside the home: that she was able to raise her daughters well, with good “*valan*.”<sup>21</sup> She emphatically describes that all her daughters have lived with their in-laws and in fact it was at Marathe’s insistence that they all have parents-in-law when they got married. This meant that they did not expect to have a separate household after marriage with their husbands. This, according to Marathe, sets her daughters apart from other young women of today.<sup>22</sup> And even though her second daughter set up a separate household from her in-laws after her return from London, her relationship with her husband’s family is both cordial and strong. In the process of obeying her mother-in-law’s rules herself, and negotiating them for her daughters, Marathe seems to have created a set of less stringent and implicit rules for her

daughters that might ensure their access to both the private spaces of the household, and to the public-political spaces of education, work and recreation.

In the context of work also, Marathe's advice to her daughters contradicts her own ideas about independence and self-reliance that paid work affords women, and her own regret of not being able to work during her youth. She acknowledges the fact that having a paid employment guarantees economic independence, but more importantly increases the sense of self-reliance, independence and a sense of achievement for the woman herself. However, her advice to her daughters – who do not “need” to work because their husbands' incomes are substantial, but they do work because they are educated and they do not want their education to go to waste – is that the family and children are their first priority. When one of her daughters wanted to take up an additional job as a visiting lecturer, which required her son to stay at home by himself for 4 hours (the son was 12 years old at the time), Marathe objected and suggested that she should drop him off at her in-laws or call them over so that he is under constant adult supervision. At his age, at the onset of adolescence, a mother or the family should be aware of what the child is engaged in: what kind of shows he watches on television, what he does on the computer. Apart from the access to inappropriate television shows, she also expresses concern about mental health and wellbeing. Now that most young couples prefer only one child, there are more chances of depression and other diseases caused by loneliness. She calls for a critical evaluation of contemporary trends in society. For instance, she says that it is important for women to have independence/freedom but once my baby comes along (I was pregnant during that time and her advice was directed at me) the baby should be my

first priority. The wellbeing of the next generation is dependent on that: “You have worked enough for your career, but it needs to be stopped<sup>23</sup> [paused] somewhere. And you can still continue to work [on your career] but only in the time that you have [after caring for the baby]. But your baby is the most important.”

Sushma Marathe had to struggle to ensure her membership and status and that of her daughters within her marital family that was “ruled” by her mother-in-law. She often had to negotiate around the generation gap that she said characterized the difference between her and her mother-in-law’s perspectives. At times she gave into her mother-in-law rules and regulations; at other times she fought them.

Contrastingly, Snehalata Raje who is about two decades older than Marathe, talked about self-imposed rules that characterized her as a person and as a woman. It is interesting to note that unlike Marathe who woefully described her mistreatment by her mother-in-law, Raje’s troubles in life, in her opinion, were the result of her own determination to not utter a discordant word in her marital home with the view of maintaining peace of mind and peace within the home at all costs. However, the price she paid was her own health, from which she was unable to recover during her lifetime.

In his examination of restrictions that Hindu men place upon women within and outside the home, Steve Darné (1994) observes that men are aware of the ways in which they benefit from the restrictions placed upon women. They are conscious of the inequalities in power between men and women, and use this difference to their advantage. However Raje’s narrative is an example of the ways in which women place restrictions upon themselves. It could be suggested that Raje had borrowed the ideology

from her father whose restrictions upon her were stringent and often unnecessary, although not cruel. It is important to note that Raje's adoption and acceptance of a subordinate and reticent position, despite her description of herself as fearless and self-made, was self-imposed rather than mandated by the relationships within her marital family.

***Snehalata Raje***

“No one should [be able to] say that [my husband] had changed after marriage.”

Raje was born in Gangapur, Rajasthan in the CKP Khopkar family but grew up in Ahmedabad. She had four sisters and two brothers and was the third eldest among the siblings. After her marriage she spent about two years with her husband in Baroda, where he was posted, before moving to Bombay (Mumbai) to live with her husband's family for about ten years. The couple then moved back to Baroda where Raje spent the rest of her life. She was also my aunt, my mother's elder sister. She passed away on March 2, 2013 at her residence in Baroda.

She began the interview by describing herself as a good student/learner. She was good at whatever she did whether it was dancing, singing, acting, sports, or academic studies. Her educational career was bright and her mother had wanted her to study medicine and become a doctor. However, her father was against sending her to college for fear of comingling of the sexes. Even though they studied in a co-ed school, he was against the unrestricted interaction between young men and women that was facilitated in a college setting. But her mother insisted that she should be given the opportunity to go to college since she was bright.<sup>24</sup> Her mother stood by her and convinced her father to allow



her to continue studying. Her father agreed on two conditions: first, that she would have to study liberal arts instead of science which Raje was interested in, and second, that she would not participate in theatre and music-related activities on campus because those would require her to associate and collaborate with male colleagues/peers.<sup>25</sup> Raje agreed to both conditions because all she wanted to do was study. In keeping her promise to her father, she had to distance herself from others throughout her college career. This however did not mean that she did not enjoy her college life, she said. She enjoyed every bit of it. In fact she used to skip history classes, which was her least favorite subject, to play “ping-pong” (table tennis) with her friend. She loved playing table tennis and she continued to play later at work.

Whether in college or at work or within the family, Raje believed in conducting herself with dignity and straightforwardness, an instance of which she described in the following incident. She was the first female from her neighborhood to go to college. Later when other women began attending college, she decided to walk to college with them. However, she did not like the manner in which these young women messed with the young men on campus. The campus was full of young men from the entrance gate to the classroom buildings. Raje was used to minding her own business and walking straight up to her classroom but these young women teased and played pranks on the young men, who in turn also teased them. Raje was uncomfortable with such interactions with men and stopped walking to college with the women from her neighborhood. This however, did not mean that she did not get any attention from people, especially from men. She amusingly told me that she had a great “personality” in her youth (she still had a great

one at the time of the interview), and that people used to line up on their balconies in her neighborhood every morning when she walked to college. Her female friends and neighbors told her about this phenomenon which took place every day. She also laughed about how she was called the “Queen of the Class” in college. When she used to enter her classroom, all the men in her class used to say “Queen of the class has arrived. Stand up!” However, her motto was that she should behave in such a way that no one would tease her or misbehave with her in any way. To ensure this, she distanced herself and refrained from associating closely with anyone during her college days. She thus placed the burden of right conduct on herself with the belief that if you conduct yourself with dignity, no one can misbehave with you.

Such conduct and ideals, however, did not preclude her father from still “suspecting” his daughters’ sexualities, as evidenced by this incident. Raje was interested in getting vocal musical training and asked her father if she could join the music college which was not very far from her home. Her father refused her request, hinting that women from respectable families do not sing before strangers.<sup>26</sup> However, a couple of years later when her younger sister graduated from high school and did not want to go to college, she asked to study music. At that time, her father allowed them both to go together to the music college. When they would be together they could act as chaperones, or as a “moral” check for each other, thus being prevented from doing anything “untoward.” Even though Raje claims that her behavior was “righteous” and “virtuous” it did not prevent her father from being suspicious. His initial objection to Raje’s learning music, therefore, is rendered irrelevant in the light of his new decision. However, it is

also important to note, as Raje did, that her father had begun to mellow with age, and by the time her youngest sister (my mother) – who was 18 years younger – was growing up, her father was a completely different person.

Despite the restrictions he had put on her, Raje talked about her father with fondness and respect. Rather than despising him for her lost opportunities, Raje saw her father as a very ethical and principled man. He was an employee of the railway department and had a modest income. But he lived his life in simplicity and morality. Raje said he was of “*Sanatani*” (conservative) thinking and that was the reason for his restrictions on his daughters, but he led by example. For instance, Raje said, he never watched films or went to the theater. Once when Raje had asked him whether he ever felt like watching a movie, he replied that there were things that were not good for children. How could he forbid them from doing those things that he himself indulged in? He followed a simple lifestyle in order to provide for his big family but also so that he could transmit those values to his children. Raje said that she did not lose out on anything by following her father’s principles and rules. He taught her ethics and discipline. Practical matters of the home, she learned from her mother and paternal grandmother. Moreover, as her father aged and the world changed around him, he began to change his thinking too. Raje recalled an incident that happened with him and her youngest sister (my mother) when she was a young girl. Her sister had seen a sweater she liked on someone in school. Her father called her and asked her what kind of sweater it was, and when she described it to him, he called her eldest brother, gave him 100 rupees and asked him to take her shopping for the sweater. Raje said amusingly that this would never have

happened when she was younger and that she would not even have the audacity to ask her father for anything. Her youngest sister's relationship to her father was different as he became more approachable and less of an authority figure for the younger siblings.

Finally, when she was allowed to study music, Raje also began learning the *Sitar*. She was able to continue with vocal training and Sitar even after her sister got married and quit music. However, since she was also studying for her Bachelor's degree along with being responsible for certain household chores, the only time she had to rehearse her music was on her way to and back from the music classes. The long walk across Ellis bridge on the river Sabarmati gave Raje the opportunity to practice the *ragas* that were taught on that particular day. In college, although she did not have much time to study for exams, she was able to do well because she paid attention in class and took notes. She described herself as someone who remembered information after reading or studying only once.

She also described herself as courageous and fearless. She was never afraid of anything or anyone, and could do very well in interviews. In addition, a lot of things that she learned in her life were self-taught, which made her both happy and confident. She was never afraid to try or learn new things. During her first job training as a telephone operator, while other trainees had a trainer dedicated to them for the week of the training, within two days the supervisor realized her potential and asked her to play around and explore on her own instead of "training" her. When she was in school, she had seen a skirt that she had liked and describing it to her mother, asked her to sew a similar one for her. Her mother made one but Raje did not like it. It was not like the one she had wanted.

Her response to the skirt annoyed her mother who retorted that she should try and sew one herself. Hearing this, Raje took it upon herself to make the skirt. It took a lot of tries and undoing of the stitching several times to get it right, but she did make the skirt that she had wanted. This is another thing that characterizes her, she said. She never liked haphazard or unorganized work; she put her heart and soul completely into whatever she did, as a result of which she was highly commended, especially in her workplace. Her dedication, according to her, also earned her the respect and admiration of most men that knew her and she was envied by most women around her.

When she was of marriageable age, her father had asked her what kind of groom/husband she wanted. She told him that she did not want to marry three kinds of men: a lawyer, a doctor, and a university professor. Doctors are infamous for having affairs with nurses and university teachers are known to have affairs with their female students due to which she despised men in these two professions. Lawyers are in the business of turning truth on its head. She hated lies and therefore a lawyer was out of question as well. At that time Mr. Raje, an officer in the Railways, was working in Baroda and knew Mrs. Raje's uncle. They both had a common interest in astrology. One day her uncle handed him an anonymous horoscope to study. He came back and told him that it was an excellent horoscope. The uncle then asked if it matched with his. It did. The uncle revealed to him that it was the horoscope of Snehalata Raje, who was also in Baroda at that time to attend her niece's naming ceremony. After an unexpected meeting at the uncle's place, Raje and her husband "saw" each other and their marriage was finalized.

They got married in Bombay.<sup>27</sup> Traditionally, the wedding takes place in the bride's city of residence but since this was the first marriage in the Raje family, they insisted that the marriage be held in Bombay. But this caused a lot of inconvenience to the Raje's natal family because they had no family in Bombay and were not very familiar with the city. The groom's family had promised to make arrangements for their stay in Mumbai during the marriage but it turned out that they were not able to get a cook or anyone to clean the place where the Khopkar family was staying. Snehalata Raje's older brother found a contact in the telephone department in Mumbai (he worked in the department in Ahmedabad) and was able to get a flat for the duration of their stay. But they had to make their own arrangements. Raje said, "It was not a pleasant experience."

The wife of the uncle who had been instrumental in arranging Raje's marriage had told false and untoward things about Raje and her family to her mother-in-law, which had initially caused some tension between them. But Raje had made a determination that "no one should [be able to] say that Bapu [her husband was called by this name by her family] had changed after marriage [on account of his wife]." That is, the husband's relationship with his wife should neither precede nor supersede his relationship with his family. The bond between the (joint) family should remain as it is even after marriage and the new bride should blend in with the family like "sugar in milk"<sup>28</sup> which does not change the nature or appearance of milk but only makes it sweeter. Derné (1994, 213-5) observes that one of the ways in which gender hierarchy and the gender system continue is by limiting the interaction between the conjugal couple. Close interactions and relationship between the husband and the wife, especially in younger couples, threaten

the harmony of the joint family system thereby weakening the family. In Derné's analysis, men actively work at restricting such relationships between the husband and wife so that the nature of the family is not altered. However, in Raje's case, she placed such conditions on herself. It was Raje herself, not her husband, who burdened her with not breaking up the joint family, even if it meant her own suffering. This was the philosophy she stood by. Thus, whatever her marital family members said to her, she would not say a word. There would be no possibility for conflict ever because she would never utter a negative word in response. She said, "There are always problems/tensions in the beginning of a marriage [with the affinal family]. But one should not take these things too much to heart." But she also said that at the time she was young and naïve and things did bother her. Her long hours of relentless work at home and in her job, the stress of travelling on the Mumbai local trains, and her determination to accept everything quietly and without protest eventually affected her entire nervous system.

Raje's marital family consisted of twelve members: four sisters-in-law, two brothers-in-law, her husband's parents, the newly married couple and an aunt and a female cousin who lived with the family. Raje used to wake up at 4 am to cook for the family. She used to prepare everything including setting the place for eating. Her mother-in-law's health was not good so she could not help much but her sister – the aunt who lived with them – helped Raje in the morning. The aunt used to wake up at the same time as Raje and helped her in the kitchen. At that time they did not have cooking gas. They had kerosene stoves and earthen hearths that used coal. Raje used to put the coal in the hearth at night and in the morning even before she washed her face, she would light the

coal so that it would be hot by the time she freshened up and came into the kitchen to cook. By 8 a.m. she would finish all of her chores, take a bath and she leave the house at 8:30 a.m. to go to work. The trains were usually full during rush hours and so she had to stand in the train on her way to work. She alighted at the Victoria Terminus station and walked for 15 minutes to get to her office. Since she worked as an operator on telephone switchboards at that time, every minute was busy and required her complete attention. On her way back home, the trains were similarly full and she had to stand. When she reached home, she would feel abashed for being away from home all day, so she would finish all the chores remaining for the day, which included, among other things, washing the entire kitchen with soap and water. Since they did not have a dining table, the usual custom was to sit on wooden planks on the floor, which required cleaning the kitchen in this way. She says, "I could do it because I had the will power. But my body responded and paid the price." This was the reason for her nervous system to be adversely affected. Moreover, since she was the only daughter-in-law in the family at that time, she bore an unequal burden of household work. Although she had four sisters-in-law, two of whom worked and two who were in college, there was a stark difference between the household responsibilities of the daughters of the family and the daughter-in-law. Raje's sisters-in-law used to wake up in the morning, have their tea, get ready, have their lunch and leave for work. Before Raje's marriage, the mother-in-law and her sister would take care of those household responsibilities which now Raje fulfilled.

Another thing that adversely affected her health was the difference in the level of heat and spice in the food between her natal and affinal families. At her parent's home,



they ate relatively mild and non-spicy food. However the food in her marital family was very hot (*tikhat*) to the point of being intolerable to her. Being a newlywed bride she thought it would be inappropriate if she said she could not eat that food. So she quietly ate it, which affected her intestines. Her health had deteriorated significantly. She had lost almost 40 pounds and her voice had become so weak that it was barely a whisper. All this was because she was determined not to utter a word even during times of discomfort and stress. She still continued to attend to the household chores and her job, even though it had become very difficult for her to keep up. Every couple of days she would have an upset stomach on account of the spicy food and lack of rest, and on those days her entire day's meal would consist of two or three cups of coffee. As her health deteriorated, someone suggested to her husband that if no medicine was effective, they should try naturopathy. Naturopathy does not use any medicines but rather cures ailments through regulated diet of appropriate food consisting of fruits and vegetables. It was just before Diwali in 1965 and she had grown very weak. She could not even speak let alone work around the house. And since she had determined not to say anything, she would not utter a word about how she was feeling. She believed that saying that she could not do something meant displaying her inability, her lack of strength, which she did not like. She did not like showing her weakness to others, so kept drudging through her ill-health. She did acknowledge that all her health troubles were caused by her determination to bear everything by herself without saying a word.

Finally she decided to try naturopathy. She spent six month at a Naturopathy treatment center at Uralikanchan near Pune. There they tested her for illness and told her

that she did not have any kind of disease. But her nervous system had been affected due to exertion and fatigue. The remedy was taking adequate rest with a regulated diet. She had taken medical leave from work; in fact, the doctor in her department had mentioned as a part of her prescription that she was not fit to live in Bombay. The doctor told Raje that the Bombay climate did not suit her and suggested that they move to some other city.

During this time Raje appreciated the amount of money that her husband spent on her care at the Naturopathy center. They had to spend 300-400 rupees every month which in 1965 was a significant amount. Her father also praised her husband profusely and sent them a money order of 400-500 rupees. Because she was on medical leave, it was leave without pay for her. Moreover, whatever she earned she had been giving to her father-in-law as a way of contributing to the household. Before marriage she also used to hand over all her earnings to her father. However, she did face discrimination when compared to her husband's sisters. When she gave all her earnings to her father-in-law, she got nothing back for her own expenses. The father-in-law not only set aside a certain amount as pocket money for his daughters, but also gave them money for the monthly railway pass while also depositing 100 rupees in their bank accounts every month. When she returned from the Naturopathy center and resumed her job, her husband asked his father to give her some money so that she could have something for herself. Her husband also turned over his salary to his father and had nothing to give her either. After that, she began getting some amount which was sufficient enough if she ever wanted a cup of coffee at work or to buy personal things like undergarments. But she had to control herself severely if she ever wanted anything for herself, for even though she earned

around 450 rupees every month (which was a good amount in the 1960s) she had to give it away for household expenses.

Despite these hardships and the several health problems that she faced, the overall tone of her interview was that she had enjoyed her life to the fullest. Her main reason for her happiness and content, she says, was her belief in the philosophy that one should love what one does, not vice versa, for the converse rarely happens in life. The source of her happiness and the reason she had no regrets in life was that she had a positive attitude.

There are two main points in her narrative that I want to explore further. The first is the self-imposition of rules of behavior and morality. The two main aspects of patriarchy's power over women are the creations of norms to govern, regulate and control women's behavior and their sexuality, and to create discourses by which women come to bear the burden of regulating their own behavior. Sandra Bartky (1990) has observed in the western context that the "modernization of patriarchal power" operates firstly by creating "docile bodies" as Foucault argued, and secondly, by making these docile bodies responsible for their own surveillance by creating social structures along the lines of the panopticon. In the western context, the modernization of patriarchal power entailed that femininity as expressed through "[f]eminine movement, gesture and posture must exhibit not only constrictions, but grace as well, and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty" (Bartky 1990, 69) as required by "the regime of institutional heterosexuality" (72). Patriarchal surveillance is transformed into self-surveillance through the internalization of "patriarchal standards of bodily acceptability" (77).

This phenomenon is visible when both Raje and Marathe assert that women have to be responsible for their own modesty and morality. And a corollary of this argument is the belief that if a woman is harassed or raped, she must have behaved or dressed in a way so as to “invite” such violence. If you do not behave in a way as to invite attention, no one will bother you. Caste patriarchy has reinforced such discourses around women’s morality and placed the burden of this morality on women’s sexuality and behavior. However, when this rhetoric is employed by upper caste women it ignores the fact that it is their caste privilege to assume safety and security in public spaces. As discussed in the introductory chapter, lower caste and class women often face harassment, humiliation and violence in these spaces irrespective of their behavior and demeanor. This also helps to support my original argument that upper caste women experience (the disadvantages of) caste in domestic spaces. But it also helps illuminate the ways in which upper caste women bring their caste privilege – albeit unacknowledged – into public spaces. Therefore, when venturing in the non-domestic spaces, they are marked only through their gender and by appropriately performing femininity, which includes controlled mobility and behavior, they can expect to be free from masculine harassment or violence. This is a privilege that lower caste and working class women cannot expect in similar spaces.

Moreover, these narratives also highlight another aspect of “respectable” femininity: the absence or the silencing of female desires, especially sexual desires. (Upper) caste ideology acknowledges the potential threat that female sexual desire might pose to this patriarchy, and therefore calls for muting such desires (Chakravarti 1993;

Puri 1999). An idealized womanhood for upper castes is thus defined as devoid of the desires of the flesh. Social reform or social change then mandates challenging the notion of women with absent or muted desires and highlighting aspects of romantic love, pleasure and desire in women (Sreenivas 2008; S. Anandhi 2003).<sup>29</sup> In Raje and Marathe's narratives we also find a familiar negation of female desire. In line with the dominant patriarchal caste ideology, female desire in these narratives is considered non-existent or at least muted/controlled in the "ideal woman." This explains the importance of self-effacement in idealized womanhood. Thus, when Raje characterizes herself as fearless, strong and determined her decision to forbear everything quietly in her affinal home does not contradict her character in her eyes but rather augments it. She acknowledges that she continued to work tirelessly at home even though her physical strength was wearing out, because to admit as such would be to display the lack of strength and ability. In her characterization of an ideal womanhood for herself, self-monitoring and self-sacrifice to the extent of self-effacement become not only important but also integral.

The second issue that I found interesting was her approach when her husband paid for her care at the Naturopathy treatment center. Even though she had been contributing towards the husband's household in terms of both paid and unpaid work, she felt grateful when her husband uncomplainingly paid for her care. Since she was on unpaid medical leave during her six months at the treatment center, she believed that her husband was bearing the cost of her treatment. She does not acknowledge the fact that, on the one hand, her unpaid reproductive labor in her husband's family had led to the deterioration

in her health, and on the other, that she had been contributing financially to the household. This, however, is obviously my feminist reading of her narrative. As Laura Rosenthal (2009, 5) cautions in the context of recovering women's writing in the field of Eighteen Century Studies, while the recovering of women's writings (and histories) is an important feminist task, we must be mindful that our recovery of these histories is also framed within, and therefore constrained by, our feminist projects/questions. Similarly, Raje's appreciation of her husband, in the context of her narrative, and not my analysis, is that it was a difficult financial time for the family. Raje's husband was the eldest child and his responsibilities were many-fold including the completion of his siblings' education and their marriages. Raje also accepted and acknowledged her and her husband's responsibility towards his family, and that an important aspect of this responsibility was financial contribution to the household. As a result, when Raje was admitted into the Naturopathy center, what she appreciated was not the amount of money itself that her husband had contributed, which nonetheless was significant, but also the willingness of her husband to support her by agreeing to utilize such an expensive facility (as compared to conventional medicine which would have been cheaper), even in the face of the tight financial situation of the family. It is also in this light that Raje is able to both accept and appreciate the money sent to her by her father during this time. Her father's appreciation of her husband, on the other hand, could also be read as an appreciation for the love and support for his daughter. This episode also highlights the intersection of class to norms of gender and domesticity for upper caste women.

### ***“Sansar”: Domesticity and the Family***

The experiences of Paralikar, Marathe, and Raje illustrate the ways in which caste (and class) account for specific gendered subjectivities of upper caste women as expressed and experienced through the family. Furthermore, their caste and (middle)class subject positions account for the differing ways in which they understand and define the family. For Marathe, the idea of a family is synonymous with the Marathi term *sansar* and how women choose to identify their *sansar*/household. Thus, she argues, in today's world, the differences in caste should not matter because the newly married couple does not have to cohabit with the husband's parents. They live independently in a separate household from the start of their conjugal life. She observes:

When we were married, [we thought/believed that] this is our home (*ghar*): mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law – this is our home. In today's world, the definition of home [family] has changed. Today's young women feel that when they marry, the *sansar*/family/household consists of only her husband and herself, and later their children. During our time, the definition was different: we believed that we have entered this [marital] home and we have to blend in seamlessly,<sup>30</sup> the sister-in-law, mother-in-law all are my people. Even the husband wanted/expected that his wife, upon entering the new home, should completely adjust herself to her new circumstances. For the new wife, however, this meant killing off all her desires and expectations. But today the situation has changed... Today since younger couples are living in separate households, the young woman's *sansar* is different and separate from her mother-in-law's. Mother-in-law's home is not the new bride's *sansar*: that is the mother-in-law's.

Your *sansar* is with your husband and your children. But when we were married, this was not the definition of *sansar*. It was the mother-in-law's *sansar* until she was [living and/or active]. Then it would be my turn to have my own *sansar*.

According to her argument, during earlier times marriage within caste was necessary because the new bride had to live with her in-laws and it was important that their values and cultures matched. It is interesting to note that even as she makes this argument, her own experiences defy this logic: even though she married within the same caste, the cultural values in her natal home were starkly different from her marital home, the price for which she paid by “killing off her desires” as she notes in the quote above. However, she also acknowledges that it is possible that there are differences between the cultures of the spouses in an intercaste marriage, which accounts for differences in thinking, but we could not know when they live in a separate household. There are bound to be differences because both are unfamiliar with the other's culture; then the question is, who adjusts and compromises? These concerns depict the transformations in the middle-class in contemporary times. With more access to education and employment, middle-class men and women seem to be choosing marriage partners from outside their caste community. This in turn is made easier by the changes taking place in the family structures in contemporary times. With young men and women migrating for education and work from smaller places like Baroda to larger cities like Pune, Mumbai and beyond, young married women are not expected to live with their in-laws anymore. These changes, according to Marathe, have made intercaste marriages easier and less problematic in today's times. In



fact, she argues, they *should* be more acceptable for caste to become more and more irrelevant for the middle-class.

Nonetheless, Marathe's conclusion from having looked at and considered the entire gamut of experiences of women around her is that "women *have to* adjust. Even after twenty more generations, the patriarchal culture [of our society] will not diminish [change]...even if you have a woman Prime Minister or a high-ranking officer, at home you have to do what the husband says. You cannot go against them [their wishes], if you want a good picture [harmonious household]. Because here again we have the Indian *sanskar* [values/culture] that we want a good home, a woman has to dedicate herself [to the home]. This is a must, else you would have disjointed and scattered home." Like other parts of her narrative, her critique of patriarchy is immediately followed by an assertion of Indian values that prescribe women's fulfillment within the family as the highest priority. Moreover, the onus of the smooth functioning of the family is uncritically placed upon the woman. This is to say that even as she challenges patriarchal culture [*purush pradhan sanskruti*], she does not question the argument that women are responsible for the making of a happy and contented family/household. The cost, as both Marathe and Raje acknowledge, is the quashing of women's ambitions, their desires and often their working careers. Such paradox is also visible in Marathe's advice to her daughters. While she wants to afford them the opportunities in education, work and access to social spaces that were denied to her, she also insists that her daughters prioritize their families and their children over their work and career. Thus, the family for Marathe is a set of relationships and women cannot and must not escape them. Her

insistence that her daughters marry into families with in-laws (where the husband's parents were both alive) demonstrates her emphasis on this aspect of the family. Marathe's advice to her daughters and her image of a family as incomplete without parents-in-law represents the contradictory pulls on women like Marathe's daughters in contemporary India. On the one hand, their caste and class status both allows for, and in certain cases, necessitates higher and professional education of women, and subsequently their employment. On the other hand, middle-class femininity continues to be imbricated within domesticity as the ultimate, indeed the highest, goal for women. According to Marathe, it is patriarchy that tethers women to domesticity. At the same time, she also extols domesticity as the true responsibility of women. These tensions are reminiscent of the tradition/modernity debates in Indian history as discussed in the Introduction. The tension between tradition and modernity for upper caste, middle-class women was resolved by making the home, the domestic, and the spiritual (which I discuss in Chapter 4) central to modern womanhood (see for instance Chatterjee 1990).

These tensions are also visible in Raje's narrative. For Raje the family was more than a set of relationships; for her it also implied a set of duties that one has to perform as part of the family. These duties, for her, included household work and showing love and respect towards her in-laws, but also contributing financially towards the household from her job. She mentioned that during the time that she was coping with her health troubles, her father-in-law did not like her "sitting at home" and not going to her job, because that meant the loss of an income to the household. Raje's father, who was opposed to the intermingling of sexes allowed her to work only because she worked as a telephone

operator and during those days it was seen exclusively as women's job. But she and her sisters were also able to contribute to household expenditure. And while both her sisters were asked to quit their jobs when they got married, Raje's husband never asked her to quit – the issue of her job never came up – may be because the family needed her wages. However, as she indicated, she never had any ownership of her income until she and her husband moved away from the family and settled in Baroda. Raje continued to work until her retirement. Thus, women's relationships both within and outside the family are often determined by class and the quest of families to maintain a middle-class status.

Furthermore, like Marathe, Raje also believed that in a marriage the woman has to adjust a great deal. She saw this as a fact, even if she did not completely approve of and agree with it. A woman, when she marries, leaves her home and entire life behind to enter into a new, unknown world, and in such case if she does not adjust, problems ensue. Like Marathe, she argued, "If we want the married life to run smoothly, then the woman has to adjust. If the couple lives in a separate household, then things are different; the couple lives lovingly. But if one has to live in a joint family then these problems [that arise in a joint family] have to be tackled by the woman [daughter-in-law]."

In her own life too, she followed this principle. She compromised and adjusted well within her new home, despite the fact that it led to severe health troubles for her. Furthermore, she had to stop her *Sitar* training upon marriage. She had been training for two years but she decided to quit when she was married. Her teachers at the music institute were dejected because they thought she could have been a star and made the institute popular. Her teacher, with tears in his eyes, recommended another institute in

Mumbai where she could continue her training. But Raje knew it would not be possible for her to devote time to playing the *Sitar* while living in a joint family. She knew that she would have little time after attending to household chores and her job. Moreover, she did not believe in fulfilling her desires and hobbies if it meant creating dissatisfaction within the family. She said, “Whatever I have done [in life] is only to get peace.” And for this peace she had made whatever sacrifices that were needed. She encountered many instances of injustice at her workplace too, but she never challenged them for the sake of peace, especially within her own self. In her relationship with her husband also, she followed the practice of not saying anything that might lead to clashes or unpleasant exchange of words. If her husband said anything to her in anger, she would not respond at that time, so the argument would stop there. Later, when things were calm she would explain her position/point of view and he would always listen calmly often accepting that her point was the correct one in that context.

Dominant cultural discourses in India – social, religious and nationalist – have cast (ideal) femininity as synonymous with self-sacrifice and self-effacement. In reading the nineteenth century autobiography of Rashsundari Devi, Tanika Sarkar (2001, 121) observes the ways in which femininity was defined in terms of women’s work in the household and through the “patriotic icon of happy, self-effacing motherhood.” Women’s work in the household was seen as a part of her devotion and spirituality which implied that women had to bear the burden of daily drudgery without complaining. Furthermore, a woman’s relationship to cooking and food was also an aspect of her femininity. On the one hand, she was expected to be cook and serve food lovingly to the household; on the

other, the patriarchal culture expected her to fast. As Sarkar (2001, 122) notes, “ritual fasting and even starving as a matter of preference among women was valorised in a whole range of prescriptive texts and literature.” Thus Marathe’s and Raje’s view that women have to sacrifice for the sake of the family, even if they are working, has an ideological basis in these cultural discourses. Similarly, their view that women are responsible for their own dignity and modesty also draws on the changes in cultural ideologies that took place in the event of nationalism in India. Partha Chatterjee (1990) has described the ways in which upper caste, middle-class femininity was redefined to be associated with and restricted to the home. Even when she had access to public space, this new woman did not challenge or threaten patriarchy in any way, unlike the Western woman. Such femininity was especially required as she stepped outside for education and work, for her freedom and modernity were contingent upon her imbibing of spirituality “in her dress, her eating habits, her social demeanour, her religiosity” (Chatterjee 1990, 249). Furthermore, as the nationalist discourse created the dichotomous inner/outer spheres to relate to masculinity/femininity, the woman not only became responsible for the sanctity of the household but also for her own behavior – both within and outside the household – which ensured such sanctity. It is interesting to note that in the quote from Marathe cited above, the words *ghar* (home/house) is made synonymous with *sansar* (world/household). This elision is not unusual or specific to the Marathi language alone. Furthermore it is also important to note that *sansar* is usually associated with women’s lives and responsibilities. I have never heard the word used in the context of men’s relationship with their households which is defined more in terms of *ghar* rather than

*sansar*, at least in the Marathi language. This difference pertains to the difference in the relationship that men and women have with the outside or the non-domestic world. For men, a world outside the home does exist, thus *sansar* cannot be confined to the household alone. By contrast women were expected to be confined to the household, if not physically then at least emotionally. This is to say that by conflating *ghar* and *sansar*, women were expected to find true fulfilment in the home, where literally the home was their world.

In her study of professional women in the IT (Information Technology) sector in India, Smitha Radhakrishnan (2009) proposes “respectable femininity” as an analytic concept that attempts to “knit together a colonial legacy of discourses on domesticity and propriety with everyday navigations of gender, class and nation” in India (198). She emphasizes the role of class – the middle-class – in institutionalizing respectability as the cornerstone of femininity for women working in the IT sector in contemporary India. The nationalist movement, according to her, which constructed the new Indian woman, drew heavily from the British discourses on “white feminine middle-class domesticity” (200). Accordingly, the creation of the new middle-class in India, and at various stages in modern India, has emphasized the virtue of domesticity and respectability for the ideal Indian woman. Such respectability is expressed by emphasizing family life and domesticity over work and career. She argues, “Maintaining the centrality of the Indian family allows this vision [of a new India] to be at once “cultured” as well as global/modern” (Radhakrishnan 2009, 202). Marathe and Raje’s experience of gender

and caste thus echo these discourses which have been central in the imagining of families, communities and the nation.

How then, can we read Paralikar's challenge to some of these norms that are seen as integral to Indian femininity? Like Marathe and Raje, Paralikar also had been a part of the upwardly mobile middle-class. In this context, Paralikar's self-admission that her ability to challenge social norms both within and outside the family is rooted in the complex caste composition of her families warrants further examination.

In Paralikar's view the family, more than caste, is the repository of values and culture. Thus, even if one marries within one's caste, there might be issues of compatibility and adjustment. She talked about a female organizer of a conference over which she had once presided. This woman has a son and a daughter both of whom were not happily married. They married in the same caste community but the reason for their unhappiness is that they have a mother who is "very outspoken" and they have been groomed similarly by her. Their spouses are from "typical" families who do not appreciate this kind of outspoken and "progressive" behavior. Thus, even within the same caste, according to Paralikar, grooming and values vary between families.

She told me how her family is different. She said that she and her husband do not want live with any of her sons, because she is very independent and also dominating, in her own words, because she has been financially independent for a long time. She knows that there would be conflicts and she wants to avoid such situations. She does visit her sons, who have migrated to the United States, from time to time but does not want to move in with any of them. She wants to allow their sons' families to have a life of their

own without the parents' interference. The sons could visit them in India or invite them to the U.S. if they wanted. If they had a problem that they wanted to share with Paralikar and her husband, they would help in whatever way they could but the latter would not "poke their noses" and ask the sons if they had problems. Everyone has problems, she says, but it is not necessary for parents to interfere. This is one way in which her children have been brought up in a different way. She often advises and reprimands her relatives who interfere too much in their children's lives; they should quit doing it and let their children grow up. If children seek parents' advice that is a different matter, otherwise parents should let their adult children handle their own problems. She attributes such sensibilities of hers to what she calls her "intercaste background." As she explained in her interview multiple times, her membership in an intercaste family and her being part of a "multicultural" university campus at Baroda, she was able to interact with people from different castes and learned different ways of living, which according to her makes people more accepting of differences and less insistent on a specific caste identity.

However in mapping the experiences of these three women, it is not possible to categorize them simply in terms of either rebellion or acquiescence. For, each participant in her own narrative captured the contradictions that characterize upper caste women's lived experiences vis-à-vis the family. As I have argued earlier in this chapter, there is an inherent contradiction between Marathe's experiences as she recounted them and her advice to her daughters (and to other young women in general) as expressed in her narrative. On the other hand, Raje seems to have "lived" her beliefs to the extent that she sacrificed her own ambitions and desires for the sake of peace within her natal and



marital families. However, it is interesting to note her negotiation of her beliefs with her characterization of herself as fearless and proactive. For me, her acquiescence within her marital home to the detriment of her health and personal wellbeing seems to belie her fearlessness, strength and independence. However, in her view, her strength is what allowed her to fulfill her duties as a daughter-in-law, which eventually won the hearts of her in-laws until her death. Her beliefs, in other words, were the source of her strength and her strong personality allowed her to stick to her beliefs.

Similar contradictions in views/beliefs also mark Paralikar's narrative. She asserts that just like she does not like to be questioned regarding her friendships/relationships with men and women outside the household, she never questioned her sons about their relationships until they told her about them. However, both she and her sister experienced similar incidents with their respective sons. On separate occasions, their sons' girlfriends left their homes with their belongings and came over to their boyfriends' homes with the intention of marrying them. However, both Paralikar and her sister, independently, escorted the women back to their parents' homes and told them: "Only when your parents say yes, you are coming; otherwise no [sic]." Thus, despite her self-described independent mindset, Paralikar seems to deny similar agency and choice to these young women,<sup>31</sup> and even to the young men in question.

Such contradictions represent the tenacity and the weakness of the cultural discourses, as upper caste women try to negotiate their positions within the family, the caste community, and the larger society. Using the family as a lens in the examination of the intersections of gender, caste and class provides insight into these contradictions that

do not need resolution but further examination into the negotiations of power, privilege and entitlements within and outside the family.

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<sup>1</sup> Chandraseniya Kayastha Prabhu, commonly known as Kayastha Prabhus or CKP to distinguish them from the Kayasthas of other parts of India, is a Marathi speaking upper-caste community. See CKP Social Club Poona. 1904. *Ethnographic Notes on Chandraseniya Kayastha Prahu*. Poona: T.V. Gupte and Israelite Press.

<sup>2</sup> As noted in the Introduction, the CKPs have sought to consolidate their upper caste status by comparing themselves with Marathi-speaking Brahmins. See Hiroshi Fukazawa 1968; Chakravarti (1995); O'Hanlon (1985).

<sup>3</sup> Although Dube (2001) does not specify it, or rather implies that almost all women's lives are circumscribed by "familial parameters" feminist scholarship in India has demonstrated that women relate differently to different social institutions based on their subject positions. This is also the position I hold and argue throughout this dissertation.

<sup>4</sup> Beteille (1992) defines a social institution as "not merely as set of social arrangements but also the ideas, beliefs and values by which those arrangements are sustained."

<sup>5</sup> As told to me by Shubhangini Patankar, a participant in my research.

<sup>6</sup> While I employ the terms public and private to denote the spaces as defined by the theory of separate spheres, where the domestic or the family denotes the private, I use these terms loosely with the acknowledgment that the boundaries between the two are permeable and fluid, that the spaces marked as private are affected by and in turn influence what is deemed public. Moreover, the private and the public themselves are subjective and always in relation to the context and the persons within these spaces of interaction. See, for example, Abraham (2010).

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of scholarships or awards granted by the CKP Utkarsh Mandal of Baroda and for signing up in the CKP matrimonial registry.

<sup>8</sup> She explained the distinction between Irani and Parsis in India: both follow the Zoroastrian religion and had migrated to India to escape from Islamic persecution in Iran, but while Parsis accepted the Indian culture and ways of life (while retaining their religion), Iranis continued to retain their Irani identity and cultural practices. For this reason, Irani as a cultural category also differs from Iranian, which is used to denote people from the modern state of Iran.

<sup>9</sup> The family did eventually move to Mumbai.

<sup>10</sup> This characterization of Pune as predominantly Brahmin is drawn from Paralikar's narrative.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that even though Paralikar's father and her step-mother loved each other, her non-acceptance of his family and her unwillingness to cohabitate with them led to their, albeit in this case temporary, separation. Marriage thus is not understood here only as conjugality but as a relationship with the husband's family, which becomes the reason for his second marriage.

<sup>12</sup> Paralikar's step-mother suffered similarly at the hands of her brothers. When the step-mother's mother passed away, her brother refused to care for her, so she took her three children and came to live with Paralikar's mother and her family. Paralikar's father had a job that took him to places outside Baroda, and while Paralikar's mother stayed in Baroda with all the five children and looked after their education, the step-mother moved around with her father.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Molesworth and Pamaji (1857) define Maahervashin as "A girl that, for some years after marriage, continues in the house of her parents." Now it is used simply to denote a married daughter who is visiting her maternal home.

<sup>14</sup> She is one of the two women who are listed with their picture for their extraordinary stature, the other being Irawati Karve.

<sup>15</sup> The nature and extent of the relationship of a woman to both the natal and affinal families is determined by an overarching patriarchal structure and nature of the family and familial ideology.

<sup>16</sup> Her eldest sister received B.Ed. after her B.A., her second sister has a B.Com., her brother has a B.A. and an LLB, and the second brother (who is deceased now) had a B.Sc. and her third brother has a Master's Degree in Science and is a scientist at ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) in Ahmedabad. Her youngest sister had contracted Meningitis which weakened her physical system and so she was not pressured to continue her education.

<sup>17</sup> When Mangal or Mars is said to be dominant in the horoscope and can cause harm to a spouse, unless they also have an equally strong Mangal or Shani (Saturn).

<sup>18</sup> The dictionary meaning of the term is to dine together, but *bhishi* began as a means of saving for middle-class women. Every month a group of women in a *bhishi* would set aside a certain amount, then draw names to see who wins that month's entire amount. The women would meet at the home of the winner who made finger foods of various kinds – which also helped highlight her culinary skills – and entertained the group of women.

<sup>19</sup> “A general or loose term for a woman unclean from the menses or other cause” (Molesworth and Pamanji (1893, 757).

<sup>20</sup> She mentions in her interview that she and her daughters both wanted to marry a Kokanastha Brahman man, because according to Marathe Kokanastha Brahmans, especially when compared with Deshashtha and Karhade, are modern and forward thinking. The former are also less conservative in the context of Brahmanical rituals. For example, she said, during the four monsoon months called Chaaturmaas, other Brahmans do not eat onion and garlic but Kokanastha do not follow any such strict norms. Their rituals are also short, not cumbersome and elaborate like other Maharashtrian Brahmans.

<sup>21</sup> The word “valan” in Marathi is used to indicate the general behavior, in the sense of training, of children which is usually the responsibility of the mother. According Molesworth and Pamanji (1857) valan, among other things, means “To turn, bend, incline; to change course, direction, or bearing.” Valan then literally means giving (appropriate/proper) direction for children's behavior.

<sup>22</sup> As a side-note, she does mention that not all relationships are equal or similar and that if there is a genuine reason, for example, the mistreatment of the daughter-in-law, then it would be appropriate to get away from the in-laws and build a separate familial structure.

<sup>23</sup> She uses the English word “stop” and so I have used stopped in this quote.

<sup>24</sup> Her older sister who graduated from high school with her had decided she did not want to continue further studies but wanted to work instead.

<sup>25</sup> I discuss these issues in the chapter on education and work.

<sup>26</sup> Her father had said in Marathi, “आपल्याला काय बैठकी रंगवायच्यात?”

<sup>27</sup> I use Mumbai and Bombay interchangeably. At that time, the city's official name was Bombay. However since the Marathi word has always been Mumbai, Raje used Mumbai in her narrative.

<sup>28</sup> I borrow this phrase from a well-known Gujarati tale that tells the story of the advent of the Zoroastrians from Iran on the coast of Gujarat. The Irani leader sent a delegate to the king of Sanjaan who sent a glass filled to the brim with milk, suggesting that the kingdom had enough population which would make it difficult for the king to grant them residence in his kingdom. The Iranileader stirred in sugar and sent the glass back to the king which symbolized that they would blend in his kingdom like sugar in milk, which does not change the nature of milk but only makes it sweeter. The king was pleased and granted them refuge in Gujarat. The Zoroastrians later adopted the Gujarati language and manner of dressing thus blending in, and are now called Parsis.

<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that Gandhian ideology utilized this very ideal of womanhood to argue for self-sacrifice and non-violence as ideals for a free and good society, as discussed in Chapter 1.

<sup>30</sup> Marathe uses the word Samavoon jane, which according to Moleworth's Marathi-English dictionary means “To enter and be contained (as in a vessel or receptacle).” Or “To enter in, into, amidst, under &c. congenially, kindly, conveniently, suitably; to enter and blend with; to enter and lie amongst without enlargement, derangement, disturbance, alteration of appearance” (826).

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<sup>31</sup> She explains that her actions were a result of the young woman's parents' allegation that her son wanted to marry her to get US citizenship, which she wanted to deny through her action of escorting the young woman back, with her bags, to her home.

### **Chapter 3: About Desire and Labor: Rethinking Gender and Domesticity within Marriage**

“In most cases of divorces that I have seen, the woman is equally educated and similarly employed [as her husband] and is married within the same caste... She has to work for equal hours at her office and she is also tired but even her parents-in-law expect that the moment she enters the home she should begin [household] work. Even if the husband and the wife have returned from work together and are sitting beside each other, the husband asks the wife for [a glass of] water. She has also come back tired, do you [the husband] give her [a glass of] water?”

-Shubhangini Patankar

In this chapter I explore the connections between marriage, conjugality, domesticity and women's desires and labor by examining the narratives of Kalpana Paralikar, Aparna Athale and Shubhangini Patankar. For these women marriage is not strictly restricted to caste anymore in that non-endogamous<sup>1</sup> marriages are both accepted and celebrated. But these women are attentive to the ways in which marriage in general and endogamous caste marriages in particular institutionalize women's desires and labor. They challenge the unequal gender relationships that characterize most marriages in their experience and highlight the ways in which women's labor – both physical and ritual – forms the necessary yet unacknowledged foundation of upper caste marital domesticity. These women also emphasize the importance of acknowledging women's desires – especially premarital – as the foundation of marriage. By challenging the domestication of women's

desires and labor, they shift the focus of marriage from caste to gender. Controlling and regulating women's sexualities, their desires and their labor has been an important way in which caste and the family seek to institutionalize domesticity for women. Therefore in challenging the existing patterns of control over women's desires and their unpaid and paid labor, my participants criticize both domesticity and its institutionalization. In addition, they also call for a recasting of domestic relationships as a key to reconceptualizing marriage for upper caste women. This chapter explores these various aspects of marriage and domesticity that shed light on the intersections of gender, caste and class.

### ***Shifting Grounds of Endogamy within Feminist Theory***

Like the family, marriage has been at the center of theoretical and practical understandings of caste. The most analyzed feature of marriage vis-à-vis caste has been the institution of endogamy which has been variously identified as one of the key features of a caste society. Endogamy, simply put, can be understood as marriage within a certain group or community, here a caste/subcaste group. The practice of endogamy within the caste system in India mandates that marriage alliances be confined to a certain caste or subcaste in order to maintain the unique nature and characteristics of that particular caste. Feminist scholars have identified endogamy as a way of regulating the sexualities and desires of women. Marriage forms an important way in which the social control of women is institutionalized. And it is for this reason that self-arranged (or "love") marriages (as against those arranged by the family), and intercaste marriages come to be seen as the highest kind of transgression against both caste and family honor. Such

marriages have often invoked hyperbolized anxieties and are countered with reactions that range from mild disapproval to extreme violence. In addition, such (self-arranged and/or intercaste) marriages also validate the existence of pre-marital desire which is seen as transgressive in the face of the caste and family. On January 23, 2014 a leading Indian news outlet reported that a 20-year old woman in Birbhum district in the eastern state of West Bengal was tied to a tree and later gang raped, in accordance with an order by the village council, “as a punishment for falling in love with a man from a different community” (Banerjee). Earlier the village council had “summoned” the young woman and her male lover, tied them to a tree and asked to pay a fine of twenty-five thousand Rupees each for their perceived transgression. When the woman’s family told the council that they could not pay the fine, the woman was “forcibly moved to a small hut where she was sexually assaulted by at least 10 men” (Banerjee). The woman and her family were able to report the crime only after escaping from the village. Thirteen men were arrested for the crime; however, the rest of the village denies that the rape ever took place. In this instance the presence of pre-marital desire and sexuality sanctions the most extreme form of masculinist violence: rape.

Prem Chowdhry’s (1997, 2007) nuanced work highlights the close relationship between family and caste vis-à-vis women’s sexuality. She observes that marriage and marital alliances are accorded an important place in caste and kinship codes. Accordingly, control over women’s sexuality is of central concern in these codes, where the “bestowal of this sexuality in marriage is crucial to patriarchal forces and their concern with caste purity, caste status, power and hierarchy” (Chowdhry 1997, 1019). In

the process women's virginity, purity, modesty and chastity are made central to the institution of marriage in a way that enables both the natal and the marital family's control over women's lives and their behavior. Analyzing the relationship between family and caste identity, marriage and women's sexuality, Chowdhry (1997, 1020) observes:

As marriage provides the structural link-up between kinship and caste, a closer surveillance is accorded to the marital alliances. Kinship linkages provided by marriage, and relations established through marriage, give a caste group its strength, recognition and leverage in wider society and polity. Any breach in these caste linkages brings down the status of not only the immediate family but also the clan and finally the entire caste group. This factor was and remains a most potent consideration behind the enforcement of strict caste and sexual codes.

Thus, endogamy is rendered not only important but mandatory for the continuation of caste identity and for maintaining its "honor." Any breach of this cultural code is seen as a crime against the family and the caste as a whole. The linking of sexual behavior (especially of women but also of men) and caste honor then justifies the use of violence in the redress of such matters. On the other hand, such linkages between women's sexuality and family/village/caste honor also results in bizarre "diktats" being dispensed by village councils. On December 6, 2013, *Hindustan Times* reported that the Katihar village council (Panchayat) in Bihar ordered a man to marry his daughter to her rapist, while also paying him 50,000 rupees and a motorcycle as dowry. The family was further "threatened with social boycott if they take the matter to the police."<sup>2</sup> Thus violence against women and their sexuality take on various forms, and are related to the way in



which the institution of marriage has been set up within the village and caste systems. Such anxieties over women's sexuality and desire are the result of marriage being associated with caste and family honor.

However, while much has been written about caste endogamy, feminist scholarship has recently pointed out that endogamy has been neither fixed nor central to caste in the way that earlier anthropological and sociological scholarship had suggested. For instance, in her examination of "contingent caste endogamy" Janaki Abraham (2014) argues against an essentialized, definitional understanding of caste that is reduced to a number of salient features including endogamy. According to her, instead of viewing caste as a social institution that is subject to change with changes in society, it is viewed as a conglomeration of "immutable principles." Thus the understanding of intercaste marriages as a threat to one's caste and/or family status, and the violent reactions towards it, are premised upon the understanding of endogamy as an "immutable" or non-negotiable principle of caste. Abraham's (2014, 57) argument is that endogamy, though central to the caste system, is "contingent" in that the "prescribed or acceptable circle of endogamy shifts over time and context, as does also the rationale for endogamy." Drawing on her research among the Thiyya community of North Kerala and using the example of "endogamy paradox" in Haryana,<sup>3</sup> she argues that there is a "divergence between the ideal of endogamy and marital alliance in practice" (57) and calls for such changes to be incorporated within the current understanding of caste in India.

In a similar vein, Ravinder Kaur (2004) and Chaudhry and Mohan (2011) examine cross-regional marriages which are clearly conducted outside the prescribed and

expected endogamous circles. According to Kaur, who has studied the phenomenon in Haryana, most of these marriages are spurred by a “scarcity” of women in the region which over the years has seen a significant decline in sex ratio. These marriages, she argues, are “uniting rural, illiterate Indians across boundaries of region, language, religion and even caste” (Kaur 2004, 2595). And contrary to popular assumptions that these marriages are in fact a form of “sale” of women, Kaur argues that the women’s families do not receive any compensation for the marriage apart from the money to travel to the groom’s village for the ceremony and a small trousseau. Furthermore, after marriage these women are “incorporated” within the family as wives and not understood as concubines, or sold into prostitution. These brides become a part of the family, adopting the language and culture of their marital homes. Similarly, Chaudhry and Mohan (2011) look at “long-distance or cross-regional” marriages in the village of Badaun in Uttar Pradesh. They argue that women agree to cross-regional marriages on account of their poverty and the inability of their parents to meet the demands of dowry from local men. Like Kaur, Chaudhry and Mohan reject the idea that such marriages are akin to sale of women, and argue instead that these are “a new kind of commercially mediated marriage[s] involving payment and a go-between” (2011, 337). Usually the groom pays for the wedding because it is the economic reality of the situation. These grooms do not/cannot find a woman in their own regions to marry them, while the brides come from poor families who cannot afford to pay dowry in their own regions. As a result, these marriages are forged out of social and economic necessity which allows for transcending the so-called endogamous circles for both spouses. Furthermore, the process

of “arranging” of the marriages also differs such that “caste and kin networks” do not have much role to play given the spatial distance between the bride and groom’s families. As a result, new kinds of “go-betweens” are created who are instrumental in arranging these marriages: the women who have married into the village. These women negotiate marriages between men from their marital villages with women from their natal villages. Such marriages have shifted the boundaries of “acceptable” marriages as defined by endogamy. However interestingly, the authors also note these brides are never consulted about their marriage: “they agreed to get married to the groom in Uttar Pradesh because their parents wanted them to” (Chaudhry and Mohan 2011, 317). This highlights the fact that challenging endogamy does not necessarily challenge patriarchy and women’s position within marriage and the family. But more importantly, this scholarship also points to the centrality of women’s labor (“productive” and reproductive) within marriage such that it can also overcome those caste and regional barriers that formerly disallowed such marriages.

In this chapter I take the discussion of marriage vis-à-vis caste away from endogamy – that is the relationship of marriage to caste – to emphasize the gendered nature of conjugal and affinal relationships and to examine the nature of women’s labor within marriage and domesticity. Although I do touch upon the subject of intercaste marriages as they occur in the narratives of my participants, the main focus of this chapter is on how caste institutionalizes domesticity vis-à-vis marriage. The insights from my participants’ narratives help shed light on the way that marriage and domesticity have been central to the continuation of caste. As discussed in Chapter 1, women’s productive

and reproductive labor is “managed” within the caste system through marriage and enforced through the discourse of domesticity.

### *Intercaste Marriages and the Elimination of Caste*

Bringing issues of women’s labor to the center of the debate over marriage and caste helps explore the kind of changes taking place vis-à-vis gender and caste in the context of intercaste marriages. Since endogamy is seen as a crucial link between caste and gender hierarchies, non-endogamous/self-arranged/“love”/intercaste marriages bear the potential of threatening both caste and gender inequalities. According to most anti-caste movements non-endogamous marriages acknowledge desire across castes/classes and thus pose a challenge to the traditional understandings of marriage. Thus most anti-caste movements advocated intercaste marriages as a means to end the caste system. As Anupama Rao observes, Ambedkar had long identified the centrality of endogamy to caste hierarchy and called for intercaste marriages as a way to weaken the roots of the caste society (Rao 2009). Periyar, the founder of the Self-Respect Movement, criticized marriage and the family as institutions that reproduce patriarchy. He called for abolishing the institution of marriage itself because according to him it “enabled women to be enslaved as the property of men” (Anandhi 2003, 142). Even so he supported those marriages that challenged the established norms, especially of chastity and regulated sexual behavior of women, and called for a repudiation of all rituals related to marriage, such as tying of the *tali* which he argued enslaved women. He encouraged marriages based on mutual compatibility and companionship of the couple rather than on criteria of caste, family or *gotra* (Anandhi 2003; Sreenivas 2008). As Sreenivas observes, “In the

movement's construction of both individual and society, brides and grooms did not enter into marriages as members of a particular caste, clan, or household/family but instead as individuals capable of giving consent" (2008, 87). By separating conjugality from the concerns of caste, Sreenivas argues, the movement redefined both conjugality and family for the colonial Tamil society.

However even as we witness more intercaste and inter-regional marriages being accepted by families as my participants suggest, the boundaries of caste and the importance of caste identities does not seem to have diminished greatly. Thus it is important to investigate whether these marriages are actually posing a threat to the dominant caste system as envisioned by the pioneers of the anti-caste movements. How are intercaste marriages affecting the caste system, the institution of marriage, or the difference of power between men and women both within and outside the marriage? What exactly is being challenged through intercaste marriages? Or rather, what is *not* being changed vis-à-vis caste and gender despite the rise in intercaste marriages as suggested by my participants? I contend that the answers to these questions lie in the relationship between marriage and domesticity and call for an examination of women's labor within marriage. How do upper caste women understand and define the centrality of domesticity within marriage? In what ways do they challenge it? What are the ways in which upper caste women have been instrumental in shifting the culture around women's labor vis-à-vis food and rituals? I respond to these questions by drawing upon the narratives of Paralikar, Athale and Patankar. Paralikar is the most vocal about the importance of female choice and the acceptance of premarital female desire within

marriage, whereas Patankar emphasizes the need to address the unequal division of labor within the household. Athale recasts the emotional and physical labor within a marriage in terms of her relationship with her parents-in-law rather than her husband who has lived abroad for his work for over 20 years. All three of them critique, albeit in different ways, the ritual labor that is mandated from women for the continuation of caste culture. In addition all three observe that marriages within caste are being mitigated by other factors like education, employment in professional careers, and class/wealth. These narratives are thematically divided into two sections: on marriage and conjugality, and on food and rituals. Issues of women's labor undergird both these sections. Furthermore even when female desire is made central in the discussions on marriage and conjugality, these discourses are also laced with concerns of women's labor and domesticity as I examine below. And since I identify women's labor as central to the institution of marriage I begin with an exploration of the issues of women's unpaid labor and its relationship with caste, class, gender and sexuality within which I contextualize the narratives of my participants.

### ***Caste, Marriage and Women's Labor***

In a pioneering essay on women's domestic labor, Kumkum Sangari (1993) argued that there is a close relationship between women's labor performed in the household and the ideologies of domesticity that make this labor invisible.<sup>4</sup> Unpaid domestic labor also influences women's participation in paid labor, which in addition to the already sexualized division of waged labor, determines the structure of labor for women both within and outside the household. According to Sangari this labor is embedded within what she called "'dependable' social relations" which structure the

labor market. But because domestic labor does not fall within the purview of market and market relations and exchange, it is easily absorbed into “symbolic and ideological systems of valuation based on the constellation of non-dissoluble, non-contractual marriage, service and nurture” (Sangari 1993, 3-4). She contends that there is a close relationship between the ideologies of domesticity and women’s unpaid (and I argue paid) labor such that they “coexist and mutually presuppose each other, [and] rather than fall into linear sequence of cause and effect, they are open to joint reproduction” (Sangari 1993, 4). In this section I examine the ways in which this system of valuation operates in the lives of upper caste, middle-class women by glorifying domesticity and institutionalizing it through marriage.

In a more recent work on women’s unpaid labor Mary John (2013) has argued that women’s labor is affected by caste and sexuality as much as by class. She also discusses the symbolic value of women’s labor (although she does not call it symbolic) when public labor within the structure of caste is considered a stigma and a source of humiliation. Unlike the Marxist understandings of work as “value-producing labor,” within the context of caste system public labor is accompanied by experiences of exploitation *and* degradation. In the anti-caste thought of Ambedkar, for instance, “labor offered a metaphor ...for associating the identity of a collective with their experience of dispossession” (Rao 2012). Such association of labor with stigma and dispossession has a significant impact on women’s paid labor. As John (2013, 183) argues, “While her labor in other households for the women of those households marks her as clearly inferior but provides a modicum of respectability, those forms of paid labor associated with public

manual work most definitely do not, and are precisely the signs of her lack of social status, from the rural agricultural laborer to the urban construction worker.” Women providing public labor particularly have also been sexually vulnerable. The association of women’s public labor with caste and sexual stigmatization is the reason why upward economic and social mobility of a family is accompanied by the withdrawal of women from public labor. In this context John notes that even though such withdrawal from paid work renders women dependent on the patriarchs/male earners of the family, it nonetheless protects them against caste, class and sexual stigma that is associated with women’s public labor. Thus paradoxically, and contrary to Marxist understandings of labor, women’s unpaid labor earns respectability and valor while women’s paid labor (except in professional careers) is looked down upon as necessitated by caste and class. This symbolic value attributed to women’s unpaid labor is ensured through the institution of marriage. Furthermore in the aftermath of globalization, India has witnessed “a marked increase in the individuation and intensification of personal relationship between husband and wife, and increasingly in the bringing up of children” (John 2013, 189). This (combined with the exponential increase in wages for young individuals today) has resulted in more women quitting their “good jobs” in order to attend to their domestic responsibilities. However these very same reasons (high wages and the commodification of idealized domesticity) have also contributed to the increase in paid domestic services being employed by families today.

Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum (2009) have examined the relationship between idealized domesticity and the reliance on paid domestic help in the sustenance of such



domesticity. Their study is conducted largely within the analytic category of class but also touches upon issues of caste to the extent that those providing paid domestic labor within middle-class homes are predominantly from lower castes (and classes). Like John (2013) they observe that presence of “servants” in the home, and the absence of women in paid labor outside the home both symbolize an ideal middle-class identity. Thus the newly emergent middle-class domesticity in contemporary Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) is predicated upon the availability and presence of paid domestic help.

However, my participants who spent a large part of their (working) lives before globalization have varying and often contradictory perspectives on women’s labor. For instance, as discussed in the previous chapter, Sushma Marathe’s only regret in life is that she was not able to get her Diploma and work (in paid employment). However her advice to her daughters (who have jobs) is to prioritize their families, especially husbands and children over their careers. According to her, this advice also follows from the fact that their families do not *need* their income; her daughters’ husbands have high salaries thus making their wives’ wages redundant in her eyes. However, in talking about her own reason for working, she cites economic independence and self-identity, factors which she overlooks in her advice to her daughters. On the other hand, she also advocates a more equitable distribution of household work between the spouses. Similarly the narratives I examine in this chapter also challenge the ways that women’s labor within marriage is structured and expected, and the ways in which it affects women’s participation in paid labor. Many of my participants also had no paid domestic help during their youth and it influenced the way in which they perceive women’s labor within marriage in comparison

to similarly educated, upper caste young women in contemporary India. There were also women like Paralikar who always had (paid and unpaid) help in the household and their escape from domesticity was predicated upon paid domestic service or on the domesticity of other women (like her “daughter” or her sisters-in-law) who provided the food-related and ritualistic labor involved in sustaining an upper caste household even though Paralikar did not expect it from them.

Furthermore an important form of labor which I discuss in this chapter, and which John (2013) also highlights in her work, is the sexual and emotional labor involved in domesticity. She contends that “sexual services and the relationship of love and intimacy ... are becoming part of an evolving new norm” and therefore need to be incorporated within the understanding of women’s domestic labor (2013, 189). While the women’s movement in India identified family and marriage as “sites of violence, discrimination and exploitation” it is only recently that issues of love and sex have been identified as the “fundamental underpinnings of these institutions” and critiqued as such (John 2013, 189). For instance, in their queer critique of marriage and the family, Rinchin (2005) observes that the paradoxical relationship between sex, desire and marriage leads to the relegation of all other relationships as secondary. They (2005, 719) indicate, “[T]he one sexual relationship, in which sex becomes secondary after a while and ‘love and care’ take over, is the culmination of our quest – marriage.” Thus while marriage is identified as rooted in desire and sex, the ideology of domesticity also expects sex to be replaced by love and care for the family. And therefore, John (2013) argues, marital relationships are seen as located in affect, and the emotional labor that goes into the sustenance of such

monogamous relationships is not seen as labor at all. Drawing upon Laura Kipnis' work she identifies such labor as contributing to surplus monogamy: "Surplus monogamy refers to all surplus labor that has to go into the creation and sustenance of sexual intimacy, the extra hours, the renunciations, the sheer labor of it all" (John 2013, 188). The romanticization of monogamous marital relationships, along with the symbolic value attributed to a devoted (house)wife has necessitated additional labor for its maintenance. Thus even as the amount of physical labor that upper caste, middle-class women need to perform in order to be identified as a "domestic goddess" has declined – with the increased employment of paid domestic help – the emotional and sexual labor that goes into the creation of an idealized (albeit commodified) domesticity has often been overlooked. It is this labor that I also want to bring to the forefront in the context of upper caste women especially vis-à-vis gendered domesticity. Such domesticity demands the showcasing of not only upper class (via commodification) but also of upper caste and sexuality (especially through the negotiation of modernity and tradition).

In his very interesting analysis of pornographic material in India, Sanjay Srivastava (2013) identifies the emergence of a new kind of woman(hood) in pornography in India. In examining the rise and popularity of an online pornographic site Savitabhabhi ("sister-in-law Savita") Srivastava calls for contextualizing it in the urban spaces which are markedly different from the "footpath" or the site of street pornographic material. It details the sexual exploits of a young "housewife" named Savita – as she "seduces" various men while her "workaholic" husband is absent from home. Savita Bhabhi treads the very familiar spaces between tradition and modernity that characterize

an idealized urban femininity in contemporary Delhi. According to Srivastava (2013, 245; emphasis in original) “Savita Bhabhi combines *the erotics of tradition* – or at least what is imagined as ‘tradition’ – with contemporary contexts that relate to new forms of urban living, consumer culture, and the politics of gender and sexuality that relate to both.” He examines two instances from contemporary Delhi – the Akshardham temple complex and the gated community of DFL City – to examine the spaces within which women carefully negotiate tradition and modernity, and which form the backdrop against which the erotics and pornography in Savita Bhabhi find appeal. These spaces are definitely a result of the globalization of economy but are not unpredicted or unexpected in any way. Srivastava observes that since the mid-1980s, several “mainstream ‘women’s’ magazines” have presented the values associated with modernity alongside those considered traditional. For instance, he observes, “extraordinarily explicit articles on sex and sexuality [are seen] alongside those on religious ‘values’, rituals, texts, cooking, and home decoration sections” (246). Thus the discourse on domesticity in these magazines combines both physical and ritual labor, and sexual and emotional labor to create the image of an ideal wife. It is the erotics of such domesticity that is visible in Savita Bhabhi, which in conjunction with the above discussion, is constructed along the lines of caste, class, sexuality and gender. As Srivastava (2013, 251) explains:

[Savita Bhabhi] is traditional yet able to express her sexuality; of the world but able to keep the ‘street’ out of her home; both desirable and yet the cause of some anxiety because of her identity as an active subject of consumerism. Savita Bhabhi is the woman who can move between ‘tradition’ (she is married) and (sexual) modernity. Of course, while she is open about her sexual desires –

wishing and willing to take part in a variety of sexual acts with both men and women – she is, ultimately, a woman of the home, flaunting both her thick *sindoor*, as well as her middle-class house.

In identifying Savita Bhabhi's erotic appeal, Srivastava points (although he does not make this argument) to the idealized womanhood as expressed through domesticity, caste and class. Although her sexuality could be read as transgressive of "traditional values" her appeal lies in the fact that her sexuality is still restricted to the home and still tethered to her marriage. This positioning of women's sexuality within traditional marriage and within traditional domesticity despite their existence within consumer culture works at "addressing a significant context of masculine anxiety" (251).

My objective of drawing upon this scholarship is to show that both love and the erotic within marriage involve women's labor that is not acknowledged as such. In addition to the physical and ritual labor that maintains the household and caste respectively, marriage for upper caste, middle-class women also involves the labor that is sexual and emotional in nature. Furthermore, within the discourse of domesticity, there is no division or distinction between physical and emotional labor because both are aimed towards a particular form of domesticity that combines materiality with love and emotion. In the context of intercaste marriages ritual labor of women – i.e. carrying forward the traditions of the caste – is also combined with emotional labor – i.e. with the love and affection that the young bride is expected to have towards her marital family. Thus even in marriages that accept desires of young women as fundamental it is important to examine the relationship between women's desires and their physical, ritual

and emotional labor that is institutionalized upon marriage. Recognizing women's labor in this context is important in order to understand the processes that institutionalize gender within marriage. As the narratives discussed below suggest, women's desires within marriage begin in the realm of sexuality and pleasure but end up in the realm of physical, ritual, sexual and emotional labor. And therefore in addition to the physical and ritual labor required of women, these narratives also call attention to women's desires and emotional labor that is associated with marriage, conjugality and domesticity. Furthermore, accounting for women's (and men's) desires within marriage also helps us understand the ways in which the discourse of domesticity itself undergoes changes. Contemporary structures of the family and conjugality are creating an appealing format of domesticity for young women. Thus while domesticity was imposed on the women who belonged to the generation of my participants, contemporary women are seen as willingly accepting domesticity. Thus even "love marriages" are not changing the force of domesticity on women's lives because by acknowledging women's desires within marriage, they are seen as willingly accepting domesticity rather than it being forced upon them by families (as seen in "arranged" marriages). However, as mentioned above, this new form of domesticity relies much on paid domestic help and is embedded within discourses of consumerism. Nonetheless, even in this new avatar domesticity is made central to the definition of femininity which is circulated through cultural discourses. I posit that this is one reason, albeit just one of the reasons, why intercaste marriages do not seem to shake the stronghold of caste contrary to the imaginings of anti-caste movements. The reason is that gender itself is not being disrupted through intercaste

marriages. There is a close relationship between caste and gender patriarchies and instead of challenging the inequalities of gender, intercaste marriages seem to continue to reinforce gendered division of labor at least within marriage. Thus instead of challenging caste, such marriages are “absorbing” women into the marital castes while still maintaining caste boundaries and certain hierarchies. In addition, as I discuss below, the emphasis on caste is giving way to the preeminence of class as an important criterion in marriages. This class is the reimagined new middle-class of post-liberalization India, which is drawn predominantly from the upper or “*savarna*” castes. Therefore, while similarly placed castes have intermarriages, there is still a stark distinction maintained between upper/middle castes and the lower and Dalit castes. I examine these various aspects of women’s labor vis-à-vis marriage and caste in the sections below. These narratives highlight the nature of women’s labor as experienced by my participants, as well as their explicit and implicit challenges to it.

### ***Desire in Marriage and Conjuality***

*Kalpana Paralikar*

Paralikar’s views on marriage and caste are influenced by her own academic study of the subject<sup>5</sup> as well by her life in an “intercaste” family. Therefore, much of her opinion about the ir/relevance of caste, also discussed in Chapter 2, is drawn from her own life experiences. She considers her family to be the perfect example of marriages that were based on love and desire, because three generations of her family have seen such marriages. Thus, Paralikar is the most vocal about acknowledging pre-marital

desires, and that these should be the bases of marriage rather than customs and traditions that necessitate endogamous marriages.

As described in the previous chapter, Paralikar had a Brahman father, a CKP mother and an Irani step-mother. Furthermore, her brother married a CKP, her sister, a Brahman, and her step-sister is married to a Jain.<sup>6</sup> Paralikar's eldest son is married to a Brahman woman, her second son to a Maratha (from the former royal family of Baroda), and her youngest son married a CKP but from the same Paralikar family (from the same *gotra* or clan/ancestral lineage). She observes that her youngest son's marriage would have been severely objected to by the elders in her family had they been alive. But her approach has been: "It is your life, you decide. [But if things don't work out] don't come to us and say you should have told us."

Paralikar's understanding of the marital relationship is that there should be mutual feeling of love, trust and respect. She emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and respecting an individual's choice of a partner. She also severely criticizes the double-standards and the hypocrisy around sexual mores that encumber marriages in India. She tells me about an incident that happened when her son who lived in the U.S. was engaged to be married to a young woman also living in the U.S. One morning she opened the newspaper and saw a notice inquiring if anyone, especially any female, had any objection if her son (his name was listed) married the woman (her name listed as well). Paralikar was furious! She called her son and asked him about it. It turned out that the would-be bride's uncle had travelled to Baroda from Bombay, gone to the local newspapers and paid for the publication of this notice. Unfortunately, this was on the same day as



Paralikar's Senate meeting at the University and everyone she knew came up to her to ask what the notice was all about. Did it mean that there was a problem with her son? She explains to me that the context behind the publication of the notice was that her son had many female friends. She says that in Baroda it was not considered inappropriate to have groups of friends consisting of both males and females. Some got romantically involved and married but others remained good friends. In addition her son also had a girlfriend but it did not work out because her parents did not want her to marry him. However even after she was married, they continued to remain friends.<sup>7</sup> Paralikar attributes this openness to the specific social environment of Baroda. On the other hand her daughter-in-law's family had migrated to the U.S. in 1962 but could not let go of their "narrow mindset" because they were from Satara (a rural and semi-urban region in Maharashtra) and from a "typical Maharashtrian group." Her daughter-in-law got really furious and said to her parents: "Learn from my mother-in-law. She is there [in India] but she is way ahead of you and you are here [in the U.S.] but you are the same Indian Satara community people [sic]." Her parents made excuses that they had heard that her fiancé had a lot of female friends and also a girlfriend. She told her parents that she was aware of his past.

When Paralikar went to the U.S. for their wedding, she said to her daughter-in-law: "Did I ask you, or your father or your mother, whether you were going steady [sic] with anyone in the U.S., because you left your house at the age of 16!" Paralikar said that having been to the U.S. before she was aware of the nature of relationships between young men and women and the openness of society there. Men and women moved out at

a young age so there was no parental check on them unlike in India. On her part the bride-to-be had also confided in her fiancé about her prior relationship. Paralikar says, “That’s okay [sic]. I mean you can’t expect a 21-year- old girl to be single. She will be attached [sic] somewhere but you should have the magnanimity [to accept it] which they did not have.” In fact Paralikar was so angry that she wanted to cancel the wedding because she did not want any association with “such narrow-minded people.” But she says her daughter-in-law was very strong and she said that she would also break her relationship with her parents. Paralikar told her not to take any impetuous decisions but also asked her to tell them not to behave in this manner again.

This episode highlights the contradictory expectations that Paralikar has as a woman and as a mother. She is insistent about two things vis-à-vis marriage: first, that young men and women are often romantically or sexually involved before their marriage and that they might not often end up marrying the same person; second, that young men and women should be allowed to choose their own marriage partners. However, her reaction of wanting to cancel the wedding also points to the fact that she considers marriage to be more than a relationship between individuals. She considers marriage to be a relationship between families, such that the need for compatibility and trust between families is important. In the end, however, she does allow the individual character of her daughter-in-law, her strength to react against her own family’s errors, to trump familial incompatibilities.

More importantly, she also challenges the scrutiny of young men and women’s desires. Her approach to such relationships is that everyone has a history of desires and

affection, but what matters is the present relationship and one's commitment to it. There is no reason to scrutinize past desires if they are irrelevant to the present relationship. Her understanding of marriage in this manner is also drawn from her own experience. Talking candidly about her own life, she reveals that both she and her husband had "affairs" before marriage but neither could marry the person they liked. And both of them knew about each other's relationships because the woman he was involved with was in Paralikar's class in the Home Science Department. Moreover, they also lived in the same neighborhood and knew that the other was in a relationship. Paralikar was a graduate student in Home Science and her husband was a member of the faculty in the Department of Psychology, when a mutual acquaintance suggested them to each other.<sup>8</sup> When they finally talked to each other about the possibility of marriage, they confided about their respective relationships. Paralikar says, "At the age of 25 and 30, you don't expect somebody to be without – ... any kind of [romantic] relation [sic]." However, Paralikar also wanted to make sure that her husband's parents would be amenable to this alliance. She said she and her husband were fine with their pasts and her parents did not care, but she wanted to be sure that it would not be an issue with his mother, whom she described as being from "a very traditional family." Meanwhile his mother, unaware of their association, was considering other proposals for her son. She regarded him highly among all her sons because he was the most educated and highly placed – socially and economically on account of his position as a university teacher – and he was also very handsome. She hoped to find him a bride from a similarly placed family, which also meant she would bring in a big dowry. But her daughter, who was also a student in the

Home Science Department and a friend of Paralikar's since school, broke the news to her mother that they both were now involved and planning to get married. Paralikar's mother-in-law's hopes were severely squashed. Not only was Paralikar not from a CKP family, but she also had a complicated familial background with two mothers. Paralikar had put two conditions before her husband: first that their horoscopes should match, and second that he and his family should unconditionally accept her family. They should not, for instance, suggest that her step-mother could not attend their wedding in an attempt to maintain the façade of "respectability." Paralikar laughs, "Of course, the day I got married, I got to know many other stories about my in-laws' family but they were not told to me [sic] as I had told my husband." She often asked her mother-in-law after marriage why they had not told her everything before marriage when she had bared everything about herself and her family. She insists that marriage must involve openness and trust between the partners. An outsider or a "third party" should not get an opportunity to reveal things about the spouse or his/her family. For instance, an acquaintance once approached her sister-in-law and told her that Paralikar had a boyfriend before her marriage. Her sister-in-law replied that she knew about it and so did her brother and the rest of her family. This reduces chances for misunderstandings between the spouses and between the married couple and their families. She also believes that every woman should confide in her spouse about this before marriage. She contends that she refuses to believe if someone says "I have no past history. May be you did not have such close relations [emotional or sexual involvement] but one always likes someone at a particular age. One has to accept it." She tells me that she is talking so

frankly about these issues because she wants younger women to know that it is completely acceptable to have premarital relationships and that it is important to be open and frank about them. Addressing me, she says that I am “lucky” because I am in the U.S. where the society is more open about these issues but in India people are still mired in caste concerns and not ready to accept premarital relationships.

But marriages that are founded upon individual choice and mutual desire are often not wholeheartedly accepted by families. She observes that for a long time after her marriage her mother-in-law was not happy because she had wanted a daughter-in-law from the same caste (CKP).<sup>9</sup> Paralikar’s husband and his elder brother both had married Brahman women, and her mother-in-law was often heard voicing her unhappiness about this. So her third daughter-in-law *had* to be CKP. But Paralikar’s youngest brother-in-law chose to marry his aunt’s (his mother’s sister’s) daughter. And even though she was from a CKP family, this relationship was also objectionable to her mother-in-law. Paralikar and the others in her family told her, “This marriage *will* take place and you *will* [have to] accept it, because if you don’t accept it, you [alone] will be miserable.” In saying thus she also emphasizes that marriages based in mutual desire need to be accompanied by changes in domestic relationships because even as individuality is important in such relationship, marriages essentially bind families together. In addition for women especially, managing relationships within the affinal home also become an important part of conjugality. There is thus a contradiction seen in these narratives, even for someone like Paralikar who has led a largely non-normative life, and which is evident from her life history. This contradiction arises from the fact that even as young women’s individuality

and autonomy of desire is emphasized and even as caste takes a backseat in such marriages, the importance of the family never diminishes. As I read it, the centrality of individual choice in marriage ends at the wedding and young women are expected to “get along” with the affinal family. Even when young couples face opposition from their families to marrying the person of their choice, once they are married, social and cultural norms expect women to become a member/part of the new marital family. Nonetheless, according to Paralikar, the current trend in India is that educated, upper caste and middle-class women do have an important voice in changing the substance of marriages.

Drawing on her interactions with the society around her, Paralikar observes that caste will not have a major role to play in marriages any longer, especially since women in India now “have an upper hand” in marriages. Her recent conversations with (upper caste, middle-class) mothers of young men of marriageable age have led her to conclude that the decision of marriage and the choice of partners is no longer the prerogative of men. Even men travelling from abroad to choose brides from India are not “attractive” any longer. If women are not attracted to them in any meaningful way they do not want to marry just because the men are settled abroad. Particularly in larger cities and metropolitan areas, parents of young men are “really disturbed” because arranged marriages are getting more and more difficult. To these parents Paralikar suggests allowing their children to select partners of their choice. She says that even within the same caste people are often picky about what geographical region their spouses come from. For instance, the general impression within the CKP community is that those from Pune-Bombay region are more progressive and forward thinking, while those from

Vidarbha or Aurangabad are necessarily backward and would not “fit” into the culture of the “Pune-Bombay CKPs.” However, now women from Vidarbha are not ready to marry Pune-Bombay men or those even who are settled abroad because they are well educated and highly placed as IT, medical or other technical professionals. They do not want to go to the U.S. and “slog there” when they could live comfortably and enjoy the same standard of living in India. Due to these changes in the mindset of young Indian women, there is definitely a panic among Indians abroad, who then might marry “a white-skinned girl” who is not necessarily as highly educated as Indian women. But she also notes, upon my asking, that these changes are seen more in the educated, and economically upper-middle and upper classes. These women want equal rights to express themselves. But men are not ready to accept it: “Generally the recognition doesn’t come easily [from men], but blame comes easily.”

It is interesting to note that she acknowledges the difference in expectations and perceptions of people of the same caste community residing in different geographical locations. Within the CKP community in the context of “arranged” marriages emphasis is often placed, for instance, on the “purity” of (*Shuddha*) language. There is a sizable CKP population in Gujarat and often in the context of marriage alliances, families also consider whether the prospective spouse’s family speaks “proper” Marathi, whether the bride is acquainted with the traditional CKP cuisine, and more generally whether there is heavy influence of Gujarati language and culture. There is thus a concern that goes beyond mere endogamy: if a caste is spread across different linguistic regions in India, question of marriage often involves considerations such as linguistic dexterity and

cultural aptitude. In such cases then, a marriage within the same caste but with someone who is not adept in the generally accepted cultural mainstream, might seem similar to an intercaste marriage in its essence.

This part of her narrative also draws links between women's education, their labor and the prospects of middle-class domesticity. She agrees with women who refuse to marry men in the U.S. and "slog" there, whereas the easy availability of paid domestic labor in India makes domesticity more manageable for these women. In addition, she also identifies the rise in patriarchal anxieties, expressed through the mothers of young men, towards the increased autonomy that women are now enjoying vis-à-vis marriage. These anxieties also extend to their sons marrying "white" women in the U.S. On her part, Paralikar says that she finds the new trend in India in which women have a stronger say in the choice of marriage partners very encouraging. But people tell her that she finds this encouraging only because her sons are now married and settled. She responds to them that problems they perceive in the matters of their sons' weddings are of their own creation. They are too hung up on finding spouses from the same caste, or the same occupational or economic level. Paralikar suggests going down in the caste or economic hierarchy if the woman is "highly educated and if she is professionally qualified to accompany your son and go abroad and settle and help him." And even if she can be "only a housewife" there is nothing wrong if the husband has a good income. Paralikar's second daughter-in-law<sup>10</sup> is a high school graduate and does not work in the U.S. but she manages the home so well that her other two daughters-in-law who are employed, also in the U.S., often wonder how she manages everything "on one salary." And not only has



she learned to manage her household finances well, says Paralikar, but because she does not work and is available at home, most friends and relatives visit them more often which means she has to “incur” more expenditure than Paralikar’s other two sons’ families who earn more. So sometimes it is not necessary that a woman be highly educated, she could be a good housewife [partner] instead. Not surprisingly then everyone, even members of her daughter-in-law’s natal family ask Paralikar how she “accepted” her in such an educated family. Paralikar says, “Is that the [only] indicator [parameter] that you accept only one who is very highly educated? I don’t think so! If she is liked by my son, and if he knows [and accepts] that she is not to be an economically productive woman...” In fact, Paralikar indicates that the work that her daughter-in-law does in the U.S. *is* economically productive, because the other two sons’ families have to pay for those tasks that this daughter-in-law performs at home. For instance, the employed couples pay \$1800 every month to a nanny to take care of their children. If we put that in the daughter-in-law’s account, there’s her economic productivity! And in fact her son does this. He gives her a certain amount every month for herself. Sometimes in an emergency she also lends him the money from this amount. For instance, when Paralikar’s husband was not well, her son’s family had to make a trip to India and it was this money that he borrowed from his wife. Paralikar’s emphasis is on partnership between the spouses which also implies decreased interference from parents both while choosing a spouse and after marriage. In fact she says she places her daughter-in-law on a higher pedestal than working or professional women including herself. She understands how difficult it is to run a house on a stringent budget, and yet be willing to entertain friends and relatives

with a smile. She also criticizes the Indian customs wherein the host is expected to bear the burden of guests during the time of their visit: even if they go out for dinner, the host is expected to pay for the meal. But understanding comes only when you interact with different kind of people. She says she is witnessing that the barriers of caste and class are going away and says that they should wither away for real democracy to exist.

Emphasizing understanding between spouses as an important aspect of conjugality she cites the examples of her eldest son who for many years was the primary earner in the family while his wife's income was supplementary. But now she has a better job and better prospects so her son is content in taking a secondary position vis-à-vis household income. Her daughter-in-law's frequent tours also keep her away from home a lot, and therefore her son has also become the primary care giver for their children.

Paralikar says this comes as a shock to everyone, including her daughter-in-law's own mother who expresses her discontent when her daughter visits India for fifteen days while her husband looks after the home and the children in the U.S.. But Paralikar reassures the young couple that they should not care about such reactions from others unless it is also creating tensions in their relationship. If they have consulted with each other, discussed and arrived at a decision and are comfortable with it, then they should not bother about what their families and friends think about their arrangement.

In another instance, her youngest daughter-in-law while studying in Pune shared an apartment with both male and female housemates. But contrary to popular belief this fact did not come in the way of her getting married, says Paralikar. After her marriage she continued her education in the U.S. where she enrolled for a Master's in Special

Education. And this time also she shared an apartment with male housemates but this became a point of critique in her family. Even Paralikar's sister-in-law whose son had a live-in relationship with a woman felt obliged to comment on the perceived inappropriateness of her housing arrangement. Paralikar retorted that her own son was living with a female, to which her sister-in-law replied that it was different because he was not married. Paralikar replied that at least her daughter-in-law was married and knew where the boundaries of her relationship with other men were. Thus, even while female sexuality and desire comes to be considered significant for marriage, gendered norms preclude the conception of an autonomous female sexuality. In this instance, Paralikar highlights the ways in which women's sexuality is viewed with suspicion both before and after marriage.

Further Paralikar feels that it is more common for women to face restrictions after marriage but today's women do not want to lose their independence. So they are taking their time to get married instead of rushing into it. This is true, however, in "higher income groups"; the more educated and economically independent a woman is, the more likely she is to be independent in her thinking as well. And parents also seem to support women in these decisions now. She is glad to see that women are now rejecting undesirable proposals from men instead of compromising. They are ready to live alone, or have a live-in relationship, although she does not approve of the latter. But if she has to weigh broken marriages against live-in relationships, she sees the latter as healthier for the society. In her own life, she has witnessed three instances wherein successful live-in relationships ended up as failed marriages in a short time. She suspects that it is the

possessiveness that accompanies the (institution of) marriage that might be a reason for this phenomenon. But I surmise that another reason could be the institutionalization of domesticity after marriage. The transition from (live-in) “partner” to “wife” is the way in which domesticity for women comes to be institutionalized. Furthermore the sexual autonomy that accompanies pre-marital relationships, especially for women in live-in relationships, faces the threat of being changed into sexual and emotional labor within marriage as discussed above. Thus I argue that since we live in societies where the law, economics, politics and culture are patriarchal, it is important to talk about women’s sexual and emotional labor even as we identify, acknowledge and cherish their sexual desires.

On the other hand, Aparna Athale’s narrative describes the division of labor between her and her in-laws, which in the absence of her husband, creates a new form of “conjuality” for her. The emotional labor in her case is intrinsically tied to the physical paid and unpaid labor she does for her home, her in-laws, and her daughter. Her experiences throw light on some other aspects of domesticity and domestic relationships within marriage.

#### *Aparna Athale*

Aparna Athale was 50 years of age at the time of my interview with her in 2011. She has a Master of Science (M.Sc.) degree with specialization in Organic Chemistry and a Bachelor of Education (.Ed.), and has worked as a teacher for almost 30 years. She states that teaching is kind of a “family profession”: her grandmother, mother, her aunts, her sister and her sister-in-law are all teachers. Her daughter also chose to be a

kindergarten teacher. Athale's parents had a mutually supportive relationship. Her mother was a working woman and her father supported her immensely. She says that their home environment was *sudharlela* or "progressive" so that, for instance, there was never any discussion of *jaat*/caste community within the family. Her parents always taught her and her siblings to live with humanity: humanity was the only "*dharma*" /code of conduct. It was only after they entered the "real world" that they realized the discriminations based on caste and community.

Athale characterizes her marriage to her husband as "love marriage." Her husband's family lived in the house facing her maternal uncle's, whom they often visited. She and her husband gradually developed a liking for each other and decided to get married. Initially they faced a bit of opposition from her family because he was less educated than her. He had a Bachelor's degree while she had a Master's and a Bachelor's degree in Education. Her family cautioned her that she might later regret not having an equally educated husband. But when she reassured them that she was confident about her decision they conceded. She says that their opposition was minimal and limited to the issue of education. The question of caste was not a major concern, perhaps, because both were Maharashtrian Brahmins even though from different sub-caste: her natal family is Deshastha Brahmin while her marital family is Karhade. When I asked if there was any cultural difference between the two, she said that there might be but she is not aware of it. She also says that it is better to not think about such differences because she does not want to transfer caste-based prejudice or bias (*purvagraha*) to her daughter/the next generation. She says that such prejudices should "end with us [her generation]." She does

not want her daughter to grow up thinking “the people of this caste are like this or the people of that caste are like that.” It is a legacy of her father’s thinking she says.

After their marriage, her husband got a graduate degree in Front Office Management from Bombay Catering College. He has been abroad for over twenty years now. He has worked in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Philippines, Canada and now he is in the U.S. working with the Hilton Group of Hotels. Athale herself has been working as a teacher since 1984. And in addition to teaching science/chemistry to secondary and higher secondary students, she has also been involved in several co-curricular activities like preparing students for debates, dance, singing, and quiz competitions both intra- and inter-school. She has also been appointed as a counselor for adolescent students at her school. At regular intervals, a psychologist visits their school and trains a small group of teachers including Athale so that they can provide appropriate counselling to students. Students come to her with questions about menstruation, sex and sexuality, and she provides both information and guidance in these matters. In a co-education school, she says, you cannot tell students to stop interacting or talking to the opposite sex when they come of age. As a counselor she tries to explain to the teenagers that feelings of sexual awareness and sexual attraction are normal and natural and guides them about how to effectively address/control those feelings. She says that her school ensures that adolescent boys and girls participate together in every activity. This is necessary because interaction with the other sex needs to become a part of their normal or daily lives. When interaction between the sexes is normalized in this way such that it is not unusual or novel, young boys and girls do not have to seek out “other” ways to find companionship of the

opposite sex. Her experience of years of advising students has led her to believe that adolescent children need support and guidance from not only parents but also from schools. Her school has ensured such an environment to teenage students and she says that this has significantly reduced the number of “troubled” and troublemaking adolescents in the school. Based on her involvement with students on such various fronts, Athale received the Best Teacher Award from the Lions’ Club of Baroda in 2011.

Right from her school days, Athale and her siblings had decided that they would work (paid) when they grow up because they had grown up in scarcity. They had limited clothes, books, and very rarely were they able to access various forms of entertainment – whether it was eating out or going for a movie. Citing the difference in the conditions between her and her daughter’s work, she says that she wanted to work but she also needed to work because she had to “run the household.” For her generation, it was necessary to work in order to provide better living conditions for their children. On the other hand, her daughter does not really “need” to work. Athale earns enough to take care of all the household expenses, but she urges her daughter to work so that she is economically independent in the future. Athale does not ask her daughter to contribute to the household now, because she doesn’t need to. But she asks her to save her wages for emergencies and also emphasizes to her the importance of independence for women. Athale believes that everyone should be self-reliant in life, whether they need to or not.

Since the time she got married she has lived with her parents-in-law and they have supported her throughout her career. After the birth of her daughter, she had to resume her job when her daughter was only one-month old. She left her daughter and the

household in the care of her mother-in-law who took great care of both. And she was never worried about her daughter because she trusted her mother-in-law completely. Similarly she never had to worry about the household, about visitors, even from her natal family – her parents or sister – because her mother-in-law was very conscientious about attending to all visitors. Her mother-in-law was seventy-five years of age in 2011 and still entertained visitors with the same zeal. Athale says that she could continue her job all these years because of the support from her parents-in-law. One of the main responsibilities in a home is management of the household and she had never had to worry about that because her parents-in-law managed things effectively. They had domestic help for cleaning and doing the laundry, but there are still many tasks to take care of in a household, she says. But she is the most grateful to her mother-in-law for taking care of and raising her daughter when she was at work. “I will never forget that,” she says. And this is the reason why she does not differentiate between her mother and her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law is as close to her as her mother. She is also close to her father-in-law. In turn, she takes care of all the tasks outside the house like getting groceries, attending to all medical needs and emergencies, and taking care of repairs and other maintenance of the house. She is also usually the person who rushes to take care of her extended family’s emergencies, especially medical emergencies. For instance, her sister’s sister-in-law (husband’s sister), who is widowed and has no children, had renal failure, and her in-laws’ family refused to take care of her. She needed hospitalization for three months, and later stayed with Athale and her family until she was ready to go back



to her home and live alone. Athale and her sister took care of her during this time. She is still on dialysis, but at least she is able to take care of herself.

In her own family, she has cared for her in-laws through several surgeries, including her father-in-law's heart bypass surgery. In the absence of her husband, she has been the one to take care of her in-laws in every respect. Sometimes her husband is not even aware of a certain problem or health issue because they do not want to bother him, especially since he cannot travel back and forth frequently. Similarly, she is also the one who takes care of her mother if necessary. Her mother is elderly but still physically active and independent. But if there is any medical need or an emergency, Athale being in the same city is able to respond sooner and more effectively than her siblings. So when her mother had to undergo a knee replacement surgery, she stayed with Athale for a month until she felt better.

On my asking her, she told me that she has been preparing for her daughter's wedding. The most important thing is that she sets aside a certain amount each month from her salary towards the wedding. They also have another house which they have rented out and she sets aside the entire amount of rent towards the wedding as well. Moreover, that house is also an investment, which if required she would sell. And even though her husband is in the U.S., Athale has raised her daughter to value money and hard work. Even in the context of her marriage, she would not want to consider her husband's overseas status as one of the key elements while looking for a husband for her daughter. She is preparing for a "regular/simple" (*saadha*; her term) wedding as opposed to the current trend of "designer" (my term) weddings. She says that these days the

grooms' families (in her caste) do not "demand" dowry openly but the general practice is to give at least five to six *tolas* (approximately 58 to 70 grams) of gold at the time of the wedding. But the main cost in a wedding, according to her, is that of food because now social circles have grown so wide that the number of invitees at a wedding has increased exponentially. I asked her if she would agree to the terms of "gift giving" (euphemism for dowry) if her daughter married a person of another caste in accordance with the customs or practices of that caste. Athale says that she is prepared for that but she also trusts her daughter to be mature and understanding enough to tell the partner of her choice that her family can afford to spend only a certain amount on the wedding. She cites the example of the Patel caste community wherein the bride brings in 60 to 70 *tolas* of gold. She says that they cannot afford it and it must be understood by the groom's family. If they cannot accept, she would advise against such a marriage. In turn, she also does not expect that her daughter's husband or her family be very wealthy. She emphasizes the importance of education and "*sanskar*" (good behavior/habits). Her own experience has been that they could make a life out of nothing based on their education: "we were nothing, literally zero." Her daughter's generation does not have to face this situation. Her daughter, for example, would not have to go and buy a pressure cooker after marriage like she had to. They (Athale's generation) have created a foundation upon which the next generation can now build their lives.

Her parents had never pressured her to get married at a certain age and she has given the same right to her daughter of making her own decision with regard to marriage. Her daughter has completed her education and is working as a kindergarten teacher but

she wants to take a couple of years more to get married. Athale is fine with her decision because she believes that it is important to make a mature decision with regard to marriage. In her caste (Karhade Brahmins)<sup>11</sup> women's education and employment are key in the context of an arranged marriage. Athale believes that education is also important because it helps broaden our thinking. After attending six years of college, men and women become more understanding and mature which is important. In today's world, a Master's degree has become the minimum requirement for most. And Maharashtrian people, according to her, do not look at the wealth of a family during marriage. The emphasis rather is on education and the prospects of the groom based on his education. She says, "We look at *Saraswati* (the goddess of knowledge and learning) first. *Lakshmi* (the goddess of wealth) follows inevitably."

On the issue of intercaste marriages, she says that both marriages within the same caste and intercaste are important in their own ways. For marriages within the same caste, the traditions (social, religious and cultural) particular to that caste tend to continue. In intercaste marriages, the culture of the woman's family are not continued any longer, at least through the woman. Women tend to accept the culture and practices of the family they marry into. Her niece who is a Karhade Brahmin has married into a Jain family. Her affinal family is "nice" in the sense that they have allowed her to worship her own gods, along with Jain gods. But not all families are this accommodating. In most cases, the traditions and customs that are characteristic to the woman's family are not continued in her marital family. But now she has also seen the trend that both cultures in an intercaste marriage are continued and developed in the family. Furthermore, the children of

intercaste marriages are extraordinarily intelligent. Intercaste marriages cause a change in the genes which is producing a generation of exceptionally bright children. According to Athale, this is affirmed by both the scientific and social science communities. And people have now become more accommodating and understanding. They allow their wives and daughters-in-law from a different caste to continue her customs and practices within the marital home. As a result, women are now even more willing to accept and adapt to their husband's cultures. Women's resistance to customs and practices is mostly seen in cases where they are not allowed to continue their own (natal family) culture. In cases where women are allowed to practice their customs, they are more willing to also accept their marital family's practices, along with their natal ones. In rural regions, however, intercaste marriages are highly opposed, but in more educated families and in larger cities intercaste marriages have become very common. In fact in intercaste marriages spouses and in-laws are more careful and respectful towards each other. But education is the basis for such change. Where there is no education, there is "orthodox" thinking. She also passingly mentions that the main difference in intercaste marriages is also in terms of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food.

The children in intercaste household are also at an advantage in terms of being able to access the languages, customs and cultures of two distinct sets of people. According to Athale, this new generation which is born in intercaste households will grow up to be smarter and more aware: "they will not need to be told to not create *"bhaashavaad,"* (linguistic nationalism) or *"jativaad,"* (casteism) or *"rashtravaad"* (patriotic nationalism)." Upon my asking, she also says that while it is true that intercaste

marriages are usually between similarly placed castes, and that there is still a divide between what are seen as upper and lower castes, such barriers are dissolving with the spread of education. Education, according to her, is the key to a society that is not divided along the lines of caste. She says that marriages between upper and lower castes are now seen in larger cities like Mumbai. Education gives us the “moral values” that are required for a good life. So education is of utmost importance. It is through education that we “see the world and learn the world” and this is how we learn “moral values.”

Towards the end of the interview when I asked her if she wanted to add anything else she said that usually she has seen that most women need to consult their husband for the smallest of things. Women seem to depend on their husbands for such things as what to cook for dinner, what groceries to get, for things in the house that do not work, or need repair, or a screw that has come loose, or a faucet that is leaking, or a tile that has come off. Women seem to be “dependent” on their husbands in such matters, and for “outside tasks” like getting groceries or going to a bank or to the post-office. But she has never felt the need to rely on her husband (or any man) in these matters. From the beginning she has been taking care of such things, and by choice. She likes being self-reliant and independent, and also being available for others. She has noticed in her neighborhood that if a plumber is needed at home, women do not want to go and get a plumber. How can a *woman* go and get a plumber or a mason? But Athale has taken care of all these matters without any problem. When there is a medical emergency and she needs to communicate with doctors, she has never had any hesitation or apprehension. She says that it is possible that she does not and cannot depend on her husband because he has

been away. But even when he was in India and they were living together, she never felt the need to depend on him. Her husband did have a very demanding job, which kept him busy from 7 am to 11 pm, so he could contribute in these ways to the household. Even so, Athale liked taking care of the house and the family. She says that her husband is at the top of his career now because he had unconditional support from Athale. He has never had to worry about either the home or the family including his parents. He has been out of the country for so long but he never worries whether his wife is treating his parents with love and respect. Similarly, Athale has never had any occasion to worry about her husband's reactions if for example she spends a sizable amount of money on something. She is never worried that he husband might ask where the money was spent or ask why she had spent it at all. It is about trust from both sides. She says she has never had any tensions or problems with her in-laws and for this she humbly takes the credit. She is very happy that there has never been any occasion for hurt within the family. She repeats that she has also had immense support from her mother-in-law.

I asked her if the difference that she perceives between herself and the women around her is also on account of the difference in education and because she has a paid job. She responds that both might be factors. Women who are employed outside the home have to work: "it is a compulsion" because they have a job. But it is important that the family members realize the importance of this work and of the money that is brought home by these working women. Just because a woman has a job outside does not mean she roams around freely and unrestrained. Most women neither think nor behave in this manner. Only when the family is cognizant of the ways in which the family and the

household benefits from women's jobs can they understand the purpose of women's paid work. The family members should realize that it is because of her job that she needs to stay out, that she does not stay out for fun: "mother does not stay out till 1 pm at school for fun." And after that if she has to pick up groceries or vegetables from the market, the family must realize that she stays away from home because she has to, because others cannot go and get groceries. Moreover women who have to run these errands also should not worry about staying out of the house for a long time. Nonetheless, Athale does take care to call home and inform her family if she is delayed at school, especially because her in-laws wait for her so that they can have lunch together. Whenever she is out, Athale makes sure to communicate with her in-laws so that they know exactly where she is and when she would return. Athale thinks this is an important responsibility on her part for two reasons: because she is a working woman and because her husband – their son – is not with them. So both she and her in-laws make an effort to cooperate with each other, and the results have been very positive.

People often ask her why she is still in India; why doesn't she leave for the U.S. to be with her husband. Why does she need to live away from her husband and take care of *his* parents? To such questions, she replies that they are her parents, too. Her husband has entrusted her with their care, and it requires a lot of trust in someone to do something like this. I asked her why she did not move with her husband. She said that it was on account of her in-laws, but also her daughter who wanted to continue her studies in India. Gradually her parents-in-law aged and now she cannot think of leaving them and moving to the U.S. Her mother-in-law often says that Athale is their son, their daughter, and their

daughter-in-law. All joys and sorrows they share with her alone and she is the one they depend on. Her husband visits every one and a half years. He plans to return to India after he retires.<sup>12</sup>

Athale's life story depicts the inextricability of her physical paid and unpaid labor and her emotional labor of love and care. For her, however, there has been reciprocity of both kinds of labor to the extent that her mother-in-law (and her father-in-law) has also given her emotional and physical labor towards managing her household and raising her daughter. Athale's paid employment is necessary for the smooth running of the household and therefore is her domestic responsibility. At the same time Athale views her work as a source of her financial and emotional independence. Conversely, she describes in her narratives how this independence is related to her relationship to the household and thus needs to be approached responsibly. Working women, she says, need to stay out of the house but only to the extent needed to fulfil their domestic and conjugal responsibilities. In describing her relationship with her in-laws Athale shifts the understanding of marriage away from (only) conjugality towards familial relationships and harmony. The division of labor within Athale's household although gendered works to alleviate some of Athale's responsibilities while adding others. She is critical of the gendered division of labor, especially when it involves interacting with "other" men like plumbers, masons, vegetable vendors, or doctors. But at the same time, her association of such labor with her independence and with her ability to care for others makes her incognizant of it being additional labor. Instead of being cumbersome, such labor gives her a sense of fulfillment especially the fact that she is venturing into hitherto male



spaces and maneuvering them adeptly. This highlights another aspect of women's labor vis-à-vis domesticity: how do we critically engage with women's labor within marriage and the household if this labor is a source of self-fulfillment for the women, especially in non-domestic spaces? How can we reconcile regressive cultural discourses which define femininity through domesticity with such instances where women's domestic labor becomes a source of an independent identity? In addition, as Athale expresses, women's labor is seen as central to the wellbeing and comfort of the next generation. In her own words, she has worked so that her daughter gets the life and the conveniences that were not available to Athale.

Furthermore for Athale conjugality is not merely the woman's relationship with her husband but her relationship with his family as well. For over twenty years since her husband has been away, her in-laws have been an integral part of her life. Her husband has had to stay away from his family in order to raise the standard of living of the family, but also because he was ambitious and wanted to move ahead in his career. For Athale, supporting her spouse in his career while also bearing the emotional costs of the same in the form of physical separation from him for over two decades, is also an important aspect of conjugality. She mentions multiple times in her interview that she is very happy and proud of where he is in his career. When I asked her if she was happy with her career, she said that she was but it was different for her. She had known she wanted to be a teacher and found a job that satisfied her. So her career, like her life, has been stable. In her husband's case, he had changed jobs and locations in order to move ahead in his career and he is finally at a place where his is content and happy. These two aspects – her

support to her husband in his career and her relationship with her in-laws – are significant to Athale's understanding of her marital life and conjugality.

*Shubhangini Patankar*

Patankar is a poet, a writer, a speaker and a social activist. She was 65 years of age at the time of my interview with her in October 2011. She has an M.A. in Sociology and had briefly worked as a teacher. She also worked on air with Akashvani (formerly All India Radio) for 17 years. Currently she is on the Board of Directors of the CKP Cooperative Bank in Baroda and a member of various women's groups and associations in Baroda. Her articles and opinion pieces appear regularly in the Baroda CKP Caste Association's newsletter, *Utkarshavrutta*. Of all the participants in this research, she was the only one who identified herself as a feminist (*strivadi*) and was vocal in the interview about the inequalities and injustices faced by women in everyday life. As I discuss in the next chapter, Patankar's lifelong ambition had been to work and be economically independent. However, her father did not allow her to work despite her educational qualifications.<sup>13</sup> She noticed this trend among many CKP families while growing up. Her own mother was not allowed to work outside the home, and her maternal uncle had compelled his wife to quit her job as a kindergarten teacher after their marriage. In her opinion in those castes where men and women have equal access to education, the purpose of women's education was to be able to find a suitable husband. But the parents did not want their daughter to work because then they would be criticized for financially benefitting from her income. Furthermore, the patriarchal mindset that the man is the breadwinner and woman is a housewife was a way of making women economically

dependent on men. This was especially true for Patankar's generation because even though they wanted to work, many of them could not. The situation has changed today, she says, so more women are now able to pursue a career rather than just a job. And those women are now valued in their families. Patankar is thus critical of ways in which women like her were not allowed to engage in paid employment which diminished their status and value within the household. According to her, women's opinions are valued and their decisions trusted only when they are economically independent. Such financial independence gives women a more equitable footing in the family, especially the marital family. However she is also cognizant of the ways in which some upper caste women, especially in castes like the CKP suffered emotionally and financially when compared to, for instance, Marathi-speaking Brahman women.

Comparing the marriages in Brahman and CKP communities, Patankar says that her generation of CKP men and women suffered economically. Many CKP families had been very or relatively wealthy in the past. However, their lifestyle which included indulgence in meat, liquor, and general extravagance is said to have destroyed their wealth. At the same time, education was seen a way of both retaining upper caste status and rising to the middle classes. But in the absence of financial support from their parents for their education, many men and women of Patankar's generation had to save up and pay for their own education and weddings. For instance, her husband used to work while he studied and he and his five brothers paid for their own wedding and supported their own marital lives. Thankfully, she says, they did not have a sister for whose wedding they needed to save. Investing time and money towards education and marriage also

meant that young CKP men and women could not marry early unlike in some Brahman communities. As a result, the age of marriage kept rising in the community. Furthermore, some women got a job after their Bachelor's degree and helped to pay for their siblings' education. In fact, some women remained unmarried because they were busy taking care of "their fathers' *sansar*" or their father's responsibilities. Later, when families had only one or two children, it was easier to care for them and the financial condition of the families began improving. In comparison, Brahmans, like "Gujaratis", used to save up for their children's weddings, due to which marriages took place at a younger age, when compared to the CKP community. Patankar says that she knows many Brahman women who are well educated and had jobs but they were also married "at a more appropriate age" so they are introduced to familial duties sooner. Brahman communities are thus financially better prepared for the future than CKPs according to Patankar. But one good aspect about the CKP community is that women's ambitions for careers are being acknowledged and respected. So if a young woman does not want to marry early it is not seen as problematic: "she is making her career."

Patankar says that recently she has noticed a higher number of intercaste marriages within the CKP community, as well as a higher number of divorces. In the cases of divorces that she is aware of, the problem has been the difference in "family background" or a difference in the expectations of the spouses within the marriage. Even when both spouses are equally educated and hold equal paying jobs, and the woman gives as much time to her job as her husband, when they come home from work, the woman is expected to return to household work immediately. The parents-in-law expect

as such from their daughters-in-law. Even if the spouses return home from work at the same time the husband asks his wife to get him a glass of water. The wife has also just arrived, so how come the husband never offers her a glass of water, Patankar asks. The reason, Patankar argues, is the gendered socialization of boys and girls from a very young age. She tells me that her son, on seeing his father ask Patankar for water every time, had begun emulating his behavior. But Patankar told him, “When I come home from outside, do I ask you for a glass of water? No. I wash my hands and feet and pour my own glass. You are now grown up. Wash your hands and feet and pour yourself a glass.” Lately her husband has also stopped asking her for water and pours his own glass. According to Patankar, it is the mother’s responsibility to raise boys and girls equally. Just like a mother asks and expects a daughter to work at home with her, she should demand it from her son as well. Most people no longer live in joint families where there are many women to take care of the household tasks. In a family of four, why should the wife/mother be the only one to take care of all the household work, or why should the daughter be the only one to help the mother? Moreover now women are as educated as men, so why can’t men do household work like women too? But to bring about such changes, she observes, the mother has to be socially aware. More importantly such socialization is related to the success or failure of marriage. She posits a scenario where a CKP family has a CKP daughter-in-law who is expected to take care of the household without much consideration from others in the family. But these days women are educated and economically independent, so they will not put up with this. So they get a divorce, and the son marries a second time. This time the daughter-in-law is not from the same caste;

much leniency is shown towards her because she does not know the community's customs and the family's ways. Patankar says that if the family had been similarly considerate towards the first daughter-in-law that marriage would have survived. This is the reason for the rise in the number of divorces in the community as well. According to Patankar, this is what needs to change: even when you have a daughter-in-law from the same caste community, who is as educated as your son and earns equally, you must value her in the same way you value your son. For Patankar demands on women's physical and emotional labor are also determined by caste affiliations. But she is the most critical about the discrepancies in the division of household labor especially in families where both spouses are employed. And while she says that this will change only when both boys and girls are raised to value household labor, she still allocates this task to the mother. This is because for her generation it was still women who were primarily responsible for tending to both the household and children. But according to her mothers of her generation need to bring about changes so that the next generation of children is not mired in the same kind of sexual inequality as Patankar's generation.

According to Patankar, today's women do not want their voices to be silenced or suppressed like their mothers' and grandmothers'. They want partners who will value their opinion. However if a woman unnecessarily flaunts her ego just because until now men have flaunted their egos, then it is not practical. Instead the spouses should try to understand each other in order to have a successful marriage. One of her acquaintances got married less than two years ago and the couple is now getting a divorce because they think they are not "fit for each other."<sup>14</sup> Patankar says that young people should think

about compatibility before they get married. According to her, in the CKP community these days the period between engagement and marriage is at least a few months during which time the young couple continues to communicate and see each other often. So in her opinion, instead of getting married and then seeking a divorce on the grounds of incompatibility, young men and women should speak up before the marriage takes place. She says that they have ample opportunities to find out if they as a couple and if their families are compatible with each other. The Internet also makes it easier to communicate. In the CKP community these days, parents get involved in “arranging” a marriage for their children only when the latter have not selected a partner of their choice. And when the parents get involved they want to restrict their search to the same caste community because customs of practices of everyday life differ by caste. Moreover, CKP caste is known for its love of meat and fish, and the difference is more pronounced because both Marathi-speaking Brahmans as well as many Gujarati-speaking castes in Baroda do not eat meat. She says that her husband often jokes that he hopes their future daughter-in-law enjoys both cooking and eating.

On another occasion, a friend of Patankar’s husband told her son that if he ever fell in love with anyone and wanted to marry her, he would not face any resistance from the family. However he had a word of advice for young people like him: “whenever you think about marrying someone, don’t think only about your educational equivalence (or intellectual and emotional compatibility) but also be attentive to what kind of family they belong to.” For, marriage is a relationship between two families and it is important to

ensure that the two families are compatible with each other: “Fall in love but don’t be blind. Be practical.” Patankar thought this was very good advice.

Patankar makes the most direct feminist analysis of the relationship between patriarchal/masculinist culture and marriage. She also blames patriarchy for the failure of marriages. However, even as she identifies marriage as a patriarchal institution, she does not challenge the idea of marriage itself or its idealization in society. And therefore the failure of marriage or divorce is still identified as a social problem that needs to be addressed. As described in her narrative, she blames the masculinist expectations within marriage for most divorces. By identifying a causal relationship between gender socialization and power differentials within a marriage, she calls for a change in the upbringing of children in order to arrive at more equitable marital relationships. Like the other two participants discussed in this chapter, she also emphasizes the importance of familial compatibility for a successful marital relationship. Such focus on the relationship between families is also related to the emphasis placed on education and economic status of the families within a marriage. Education is seen as means of elevating one’s economic standing, and the combination of the two makes caste irrelevant or obsolete in the view of my participants. In a similar exercise, Fuller and Narasimhan (2008) have examined the phenomenon of “companionate marriage” among the eighteen-village Vattimas, a subcaste among Tamil Brahmins. They observe that the previous emphasis on endogamy which was also made equivalent to “arranged” marriages and posited in opposition to “love” marriages, is being replaced with a focus on “companionate bond” between the spouses. However, this is not the same as the modern Western ideal of



companionate marriage, which is “closely linked to individual freedom of choice” (751). According to the authors, among the eighteen-village Vattimas, endogamy is congruent with the ideal of companionate marriage because “partners sharing the same subcaste culture are most likely to form a strong bond” (752). In castes like the eighteen-village Vattimas and the Maheshwaris “endogamous companionate marriage, in which partners are primarily selected with reference to their own educational qualifications and employment, and their potential happiness as a compatible couple, is a system that reproduces both caste and class, specifically ‘middle classness’ as social practice and cultural discourse.” Therefore, even as Paralikar, Athale and Patankar talk about the breaking down of caste and class barriers with the spread of education and an increase in the perceived autonomy that this accords women in the context of marriage, the focus on “familial compatibility” as an important element of a companionate marriage results in the reproduction of idealized caste and class identities (i.e. upper/higher caste and middle-class). In other words, a casteless and classless society is envisioned as the one that continues to operate through the values associated with the upper castes and the middle-class. This aspect is also important in the light of the ritual and food-related labor that women are expected to perform in upper caste communities. In the following section I examine the ways in which women’s food-related and ritual labor forms an important part of upper caste, middle-class domesticity.

### ***Marriage, Food, Rituals: Caste and Women’s Physical Labor***

All three participants mentioned the issue of food and food habits as an important aspect to consider especially in the context of intercaste marriages. For instance, Paralikar

says that she did not grow up with “typical” CKP food in her home, even though her mother was a CKP. She was familiar with the CKP cuisine but enjoyed Irani cuisine more. So when she used tomatoes in her cooking instead of tamarind, which is traditionally used in CKP cuisine, she drew much criticism from her mother-in-law. Her father-in-law, on the other hand, was always appreciative. Paralikar says that her father-in-law’s openness in trying new foods and different tastes was because he had traveled a lot, and had also been to England. She remembers a specific incident where she had burnt the food entirely and was in tears. Her father-in-law consoled her, “Why are you crying? This is barbequed food and we pay more for barbequed food in restaurants than for regular food!” At that time Paralikar did not know what barbeque was, but her father-in-law ate the food and appeared to relish it. Paralikar suspects that he might have pretended to enjoy the food to save her from her mother-in-law’s wrath, who often criticized her by saying, “You don’t know anything. You haven’t been taught anything!”

When Paralikar got married, she knew how to make puddings and cakes but did not know how to make simple thing like *sheera* (a semolina pudding). One day her husband’s cousin and his wife had come over and he demanded to eat *sheera-bhaji* (semolina pudding and potato/onion fritters, which were traditionally served to visitors in CKP households). She began making the *bhaji* and kept lingering in the kitchen waiting for the cousin’s wife to drop in and see what she was doing. And as expected she came and asked, “What are you making?” Paralikar answered “*Bhaji*,” to which she asked, “You haven’t started on the *sheera* yet?” Paralikar said, “I don’t know how to make it.” So the cousin’s wife began preparing the *sheera* but also cautioned Paralikar to keep this

fact from her husband because he believed that women *must* know how to cook and would get angry if they could not. She taught her how to make *sheera*. When the *sheera-bhaji* were served, the cousin kept saying that the *sheera* is just like what his wife makes, at which Paralikar could not hold her tongue and confessed that she had not made it because she did not know how to.

During all her years in a CKP family after her marriage, she has never had to make the traditional *kanavle* (a traditionally CKP delicacy prepared during Diwali). She says she knows how to make it in theory, she knows the exact procedure but she does not think she can manage the delicateness with which it needs to be prepared. In this context, though, she has been lucky, she says, because her sisters-in-law – husband’s sisters – are expert cooks. They have been making it for her year after year. Before Diwali each year, they would take turns to go to each other’s homes to prepare the laborious *kanavle* and when they were at Paralikar’s place, she would do all the preliminary preparations but the actual item was prepared by her sisters-in-law. Another such item is *anarsa* which she knows how to prepare but had never made by herself before she went to the U.S. and made it for her son’s family. She made it on special request of her granddaughter who loves the *anarsa*. Her son said that in so many years this was the first time he had seen her make it from scratch. When her mother-in-law was alive, Paralikar helped her and so she theoretically knew how to make all these items but never had the occasion to make them herself. After her mother-in-law passed away she was “blessed” with another older woman who took care of her children for 14 years. She had been “groomed” by her mother-in-law and even though she was Gujarati, she had learned all the main dishes of

CKP cuisine from Paralikar's mother-in-law. She also has in her family, a young woman whom she calls her daughter, and who has grown up in the family. She was left as an infant on Paralikar's doorstep at the M.S. University Faculty residence by her father who worked as a peon in the university. The girl's mother was dead and her father had remarried but his new wife did not want the baby. Since then she has been part of the family and takes care of all the household work. She is unmarried and still lives with and takes care of Paralikar and her husband. She is also a reason why Paralikar has never cooked "a full meal" until this day. This young woman is fond of cooking and has learned the best recipes from the people around her. Paralikar helps her in chopping, cutting and other preparations but her "daughter" does the actual cooking. Paralikar says that in this regard she is like her mother, who never liked to cook and who used to say, "I am not born to serve, I am born to rule." Like Paralikar, her mother was also "blessed" with "good servants" who cooked and cleaned such that neither had to spend time in the kitchen. The only time she has ever needed to cook is when she is in the U.S. visiting her sons, because there is no one else to cook. Her husband jokes that the only time he gets to eat food cooked by her is when they are in the U.S. Her sons also ask her to cook for them. On my asking if her food is different from her daughters-in-law's, she characterizes the difference in food preparation as a caste difference. Food preparation depends on caste as well as geographical location. And an important time when the difference in food preparation and knowledge about food becomes significant is during festivals when certain foods are expected to be prepared on certain days and served and consumed in a certain manner. Paralikar has never, for instance, made food for the "*saptami vaan*."<sup>15</sup> At

the heart of this is her basic dislike for cooking and therefore she is apprehensive in taking on challenging items like *kanavle* or *ninava* for she fears they will not turn out perfect. But she and her family have still been able to consume these items on account of transferred or delegated labor. Her sisters-in-law and her “daughter” still have to perform the caste-related ritual labor. So although Paralikar has been able to avoid much of the food-related labor that is characteristic of upper castes like the CKPs, the labor of other women ensured the maintenance of this status.

Similarly, when I asked Athale what the main difference between Deshastha and Karhade Brahmins was, she said she did not know. But when her mother-in-law came into the room where we were recording the interview Athale asked her to explain. She said that the main difference had to do with food, rituals and food related rituals. For instance, the *naivedya* (food offered to God) in Deshastha families has to be *Kesari Bhaat* (saffron flavored sweet rice) and *Puran* (a sweet made with split gram and jaggery). But in Karhade families there is no prescribed sweet that needs to be offered so anything can be made for *naivedya*. Moreover, Deshasthas also have to strictly follow *Solvala* or *Savala*<sup>16</sup> (ritual purification only after which one is allowed to enter the kitchen). Even Karhades are expected to follow *Savala* but these days only a few families are able to do it. She explains that her family does not need to follow *Savala*; the family that has taken the responsibility of the family deities does follow it but her family in Baroda does not, even though they have Ganesh and Navaratri at home. Even these festivals are celebrated at her home only so that their children become acquainted with the culture and the rituals involved. During Navaratri festival they invite a married woman (*Savashin*), a Brahman

and a pre-pubescent girl (*Kumarika*) for lunch and dinner for all ten days until *Dasara* (the tenth day of the festival). She explains that her family has been very lenient about things like *Savala* because her mother-in-law did not follow it much. Athale's father-in-law lost his father when he was nine, and his mother moved with him to Pune where she worked and raised him. Therefore she did not have the time, the energy or the means to follow *Savala*. As a result, the practice has disappeared from this part of the family. They have a sizable *Puja* (worship) room with an altar and where daily worship is offered but the strict rules of pollution are not followed, nor are they possible in this time and age. The only time of the year that Athale's mother-in-law used to follow the *Savala* was during the *Shraddha Paksha* (time of year when food and appeasement is offered to departed ancestors). They used to invite two Brahmans for lunch but as per the prescribed rules cooking could not begin before noon. So she used to make *Sabudana Khichadi* (savory tapioca which is typically eaten during fasting) for the entire household because no one could have lunch until the Brahman had eaten, which usually was around 2 pm. She did this until her mother-in-law (Athale's grandmother-in-law) was alive. After they moved into their current residence she followed the ritual a couple of years, but since they live away from the heart of the city, it was difficult to find Brahmans who were willing to travel the distance for a ritual lunch. So she began donating money to needy students instead. Her daughter (Athale's sister-in-law) works in a school and she used to give the money to her to buy uniform or books or writing equipment for a student who needed it. Since no Brahmans were willing to come, and since there had to be a donation (*daan* or *dakshina*), she found donating money for a cause to be more worthwhile. Since

the past few years they have been giving money to a woman – their daughter’s friend and neighbor – who finds it difficult to pay her children’s fees. They live in a joint family and often cannot find the resources to pay for their children’s education. So every year they give a certain amount to their daughter who then passes it along to this woman. Athale’s mother-in-law says that this woman is also a Brahman but that is not the reason why they give her the money. They give it to her because she needs it. She laughs that these days Brahmans are rich enough to not require money from *Dakshina*. Athale joins in and laughs that their “rates” have gone up tremendously; they charge 151 rupees for *Abhishek* (pouring of *Panchamrut* – made with five items milk, curds, clarified butter, honey, and sugar – drop by drop over the idol of god), where previously they would be paid 5 or 10 rupees.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, if a Brahman is invited for lunch or for *Abhishek*, they have to be paid the return auto rickshaw fare also. The charge for performing a wedding ceremony is 10,000 rupees, says Athale. So instead of spending money on feeding a Brahman or performing *Abhisheks* it is better to give that money to someone who needs it.

The experiences of Athale, her mother-in-law, and to an extent her grandmother-in-law, indicate the nature and extent of ritual labor necessitated from women in Brahman castes such as the Karhade or Deshastha. This ritual labor often is more physical and does not involve the same kind of emotional commitment that some other forms of women’s labor demands. This might be one of the reasons why women have been able to challenge and put a stop to many rituals that they deem unnecessary or peripheral to caste and class status. Women like Athale who firmly assert that caste and class prejudices need to end in contemporary society are also able to shift the customs particular to a caste and family.

Thus, on the one hand, it is important to note the kind of ritual and physical labor demanded from upper caste women in the continuation of caste, but on the other, it is also important to acknowledge the ways in which some upper caste women have been instrumental in shifting the boundaries of caste by challenging the reproduction and continuation of caste-based rituals.

Patankar is similarly critical about following rituals blindly. She says that if her son chooses his own partner, she would be happy. But even if the marriage happens “in the traditional way” or in the form of an arranged marriage, she will not accept two rituals that are seen as an important part of the CKP marriage ceremony: *Tonddhuna* and *Paaydhuna*. *Paaydhuna* is the ceremony wherein the bride’s mother washes the feet of the groom and his parents thereby honoring them and thanking them for accepting her daughter. The ritual is meant to imply that the bride’s natal family is subordinate in status to her marital family. *Tonddhuna* is another ritual of honoring the groom’s mother by giving her various kinds of beauty products, jewelry and other gifts. Patankar says that even if the bride’s family is adequately wealthy and insists on giving her the gifts that are a part of this ritual, she will refuse to accept them. She often tries to explain to people how and why the ritual of *Tonddhuna* originated. She observes:

Infant boys are weaker in constitution than infant girls. Girls are stronger and are said to be more resistant to infections and other diseases. Moreover during older times when the practice of child-marriage was prevalent, and medical science was not as advanced, an 11 or 12 year old boy was seen as a major achievement of his mother: that the mother had been successful in keeping her son alive and healthy. *Tonddhuna* was a way of honoring the groom’s mother whose hard work



had kept the boy alive and who was now going to be the bride's husband. The groom's mother had spent her energy on raising her son, which was considered more difficult than raising a daughter, and to replenish her she was given energizing foods like *soonthichya vadya* (dried ginger bars), and *dinkache ladoo* [foods that are typically given to a woman post-delivery in order to replenish her energy]. But no one knows this significance; rather it has become another signifier of consumerism. Now people give sari and jewelry and tea-set. Why all this? In fact the groom's mother should not accept it. I tell everyone that I have a son and I will not accept all this. Even if I had a daughter I would have told her my opinion about this, and if she were like me, she would have refused it herself.

She tells me of her friend who has a son and a daughter. She accepted *tonddhuna* during her son's wedding and said she would give it to her daughter's mother-in-law during her wedding. Patankar told her that since she has a son and a daughter she can justify it as pay-it-forward. But families with only daughters will always have to give. Why should they? Nowadays women are as educated as men, and women's parents spend as much time, effort and money on their education as men's parents. Like the groom's mother even the brides' mother puts in a lot of effort in raising her daughter. So why must the groom's mother alone get the *tonddhuna*. Patankar says pensively, "I have thought about these issues for a long time."

She then tells me about another friend who has three daughters. During the weddings of the first two daughters, their mothers-in-law refused to accept the *paaydhuna* ritual. They told her that one should not think of such hierarchies anymore. But when her youngest daughter got married, her mother-in-law insisted on having the

*paaydhuna* ritual. Ironically, she tells me, this daughter had a “love” marriage and the mother-in-law was actually an old friend of the mother. In this case the ritual labor expected of Patankar’s friend was to maintain the gendered hierarchies of marriage, and the hierarchy between the families of the groom and the bride.

In her assessment of gender inequalities Patankar similarly delves into caste-based food habits and women’s labor. For instance, when I asked her about the caste composition of the *Mahila Mandal*, a very popular women’s association in Baroda, Patankar said that a majority of the women are Marathi-speaking Brahmans, with a few CKP and Maratha women despite the fact that Baroda has a significant CKP population. More CKP women are now becoming members but the majority is still composed of Brahman women. The members meet once a week from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. According to Patankar, the difference in food habits, especially between Brahman and CKP families, is the reason for the difference in leisure time available to these women to participate in the *Mahila Mandal*. In another part of the interview she explains this difference. CKPs are known for their penchant for non-vegetarian food, but even vegetarian food is prepared with a lot of *masalas*/spices and most dishes involve very lengthy procedures which require much work on the part of women. Contrasting CKP food with that of Marathi Brahmans she says that in CKP families every meal required *vaatan* (ground masala made with coconut or caramelized onion and coconut along with other spices). Before families had mixer-grinder at home, they used to grind the *vaatan* on a stone slab with roller (*pata-varvanta*). She indicates that in fact CKP women have spoiled the palate of CKP men by making foods that require such laborious processes. These days men do

help women, especially in cutting and cleaning the meat after bringing it from the butcher's. But earlier women would have to do it all. Even vegetarian dishes in CKP households are never cooked without masalas or *vaatan*. And this has been transferred from mother to daughter for generations. Thankfully the practice of *Savala* has declined in CKP households but earlier CKPs used to practice *Savala* more strictly than most Brahman households.

### ***Female Sexuality and Women's Sexual Labor***

In this chapter I have attempted to examine marriage vis-à-vis caste by centering the issue of women's labor within marriage. I argued that in addition to caste-based inequalities, the inequalities of gender that are still extant within marriage need to be highlighted. The ways in which domesticity is institutionalized within marriage necessitates certain kinds of physical, ritual, emotional and sexual labor that demands interrogation vis-à-vis gender, caste and marriage. By shifting the focus from endogamy to women's labor within marriage I have suggested another way in which caste and gender hierarchies are entrenched within patriarchy.

Notwithstanding these critiques of marital practices and the nature of women's domestic relationships after marriage, it is equally important to note that none of my participants challenge the idealization of marriage itself. In fact all those who spoke about marriage and marital relationships emphasized the sanctity of the institution and maintained that it represents the ultimate goal for the gratification of sexual desires. Indeed women's premarital relationships are made acceptable only in the light of imminent marriage. That is, women's premarital (sexual or emotional) relationships, for

instance in Paralikar's narrative, or their desire for the person whom they want to marry are "legitimated" only in the context of marriage. Marriage is thus the only way in which the culmination of sexual desires is imagined. To those participants who brought up the issue of marriages and especially intercaste marriages, I posed a question about the importance of marriage itself. Invariably marriage was compared with "live-in" relationships and preferred over the latter. Live-in relationships were approached with suspicion and often rejected because they pose a threat to the values of family life – of cooperation, coordination, and understanding (Raje). Furthermore as Snehalata Raje explained, marriage is said to provide a "safety net" to women in a way that live-in relationships cannot. Since women have the burden of bearing children, marriage offers security for both the woman and her children. Men do not care much because they do not have to bear children. They can have as many sexual encounters they want without any guilt or stigma. But if a woman lives with a man for two years, for example, and they realize that they do not get along and decide to separate, what happens to the children? Later if both these partners decide to marry others, whose children will stay with whom, asks Raje. Thus for Raje, female sexuality is problematic precisely because a woman is encumbered with pregnancy. However, incompatibility within marriage is not something that Raje considers. For her, being a part of a family implies adjusting to one's circumstances and generating cooperation and understanding even if the spouses do not get along. In addition, the freedom and the autonomy that are associated with self-arranged or love marriages, or even in some cases, marriages that are arranged but with the final input from the bride and groom, are expected to decrease the number of divorces

and failed marriages, as Patankar observed. Thus sexual autonomy is also made relevant only within the context of marriage.

Furthermore, upper caste female sexual agency is also constantly compared and contrasted with the sexualities of lower caste/class women. So while Paralikar's rebellious approach to caste, family and social relationships has accorded her an autonomous feminine agency, she imposes similar agency on a low caste tribal woman who had been sexually exploited by an upper caste man of the Patel community. She narrates the incident thus:

...an 82-year old man was dragged into a sexual controversy that he raped a tribal girl [sic] several times and she became pregnant. First of all I was little hesitant, when somebody said raped several times. Can rape be [done] several times? Raping is something which happens according to me once, when you are forced into sexual act against your will. But when you are staying in some ashram, school or something and then every week or every day you are asked to satisfy the urge, I don't know whether you will call it rape or sexual abuse? Anyway first of all I didn't agree that she conceived through that [sexual encounters]. So I said it is politically instigated. Lot of people laughed at me...I said no, not because I know this gentleman who was a freedom fighter, not because I am sure he is not a sex abuser – I am not very sure about it, he could be, I am not refuting that. But this continuous rape up to conceiving [sic] ... it has to have some political ill-will behind it.

Ultimately it was proven that he had sexually abused the young woman. Even his wife and his daughter spoke out against him. However the scandal according to Paralikar was

a political creation because he had founded the *Lok Adalat* (People's Court for cases that were pending interminably in courts) in tribal areas which were very popular. He had also started initiatives for education of tribals, which worried the political leaders of the region. So he was made a scapegoat by pinning allegations of sexual abuse on him. In this manner, even as she accepts that the man involved was an abuser and the allegations against him were proven to be true in the court of law, Paralikar casts doubt on the sexuality of the tribal woman who was impregnated. According to my reading of her narrative, there is a complicated positioning of lower caste female sexuality involved in this description. On the one hand, the differences of power between an upper caste male, especially one in a position of authority who runs the *ashram*, and a lower caste young tribal woman is not only ignored but indeed negated. On the other hand, she is assigned a sexual agency that sees her as capable of entrapping this man in a political scandal by becoming pregnant. And therefore it is very interesting to note the tone of Paralikar's argument that even though she agrees that the man *had* abused the woman, his guilt is mitigated by her impression that the tribal woman was a part of an elaborate plan to discredit this man and his work in the region. Paralikar's argument is that the young woman *must* have been a willing participant in the sexual encounters because in her view one cannot be raped repeatedly. Such reading (which disregards the power differential based on caste, class and gender) bestows the young woman with an active sexual agency which she used to collude with the political leader to entrap him. Thus, even if the tribal woman was used as "an instrument" by political leaders to discredit his reputation, her powerlessness in the face of caste, economic and political power of the leaders is also

effaced by the fact that she became pregnant. That is, her pregnancy indicates her collusion with the political leaders and must therefore be similarly implicated in the incident. In the context of the overall argument of this dissertation, I argue that it is only by identifying women's subject positions vis-à-vis caste that we can begin to highlight and investigate these differences in power and perceptions. In the absence of such analysis instances as these are rendered irrelevant to or not linked with issues of caste and class. Paralikar's abstract subject position as a woman (not an upper caste woman) leads her to analyze the issue in terms of scramble for political power as if politics itself can be divorced from issues of caste and gender.

In another instance, Raje narrated an incident involving her boss at the Department of Telephones in Mumbai. This boss, a married man, was the most decently behaved towards Raje and her friend, such that even when he gave them a set of keys, for instance, he made sure that he did not accidentally touch their hand. A few days later Raje heard about his involvement with a woman. People reported seeing them together at the movies, having dinner or walking along the beach. Initially Raje and her friend defended him saying that the rumors had to be false because he was a decent man. Soon however Raje learned that the woman he was involved with was *Sindhi* (community originally from Sindh in Pakistan who migrated to India upon Partition). In Raje's view Sindhi women are the "most characterless." When the reports continued about their romance Raje advised her friend to not defend him anymore lest people should think that they are in league with him. Thus while Raje upholds the necessity of "impeccable"

female sexuality, such sexuality is predicated upon labelling other women as “characterless.”

I describe these instances to highlight the nature of the division of women’s sexual labor along the lines of caste, class and community. While I argue that it is important to account for the labor of women (especially upper caste) within marriage, these examples also illustrate the ways in which upper caste women benefit from such division of sexual labor and sexuality. To this extent, I see my work positioned alongside Dalitbahujan feminist scholarship which argues that both the sexual division of labor and the division of sexual labor form an important aspect of the study of gender and caste in India.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of caste, I use the term “non-endogamous marriages” to mean marriages that are not conducted within one’s caste. “Intercaste” is another word used to such marriages.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondent, Hindustan Times. “Panchayat orders Bihar girl to marry and pay dowry to her ‘rapist.’” Hindustan Times. December 6, 2013, accessed February 1, 2014. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/panchayat-orders-bihar-girl-to-marry-and-pay-dowry-to-her-rapist/article1-1159900.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> She defines the endogamy paradox as situations “where some endogamous relationships are accepted [like cross-regional marriages] while others are seen as threatening [and met with violent reactions like “honor killing”].”

<sup>4</sup> Sangari uses Marxist analysis to examine the nature of women’s domestic labor and whether women’s unpaid domestic labor can use incorporated within Marxist understandings of work and labor. She also examines the role of the symbolic in sustaining women’s unpaid labor.

<sup>5</sup> During her academic career, she wrote a book on marriage and family relations. She had to go through a number of Sociology books from which she gained information about caste. According to these books, the Indian society was divided into four varnas from which the concept of caste emerged. Initially there were only four varnas: brahmans, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Varna was hereditary and one could not change one’s caste by elevating one’s educational or economic status. However over time inter-varna marriages became possible and it is from here that the caste system as we know of today came into existence. The emergence of castes was different in different regions: for example, in the northern part of India there was more Aryan influence, whereas the south was more or less Dravidian. As the Aryans came to India, they pushed the Dravidians southward. And therefore beyond Karnataka you won’t find Kayasthas or Kshatriyas in the same sense as in the north. In the southern region, the predominant distinction is between Brahmans and non-Brahmans. In this ways castes emerged, even within Brahmans there came to be high-caste Brahmans and low-caste Brahmans: low caste Brahmans were those who were not considered as Brahmans but still were in the educated category like Yajurvedis and Samavedis, those who practiced medicine. So each varna began to be divided into castes. A divided caste system emerged as a consequence



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of inter-varna marriages, and wife and the children came to be identified by the caste of the husband/father. Her findings in the book were that with higher education and higher economic status, there were more possibilities of inter-varna and intercaste marriages. Those women who were of higher caste but low economic conditions were married to families with higher economic status but in a lower caste. Shudras, however, were never easily accepted because they were never so rich as to attract the attention of even the poorest higher caste families, but the intermarriages between the other three varnas was accepted on the basis of economic status. Thus she places an emphasis on economic status and life prospects as a central concern within marriage more than an emphasis on caste. That is still the parameter, she says, in the context of intercaste marriages. If a woman chooses to marry someone from a different caste, the first thing her parents inquire about is how well is the man placed educationally and economically. If they are convinced of her financial security then they are less likely to oppose the marriage. This is especially true, she says, for patrilocal families. Thus her theoretical/academic understanding of caste and marriages related to caste is drawn from this literature.

<sup>6</sup> She says that her eldest step-sister “suffered” because she looked more Irani than “Indian.” On account of her looks, no Indian was ready to marry her; on the other hand, no Irani would marry her because she had not undergone the *Sadra-Kasti* ritual and thus not accepted within the Irani community as a “true” Zoroastrian. Moreover, Paralikar’s step-mother was prejudiced against Muslim and Christian communities so marrying persons of these communities was not an option. Even though her step-sister had many good friends from these communities and although Paralikar’s mother was ready to support her if she married a Muslim or a Christian man, her step-sister worried this would upset her mother enough to end her life. So she remained unmarried. This instance also highlights the importance of religion vis-à-vis non-endogamous marriages, an issue which I have not taken up in this work due to paucity of space. But it is also an important consideration during marriages in India.

<sup>7</sup> Paralikar and her husband visited her in the US even after her marriage and her brother-in-law went and stayed with Paralikar’s son when he was employed in San Diego.

<sup>8</sup> Paralikar told the acquaintance that she had *Mangal* in her horoscope and unless the prospective groom had a strong *Shani* or *Shukra* she would not marry, so if he believed in this, she was ready to consider the proposal.

<sup>9</sup> However, even though she was not happy about Paralikar’s marriage for a very long time, over the years she liked her and lived with her until her death. In fact, when she was severely ill and one of her other sons wanted to take her to Bombay with him, she declined. She said that she didn’t want to “give credit” to anyone other than Paralikar for taking care of her because Paralikar has cared for her all for all these years.

<sup>10</sup> Her second daughter-in-law is from the Gaekwad family (the former rulers of Baroda state). Her family was not very happy when she declared that she wanted to marry Paralikar’s son because they were from the “Maharaja’s family” and wanted their daughter to marry into a similar/“royal” family. However the daughter was only a high school graduate whereas Paralikar’s son was an architect. So Paralikar told them that they could either marry her to a person from a royal family who may or may not be educated or they could let her marry Paralikar’s son. Finally the woman gave her parents an ultimatum: either they allow her to marry Paralikar’s son or she would elope with him. She told them that they could either be known as the parents of a woman who “ran away” or allow her to marry him. Finally they succumbed to her pressure and accepted.

<sup>11</sup> Her natal family is Deshastha Brahman but since she had married in a Karhade family, she is now a member of Karhade caste association and cannot be a part of the Deshastha caste. She believes that women should be able to keep her natal caste identity if she wants but she says that the people in the caste association who make the rules have a different set of beliefs.

<sup>12</sup> Athale tell me that her husband is a US citizen and has bought a house in the US but because of the recession in the housing market he has not been able to sell it at a satisfactory price. Once he is able to sell the house, he wants to return to India and be with the family. She is very proud of how ambitious he is and how well he has done in his career. She says that he began as night auditor looking at accounts, and is now a Hotel General Manager with the Hilton Group of Hotels and is often entrusted with the opening of new hotels. He cooks his own food and takes his lunch with him. He has stayed away from all addictive habits like alcohol and tobacco, and is completely vegetarian. He is very religious-minded (*dharmik*) and serves as

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a priest at a local temple. He can perform all kinds of worship (*puja*) – Laghurudra, Maharudra, Navagraha Puja, Satyanarayan Puja, Abhishek, Ganesh Puja, and he has now learnt the Vishnu Sahastranaam. Every week he goes to the temple in Washington DC. He is a member of the Committee of Priests at the Temple. He also performs ceremonies at people's homes.

<sup>13</sup> After her marriage and when her son was bit older, she began tutoring children for kindergarten interviews. Later she began a play school or pre-nursery. She also offered art and craft classes during summer. She also worked at the Akashvani Radio for 17 years.

<sup>14</sup> Upon my inquiring if this was an “arranged” marriage, she said that it was but they had enough opportunity to get to know each other before the marriage. The husband and wife both worked in Mumbai; the husband's parents lived in Baroda while the wife's parents were in Pune. So they had enough time to see and get to know each other before the wedding, and were in fact very friendly before the marriage.

<sup>15</sup> Saptami Vaan is given on the seventh day of the month of Shravan (in the monsoon season). It is a festival that celebrates the health and life of children.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Molesworth and Pamanji (1857, 868) Sovala means “ Among Bráhmans. Pure, holy, clean, that is in the state contradistinguished from *oovala* or common; that has, by ablution or other purificatory ceremony, attained qualification for the highest and most sacred rites of religion, and whom the touch of persons or things in the Ovala or common state would disqualify. The word is used also of cloths, culinary vessels, food, and things in general which, by washing or other act or rite of purification, are rendered fit, and of certain things (such as silken and woollen cloths) which are inherently and unvaryingly fit, for the touch or use of the Sovala person.”

<sup>17</sup> However Athale's mother-in-law also says that given the inflation in the price of common commodities it is only normal that their rates have increased.

## **Chapter 4: Thinking beyond the Public/Private Dichotomy: Education, Employment and Domesticity for Upper Caste Women**

... But [my] loss was that nobody was ready to marry me.  
- Shobhana Deshpande

In this chapter, I explore the relationship of upper caste, middle-class women to non-domestic spaces by examining their life experiences in the fields of education and paid employment. Although women accessed non-domestic spaces for other activities like shopping and recreation, their access to education and employment was heralded as an important step towards gender equity. It was seen as a sign of the breaking down of the barrier between the public and private spheres which had prevented upper caste and middle-class women's access to these institutions. Some of the questions I ask in this chapter are: What conditions enabled women to attain schooling or formal education? What conditions governed their entry into the sphere of paid employment? How did these careers relate to their domestic responsibilities, especially in the context of the discourse of domesticity? The life histories of my participants highlight that domesticity as an ideology continues to inform women's experiences in both the domestic and the non-domestic spheres such that the mere presence of women in the public sphere does not dissolve the boundaries between the spheres as envisioned by early feminism. Since then,

feminist scholars have rethought and re-theorized the public and private and highlighted their mutually dependent nature. However, I argue that in order to understand upper caste women's interactions with the so-called public sphere, we need to think beyond the public/private dichotomy to identify both these spheres as further segregated along the lines of gender. In other words, even as the boundaries between the public and the private broke down to grant women access to the erstwhile male spaces, women did not enter these spaces on an equal footing with men. Instead, both the domestic and non-domestic spaces became ideologically divided along gender.

Drawing on women's experiences within the fields of education/schooling and paid employment this chapter begins to recast the public/private debate in feminist theory in terms of gendered male and female zones. That is, instead of the dichotomous (albeit interrelated and with porous and ever-shifting boundaries) public and private spheres that were linked respectively with male and female spheres of activity, I propose that we think of both the public and the private as further divided into *ideological* male and female zones. These zones are characterized by elements of masculinity and femininity as prescribed by a patriarchal and masculinist society, and account for the differing ways that men and women experience these two spaces of activity and interaction. In other words, the experiences of men and women in both the public and the private spheres are mediated through these male and female zones.

This chapter also draws attention the tenuousness of domesticity and the domestic sphere itself. My participants' narratives highlight that even as they were burdened with the ideology of domesticity, access to domesticity was contingent upon their embrace and

performance of *appropriate femininity*. In turn, appropriate femininity was defined in the language of domesticity, which was made a central element of an ideal femininity. But while they embraced some aspects of domesticity, they challenged and rejected other aspects and effectively changed its significance in their lives. Often their presence and their experience within the public political spheres of activity have enabled them to redefine the domestic and the significance of domesticity in their life.

### ***The Public/Private Dichotomy and Feminism***

In Chapter 1, I discussed the relationship between the separation of male and female spheres of activity and the ideology of domesticity. With industrialization and the emergence of a bourgeois identity in Europe, these separate spheres came to be identified in terms of private or the domestic sphere, and the public or the non-domestic sphere. Although the distinction between the public and the private has been “a central and characteristic preoccupation of Western thought since classical antiquity” (Weintraub 1997, 1), the “woman’s place” in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to be determined through the public/private dichotomy. There are multiple ways in which this division has played out in the fields of socio-cultural, political and economic thought. Given the broad scope of the term public (sphere) and its varying relationship with the private, I want to restrict the scope of the discussion of public/private dichotomy in this chapter to the division between the non-domestic/domestic which has been of significance to feminist theory. The rationale for the selective appropriation of this dichotomy is two-fold: firstly, for the purpose of this chapter, I employ the dichotomy as it relates to the gender ideology (i.e. the theory of separate spheres), which was used to

deny women individual existence within and mostly outside the sphere of household; and secondly, it is impossible to attend to the various meanings embedded within this dichotomy within a single chapter. More importantly, I want to investigate the nature and impact of this dichotomy as it relates to the ideology of gender. How do women relate to the non-domestic sphere and in what capacity? How are their experiences in public spaces influenced by the overwhelming importance of the domestic in their lives? Examining the shifting boundaries between the public and the private as they pertain to women's lives has been an important aspect of rethinking the public/private dichotomy.

The centrality of the public/private dichotomy to feminism is captured by Pateman in an early work (1989, 118) where she observed, "The dichotomy between the public and the private ... is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about." The feminist slogan "Personal is Political," as Okin (1997, 124) explains, implies "that what happens in personal life, particularly in relations between the sexes, is not immune from the dynamic of power, which has typically been seen as a distinguishing feature of the political." Furthermore, feminist theory also highlighted the interrelated, in fact reciprocal, relationship between the two realms such that one cannot be "understood and interpreted in isolation from the other." It is this relationship between the two spheres that is the subject of this chapter. In examining women's experiences outside the home, particularly in the fields of education and paid employment, the tensions and the tenuousness of the boundaries between the two become evident. At the same time, women's entry into the public sphere did not by any means "level the playing field" as liberal feminism had hoped. Feminist political theorists have for long argued that the

mere extension of formal rights to women will not substantially alter women's lived realities as long as the core conceptual meaning of political theory continues to be defined in masculinist terms. Furthermore, the overwhelming importance of (modern) domesticity that proliferated into a global discourse since the nineteenth century (Walsh 2004) has also influenced the ways in which women and men have experienced the public sphere. I argue that an examination of the public/private debate as it relates to gender ideology has to account for the way in which domesticity continues to be defined as a central tenet of essentialized femininity.<sup>1</sup>

It would be important to add, however, that this division between the public and the private, and its association with male and female activities respectively, has been more significant to the lives of middle-class women. Leonore Davidoff (2003, 15) contends that "working-class women were always an ignored presence, providing catering, cleaning, and even sexual services around public buildings" in Britain. It was only when upper-middle-class women entered the public sphere "as shoppers and for leisure pursuits" that women were actually identified as being present in the public sphere. Respectability as associated with femininity was seen as the prerogative of the middle/bourgeois and aristocratic classes. Therefore, the idea of access to the public sphere and the changes in the boundaries of the public and the private were closely associated with the lives and experiences of bourgeois women. In addition, as Black feminists in the United States have pointed out, work for African American women meant something very different from what it has meant for middle class white women. For middle class women work outside the home was seen as a respite from leisure and

boredom, and as a means of economic independence. But for working class women of color, work has implied a struggle for survival; not a source of freedom but of bondage into hours of drudgery and backbreaking labor (hooks 2000). Thus, it comes as no surprise that one of the first consequences of the upward mobility of a working class family into the middle class is the withdrawal of women from paid labor outside the household. I keep in mind these differences as I examine the participation of upper caste women in paid labor, and my postulation of male and female zones pertains specifically to the entry of upper caste and middle-class women into non-domestic spaces.

Feminist scholars have argued that the public and private were more fluid than what has been understood through the theory of separate spheres. Even when the “cult of domesticity” was supposed to have confined women to the tasks within the household, scholars like Deborah Rotman have shown the fluidity in the “gendered uses of space.” Using archeological data from nineteenth and early-twentieth century Deerfield, Massachusetts Rotman (2006, 668) argues that changes in property relations in the late nineteenth century created a “radical transformation” in the “gendered division of men’s and women’s activities in the village” such that some women were successful in subverting “the ideals of domesticity” by “reuniting public and private spheres” through their work.

Furthermore, feminist and sexuality studies scholarship has argued that the definition of what counts as public and private also keeps shifting depending on the social and cultural contexts and historical times. For instance, what counted as public and private realms was different in India before its encounter with colonialism. Meera



Kosambi (2007) argues that the public/private distinction as we understand it today was a result of the imposition of British cultural values associated with this dichotomy upon colonization. According to her, there existed clearly demarcated male and female zones in precolonial Maharashtrian society and culture, but “the conceptual boundary between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres was as blurred as was their spatial anchoring” (8). The pre-colonial Maharashtrian home was divided into male and female spaces but most of the public-political activities were conducted from/within the home. The colonial administration, however, introduced the concept of public buildings to conduct “public” activities that were distanced from the home, which was now deemed private. The rise of new social and political organizations during colonialism, as well as the “social tensions within the family and fissures within the new private sphere,” (9) led to the creation of “male” and “female” zones within the newly demarcated private sphere of the home. The male zone within the household was further divided into “traditional” and “modern” and both endorsed different norms for women’s access to and entry within the male zones. Kosambi (2012, 10) observes:

Women cannot enter the social space of the traditional male zone, which is conservative and rigidly enforces gender segregation. But women can access the social space of the modern male zone at the behest of progressive husbands, especially in temporary situations of nuclear-family living, enabled by new economic structures and transferable jobs.

Thus Kosambi posits the (modern) male zone as a location between the private and the public spheres, and women could gain entry into the public sphere only after they had

successfully accessed this modern male zone. These male zones ranged from spaces within the home like drawing or reception rooms to outside activities like horseback riding (10). Women's entry into these spaces also meant that they were able to interact with other men. According to Kosambi, access to these modern male zones was a precursor to women's active participation in public-political spheres.

***Thinking beyond the Public/Private: Male and Female Zones***

Nonetheless, feminist scholars have critiqued the false dichotomy between the public and the private, which was utilized to keep women in less privileged and subordinate positions in both these realms. However, scholars like Janaki Abraham (2010) have challenged the strict association of the domestic/non-domestic with private and public. Examining the practice of veiling in a town in Bikaner, Rajasthan, Abraham argues that the "production" of public and private spaces vis-à-vis the practice of veiling needs to take into account the network of relationships within which women operate and mark certain spaces as public or private. The strategic use of the veil works to create private spaces in the non-domestic sphere. On the other hand, the presence of a non-kin visitor within the household requires the use of the veil which creates a public zone within the domestic sphere. Conversely, not using the veil in public spaces that are regarded as kinship neighborhoods also creates private spaces for women outside the home. Thus not only are the boundaries between the two permeable and shifting, but we also see the creation of "private" spaces within the non-domestic and vice versa.

I combine this argument made by Abraham with Kosambi's formulation of gendered zones to argue that what are regarded as "private" spaces within the public are

actually those that have been gendered feminine. That is, when women cross the threshold of the domestic to venture into public spaces as permitted by their specific patriarchies, ideological female zones are created within the public sphere, which determine the extent of women's access to the public-political spaces and activities. Kosambi's conception of the male and female zones is spatial. They refer to physical spaces within the household and outside it that were marked as male and female and which were historically specific. However, with the large-scale entry of women into the physical public spaces outside the home in the Indian context – as a part of Gandhian nationalism and later after independence – the boundaries of these zones came to be redrawn. I extend Kosambi's observation to contend that in those historical moments when women gained entry into what were demarcated as exclusively male (and therefore public) zones, the physical barriers between the male (as public) and female (as domestic) spheres break down, but there is a redrawing of the boundaries at an ideological level. In other words, when women began entering the public sphere, there was an ideological female zone that was created alongside the already existing male zone. In the context of public/private dichotomy, with the entry of women into the public sphere, the male and female zones came to be reimagined as ideological boundaries rather than spatial ones. These zones are defined through popular understandings of femininity and masculinity which inform both the domestic and non-domestic spheres. The reimagined male and female zones relate to the prescribed division of social, economic and sexual labor, as well as to the prescribed norms of sexuality and sexual behavior as congruent with masculinity and femininity. Therefore it does not matter whether women operate within

the private sphere or the public – to an extent – as long as they limit their activities to the female zones without transgressing into the male zone. A simple and fairly ubiquitous contemporary example of such division of the public sphere into male and female zones is the nature of the discourse on rape and sexual assault taking place in a large part of the world today. The burden placed on women for assaults on them point to the different expectations that are placed on women in public spaces. These public spaces being defined primarily as male spheres of activity, the entry of women comes at a cost: the self-regulation of their sexuality and behavior. In other words, the condition for women's entry into the male defined public sphere is the adherence to norms of femininity as described by a patriarchal society and system. I argue that the creation of female zones in the public sphere, to distinguish them from legitimate zones of male activity, is an aspect of the process of institutionalization of gender norms in the non-domestic sphere. And with these changes new boundaries continue to be drawn and redrawn around acceptable male and female zones.

Whenever the boundaries between the public and private are redrawn to align with a renewed gender ideology, the male and female zones within both these spaces are also redefined. These zones are also recreated in the domestic sphere of the household and they affect the ways in which men and women are differently able to access the benefits and opportunities associated with the private. The double burden or double shift for women can be cited as an example of this. Even when men and women work outside the home, the responsibility of managing the household, which is still defined in feminized terms, remains the burden of women.<sup>2</sup> Even when there is a form of division of

labor within the household, these too are defined in gendered terms, such that the kitchen and cleaning remains the primary responsibility of the woman, whereas mowing the lawn or taking out the trash are defined as male activities. This is not to suggest that all (heterosexual) households follow this division of labor, but rather to argue that this is the scheme that is offered by popular(ized) gender discourses. Therefore although spatially not divided along the lines of gender any longer (i.e. seclusion of women within the inner quarters of the house), the home continues to be ideologically divided into male and female zones.

At this point, it would be important to note that I describe the domestic and the non-domestic spheres as divided into binary male and female zones because my argument is that it is the masculinist culture, society and politics that have created these zones. Those who do not conform to the gender binary – either through their bodies or through their behavior – have a hard time maneuvering these spaces. The harassment of and violence against the *hijras* and other transgendered people, and against gays and lesbians is an example of this difficulty. This is not to imply that there are no challenges being posed to these zones and to the dominant conception of what constitutes a public sphere. As Nancy Fraser (1990, 67) has argued, many of the marginalized peoples have always successfully created what she called “subaltern counterpublics.” She defines these counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (67). This is precisely why those challenging gender normative structures and performances are seen as capable

of shaking the foundations of binary zones and are therefore seen as a threat to the existing patriarchal/masculinist interests. The engagement of queer theory and politics with the public/private dichotomy has been of crucial importance in challenging the binary of the male and female zones.

Thus, even as the boundaries between the public and the private keep shifting/changing, the essentialized differences between the sexes makes it possible to create male and female zones within each sphere. When upper caste, middle-class women were not allowed into the public sphere, the male and female zones were divided spatially and identified as the non-domestic and domestic spaces respectively. However, as these women begin entering the public sphere, the spatial division gives way to a more ideological identification of the male and female zones such that men's and women's access to and engagement with both the public and the private is defined through their gender, and is often unequal. A few simplistic examples of an early division of gendered zones would be the sex-segregated labor market as well as educational institutions. The earliest types of paid jobs available to women were the ones that were seen as an extension of their "natural" role as caregivers: nurses, kindergarten teachers, assistants, secretaries. There was an "automatic" division of the public sphere into male and female zones when women began entering it. As more women begin getting access to hitherto male professions, the female zones are reorganized such that (idealized) femininity – which suggests a certain kind of sexual behavior, sexual regulation as well as an emphasis on domesticity – is made the cornerstone of female presence in the public sphere. The continued emphasis on women's outward appearance and the value placed on

their prioritizing family life and motherhood (when compared with their male counterparts) are examples of the newly demarcated female zones. Here, domesticity together with femininity forms the hallmark of female zones such that even when women are not physically confined within the domestic sphere the burden of domesticity tethers them to it. While being attached to and associated with the family is not a disadvantage in itself, but is made so by the ways in which the socio-economic, political and cultural institutions are constructed. In India, as in the United States, while the value attached to the domestic is high in social and cultural worth, it is still rendered disadvantageous from an economic (financial) and political (power) perspective.

This brings me to another aspect of the female zones ascribed by patriarchy. Instead of considering it as a singular zone with more or less defined boundaries, I imagine this zone as formed by the intersection of multiple zones and defined by multiple overlapping and intersecting patriarchies. Kumkum Sangari (1995a; 1995b) has used the term “multiple patriarchies” in the context of the formulation of a Uniform Civil Code in India to identify and acknowledge the multiple and overlapping patriarchies that affect women’s lives. Her argument in the context of personal laws in India is that it would be erroneous to identify religious communities as expressed through “religio-legal systems” as the “sole or primary determinants of patriarchy” (1995a, 3287) because religion is related to other social systems involving “social status, caste, class formation, capitalism, division of labor, political and material interests” (1995b, 3384). Similarly, I argue that the creation of female zones in the public and private sphere is also a function of this interrelation and overlap between patriarchies. While “public” patriarchies could be

understood as those systems and institutions that define “broader” or larger female zones in the non-domestic sphere, each individual woman’s access to the public sphere is further determined by “private” patriarchies that exist within the domestic sphere. At the same time the use of the term female zones (in plural) also seeks to highlight that every woman is differently circumscribed by different configurations of overlapping female zones as determined by her subject position vis-à-vis caste, class, sexual orientation, age, religion and nationality. One can identify a broader definition of the female zones as determined by dominant ideologies within a particular society or culture at a specific historical time. The evidence of this could be gleaned from national documents, educational records, employment patterns, political participation, etc. However, each woman is further confined within female zones in the public sphere whose boundaries may be defined in the domestic sphere. For example, a society may generally allow women to access public spaces for education. The boundaries of the female zone in this case would be those that are created by the expected social and sexual behavior from women: how they dress while in the public space or how they behave with men in public spaces. But other concerns like the level of education, the kind of school they are allowed to attend (gender segregated or co-ed), how late and how far can they travel from their home, or the types of courses that are seen as acceptable for women are determined by “private” patriarchies like the caste, community or the family. Thus, there is a close relationship between the patriarchies in the public and private spheres. Furthermore, to the extent to which the female zones are deliberately differentiated from the male zones influences the ways in which women are able experience the public sphere. Therefore,



from a feminist or a gender perspective, there is a dual reason for interrogating domesticity vis-à-vis the non-domestic in this context: firstly, domesticity is imposed on women in ways that it is not imposed on men, and secondly, since it is associated with women, domesticity is devalued vis-à-vis economic and political capital. It is important to note that while patriarchal discourses on domesticity and femininity inform women's participation in domestic and non-domestic spaces – thereby complicating the very distinction between domestic and non-domestic – the same discourses also pave the way for women to problematize, complicate and challenge the meaning of the domestic in various ways. Drawing upon the narratives of my participants, I examine here the ways that their engagement with non-domestic spaces complicates the idea of domesticity itself.

### ***Multiple Patriarchies, Multiple Thresholds<sup>3</sup>***

I use the example of two of my participants, Shubhangini Patankar and Snehalata Raje, to illustrate the concept of overlapping and subjective boundaries of the female zone. Both Patankar and Raje were born into upper-caste CKP families. Both assert that during the time that they were growing up, educating girls was the norm for upper caste families. In fact, Raje who was 79 at the time of the interview in 2011, said that she attended a co-ed school. However, her father refused to let her go to college by arguing that the setting of colleges allows for unrestrained and unsupervised mingling of the sexes. Raje's mother wanted her to study medicine. But for Raje's father, studying science was out of question because science labs could be notoriously unrestrictive for the young people. However, he allowed her to study liberal arts because Raje would not

*have* to communicate or mingle with male students even though they would be in the same classroom. Thus the acceptable larger female zones which allowed women to pursue both sciences and arts are further confined for Raje by her father's restrictions. The acceptable female zone in this case was that she could attend college and study as long as she refrained from collaborating and comingling with men.

Another condition put forth by Raje's father was that she would not participate in any cultural activities at her college or showcase any of her artistic talents. Her father thought this condition was necessary in Raje's case because she was a very good dancer, singer and orator. Participating in cultural activities in college would mean interacting with men. But Raje accepted his conditions because all she wanted was to get study. She narrates an incident where she was approached by multiple student organizations which sought her participation in cultural events. She and her sisters had performed a dance at an event organized by a spiritual organization with which their family was associated. A student from her college, who was also associated with a student organization had seen her performance and recognized her. She was then approached by many student organizations with requests to participate in their events. She told everyone that she was there only to study and would not participate in other activities. Her refusal was honored and accepted by all organizations but the Marathi *Vangmay Mandal* (Marathi Literary Association). They insisted that her immense talent should at least benefit the Marathi *Mandal* (Association). She confided in the faculty adviser of the *Mandal* about her father's conditions for her to attend college and about her promise to follow them. He insisted that he would come to her home and convince her father to let her participate.

She said to him, “My father is a very sensitive person. If you come home and talk to him, he will not be able to refuse your request but it will hurt him immensely. And I don’t want to hurt him. I have told him [given him my word] that I won’t participate.” Thus, in order to attend college, as Raje expressed in her own words, she “kept herself extremely removed from everyone (*alipita*).” In this instance her father created the boundaries within which she could experience the outside world.

When Raje got selected to work as a telephone operator at the Department of Telephones, her father did not object. When I asked her the reason for this, she said that in those days telephone operator was characterized as a female job and thus being an operator meant being among women (although it also meant interacting with the men who were their bosses or colleagues in other positions). The father’s perception of the non-domestic/public sphere thus informed the ways in which she was “allowed” to experience it. This did not however, mean that these were the only ways in which women experienced the public sphere, for there were always spaces for the exercise of women’s autonomy and agency even within the circumscribed spaces imagined by the patriarchs. For instance, I have examined in Chapter 2 how Raje received male adoration all her life – although she never reacted to it – despite her father ensuring against it by imposing conditions on her participation in activities outside the house. But it was also Raje herself who determined what appropriate femininity and domesticity meant for her, and despite her strong and independent individuality she expressed her femininity as subordination to the patriarchs in her life – her father and later her husband. Her life also demonstrates the changing definitions of domesticity which were dependent on both historical times and

on the women's own understanding of their duties and responsibilities "as women." I have argued above that domesticity informs women's experiences within the non-domestic sphere. However, often the idea of domestic responsibility has required women to engage in paid employment in the non-domestic sphere. In these cases, women do not experience employment in the sense of economic independence or self-fulfillment or as a source of identity. Rather, paid work coincides with a sense of duty, especially towards the marital home. Snehalata Raje had to work, despite her frequent ill health, because her marital family needed her money. She said that her father-in-law would not be pleased if she stayed away from work for long during the days that she was not well: no work meant less income for the household. In addition, in spite of her job, she was often without money even for such basic needs as buying undergarments for herself or getting a cup of coffee at work. Domesticity in her case not only required her to take care of household chores but also to continue to work and contribute monetarily towards the household. It was only years later, when she and her husband moved away from Bombay to Baroda on account of her severely deteriorating health, that she could have some sense of ownership over her wages.

On the other hand, Shubhangini Patankar's lifelong ambition had been to be a "working woman." However her father's thoughts on women's education and their participation in the labor force defined her early interactions within these public spaces. Patankar, who was 65 years of age at the time of my interview with her in October 2011, has a Master's in Sociology but her father did not allow her to work. She explains that her father was a very accomplished man and involved with social reform activities himself

but had conservative views regarding the purpose of women's education. He also forbade her mother from working outside the home although he was supportive of her involvement in unpaid social activities/social work. He told Patankar that she could study as much as she wanted, and even participate in "social work" like him and her mother but she should not work. Having been interested in teaching, Patankar wanted to pursue B.Ed. after her Bachelor's. But since she knew she would not be allowed to work, she did not apply. In fact her mother had initially also discouraged her from pursuing a Master's degree. According to the social conventions of the time, Patankar says, a woman's parents always looked for a groom who was more educated than their daughter. Patankar's mother thought that if she allowed her daughter to get an M.A. then she would have to find a comparably educated groom for her, which might be difficult. However, she wished that Patankar could work, especially since she herself was not allowed by her husband.

Meanwhile, Patankar's aunt (her mother's sister) who retired as a "gazetted officer" was at the time the Superintendent of a ladies' hostel in a "tribal" area near Surat. During the *Nav Nirman*<sup>4</sup> movement in 1974 all colleges were closed and students at residential colleges were sent back home to reduce the cost of operation. This left Patankar's aunt alone and quite lonely on a large college campus. She asked Patankar to come and stay with her. When Patankar was visiting her, the aunt was contacted by the SNDT College in Mumbai to ask if she knew anyone who could fill the position of a lecturer in Sociology at SNDT. Patankar's major field was Sociology but she could not apply for the position because she did not have a Master's degree. After this incident,

Patankar's aunt reprimanded her sister (Patankar's mother) for forbidding her from doing a Master's. So finally she began her Master's as an external student (via distance learning). Meanwhile she became engaged and although she did finish her graduate degree, she could not work in the ways that she had wanted to (she did run a home based pre-nursery school, tutored children in her neighborhood, and also worked at the national radio station in Baroda). In another incident, Patankar tells about how her friend recommended her for a job at a nationalized bank – Bank of India – because she was getting married and going abroad. Patankar had assumed, while agreeing to be recommended, that her father would not object to such a “reputable” and secure job but he did.

Contextualizing her desire to work, Patankar identifies three reasons for women's engagement in paid employment: one, it is the logical utilization of having an education; two, she wanted to have economic independence which gives women a voice and authority within the family; and three, to have her own independent identity. She believes that particularly in educated upper castes and middle-classes a woman's voice and opinion is given importance or worth only when she is an earning member of the family. The experiences of women in her family had led her to believe that all social (reform) activities aside, a woman's voice and words are valued only when she is economically independent. Furthermore a woman will be able to express her opinions with authority only when she is not dependent on anyone. When I enquired about the conditions under which her aunt was allowed to work, and what mindset her grandfather's family had about women's employment outside the home, she said that although she had never

discussed this with her aunt, she suspects that the family's strained financial condition might have been a major factor in allowing her aunt to work. She also suggests that her aunt was a single woman who never married and was of independent thinking, which was one reason why she was able to work and gain financial independence. Her maternal uncle, on the other hand, forbade his wife to work, even though she used to work as a kindergarten teacher before their marriage. So her aunt's unmarried status might be seen as a contributing factor to her continued employment outside the house. Patankar explains that in communities where men and women had equal access to education, the purpose of education for women was to get an educated husband. But it was considered inappropriate in upper caste and middle-class families to rely on a daughter's or wife's income/money. In addition, she argues, the patriarchal mindset that men were the breadwinners and women should take care of the house ensured male authority within the family. In today's times this patriarchal thinking has not changed much, she observes, but now women have more access to jobs and those women who are career oriented are valued more in the family. Nonetheless, today's women do not know what it means to be deprived of the opportunity to work, she says.

Patankar's narrative depicts the ideological as well as material basis upon which public and private patriarchies create female zones. In Patankar's case her father's refusal to let her work outside the home might be based upon an ideological bias against women's employment; however, it is also based upon material realities and the constructions of caste and class status. For an unmarried woman to be allowed to work might imply that her family needs her money thus compromising the perceptions of their

class status in society. On the other hand, Patankar's aunt could work at least initially on account of her family need for money. Later of course, as Patankar asserts, she worked because she wanted to and remained unmarried through her life. Similarly Raje's father did not object to his daughters' working because they had a large family and he was the sole earning member.

However, saying that women's participation in the public sphere is predicated upon their performance of appropriate femininity and domesticity is not to imply that women are not able to carve out spaces of autonomy, resistance and subversion within them. For instance, before she got married Patankar (as Pratibha Hazarnis) was a popular name in Marathi-speaking social and cultural circles in Baroda. Her poems were published in several magazines and she was invited to speak at symposiums. She was socially very active and therefore well-known in most Marathi speaking circles in Baroda. But when she got married, her husband insisted that she not only change her last name but also her first name from Pratibha to Shubhangini. This was absolutely unnecessary, she says, especially since no one even in her marital family ever called her by her new name. Everyone still calls her Pratibha. But as one of her friends explicated, her husband felt the need to change it because she was famous by her maiden name. Thus, changing her first name was an attempt at challenging and changing her identity. But, she says defiantly, even as Shubhangini Patankar she continued her work and today she is well-known by her new name. As Shubhangini Patankar she has worked at the Aakashvani for 17 years, is on the Board of Directors of the CKP Bank in Baroda (the only woman on the Board), and is active in several women's groups as well as literary



associations in Baroda. And even as domesticity and domestic responsibilities seem to have limited her initially, Patankar has created her own identity and space within both domestic and non-domestic spheres.

Similarly, for Kalpana Paralikar the experience of domesticity has been contradictory in some ways. Paralikar was able to avoid the compulsions of a domestic life even as she was tethered to the domestic in other ways. As discussed in Chapter 3, Paralikar never had to worry about her domestic responsibilities. She had dedicated and loyal helpers who cooked, cleaned and took care of her children when they were young. This is not to say that Paralikar was not responsible for her own household but that, in her own words, she was never fond of domestic work, and thus not invested in it. It is ironic that she belongs to a field which is called “Home Science” since she has never been interested in doing domestic chores. Incidentally, her field of expertise is Extension Education.

After high school,<sup>5</sup> Paralikar wanted to study Fine Arts. And even though Paralikar’s mother herself had a love marriage and was generally very forward thinking she forbade Paralikar from going into Fine Arts. She said that Fine Arts was a field for those with loose morals, those who are wayward and that “people from good families do not go to Fine Arts.” Paralikar was also interested in studying Architecture. So she took the entrance examination and cleared it. But a woman from the CKP community who worked in the Department of Architecture dissuaded her mother. This woman told her mother that studying architecture involved hours of standing and drawing and given Paralikar’s thin and frail frame she would not be able to survive there. Her mother argued

that she had a thin body frame but she was healthy and had no problems with her health. But the woman kept on insisting they should drop the idea because she was sure that Paralikar will not do well in the field. So Paralikar's mother declared that Paralikar would not go into Architecture either. Then Paralikar suggested that she could study (liberal) Arts. She liked History and Geography as subjects and later she could take a degree in Education and become a teacher like her mother. Her mother liked the idea, but Paralikar could not get into the liberal Arts because she did not take mathematics as a subject in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade. She had dropped mathematics for drawing because she had wanted to study Fine Arts. By this time she was in tears. Her mother who was "hotheaded" like her, she says, took her to see Hansa Mehta, the Vice Chancellor of the University. Mehta was very approachable and people could walk into her office at any time. In addition, Mehta's father was a Diwan and knew Paralikar's grandfather (also a Diwan) very well. Paralikar's mother laid out her story before Mehta. Hansa Mehta had an answer ready for them because she had just started the Home Science Faculty and "was looking for scapegoats" laughs Paralikar. Paralikar says it is ironic that she landed in Home Science because she liked neither sewing nor cooking. For the first two years she had to take all the required courses which included cooking and sewing. She was bad at cooking she says, so she got B and C grades in that subject. Her stitching was even worse. She never went above a C grade in sewing. But she was attracted to the field of Extension Education. She had a knack for storytelling and she knew she would be a good teacher. She also loved the outdoors and enjoyed visiting the adjacent rural areas as a part of her study.

At that time the sub-field of Home Management within Home Science was “dominated” by Marathi-speaking women and the head was also a Marathi woman. When Paralikar declared Extension Education as her major, the head of Home Management went to her mother and said that it was unseemly that a Marathi student should go for Extension Education. But this time Paralikar refused to heed her mother. She declared to her mother, “I don’t like it [Home Management]! So far I have heard (sic) whatever you said. Now it is me and my decision. I am not going to listen to you. I am going for Extension Education or I am quitting.” By this time Paralikar was in her third year of college and had two other siblings in college. She says that having three children in college was “a costly affair” for her mother and so she angrily told Paralikar that she had been fickle and indecisive about her academic career anyway so she should just quit. Paralikar could not argue and relayed this to the Dean of the Department. The Dean was a nun who asked her mother to come and see her. When her mother went she had on her the usual pieces of jewelry any married Marathi woman from the middle-class was expected to wear: four gold bangles, gold earrings, a *mangalsutra* and a gold chain around her neck. When the Dean saw this she said, “May I ask you one thing? You have all this gold on you and you want your daughter not to study (sic)?” Her mother retorted that it was none of her business and that these were symbols of her marriage. She could not possibly sell them to pay for her daughter’s education. And furthermore, she told the Dean, her daughter had always had a wavering mind and never had a clear picture of what she wanted to do with her life. The Dean disagreed with her and said that she thought Paralikar was very talented. She urged the mother to pay the fees for one more

term until she could figure out how to get Paralikar a scholarship of some kind. Her mother agreed. Later the Dean got Paralikar a scholarship that paid for her tuition at the University. At that time, Ford Foundation Fellowships were also being introduced in the University. Students were paid a stipend of 15 rupees a month to work for half an hour every day for five days a week. They could work as assistants in the library, in the cafeteria, in nursery (pre-kindergarten) classes, or assisting visiting professors in grading papers. Paralikar got this scholarship and in two years she had learned typing, filing letters, evaluating papers, classification of books in the library, and how to deal with nursery children. Furthermore, working in the cafeteria and at the nursery school also took care of her lunch.

After she graduated from Home Science with a Bachelor's degree Hansa Mehta offered Paralikar her first job. Mehta's sister was running a school in Udvada in southern Gujarat. They were establishing Home Science and Mehta wanted Paralikar to help set up laboratories for students. She worked there for six months but quit her job when another opened up in Baroda. This job was in the Gram Sevika (women social workers for the villages) Training Center. She later began her Master's at M.S. University where she was given the opportunity to be a graduate student demonstrator in the laboratory. She thus quit her job at the Gram Sevika Training Center and became a demonstrator. In this manner she had been economically self-dependent since her second year of college. Thus even while she had been associated with Home Science which was designed as a "feminine" field of knowledge, she always rejected traditional domesticity.

She also emphasizes economic independence and the self-worth that emerges out of such independence at several places in her narrative. This emphasis also led to her challenging traditional domesticity in other ways. For instance, she says that a bold thing she did in her marital family was to make all her husband's brothers contribute to their parents' upkeep when they were old and retired. She says "it was weird" when her mother-in-law had to ask money from Paralikar to give a gift to Paralikar's son. It was not that she could not or did not want to give her the money but why should her mother-in-law feel abashed [*oshala*] asking her for money? So she made her husband and his brothers contribute to her in-laws. The sons initially did not like her decision but she insisted: "Somebody has to be bad in order to change [the status quo]." Beamingly, she told me that using that money her mother-in-law was able to buy her own gold and her father-in-law bought his own savings certificates, which eventually came back to the sons and their children. But during their lifetime her parents-in-law had the satisfaction of having their own money and of not being deprived of their economic independence. Paralikar attributes this to her mother's influence. Paralikar's mother was "a practical woman" who demanded that her daughter should also contribute towards the household. Paralikar earned 150 rupees in her first job at Udvada and her mother demanded that she send 50 rupees to Baroda for their household expenses. She also attributes her aversion to prescribed norms of domesticity, especially cooking and taking care of the household, to her mother's upbringing. Thus the two specific ways in which she was able to challenge domesticity was by rejecting the traditional household responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, and raising children, and by reorganizing domestic relationships and

responsibilities. In addition to ensuring her parents-in-laws' economic independence in their aging years, she also denounced her responsibility towards her sisters-in-law – not emotional but financial/practical – on two occasions. In one instance, my grandfather who was one of the key functionaries in the CKP Cooperative Bank in Baroda, visited her to seek her counsel on how to retrieve the unrepaid loan that her sisters- and brothers-in-law had taken from the Bank for their education. Paralikar told him to go to them and unhesitatingly ask for the money back. She also approached her sisters-in-law (the Paralikar daughters) and said to them, “You are now married and working. Your money is helping your marital family. Can't you tell your husbands that it is only because you got the loan that you are educated and now earning? You better repay your loans.” When my grandfather expressed his amazement to this, she said to him firmly, “Why should I pay for my sisters-in-law? I don't mind paying ... but if I have [studied] with my mother's money it is obligatory for me to pay her back that money if she has taken [out] a loan. Why can't they do it [too]? And have they tried to tell their husbands that they [have taken out loans]? ...And unless they repay how can the Bank lend to new seekers [of loans]? I can repay the loan but I won't.” She says that the amount to be repaid, which was very low interest, was also measly, and that there was no reason why her sisters-in-law could not repay it. She also told her sisters-in-law's husbands, “You are benefiting from your wife's income. So who then will [should] pay back the loan?” She also wondered how such educated women could not tell their husbands that they want to repay the loans. She says that it was a very bad situation and she had to face the “wrath” of the

family. Her mother-in-law was deeply hurt by this. But Paralikar told her “Someone has to initiate it [the change].”

On another occasion, the University deducted her sister-in-law’s unpaid loan scholarship from Paralikar’s paycheck. She fought back saying they had no right to do this. The administration personnel told her that since she was her sister-in-law and from the same department, they had deducted it. She asked why they had not deducted it from her husband’s paycheck then. He was also a member of the faculty in the same University. She threatened to go to Court and they reimbursed the deducted amount. These instances depict how she rejected the role of the daughter-in-law who is made responsible for everything in her marital family. Unlike Raje who embraced the role of the dutiful wife and daughter-in-law and who gave both her labor and her earnings to her marital family, Paralikar strived for a more egalitarian distribution of domestic responsibilities that did not unjustly burden the daughter-in-law.

At the same time, on other occasions she was forced to accept the role and responsibilities of a wife and a mother who prioritized her family over her career/job. In response to my question about her in-laws’ reaction to her being so highly educated Paralikar specified that when she got married, she only had a Bachelor’s Degree and was pursuing her Master’s. At the time of the marriage her husband also had a Master’s degree and worked as a lecturer in Psychology at the M.S. University of Baroda. After their marriage her husband got his Ph.D. and later Paralikar got her Ph.D. So education was not an issue in her marriage. But she says, “What really bothered my mother-in-law... was my going abroad.” In 1969 Paralikar got a Ford Foundation Fellowship to go

to the United States. She had two sons by then who stayed back in India with her husband and her in-laws. Her mother-in-law was upset that her son, whom she cherished the most on account of his good looks and education, could not go to the US but instead Paralikar got the opportunity. She demeaned the importance of Paralikar's award by saying, "What's so great about it!"

While Paralikar was in the United States, her husband's chronic acidity problem had turned into a bleeding ulcer. Her mother-in-law wrote to her, "If you want to continue there, it is at your risk. Your husband is not well. He is bleeding." So Paralikar decided to come back home.<sup>6</sup> On her way back to India she stayed with Anant Karnik and his family in New York. Karnik was one of the three survivors when the Kashmir Princess exploded in midair in 1955 and had to do an emergency landing in the sea. At that time Karnik was posted as a Station Commander of Air India in New York. When he came to know about the reason for Paralikar's return to India, he offered to give her a job as a ground hostess. If she had accepted, she would have been able to get her family to the US within a year. But her husband's health was "very bad." Her mother-in-law told her, "I can take care of your children, but I can't promise anything about your husband." So she flew back to India.<sup>7</sup>

This instance illustrates the negotiation of domesticity and domestic responsibility between two women: Paralikar and her mother-in-law. Paralikar never mentions what her husband felt about this issue or if she was able to consult with him about it. I suspect both women thought he was too sick to be bothered with it. So, even as Paralikar was able to escape traditional domesticity on account of her education and her position as a



university teacher, domesticity fettered her in other ways. Her career path was thus determined by her duties as a wife and a mother. Ultimately she was made responsible for the wellbeing of not only her husband and his health but also implicitly their marital life and their future together. And to that extent her role as a wife and a mother affected her in predictable ways.

Paralikar's experiences, like Raje's, vis-à-vis her college education also suggests the ways in which social perceptions and prescriptions of womanhood interfere with women's choices in education. From the ill-founded assumption that Fine Arts is for socially transgressive people – and thus inappropriate for women from “respectable” families – to the interference from the community with regard to educational choices, the instances from Paralikar's life suggests the extent to which women's freedom of choice and their access to educational and employment opportunities are mediated through various forms of patriarchies. Nonetheless, Paralikar was able to carve out her own identity, an integral aspect of which was her challenges to domesticity and unequal domestic relations.

***Shobhana Deshpande: Narrating a Life(time)***

In a different vein, the life history of Shobhana Deshpande complicates the idea of domestic and domesticity in several ways. Even as she succumbs to the social norm of desiring domesticity as the fulfilment of a woman's destiny, her strong presence in non-domestic spaces as well as her independent thinking poses a hindrance to it. At the same time she unwittingly creates alternate forms of domesticity for herself and her daughter as

I examine below. Her home and her domestic life are quite literally created out of her engagement with the public-political sphere.

Shobhana Prabhakar Deshpande spent most of her life in Mumbai before settling in Baroda in 2005. However, she had family in Baroda including her mother's parents due to which she was quite familiar with the city. Much of her narrative revolves round her work and participation in public life – as a teacher who had won many awards, as a theater actor who participated in competitions, and as a social and political activist. A large part of her life story revolves around her work as a teacher at Dr. Shirodkar High School in Parel, Mumbai. At the outset she comments that her personal and social life is related, and throughout the interview, her narrative does intertwine the two in very interesting and enlightening ways. However, the tangential mention in her narrative of her domestic life and duties, is on the one hand, a result of her failed marriage and thus failed domesticity; on the other, it is also symbolic of the importance of education, work and her life in the so-called public sphere vis-à-vis her domestic or family life. I discuss below how she negotiated her presence in the public sphere vis-à-vis the feminized/feminine zones therein. I also describe the ways in which her life challenged the established definitions of what counts as domestic and domesticity.

It is instructive that instead of “beginning at the beginning” with her childhood and early life, Deshpande starts her story at the point when she begins working as a teacher at Dr. Shirodkar High School. For me, this is symbolic of the way in which she sees her life as beginning with her entrance into public life; its importance also evidenced from the detrimental effect that her somewhat “privatized” life in Baroda after her

retirement had on her (as I discuss later). She begins the story of her life by emphasizing that she had tremendous support for her education and other activities from her parents, especially her father. He was a manager in a textile mill in Mumbai and she worked at Dr. Shirodkar School, which is located in the working-class neighborhood (*kaamgaar vibhaag*) at Lal Bagh in Mumbai. Thus, the children of the workers in her father's textile mills attended her school. She also says that there was a close intellectual (*vaicharik*) relationship between her and her father. He used to give talks at various events and she used to join him. She was an expert in giving lectures and speeches in Marathi and was invited often to speak at *haldi-kunku* ceremonies,<sup>8</sup> at award functions of various kinds, and at other such events at least three days in a week. During Navaratri and Ganesh Utsav festivals the local groups used to organize events like brain-trust and symposiums/seminars (*parisanvaad*) where she was invited as one of the experts. During these two festivals, she used to be booked completely, and after returning home from work around 7 p.m., she used to be busy until 11 or 12 in the night participating in such events.

She suggests that she was in such high demand and much appreciated on account of her educational and caste status. Her neighborhood at that time, near Lal Bagh and Parel in Central Mumbai was mostly populated with working class Konkanis (from the coastal region of Konkan in Maharashtra). She was fair, good looking, from an upper caste, highly educated (M.A. B.Ed.), and a teacher at a prestigious. As a result, she was much admired (*kautuk*), appreciated and valued, which was also a reason that she was invited as the chief guest to so many events. Initially the events to which she was invited

were those organized by small local groups (*galli-bolyatala*) but these kept her immensely busy. She was also invited by the CKP and the Bhandari caste associations as a speaker. Since she was interested in intellectual and cultural activities she was often invited to be a judge at various competitions like elocution, essay writing and *rangoli*.<sup>9</sup> She says that must have judged over 150 “fancy dress” (costume) competitions during her teaching career.

A large part of her narrative details the innovative activities which were designed at Dr. Shirodkar High School to foster different educational experiences for the students both within and outside the school. Deshpande says that these activities have now become commonplace, to the extent of being mundane, but it was at Dr. Shirodkar School that they were first instituted in the early 1970s. Her narrative details these activities and the efforts it took to see them through successfully. I reproduce them here not only as an oral history of innovative education at the school but also because these activities, as Deshpande maintains, played an important role in shaping her individuality and identity. She attributes her growth into a confident and highly active woman with a strong public persona in large part to her experiences at Dr. Shirodkar School. I therefore, devote substantial space to the description of these activities and to Deshpande’s participation in them.

The then superintendent of the school Dr. H.D. Gaonkar was educated in the US and therefore was very “broadminded” as Deshpande characterized him. In addition to hiring teachers from different caste communities, including Maratha, CKP and Saraswat, he also gave a lot of encouragement and support to the teachers. The founder of the

school, Dr. Shirodkar had migrated from Konkan and started the school in order to alleviate the condition of the children of workers/working class. Therefore, most students at the school were the children of factory workers and laborers who lived in the surrounding slums. The school also had night classes for children who had to work during the day and also had special classes that provided vocational training.<sup>10</sup> During his tenure, Dr. Gaonkar introduced a “value education” class period which later was adopted by many schools and which by now has become a norm in most schools. He also began a tradition of celebrating various (mainly Hindu) festivals in the school. He emphasized the importance of festivals and their cultural impact (*sanskar*) on children. As a part of this he initiated the tradition of reciting the *Bhagwad Geeta*. Deshpande takes pride in the fact that even though the students at her school children could not speak “proper/pure” (*shuddha*) Marathi, they efficiently chanted *shlokas* from the *Geeta*.<sup>11</sup> Under her guidance, her students secured the first position for five consecutive years at the *Geeta Pathan* (Geeta recitation) competition in Pune.

They also celebrated an annual event comprising of “variety entertainment programs” which again was a novel idea at that time. Every class had to participate and perform at this event. This provided a platform for the students to express themselves through various activities. For example, when she joined the school as a teacher in 1968, it was considered inappropriate for women to dance, especially before an audience. But the annual celebrations provided female students at the school a platform to participate in dance performances without it being seen as transgressive or inappropriate. Various

cultural performances showcased at the school auditorium have over the years produced many famed artists in the fields of art, music, film, theater and literature.

Another novel endeavor of the school, in an effort to foster national integration (*antar-rajiya samanjasya*), was to assign an Indian state to each class. Over the duration of the academic year, each class gathered information about their respective states and at the end of the year, showcased the “traditional” and the “folk” of that state. On the final day of the three-day annual celebrations at school, they celebrated each state’s traditional attires, foods, customs and folk dances. The rationale behind this kind of celebration was to encourage the students to learn more and to equip them with different types of learning tools. The concern of the school had always been that since the students were from the working classes, their home environment often could not provide much in terms their education and learning. Thus, Dr. Gaonkar and the teachers at the school found new ways to not only keep the students engaged but also aid them with new ways to learn and retain information and knowledge. This was a time before the internet age, and even television was only just becoming commonplace and gathering information about the states was not terribly easy. Both the students and the teachers had to do a lot of groundwork like visiting libraries and archives and gathering information from various other sources. While such activities fostered the students’ knowledge and individualities, it also helped develop the “personalities” of the teachers who also competed to make their class the best in representing the state assigned to them during that year. Even the makers and renters of costumes (*dresswalas*) at the time took on the challenge to create costumes from different states to fulfill the needs of Dr. Shirodkar High School. Later this concept of highlighting

various states became so popular that an entire book series was published on this model. Noted poet and litterateur Raja Mangalvedhekar developed a series of booklets about each state of India.

The students at Shirodkar High School also created handwritten magazines and took care of all the logistics involved in the process like contacting binders, getting quotes and having the magazine bound for a final showcase event, usually chaired by a famous writer. As a result of such activities, the school has produced many authors, poets and screenplay writers over the years. These students had tough family lives: many used to sleep on the balconies during the night, wake up early and help in storing potable water for the family, help their mothers in the kitchen, and then go out to collect material and resources for school activities. Thus the students of Shirodkar High School are called “*dhadpadnari mule*” or struggling (and succeeding) children, and due to their struggles, they are ready to take on whatever challenges life throws at them.

Deshpande also prepared and accompanied her students to interschool “fancy dress” competitions. Her students won the first prize for her costume of Mount Mary (the statue of the Virgin Mary at Mount Mary Church in Bandra) and Gaur (a specific representation of a Hindu Goddess as seen in Maharashtrian households during the Ganesh festival.) Her student, whom she had dressed as half Radha and half Krishna akin to Shiva’s *Ardhanarishwar*, also won the first place. This was in 1970 when such costumes and make up were not easy or accessible. In another memorable event she dressed a teacher as “a statue in a Municipal garden.” The teacher stood on a stool with a trench coat and a hat, and a live pigeon on her head. When the curtains opened the pigeon

flew off with a loud flutter leaving a few droppings on the “statue.” This also won her the first prize and she became quite famous. She was around 22 years of age at that time.

She also decided to learn *Bharatnatyam* (dance style) from her colleague at school in order to prepare her students for dance competitions. As a young student at Balmohan Vidya Mandir in Dadar, she was already well versed in *Kathak* and *Manipuri* dance styles. She began learning *Bharatnatyam* at the age of 21 and continued to learn and practice until she was 30 years of age. She got her Senior Diploma in *Bharatnatyam* and also gave performances as she continued to learn. She was also able to use this experience in preparing her students for competitions. Her students used to participate in various folk dance competitions and every year Deshpande looked towards a new state to learn their folk dance which she then taught her students. She says she “discovered” the *Suttalam* or the bamboo dance<sup>12</sup> from a book on folk dance. She then worked with the dance teacher at the school to teach it to her students. It became so popular that whichever competition they participated in, it won the first prize. Thus, she observes, her tenure at the Dr. Shirodkar School gave her different venues to explore and many opportunities to develop her “personality.”<sup>13</sup>

She grew as a teacher and as an individual in other ways. Having learned about Montessori education as developed in India by Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modhak she took Montessori teacher’s training course from Modhak’s disciple Anutai Wagh. With the support of her school Superintendent, she also ran a successful Montessori teacher’s training course through her academy Little Flowers Institute of Child Education.<sup>14</sup> It was a correspondence course and she sent the materials by post to those



enrolled. At that time (between 1980 and 1990) such courses were not very commonplace. Today they have mushroomed everywhere, she says. But her course enabled young women in rural areas of Maharashtra to gain employment as *Anganwadi*<sup>15</sup> teachers in villages. In addition she also trained many women at Dr. Shirodkar High School.

Among her duties at school were teaching higher level Marathi to higher secondary classes (10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades) and lower level English to secondary classes (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades). For the Marathi course, she had the class with the brightest students in the school and her responsibility was to prepare them to excel in the Board Examinations. For the English classes, she was assigned those students who had no clue about the language and were expected to fail in the subject. Her goal for these students then was to prepare them so that they could get the minimum 35% that was required to pass the subject in the school examinations. Thus her approach and attitude towards both classes had to be very different and she succeeded in helping the students reach their respective goals in both courses. As a result she was invited by small autonomous social welfare organizations to speak about how to pass English and Marathi subjects in the Board Examinations. In these talks she spoke about the strategies for writing examinations that would enable students to finish on time and secure the expected points/marks. Even such talks were not very commonplace then, she says. And it was even more unusual for a female teacher to be invited to speak authoritatively on such issues. Her entire month of December would be booked for these talks. She must have given at least 200 lectures on the issue during her teaching career she says. During

cultural (*sanskrutik*) celebrations like the *haldi-kunku* she would be invited to talk about the socio-religious and cultural bases of these celebrations. It was possible for her to participate in such extra-curricular activities in addition to her job because she was still not married – and thus had no marital responsibilities – and because her parents supported her immensely.

Dr. Gaonkar had also instituted a student government which was elected by a secret ballot system. A large scale event was held to “swear in” the newly elected student officials, presided over by the mayor of Mumbai or a Minister in the government. This event required so much preparation and organization on the part of the teachers that it provided them another unique opportunity to develop their skills. Of course, there were those teachers who did not want to be involved in the planning of this event because it meant a lot of additional work, but teachers like Deshpande saw this as a unique opportunity. Deshpande was always assigned the task of introducing the chief guest. She took it as a challenge to find out interesting things about the guests and narrate them in an interesting (“*khushkhushi*”) manner to the audience. She was the compere/anchor for most of the events held at her school. These activities over the first eleven years at her school fostered her “personality” in various and fascinating directions.

During her early adulthood she had also been involved in experimental theater, a talent that she was later able to utilize in her teaching career. She and her sisters used to participate in various competitions like the Maharashtra State Drama Competition (*Maharashtra Rajya Natya Spardha*) and Chintaman Kolhatkar Drama Competition (*Natya Spardha*). Her sister Vibhavari is a prize-winning story writer and playwright.<sup>16</sup>

Deshpande's first play for Maharashtra *Rajya Natya Spardha* was "*Vedi Manasa*" (Mad Folk), for which she won the consolation prize for her acting. Participating in a state competition requires hard work and perfection, she says, as she learned about efficient and accurate body movements and modulation of her voice. She had the chance to share the stage and interact with the then emerging (now famous) stars of Marathi theatre and film like Amol Palekar, Sadashiv Amrapurkar, Rohini Hattangadi, Sriram Lagoo and Deepa Lagoo. She was so fond of the theatre that she also took a six month course in *Naatya Shastra* (laws of the performing arts) from the Mumbai Marathi *Granth Sangrahalay* (Library/Archive) offered by the Government of Maharashtra. The course included a study of Greek, English and Marathi theatre and she excelled in this course as well. Later she also directed one-act plays in addition to acting in them. At her school the teachers put up a one-act play annually and Deshpande says she must have acted in at least 32 such plays during her tenure at the school. She also participated in local competitions often winning prizes for her acting. As she became popular in local circles, she also came to be invited as a judge at various drama competitions. In those days such competitions would have three-act plays which would take up an entire evening, and since there would be as many as twenty entries in a competition, she would be busy for almost a month until 10 o'clock at night. During such times, her mother would get frustrated at her for being away from home all day but her father supported her unconditionally.<sup>17</sup> Later she was also invited to judge the prestigious Chintaman Kolhatkar Competition among others. These years saw some memorable events that she still remembers distinctly and narrates in detail with enthusiasm and pride.<sup>18</sup>

Her job kept her busy from 12 to 6 p.m. and from 7 to 10 p.m. she would be busy with such activities as giving lectures at various forums, and such diverse ones as women's *haldi-kunku* ceremonies to advising students on how to effectively write their Board Examinations, and as a judge at various competitions including elocution, essay writing, "fancy dress" and plays. In the early days of the Doordarshan (Indian public television), she also conducted interviews on programs like "*Kaamgaar Vishwa*" (*Worker's World*) and "*Sundar Majha Ghar*" (*My Beautiful Home*). She reiterates that she was able to do all this due to the unconditional and tremendous support from both her parents.

When I asked about the reaction of people outside her immediate family to the support that Deshpande and her sisters received from their parents for all their activities, she said that people were usually critical of their acting in plays/dramas. People were not critical of young women in education or sports at that time but they did not approve of young women on stage. However, her mother lived a rather splendid life for that time. Since her father had a managerial position in the textile department, he had a good income; they lived in big government quarters and owned a car which was unusual for the time. The only other family member who had a car was Deshpande's maternal uncle who was a doctor. So they remained rather aloof from their extended family, whose members were envious of their success.

But she also explains that upper caste men and women who acted in plays at that time did not participate in professional or paid theater, but in experimental theater, which was seen as highly respectable (as an art). She describes this as their "high(er) level

hobby.” Similarly even though they had learned dancing, they would perform only at select venues like at a *Mahila Mandal* (women’s association) event. Deshpande thus distinguishes their participation in theatre and dance as a hobby rather than a profession, as was seen as suitable for upper caste women at that time.

But the consequence (she uses the Marathi word “*tota*” which means loss or deficiency) of her being so accomplished and outgoing was that no one in the CKP community was ready to marry her. They would say “We don’t want a girl ‘like this.’” At the outset of every meeting with a prospective groom and his family, everyone liked her appearance/beauty (*roop*), her education and her job. But the moment they learned about her “other” activities including the ones on television, it became grounds for her rejection. I asked her what the perception in her community was about such activities outside the home. She explained that her having acted in plays, as someone who had learned dance, and who was invited as a chief guest to various events was not taken kindly by the potential grooms of her time. The generally acceptable female behavior was that the woman/wife should be “two steps behind the man.” So her independence of thought and her intelligence – as evidenced by the fact that she was invited to participate in “brain trusts,” colloquiums and seminars – was not seen favorably by her prospective grooms and their families. So until the time of “seeing” or meeting with the groom and his family her résumé was seen as commendable – that she had M.A. and B.Ed., had a good job, and was interested in the arts. But when they learned that she was invited for events from 7 to 10 in the night, their attitudes changed, despite her assurance that she would not continue these activities after marriage. In fact in her interview she emphasizes

her recognition and acceptance that “of course one (a woman) would have to stop such activities after marriage”. She had accepted it for herself that after marriage she would not be allowed to or would not have time for participating in such various events and activities. But this was only one reason for her rejection by prospective grooms. The other was that she was well-spoken and smart and the moment she began interacting with the prospective grooms they would be put off because she came across as smart, confident and independent, and a woman who was not afraid to speak her mind and who was also proud of her accomplishments. Moreover unlike today, she observes, during that time it was difficult to find a life partner of her own choice and who could match her “standing” from among the people she knew.

Soon this began affecting her family because she was the eldest sister and still not married. The stress of her not being married, with two younger unmarried sisters, began to adversely affect her mother’s health. Meanwhile, her younger sister met her husband in college while she was doing her MA. It was generally the custom to have the eldest daughter marry first but Deshpande urged her family to let her younger sister marry since the latter had already chosen her partner. This was the only marriage that he mother could witness before she succumbed to her illness. Deshpande was still unmarried. After a few years, her youngest sister also married. Meanwhile her father had retired from his job and they had to vacate the government quarters that they had been allocated. They moved into a small rented apartment in Lal Bagh, just opposite the location where the Lal Bagh Ganesh festival takes place every year. Immediately after they moved in, the Lal Bagh *Ganeshotsav* Committee got to know about her illustrious background and urged her to

become an honorary member of the committee. She accepted and she served in this position for eight consecutive years.

But whenever she began talking about her accomplishments to her prospective grooms, they rejected her saying “*naaka peksha moti jad honar*” (the pearl in the nose ring would be heavier than the nose and weigh it down). She had been rejected so many times that she began wondering if there was something wrong with her. Finally, in 1980 her father appealed to her that he would die happy if she were married, so she told him that she would marry the next person he chose for her.

The family she eventually married into seemed very nice in the beginning. They had a nice apartment in the Shivaji Park area of Dadar. When she had gone to their house to meet them she had worn a sari with a sleeveless blouse and lipstick (both the sleeveless blouse and the lipstick indicate that she was “modern”). But she says all they saw was her job as a teacher and her pay, both of which they highly approved. And she got married. But after marriage she realized that they did not approve of her independence of thought and speech. At the time of her marriage she was 33 years of age, and someone who was “this old,” with such exposure and experiences as she had, she found it difficult not to have independent thinking. Even if she made plans with her father or her sister independently of her husband he would flare up in anger. She tells of one particular incident when her father and her sister had come to visit at her marital home, and she made plans to go to the bank with her sister the next day. Since the bank was close to the school, she planned to meet her sister at the bank directly after work. Her husband listened to their conversation silently but as soon as her father and sister left, he closed

the door behind them and began scolding her for not having consulted him before finalizing her plans with her sister. Deshpande exclaims that it was such a normal thing to do: she goes to work every day and since the bank was near the school she would drop by and finish the work at the bank! She did not see any reason to either ask her husband or seek his permission for such a mundane/ordinary thing. But he insisted that she must first ask him, and his parents, before making any such plans. Soon it began getting intolerable for her and gradually the verbal harassment turned into physical violence. And every time the reasons were similar: things that she found ordinary and mundane like travelling in a taxi or proactively seeking out a seat on a public bus was found objectionable by her husband.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, when she came to Baroda (to her sister's) for her delivery, she refused to go back to her husband's home. She was so scared that she could not convince herself to go back. When her husband visited her in Baroda to see the baby, instead of showing concern for Deshpande and her daughter, he began reprimanding her for failing to give him her paychecks for the duration of her maternity leave. What is interesting is that he had not spent a single rupee on her delivery or postpartum care! In fact he also went to her school to demand her pay and her colleagues and staff at school ridiculed him for being so ludicrous that he thought they would just hand it over to him. Deshpande was so worn out by such things that for two years after her daughter's birth she did not leave the house. She returned to Mumbai but stayed at her father's apartment at Lal Bagh. At that time her father had taken up a job as a General Manager at a factory in Bhore (near Pune in Maharashtra). Every month he sent over most of his salary to Deshpande and the



mother and daughter managed to survive in this way for two years. After her maternity leave of three months, she had an additional three months of paid leave. Usually women resumed work after six months and she also wanted to, but her husband rejected her idea that her daughter would remain at home under the care of his parents. He wanted to put her in a daycare but Deshpande was not willing because her daughter was “a low birth-weight baby” (Deshpande suspects that all the stress from her husband’s behavior might have resulted in her child’s low birth-weight). So she did not return to her in-laws’ home. Her husband’s uncle tried mediating between the two families but Deshpande was tired of the “silly allegations” that her husband levied against her. For instance, she had been teaching at Shirodkar High School since 1968 and often ran into her students wherever she went. The students respectfully acknowledged her and stopped to talk to her, but of course she could not remember their names when her husband asked her. He basically disapproved of her interacting with anyone. When she was pregnant and travelling in the bus with him, often she would rush to get a seat for both of them. He disapproved of this too alleging that she had pushed someone (a male) to get to the seat, or if the seat she had found was beside a man, he would ask why she was sitting beside that particular man or why was that man looking at her. In her interview, Deshpande frequently compares her experiences before her marriage to her life afterwards, contrasting the stark differences which made it impossible for her to continue in her married life.

After she and her husband had been living separately for a while, her father had gone to visit her in-laws. Her father-in-law was in the living room and her husband was in the kitchen. And as her father sat down, her father-in-law hurriedly closed the kitchen

door and locked it. As the visit progressed her father heard her husband shout abuses at him apparently with a knife in his hand. This incident completely scared her father after which she and her husband separated formally. Meanwhile after two years of paid and unpaid leave, the school finally sent her a message asking her to resume her job and she decided to go back to work.

As soon as she started her job again, she got busy with the school schedule. As luck would have it, one of her neighbors at Lal Bagh was a lower-middle class family, who agreed to take care of her daughter while she was at school. Deshpande paid them to take care of her daughter, and to prepare lunch for Deshpande. In the evening, she used to return home and cook for herself and her daughter. Thus began a different phase in her life's cycle. At work, her progress and her career refused to take a break. Her school sent her to attend a 6-month course in phonetics offered by the British Council's State Institute of English.

1990 was the centenary year of the Marathi poet Balkavi. The students of Shirodkar High School were given a spot on Doordarshan and the school prepared *Nrutyanatika* (a dance drama) for the occasion. It was so well received that Mumbai Doordarshan sent the tapes of the program to all regions of Maharashtra. Every year she also prepared her students to participate in interschool drama competitions. When her daughter was an infant, she would take her wherever she went after work hours. Gradually all the activities that had taken a backseat or had stopped completely after her marriage resumed once again: she began lecturing at various venues and from various platforms, and under her guidance her students won prizes in drama, art and folk

music/dance competitions. After eight years of being separated, her husband initiated a divorce and they divorced by mutual consent.<sup>20</sup>

A noteworthy thing she mentions is that the Superintendent of the School was such an honorable man (*“laakh mola cha manus”* or a person worth a lakh) that no one at school ever bothered her over her divorce, or even questioned her even though everyone knew about it. Meanwhile, even though she had used her husband’s last name while registering her daughter in school, she had never changed her own name officially; her name always remained Shobhana Prabhakar Deshpande. But her daughter had a different last name than hers. And although Deshpande was never questioned or harassed over the issue, she says that her daughter had to face the difficult questions because everyone wanted to know why her last name was different from her mother’s. How could one respond to these questions without talking about the divorce? Deshpande says that all this caused her daughter to become quieter and withdrawn over the years.

A few years later she had to vacate the Lal Bagh apartment. Meanwhile, she was already having back pains. All the stress from her work, her extra-curricular activities and her personal life had manifested as back trouble, she suspects. When she was in Baroda on one occasion, she also slipped on a banana peel and broke one of her vertebral discs. Due to this, several restrictions followed which included wearing a belt and not lifting heavy things. These restrictions also meant that she was not able to work much around the house, about which she was rather happy. She says, “I was never much interested in working around the house anyway. I would make *“pakvanya”* or fancy dishes, and a non-

vegetarian dish every Sunday.” But the daily grind of domesticity had never appealed to her.

When she had to vacate the Lal Bagh apartment, one of the considerations in finding a new place was her back pain. She could not travel by bus or auto rickshaw since it would cause stress to her already bad back. So she bought a very tiny apartment right across from her school. It was a nice place at that time with only a few families living nearby. Initially there was a lot of gossip and whispering (*kujbuj*) about her since there was no husband in sight but she says her doors were perpetually open, and there was always a steady stream of students. Gradually the neighbors realized that Deshpande was “not one of those women” (“*tyatlya nahi*”), and also she was old(er) now at 40-42 years of age. By this time, her daughter was also in school and that kept both of them busy.

Meanwhile, in the process of getting her ration card registered to her new address, she was put in touch with Dr. Datta Samant of the Kamgar Aghadi Party (worker’s trade union). She became an active worker of the party and later ended up as the Secretary of the Kamgar Aghadi’s Parel taluka division. Thus began her political career. When the Vidhan Sabha (State Legislative Assembly) elections were near, Dr. Samant asked Deshpande to contest as the Kamgar Aghadi candidate. But she declined and asked for the President to be nominated instead. She agreed to take care of all the work involved with the position but she did not want to be an electoral candidate. At that time Dr. Dutta Samant’s name held a lot of authority – and was even feared. When the school authorities learned that she was a Kamgar Aghadi Party worker, she got all the support and leniency from her school. If she had to go somewhere for Aghadi work, she was always supported.

As a Kamgar Aghadi worker she also had to give many public lectures. On one occasion, she was speaking and the event was being recorded on video. A little while later, a police van came up and arrested the organizers because they had failed to get written permission for the event from city. She laughs about the incident as she tells me that she was locked up in Bhoiwada Police Station for half an hour. After this she began taking care of getting all the required permissions before any public event or rally. Laughing still, she tells of a time when she spoke from atop a van during an election rally near Samrat Hotel in Churchgate.

Later Dr. Samant contested the Lok Sabha elections and she became busy with that. After work she would go to the Aghadi office and would be there until 9 or 10 in the night. She had to nominate polling agents for the party, and during the counting of votes she represented her party. The only thing she insisted upon and followed was that she would not be involved with any financial or monetary matters of the party. She also helped the party organize free eye checkup and free blood donation camps.

One year during Diwali all the grocers had inflated the prices of *maida* (all-purpose flour) and semolina, which are in high demand for making various sweet and savory snacks for the festival. There was a lot of anger and restlessness among people about this. It was even more backbreaking for the workers of the Lal Bagh Parel region, so Dutta Samant gave ten thousand rupees to a group of the party workers to buy flour and semolina from wholesale vendors and sell it at cost price to the workers. Deshpande bought flour and semolina at a wholesale market and set up a stall in the Lal Bagh area. At that time Shiv Sena (a rival political party) was powerful in that region and they did

not get along with the Kaamgar Aghaadi party. But they all knew “Deshpande madam” and no one would touch her. Moreover, the chief inspector at the Bhoiwada Police Station was a former student of Deshpande. So it all sailed smoothly without any incident of violence. All the grocers in the region, as expected, were furious with her. Since she was selling without a profit margin, even people beyond the neighborhood came to buy from her stall. Her well-wishers warned her that she might be attacked in the dark of the night. But nothing happened and the result was that the inflated prices at the grocers’ were immediately taken down and they began selling it at the price that Deshpande was selling at her stall. She sounds proud, happy and amused while narrating this incident. This was the reason, she says, why she never left Parel to live in the suburbs. She was happy to be in the midst of all these social and political activities.

When she became the Principal of the School, she had an additional set of duties as well. For instance, her school was a center for the Scholarship Examinations. A day before the examinations she had to collect the question papers/exams and the entire day was spent managing the exam.<sup>21</sup> She also acted the Conductor for 10<sup>th</sup> standard Board Examination. A main responsibility of the Conductor was to ensure that the exam was not leaked. She later also became the Chief Conductor which involved more work and responsibilities. At 7 a.m. she would go to the Police Station from where two police constables would accompany her throughout the day. She would not be left alone even for a moment. If she had to use the restroom, a female constable would accompany her. There was a huge problem of examination questions being leaked during this time so she had to be extra careful. From the police station they would go to the custody office, pick

up the trunks full of examination questions, and deliver it to the 8-10 centers in the region for which she was the Chief Conductor. After the examinations, she had to similarly collect them from all the centers and safely deliver them to the custody office.<sup>22</sup> The then Education Inspector was very happy with Deshpande and praised her diligence in this matter. As the Principal, she also encouraged her teachers to participate in various activities like she herself had when she was a teacher. She also had under her supervision the Air Force troop of NCC (National Cadet Corps) and under her headship the troop and the teacher in-charge got awards. She herself got many Best Teacher awards and was felicitated on many occasions for her school's participation in various activities – academic, cultural and artistic.

Outside the school too, she was extremely active and sought after. Her building had a hundred tenants and five shops and had formed a residents' committee. Her father had initially been the President and she was the Secretary. And although every few years the committee members changed, there were so many disputes and fights among the members that eventually every matter came before Deshpande. So she became a sort of permanent Secretary of the committee. Often when there was no supply of potable water in the taps or if the sewer was blocked she would take a group of people to the responsible government office to demand that the problem be addressed. On most occasions she found her students in various positions at these offices and was able to get the matter looked into without any hurdles. She even forged a relationship with the police during this time. There were many disputes and verbal fights among the tenants in the building which often ended up at the police station. When the police realized that she was

the Principal of Shirodkar High School, she was contacted for such things as lending her NCC troop to the police for regulation of crowds during Ganesh festival. On such occasions Deshpande also accompanied her students to ensure their safety. She was also asked to be on the *Mahila Dakshata Samiti* (Committee for Women), *Shantata Committee* (Committee for Peace and Quiet) and *Moholla Committee* (Neighborhood Committee). A police jeep would come to escort her to meetings and before any major public celebration she would invariably be consulted about the best way to make the necessary arrangements. She had a special identity card from the Bhoiwada Police Station which granted her access to a lot of public and political venues and offices without a problem.<sup>23</sup> Thus her life in Mumbai was busy, active and filled with people who respected her and looked up to her. Her home was “like a beehive” buzzing until midnight with people coming to her with their problems. Contrarily, whenever she had visited Baroda her relatives had looked down on her achievements as insignificant or irrelevant. Deshpande attributes such reactions to the narrow-minded and/or conservative outlook of the people she knew in Baroda. Therefore, upon moving to Baroda after her retirement she faced immense personal, emotional and mental troubles. She was clinically depressed for two long years before she began working again in Baroda.

She had to move to Baroda on account of her father’s ill health. He had moved to Baroda and bought a house there. In 2004 he had to undergo surgery of the prostate gland and he needed someone to be with him during and after the surgery. Her sister who lived in Baroda, argued that since Deshpande was going to inherit her father’s house, she should be the one to care for him. Deshpande had just retired and her daughter<sup>24</sup> had just



finished her internship after her BDS (Bachelor in Dental Surgery) so she saw this as a good time to make the shift to Baroda. Upon moving to Baroda, her daughter picked up Gujarati quite effortlessly and she began getting good job offers quickly. So they decided to settle in Baroda.

But while her daughter's career took an upturn, Deshpande went into severe depression in her new life. In Mumbai she was very active and had worked till her last day on the job. On the day of her retirement, December 24, 2004 she attended a Children's Drama Competition (*Bal Natya Spardha*) organized by Ravi Kiran Mandal. There her students won the first place yet again and the award ceremony was followed by her felicitation by the organization. She came to Baroda on December 25 for her father's surgery. On January 11, 2005 her school had organized an official send-off/farewell ceremony for her which lasted for three long hours. When she moved to Baroda for good after that, everything was different and difficult. First of all, she was not used to Baroda's hot and dry weather. The heat was unbearable for her. She tried to find a library close by but there was none in her neighborhood. In Mumbai she used to be surrounded by people at all times: whether it was her school, or her apartment building, or her social and political activities she was surrounded by people who loved, admired and respected her. In Baroda, however, she knew no one. Even her relatives' behavior was erratic. People from Mumbai still contacted her in the context of the tasks that she had handled. So every couple of months she would go to Mumbai for a few days. These trips, though emotionally fulfilling, put a strain on her savings.

But she could not figure out what to do with her time in Baroda. Since she had suffered from a slipped disc and spondylitis for years, she had always had a cook at home. So she was not used to spending time in the kitchen. Moreover, she was also not the kind who enjoyed cleaning and dusting and rearranging the house. She was at a total loss about how to spend her days. In addition her relatives were also unsupportive. If she ever began talking about her life in Mumbai, which she evidently missed and still does, they would say: “Stop gushing about your Principal-ship (sic). Stop talking about that Kamgaar Aghaadi. Don’t even mention all that here.” If she began talking about her work involving the Police Department, they would say disparagingly: “Eee! Why would you work with Police at all?” Comparing her public life with her domestic one in the context of these remarks of disapproval from her sister’s family, she says that she is as competent a cook as her sister. In fact her sister does nothing around the house at all! If there had to be a family gathering over a meal, they would all rush to Deshpande’s place because she was a better cook. Her family craves her mutton curry, mutton biryani and fried fish. Furthermore, she is also an expert in making the exclusively CKP style *khaajyache kanavle* – a sweet delicacy prepared during Diwali, and her sister would ask her to make some for her family as well. But she definitely did not like to slog in the kitchen for the whole day. She was more of an outdoors person.

Moreover her situation had also changed financially. She was no longer getting the kind of income she used to. Her pension was hardly significant. And they lived so far away from the old city where all the social, cultural and literary activities took place that travelling there in an auto-rickshaw would cost her half her monthly income. And since

she was new to the city she did not know many people even within the CKP community or caste association. In addition she was a divorced woman. Most activities in the CKP community, especially for women, were limited to *savashni poojan* on various occasions (worshipping of married women whereby married women come to stand in for the goddess), and she felt out of place within such spaces.

Reminiscing about her life in Mumbai she says that she was not only loved but also respected a lot. When she entered her building in the evening after work, it took her a good half hour to climb up three floors because people kept stopping to talk to her. When she was part of the Kaamgar Aghadi party, she was escorted by the party workers in the party vehicle at all times. Thus she was used to being surrounded by people all day long. And a major difference between her life in Mumbai and Baroda was that even though people in Mumbai knew about her marital status, it did not seem to bother them and every year she was invited to be the chief guest at various *haldi-kunku* celebrations. Often her sisters would get furious over this: “there is no husband in sight but here she goes as a chief guest at *haldi-kunku* again.” But the women who invited her did not seem to worry about this. To them she was a highly educated teacher, a good-looking, upper caste woman, who was also a good orator. And even when she asked them not to invite her, they would not listen. Thus, she was so used to receiving respect and admiration that her new life in Baroda felt empty and loveless.

All this caused her to be angry all the time and she was so depressed that she had to see a psychologist. She was put on anti-depressants for two long years. She spent her days in drowsiness and finally the doctor suggested that she should go to the “mental

hospital.” When she went to the hospital for mental diseases, as she got out of her daughter’s car, the hospital staff mistook her for a senior doctor on account of her authoritative appearance. After the asylum doctor interviewed her she told her daughter: “She is perfectly fine. Just give a tranquilizer at night. She needs no other medication. All she needs is some activity. For someone who has been so active in her life and has achieved so much, she needs some kind of activity [to keep her busy].” So to keep busy again she began a course in Montessori education in Baroda, despite the fact that she herself used to train others in the past, and immediately began getting offers for jobs. She currently works at Sri Sri Ravishankar School in Baroda and admires their philosophy of stress-free education. She has continued her passion for teaching as well as mentoring in extracurricular cultural activities at this school.

When I called her casually in June 2013 she told me that she has now adjusted to her life in Baroda. Her daughter has started her own dental clinic but the competition is fierce. There was a time when her daughter insisted that they should move back to Mumbai but Deshpande refused. She told her that she is now settled in her life and has become used to the open spaces and her large house in Baroda. She told me that she does not want to return to Mumbai and live in a small cramped house.

### ***Rethinking Domesticities***

Shobhana Deshpande’s life represents a rich resource for examining women’s complex and often complicated positioning within the family, caste, community, and the society at large. It is a rich mosaic of the layers of relationships that women share both with the domestic and non-domestic spheres. On the one hand Deshpande’s narrative

depicts her as a woman who lived her life in the non-domestic sphere; her sense of fulfillment is drawn from her achievements outside the home, in her work as a teacher and a mentor, in her social activities, in her political activism. On the other hand, it also describes the seeming incompatibility of her public life with society's and her own expectations of a successful domestic life.

Unlike Raje and Patankar, Deshpande faced no constraints in her educational or work life. In fact she talks about the strong support she received from her father and Dr. Gaonkar who was a father-figure. Indeed it could be argued that Deshpande was able to access all those public spaces that might have been available to her male counterparts. However it is also important to note that her proficiency in the non-domestic sphere made it difficult for her to access "traditional" domesticity. While her educational, caste and class status granted her unrestricted access to non-domestic spaces, the same criteria restricted her access to domesticity. Her education and her job provided her with tools to groom her individuality and intellect; the same however limited her options vis-à-vis marriage. While women working as teachers were seen as ideal candidates for marriage in upper caste, middle-class families, women like Deshpande who had used their experience in the workplace to develop independent thinking were decried as unsuitable marriage "material." This contradiction is captured beautifully in Deshpande's narrative. On the one hand, she is proud of her independence. She values economic and intellectual independence and the freedom of mobility that she has. On the other hand, she also seeks the traditional domesticity that is manifested as marriage and family life. In doing so she also recognizes the limitations that such domesticity might impose on her. As she says,

she both acknowledged and accepted that her extracurricular activities would have to stop after marriage, because the home and the family come first. However she is also clear about the extent of these limitations. She strongly criticizes the suppression of women's independence of thought and movement in both her and her youngest sister's marriages. Her youngest sister married their paternal aunt's son in Baroda. She had also participated in plays and drama competitions with Deshpande and her other sister and had been equally outgoing. But after her marriage Deshpande's sister had to face the "orthodox" mindset of her husband and in-laws so much so that if she even talked to someone freely they would disapprove of it. Deshpande observes that they were a fairly rich family and otherwise treated her well. She was draped in silk saris and gold ornaments. But she criticizes that they disapproved of her independent thought and behavior because she was a woman. They did not allow her any kind of freedom (*swatantra*) especially independent thinking (*vaicharik swatantra*) and freedom of movement. They allowed her to participate fully in all familial and social occasions but she could not go anywhere independently of her husband or in-laws.

Similarly, Deshpande critiques her husband for not allowing her an independent existence. Deshpande was especially convinced that once a woman is educated, has experience in the non-domestic sphere and is of a certain age, she is bound to develop an independent and individual identity. If after marriage the husband does not acknowledge it as such the marriage is bound to fail, as hers did. Therefore she highlights the complexities that women's presence in the public sphere poses to domesticity as an ideal for women. Deshpande herself wished to get married and have a domestic life and was

willing make some compromises necessary for a successful marriage. However, her rejection by many prospective grooms and their families depicted the unreal expectations from working women vis-à-vis domestic life. Women were not only expected to keep their work separate from and unrelated to their domestic life, but they were also expected to leave their experiences of the non-domestic sphere at the threshold when they entered their homes. Furthermore, norms of ideal femininity also demanded that women both recognize and accept their secondary or subordinate position vis-à-vis their husbands. As the instances from her life illustrate, Deshpande's husband defined domesticity in terms of docility. Domesticity and the differentiation of the private from the public have implied the dependence of women on men. As a key feature of the female zones, domesticity demands such dependence on men. If a woman is employed outside the house and therefore not economically dependent on men in the conventional sense, the definition of domesticity posits other ways in which her dependence can be ensured – for instance, by demanding that she ask her husband before spending any money or taking a decision, however minor it may be. But while her husband defined domesticity as subordination of women, Deshpande's outright rejection of it and her need and later demand for independence of thought, feeling and movement points to the ways in which women have also redefined domesticity in their lives. Thus while Deshpande was ready to make some sacrifices like cutting down on her involvement in extracurricular activities, she was not ready to compromise her freedoms, especially of thought, behavior and movement.

While the ideology of domesticity was congruent with education and employment of upper caste women, there were other areas which were seen as incompatible with it. As Deshpande describes above, there was no opposition from any quarters in her life to her education and her job as a teacher. But there was always a shadow of doubt cast on women who participated in theater (or learned dancing or singing). The legitimacy of female presence in these arenas is then established by distinguishing between professional or “paid” theater from a more cerebral or experimental theater. The boundaries of the female zones are complicated by caste and class in this instance, because “*natak*” as a vocation was an attribute of the lower castes and classes. In her excellent analysis of the fall of the *Lavani* (an erotic song and dance) and the rise of the *Powada* (ballad of bravery) in Maharashtra, Sharmila Rege (2002) examines the role of gender and caste in popular culture. Both *Lavani* and *Powada* were identified as the folk tradition of the lower castes. However, the association of *Powada* with the masculine and its appropriation by the aspiring upper caste Marathas as a means to recount their acts of bravery helped raise its profile as a “respectable” art form. *Lavani*, on the other hand, had always been regarded as feminine and during the Brahmanical Peshwa rule in Maharashtra became “one of the modes of constructing the sexuality of women of lower castes” (Rege 2002, 1041). *Lavani* became one of the ways in which lower caste women’s labor was appropriated for satisfying the sexual desires of upper caste men. Its association with women and with sensuality (rather than identity and pride as was the case with *Powada*) it was relegated as a trivial art for the senses. Similarly, in Deshpande’s account the difference between experimental theater, to which upper caste



women had access, and acting on stage as a profession highlights the role of caste and class in determining the definition of ‘art.’ Experimental theater suggests some amount of leisure, the availability of economic resources and access to education to cast it as a cerebral activity rather than a means of entertainment. The participation of women in this kind of theater is thus seen as acceptable in certain caste communities and families. This also highlights the nature of the multiple and overlapping female zones that enable and constrain different women differently. Deshpande mentions at several points in her narrative that she was admired and respected not only on account of her skills but also on account of her caste, class (especially her middle-class status in comparison with the laboring class students and neighbors), and education. That she was able to access some of male zones early in her life was on account of her father’s encouragement and support. But her later extensive exposure to non-domestic spaces including political activism can certainly be attributed to her caste and educational status.

At the same time she was in a position to avail of these opportunities on account of the absence of domestic responsibilities. She observes that while it was acceptable for women to work – and a job as a teacher in a school was seen as respectable and ideal for women – taking on other tasks at school or going beyond the routine schedule of teaching at the school was seen as unnecessary and indeed problematic. As Deshpande observes, “During the years between 1970 and 1980...there were very few female teachers who could give public talks. There were many female teachers, but because of their family background ... their in-laws would not allow them. Therefore a couple of us who did give public lectures were in high demand.” In her own life too, the onset of the compulsions of

domesticity threatened to rob her of or silence her experiences in the non-domestic spaces. As she describes, whenever she went to meet the family of a prospective groom, her outgoing nature, her expertise in maneuvering the public spaces and her overall intelligence was seen as offputting and “too much” for a woman. Her education and job were seen as desirable but not her “other” activities outside the house. Later, her husband’s eccentricities also worked to narrow her sphere of activity both in the domestic and non-domestic spaces.

And while she defied traditional domesticity it is also interesting to note that she maintained a semblance of domesticity after her marriage until her retirement. Even after her divorce she wore her *Mangalstura* (a necklace with black beads and gold indicating the married status of a woman) and a big red *Kunku* on her forehead. An instance from her later life might help illustrate my point. Although she and her husband had formally divorced in 1998, she had never bothered to procure the Decree of Divorce. When she was about to retire in 2004 her school required her to have her Decree of Divorce on file. She had no idea how to get the Decree after so many years. So she went to the City Civil Court and the policeman on duty saluted her and said: “Madam, I was your student.” She told him what she needed and he directed her to the first floor. There she found out that the clerk was also her former student. Deshpande told her what she wanted and the student confessed that she was surprised to hear that Deshpande was divorced. The clerk said to her: “When we used to see you [at school], we always imagined that you had a wonderful and appreciative husband, since you are so intelligent and smart. You always looked so *satej* (having a brilliant glow). And you also always had a big [kunku] on your

forehead.” Deshpande stopped wearing the *Mangalsutra* only after she moved to Baroda. Thus as she straddled the non-domestic spaces, even the adventurous and dangerous ones (like political rallies, setting up the vending stand during Diwali in the midst of the political rivalry between two prominent parties, and being jailed) she appeared as married; even though the people who visited her home and those who knew her well had seen that there was no husband in sight. I am not arguing that Deshpande had calculated the costs and benefits of her performance of domesticity, but rather it gave her more leverage in exploring predominantly male spaces. Here her embodied ideal femininity – in the eyes of society – was predicated upon her caste, class, educational *and* marital status.

It is also interesting to note that while her outward appearance suggested the presence of a husband, she did not actually have an identifiable patriarch for most of her life. At the time when she was treading on to what could be understood as typically male zones in the public sphere – dealing with the police on various occasions, acting as a mediator and the voice of authority in local disputes, heading political events and being an active member of a political party – she did not have a male authority figure in her life. Her aging father had moved to Baroda and she was divorced. She also had no son, only a daughter. Therefore, those experiences which portray her as a powerful and capable woman in her own right were a result of her independence from both traditional patriarchal life and from traditional domesticity. However as soon as she was in Baroda in the midst of her sister’s family, whose husband was also her cousin, the imposition of

his patriarchal authority becomes evident. His disapproval of her activism and other activities is in stark contrast to the admiration and accolades she received in Mumbai.

At the same time it would be incorrect to label her idea of domesticity only as a performance or a semblance. For, while she defied traditional norms of domesticity, in her own way she also redefined them. Her life story complicates the definition of domesticity and domestic space. At several times in the interview she mentions her home as an active and busy space. The doors were always open, she says, and there was a constant stream of students and neighbors coming in and out of this space. The domains of the domestic and the non-domestic are not only fluid in this context but actually meld together. The relationships that animate her domestic space – in addition to that with her daughter – are those that are rooted in her relationships in the non-domestic spaces: the party workers, the police and her students. Thus the domestic space is extracted from the clutches of the “private” and put in direct contact with the “public.” And domesticity, far from being devoid of the free exchange of thoughts, feelings, and ideas (as her husband envisioned) becomes a platform for intellectual, cultural and political exchange. Instead of being the “haven” for protection against the ills in the public sphere, as the early division between the private and the public envisioned it, her domestic space is placed right in the center of all social and public-political activity. Her reimagining of the domestic space in this manner is also one of the reasons for her mental and emotional breakdown in Baroda. Not only was she put in a more traditional setting of the domestic, the relationships that she had to engage with were also highly “private” ones. On the one hand, her life in Baroda lacked the intellectual activity that she was used to; on the other,

she was also expected to rebuild the boundaries between the domestic and the non-domestic that she had destroyed in her life in Mumbai. Thus whenever she began talking about her life in Mumbai, about her relationships at her workplace and with the police, this was met with disregard and disapproval from her relatives in Baroda. Her gradual regression into the recesses of the traditional domestic space resulted in her psychological breakdown. The remedy, as the doctor suggested, was to get her busy again. It is upon her reconnecting with the non-domestic sphere that she was able to get herself out of the mire of depression and become the woman that she was in Mumbai.

Feminist theory has challenged the superficiality of the public/private dichotomy while emphasizing the interconnected and mutually defining nature of the two spheres. In this chapter, I have argued that in order to rethink the public/private dichotomy, we need to think beyond it: to think of the ways in which it is connected with and reinforces gender ideology. I have argued that the creation of male and female zones within the public and the private accounts for the different ways in which women continue to be at a disadvantage despite their access to the public sphere. At the same time, the continued distinction between the two, even as we challenge it, also obfuscates women's critique of and challenges to domesticity. And while the boundaries of the zones continue to be redefined, and as women continue to forge spaces for resistance, identity and self-fulfillment, identifying and challenging the processes of the institutionalization of gender in both domestic and non-domestic spaces is an important aspect of a feminist critique of the public/private dichotomy.

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<sup>1</sup> For the importance of domesticity to contemporary constructions for femininity, one can consider the popularity of Martha Stewart as someone who inspires elegant domesticity, and of Nigella Lawson as the personification of such domesticity. Lawson's book "How to be a Domestic Goddess" is a consequence of the continuing significance of domesticity to the definition of femininity/womanhood in a neoliberal world. While someone like Martha Stewart "taught" women how to be a better "homemaker," which includes in addition to cooking, being adept in such skills like crafts, home décor and gardening, Lawson portrays herself as the expert homemaker. The educational emphasis in Stewart is replaced by a call for identification in Lawson: if I can do it, so can you. See for instance Brunsdon 2005, Leavitt 2002, Lawson 2001. In the preface to her book *How to be a Domestic Goddess*, Nigella Lawson writes: "This is a book about baking, but not a baking book – not in the sense of being a manual or a comprehensive guide or a map of a land you do not inhabit. I neither want to confine you to kitchen quarters nor even suggest that it might be desirable. But I do think that many of us have become alienated from the domestic sphere, and that it can actually make us feel better to claim back some of that space, make it comforting rather than frightening. In a way, baking stands both as a useful metaphor for the familial warmth of the kitchen we fondly imagine used to exist, and as a way of reclaiming our lost Eden. This is hardly a culinary matter, of course: but cooking, we know, has a way of cutting through things, and to things, which have nothing to do with the kitchen. This is why it matters."

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this chapter and the argument I make here, I am utilizing heteronormative framework of analysis, especially since the experiences of my participants are located within a heteronormative marital structure.

<sup>3</sup> Sangari 1995a and 1995b; Kosambi 2007

<sup>4</sup> Nav Nirman or reconstruction was a movement began by the middle-class and students to protest government corruption. Inspired by the Bihar movement started by Jay Prakash Narayan, the Nav Nirman movement was successful in ousting the ruling government.

<sup>5</sup> Paralakar says that as a child she was not academically inclined because she was always interested in other things like dance or music. When she was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade she declared to her mother that she was quitting school. Her mother was a teacher in the same school and said that she could do what she wanted. Paralakar says that she was "whimsical" and so her mother thought there was no merit in arguing with her or persuading her to change her mind. Two months later she was bored: all her siblings and her mother went to school and she was left all alone at home. She resumed going to school.

<sup>6</sup> If not, she would have settled in the US in 1969. The head of the school she was visiting persuaded her to stay back because within some time she could have brought her family to the US. But she would have had to stay in the US for a few years before she could do that.

<sup>7</sup> In 1980 she went back to the US again three times and during one of her visits she managed to get her eldest son to the US on a student VISA. Her contacts from the US universities were helped her get the paperwork needed for applying for a student VISA. He had wanted to go to the US and often blamed his mother for making the decision of not settling in the US.

<sup>8</sup> The Haldi-Kunku ceremonies are held by married women for married women to celebrate saubhagya (literally, good fortune but which is used to refer to a state where a married woman's husband is alive).

<sup>9</sup> In the Maharashtra context, rangoli is a folk art form which uses colored powder to make patterns and designs. In other parts of the country, rangoli is also made using rice flour or flowers/petals.

<sup>10</sup> According to Deshpande Dr. Shirodkar was the first educator in India to introduce the concept of work experience as a part of education, especially for the working classes, which helped them gain vocational skills like stove repairing and cycle repairing. Later the Maharashtra government adopted this model with emphasis on vocational training and work experience for many of its schools.

<sup>11</sup> One could argue that this was an instance of the imposition of Brahmanical values on non-Brahman castes, and this phenomenon is complicated by the fact that Dr. Gaonkar was not a Brahman himself. However, I do not go into greater details on this issue here.

<sup>12</sup> This dance used to known as Assamese (from the eastern state of Assam) but is attributed to the Mizo and Kuki peoples of Mizoram (another eastern Indian state).

<sup>13</sup> I use "personality" here because Deshpande uses this English term in her narrative. In this context it means development of a strong character, individuality and identity.

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<sup>14</sup> As an employee of the Government of Maharashtra she was not allowed to have another employment or business. But the Superintendent of her school supported her. She named her father as the Director of the institute on paper, and listed herself as an unpaid employee.

<sup>15</sup> *Anganwadi* is a program initiated by the Government of India in 1975 that addresses basic healthcare and malnourishment of young children and pregnant mothers. Pre-school education to young children forms a part of this.

<sup>16</sup> Her sister still continues to write for Marathi magazines and during the year of my interview with Deshpande (2011) her stories had been published in the Diwali Special Issues of four Marathi magazines: *Kathashree*, *Shree va Sau*, *Rangaaee* and *Anuraadha*. She also won the first prize every year in the drama competitions for her one act plays (*ekaankika*).

<sup>17</sup> He had a car in those days and having a car especially in their neighborhood was unusual. He used to drop her and pick her up so that she would not have to travel alone at night.

<sup>18</sup> However, she laments that despite these talents she and her sisters unfortunately did not have a lot of money. Today she feels frustrated to see untalented and ignorant people around her “minting money.” But someone like her who wants to do so much with their talents could not due to paucity of means.

<sup>19</sup> On another occasion, she was stuck on Tilak Bridge in Dadar for 45 minutes while travelling back from work on account of a Ganesh procession of a 42-day Ganesh festival. When she reached home he refused to believe that there could be a 42-day Ganesh festival and beat her mercilessly. Not only was she not used to such behavior in her natal home, but that her own individuality that had grown in so many ways over the years of her teaching career, she was unable to bear such behavior from her husband, and found it utterly unacceptable. On yet another occasion, her husband got an invitation to a dance program by Charusheela Sable who was her former student. When she exclaimed this before her husband, he refused to believe her. So she decided to keep a low profile when she accompanied her husband and his father to the show. After the show her husband’s friend came over and escorted them to the green room to meet the actors. When Sable saw Deshpande, she ran towards her and touched her feet (a gesture to show respect). Deshpande’s husband and father-in-law were both awestruck and dumbstruck. She told everyone present there how Deshpande had encouraged her and prepared her for her first dance show when she was in the 5th grade. She narrates this incident to argue that within a marriage both parties should understand each other. However, in her case her husband and his family failed to acknowledge her independent personality and understand her to that extent.

<sup>20</sup> When her divorce was being finalized in the Court, Deshpande’s cousin who had just retired from the Navy suggested that she should demand some amount in maintenance for their daughter, to which her husband did not agree and so the divorce proceedings prolonged for a while. The lower court had decided the amount as 200 Rupees, an insignificant amount but he refused to give that too and took the matter before the High Court. Deshpande describes how the High Court Judge ridiculed him saying, “Is this a matter to bring before the High Court? Do you have any sense at all?” The Judge ridiculed him so much that that all the people in the court at that time and the lawyers rushed to see the man who would deny a 200-Rupees maintenance to his daughter. Finally for his satisfaction, the Judge reduced the amount to 150 Rupees and the matter came back before the City Civil Court. Meanwhile her activities at work and outside continued. She taught at school, gave lectures in the evening, prepared students for various competitions and also attended the court for the divorce.

<sup>21</sup> These duties also required her to be away from home for the entire day. Thus she had formed a habit of having a proper breakfast and then sustaining on cups of tea during the entire day.

<sup>22</sup> However while performing such duties, she says, one gets to know how different people behave under various circumstances. She narrates an instance when she was the Principal of the School and also the Chief Conductor, but the Principal of the Junior College (Higher Secondary) was officially placed above her. That year, after having written his Marathi exam, a young student of 10<sup>th</sup> grade fell down the stairs and broke his arm. The school security escorted him to KEM hospital and called his parents. Since he had broken his right arm which was his primary hand, he was unable to write the exams. However he was well-prepared to take the exams and called the Office of the Board Examinations to find out if anything could be worked out. The official who answered his call was rude and curtly replied that there was nothing that he could do, that he had lost that year and should take the exam in the coming year. But Deshpande did not

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accept this. She believed the young student when he said that he was well-prepared to take the examinations. She called the Board Examination Office herself and asked what the rules/provisions for such situations, and was informed that the student could be provided with a writer, who should be as student in a grade lower than the student in question. The Officer at the Board insisted on having the application process in place before agreeing to grant the permission to use a writer. However, Deshpande insisted that all that could be taken care of later; right now it was important that he continues to take his exams as scheduled. That day when the school let out for the day, she caught hold of a smart 9<sup>th</sup> grader and first gave him food and milk. Then she asked the school guard to go to his home and tell his mother that he was detained in school for this reason. Until the permission came through, it was two days and if it wasn't for Deshpande, the student would have lost that year and would have had to reappear for his exams in the next term. So she says that even though many people are in a position to affect people's lives, they do not choose to do so in a positive way always. The young student in question did clear all his exams and came to see her and thank her after the results.

<sup>23</sup> Once there was a case in which a woman had been set on fire by her husband and sister-in-law and Deshpande was called to talk to her. She had already given a statement to the police implicating her sister-in-law, but when Deshpande went to see her, she recanted her original statement. Deshpande urged her to tell the truth but the woman mistakenly believed that she was going to live and she did not want to implicate her husband and in-laws. A few days later she died but this incident bothered Deshpande who then requested the police not to involve her in such cases.

<sup>24</sup> She says that her daughter brought her a lot of honor (*yash*). Even though Deshpande was a single parent, she daughter always scored 90% and above in her academics every year. When she graduated from high school she had similar high score in the science subjects. Admissions to medical schools were suspended that year because of an ongoing case in the High Court. She began studying electronics engineering but the next year when the admissions to medical schools reopened she changed her field. Deshpande told her to at least try for MBBS degree but she wanted to study dentistry. During her daughter's college years, Deshpande feels that her small house was not conducive for her daughter's studies, plus the working class neighborhood was also a disadvantage because being a woman she could not go out and study either. But still she completed her BDS with First Class.



## **Chapter 5: The Domestic Space and Women's Writing: Counternarratives in the Life and Writings of Anandibai Jayawant**

In this chapter I examine some aspects of the domestic space – physical and ideological – in the life and writings of Anandibai Jayawant. I especially use her novel *Unmilan* (opening of the eyes; unfolding) to interrogate the counternarratives of gender, sexuality, and modernity and the way in which these relate to domesticity and the domestic sphere. Anandibai was an upper caste Marathi writer from Baroda. She was also my grandmother's aunt. My initial objective in examining Anandibai's work was to explore the ways in which she constructed upper caste female subjectivities in her novels. However, my experience of locating her books and finding out about her life led me in new directions towards recovering women's history. While using narrative as a method for understanding women's histories and their subjectivities, I encountered my own narratives about the difficulties of locating Anandibai's work. It raised new questions for my project: under what conditions do women's writing/documents get preserved or archived? How (and why) does the domestic space become central to the recovery of women's histories? In this chapter I engage with these questions in the context of the life and writings of Anandibai Jayawant. I examine the ways in which the domestic space becomes a repository of history, and the ways in which memory acts as an archive and a

site of history. Drawing on my experience of the “rediscovery” of Anandibai’s life, this chapter also explores the relationship between women’s writings, private memories and social history. In another way this chapter is also an attempt to narrow the gap between literature and history that has been created and institutionalized through the centuries (Burton 2003, 20-21). There are three aspects of the domestic that I explore in this chapter: first, I briefly investigate the relationship between domesticity and women’s writing, and the reasons why women have deployed the domestic in their fictional and personal narratives; second, I explore the ways in which the home and domestic relationships have become repositories of Anandibai’s life and her books; third, I examine the reconfigurations of sexuality, conjugality and domesticity in Anandibai’s novel *Unmilan*.

### ***Women’s Narratives and Social Histories***

The recovery of women’s writing has been central to and an important source of feminist studies. Women’s writing has been mined for women’s histories (Forbes 2003, Burton 2003), for acts of resistance against forms of patriarchy (Tharu and Lalita 1991), and as works of art that have been underrepresented in the canon (Kosambi, 2012) to highlight a few rationales for their recovery. Calling for the “inclusion of women” has been a “foundational issue for feminist studies” across academic disciplines. The objective of scholars attending to such recovery was to look for counternarratives or “counter-representations to dominant narratives” within women’s writings (Rosenthal, 2009). Geraldine Forbes (2003) identifies the need to locate and preserve women’s documents as a first step in uncovering women’s history in India. Drawing on her work in

the subcontinent since 1979, Forbes highlights how the recovery and reading of women's documents has been key in providing an alternate history of Indian women when the dominant narratives of India in the West were influenced by Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* or Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*. She also emphasizes the value of historical materials like women's memoirs and photographs which need to be approached in new ways (Forbes 2003, 170). Where libraries and archives proved insufficient, she found valuable historical photographs in family collections. In this manner, Forbes highlights the importance of women's documents in providing a counter-history. She also underscores the need to look beyond conventional archival sites for such documents. I discuss this point in detail later in this chapter.

In an extensive work Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (1991), editors of *Women Writing in India* use a feminist analytical lens to examine women's writing throughout Indian history in order to identify spaces of complicity and resistance vis-à-vis dominant patriarchal ideologies and practices of their respective historical times.<sup>1</sup> These women-authored writings, in addition to being "a joyous retrieval of artifacts that signify women's achievement," (34) are also important for understanding how women in their different subject positions responded to, colluded with or resisted the dominant ideologies of their time. In other words, these texts are "documents that display what is at stake in the embattled practices of self and agency" (36). According to the editors, men and women are differently positioned within mainstream ideologies, giving women's subject position a unique perspective that is a result of their "complexly constituted and decentered positions" within these ideologies (35). And to this extent, women's writings

differ from those by men. However, the radical nature of their project of analyzing women's writing might be lost, they argue, if this body of work is employed to "perform the same services to society and to the nation that mainstream literature over the last hundred years has been called upon to do" (35). Rather the editors call upon their readers to consider the task of (re)reading these works as "an aesthetic that must undo the strict distinctions between the literary and the social text ... and redesign itself to orchestrate contradictions and cherish the antagonistic forms of insurgency and resistance" (Tharu and Lalita 1991, 36).

In an example of women's writing as suggestive of the relationship between women and society, Meera Kosambi (1998a) explores the differences between two Marathi novelists Vibhavari Shirurkar and Gauri Deshpande, who are separated by a generation. Kosambi notes that while Shirurkar's writings are fiercely feminist with "idealistic impulses" for social changes, the subsequent "literary generation" focused more on individual relationships and struggles rather than on massive or all-encompassing social changes. For Gauri Deshpande's generation, Kosambi (1998a, 139) argues, "the literary lens zoomed from society and family to self.... from the patriarchal underpinnings of the marriage institution to its near-irrelevance, and from a woman's suffocation within marriage to her multi-layered emotional-sexual involvement."

According to Kosambi the "first-wave" feminists' fight for gender equality as expressed in the writings of Shirurkar gave way to expression of self-reliance and independence as represented through friendships, international travel and fulfillment of sexual desires in the writings of Deshpande. Kosambi identifies this change as a shift in

the concerns between the two generations of women, wherein the centrality of the society and the family for an earlier generation was replaced by focus on the self, and struggle/rebellion at the level of the individual for the later generation. Kosambi observes that Deshpande's writings illustrate "a woman's search for selfhood and for a meaningful life outside marriage, in fact, even outside the man-woman relationship." The most important difference between the two generations is the ease with which women began expressing sexual desires and demanding their unabashed fulfillment. Women's writing has thus been valued not only for its creativity but also as a useful tool for charting the changes in a society.

At the same time, as Sunder Rajan (1992) reminds us, writing remains a "privileged mode of self-representation in India" (75). In response to her question, "what does it mean to write as a woman?" in the South Asian context, Sunder Rajan points to the "contradictions" that are highlighted in works like *Women Writing in India*. For, if women as a social category are considered "definitionally subaltern," it precludes those women who have no access to writing or reading from the category of "women." It is therefore important to keep in sight the inequalities in access to education and opportunities while examining women's writing. Furthermore, writing as an important epistemological tool has also informed the production of knowledge in a society. Accordingly, understanding who writes what, when and in what manner of representation allows us an insight into the politics of knowledge production. For instance, Shivarama Padikkal (1993, 220) in his study of the emergence of the novel as a literary genre in India argues that "literary production is one of the modes by which the dominant group

constructs its reality and history.” Since this cultural production is controlled by dominant social groups, we need to account for both the historical context and “an analysis of social class” in the examination of the novel. He identifies the novel as a “social practice,” one that is related to other social and economic practices, and attributes its emergence to the rise of the middle class, the spread of education, and the changes in Indian society that were a result of the colonial encounter. The emergence of the novel in the West has been situated within the context of capitalism and the emergence of a new bourgeois class, and it focused on the “the rupture between the individual and the society.” The first Indian novels by contrast, “dwelt on the recasting of social identity in the confrontation with a colonizing power” (226). Padikkal contends that the early novel was political in nature as it aimed to portray the hopes, ambitions and desires of a newly emergent English-educated middle class in its quest for “social identity, for a new nation and for a new sense of community” (237-8). In this way, the narrative form of the novel presented the hopes, desires and anxieties of a historical period informed by colonial (and later nationalist) politics. Meera Kosambi (2012) however has challenged this argument by demonstrating that the Marathi novel portrayed social rather than political concerns, and specifically upper caste aspirations. She argues, “Even the ‘political novel’ of the years immediately preceding Independence did not voice political aspirations: at best it documented various ideologically tinted versions of unfolding political developments” (13). Kosambi, through her extensive research in Marathi literature, has highlighted the upper caste, mainly Brahmin “hegemony of culture and production of knowledge” (12). Caste has therefore been an important social factor in narrative and representation. As I

examine in this chapter, the histories of caste and class are closely linked with histories of gender, sexuality and modernity. While women's narratives can be used as an important epistemological tool in tracing these histories, it is important to keep sight of the social, cultural, economic and familial ideologies with which these women's lives were imbricated.

In her recent work on women's writing in pre-independence Maharashtra, Kosambi (2012, 1) describes her effort as "the story of how women found a 'voice' and of how they deployed it through their creative writing." She specifically focuses on the writers' "handling of gender issues through fiction" while also adding the caveat: "No attempt is made to valorize women's writing *per se*" (2). Her overall objective is to identify the difference between male and female Marathi writers on issues of gender, and calls for an inclusion of these women writers within the canon of Marathi literature. She highlights the "epistemic privilege" that men, as "reformers" and as writers, had in defining both gender problems and their resolution. The depiction of women in the fiction of male writers "essentialized" their roles, their sexuality and their issues/problems. Kosambi's recovery of women's writings is an exercise in understanding "women's own subjectivity, self-expression and self-representation" (4-5).

As the above discussion suggests, while recovery of women's writings and documents is an important feminist task, the recovery itself is a process fraught with contradictions. For one, the act of recovery risks the danger of essentializing women's writing as always resistant to or rebellious against patriarchy, and thus universalizing women's experiences. For instance, Sunder Rajan (1992) in her review of *Women*

*Writing in India*, she takes issue with the editors' characterization of women's writing as inherently resistant. She contends that women's writing as a social process is embedded within other social practices and must be examined as such. The analytical position that women's writing is necessarily a resistant practice and thus an act of "heroic exceptionality" can obliterate the facts of "historical everydayness" in these works. Therefore she argues that resistance is not always present in women's writing but that *reading* resistance is an aspect of feminist critical scholarship: "The discovery of resistance in women's writing also requires the investment of *our* desires and acknowledgement of *our* politics as women/feminists reading" (Sunder Rajan 1992, 16). On the other hand, a feminist recovery can occlude other aspects of women's writing as Rosenthal (2009, 5) notes: "By reading [women writers] through particular feminist lenses and largely in the context of particular feminist issues, we have, in many cases not yet fully explored their intellectual significance, aesthetic power, cultural importance, political complexity, and historical agency."

It is now a well-accepted fact that all women's writing cannot be considered feminist. For example, Rosalind Coward (1980) cautions against the valorization of a "self-defining tradition of women's writing" as inherently feminist. As Gayle Greene (1991) explains, "a novel may be termed 'feminist' for its analysis of gender as socially constructed and capable of being reconstructed and for its enlistment of narrative in the process of [social] change" (291). According to these scholars, a feminist text is concerned with challenging socially accepted norms of female behavior and sexuality; it considers gender as a socially informed institution and attempts to challenge the



dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality. A feminist text, in a word, is “unsettling” (Greene 1991, 292). However, even while the text itself might not be feminist, one can *read* it from a feminist viewpoint by being attentive to “what reality is being constructed [in/through the text] and how representations are achieving this construction” (Coward 1980, 55). Coward defines the political nature of reading as “the contesting of natural attitudes [and ] the challenging of agreed definitions” (55).

### ***Domesticity in/and Women’s Writing***

With these issues in mind, my examination of Anandibai’s life and work is framed by her class and caste position. It is in this context that domesticity is foregrounded as an important ideological construct that oppressed upper-caste, middle-class women. Much has been written about middle-class women’s writing and domesticity. Within the Anglo-American context feminist literary theorists have explored the impact and significance of middle-class White women’s writing that has come to be known as literary domesticity and domestic or sentimental fiction. Domesticity was also the central feature of the genre of conduct books or manuals for housewives. Based upon the ideological construction of separate spheres that compelled these women to experience the home in more intimate ways than the public sphere, the domestic space and domesticity became an integral part of women’s writing.

In the Indian context also, the writings of upper caste women during the nineteenth and early twentieth century explore themes surrounding domesticity and domestic life. One of the reasons for this is the strengthening of the ideology of domesticity which was linked with social reform and nationalism as discussed in Chapter

1. The writings thus, that came from upper caste women, reflected some of these concerns, especially the suffocation within patriarchal oppressions of the home and the desire to explore non-domestic sphere. All the same, in line with the nationalist discourse, there was also the celebration of the home as the supreme, most sacrosanct sphere of fulfilment for women. In such contexts however, the writings of upper caste women depict a need for changing the unequal gender relations especially within marriage, and more rights for women both within and outside the domestic sphere. The writings by upper caste women thus depict the balancing act of contesting their oppression while upholding the superiority of “Indian” tradition.

In her study of the writings of seven Marathi Brahman women Kosambi (1998b) has identified the “multi-layered connotation” of home in these narratives.<sup>2</sup> Describing their social context she observes that the Marathi Brahman household was based on patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal pattern. The way in which the architecture of the house was laid out, it was able to achieve what she calls “invisible gender segregation ...without observing the system of *purdah* or the veil for women”. Women’s spaces were usually towards the rear of the house. These spaces included the kitchen, store rooms, prayer rooms and the “*majghar* usually used by women, and a lying-in room where a new mother was sequestered for forty days” (86). As a result the “home as a social universe” as Kosambi dubs, figured prominently in these Brahman women’s writings. This included a physical description of the spaces along with the dynamics of various relationships that played out in these spaces. These writings also described the awkward relationship between the newly married couple as they interacted, or pretended not to, in

the midst of the family. Kosambi also observes that these gendered spaces were further delineated along the lines of ritual purity and impurity. Some areas of the household were to be entered only when the men and women were “ritually pure” (88). For women, one of the main constraints on such purity was menstruation, during which they had to “sit apart” but nonetheless continue to conduct “permissible type of work, instead of resting” (88). And since menstruating women were not allowed to enter the kitchen or touch cooked food and water, they were usually dependent on others for food. The sense of helplessness and humiliation associated with “sitting apart” is a recurring theme in these upper caste women’s narratives. Furthermore, Kosambi also notes the contrasting depictions of natal and marital homes within the writings of these women. Women were not only susceptible to harsh treatment, verbal and emotional, from the in-laws, but also to physical and emotional violence from their husbands. And these were the very relationships that led them to question the inequalities of power between the sexes. The change that these women desired and hoped for in the future was simply an equitable and more companionate relationship between the spouses.

Similarly, women’s fiction also represents autobiographical/personal narratives. In her recent book, Kosambi (2012) has examined the fictional writings of women in Marathi in order to investigate the treatment of gender and gender concerns. She argues that women often “consciously deployed fiction as a conduit for social change and wrote out of a strong inner urge for self-expression.” Unlike male writers, Kosambi argues, for women the art of writing was a way of expressing their varied experiences of life. Not surprisingly, gender forms one of the pivotal points in women’s fiction: “The luxury of

dispensing with gender awareness belongs to those not subjected to the disabilities of gender” (Kosambi 2012, 3). Kosambi observes that male writers, even those who were bothered by the problems facing women in their cultures, “consciously or unconsciously” could not shake the foundations of gender inequalities. They worked from within the parameters of male dominance; women writers on the other hand, focused on challenging these parameters. Kosambi’s analysis is that one sees a certain “essentializing” of woman and womanhood in the writings of men, which is rooted in their own patriarchal privileges as well as in their desire to see “woman” as defined in a certain way. Conversely, women’s depiction of womanhood, of gender, was not based on a theoretical understanding of “what it might be to live the life of a woman” but rather rooted in their own experiences of survival within overlapping structures of oppression. Kosambai (2012, 5) argues,

[The] essentialized male images of women exaggerate selected feminine traits that appeal to them, and therefore appear more “attractive” than women’s own thinking, feeling, and articulating themselves. The thinking, feeling, and articulating women authors themselves have been variously subjected to suspicion, censure, disbelief and even erasure.

It is no wonder then that women’s writing has been pushed to the periphery of Marathi literature and much of the early writings by women do not figure in the list of important literary works in the language. Kosambi calls this “literary amnesia” which she attributes to the “epistemic privilege” that men enjoy(ed).

Tanika Sarkar’s (2001) examination of Rashsundari Devi’s *Amar Jiban* [*My Life*, first published in 1876], the first autobiography of a woman in Bengali, highlights the

complex processes involved in women's writing. Sarkar's reading of *Amar Jiban* highlights the way in which Rashsundari Devi negotiated her identity as a dedicated housewife and her devotion to god with her (gendered) literary authority in the autobiography. Rashsundari got married at the age of twelve. At the age of twenty-five she taught herself to read, which was the only act of defiance/resistance in a lifetime of being a good housewife, Sarkar observes. But the reason for her "resistant act" was so that she could read the sacred book *Chaitanya Bhagavat* (Sarkar 2001). Even her autobiography is laced with stories of Lord Vishnu. Caught between her "*sansar*" and her spiritual faith, "She prised open both sansar and faith to accommodate a new figure: the serious yet domesticated woman bhakti [devotee] who has created her own autonomous and individual life of devotion within the household" (108). Thus, on the one hand *Amar Jiban* is the narrative of a woman who had dedicated her life to her family and to her duties within the household; on the other, it is an example of a bold and transgressive act, a woman writing her own life's story. However, the embedding of her life's story within the narrative of her devotion allowed her to "recast it as an expression of prescribed Vaishnavite self-abnegation and humility as well of proper womanly modesty and obedience" (110). In this context domesticity, and devotion as an aspect of domesticity, becomes a trope through which Rashsundari Devi is able to create an unobjectionable space for her seemingly rebellious activity of writing.

Some of the early twentieth century writings by women in India often included challenges to patriarchy on such issues as the eradication of *purdah* (veil and seclusion) for women, demanding increased opportunities for women's education, advocating the

remarriage of widows and condemning the practice of marrying young girls to older widowed men (Talwar 1989). Some of these issues had taken up by the social reform movements that were initiated by male reformers. However women's writings on these issues differed in spirit and intent from such reforms. For instance, writing in the Hindi journal *Stree Darpan*, Smt. Saubhagyavati linked the issue of purdah and the consequent isolation of women not only to the difficulties in women's education but also to other social problems. While the male social reformers opposed the practice of purdah in itself, writers like Satyawati, also writing in *Stree Darpan*, questioned: "Neither power, nor real knowledge, nor education, nor freedom, then what point will the removal of purdah serve?" (cited in Talwar 1989, 212). In fact Satyawati also cited women's health as a central issue at stake in the practice of purdah, arguing that women's personal health was also an aspect of their freedom. She recommended that "the rich should open their grounds and gardens for less privileged and poor women to walk in the fresh air in the mornings; no men should be allowed at this time and gardeners should keep a watch at the gates, and this would encourage friendship and interaction between women" (213). Thus, even while challenging the practice of purdah, women were able to suggest alternate ways of fostering women's health and camaraderie while still practicing seclusion from male gaze.

Another issue that these women writers wrote against strongly was the marrying of young girls to much older and widowed men. In a letter to the editor which was published in the February 1918 issue of *Stree Darpan*, Smt. Gulab Devi Chaturvedi criticized the practice as "a new form of assault on women" and called it an integral

aspect of patriarchal oppression of women by “self-centered men” (Talwar 1989, 214). In the April 1918 issue of *Stree Darpan*, Humka Devi, who was the headmistress of a girls’ school in Dehradun, “proposed that a *Kanya Hitkarini Sabha* (a society for the welfare of young girls) be set up and also put forth a list of fourteen objectives” one of which was to offer “active resistance” to what she called mismatched marriages of young girls to widowers. She went so far as to suggest that “the Government of India should be petitioned by women to declare mismatched marriages as illegal” (215-6). Similarly when male leaders of the social reform and nationalist movements were advocating the remarriage of child widows but were against the remarriage of widows who had crossed the threshold into adulthood, women writers like Rameshwari Nehru were quick to point out the hypocrisy in their thinking. She emphasized the existence of sexual desires and the desire to be married again in both set of females, even as she praised those widows who had taken a “vow of chastity and piety.” Other women writers of fiction, however, extolled the virtues of a pious widowhood dedicated in the service of the family and the nation (see Talwar 1989, 219-20).

One of the prominent feminists of the time, Uma Nehru, was also one of the most vocal and harshest critics of Indian patriarchy. In a series of articles that appeared in *Stree Darpan*, she criticized the idealization of Indian womanhood in the form of Sati, Sita and Savitri (three mythological heroines made famous for their devotion to their husbands),<sup>3</sup> the ideal of the self-sacrificing woman, the erosion of women’s identity and independence in a patriarchal family and society, and the characterization of a woman’s beauty as the essence of her femininity. She also pointed out the patriarchal hypocrisy

that celebrated feminine beauty on the one hand and treated women like slaves on the other. She argued, “According to [men] learning, independence and strength are detrimental to a woman’s good looks but working on the grindstone, pounding rice, lighting a *chulha* (earthen stove), sweeping, disposing garbage, cleaning dishes, sorting out clothes and removing cow dung are not” (cited in Talwar, 229). Instead she called for women’s education and independence, and a change in the male-female relationship to make it companionate and based on friendship.

Similarly Mytheli Sreenivas (2003, 59) in her study of women’s print culture in Tamil has observed the creation of the female subject through the “discourse of love, affection and pleasure,” which grew out of a critique of women’s oppression. According to her, this new “emotional paradigm” was important to “new articulations of Tamil middle-class identity under the conditions of colonial modernity.” This emotional paradigm cited conjugal emotionality – love, affection and pleasure – as central to marriage and critiqued Tamil customs for restricting conjugal emotions. In doing so, the women writers in Tamil magazines recast marriage as “both private and individualized.” They associated emotional life with domesticity, interiority, femininity,” and produced “new notions of identity such that one’s ‘inner feelings’ emerged as primary markers of the self” (62). Such an emotional paradigm challenged the subordination of women within marriage and within the family, thus producing the unusual relationship between love, justice and reason (68). Love was linked not only to a transformed private sphere, but also to a changed public sphere that was marked by nationalism and “Indian ‘cultural revolution.’” Emotion and affection within marriage was tied to anti-colonialism,



displacing other markers of identities like caste, kinship and patrilineal lineage. In constructing what Sreenivas calls “a new feminized private sphere” around love, affection and pleasure, the discourse created a new subject that replaced “ascriptive identities.” Thus, Sreenivas concludes that “the widow’s [woman’s] inner self marked the boundaries of her identity and her unique individuality; communitarian affiliations were rejected in favor of an individuated subject developed within female print culture” (76). In this context, domesticity is being marked with love, sexual desire and affection. And while conjugality is being deliberately delineated as “private” the demand is for the insertion of the values of justice and reason, which have been the markers of the “public/political” sphere, into this domestic relationship thereby changing its very nature.

I have tried to briefly summarize the different ways in which women writers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engaged with domesticity and the domestic space. In a way these writings imply the extent of the ideology of domesticity and the primacy of the domestic space in their lives. However, it is also interesting to note the impact of the resurgence of the domestic ideology, founded on the idea of the separation of male and female spheres – not only of activity but also of expression and limits of desire and pleasure – in the twentieth century. For instance, Tharu and Lalita (1991) observe, albeit in a very different context than what I argue here, that when Bangalore Nagaratnamma – “a patron of the arts, a learned woman, a musician, and a distinguished courtesan” – reprinted a poem by the eighteenth century Telugu poet Muddupalani, it generated a backlash that neither Nagaratnamma nor the publishers had expected and which the book had not met with when it was first published.<sup>4</sup> This poem was titled

*Radhika Santwanam*<sup>5</sup> (“Appeasing Radhika”). The poem captivated Nagaratnamma and her own love for music and poetry led her to edit and reprint the book in 1910; “the pleasure of the text was clearly the principal impetus for the new edition,” Tharu and Lalita note. This time, however, the work became embroiled in controversy. Critics alleged that the work was lewd and filled with impropriety not befitting a woman. The harshest criticism came from Kandukuri Veereshalingam, known as “the father of the social reform movement in Andhra and a novelist himself,” who condemned her work for its explicit descriptions of sex. He wrote: “Many parts of the book are such that they should never be heard by a woman, let alone emerge from a woman’s mouth. Using *sringar rasa*<sup>6</sup> as an excuse, she shamelessly fills her poems with crude descriptions of sex” (cited in Tharu and Lalita, 1991). He also denounced her work by calling her an “adulteress” and attributing her work to her being “born into a community of prostitutes and [who] does not have the modesty natural to women.”<sup>7</sup>

To sum up, it was not just the experiences within the domestic space that figured prominently in the writings of upper caste women, they also presented a challenge to domesticity as an ideology. Most common form of the critique of domesticity was expressed in terms of gender norms for women, for to challenge gender norms and to critique the sources of oppression of women within the household was to challenge the hitherto unquestioningly accepted norms of domesticity and domestic life. Hitting at the heart of the early (Western) feminist slogan “The personal is political” women’s fictional and personal narratives about domesticity and domestic life foreground the complicity of domestic patriarchy in the subordination of women (in both personal and public life).

This is especially highlighted in the narratives of women from the era when women had the opportunities for formal education and participation in paid employment, but they still occupied a subordinate position within marriage.<sup>8</sup> These also form the context within which later women like Anandibai wrote. Some of these discontents like the lack of freedom of movement for women, the perceived lack of desire in women, the expected norms of conjugality that paid no attention to women's desires and the need for women's education, independence and identity are some of the ideas that are reflected in Anandibai's life and her novel that I examine here.

***Archive in/and the Domestic Space: Retrieving Anandibai's Life and Work***

Anandibai<sup>9</sup> was born in Baroda in 1894 in a Marathi-speaking upper-caste CKP family. In 1909 she was married to Prabhakar Jayawant of Dahanu in Maharashtra. Anandibai was the second wife of the widower who was about 11 or 12 years her senior. He was studying to be a lawyer but just after a year of their marriage, he passed away from typhoid. Anandibai was fifteen at that time and although she was not completely mature she did understand the implications of widowhood. Her sorrow was so profound that her father-in-law could not bear to see it and sent her back to Baroda with her brother. At her home in Baroda, her family was both respectful and loving towards her. They made sure that she was not hurt by anyone's words or deeds. But she had confined herself to the four walls of the house. To take her mind off her sorrow, she began to read. Although she was never fond of going to school as a child, she had been very fond of reading. She did not resume school, however, because her parents were of conservative thinking and did not want to send their widowed daughter to school. Her brother who

supported her immensely throughout his life did not want to push her to attend school against her wishes. In her autobiography she mentions that she regrets not going back to school because she could have benefitted much from a formal education. “I have the intellect,” she says in her autobiography, “but in the absence for formal knowledge it has not sharpened.” With the help and support of her brother, who brought her a new book each day from the library, she continued to read. She also loved to draw and paint. Their “*shipayi*” or helper also worked as a peon in the Baroda college and he got her thrown away pieces of drawing paper, pins, pieces of pencils and erasers and she began her art on these scraps of paper. She went on to win prizes and medals at various art exhibitions, including one held in London. Later she also took the J.J. School of Arts’ Intermediate Examination held at Baroda and won the second position<sup>10</sup> (Jayawant n.d. 125). Thus she spent her days reading and drawing.

When she had exhausted the available literature in Marathi, her brother suggested that she should learn to read Gujarati so that she could explore the many wonderful books in that language. She also learned English, Hindi and Bengali with the help of dictionaries and translation aids and read many books in these languages. During this time, she said in her autobiography, she was anxious to do something. She wanted to do something meaningful with her life. Sometimes she thought she should strive to be a great artist, at other times she wanted to be a writer. She also wanted to learn how to sing, but in those days women from the upper castes were not allowed to learn singing or dancing. She was a fairly decent artist but it was also difficult to find appropriate guidance in that field (not to mention the expense). So finally she decided to try her hand

at writing. She was educated until the fourth grade in Marathi and her grammar was also quite weak. But somehow she summoned up the courage to begin writing: “Before this several stories and plots used to blossom in my mind but each time I would think that I won’t be able to write anything and the stories were killed there” (Jayawant n.d., 101) But in 1917 when Baroda city was infected with the plague, several families from Baroda went to live on the outskirts of the city towards Padra. It was here that she decided to begin writing. Her first publication, years later, was a short story in the Marathi women’s monthly *Grihalakshi* in 1929. Her first novel *Kulakatha* was published in 1932. Her first novel on “women’s condition” was *Urmila*, which I have not been able to trace. By the time her second novel on women’s issues, *Unmilan* was published in 1956, she had written and published two collections of short stories, a historical novel and three novels on social issues in Marathi, and a novel and several short stories for children in Marathi and Gujarati.

In addition to writing and painting, she was fond of singing, embroidery, and knitting and was also an exceptional cook. The 1975 edition of Ravi Bhushan’s *Famous India: Who’s Who* featured Anandibai as a writer and an artist. Prabhakar Machwe writing in 1979 (116) lists Anandibai as an established writer of short stories employing the theme of social justice in her writings. He mentions Anandibai’s autobiography among the ones that highlight the “socio-political and cultural life” in independent India (119). In his preface to *Unmilan*, playwright Vasudev Vaman Bhole notes that in the light of her many accomplishments, combined with her social situation (i.e. widowhood) she could be characterized as a self-made person. He asserts that her rise to such fame with

her writing and art compels one to appreciate her work in a unique way. She passed away in 1984 at the age of 90.

By all accounts, including her own, Anandibai was a quiet and reserved woman. There is no mention of her nature as a girl before she was married, but after she returned to Baroda as a widow and grew up, she was known as a wise woman of few words. Her overall reserved nature complemented the outgoing and rebellious nature of her longtime friend and patron Akkasaheb Mujumdar. Anandibai also got many opportunities to travel. Her description of Kerala in *Unmilan* is drawn from her own visit to the region when her brother was posted here. With Akkasaheb and her husband, she travelled to the different parts of India and to Nepal. In her biography of Akkasaheb, Anandibai says that often Akkasaheb insisted that she came along when she and her husband planned trips, even when Anandibai did not want to. But on those occasions Anandibai ended up enjoying the trips so much that she was glad Akkasaheb had prevailed upon her. In addition these trips gave her the inspiration and the fodder for the travel literature that she wrote. She also wrote a children's book describing the beautiful city of Chittogarh (Jayawant 1944).

At several places in her autobiography and in Akkasaheb's biography, Anandibai describes herself as timid, introverted and shy. However, she was not afraid to challenge certain customs and rituals that she felt were unnecessary. As I discuss in the following section, her position on women's education, identity and sexual freedom is made evident in *Unmilan*. But, even in her own life, she tried to criticize what she thought were unnecessary customs and practices. In one instance, she was the one responsible for a major part of the preparation of my grandmother's – her niece's – wedding. Anandibai's

mother had passed away, and her brother and his family lived outside Baroda. However the marriage was to be held in Baroda which made Anandibai responsible for most of the preparations for it. She said that this experience enlightened her about which rituals were actually necessary for marriage and which were merely “ritualistic.” She had challenged and ceased the practice of several such rituals in her family. She also challenged the idea of, and eventually stopped (in her family) the practice of “*rukhwat*” the gifts that are given to the bridegroom and his family. *Rukhwat* especially includes ritually made sweets and art/craftwork by the bride, which is set on display to showcase her talents. For her to stop *rukhwat* for marriages in her family was actually an accomplishment because the custom of *rukhwat*, albeit in a different manner, continues even today. She rationalized its removal by arguing that it was a waste of time, money and energy. Some, she said, disagreed.

As mentioned earlier, Anandibai was my grandmother’s aunt. Thus my connection with and search for her work is originally a personal one because it is through my memories of my grandmother that I trace my investment in Anandibai’s work. My earliest memories of my grandmother are of her reading a “*kadambari*” [novel] despite the fact that she had had little schooling. When I went to Baroda for my fieldwork in 2011 I had no doubt in my mind that it would be quite easy to acquire Anandibai’s written work. Not only had she lived in Baroda her entire life, but some of her books were published in Baroda as well. In addition, Baroda has a large Marathi-speaking population and a significant CKP community. In fact one of the awards given by the *Marathi Vangmay Parishad* (literary association) of Baroda is called Anandibai Jayawant

award. The category under which this award falls is “those respected female authors who made Baroda famous.” Given the popularity of her name in Baroda and in the Marathi literary community, I was confident of finding her books with ease, a few even in my home. Between private collections and the libraries of Baroda, there was never any doubt in my mind as I travelled to India.

But when I failed to find her books in my home (apparently my grandmother had given them away before her death in 1990) and located only two in all of the libraries at Baroda,<sup>11</sup> I contacted all relatives, friends and other members of the CKP community who might possibly have any of her books. When I contacted the President of the *Marathi Vangamay Parishad*, also a member of the CKP caste association, he told me that they had none of her books. He told me that the CKP caste association of Baroda has been trying to bring out a special issue of their magazine on Anandibai but no one seems to have any information about her life or her work anymore. Anandibai’s (now late) nephew Shrikant Korde and his wife Shubhada, with whom she had lived until her death, also did not have any of Anandibai’s books in their home. Shubhada Korde informed me that she had given away an entire stack of books and paintings to her nieces (Anandibai’s other nephew’s daughters), who were also interested in Anandibai’s work. After many phone calls, one of the nieces informed me that she had lost track of the books after she lent them to another relative (who is now deceased). Her sister who is an artist has probably retained her paintings.

I contacted Shubhada Korde again, who was very cooperative and very keen on helping me locate Anandibai’s books. She told me that Anandibai had a lifelong



friendship with Akkasaheb Mujumdar,<sup>12</sup> the wife of a prominent Sardar<sup>13</sup> Abasaheb Mujumdar of Baroda. Korde believed that her family might have some of Anandibai's books. However, her husband was not hopeful of finding them at the Mujumdar home. He argued that her books would be treasured by a generation that was her contemporary. Since no members of that generation were alive in the Mujumdar family now, the chances of finding her books there were very slim. But, as a last resort, Korde took me to see Sarojtai Mujumdar. Sarojtai is the granddaughter-in-law of Akkasaheb, who was also a patron of Anandibai. A very dynamic and strong woman in her own right, Sarojtai had not only lovingly retained all of Akkasaheb's books in her library but also catalogued them. She knew exactly how many of Anandibai's books she had and which ones, and was more than willing to share them with me.<sup>14</sup> She also expressed her appreciation that I was working on Anandibai's life because, according to her, Anandibai deserved more praise and fame than what she has received – much of which has waned by now. She was particularly appreciative of the fact that I was related to her and had chosen to write about her (and in all future meetings she referred to me as Anandibai's "granddaughter"). And although Sarojtai only had seven of the books that Anandibai had written, it was a start. She also showed me a set of 36 pictures depicting various episodes from the life of the mythological hero Krishna painted by Anandibai as a gift to Akkasaheb. The home of Sarojtai Mujumdar has thus become a repository of artifacts, an archive for charting the life of Anandibai, and her friendship with Akkasaheb.

Challenging the dichotomy between history and memory as associated with the public and the domestic, Antoinette Burton (2003) has argued for broadening the

meaning of the term archive. If history can be thought of as “a narrative, a practice, and a site of desire,” then Burton sees the home not only as a repository of women’s memories but also as “a foundation of history” (4). But the material contents of this archive, the books and the paintings, are founded upon memory: on Sarojtai’s memory of Akkasaheb. When I interviewed Sarojtai a few days after our first and rather unplanned meeting, I realized that there was a close relationship of mutual admiration and affection between Akkasaheb and Sarojtai. Sarojtai came into her marital home as a young woman of 18, and it was Akkasaheb who not only urged her to continue her education in Baroda, but also supported her through it. When she graduated, Akkasaheb gifted her a specially-made piece of jewelry. This is only one instance of their close association. According to Sarojtai Akkasaheb was very forward-thinking and she and Sarojtai got along better than Sarojtai and her mother-in-law. It is on account of this respect and admiration for Akkasaheb that Sarojtai has preserved her possessions, including Anandibai’s books. In addition, Akkasaheb’s close relationship with Anandibai is the reason that Anandibai’s life and work is cherished and preserved by Sarojtai. In the absence of her own immediate family, the Mujumdars become a surrogate family through which Anandibai’s heritage is being preserved. Recently, as a result of my interview with her, Sarojtai has also located Akkasaheb’s biography (a typed document) that was written by Anandibai, and I have managed to get a digital copy of this document. Meanwhile, as a result of my interest in Anandibai’s life and her work, and my now reacquainted relationship with Shubhada Korde, she managed to retrieve a handwritten and unpublished copy of Anandibai’s autobiography, *Jeevandarshan*. These are the processes that I am interested

in examining while talking about the recovery, discovery or retrieval of women's histories. How do historians of women's lives chance upon these documents? What are the processes involved in such recovery? I argue, and as my experience demonstrates, there is a facet of memory that has been overlooked when talking about women's histories: the relationship of admiration, love and fondness between women.<sup>15</sup>

For more than a decade now, feminist scholars have engaged with the home as an archive and therefore as a site of history. Challenging the false dichotomy between the home/domestic and the public such scholarship has highlighted the ways in which the home has been central to the formation of history and historical memory (Burton 1997; 2003; Fitzgerald 2005). Moreover, the archive itself has been a subject of much debate and contestation. A response to my surprise and bewilderment at the absence of Anandibai's books and life in any of the conventional archives in Baroda is Carolyn Steedman's (1998) observation about the exclusionary nature of the archive itself. She writes:

In the Archive, you cannot be shocked at its exclusions, its emptiness, at what is not catalogued, at what was 'destroyed' ... nor that it tells of the gentry and not of the poor stockinger. Its condition of being deflects outrage: in its quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated...

Paying attention to the silences and the absences within the archive therefore is equally important for engendering comprehensive historical narratives. Since the function of the archive is to "institutionalize historical memory" attending to the silences and gaps within this memory allows us to understand the nature of power involved in the production of knowledge. Furthermore, it is also important to examine who – what groups or

individuals – act as gatekeepers to historical memory. For instance, “Who decide[s] what material is worthy of donation or worthy of storage?” (Fitzgerald 2005, 659). So while Burton fortuitously finds Janaki Majumdar’s unpublished diary/memoirs in the possession of her grandson, who has lovingly retained them and is willing to share them with Burton (2003), my experience of not being able to locate the documents that I am looking for raises a different set of questions. Burton’s reading of Majumdar’s diary leads her to rethink the meaning and location of the archive. In exploring the relationship between private memories and political history, she challenges, on the one hand, the description of the location of an archive as public, and on the other, the definition of the home as private and therefore, in a sense outside history. In her study of the memoirs of three Indian women of the twentieth century, she argues that “all three used domestic space as an archival source from which to construct their own histories and through which to record the contradictions of living as Indian women in the context of colonial modernity” (Burton 2003, 5). However, what happens, under different circumstances, if there is no family to retain and restore these histories? What if the family decided to destroy or not share women’s documents? In her interview my participant Sushma Marathe mentioned her daughter’s mother-in-law as a very strong woman who overcame many hurdles to lead a successful and prosperous life. She had detailed all her struggles in a diary before she succumbed to cancer and it was only by reading the diary that Marathe had come to know the intimate details of her life. But when I asked if I could see the diary or include it in my work, she replied that her son was very protective about his mother and her struggles and would not be willing to share it with anyone. I also suspect

he was protective about the family's reputation because she had an abusive husband who had lost his job and harassed her throughout her life. When I spoke with Marathe's daughter over the telephone, she confirmed that her husband would not want to share his mother's life story. The complex interplay between female sexuality, women as symbolic of family honor and men as the protectors/gatekeepers of women's memories raises troubling questions for women's histories. If as Forbes (2003) argues, locating and preserving documents related to women is a first step in reconstructing women's histories, it is important to examine the role of the family and/or community in maintaining access to these documents. In the context of Anandibai's work, I often wondered whether it would have been easier to find her books and other related documents if she had her own child. Her extended family had retained some of her memories but not her work. Alternately, would it have been more difficult to get information about her life if it had been her children sharing the information with me? To illustrate this point, I refer to a statement made by her nephew during my conversation with him, that although she passed away at the age of 90, she was ready for death/tired of living much earlier. He mentioned a letter that she had written to her editor<sup>16</sup> at the age of 75 expressing her desire for death to come. And since such information cannot not be found in conventional archives, my point here is to draw attention to the fact that the domestic space and relationships play an important role in determining the access to and preservation of women's histories. Conversely, the family might also play an important role in preventing access to or even destroying such histories.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Counternarratives of Gender, Sexuality and Conjuality in Unmilan***

I use a social history rather than a literary lens to examine Anandibai's novel *Unmilan*. In analyzing Anandibai's work as a counternarrative, I acknowledge my own feminist inclinations in reading her work as resistant. At the same time, I argue that Anandibai herself envisioned a new social and moral order by challenging the existing norms of gender and sexuality. To that extent, she herself inserted resistance to dominant narratives in her work.<sup>18</sup> However the distance between generations in the reading of the novel became apparent when my mother, with whom I did a first reading of the novel, interpreted it differently than me. She saw the heroine's transgression as indiscretion – not rebellion – and instead wept for the hero. That *Unmilan* provides a counternarrative to dominant norms of gender and sexuality is spelled out by Anandibai herself in the preface. She characterizes the content of the novel as “bold” and wonders how well it will be received by her readers. This boldness refers to the “transgressive” behavior of a married woman and its consequences, and draws attention to society's double standard with regard to male and female sexualities. And while Anandibai questions and challenges this double standard in several places in the novel, I argue that she goes beyond to provide an alternate vision of a new moral and social order than is contingent on the reconfiguration of gender norms and relationships.

In his preface to the novel, playwright and director Vasudev Vaman Bhole argues that Anandibai's work is not merely a product of ambition and imagination but rather is imbued with a keen sense of social realities, which reflects her astute observation of the society around her. He identifies this as characteristic of both her novels on women's

lives: *Urmila* and *Unmilan*. Like Kosambi (2012, Bhole observes that when compared with the writings of male novelists of the time, novels by women are characterized by a deeper understanding of female lives. According to him, much of the literature by women differs in their basic intent and motivation from the works of male authors of the time.

Published in 1956, *Unmilan*<sup>19</sup> is Anandibai's second novel about issues surrounding women's lives. Her first work *Urmila* must have been published between 1936 and 1939, at least sixteen years before *Unmilan*. Comparing the two novels, Bhole remarks:

Anandibai's novel *Urmila* presents both the issues surrounding women's lives and the need for rural reforms. And although it focuses on the development of characters [of the novel] overall it deals with issues and concerns. *Unmilan* [on the other hand] does represent her devotion to women's lives and issues but it focuses especially on the character sketch of the main protagonists and so in my view it is a "Character Novel." And if this perception of mine is right, then she has conquered yet another step in her progress [as a writer], for now instead of being stuck on issues or [social] questions, it seems that she is being drawn, more and more, towards character sketches. [So] naturally this novel surpasses *Urmila*. I know and acknowledge that there are some natural limits to Anandibai's writing skills and her field of experience. But despite these limitations, I want to say that her progress in the field of novel writing is noteworthy. Her characterizations of Chandrashekhar, Vidula and Parag are sympathetic, harmonious and to a great extent, logical.

In the following pages, I examine Anandibai's exploration of gender, sexuality and conjugality in the context of modernity in independent India.

The plot of the novel briefly is this: Vidula is a parentless young woman, living with her brother's family. Despite his limited means, Vidula's brother has assented to send his sister to college per her wishes. Vidula's pursuance of a Bachelor of Arts degree is not only her means to an independent and self-reliant life, but also a way of easing her brother's burden. In college, she is attracted to a rich and good looking young man, Parag, and their acquaintance transforms into love. A parallel narrative tells the story of Chandrashekhar, a renowned lawyer and a self-made person. Having lost his parents early in life, his struggles have taught him that hard work and dedication can overcome all adversities in life. Due to the dire circumstances of his poor, ill, and dying sister, he is left in charge of her daughter, Lily. Vidula takes up a job as Lily's tutor, in an effort to support her brother financially. On the one hand, the love between Parag and Vidula intensifies; on the other Chandrashekhar realizes his attraction towards Vidula.

That summer while Parag is away visiting his family, an unprecedented incident, and several misunderstandings result in Vidula's marriage to Chandrashekhar. But just after the wedding she finds a letter from Parag explaining his long absence from her life. Vidula blames herself for upholding some misguided notion of self-sacrifice and agreeing to marry Chandrashekhar. Angry and disappointed she confronts Chandrashekhar with the accusation that she was forced to marry him in return for his help towards her family. She tells him that she does not love him and that he has merely bought her like a slave with the money that he gave her brother to help him out of false charges of theft. She will



be his wife, she says, since she is bound to him by marriage but he will never be able to acquire her affection or her love. Chandrashekhar on his part is shocked and dejected. He assures Vidula that she will never be forced to do anything against her will. He guarantees her complete independence – of movement, association and behavior. He even offers to give her a divorce if she so wished.

When Parag returns for a new academic year and learns about Vidula's marriage, he is angry and devastated but unwilling to let go of her. The narrative captures the complexities of Vidula's love for Parag and her concern about societal norms, which she willingly and unwillingly challenges and breaks on many occasions throughout the novel. While Vidula continues to stay in Chandrashekhar's house, Parag continues to visit her, often for long periods and at odd hours. When her association with Parag begins fetching too much criticism from the people around her, she decides to elope with him. They travel to Mumbai where they meet a friend of Parag's from his hometown, who works in Kerala and is travelling there with his new wife. Parag and Vidula decide to join them since no one in Kerala knows them and they would be safe from public criticism. They are in Kerala for almost four months before Parag's father, having discovered his whereabouts, comes to fetch him. He reprimands Parag for "removing" a married woman from her home, and criticizes Vidula for being a whore who had stolen his son from his family. His criticism of Vidula, of course, is more extensive and poignant than that of his own son. It was her fault that Parag had become so senseless in love. A huge debate ensues at the end of which Vidula tells Parag that she sets him free, and that in his state of freedom and autonomy, he should do what he thinks is right. The father takes his hand

and yanks him away and like an obedient child, Parag follows him, never once looking back at Vidula who remains stranded in an unfamiliar part of the country with little money to survive.

She goes back to Mumbai to get a job and survive on her own. Her unfamiliarity with Mumbai lands her in the same *Pathikashram* – traveler’s lodge – where she and Parag had stayed before their departure to Kerala. There she runs into Lily and Chandrashekhar, who is visiting for work. In the final conversation between the two, Vidula repents for having put Chandrashekhar through such an ordeal, but he convinces her that in his eyes she has done nothing wrong. According to him she was only striving to lead a truthful life. If she believed that her love for Parag was true then following her heart was nothing but honest behavior. And although it had hurt him, it had not diminished his respect for her. He convinces her to return home, and as she rests her head on his shoulder and feels his embrace, the shadow of the eclipse that covered her heart is lifted.

From the beginning of the novel, Anandibai creates Vidula as a strong and fiercely independent woman. Her quest for education and work mirrors the support for women’s education in Baroda as discussed in the introduction. Anandibai’s narrative casts education as a way of attaining self-reliance for women, but also as way of regaining control over one’s desires, sexuality and destiny.

Through Vidula, Anandibai also challenges the double standard for men and women. As Vidula and Parag’s affection increases they go for long walks to the outskirts of the city, seeking out places where they can be alone. Vidula criticizes the dual standard

for men and women, for she has to worry about the society and how her association with Parag might affect her reputation. She is also unhappy that she has to be answerable to her family for her absence from home:

Sometimes she would be furious at the dependent nature of women's lives; at other times she would get angry at their helplessness. Since her birth a woman is forced to depend on her father, her brother, her husband, and later in life, her son. What kind of justice is this? The only way out of this was for women to be independent and succeed in life without any help from men. But then, she had seen even educated women willingly submit to dependence [on men]. (8-9)

Vidula's focus on her independence as her goal, especially through education, is evident from the following incident. When Parag professes his love for her and proposes marriage, he convinces her that they should wait until he graduates to get married. He could get a job, thus getting out from under his father's authority, and then they could marry without problem. Vidula suggests they should wait until she graduates too, to which Parag replies that it would mean three more years and instead she could continue to study after marriage. Vidula puts her foot down firmly and retorts: "Do not come between me and my ambitions." She views her education as a means to a life of independence and self-reliance. Parag's proposal is described as one of the most beautiful moments in her life, but love and desire fail to replace her strong ambition to study.

But more significantly, *Unmilan* strives to envision a new social and moral order for the modern times, one that recasts gender, sexuality and conjugality. Anandibai's emphasis, however, is on redefining masculinity rather than recasting femininity as an important requisite for a gender egalitarian social and domestic life. *Unmilan* represents

the tensions between “tradition” and “modernity” as they affected upper caste women like Vidula. Historians have noted that the transition of India into modernity during colonialism and after independence raised troubling equations of gender and sexuality for women, especially of the upper castes and middle-class. For instance, Sanjay Joshi (2012) in his work on colonial Lucknow has examined the reciprocal relationship between modernity and the middle-class. He defines the newly emergent middle class as belonging to the upper castes and as financially comfortable, but distinguished from the “richest strata of Indian society, such as the major hereditary landlords or the remnants of the indigenous aristocracy.” Modernity for this middle class meant developing “newer, modern forms of politics, culture, domesticity and religion,” by challenging certain traditional values and changing the “basis of social hierarchy” (30). However, since the middle class was comprised of the upper castes, holding on to certain traditional hierarchies was also necessary in order to maintain a distance from the lower castes. Such contradictory or “fragmented” nature of modernity is also visible in the context of gender relations. On the one hand, a modern social order called for equality of the sexes and the importance of women’s education; on the other hand, it held on to the hierarchy between the sexes within marriage as enforced through the ideal of *stridharma*. Therefore, even as modernity called for renewed gender relationships, it severely restricted the space for critiquing patriarchy. Attempting to reconcile tradition and modernity, this discourse created what Joshi calls “fractured” or fragmented modernity.

In a different but related way, Chatterjee (1990) and Kosambi (2012) have also identified the struggle between older and new old forms of patriarchy vis-à-vis upper

caste women in the context of modernity. Chatterjee has observed that the new forms of patriarchy under nationalism granted women access to certain aspects of the non-domestic like education and social reform but still retained the “patriarchal” essence of the gender system. Similarly, Kosambi argues that women’s access to the public spaces under colonial modernity was mediated by their access to what she calls “the modern male zones.” These were those “private” spaces to which women did not have access under older forms of patriarchy. Nonetheless, both old/new or tradition/modernity were essentially *patriarchies* (or patriarchal in nature). However Anandibai’s characterization of “new” or “modern” masculinity as represented through Chandrashekhar is one that critiques patriarchy and calls for gender equitable relationships as I discuss below.

*Unmilan* conveys the incompatibility of older forms of patriarchy as represented by feudal aristocracy with modern forms of gender relationships. The three key characters, Vidula, Chandrashekhar and Parag illustrate the tensions between a feudal aristocracy and the emergent middle class values – a conflict that is played out in the domain of desire and conjugality. Consciously or unconsciously, Anandibai creates Parag and Chandrashekhar’s characters as representing these two faces of Indian society. While both are from the upper caste Marathi-speaking CKP community, as evident from their last names, Parag is a *sardarputra*, the son of a Sardar (of a former Maratha kingdom in northern India), while Chandrashekhar, orphaned as a child, has struggled through his life to achieve fame and fortune through merit and hard work. Parag’s aristocracy renders him charming and desirable, while Chandrashekhar’s key attributes lie in his thoughts and action. Furthermore, Chandrashekhar’s virtues are not merely hollow words; they are

exemplified in his behavior. His actions depict his thoughts on equality of partners within marriage and of the freedom and autonomy of women within and outside marriage. While asking his secretary Bapurao to mediate a marriage proposal to Vidula's family, Chandrashekhar insists:

...Make inquiries only if the girl<sup>20</sup> [woman] is willing [to marry me]. Otherwise we do not go that route, alright? We do not want to impose ourselves on anyone.

Marriage [must] mean mutual happiness [of spouses], isn't it? (79)

Later, on realizing that Vidula's rejection of him is a result of her affection for another man, Chandrashekhar willingly and respectfully allows her the freedom to not only live in that house, which he believes is rightfully hers, and also does not prohibit her association with Parag. Through Chandrashekhar, Anandibai delineates the role that men need to play in order to transform gender relations. She emphasizes the role of a companionate marriage as the key to good marital relationships. When Vidula is convinced that her marriage to Chandrashekar is an arrangement which got her brother out of a difficult situation, she tells him that she will accept him as her husband, but he can never have her love, affection or admiration. Chandrashekhar on his part, not only admires Vidula for her truthfulness and straightforwardness, but when they both meet at the climax of the novel, he confesses that he has never stopped either loving her or admiring her. Thus, Anandibai's envisioning of a new social order is predicated upon a new moral order. Morality is not mindless adherence to dated norms of sexuality and behavior. Rather morality for a modern era is redefined as being true to one's feelings and desires, and doing what one thinks is right instead of following social dictates of

righteousness. Thus focus is shifted from society (and social norms) to the individual (and individual desires). But while Vidula's character is burdened with the task of redefining morality in this manner, it requires Chandrashekar's support and acceptance to be legitimated as such. In the end when Vidula is shown as repentant and ready to fall to Chandrashekar's feet after he acknowledges her as his love and his wife, it is Chandrashekar who becomes the mouthpiece for such changed morality: "You might think your behavior has violated social norms," he tells her, "But in my eyes you have been nothing but truthful. You have been striving to lead a life based on truth and honesty. And even though I was despondent, I hold nothing but respect for your character in my heart" (227). Through Vidula's character Anandibai accedes that women often have to end up compromising their values and thoughts in order to conform within a patriarchal society and culture. However, through Chandrashekar she points out that men have no such compulsions and should support women in challenging those norms that shackle women to men and their desires.

Anandibai also attempts to subvert gender constructions by turning the gaze onto the male. Unlike conventional love stories Vidula is never described as the object of desire. The gaze is instead turned on Parag as Vidula admires his dark, curly hair, his fair skin and his attractive features. In doing so, Anandibai grants her active sexual agency. Vidula's beauty, especially the physical description of her body is never offered up in the novel, even as her melodious voice is highlighted. Furthermore, contrary to conventional gender descriptions, Parag is depicted as weak minded and as governed by emotions. While Vidula is able to stand up to the problems that face her, Parag is thrown into a

frenzy of sorrow and despair when he learns about her marriage. Throughout the novel, Vidula is concerned that Parag might suffer mental anguish if she did not support him. In the end, he meekly walks away with his father like a child while Vidula continues to be the more determined character. At one level, Parag's character could be read as an instance of gender subversion or rather inversion. However, in the context of the studies on modernity, nationalism, and masculinity in India, I attempt another reading. Parag comes to symbolize a dying feudal aristocracy – its decline caused by its weakness and “effeminacy.” On the other hand, Chandrashekhhar and Vidula represent nationalist modernity characterized by strength of character, adoption of modern values and confidence in one's convictions. But although Chandrashekhhar and Vidula share some of the same values and convictions, Vidula's gender role at times compels her to feel weak, dependent and helpless despite her fiercely strong character. Therefore she vacillates between modernity and “tradition,” between independence/autonomy and dependence, especially on men, and between defiance against the institutions of marriage and the family and the traditional values that emphasize reverence to one's husband. And therefore Vidula's quest for a better society is rendered incomplete without Chandrashekhhar's unconditional support and love. Through Vidula's character, Anandibai creates the image of a new woman, who wants to play by her own rules, and often does, but in the end compromises with “traditional values” and submits to some form of patriarchy (as evidenced from her reaching to touch Chandrashekhhar's feet in the final scene). Parag's father symbolizes an older form of authority which is made synonymous with “traditional” patriarchy. But it is Chandrashekhhar who symbolizes ideal



modernity for India by challenging both older and new forms of patriarchy. It is noteworthy that both Chandrashekhhar and Parag console Vidula by claiming that they do not care about what the world thinks. However, while Parag's nonchalance is a consequence of his privileged social position, Chandrashekhhar's conviction is a result of his hardships and the lack of social support during his years of struggle. In the end, Anandibai shows how Chandrashekhhar retains his conviction in his beliefs as he accepts Vidula wholeheartedly and unconditionally. The old versus new ideas and ideals are yet again put in contrast. Anandibai thus envisions a modern society that is built upon values that emphasize education, compatibility in marriage, gender equality and transformation of social hierarchies. Just like Parag exits from Vidula's life without turning back, she hopes for old values to exit the modern society.

But Anandibai's Chandrashekhhar also departs from the figure of the middle class reformer – who symbolizes the new patriarchy – to the extent that he unconditionally dismantles gender hierarchies both within and outside the home. Whereas social reform and nationalism in India had envisioned modernity by making women central to the discourses on modernity (Chatterjee 1990; Sinha 1995; Bannerjee 2001), Anandibai (re)envisioned modernity by making masculinity and “reformed” male behavior and thought central to it. However establishing such modernity is contingent upon the distinction of the middle class from not only feudal aristocracy but also from lower castes/classes. Thus while Chandrashekhhar is elevated to the status of the ideal Indian male by his critique of patriarchy and his granting of unconditional freedom to Vidula, *Unmilan* also records the discontent and disapproval of his lower caste domestic help

towards his sensibilities and towards Vidula's freedom. For instance when Chandrashekhar refuses to react to Parag's daily and lengthy visits to Vidula at Chandrashekhar's home, Vidula overhears a conversation between the domestic help Shankar and Jayabai. Jayabai tells Shankar that her brother's wife also did not want to "remain married" [this is the closest meaning of the Marathi term *naandane*] to her brother, but her brother "took it out of her" [it is not clear whether the violence was verbal or physical] and she *had* to stay with him. Shankar responds by saying that it is different for the upper classes<sup>21</sup> also adding that "their master" should not give his wife so much freedom (*mokalepana*); there could not be another man as nice as him. Jayabai replies, "That's true, but how can he not be bothered by the criticism of an entire society? At such a time, one should renounce godliness and become a *rakshas* [monster]" (147). Chandrashekhar's modernity is thus defined by his distinction from both Parag's aristocracy and presumed "lower caste/class values" as embodied by the "servants."

In another bold move, Anandibai recasts female sexuality by dissociating it from purity and chastity. During their stay in Kerala Vidula notices Parag getting more anxious with each passing day to have a sexual relationship with Vidula. Vidula, on her part, feels uncomfortable since she is still married to another man. However, the fact that troubles her most is that since their travel from Baroda, she has been totally dependent on Parag. Neither does she have any money of her own, nor does she feel safe in this unknown place without his protection. Such dependence is a matter of much stress and suffocation for Vidula. Here again Anandibai defines Parag's behavior as starkly different from Chandrashekhar's. While Chandrashekhar was married to Vidula and had the "right" to

her body, he refuses to impose on her his relationship as her husband. Instead, he grants her the freedom that he think she deserves, and moves into a different part of the house, so that she does not even have to see him if she did not want to. On the other hand, Parag is defined through his desires for Vidula, even at the cost of her feelings. In a chapter titled “*Ulkapat*” or “falling star” Anandibai disguises a sexual encounter between Parag and Vidula.

“Vidula! Vidula!!” he cried out impassionedlly. She fell silent for a moment. As she raised her head, she saw a bright star descending fast from the heavens. Her heart sank. When the star was in the sky, it shone brightly and proudly. But now that it has fallen, it will forever remain a stone on earth. (191)

By describing their sex in this manner, Anandibai is not only able to incorporate a socially illegitimate sexual encounter in the novel, but its “invisibility” also makes it immaterial to the future relationship between Vidula and Chandrashekhar. In the end, Chandrashekhar does not have a “virgin” bride, thus rendering female sexual history unimportant to a mutually respectful relationship between the two. Through Chandrashekhar Anandibai demonstrates the futility of the values of purity and chastity for women. His own struggles have convinced him about the cruel, hypocritical nature of society. And now Vidula’s plight has highlighted the different standards that men and women are held to in society: “He felt sympathy for womankind. While Vidula would have to bear the harsh treatment from society, Parag who is guilty of betraying her would continue to live with his head held high” (216). Similarly, Vidula contemplates: “The world will blame me alone. Parag’s father will forgive him and the world will soon forget his offence. He will get married and spend his life as a respectable member of the society.

But I will continue to be remembered as the fallen woman who eloped with her lover, and people will continue to despise me” (203).

There are two aspects of the domestic in the context of gender that I have examined in this chapter. The first is the rethinking of the domestic as a space marked by gender equality, mutual respect and freedom for women both inside and outside of the home. Like much of the proto-feminist and feminist writings by women in India, Anandibai’s *Unmilan* also envisions a new social order by envisioning new forms of gender relations. Through Vidula’s and Chandrasekhar’s questioning of the double standards for men and women in society, Anandibai calls for changing social norms about gender. But the essence of her argument, which forms the heart of the plot of her novel, lies in the rethinking of gender vis-à-vis intimate relationships. She attempts to recast the home as a site of equality and of equal freedom of the spouses. It is within this revised domain of the home that Anandibai envisions new forms of conjugality and intimacy. The displacement of the social/outer in favor of self/interiority is significant in this context, because it is through changes within the self and within the home that Anandibai envisions a changed society.

In the context of this project, this chapter contributes to the investigation of domestic space as central to the formation, preservation and recovery of women’s histories. In narrating my experiences of trying to locate the life and writings of an author as well-known as Anandibai, I have tried to highlight the role of the family, of interpersonal relationships and of intergenerational memory in retracing women’s

histories. In examining *Unmilan*, I have also explored the political potential of the domestic space and of domestic relationship in bringing about a gender just social order.

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<sup>1</sup> On p. 36 the editors ask: “Our stress is on what forms the grain of these women’s struggles. How were they worlds shaped? we ask. How have they turned figures, plots, narratives, lyrical and fictional projects set up for different purposes to their use? With what cunning did they press into service objects coded into cultural significations indifferent or hostile to them? ... How did they avoid, question, play off, rewrite, transform or even undermine the projects set out for them?” (Tharu and Lalita 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Kosambi (1998b; 2007) uses the personal narratives of seven women to rethink the social history of Maharashtra. These women include Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924), Yashodabai Joshi (1868-1948), Kashibai Kanitkar (1861-1948), Anandibai Joshee (1865-1887), Anandibai Karve (1866-1950), Parvatibai Athavale (1870-1955) and Laxmibai Tilak (1868-1936). All these women belonged to the Chitpavan Brahman community: Kosambi (1998, 83) observes that “The chief reason for selecting this community is that the available personal narratives of women, dating from this period, belong almost entirely to this particular community.”

<sup>3</sup> I use the phrase “made famous for” because in mythological narratives, they are also defined as strong willed and independent women who challenged patriarchy in different ways: Sita, after having denounced by her husband, later refuses his request to come back to him and instead wills the earth to part and vanished therein. Sati defied both her father and her husband; while Savitri tricks Yama, the God of Death, and compels him to return her dead husband to life. However, the strength, independence and wit of these women has been replaced by one phrase “devotion to the husband.” As a caveat, I must also mention that such re-reading of mythology is not a way of valorizing an ancient Indian past because feminist scholars have already pointed out the dangers of doing it (see for instance, Chakravarti 1989) but merely to point out the patriarchal readings of women characters in Hindu mythology.

<sup>4</sup> Tharu and Lalita (1991, 6) contend, “There is no evidence to suggest that Muddupalani’s work was attacked or dismissed in her own times. The autobiographical prologue conventional in such works indicates that she was a respected poet and also accomplished in music and classical dance. It was not customary for male artists to dedicate their writings to a woman mentor, but Muddupalani records with pride that several works had been dedicated to her. she speaks of her beauty and of her learning with the directness and self-confidence of one who has never been required to be apologetic or coy, and records instances when she herself expressed her appreciation of other poets with gifts and money. If the honors and rewards bestowed on her by Pratapsimha [who ruled from 1739 to 1763], her royal patron, can be taken as a response of a contemporary reader, there can be no doubt that her work was truly appreciated in her own times.”

<sup>5</sup> Radhika or Radha is the lover of the cowherd god Krishna.

<sup>6</sup> In dramatic theory, this is one of the nine rasas or elements of feelings and denotes the erotic, seduction, romance and love.

<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, Tharu and Lalita (1991) note even he had to admit her literary genius: ‘there is no doubt that this woman’s poetry is soft and melodious, and that she is a scholar, well versed in the literature of Sanskrit and of Telugu.’

<sup>8</sup> See for instance, Kosambi’s (1998a) work on Vibhavari Shirurkar.

<sup>9</sup> When I wrote a first draft of this chapter in late 2012, the only available information about Anandibai’s life was through my interviews with her nephew Srikant Korde and with Sarojtai Mujumdar. I also found bits and pieces of her life in Bhole’s foreword to *Unmilan*. But other than that I was still trying to piece together her life history. I had read about the existence of her autobiography in a review of Marathi literature written by Prabhakar Machwe. However, my search for the same yielded no results. Later in a casual phone conversation with Shubhada Korde, who was also my participant (and I usually call my

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participants to stay in touch) I mentioned to her Anandibai's autobiography, to which she replied that there was one at a relative's home in Indore. She said that they were coming to Baroda for a visit in January (2013) and that she would ask them to bring it along. I assigned my parents the task of getting the book from her, scanning it using a scanner at home (since I would not trust photocopiers to care adequately for old books) and return it to her. When they finally got the "book" they informed me that it was actually a handwritten notebook. She had entitled it "Jeevandarshan" or "Glimpses of [My] Life." Shubhada Korde informed me that this relative who had the book intended to publish it and so it has been in their keep ever since. She did not remember how it went to Indore from Baroda. This biography is a result of all these sources. Reading her autobiography also helped me cast a different light on *Unmilan*. It helped me see the continuities and contrasts between her life and the experiences of her protagonist, Vidula.

<sup>10</sup> In her autobiography she mentions that when she won the J.J. School of Arts prize, she was encouraged to get trained as an Art teacher. But that meant that she would have to spend two years living alone in Mumbai. She says that on the one hand she herself was a timid woman and could not make herself go to Mumbai and live alone; on the other hand, she also knew that her mother would not allow her to go. Therefore she did not consider it and her training in Art remained incomplete.

<sup>11</sup> I found one book in the M.S. University Library and one at the Oriental Institute

<sup>12</sup> Akkasaheb was the princess of Sangli.

<sup>13</sup> Under the Maratha rule, Sardar was a title given to personnel fulfilling important military and other aristocratic functions.

<sup>14</sup> She also informed me that she had lent Anandibai's books to a professor of Marathi in Baroda a few days ago, who was tracing the literary history of Baroda.

<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere I have identified "memory of fondness" between women as a methodological tool in the writing of women's history. I emphasize the role of intergenerational memory of affection and admiration between women, and argue for considering the relationships of love, friendship and affection between women as an important archival source for the retrieval of women's histories (Chitnis 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Shrikant Korde did not remember the name of this editor.

<sup>17</sup> I am grateful to Amber Abbas for highlighting this aspect as evidenced through her own research.

<sup>18</sup> This point is also argued by Kosambi (2012) in the context of other women writers writing about gender in pre-independence India.

<sup>19</sup> Molesworth and Pamanji (1893, 63) define *Unmilan* as "opening or expanding (of eyes, a flower)" or "opening or uncovering (of an eclipse)."

<sup>20</sup> The term "girl's" is used here as a literal translation of the word "mulichi." In Marathi the term "mulgi" (girl) is used instead of "bai" (woman, often older) to identify a young woman in the context of marriage.

<sup>21</sup> He uses the word "paandharpesha" which according to Molesworth (1893, 503) means "a comprehensive term for higher classes" especially to distinguish them from "mere cultivators." Upper classes here implied higher and middle castes which are not poor or in servitude of others. Examples include the Brahmins, Prabhus, metal smiths, carpenters, etc.

### **Conclusion: Inserting Domesticity into the Study of Caste**

In 2005 I attended a colloquium on cultural studies at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) in Hyderabad, where the influential Dalit scholar Gopal Guru addressed a largely feminist audience. His appeal was that we need to acknowledge the ways in which upper caste “housewives” contribute to the continuation of caste exploitation. He contended that in the daily interactions between upper caste women, and lower caste men and women, who provide various forms of labor for upper caste households, patterns of caste exploitation and humiliation are replicated. In examining the narratives as a part of this project, and other feminist literature that has been written on the subject since (for instance Rege 2006), I now understand the urgency of Guru’s argument: that caste (and gender) inequalities are reproduced and multiplied in the domestic sphere and through domestic interactions. Therefore, even as caste has become salient in the Indian public-political discourse, the inequalities and discriminations based on caste have not declined.

In this project I have identified the domestic sphere and the ideology of domesticity as key institutions that uphold the inequalities of caste. Feminist and anti-caste scholars have identified, through different analyses, the centrality of the domestic sphere to the creation and reproduction of caste and/or gender inequalities. However, in

the context of the changes envisioned to address caste-based violence, exploitation and discrimination, these discourses have emphasized largely, if not solely, the public-political sphere. This is despite the fact that most anti-caste discourses in Indian history have identified the primacy of private sphere and relationships to both caste and gender based discrimination (O'Hanlon 1976 and 1985; S. Anandhi 2003; Sreenivas 2008). In these anti-caste discourses, caste was viewed as a social and cultural aspect of Indian society, and therefore the desired changes in the system were sought in social, personal and intimate aspects of the lives of people. In saying this I do not mean to suggest that there were no economic or political implication of the social disabilities associated with caste. This also does not mean that the anti-caste discourses did not acknowledge the importance of economic and political changes vis-à-vis caste. Rather I argue that although anti-caste discourses sought to create a relationship between cultural and political aspects of caste, social change or reform of relationships within the domestic sphere were seen as the basis of political change.

The developments in Indian society and polity in the 1990s reorganized caste in the public-political sphere in unprecedented ways. Decades of anti-caste movements had culminated in the formation of caste as a source of political identity, and the basis of demands for social, economic and political resources for the lower castes. It signaled the failure of a social reform approach in changing the attitudes towards caste in the absence of tangible economic and political changes. But while this movement brought about the much needed changes in the law and polity of India (for instance, emergence of caste-based political parties managed to change the composition of the Indian Parliament,



which had been dominated by upper castes and classes, in favor of lower castes and classes), these developments removed the discourse of caste from the domestic into the public. Furthermore, the epistemology of caste mirrored this shift from socio-cultural to political such that while anti-caste challenges in public-political discourse began to be incorporated within the understandings of caste, those aspects that were not reflected in these discourses remained within the domain of the empirical. There are two arguments that I make in this context: first, that it would be erroneous to see the public-political discourses on caste as divorced from socio-cultural and vice versa; and second, that in privileging political identities and discourses on caste, we have managed to lose the tradition of conducting anti-caste discourses through domestic spaces and relationships, where caste discriminations and inequalities continue to be reproduced daily. It is within this context that I position the contributions of my work. In identifying domesticity and the domestic as an important site upon which caste and gender inequalities are created and recreated, I argue for the incorporation of the institutions of the family, marriage, (women's) labor, sexuality and domesticity within the purview of contemporary caste (and anti-caste) theories.

In this project I have observed that while feminist scholars have highlighted the centrality of caste in the subordination of women within domestic spaces and relationships, we have not accounted for the ways in which caste-based inequalities are sustained through the normalization of domestic relationships and domesticity. In turning the focus of caste analyses from the public-political sphere to the domestic, I envision a new direction for the study of both caste and gender patriarchies. In suggesting this shift

in focus, I do not imply that political discourses on caste have been fruitless in changing the political and epistemological conditions of the lower castes, but rather to argue that in the absence of an engagement with the domestic sphere, these changes have been only partially successful. To highlight domesticity as an element of caste is not to withdraw from the public-political discourses of caste, but rather to combine them with those discourses that define and inform caste relations in domestic spaces. Emphasizing domesticity as central to caste is to insist upon the political nature of domestic spaces and relationships. In the absence of an engagement with the domestic, political and economic gains of the lower castes have met with resentment and retaliation from the upper and middle castes. Thus, I argue, we require a social discourse that focuses on the domestic as much as the political in order to change the nature of caste-based discrimination and inequalities in India. In this context, I identify the institution of domesticity as the key which links gender and caste inequalities in domestic and non-domestic spheres. In inserting domesticity into the study of caste, this project stresses the interrelatedness of both (domesticity and caste) in organizing women's sexualities and their labors (in both domestic and non-domestic spaces).

This project began with the question, what does the incorporation of upper caste women's voices add to the theories of caste in India? Dalitbahujan feminist discourse has insisted that in order to understand the discriminatory and exclusionary nature of the caste system, caste should be made relevant to all female subject positions and subjectivities. It is only then that caste-based privileges as well as the patriarchal underpinnings of caste can be fully explored and exposed. Accordingly, this project

attempted to redefine upper caste female subjectivity as encumbered by both gender and caste. Using the life histories of women, I explored the ways in which my participants constructed specific gender and caste subjectivities in their narratives which center on domesticity. Accordingly, I identified domesticity as the uninvestigated component of caste. Each chapter explored a different but interconnected aspect of domesticity and the domestic, and examined the linkages between gender, caste, sexuality and labor as aspects of the ideology of domesticity. Feminist scholars have explored the relationship between domesticity (as an ideology) and the formation of class, racial and cultural differences, but its relationship to caste has remained unacknowledged and therefore, unexamined. I argue for the incorporation of domesticity in the understanding of caste differences. I recast the home/family/domestic as central to the organization of caste differences. Feminist scholarship on caste in India has demonstrated the primary relationship between caste and gender patriarchies. I further this argument by adding that it is through the ideology of domesticity organized first and foremost, but not exclusively, within the domestic sphere and through domestic relationships that these mutually reinforcing patriarchies are maintained.

In examining domesticity as a central organizing principle of caste in India, I explored how domesticity came to be reformulated vis-à-vis modernity during colonial and in early pre-independence India. The discourses that placed domesticity at the heart of Indian modernity also defined it through the bodies and lives of women, especially upper caste and middle-class women. Women's education, behavior and dress became as important to the restructuring of domesticity as changes in the home and familial

relationships. Importantly, the construction of a nationalist modern domesticity was constructed by creating the “Other” of the caste modern, the lower caste woman. Upper caste women’s access to non-domestic spaces was contingent on their adoption of appropriate femininity, which in turn was defined through appropriate domesticity. The social, economic and political changes that allowed upper caste women to access new opportunities (like education, employment and increased social mobility) also encumbered them by emphasizing domesticity as central to these opportunities. In contrasting modern Indian womanhood from Western womanhood, Indian nationalist discourse identified domesticity and the domestic as the essence of Indian womanhood. These notions of female interiority were then transferred on to the nation by positioning the Indian nation within the home, and as associated with femininity and domesticity. As I examined in Chapter 1, these notions of female interiority still continue to define femininity in globalized India. The ideology of domesticity governs ideas about women’s labor and sexualities. At the same time, consumption patterns under neoliberalism have enabled the continued reproduction of caste and class based inequalities within the home. The demands from upper caste women’s domestic labor, as seen in the narratives of my participants, are alleviated in contemporary contexts, and they have been transferred on to “servants” or domestic help, who are most often women from lower castes and classes. Thus, the interrelated nature of the patriarchies of caste and gender is reflected in the ideology of domesticity for upper caste women.

I defined domesticity as a specific arrangement of gender hierarchy which gives primacy to women’s association with domestic spaces and domestic relationships. It is a

way of organizing labor, resources and entitlements within the family. By essentializing domesticity as an element of gender, the ideology of domesticity works to appropriate women's physical, emotional and sexual labor. However, the material inequalities generated by domesticity are obfuscated by associating it with high symbolic worth. The ideology of domesticity thus, operates by constructing the images of "good" and "bad" women vis-à-vis their complicity in this patriarchal arrangement. Furthermore, as a function of caste, domesticity constructs the image of an idealized womanhood by juxtaposing the sexualities and labors of upper caste women with those of lower caste women. Thus, labor comes to bear differential symbolic worth based on the location within which it is performed. Upper caste women's labor within their own families generates a different set of questions about women's labor than the conditions of paid and unpaid labor for lower caste women. If upper caste women's work within the family is aimed at "status production" how do we reconcile the symbolic worth of this work and its economic worth? How do upper caste women's domesticities benefit from the institutionalization of caste differences and hierarchies? If upper caste (and middle-class) women's domesticity is dependent on the labor performed by lower caste women, how do we reconcile this with the disadvantages that domesticity, as an element of the institutionalization of gender, places on upper caste women? Domesticities and domestic work for upper caste women generate contrasting experiences and expectations. These contradictions are a result of the tensions between the demands that domesticity places on women and their desire for autonomous agency. When challenging domesticity becomes an important aspect of challenging gender inequalities, these contradictions arise out of

the fear of losing femininity, which is made inseparable from domesticity. This paradox is an important way in which caste patriarchy has been able to refine and redefine domesticity for upper caste women while keeping intact its gender and caste disadvantages.

In Chapter 3, I examined the ways in which domesticity for upper caste women is institutionalized through marriage. In addition to the institutionalization of women's labor, domesticity also institutionalizes women's sexualities. I examined the ways in which female sexuality is understood, represented and negotiated in the narratives of my participants. Even when there is an acknowledgement and validation of the presence of female desire, especially premarital, marriage is expected to be the direction and goal of this desire. Furthermore, the ideology of domesticity in the Indian context informs the ways in which marriage is associated with the family: marriage is not seen as a bond between two individuals but a relationship between families, even when love and desire between two individuals is seen as the basis of marriage. Domesticity also determines the relationship of women to the family and the caste community. The seamless incorporation of women into their marital families is contingent on their performance (literal and symbolic) of domesticity. It is for this reason that patriarchy's problem with independent or autonomous female desire (i.e. outside the framework of a marriage that is accepted by the family and the community) must also be seen as an aspect of the institutionalization of domesticity. Domesticity thus, is not only a function of women's labor but also of women's sexuality. It is about the specific arrangement of women's desire as much as it is about the organization of women's (unpaid and paid) labor.

At the same time, domesticity is also important in the construction of non-domestic spaces for women. I examined the ways in which domesticity informs women's access to and participation within the public-political sphere. I argued that women's participation in the non-domestic sphere is predicated upon their performance of femininity, defined as (and through) domesticity. The creation of female zones in both domestic and non-domestic spaces is defined through femininity understood as domesticity. Furthermore, domesticity determines the different ways in which women of different castes and classes are able to access the non-domestic sphere. "Respectable" domesticity for upper caste women is defined through a lack of similar domesticity for lower caste women, especially those who need to perform public labor for survival. The discourses of domesticity thus inform not only the domestic lives of women but also their presence in non-domestic spaces.

In a different but related aspect, I also examined the possibility of the domestic as the site of the production and preservation of women's histories. Feminist historians have demonstrated that since domesticity establishes the primacy of the home, being attentive to domestic processes, spaces and relationships forms an important aspect of the recovery of women's histories. In Chapter 5, I explored how women's relationships within the private sphere were central in recovering the work of Anandibai Jayawant. In addition, I have also highlighted the ways in which the domestic becomes the place of social, cultural and political fulfilment for women. By examining the fictional narrative of Anandibai Jayawant, I also examined her re-envisioning of the domestic as a site of freedom and mutual respect, especially between spouses. Anandibai taps into the political

potential of the domestic by calling for a change in familial and domestic relationship as the cornerstone of a gender just society.

It is for these reasons that I identify domesticity as a discourse that is essentially political in its intent. While caste has been problematized and attempted to be revised in and through the public-political sphere in contemporary India, the political aspects of domesticity which determine the everyday occurrences of gender and caste discrimination have been overlooked. I argue for the incorporation of these concerns within the rethinking of caste, especially in its relationship with gender, in India.



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