Conflicting Ideals and Practices: Gender, Marriage and Norms within the Urban Middle Classes in Contemporary India

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Table of Content

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

CMIE – Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy

FLPR – Female Labour Force Participation Rate

GE – Gender Equality

GOI – Government of India

HR – Human Resource

IPC – Indian Penal Code

IT – Information Technology

MD – Managing Director

MRA – Male Research Assistant

NGO – Non Governmental Organisation

NSSO - National Sample Survey Organisation

PT – Part Time

QDA – Qualitative Data Analysis Software

WCD – Ministry of Women and Child Development

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how, why and with what implications, married men and women from the Bengali urban middle-class in Kolkata draw from discourses of gender equality and practise traditional gender norms at home.

The thesis will explore the implication of normative constraints placed on social actors, married men and women, when discourses of gender equality intersect with the practices of traditional gender norms within a patriarchal culture. Drawing from in depth interviews with married heterosexual men and women belonging to the Bengali urban middle-class in Kolkata, the thesis will analyse the process of drawing certain ideals from the discourses of gender equality within a patriarchal culture and its impact on the creation of a complex gender identity for married men and married women in contemporary India.

In a patrilineal kinship system, women make intimate relationships after marriage when entering the marital home, with the husband and his family, especially his mother and father. In this process, the marital home evolves as a site of resistance and negotiation for married women who belong to a class that professes certain egalitarian ideals by drawing from discourses of gender equality but place the normative expectation of caregiving on women and breadwinning on men.

Drawing from Bourdieu's theories of habitus, field and distinction, the thesis examines the processes through which practices that uphold the traditional gender norms at home persist even when women belonging to a culturally dominant class engage in passive resistance or question these patriarchal norms by drawing on certain ideals from discourses of gender equality.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Situating the study: Kolkata

"Englishmen, who came to Bengal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, carried two burdens: the 'white man's burden' of educating the unenlightened natives, and the 'man's burden' of emancipating native women from what they considered to be a socio-cultural milieu of utter ignorance and impurity. The latter burden came to be shared by the English-educated Bengali *bhadralok* of the nineteenth century (sons of absentee landlords, East India Company agents and traders who made fortunes in the eighteenth century, various professionals and government servants) all of whom, in spite of differences in economic and social status, were moving towards the development of certain common standards of behaviour and cultural norms." (Banerjee, 1989, p. 127)

The historic and contemporary capital of (West) Bengal, Kolkata[1] offers a fitting location for a study on intimate relationships among the Hindu urban middle-class Bengali. The reconstitution of patriarchies along the lines of class and gender in colonial Bengal continue to shape urban middle-class relationships through the process of modernising patriarchy in contemporary India (Sangari and Vaid, 1990). As Banerjee

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[1]Kolkata, previously known as Calcutta, was the capital of the British colony in India from 1772 -1910. It became the centre of mobilisation of the Indian freedom struggle movement against the colonial rule of the British. The state of Bengal was first partitioned in 1905 to break the momentum of the Indian freedom struggle movement, however, due to huge protests, the partition of Bengal was withdrawn by the British Empire and the capital of the colonial empire in India was changed from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. In 1947, when India gained independence from colonial rule, the state of Bengal was divided into West Bengal as a part of India and East Bengal as a part of Pakistan (now Bangladesh). To read more about the socio-political history of Bengal, refer to Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947 by Joya Chatterji (2002) and Modern India 1885–1947 by Sumit Sarkar (1989).

(1989) suggests, the making of the urban middle-class *bhadralok*[2] in Kolkata was a result of colonial influence which led to a breaking down of diverse local voices and creation of a hegemonic form of respectable modernity through the formation of the Bengali urban middle-class, especially men, who denounced their own culture to adopt the practices of their colonial rulers. The class politics of the Hindu urban middle-class, to hold themselves distinct (Bourdieu, 1984) from working classes and Muslims by denouncing the latter's vulgar taste, led to the creation of dominant norms of respectable modernity which was an attempt by *bhadralok* men to modernise patriarchy (Chatterjee, 1990). The embodiment of norms of respectable modernity in urban middle women or *bhadramahilas*[3] became evident in the way they maintained their class distinction through how they dressed, restricted their movement in social spaces and the literature they read (Banerjee, 1989).

The colonial norm of respectable modernity transformed into respectable femininity with the restructuring of the Indian economy in the early 1990s. This restructuring was a result of neoliberalisation which created the normative expectation for women to enter the paid workforce but also achieve feminine respectability by prioritising family over career (Radhakrishnan and Solari, 2015). The norms of respectable femininity continue to reshape women's lives in contemporary India. This study will help in understanding how historically sedimented socio-cultural norms interact with norms of respectable femininity and continue to bear upon the reconstitution of gender relations within the urban middle-class Bengali families living in Kolkata.

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[2] The word *bhadro* in Bengali or Bangla language means respectable and *lok* means man. Thus, *bhadralok* is an obeisance bestowed by the society to acknowledge their collective respect for this group and their aspiration to belong to the same. Usually, urban middle-class men are referred to as the *bhadralok*; but it can be used interchangeably to mean this class as a whole.

[3] The educated wives and daughters of the *bhadralok* or the urban middle-class Bengali men (Sangari and Vaid, 1990).

1.2 Gender, marriage and norms in contemporary India

Songsar sukher hoye romonir gune[4]

- *A Bengali proverb*

This proverb creates a temporal bridge between contemporary Kolkata and its colonial past as Bengali proverbs like the one mentioned above have been in use for centuries. The proverb identifies a normative expectation that Bengali women are expected to fulfil when they marry to perform the primary caregiving role within their marital family[5]. The continued usage of such proverbs contextualises the need for critically analysing gender relations in intimate spaces to understand the way in which gender hierarchies are embedded in everyday practices of Bengali middle-class households in Kolkata.

In contemporary India, research related to marriage and women's role within the family has started to gain interest in the recent past (Desai and Andrist, 2010; Nandy, 2017; Yeung, Desai, and Jones, 2018). However, the perpetuation of traditional gender norms within a social institution like marriage is still an under-researched area especially in urban middle-class families, where women have attained social and cultural capital, though belonging to a socially dominant class, engaging in paid work and attaining high levels of education.

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[4] The English translation of this Bengali proverb is *it is women who have the ability to transform the home into an abode of prosperity*.
Here, I have translated the Bengali word *songsar* as home. However, in the context of its usage in Bengali (or *Bangla*) language, this term is more expansive in nature; from chapter two onwards, where I introduce the concept of *domestic field* in section 2.1.1, this term may be interpreted as an exact Bengali translation of the concept of *domestic field*.

[5] Patrilineal kinship structure is most prevalent in South Asia. In such a kinship system, women move in with the husband's family after marriage and the family structure is organised through the male line of descent. Throughout the thesis, I refer to this family set up as the marital family.
It is important to note that there exists a family set up where married women live with their husbands alone but near the husband's kin, sometimes in different floors of the same building, such a family structure is called patrilocal (Dube, 1997). In common parlance, patrilocal residence is commonly referred to as a nuclear family.

Purkayashta et al. (2003) has broadly categorised gender based research in India into three categories. First, historical analysis of women's position during India's colonial period including the years leading up to India's freedom from the British empire and the partition of India (Murshid, 1983; Bagchi, 1990; Sangari and Vaid, 1990; Butalia, 1993; Chakravarti, 1993; Raychaudhuri, 2000; Sangari, 2001; Sarkar, 2003; Borthwick, 2015). The research in this first category analyses the role of women, especially Bengali elite women, in colonial India and the impact of social reforms on their position in the society. The historicity of gender roles for middle-class women in colonial India highlighted in these studies is instrumental in informing research on women's role within contemporary Indian society. Due to the gap in literature on gendered lives of middle-class Bengali women post India's independence, this current research has gained critical insight from the rich historical research analysing women's role in colonial India.

The second category identified by Purkayashta et al. (2003) is case study based research focussing on the analysis of specific cases of violence and caste based atrocities towards women (Kannabiran, 1996; Rao, 1999; Dutta and Sircar, 2013; Roychowdhury, 2013). Though, violence against women is not the focus of this research, these studies have helped in informing the extent to which Indian women may not resist against oppression. The third category identified by Purkayashta et al. (2003) was quantitative analysis in the area of feminist economics especially issues related to women empowerment and gender equality (Agarwal, 1994; Drèze and Sen , 1997; Garikipati, 2008; Kishor and Gupta, 2009; Hirway, 2012). These macro level studies have helped in situating this research within the larger debates that exist regarding gender justice in India, like the need for women's education and the falling rate of women's participation in the workforce.

Analysis of visible incidences of patriarchal injustices like child marriage, female foeticide and declining work force participation have dominated the gender discourse in this region

(George and Dahiya, 1998; Aravamudan, 2007; Ghosh, 2011; Hirway, 2012). Such studies are significant as they help foreground this current research which studies the invisible barriers that are not directly observable but are significant in shaping men and women's gender identities and may contribute to the persistence of inequalities in gender relations, mainly through the practice of traditional cultural norms. Recent literature on the persistence of gender inequality in South Asia suggests that these invisible normative barriers need to be critically analysed to understand the persistence on inequality in gender relations in contemporary India (Deshpande and Kabeer, 2019; Jayachandran, 2021).

I argue that these understudied invisible barriers may influence the perpetuation of visibly unjust practices like child marriage and the decline in women's workforce participation. Urban middle class women who are engaged in paid work are in decision making positions[6] in their communities and workplaces, and their opinions can help initiate policy discourses on invisible barriers that women negotiate with within their everyday lives. Understanding the processes that shape the lives of women who are already highly educated, engaged in paid work and who belong to a dominant cultural class with 'hegemonic aspirations' (Fernandes and Heller, 2006, p. 495) will help in addressing the nuanced way in which patriarchy reconstitutes itself in heterosexual gender relations.

The urban middle-class *bhadralok* is a historically and culturally dominant group in Kolkata (Dutta, 1999; Shabnam, 2018). Most of the studies analysing the culturally dominant *bhadralok* class or the Bengali middle-classes have been done from a political perspective (Dasgupta, 2000; Gupta, 2000, 2010) but very rarely from the perspective of analysing the intersection of middle-class respectability with gender (for an exception see Donner, 2008). My study bridges this gap in the literature by critically analysing the everyday practices

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[6]Social activists, employed in government bodies, local organisations, media houses, non-governmental organisations (charity) and so on.

within the Bengali urban middle-class families in Kolkata to understand the processes through which gender relations are reshaped by discourses of gender equality and neo-liberal patriarchal domestic arrangements.

1.3 Significance of this research

Globally, the shared structural feature of neo-liberalism is the prevailing tensions between ideologies of women's empowerment and material conditions which place the expectation of domestic work on women, leading to a contradiction for women who are engaged in paid work (Radhakrishnan and Solari, 2015). For middle-class women, the burden of meeting normative expectations of intensive mothering and caregiving leads to prioritisation of care work over career, which then leads to greater dependence on the male breadwinner (Stone and Lovejoy, 2004; Correll, Benard and Paik, 2007).

Moreover, the co-existence of competing discourses of tradition and modernity since India's independence added more complexity to the middle-class gender habitus, with liberalisation debates around women's position in the society strengthened especially in the media as women were seen to be equipped with possibilities for resistance by gaining greater access to the public sphere (Thapan, 2001). Scholars studying middle-class and gender in South Asia agree on the influence of media discourse and English education in the production of a new global culture represented by the elite women who are liberated, cosmopolitan and part of a global culture yet rooted in traditions of the respectable Indian family (Munshi, 1998; Chaudhuri, 2000, 2001; Thapan, 2001; Radhakrishnan, 2008b). Chaudhuri (2000) who studied the how media in neoliberal India make meaning of the gender equality discourse in the late 1990s found that when feminist ideals enter the public discourse in India, they "tend to change their meaning and emphasis as they travel" (2000, p. 280). There was a conflict in understanding what feminism was supposed to represent and Chaudhuri (2000) found that there were two versions of feminism presented by the media, one was 'freedom of choice'

that underpinned the discourse in expensive magazines read by the elite and the other was 'traditional feminism' which was found in majority of the print publications. The discourse of freedom of choice was related to the "dissemination of a concept of selfhood defined by choice and consumption" and therefore, "articulate the upper- and aspirant upper-middle-class desire to break away from where a past public discourse spoke of thrift and of obligations to society- now perceived as an obstruction to the individual's desires and potential" (Chaudhuri, 2000, p. 268). This media discourse of freedom of choice can be linked to the academic discourse on "transformation of intimacy" (Giddens,1992:95) in which Giddens argues that gender equality would result from the intimacy between a couple who would disclose their innermost individual selves to each other as well as solve problems together and embrace each other's individuality (Giddens, 1992).

On the other hand traditional feminist discourse in Indian media, according to Chaudhuri (2000), was a result of many factors combined. First, 25 years of the women's movement had made a significant impact on the public policy discourse in India. Second, the Hindu rights resurgence during the early 1990s which disavowed western feminist ideals that went against the traditional family ideal (Jeffery and Jeffery, 2006; Jeffery, Jeffrey and Jeffery, 2008; Still, 2011). Third, the already pre-existing discourse on traditional female ideals which was a result of nationalist freedom struggle against the colonial regime (Sangari and Vaid, 1990). Finally, the backlash against the women's movement in India which was feared to break down the patrilineal multi-generational family structure and create a shift towards western family systems (Agarwal, 1994; Dube, 1997). This discourse of traditional feminism posited itself as authentic and traditional while western feminism which was represented as false (Chaudhuri, 2000). According to Foucault:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms

and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

The regime of truth in the context of gender discourse in India is complex. In order to perform their gender identity, middle-class men and women in India have to negotiate between borders of traditional versus modern, national versus global, individual versus family all at the same time (Puri, 1999; Chaudhuri, 2001; Liechty, 2003; Phadke, Khan and Ranade, 2011; Twamley, 2014; Twamley and Sidharth, 2019). Puri (1999) states that to negotiate such a complex discourse, women in the middle-classes believed more in the discourse of freedom of choice which would make way for upward social mobility and greater consumerism.

In neoliberal India where there is a visible rise in consumerist culture, there exists a social pressure to maintain a higher standard of living within urban middle-class families (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1995; Fernandes, 2006). Therefore, when selecting a bride, groom's families usually prefer a girl who is earning a living as the economic contribution of the daughter-in-law to the financial corpus of the family is seen as a profitable proposition. A bride's level of education is also seen as beneficial for urban middle-class families as educated women can perform their primary role by raising educated children, transferring cultural values and meeting the ideals of companionate marriage (Donner, 2008a; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Twamley, Pryce and Kielmann, 2012). In fact for Indian parents, educational achievement of girls has not only become a source of pride but also acts as a source of security against future uncertainties like domestic violence, divorce or widowhood (Ganguly-Scrase, 2003). Within an urban middle-class household, a wife's dedication toward housework, caring for the members of her marital home and upholding the family's tradition and honour is the only yardstick against which her worth within her marital family is

measured (Donner, 2016). Therefore, it has become a norm for working women to adapt themselves into the role of *dashobhuja*[7] when they marry and to accept that it is their primary responsibility to perform domestic chores and provide child care, regardless of their employment status. If they are employed, they perform the double shift (Hochschild and Machung, 1989) and thus gender hierarchies within the family remain mostly unchanged. Unlike women, men are highly valued in Indian society and within the family for their role as the breadwinner (Osella and Osella, 2006).

Existing literature on gender violence in India suggests that women may remain silent despite being subject to violence or discrimination, as they feel an obligation to protect the honour of their family (Ray, 1998; Radhakrishnan, 2009; Lahiri and Bandopadhyay, 2012; Ponniah, 2018). Moreover, the extent of familial violence amongst the upper echelons of the Indian society is largely underestimated as they use their wealth to protect their honourable status (Das, 1994).Thus, understanding invisible barriers that women negotiate within their everyday lives will help unpack the deep-rooted nature of patriarchal practices.

In contemporary India, being middle-class means espousing egalitarian beliefs and being open minded (Baviskar and Ray, 2011). Due to the wide-ranging influence of the urban middle-class over perpetuation of social norms and policy formulations (Gupta, 2000), the middle-class is an important demographic to study when it comes to critically analysing gender relations within the social institution of marriage. Through historiographical analysis, Indian feminist scholars Sangari and Vaid (1990) have pointed out that middle-class family ideals are significant enough to constrict Indian women's workforce participation, in general. Thus,

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[7] Married women are equated with Goddess Durga, a hindu goddess who has 10 hands, a cultural symbol for women's ability to multitask. From very early on young girls internalise the imagery of 10 hands of Goddess Durga as a culturally prescribed way of signifying women's natural ability to multi-task. Therefore, women's engagement in the paid workforce is culturally understood to be an extension of her multi-tasking ability and not recognized as additional labour. Such glorification might render women's labour within the domestic sphere as invisible.

analysing how middle-class family ideals are being reconstituted in contemporary India will not only help in understanding whether espousing egalitarian beliefs actually results in egalitarian practices within the family but will also help us to understand the normative constraints faced by women in Indian society as when engaged in paid work.

Despite the outward practice of empowering women, through supporting women's education, dominant traditional norms are perpetuated through the everyday discriminatory practices against married women within the homes of urban middle-class Bengali families in Kolkata (Chatterjee, 2014). Within urban middle-class Bengali families, the normative expectation of care work is placed on younger married women within the household (Donner, 2008a). Thus, there is a pressing need to critically analyse the socialised practices within urban middle-class Bengali families in Kolkata so that we can understand how class hegemony reconstitutes gender relations within the domestic sphere. By focusing on men and women belonging to urban middle-class Bengali families this study will address the complex process of negotiation and resistance that women in these families engage in within their everyday lives. By analysing the hetero-normative gender roles performed by married men and women at home this research provides an understanding of how their learned egalitarian ideology and contradictory normative practices impact the process through which women undertake the role of being a respectable middle-class wife.

1.4 Research Questions

1) How are gender relations in urban middle-class families in contemporary India being shaped by discourses of gender equality combined with traditional patriarchal practices within the family?

   a) How are discourses of gender equality reshaping ideals of equality of married women and their role within the family?

b) How are discourses of gender equality reshaping ideals of equality of married men and their role within the family?

c) What are the processes through which traditional gender roles within the family are being reconstituted by discourses of gender equality?

1.5 Outline of the thesis

This first chapter focused on the need for conducting this research and laid out the context, both academic and social, in which this research is situated. We began by understanding the historical processes that determine contemporary practices and how dominant norms continue to be reproduced through the everyday practices performed by social actors. I then explained the need to critically analyse the transformation of dominant cultural norms and how this can lead to a greater understanding of the complexity of constraints that women face in their everyday lives. Next I explained the need to critically analyse the middle-class practices from the perspective of gender relations in intimate spaces as a currently under studied, and illustrated how as the urban middle-class holds a hegemonic social position within contemporary Indian society (Baviskar and Ray, 2011) thus exerting influence on the practices of all other classes.

In chapter two, I review existing literature and lay out the theoretical underpinning of this study. I identify gaps in the literature, engage with the existing literature on the urban middle-class in India and explain how this research adds to this discussion. I also write about the socio-legal context in which this study is being undertaken as well as the existing literature on class and gender to explain the relevance of this research.

In chapter three, I explain the methodology that I used. I begin by situating myself in the research, and explain my reflexive position as a member of the group I am studying. I then lay out the methodology by locating myself within the research and framing the research within a feminist approach by providing a reflexive account at the stage of conception of the research

and during the collection and analysis of the data. For this study, in depth interviews of 30 men and 40 women were conducted in 2019, all participants were married and belonged to the urban middle-class in Kolkata. The women were all engaged in paid work. Lastly, I reflect upon the data analysis process and the writing up of the thesis.

Chapter four draws from women's accounts of their childhood and the process of socialisation and lays out the conflicting ideals and practices inscribed upon women's bodies. This chapter then analyses women's accounts of how they reconcile the contradiction between ideals and practices. This chapter adds to the literature in a nuanced way as it provides an understanding how social actors reconcile conflicts between ideals and practices depending on their position in the gender hierarchy within the family.

Chapter five analyses women's accounts of their lives after marriage and explores the ways in which they negotiate the normative expectations of their class and those of their marital family, resulting in women having to perform the double shift. This chapter helps us understand the acts of resistance through which women's habitus is shaped and restructured as they move through different phases of their married life.

Chapter six analyses the data collected from urban middle-class Bengali married men with a focus on men's narratives about women's position and men's own position in society. Thus, this chapter adds men's interpretation of women's position in the society which is largely missing from the evolving discourse of gender in South Asia. This chapter also highlights how men make sense of their own gender identity in contemporary India.

Chapter seven draws together all of the findings presented in this thesis. I discuss the significant contribution this research makes to the wider academic discourse on gender justice as well as discussing the theoretical implications and relevance of the findings in the different

substantive analysis chapters. Finally, I explain the limitations of this research and the course for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Habitus, Field and Agency

This thesis questions the perpetuation of traditional gendered practices in urban middle-class families in contemporary India. There is an interaction of traditional gendered practices with the overall structure of urban middle-class families living within neoliberal India. To theoretically frame the research problem I draw from Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) in which he discusses a social actor's habitus and the need to undertake empirical investigations to understand an individual's connection with the material and the social world (Maton, 2008).

Bourdieu wanted to explore how behaviour is not only a result of one's reflexive action but also influenced by the social structure inhabited by the social actor. He stated that he wanted to develop a way to study, "how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 65). The concept of habitus addresses how conflict between norms imposed by a social structure and individual agency can be reconciled. Habitus is 'a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a disposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 214), and a structure that 'at every moment structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences' (Bourdieu 1990: 60). Therefore, habitus explains the interaction of the structure with individual behaviour that together becomes a practice (Macarthur *et al.*, 2016).

Although feminist theorists have highlighted the fact that Bourdieu himself had very little to say about women or gender, they have identified the relevance of his theoretical contribution for feminist research (Moi, 1991; Lovell, 2000; McNay, 2000; Adkins, 2004; Lawler, 2004). Feminist theorist McNay (2000) discusses the scope of Bourdieu's habitus in explaining the complexity of gender identity formation, and relates the involvement of the individual's deep-

rooted investment in performing historically sedimented practices to explain how these practices are perpetuated long after social actors have surpassed their original social conditions such as women's access to higher education and engagement in paid work, as these original social conditions or tradtional gender hierarchy are embodied within the social actors living in a patriarchal culture. She says that the habitus "expresses the idea that bodily identity is not natural but involves the inscription of dominant social norms upon the body" (McNay, 2000, p. 25). Therefore, the concept of habitus helps in framing my study which questions the perpetuation of historically sedimented practices or traditional gender norms by women who have surpassed pre-existing social conditions by becoming highly educated and earning a living.

Indian sociologist Thapan (2006) extends the concept of habitus to the Indian postcolonial context. She suggests that within the concept of habitus lies the possibility for understanding reproduction and resistance when it comes to analysing gender relations. Thapan introduces the concept of postcolonial habitus to frame her research on English educated middle-class women's embodied identities in Indian society. She states that postcolonial habitus is "the dominant modality for the exercise of multiple subjectivities shaped by class, age, ethnicity and region" (Thapan, 2006, p. 199). Other Indian feminist sociologists have used the concept of habitus to understand the ways in which compliance and resistance operate together to reproduce the traditional gendered habitus in conjunction with class habitus (Palriwala, 1996; Kalpagam, 2000; Thapan, 2004; Vijayakumar, 2013).

Habitus consists of the unconscious embodied practices and behaviours which enable individuals and groups to make sense of self in a given place and in relation to those who share that place (Webber, 2018). Therefore, to understand how individual agency of married women within the family is determined in relation to the predisposition of the other members of their family, the in-laws and their husbands, habitus is important as a theoretical

framework. The concept of habitus helps to explain the predictability of social life, since it gives rise to new experiences based on the internalisation of previous occurrences and events (Maton, 2008).

McNay (2000) argues that linking habitus and its interplay with the rules of the field is central to the understanding of complex gender relations in contemporary society and that it helps explain the formation of gender identity as a complex process. A field is a boundaried social space with its own principles, in which actors struggle or compete to change or preserve its boundaries and form in line with the interests of those who dominate the field, such as within a family where social actors assume hierarchical positions on the basis of their individual capital and power. The objective conditions of a field thus structure the habitus, while at the same time the habitus is the basis for social agents' understanding of their lives, including the field. On one side habitus is a relation of conditioning where the field structures the habitus, and on the other side, habitus contributes in constituting the field as a meaningful world for those who inhabit it (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Bourdieu (1996) has identified that the family always operates as a *field*. Those with symbolic power within the field of family, like the hierarchical superior position of men in a patrilineal family structure and the power embodied within those who hold this position, struggle for conservation of the traditional symbolic power relations within the family. In the field of family, symbolically powerful social agents identify the inscribed norms of the field to conduct domestic relationships as common sense and thus this becomes the gendered habitus. In this thesis the family will be referred to as the *domestic field*. I identify the domestic field as the key field in this research by suggesting that the rules/norms governing the domestic home are distinct from those governing other fields.

When asked by Wacquant about how habitus and field are linked, Bourdieu suggests that "the habitus being the social embodied, it is "at home" in the field it inhabits, it perceives it

immediately as endowed with meaning and interest" (1992, p. 128). Thus, the habitus-field couplet provides a non-reductive account of power relations in which to situate agency (McNay, 2004). Lawler (2004) says that within the field, there is always an ongoing struggle to claim ownership of authority and capital. Thus, the concept of field and understanding the laws operating within each field is crucial to understanding acts of resistance, conflicts and constraints that exist within the field and to theoretically frame gender relations as lived social relations that are reproduced through resistance and negotiation between constraints and choices.In my research, I use habitus to emphasise the interaction between individual agency and structure, bringing micro-level (the individual practices) and macro-level (the traditional gender norms) factors together to explain the practices that are undertaken within the domestic field.

2.1.2 Respectability and distinction: A socially veiled existence

Lawler (2004) in her analysis on intersection of gender and middle-class distinction, mentions that, according to Bourdieu (1998), classes are produced and reproduced through divisions created by the acts of the members of the class. Bourdieu (1984) suggests, the bourgeoisie attempts to possess cultural capital in order to distinguish itself from other classes and assert their cultural dominance, which is similar to the way in which the urban middle-class in Kolkata distinguishes itself from the rest of the society. Traditionally, urban middle-class Bengali families in Kolkata have practised class distinction by focussing on accumulating educational and cultural capital (Ray, 2000).

A way in which urban middle-class Bengali publicly assert their cultural dominance is through *adda*[8], this is a distinct practice through which the middle-class *bhadralok* identity is performed (Chakrabarty, 1999; Chatterjee, 2014). In general terms, *adda* takes place when the

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[8]In Kolkata (earlier known as Calcutta), *adda* is a practice of friends getting together for long, informal conversations (Chakrabarty, 1999, p. 110) in public spaces, offices or at someone's home, although the term *adda* cannot be translated fully into English.

urban middle-class Bengali, mostly men, gather in public places to discuss and debate current events and social issues. Thus, presenting oneself in public as being knowledgeable and articulate about socio-political issues, being widely read and having culturally refined tastes is an essential part of claiming one's identity as an urban middle-class *bhadralok* (Sil, 2013). However, *adda* has been identified as a gendered practice dominated by men even when the *adda* takes place at home in the presence of married women who are expected to serve food and care for the children while married men engage in *adda* (Chatterjee, 2014). Although in these families domestic chores are usually performed by domestic workers, who are also women, the domestic workers are closely monitored by the married women within the family. Thus, the normative expectation of care work mostly falls on women, whether it is respectable middle-class women or working class women (Ray, 2000).

The invisibility of middle-class respectable femininity within the Bourdeusian construction of class has led feminists scholars to understand the construction of class in relation to the construction of gender identity (Lovell, 2000; Skeggs, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand the process through which the habitus is generated not only along the lines of class but also gender. The discourse of respectability within the middle-class as a mode of distinction from other classes, especially working classes, has been well established in feminist interpretations of Bourdieu (Lawler, 2004; Skeggs, 2004). How working-class women in Britain expressed their femininity in an effort to identify themselves as a part of the middle-class forms the basis of Skeggs's (1997) work. She questions the lack of research on class and its interaction with gender in feminist discourse since class forms an integral part of one's identity. Social standing and belonging to a particular class create certain behavioural expectations for women as well as men, whether it is in the workplace, or the streets or one's home.

Skeggs (1997) concluded that for women, respectability was a burden that they had to carry throughout their life. Younger women carry it in the form of educational attainment and appearance and in later stages in life, they have to carry the added burden of domestic responsibility, including childcare, in order to maintain respectability. Lawler (2004) points out that gender is "one axis around which class distinctions are drawn and maintained" (2004, p. 110), this helps certain class identities like middle-class respectable femininity to be normalised and even emulated by other classes.

Indian sociologist MN Srinivas (1977) expanded his theory of *sankritization*[9] in his article 'The changing position of Indian women' to examine the intersection of class and caste with gender. He discussed how the rest of India emulates the behaviour of urban middle-class which is largely comprised of Hindu upper castes. Therefore, the position of urban middle-class women is the standard against which the rest of the women in the society align themselves (Srinivas, 1977). In a similar vein, Skeggs (1997) uses the Bourdeusian theory of class distinction to understand the practices of working-class women in Britain and writes of the process of dis-identification of working class women from belonging to the working-class, rather emulating the middle-class norms of respectable femininity to measure up to the standard set by the middle-class.

In contemporary India, a study on marriage practices in a Brahmin sub-caste of south India, Fuller and Narsimhan (2008) posit that for the upper castes, sub-caste endogamy is the norm, however the bride and groom look for personal compatibility, and the educational attainment

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[9] "The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible, and especially so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism, and by Sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins, and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden. This process has been called "Sanskritization" " - (Srinivas, 1952, p. 30).

and employment status of girls and boys seeking marriage is taken for granted. Therefore, the practice of traditional norms like endogamous marriages along with newer norms of high educational and successful career, influences the class and gendered habitus of the middle-class in India.

Other studies on respectable femininity have looked at women who work in the IT industry, who form the new urban middle-class and examine how norms of feminine respectability transform into women's workplaces (Radhakrishnan, 2009; Gupta, 2020). Being a respectable married woman in South Asia, belonging to the urban middle-class, involves abiding by the normative standards of femininity (like wearing a bindi and a sari on formal occasions), aesthetics (taste in cultural texts), caring (prioritising family responsibilities above everything else) and morals (maintaining the social standing or honour of her family) (Hussein, 2017). Despite women surpassing original socially restrictive conditions, an urban middle-class woman carries the normative expectation of middle-class respectability by always being accompanied by someone when she is in public after sunset (Phadke, 2007). She is bound by the respectable time by which she must return home lest she dishonour the name of her in-laws within society.

In her book 'Domestic Goddesses', Henrike Donner (2008a) used class distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) to explain the paradox of Bengali middle-class wives in Kolkata in the mid-1990s, who internalised the role of being adept at domestic chores and taking pride in never asking for help from her husband as well as upholding the family's honour. Thus, a Bengali urban middle-class wife becomes a living replica of the Hindu goddesses who have divine power to perform any impossible task. In the context of new middle-class Bangladeshi women, Hussein (2017, p. 4) also uses the concept of distinction to explore how women negotiate with binaries of respectable femininity (domestic responsibilities) and 'unrespectable practices (professional/personal aspiration)'. It is specifically due to this that women from these

families only find themselves seeking employment in professions that will provide flexible hours so they can return home before it gets dark, leaving them ample time to tend to the household chores so they can maintain boundaries of feminine respectability (Radhakrishnan, 2009).

In the south of India, Radhakrishnan (2009) found out that the neo liberal middle-class bestows respectability on stay at home mothers who choose family over employment after childbirth, and declining opportunities for promotion is lauded and considered as the respectable option. When women do have a moment to reflect upon their position in the family and in the society, they immediately console themselves that they are better off than women in lower socio-economic classes and in turn they are also consoled by the members of their social class.

In my study, I analyse the complexity in gender relations between married men and women in contemporary India who are engaged in paid work and are highly educated to understand the nuances in everyday lives of the urban middle-class who are normatively expected to maintain traditional gender roles within patrilineal kinship system while simultaneously pursuing the egalitarian ideals, of career and education, which is largely missing from the literature on gender in South Asia.

This study will help build on the work done by Donner (2008a), which studied gender roles within middle-class families in the 1990s when the process of transformation of the new Indian middle-class under neoliberal influences began, by finding the continuities and discontinuities in patriarchal traditions as well as including the voice of men in understanding the complexity of gender relations in contemporary India.

Radhakrishnan's (2009) work on middle-class respectable femininity was limited to the public sphere, this study will build on this body of knowledge by understanding the process through which middle-class gender identities are constructed within the domestic field.

Hussein's (2017) study focused on understanding the new middle-class-ness within Muslim women in Bangladesh and to what extent these women conformed to their role as the new woman, with personal aspirations and domestic responsibilities. My study provides a comparative look at the process through which middle-class identities are constructed within the Hindu middle-classes in India. Moreover, this study is based on understanding the perspectives of both men and women who have accepted the double shift undertaken by married women as a part of living in a highly consumerist society. Thus, I add to the literature on middle-class women in South Asia by taking an in depth look at the relationship between men and women's gendered habitus within the domestic field.

2.1.3 Socialisation and gender role

Feminist scholars who have critiqued socialisation have defined it broadly as "the process through which children are transformed into social beings who have taken on particular norms and values, and know what kind of behaviours are expected of them" (Stanley and Wise, 2002, p. 93). Stanley and Wise (2002) go on to explain how gender/sex roles are only a part of socialisation as a whole and gender/sex roles are directly related to the feminist concern of women's oppression. This is that aspect of socialisation through which children adopt roles that are binary in nature, either masculine or feminine.

Feminists have also criticised the heterosexist nature of socialised gender/sex roles (Stanley and Wise, 2002; Harding and Hintikka, 2003). Harding (1986) states that the critique against gender/sex role socialisation is the assumption made within sociology regarding the existence of a single society in which broad generalisations can be made about heterosexual married

life. She further states that it is therefore important to recognise that the within the same marriage there can be two different realities for the husband and the wife, thus, research on heterosexual marriages need to account for the differences in position and interests of both the husband and wife. This thesis has therefore weighed the criticism against using Socialisation theory as well as the implication of using the concept of gender role as defined within Socialisation Theory. In this thesis, I draw from Socialisation theory to talk about the reproduction of normative gender roles within the middle-class in India, like masculine role of the breadwinner and the feminine role of the caregiver.

Studies on men, masculinity, and its influence on gender roles in India are rare, especially when compared to the number of studies done on middle-class women and their gender roles in the last two decades. The limited research on Indian men in neoliberal India states that men bear as much pressure to conform to the masculine normative expectation of the breadwinner as women face to follow the feminine norm of the balancing act (Puri, 1999). The existing literature has identified that traditionally, norms of masculinity placed on men in Indian middle-classes expect them to be the authority and head of the family as well as be solely responsible for the economic wellbeing of the family (Das, 1994).

Osella and Osella (2006, p. 204), studying upper caste men in South India, have found that being 'real men' entails holding onto the role of being the primary breadwinner within the family. Jeffreys' (2008; 2010) extensive ethnographic study among lower-middle-class men in North India found that men use various strategies to negotiate with the normative masculine expectation of the breadwinner like engaging in higher education as they wait for opportunities to become the family's breadwinner. Twamley's (2014) transnational study on Gujarati men in India and the UK found that middle-class men in India preferred that their wives prioritise the home while they maintain their position as the head of the family.

This current research looks at this aspect of varied realities of everyday experiences within the family from the perspective of men, acknowledging that there may be possibilities for women to gain informal power within the family when men are also subject to conform to masculine normative expectations to maintain their role as the breadwinner and head of the family. Thus, this research helps to further our understanding of the strategies, negotiations and possibilities that emerge within everyday contexts for married men and women in middle-class Bengali families.

2.2 Heterosexuality and intimate relationships

Feminist theorist Ingraham (1994) has argued against the consideration of Gender as the only organising institution in feminist research. Instead, Ingraham argues for the development of feminist discourse that identifies institutionalised heterosexuality as an organising institution of everyday life in research related to family, marriage and sexual violence. According to Ingraham (2002), institutionalised heterosexuality is "an arrangement involving large numbers of people whose behaviour is guided by norms and rules" (2002, p. 74) and therefore it can also be considered as a social institution. This heteronormative arrangement creates complexity in the everyday life of people who do not identify with this normative arrangement, yet they must "negotiate a nexus of norms which ignore, marginalise or confer recognition. Thus, norms of recognition function to produce and de-produce the notion of the human" (King, Santos and Crowhurst, 2017, p. 52). The world of intimate relations is therefore organised by institutionalised heterosexuality where sexual diversity may have greater acceptance than before, but the ideal of the heterosexual couple remains the normative representation of an adult intimate relationship (Jackson and Scott, 2016; Roseneil *et al.*, 2020).

When it comes to the practice of intimate heterosexual relationships, Jamieson (2011) defines this practice as a way of "giving to, sharing with, spending time with, knowing, practically caring for, feeling attachment to, expressing affection for" where each of these practices produce intimacy. Moreover, feminist researchers have argued that due to the influence exerted by institutionalised heterosexuality in everyday life, gender inequalities may persist alongside intimacy in adult relationships (Jamieson, 1999, 2011; Orgad, 2019).

When it comes to practices of intimacy in various cultures around the world, it has been observed that in Asian cultures such practices take on a very different form than European cultures (Jamieson, 2011; Twamley, 2012, 2014). Rising consumerism in Asian cultures and the influence of western family practices have led young people to adopt a middle path by following the traditional practice of taking collective responsibility of the elders in the family but also break away from tradition by committing to love marriages, instead of arranged marriages, as well as living in a nuclear set up, instead of living in three generational families (Croll, 2006; Quah, 2008).

Studies based in India also observe the increasing participation of young people in the selection of their spouses and the importance of conjugal love in making spousal choices when marrying (Donner, 2002; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Twamley, Pryce and Kielmann, 2012; Twamley, 2013; Twamley, Doucet and Schmidt, 2021). Thus, ideals of conjugality and persistent gender inequalities in intimate relationships create tension which is expressed in the ways in which gender asymmetry is reproduced in our everyday life (Jamieson, 1999; Jackson and Scott, 2016; Orgad, 2019).

For the middle-class in India, institutionalised heterosexuality influences the reproduction of gender relations in everyday life, and these relations are subject to hegemonic codes of normative masculinity and femininity. Puri's (1999) study of urban middle-class women in Mumbai and Delhi during the early 1990s showed how cultural norms about Indian

womanhood resulted in normalizing hegemonic codes of heterosexuality through the practice of respectable sexuality that influenced women's everyday lives. Phadke et al. (2011) found that women are bound by the cultural expectation of respectable femininity to abide by the respectable time for middle-class women to return home. Studies on middle-class women have concluded that women have to negotiate with the normative expectation of being respectably feminine in their everyday lives (Thapan, 2004; Radhakrishnan, 2008a; Belliappa, 2013). The current research helps to provide a deeper understanding of intimate relations given the normative constraints negotiated by the middle-classes in India.

2.3 Family, law and society in India

Family continues to form an integral part of South Asian women's lives and marriage in this region is not only a ritual that connects the bride and the groom but also their families (Ponniah, 2018). In a largely patrilocal[10] society, where women's well-being is greatly determined by the members of her family, and three or more generations are expected to remain in close contact (Dube, 1997).

Bourdieu has argued that the family is a privileged institution that plays a decisive role in maintaining the social order and reproducing traditional social relations with each generation (Bourdieu, 1996). The need to protect the family ideal in contemporary India where traditional gender hierarchy is resistant to change is a challenge with which feminist activists have to constantly negotiate (Gangoli, 2016). As recently as August 2021, a state high court[11] upheld section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which legalises marital rape. This section of the IPC has been legal since 1860, and it helps to maintain a gender hierarchy within the

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[10] Discussed in footnote five.

[11] In August 2021, Chhattisgarh High Court discharged a 37 year-old man accused of marital rape, the judge stated that since the complainant is legally wedded to the accused therefore sexual intercourse would not constitute as rape even if it is against her wishes. Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code states that, "sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape."

family by placing the husband in a symbolically superior position compared to the wife. The continued existence of patriarchal norms, which inscribes the normative expectation of protection of family honour on women's bodies through practices such as protecting women's virginity lead law enforcement agencies and other government agencies to continue to blame victims of rape (Menon and Allen, 2018).

Family as a social institution has long resisted legal interventions like the legalisation of women's right to inheritance, in an effort to maintain the traditional hierarchical social order (Agarwal, 2000). Legally, Hindu women in India were given equal right to inherit property from their natal family in 2005[12]. A recent study by Bhalotra et al. (2020) analysing the impact of this legal intervention on the dominant social norm to exclude daughters' inheritance rights in their natal home, found that rather than codifying women's right to inherit, the law instead led to increased incidence of female foeticide and further strengthened the prevalence of son preference in India[13].

Another social practice within the family which has been debated for its unjust nature and which perpetuates the custom of considering daughters as a burden is the practice of dowry[14]. The practice in India of giving dowry to the groom became prevalent during the colonial period with the formation of the urban English (language) educated middle-class men who held administrative positions in the British administration (Srinivas, 1984; Mani, 1989). A

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[12] In 2005, The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 replaced the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 to bestow equal rights to daughters like sons in allotment of ancestral inheritance. Previously married daughters did not have inheritance rights in the property that belonged to their natal family.

[13] It is important to note that there are different personal laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance in India for different religious communities like the Hindus, Muslims, Parsees and Christians. Since the focus of this study is on the Bengali urban Hindu middle-class, I will draw from Hindu laws.

[14] Modern practice of dowry giving in India is not equivalent to bride price in other cultures as in the case of the latter, the bride and the price move in opposite directions, but in the case of dowry giving, the bride and the dowry both move into the marital family. In India the practice of dowry giving was prohibited under Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Act, 1986, this act was amended several times before.

study by Srinivasan (2005) found that the legal prohibition of dowry giving was unable to prevent the practice. Rather, instead of voluntary gift giving, dowry continues as a dominant patriarchal norm that burdens parents who bear girl children, regardless of class, caste, and lead to further strengthening of preference for sons.

However, several changes have happened within the institution of the family, such as increase in the legal marital age [15] and women's participation in spouse selection in arranged marriages [16] (Desai and Andrist, 2010; Allendorf and Pandian, 2016), an increase in companionate marriages which can sometimes begin as an arranged marriage[17] and then turn to love (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Twamley, 2012, 2014) and changes in attitudes towards divorce with increasing rates of divorce (Thadathil and Sriram, 2020).

In the case of divorce, a complex problem arises for women as women's parents, in a patrilineal[18] kinship system, are normatively expected to end their obligation towards their daughters upon marriage. This lack of support from the natal family adds pressure on women to continue unsatisfactory marital relationships, and these constraints are reflected in the lower rate of divorce in India as compared to the global average (Dommaraju, 2016). Moreover, women living alone in India face considerable social stigma, which discourages women from pursuing divorce even if they are economically independent. Thus, women are socially constrained to remain dependent on men (Dommaraju, 2019). Studies in the global south have found that even among wealthy landowning classes, women remain deprived of

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[15]The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 was amended in 1978 and the marital age for both men and women was increased. At present, under this act, Hindu men are eligible to marry after they attain the age of 21 and Hindu women are eligible to marry after they attain the age of 18.

[16]Families of bride and groom arrange the marriage, it's mostly endogamous with marriages taking place within one's caste, class and religion.

[17]Marriage alliance made through a kin network with the involvement of bride and groom's parents and extended family.

[18] See footnote 5. It is important to note that in recent times the size of the family has reduced from a joint family, where three or more generations would live together. In contemporary India, middle-class families are usually constituted of the son, son's parents, his children and his wife.

immovable assets due to gender discriminatory practices in the distribution of inheritance, which passes onto men patrilineally thus making women further dependent on men due to the limited choices and resources available to women outside of marriage (Agarwal, 2000; Chung and Das Gupta, 2007; Field, 2007).

In a patrilineal kinship system where women locate themselves in their in-laws home after marriage, a complex gender dynamic ensues due to the bride's arrival in her new family. After marriage the young woman becomes a part of the husband's kin network and is expected to promote the interests of her husband's family (Srinivas, 1984). The power structure in patrilineal family systems is such that the most powerful authorities are the eldest members of the family, male or female, followed by the younger men and then younger women (Dube, 1997). The least power rests with the youngest bride and so young married women must accept their role as a multi-tasker in the marital home, a trade that has been described as the patriarchal bargain[19] (Kandiyoti, 1988). The bride not only has to negotiate with her partner but also his family members and the husband finds himself in a complex situation where his family members place the expectation of maintenance of the traditional gendered hierarchy on the bride as well as the groom. Therefore, not only the young brides but also their husbands are subject to the cultural norm of abiding by the wishes of the elders and accepting the gender hierarchy within the household as normative. This study fills a notably understudied aspect of gender relations in India by including data from married men which allows me to analyse the role of the husband in reproducing traditional gender roles within the family.

2.4 Women's empowerment and agency: Intimate empowerment

Empowerment is a contested term in gender studies. The concept of empowerment is embedded in the idea of power, and feminists have tried to reclaim the concept of power that

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[19]The term 'patriarchal bargain' as defined by Kandiyoti (1988) states that women bargain from a weaker position within the patriarchal family structure. Although they make a difficult compromise by accepting the set rules 'to which both the genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated' (pp. 286).

was traditionally understood to mean dominance and instead replace it with the idea of capacity building for those who are dominated (Hartsock, 1983). Power as an instrument of capacity building is the core idea of empowerment, and it is through empowerment that women come to recognize their ''power within'' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 438).

A burgeoning literature on women's empowerment has shown that when compared to women's position in the public sphere, women's position in the household and in intimate relationships has not undergone much change (Rowlands, 1997; Adato *et al.*, 2000; Sullivan, 2004). As men and women are engaged with each other through various social and familial relationships, it is critical to study the relational nature of empowerment as women are only empowered in relation to the people or groups whose lives intersect with theirs (Mason, 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

For many women, their marriage or domestic partnership is the most difficult place for them to negotiate gender responsibilities (Hochschild and Machung, 1989; Rowlands, 1997; Adato *et al.*, 2000; Murphy-Graham, 2010). Discourses on the empowerment of women has mostly been targeted toward policy reforms, which have been subject to statistical measurements of women's position in the public sphere, such as women's access to healthcare, education, employment, and their rate of survival amongst other such measures, and this is especially true when women must compete for limited resources that can be allocated to other causes as is often the case in less developed countries (Kabeer, 1999). While changes in policy demand quantification of empowerment, Kabeer has identified that there is a need to analyse the dynamics of power in gender relations that operate in "everyday life from a 'deeper' level of reality, one which is not evident in daily life because it is inscribed in the taken-for-granted rules, norms and customs within which everyday life is conducted" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 441).

The empowerment of women has largely dominated the gender discourse in India (Das, Kumar Singh and Pawar, 2010). For girls in South Asia even surviving till they are married is

considered a miracle due to the existence of son preference and female foeticide (Chowdhury and Patnaik, 2010). In fact, West Bengal has seen a significant rise in underage marriages among domestic workers in Kolkata compared to other places in India (Sen and Sengupta, 2012). Therefore, while on one hand academic research and public policies continue to address empowerment of women from a public perspective, such as the reform of social practices like child marriage or female foeticide (Duflo, 2012), there has been little focus on the gender dynamics that women in India have to negotiate when it comes to intimate spaces within the marital family. As Rowlands (1997) points out, due to absence of focus on the relational aspects of women's empowerment in intimate relationships, change in the level of empowerment in intimate relationships may be least visible.

Feminist scholar Mohanty (2003) has cautioned against the monolithic representation of women in South Asia as third world women. Mohanty argues that we need to analyse cultural heterogeneity and study women from different groups when focusing on women in South Asia. She suggests that "specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully" (2003, p. 505). Therefore, studying a historically and culturally dominant class like the urban middle-class in Kolkata which claims itself to be different, and distinct from other classes as they do not practice child marriage and do promote women's education, is useful. By critically analysing the ways in which urban middle-class Bengalis reproduce traditional gender hierarchies within the family, despite their claims of distinction, we can understand the nuanced ways in which patriarchy reconstitutes itself over time.

2.5 Engaging Men in studying gender relations

Women's empowerment theory underpins the fact that there are power dynamics at play between men and women. Komter (1989) has argued that in classes and regions where women have been able to increase their participation in the public sphere, men's institutional powers have been directly challenged, causing informal ways of sustaining power dominance

over women to become more visible, including burdens placed on women such as housework and child care which also serves to limit their capacity to participate in and challenge men's dominance in the field of paid work. This inequality in gender power relations is most visible in an intimate relationship (Murphy-Graham, 2010). The gender gap in performing housework and child care is visible globally, where men have continued to perform the role of the breadwinner and women have gone on to undertake the dual role of the homemaker and the breadwinner (Lindsey, 2016). Butler (2006) has argued that performance of repeated acts of maintaining masculinity and femininity serve as a tool for sustaining the existing patriarchal power structure in gender relations and in turn the society. The power structure not only helps in repressing deviations in gender performance but also helps in perpetrating heteronormative binary gender performance.

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights, and obligations in all spheres of life (Chowdhury and Patnaik, 2010). When it comes to gender discourse in India, it has exclusively focused on women as agents of change without placing much focus on the "relational aspect of empowerment" (Mason, 2003, p. 1). It has been identified by Ponniah (2018) that in India, women's ability to exercise choices are greatly tied to their families. Thus, it is important to understand how intimate relations impact women's ability to exercise choices. To understand the impact of gender equality discourses in a society that largely idolises and re-invents heteronormative customs will require a new way of questioning the existing norms and men's gendered habitus.

Including men's voices in research on women's empowerment is a way towards breaking away from the existing norm of including only women's voices in research on women's empowerment (Chowdhury and Patnaik, 2010; Das, Kumar Singh and Pawar, 2010). A study conducted in western Africa found that engaging men in empowerment discourses by increasing their awareness had a positive impact on women's empowerment (Asiyanbola,

2005). To reduce the gap in the division of labour in housework and child care, not only is there a need to look at why women continue to accept traditional gender roles but also how men perceive such inequality in gender relations within the domestic field. I argue that understanding the processes through which patriarchal norms are reproduced within urban middle-class families requires an in depth exploration of both men and women's experiences. Since men are usually excluded from the gender discourse of women's empowerment, understanding men's views on empowering women can help in engaging men in the process of women's empowerment.

There is a burgeoning literature in criminology on involving men and young boys to prevent the growth of violence against women (Messerschmidt, 1997; Bufkin, 1999; Casey *et al.*, 2013; Flood, 2015). Such studies have shown the need for changing men's attitudes towards gender relations. Patterns of projecting aggression towards women have been linked with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which embodies the idea that being masculine entails the subordination of women. Not only men, but in many cases women are instrumental in constructing masculinities – "as mothers; as schoolmates; as girlfriends, sexual partners, and wives" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848). In fact, in social institutions like the family, men are ridiculed for performing traditionally feminine chores like child care and housework (Chatterjee, 2014). I argue that to create a gender equal environment, men's experiences need to be included in research analysing the status of women in the society.

The question of housework is even more complex in societies like India where multi-generational patrilocal extended households are operational. Kandiyoti (1988) defines such societies as those societies that practise 'classic patriarchy' (1988, p. 278). In India, marriage not only binds a couple together but also brings together two families and the success of a marriage not only depends on the married couple but also on the negotiations of the bride with

her extended family (Dube, 1997). The traditional multi-generational family structure[20], where women of all generations shared housework, is becoming rare in contemporary India. As single generation households are becoming more common, especially in urban cities, there is a rise in the need for male sharing of domestic work, child care and elder care (Agarwal, 2000). There have been recent studies in India aimed at understanding the role of the father within the family from a psychological and demographic perspective (Saraff and Srivastava, 2010; Chaudhary, 2013). However, it is important to understand the position of the husband within the patrilineal family to understand the way married women negotiate agency within the domestic field.

Moreover, the absence of men's voices from the discourse on women's empowerment in India and the lack of engaging men in women's movements has taken on a reactionary form through a rise in widespread patriarchal backlash by men's rights activists who have demanded the withdrawal of laws providing equal rights to women (Das, Kumar Singh and Pawar, 2010; Chowdhury, 2014). This is happening not only in India, there is a global backlash against feminism and the gender rights movement (Halperin-Kaddari and Freeman, 2016). Most of the demands posed by men's rights groups, come from a position of being excluded from women's discourses and a lack of understanding of the feminist movement. This study aims to create a wider understanding of men's perspective on the discourse of gender equality by studying married men's gendered habitus.

Feminist theorist Grosz (1990) has argued that "in claiming that women's current social roles and positions are the effects of their essence, nature, biology, or universal social position, these theories are guilty of rendering such roles and positions unalterable, necessary and thus of providing them with a powerful political justification" (1990, p. 335). The focus of this

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[20]Otherwise known as a joint family in South Asia.

research is to understand how women's social role, as a caregiver, may be socially determined by the gendered habitus within which women live their day to day lives.

2.6 Class formation: Urban middle-class in India

2.6.1 The Old: Colonial India

Under the influence of European modernity, Bengali men in 19th century Bengali observed that they needed to stand up for socially reforming the position of Bengali women mainly because the colonial rulers heavily criticised the way Indian women were treated (Raychaudhuri, 2000). Social reformers, mostly Indian men, argued on behalf of women, mainly upper caste Bengali women, in favour of abolishing regressive practices like sati (Hindu widow immolation), and in support of the introduction of widow re-marriage, and the education of girls (Murshid, 1983; Chatterjee, 1990; Borthwick, 2015).

This early middle-class in colonial Bengal, belonged to the upper caste, were English educated, worked in various government departments set up by the British Empire and were called the middle-class (*madhyabitya*[21] *bhadralok*) as they were below the aristocracy but above those who performed manual labour in rural areas, mainly the lower castes and Muslims (Sarkar, 1997). Thus, the *bhadralok* middle-class was a more exclusive group that emerged as a result of colonial interaction with the British, and post-independence the *bhadralok* middle-class continued to maintain urban middle-class distinction by dis-identifying themselves from the rest of their countrymen (Varma, 2007).

Some Bengali men during the early 20th century have candidly written that they wanted a partner with whom they could have an intellectual conversation, and not just a wife who was only good at taking care of the household, which generated a demand for educated brides (Raychaudhuri, 2000). Therefore, the education of women arose out of the demand for educated girls in the marriage market and the education of women was instituted to meet

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[21] This is a Bengali term which is used to signify the middle-class.

men's need for companionship, serving only an ornamental purpose in the lives of women in colonial India. Thus, historically women from the *bhadralok* middle-class were most valued for attaining respectable modernity in the form of cultural and educational capital for the purpose of enhancing the lives of their husbands and increasing their ability to become good mothers to their children.

With the rise nationalistic fervour and anti-colonial protests against the British, there rose a need for the creation of a distinct national identity. There was a steady decline in interest in social reforms directed at women's empowerment, and with time the issue of women's empowerment was side-lined to give space to issues considered to be more important, such as national freedom. In fact, in order to create a distinct national identity, it became imperative to create a distinction between British women and women belonging to South Asia (Sarkar, 2003). Thus, women ended up being treated as a symbolic token, representing the family's respectability, and were objectified as an embodiment of national identity. The interaction of ideals of colonial modernity, gender, caste and historical roots of the old middle-class has been studied by historians in great depth (Sarkar, 1989, 1997, 2003; Chatterjee, 1990; Sangari and Vaid, 1990; Raychaudhuri, 2000; Borthwick, 2015).

2.6.2 The New: Postcolonial contemporary India

Post-independence, with a few exceptions, studies on middle-class life in India were almost absent and only started emerging again post liberalisation of the Indian economy (Donner, 2011). While the exclusivity of the old middle-class had started to break after India's independence from the British empire in 1947, it changed drastically post liberalisation of the Indian economy in early 1990s with the emergence of the new middle-class (Varma, 2007). The new middle-class combined with the old middle-class in primarily two ways, through socio-political mobilisation (see Jaffrelot, 2003) and by joining the emerging IT industry thus becoming the new rich middle-class (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2007). Waldrop (2011) writes

that the new middle-class took to conspicuous consumption wholeheartedly unlike the old middle-class, who were known for converting economic capital into social and cultural capital such as investment in higher education and/or club memberships. In this way, neoliberalism "allowed for the creation of wealth by destroying and replacing previous relations of production, consumption, and distribution and by generating new forms of desire" (Schiller, 2011, p. 37). The blatant consumption among the new middle-class that resulted from the neoliberal restructuring of the Indian economy drew the attention of sociologists who studied the formation of the new middle-class by analysing the consumption practices that became a part of the social status of the new middle-class (Béteille, 2001; Fernandes, 2006; Uberoi, 2006; Varma, 2007). However, Fernandes (2011), while reflecting on the cultural hegemony of the middle-class in India, wrote that focus on consumption practices of the urban middle-classes (Jaffrelot and Veer, 2008; Brosius, 2012) might overlook the ways in which this class may perpetuate social inequality.

It is well established in the literature that even within the new middle-class there is importance placed on 'good' (Nambissan, 2009, p. 286) education, existing literature studying middle-classes in different parts of India all conclude that men and women are both encouraged to pursue higher education (Donner, 2008a; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Nambissan, 2009; Kothari, 2013). Existing literature identifies that the value placed on women's education is for the creation of companionate wives and good mothers (Donner, 2008a; Chickerur, 2020). Narayan's (1997) study on middle-class women and their focus on careers found that as mothers they encouraged their daughters to get educated to ensure that they were secure if they had to navigate future uncertainties like failed marriage. Donner (2008a) who studied Bengali middle-class women in Kolkata in the early 1990s found that education of girls was mainly encouraged for the purpose of educating their future children. However, the purpose of women's education shifted from the sole purpose of educating

children to becoming an "educational dowry" (Drury, 1993; cited in Nambissan, 2009, p. 285) as prospective brides with jobs could participate in the rising consumption practices of the new middle-class in contemporary India.

Baviskar and Ray (2011) have identified the need to critically analyse the myth of the existence of the progressive middle-class who profess liberal ideals like encouraging women's education. My dissertation addresses this gap in literature and contributes to the understanding of the complexities of the middle-class. I also examine how class intersects with gender, and draws from discourses of gender equality to analyse the ways in which traditional gender relations within the domestic field are informed by middle-class habitus, including how class habitus shapes the gendered habitus, especially when it comes to practices of ideals of gender equality.

2.7 Towards Equality: Tracing back policy reforms in India

On the eve of the 1975 International Women's year declared by the United Nations, a report drafted by the Committee on the Status of Women in India was published by the Government of India called "Towards Equality" (Hasan *et al.*, 1974). This report is credited by Indian feminists as a foundational text for development of women's studies as an academic discipline in India. Apart from that it gave impetus to the women's rights movement in India and helped to situate women's voices within the larger discourse of policy formulation (Bagchi, 2013). Bagchi (2013) points out that this report was influenced by the second wave of feminism in the global north, although she notes that the specifics of the impact of this wave varied from country to country as the level and extent of inequality was variable. The influence of the second wave is evident as the report identified Indian women's role as caregiver within the family and suggested that their labour at home be economically and socially recognised by the society and the state.

Since the 1990s the dominant discourse in policy related to the empowerment of women has measured empowerment by using predetermined definitions of growth and development at the societal level instead of examining the personal well-being of women (Ali, 2013). Although policy makers are informed by extensive research on empowerment strategies, it is mostly assumed that women are passive recipients of state determined interventions. However this view ignores that women do exhibit agency in their own lives (Ali, 2013).

In neoliberal India public policy discourses of women's empowerment and equality like *Beti Bachao* (save the girl child)[22] or *Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan* (Education for All)[23], various legislation for gender justice like Section 498A in The Indian Penal Code[24] and the institution of rules of equal rights in workplaces (Internal complaints committee[25]) create awareness among people about gender equality. It is now a legal requirement in India that every

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[22]*Beti Bachao* is a public service campaign that was launched in 2015 by the Government of India to raise awareness against the decline in Child Sex Ratio and to appeal to the citizens of the country to save the girl child. There has generally been a trend of decline in Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in India since 1961. Child Sex Ratio is defined by the government of India as the number of girls per 1000 boys between 0-6 years of age and according to the Women and Child Development website "the decline from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001 and further to 918 in 2011 is alarming. The decline in the CSR is a major indicator of women disempowerment" (*Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, 2015).

[23] This scheme was introduced in the year 2000 to provide quality secondary education for all children between the age of 6-14, this scheme also had a special focus on educating the girl child (*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, 2000).

[24] As per section 498A in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) - "Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty.—Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine."

[25] The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 states that it was introduced "to provide protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace and for the prevention and redressal of complaints of sexual harassment and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. WHEREAS sexual harassment results in violation of the fundamental rights of a woman to equality under articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India and her right to life and to live with dignity under article 21 of the Constitution and right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business with includes a right to a safe environment free from sexual harassment; AND WHEREAS the protection against sexual harassment and the right to work with dignity are universally recognized human rights by international conventions and instruments such as Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, which has been ratified on the 25th June, 1993 by the Government of India;"

organisation must have an Internal Complaints Committee for the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace. Conducting gender sensitization training is a duty of the Internal Complaints Committee and it is mandatory for employees in the organised sector to undergo such training in the form of workshops and awareness programmes that promote the right to equality for women in the workplace. Therefore, members of the urban middle-class who make up the majority of the workforce in the organised sector are aware of egalitarian ideals.

Brazilian feminist scholar, Sonia Correa (2010, p. 184) points out that to bring real change in women's everyday lives there needs to be a more "intricate" and "nuanced" look at women's perception of power and greater focus on understanding the complexity of gender relations in intimate spaces. Correa argues for deeper understanding of gender relations instead of interpreting patriarchal power as men dominating women unilaterally, she asks "does having a woman as president or prime minister or secretary of state resolve gender and other inequalities?" (2010, p. 184).

In this regard, India has already elected a female head of state, Indira Gandhi[26] and currently the elected chief minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee[27] is female. Since India's independence in 1947 there have been several other women who have been elected as head of other states in India. However, women's entrance into the traditionally male dominated world of politics did not result in the resolution of the issue of inequality in gender relations, curb the rise in incidence of gender-based violence or help address the fall in women's participation in the workforce.

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[26] She served as India's prime minister for three terms from 1966-1977 and then again from 1980-1984.

[27] Serving her third term now after defeating the ruling party at the Centre, the Bharatiya Janata Party in the legislative assembly elections held in West Bengal in 2021 by winning the majority mandate, 292 constituencies out of 294 constituencies. She was first elected in 2011 and she is the first woman to hold the office of the chief minister of West Bengal.

2.8 Indicators of gender equality in India

This research contributes to the academic and policy discourse around the declining rate of work force participation of Indian women in paid work since 2004. Although India is a signatory to various international human rights conventions that are committed to providing equal rights to women, such as the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1993) and United Nations gender equality conventions, Indian women continue to remain far behind Indian men in most indicators of gender equality especially economic participation (*The Global Gender Gap Report*, 2018).

Figure 1: Decline in women's labour force participation in India
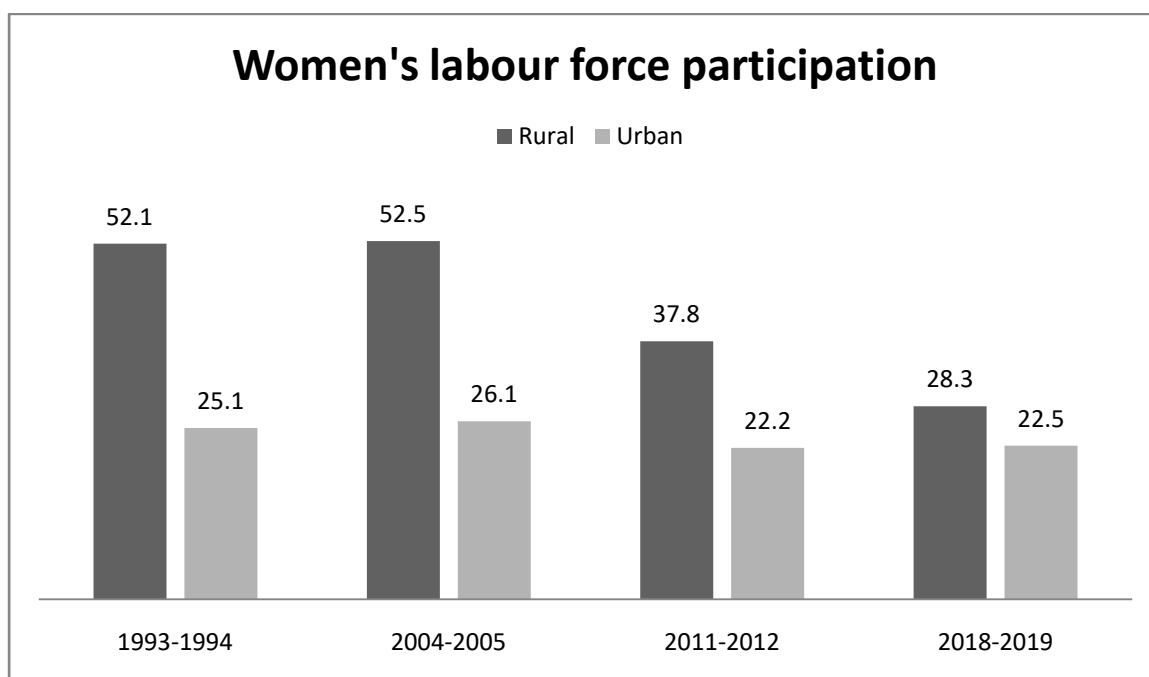
Source: NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation), India

The figure above shows the declining workforce participation rate of women in India and also the low rate of participation of urban women compared to women in rural India. This research offers critical insight into the gender dynamics that operate in everyday lives of urban women

that may have an impact on women's participation in the workforce at a deeper level than what is measured in macro level statistics. In figure 2 (below), statistics from India show that India is far behind its neighbouring countries in South Asia when it comes to addressing the low participation of women in the paid workforce. In fact, only Pakistan and the Arab world are lower in women's labour force participation than India.

Figure 2: Global Female Labour Force Participation Rates in 2017
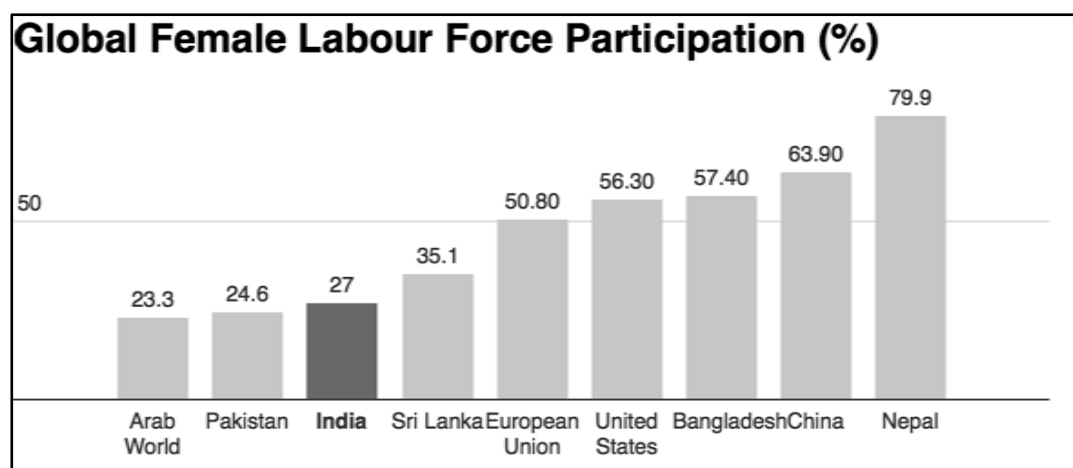
Source: World Bank, 2017

Economists have analysed large scale survey-based data to arrive at various explanations for this phenomena. One study found that what was unique in India's case was that there was a negative relationship between rise in women's educational attainment and fall in female labour force participation rate (FLPR) (Das and Desai, 2003). Secondary school level education has doubled since the 1980s, yet the FLPR has remained stagnant. In fact, even though women form less than half the population of India, there are more new women graduates than there are men. Das and Desai (2003) posit that this seeming contradiction is due to the lack of suitable job opportunities for women, and overall lower rate of unemployment in India rather than cultural gendered factors.

Table 1: Crime against women in West Bengal (per one lakh female population)

Year	Rate per one lakh female population
2011	31.9
2012	70.3
2013	67.14
2014	85.4
2015	73.4

Data Source: NSSO (National Sample Survey Organisation)

Table 1 (above) shows the increase in incidence of crime against women in West Bengal since 2011. Another quantitative study found that the low FLPR is due to the rise in crime against women as women's honour is highly valued in Indian society and victim blaming women who experience crimes (like rape, acid attack etc.) is a dominant traditional norm, which acts as a deterrent for women to travel for paid work (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2018). Men on the other hand are expected to play the role of the breadwinner, and this is reflected in the male work force participation rate of 76 % in 2018 (Vyas, 2020).

A recent study by feminist economists Deshpande and Kabeer (2019) analysing the FLPR in West Bengal have found that socio-cultural norms are responsible for the decline in the FLPR. They argue that the prevalence of normative expectations of women to perform the double shift reduces women's chances at equal participation in the paid workforce. The authors also highlight how women's contribution in care work remains invisible to society and is absent from data measures of work force participation (Deshpande and Kabeer, 2019).

This study analyses the gendered habitus of married young men and women who are engaged in paid work to understand the implication of upholding traditional gender roles within the family on women's participation in paid workforce, the nature of unpaid work that women undertake, and how choices and constraints are intertwined through an in-depth analysis of everyday life of urban middle-class men and women in Kolkata.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Locating myself in the research

In our daily life, we experience things from an ontological perspective rather than an epistemological perspective (Messer-Davidow, 2002). The process of understanding a phenomenon is integral in informing the theoretical and methodological basis of research.

I have been teaching in various higher educational institutions in India for little over a decade. I have been married for seven years now. The idea for this research germinated in various stages. First when I got married, I realised my educational and cultural capital had a very important role to play in being a suitable bride. However, once married, my identity as a respectable wife eclipsed my professional identity. On one hand I had to fill out official forms in banks and other public institutions, that assigned my husband as my guardian and on the other I was told by a feminist acquaintance, belonging to my class, that wearing a wedding ring disqualifies me as a feminist.

Second, as a part of our ongoing training as young academicians we have to undergo various training sessions. It was during one of these training sessions around five years ago that I attended a seminar on the plight of upper caste women of colonial Bengal. As I listened to the lecture, I could easily position myself in the place of these women who had lived in Bengal a century ago. I realised that apart from having access to higher education and the option to join the paid work force, women's position in the family (both natal and conjugal) post marriage has remained mostly unchanged and this is what fascinated me the most. Moreover, the discussion that followed among the audience members after this seminar was about the unjust conditions faced by their domestic help; Though the lecture was about privileged women in Colonial India and was given to a privileged audience living in contemporary India, the historical continuity or discontinuity in the condition of urban elite women in contemporary India was left out of the discussion. The visible patriarchal injustices faced by domestic

workers seemed to render the invisible symbolic barriers faced by elite women as trivial and not worthy of discussion. This was the moment I began locating my own experiences within the larger academic debate of women's empowerment and gender equality and my dissertation research stems from the lack of academic literature on the lived experiences of women like me who belong to the Bengali urban middle-class in neoliberal India.

I not only started becoming aware of my class and caste position in the public sphere as I began to identify myself as a feminist, but I also actively participated in debates surrounding various issues related to gender discrimination in South Asia, and even began writing opinion editorials in national level English news publications. I knew that I could use my education, my caste privilege and the power of writing to voice my opinion on a public platform. Even when I was writing opinion editorials, I made a very conscious decision to write in mainstream publications because they were read by everyone. Feminist debates, especially issues related specifically to women, are usually published in magazines or journals that are edited and read only by women. I knew that I needed to make these issues a part of the mainstream debate and increase public engagement as I did not see these issues as only women's issues but as a social injustice. Now when I read *Formations of Class and Gender* by Beverly Skeggs (1997), I realise not only how my class informed the choices I could make but also the choices that I cannot make, and further, how I am limited by the respectable boundaries of my class and the historical lineage of this class.

As a member of this class, I came in contact with other married women from the urban elite class who confided in me about the burden of balancing work and home in various social and professional gatherings. I have seen some women in tears at work after being exhausted from handling both professional commitments and housework at the same time. I observed that while married women called home to check upon the daily arrangements at home, married men concentrated solely on their official work when they were in office and they did not use

the phone to check on domestic arrangements at home. Through observation, I became aware that men did not carry the normative expectation of balancing paid work with family responsibilities. It became obvious to me that women not only worked a second shift (Hochschild and Machung, 1989) but they worked *both shifts* simultaneously throughout the day.

My male colleagues faced no dilemma in pursuing their professional commitments and my interactions with them would mostly be on academic and administrative issues rather than domestic issues. It could be that sex informed the topics we selected to share with each other, and each sex felt more comfortable sharing their worldviews and experiences with people of the same sex and same social standing. I also realised that married women opened up to me a lot more once during social interactions once they knew I too was married.

In my daily experiences with my domestic worker, a woman who cooked for me and cleaned my home in the morning and did stitching at a local tailor shop in the evening, I observed that she was articulate regarding the gender oppression she faced in her daily life. In comparison to women from my class, my domestic worker was able to express herself more freely.

As more and more women from the urban middle-class enter the paid workforce, they do so knowing that they will have to work a second shift at home. In addition, while they work in the office physically during the day, they simultaneously work at home mentally. As per my observations, married men do not negotiate with expectations of care work, rather, it is a choice for men regarding how involved they want to be at home. In my own case, my husband is actually more adept at performing household chores than I am. He does not expect me to do all the household work, we share it mostly, but he takes more burden in the household than I do when he is around. However, if he decided to choose not to perform household chores, which is usually the case with men belonging to the urban middle-class, he would be free to make that choice, as opposed to the societal expectation that women have to negotiate with

regarding being the primary caregiver, which is not seen by society as something that women can choose to do or not do, as men can.

In my research, I aim to understand the everyday experiences of married men and women in *bhadralok* families and how empowerment in intimate spaces is challenged when juxtaposed with class respectability and the traditional gender hierarchy. I did not directly ask the participants about violence they may or may not have faced at home, though a few did disclose such experiences to me, as that is an area that needs to be explored in greater depth and should be a study on its own. This research is, therefore, a product of my reflective journey as an academic within this class, my personal journey as a married woman who was born into this class, and an effort to address the lack of academic literature on these issues.

3.2 Research Design

The design I am using to answer the research questions presented in Chapter 1 are based on a feminist approach as I critically analyse the multiple subjectivities within which traditional gender relations are constituted within urban middle-class families in Kolkata. Understanding agency and power dynamics in gender relations forms the core of feminist qualitative research (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). Moreover, the gendered nature of care work is directly related to feminist concerns (Allen, Walker and McCann, 2013).This approach is therefore aligned to my research questions as I endeavour to understand the nuances of normative gender roles between married couples, and to explore how these roles undertaken within the domestic field, are influenced by discourses of gender equality. By locating myself within the research, as a member of the class I am studying, I lay out my perspective as a way of being self-reflexive about my own voice (Patton, 2002). Using this approach helped me in conducting this research with openness, and in greater depth and detail as I worked to question things that even I, as a feminist social scientist, have taken for granted in the past.

The main purpose of this research is to understand the ideologies and practices of the Bengali urban middle-class within the neo-liberal, post-colonial context in which they reside. Therefore, this qualitative study used in-depth semi-structured interviews as a tool to focus on the everyday lives of the Bengali urban middle-class residing in the city of Kolkata (in India).

The research questions also are aimed at understanding a particular phenomenon in contemporary India, and are related to a distinct social class, the Bengali urban middle-class in Kolkata. Therefore, a qualitative research design is most suitable as it helps in understanding situations in a particular context and helps in capturing the uniqueness of the participants' experiences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). The qualitative method of inquiry will enable me to capture the various aspects of the lived experiences of married couples within their family and to identify how gender roles are constituted in these contexts. Using qualitative methods I aim to understand how the *bhadralok* middle-class in Kolkata make sense of their lived experiences as a way to help in building a bridge "between public social knowledge and private lived experiences" (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998, p. 2).

The two main approaches to conducting research are the inductive approach and deductive approach. Adopting the inductive approach is more aligned with a design that wants to generate theory from the emerging data. On the other hand the deductive approach is more aligned to a research design where the data is analysed in accordance with an existing theoretical or conceptual framework (Patton, 2002). Since I am beginning with a theoretical framework and an interview guide for conducting my research I have used a combination of both these approaches in designing my research (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Thus, this combined approach, also known as the social constructivist approach, helps the researcher study the process through which individuals develop subjective meaning about the social world they inhabit through interaction with others and the historical context and cultural norms bestowed upon them (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Through this approach, the

researcher also acknowledges their own personal, historical, and cultural experiences when positioning themselves within the research.

The inductive approach allows one to understand the phenomena from the perspective of the participants (Warren, 2001). By conducting semi-structured interviews with the chosen demographic, my intention is to understand the perspective of the participants and how they make sense of their everyday lived experiences within their families. By using aspects of the inductive approach, I can investigate the gendered roles and experiences of both married men and married women of the Bengali urban middle-class without necessarily imposing a framework on those experiences. The research began with a deductive approach by narrowing down on a theoretical framework as well as creating an interview guide based on a review of the current literature as well as my own epistemological contribution of belonging to the group that I am studying. I used deduced propositions and linked them with existing theoretical propositions to produce novel propositions (White, 2013), thus allowing the data to reshape and contribute to the theory with which I began.

Since the 1990s there has been a significant rise in consumerism after the liberalisation of the Indian economy, with most Indian middle-class households depending on the earning of multiple family members rather than the traditional social norm of depending on the earning of the male members of the family which was the case before the early 1990s (Fernandes, 2006). For my research I recruited men and women who grew up during the liberalisation period in India to find out if living in neoliberal India has had any impact on the choices available to married men and women, especially within the domestic field.

For this study 30 male and 40 female participants were recruited, all of whom were residents of Kolkata and between the ages of 25 and 45 years old. The majority of the participants were between 30 and 40 years old. I used snowball sampling to recruit participants for my research starting with members of my class with whom I am personally acquainted. The general

criteria on which the recruitment of participants was based was self-identification as members of the urban middle-class, and their status as married, professionally employed individuals, living in Kolkata. To find an answer to the research questions raised, I included married men and married women and analysed their perception about the gender roles they performed at home.

3.3 Fieldwork

3.3.1 Field visit

I began fieldwork at the end of April 2019. I had reservations regarding the process of recruitment of participants as I was going to ask questions about their experiences within their intimate space. I thought it would be difficult to recruit participants and that they might not agree to participate when contacted personally so I kept an alternative option for recruiting participants for this study, by visiting institutions in which the members of this class worked. However, I did not have to use the second option, the shared culture and class habitus with the participants helped me recruit participants more easily than I had foreseen. What I had thought was my epistemological weakness before going on the field turned out to be my strength once I entered the field. Participants were knowledgeable about the data collection process and what an interview entails so there was a shared understanding of the knowledge that was to be produced through the data collection process. My apprehension about introducing the ethical approval form which I thought would dissuade participants from participating was unfounded as the consent form instead reassured them that the data collection process was authentic and that their narrative was not going to be misused or compromised.

Participant recruitment was done using exponential snowball sampling. I began by contacting people I knew who fell in the target demographic, who I then asked to help me in recruiting more participants (Arksey and Knight, 1999). In snowball sampling, the first point of contact

are people who have the same characteristics of the target demographic but are personally known to the researchers, in cases where the researcher does not recruit the first point of contact, they are referred to as the purposive sample and, this sample then helps in further recruitment of participants for the research (Bryman, 2016). Once I contacted my personal contacts who matched the recruitment criteria of the target demographic then I recruited the contacts that were forwarded to me by the purposive sample.

Because the interviews were about gender roles in intimate spaces I determined that men would speak candidly if the men's interviews were conducted by male research assistants (MRA). The MRAs followed the same sampling method I did to recruit male participants. Towards the end of the data collection process I helped in the recruitment as the MRAs had exhausted their contacts. The MRAs shared the same class habitus as me, so the primary difference between us was their biological sex. The MRAs were also somewhat younger than I am at below 25 years of age, so their lived experiences were also likely different from mine. The professions of the recruited participants, both male and female, varied from business managers, college and university lecturers, chartered accountants, doctors, lawyers and IT professionals, to school teachers, bank employees and other service sector employees.

I recruited female participants by using my personal contacts, mainly friends and colleagues. When I approached my contacts, I told them that I wanted to maintain complete anonymity and so I did not want to interview them, but instead asked if they could provide me with contacts of those who fall in the target demographic and who shared similar class habitus. I only asked them to provide contacts of prospective participants from their own social and professional circles. I did not want my personal relationship with my own contacts to add any bias to the data collection process, so I declined when my own contacts offered themselves to be interviewed.

Countering bias was not an issue with the recruitment of male participants by MRAs because they were not involved in the designing of the interview guide or the research proposal. If I had interviewed people with whom I already had an established relationship, the generated data could have been biased by my previous knowledge of their personal lives, despite everyone's best intentions. Moreover, the urban middle-class in Kolkata, as in the rest of India, are employed in varied professions and I personally do not know participants from all of them so I wanted to ensure that people from various professions could be recruited as there might be differences in how gender relations are constituted at home based on people's occupation.

3.3.2 Recruitment of Male Research Assistant

It has been observed that men may feel compelled to adhere to dominant notions of hegemonic masculinity during social interactions (Connell, 2001; Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001). I determined that a female researcher interviewing men about gender relations may lead to them holding back information, especially information of an intimate nature. I also felt that being a female interviewer interviewing men, it could make it challenging to elicit information from men about their personal lives. To counter this and ensure that the data collected is not culturally prescribed through the self-presentation of men in front of a member of the opposite sex, it was important to employ a male research assistant who could conduct the interviews of the male participants.

To recruit male research assistants, I started by sending out emails to my colleagues working in various Universities in Kolkata. I provided a detailed description of the job role of the research assistant who would conduct the interview of the male participants and the remuneration that was to be paid to the MRA for conducting each interview.

3.3.3 Access to participants

Perriton (2000) says that field researchers are dependent on the support of colleagues, friends and family members in various phases of the fieldwork and it is important to acknowledge the importance of their contribution rather than maintain objective distance. I began my fieldwork by contacting my friends, family, and colleagues to recruit participants as well as male research assistants. Approaching prospective participants through their social circle helped in building rapport and also generated trust during the interviews as I was referred to by people who knew both me and the participants personally.

The recruitment of male participants was mostly done by the MRAs, though some contacts were provided to them by me. The MRAs used the same techniques I used for recruitment and drew from their own social circles. The MRAs, first contacted their personal contacts who belonged to the target demographic and from them obtained contacts of other qualifying male participants who then agreed to participate in this study.

Social media, especially WhatsApp, formed a significant part of contacting and recruiting new participants and interacting with my research assistants. This is mainly due to the fact that WhatsApp has replaced text messaging in India and emails are considered a more formal way of approaching people (Mcmillan, 2014). As I knew the first point of contact personally, I used WhatsApp, a more informal and socially acceptable platform in India for approaching the contacts that were sent to me by my personal contacts. After talking to my personal contacts over the phone and explaining to them the criteria of my target demographic and what the interview would entail, I messaged them the criteria on WhatsApp so that they could forward it to prospective candidates.

My personal contacts would then talk to their contacts and forward me the information of those who were interested in participating in my study. I would then use WhatsApp to message them by introducing myself and asking them when I could call them to talk to them

about participating in the project. When I spoke with them, I briefed them about the interview topic and mentioned that it would likely require around two hours of their time.

I let the participants decide the location of the interview as I wanted them to feel comfortable in the environment in which they were being interviewed. The majority of male and female participants chose to be interviewed at coffee shops close to their homes (within 1 km). The rest of them chose their workplace or their home. The female participants chose their location of interview based on the proximity to their home or workplace, while the male participants gave the male research assistants an option to conduct the interview in a location of the MRAs choosing.

3.3.4 The Interviews

Classically, an interview has been defined as a conversation with a purpose, and the purpose is to gather information about the world which the interviewee inhabits (Webb and Webb, 1933). In my research, I wanted to understand how the chosen demographic negotiates normative gender roles within the family and creates meaning within the broader neo-liberal, globalised socio-cultural context.

These interviews were conducted as more of a conversation, which can provide the interviewees a high degree of control in regard to expressing their opinions, and can facilitate greater intimacy and depth within the context of an interview (Gilgun, 2013). A semi-structured in-depth interviewing method was used, and the interviews were conducted with the help of a semi-structured interview guide that was prepared before the beginning of the fieldwork. The interview guide was designed keeping in mind the normative gender roles within the family of the chosen demographic, the emerging questions from the identified gaps in literature, the theoretical framework of my research, and my specific research questions.

Although the interviewer might have had more power considering that an interview guide was already prepared beforehand, these interviews followed the structure of a conversation where

the participants were given time to establish a connection with the interviewer so that they would feel comfortable that they could be candid. Participants were allowed to take an active role in the interview and guide the process, while I played the role of the listener and tried to make the participants feel in control of the interview process (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003). I also trained the male research assistants to do the same. The MRAs relied on the interview guide and were asked not to interrupt the participants when they were answering to ensure that the participants felt at ease. Each interview lasted on average one to two hours.

The interviews were bilingual, English and/or Bengali, depending on the preference of the participants. Only a few participants gave the entire interview in English, the rest of them spoke in a mixture of Bengali and English. All male participants spoke mainly in Bengali during their interviews. Women sometimes spoke in Bengali and sometimes in English.

To inform the participants about the research they were going to participate in, each participant was given two documents to read before the interview was conducted. Each participant received an information sheet and the University's ethical approval form with the details of this research project, including an informed consent form which they signed before the interview began. Consent was also obtained verbally before the beginning of each interview. A brief demographic questionnaire was also given to the participants to be filled out before the start of the interview. The overall projects and all associated documents were approved by the University of Essex Ethics Committee in January 2019. I observed that the process of filling out the required paperwork made it easier to start the interviews, as participants were ready to be interviewed after reading that personally identifying details would be anonymised and their identity would be protected. This process reassured the interviewees and allowed them to open up during the interview.

All the interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. Verbal consent was obtained after switching on the audio recorder and before the start of the interview. While

providing them with the forms and questionnaires, the participants were asked not to refer to themselves or others by their real names during the recording of the interview, and not to reveal other potentially identifying personal details, like addresses or the name of their workplace etc. If anything of this sort was revealed, it was changed and anonymised during the transcription process which I completed myself. Care has been taken to ensure that the responses remain confidential. Interviews were stored on two hard drives, access to which is restricted to the principal investigator, and are protected by password to ensure the confidentiality of the data.

3.4 Epistemological and ontological approach

Feminist epistemology is concerned about the how gender plays a role in what is considered as knowledge. The production of knowledge that aligns itself with feminist epistemology concerns itself with the study of socially constructed conceptions about gender and gender specific norms (Anderson, 1995). Stanley and Wise (2002) states that a research process will be determined as feminist when the researcher makes an open presence within the research as any research happens "through the medium of the researcher" (2002, p. 175).

Cook and Fonow (1986) identified the main principles of feminist epistemology as "(1) the necessity of continuously and reflexively attending to the significance of gender relations as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research; (2) the centrality of consciousness-raising as a specific methodological tool and as a "way of seeing;" (3) the need to challenge the norm of "objectivity" that assumes a dichotomy between the subject and object of research; (4) the concern for the ethical implications of research; and (5) an emphasis on the transformation of patriarchy and the empowerment of women." (1986, p. 2).

In the 1980s, feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1986) argued for recognition of feminist epistemology when she criticised the positivist tradition of social science research. In her seminal work she mentioned that there are no distinct methods when it comes to feminist

research. However, she identified three distinct epistemologies in the development of feminist research, namely feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism (Mauthner, 2020).

According to Harding (1986), feminist empiricism aims to remove the androcentric biases of research and critiques the positivist approach towards research where the researcher is expected to be 'neutral'. Thus, within feminist empiricism, the knowledge produced is shaped by the values of the knower and their social contextual location, which is made known within the research process. However, this interpretation of feminist empiricism has been criticised by feminist postmodernists for its assumption of scientific research as positivist (Mauthner, 2020).

The second stage of feminist epistemology as identified by Harding (1986) is feminist standpoint where the feminist research process acknowledges the gendered nature of intimate relations and the analyses of women's lives recognises the same. This framework argues that "in a social world organised around gender differences and hierarchies, men have a partial and perverse understanding of reality while women, because of their subjugated position, have clearer and more comprehensive insights" (Mauthner, 2020, p. 4). Although this framework has been criticised by non-western feminists as a reflection of "western feminism's own racist, classist, and colonialist assumptions in attempting to "speak for" all women" (Ingraham, 1994, p. 204). This framework has also been criticised for its silence regarding lesbian and black women's experiences (Stanley and Wise, 2002). The third stage of feminist epistemology identified by Harding is feminist postmodernism. Feminist postmodernists call for "theoretical and empirical investigations of how subjects, identities, and experiences are linguistically, discursively, and historically constituted" (Mauthner, 2020, p. 5). Thus, postmodern feminists postulate that identities are in flux and contest the idea of the unitary self while recognising that multiple subjectivities determine experiences. The current research

draws from both feminist standpoint theory as well as feminist postmodernism when approaching how data is analysed. Feminist standpoint informs this thesis by acknowledging the gendered nature of intimate relations where these relations are organised around gender. Feminist postmodernism informs this current research by acknowledging how identity is in flux and driven by contexts and subjectivities not by a unitary definition or a momentary definition of self.

This research also takes into account the complexity posed by the contested meaning of gender equality as it travels through different social, political and cultural contexts, and creates multiple discourses that change, intentionally as well as unintentionally, its meaning (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2009). Ontologically as researchers, our own understanding of gender equality is also based on our normative assumptions. My understanding of the definition of gender equality is closer to the ones provided by Walby (2009) and Verloo (2006), who state that there is a need for transformation of power relations between men and women by empowering women as well as taking into account that gender inequality co-exists with other social inequalities which in turn creates complex inequalities. The data in this study has been analysed from this lens as my own understanding of the discourse of gender equality helps in being aware of my own normative assumptions while analysing the data.

DeVault and Gross (2012) argues that in feminist research based on qualitative interviewing, the researcher needs to recognize that experiences shared by participants emerge in the moment as identities are in flux. Thus, the analysis of qualitative interview data involves acknowledging how listening influences the narrative as well as its telling. Belliappa (2013), in her research on middle-class married women in India, points out that a qualitative research interview captures a particular narrative of the self within a given context and the role of the researcher in co-creating the self presented by the participant must be acknowledged.

Riessman (1987) pointed out that a researcher may not have heard anything until they acknowledge how knowledge between the researcher and the researched was co-created.

In my thesis, when recruiting married women, I mentioned that the interview is about the balancing act they perform as caregivers and engaging in paid work, thus I acknowledged my role as the co-creator (Riessman, 1987) in the production of knowledge in the research process. Male Research Assistants (MRAs) approached male participants by mentioning that they (MRAs) wanted to interview men about their married life and they did not mention anything about the balancing act although they were asked during the interview how they manage work and family commitments. In addition to introducing the topic, I and the MRAs also asked questions for clarification and sometimes asked for justification for the choices made by participants. Thus, the reflexive position of the researcher had an influence on the way the research was conducted and the way the data was analysed. However, the position of the researcher in this study did not affect the authenticity of the data as it is arguable as to what approach would lead to a more authentic data.

There has been considerable consensus among many feminist sociologists that in most feminist research the power balance between the researcher and the researched is unequal, as the balance of power tends to favour the researcher seeking to contribute to knowledge (Cotterill, 1992; Reinharz, 1997; Wolf, 2018). However, feminist research has also progressed toward questioning how power influences knowledge production along with questioning power inequalities between the researcher and the researched (Doucet, A., & Mauthner, 2006). This current research approaches this aspect of feminist epistemology with an attempt to unveil the thoughts and experiences of the participants to gain a nuanced understanding of the data rather than judging the perceived inequalities from an ontological standpoint. One of the ways in which this was addressed was by questioning the epistemological assumption of

power in feminist research which tends to favour the researcher, in this research I as the principal investigator was not always in a position of power.

My identity as a woman led participants to make assumptions about my role as the principal investigator which were of sexist nature. For example, during my data collection, there was one couple who agreed to participate in this research, both were interviewed separately. The husband was a contact of the MRA and he was very keen that his wife should also participate in my research. I contacted the wife through her WhatsApp number which was given to me by the MRA. I eventually interviewed her, and after the interview, I also mentioned to her that if she had a query and wanted to talk to me she could call me on my number. After a few days the MRA got back to me saying that the wife needed a copy of the ethical approval form that she had signed, so she had contacted the MRA assuming that this was his project and he would have it. Thus, I had to face certain sexist assumptions like this one when I went on field and I was not always in a position of power.

The feminist emphasis on voice has tended to neglect the silences found in narratives when collecting data which can create moral, ethical and epistemological dilemmas for the researcher (Ryan-Flood and Gill, 2010). Sometimes gaps and silences can suggest experiences that are so horrific that they cannot be retold. In one case, a female participant who was a lawyer spoke at length about how she fought against sexual harassment to become a lawyer but later on mentioned an incident about slitting her wrist when there was a misunderstanding between her husband and her. I was admittedly in a dilemma ethically as well as morally regarding how to remain objective. I did ask her a follow up question to know what made her want to commit suicide, her reply did not answer the question so I respected her silence on the matter instead of pushing her to revisit a painful memory. There was a shared understanding that developed in that moment of silence between the participant and

the researcher, thus the research process was more collaborative in nature and knowledge production depended on both the researcher and the researched (Clarke and Braun, 2019).

3.5 Challenges during fieldwork

Once I began my fieldwork with women by contacting prospective participants to recruit them, I would tell them that I wanted to ask them questions about how they balanced their professional and household responsibilities. This in all (female participants) cases was met with the statement that they would love to participate in this research. However, the most difficult part of recruiting female participants was that after they agreed to be interviewed, they realised they did not have the time to sit and talk with me. In consequence, fixing the appointment with the female participants became the most difficult challenge I faced during my fieldwork. I was not prepared for this as I had assumed that they would have some time for themselves. In fact, when interviewed women told me that as I am studying how women perform the double shift that I would certainly understand why finding time for oneself was an issue. There was one instance where I reached the interview location, but the interviewee did not show up as they could not manage to get an hour off from performing childcare. However, I found that women themselves were interested in talking to me about their lives and they generally found ways to negotiate with their marital families to make time for the interviews. For some women this involved me conducting the interviews in their homes while they tried their best to arrange for privacy. For other women it was easier for me to conduct the interviews during their lunch time at work. Finally, some women gave excuses to their marital family, such as saying that they were going to the doctor, in order to make time for the interview.

This limitation on allocation of personal time was not there for men and so was not something that with which the MRAs had to contend. Men knew when they would have free time and

were able to meet after work, or to go home late to meet at a location convenient to the MRAs, or for some, even meet on a weekend. Men were also more flexible with the location of the interview and often let the MRAs choose the location of the interview.

The interviews of male participants began in May and ended in August 2019, and overall four MRAs were commissioned to conduct these interviews. On the other hand, I began interviewing female participants on 24 April and this ended on 7 September 2019 as I had to depend a lot on the availability of the women who always ran short on time. The female participant interviews also took longer to complete as I was conducting the interviews while also keeping track of the male participants' interviews and maintaining daily communication with the MRAs regarding their progress, their training needs and so on.

As gathered from the interview briefs written by the research assistants, the male participants were never interrupted by calls regarding any household responsibilities. If the male interviews were interrupted it was either by their professional commitments or, if the interview took place at home, by their mother or wife to serve them food. Only in one instance, when the husband was alone at home, as the couple lived separately from the husband's parents, did an interview participant get food on his own during the interview process.

I told my research assistants to ask the male participants to provide the contacts of their partners, as ideally, I wanted to interview both halves of married couples. However, all but one of the male participants declined to share the contact information of their wives. I also asked the same of the female participants at the end of each interview. While the women said that they would ask their partners if they were willing to participate in my study, no contacts arose from this process. As a result, I could interview only one female participant whose husband was interviewed by one of the MRAs.

It was difficult to find a private room to conduct the interviews in Kolkata. The city is 1480 sq km in area[28], thus it would be inconvenient for participants from every corner of the city to travel as it would be time consuming and uncomfortable for the participants. Moreover, Kolkata is one of the most densely populated cities in the world (Malik *et al.*, 2020), therefore to find a room which would ensure complete privacy and be accessible to all the participants would be challenging if not impossible. In addition to all this, interviewing in a room in an academic institution, like a University or the participants' workplace, has its own challenges of power and positionality, social status and professional identity, between the interviewer and the interviewee, especially when conducting interviews about intimate relationships (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

When participants told me they wanted to be interviewed at home, I told them there could be privacy issues as Indian families are composed of many members. When coffee shops were proposed by the participants themselves, for privacy purposes, I tried to ensure that we conduct the interviews in cafes during non-peak hours or at a table far from the rest of the tables. I was fortunate to get a lot of support from the staff members in various cafes who were willing to help me maintain privacy, and control noise, and who were careful to maintain their distance from us during the interview.

Edwards and Holland (2013) suggests that interviewees' choice of location should be given preference, such as cafés or the homes of participants, since they are likely to speak more freely about their personal lives in an environment in which they are comfortable. When participants asked me to be interviewed outdoors, mostly in cafes, I allowed them to suggest the location of the café they wanted to be interviewed in and at a time that was preferable to them. I found out as I conducted more interviews in cafes that female participants always

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[28] This data has been collected from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation Website - https://www.kmcgov.in/KMCPortal/jsp/KolkataStatistics.jsp

chose a café at walking distance or within a kilometre from their homes so they could reach home easily if there was any emergency. During the interviews that took place in coffee shops, women often received calls from their nursemaids at home and sometimes they stopped the interview to call home to check on their children.

The male research assistants reported that male participants who were interviewed at home, were interrupted by phone calls from their workplace, their wives and/or mothers interrupted them to serve them food and drinks. When the men's interviews were conducted in an outdoor setting, there was no interruption on the phone from their home, and if they got a call, they said they were busy and would call back later. The male participants never stopped the interview to check on their children or family at home.

The interviews of female participants which took place in their homes were interrupted many times by their maids, their mother-in-law, their husbands and/or their children. Participants were asked to perform care work by their husbands and/or parents in law and by the domestic help. These requests ranged from getting the briefcase ready for a husband before he left for his office, to instructing the domestic help on what to cook and how to cook it, or making and serving tea to everyone at home, and attending to their children although everyone, including the husband, was present in the home at the time. I was concerned that these sorts of interruptions would happen and that the confidentiality of their interviews could be compromised, so I told participants that it would be difficult to maintain anonymity of what I would record if they were surrounded by people they knew when the interview time and location was arranged. However, if participants felt that they were okay knowing that their account would not remain completely anonymous, then I was willing to conduct the interview at their home. In the end, a total of nine interviews were conducted in participants' homes privately, out of these, in six cases the interviews were interrupted by their family members/maids during the course of the interview.

In these nine interviews, the data was only compromised to the extent that the participants praised their in-laws when they were within earshot. There were two strategies adopted by participants themselves that helped in maintaining the data from being influenced. First strategy was the use of language. Female participants who were interviewed at home spoke in English when their in-laws did not know English. They used English around in-laws when expressing themselves in an uninhibited manner. The second strategy was the participants' willingness to speak about the balancing act and to disregard anyone around them. This strategy was adopted by women who were married for longer than ten years. I also helped the participants on occasion, especially in the case of newly-wed brides, by stopping the interview when their in-laws entered the room and informing the individual that had entered the room that I needed to speak to the participant alone, and this usually worked.

To account for these interruptions, generally participants themselves gave more time to complete the interviews, and therefore these interviews lasted longer than three hours whereas the majority of the interviews lasted around two hours. These interruptions, at homes and in cafes, gave me a limited opportunity to observe how gender roles are practised and how women negotiate normative expectations within their own homes.

3.6 Reflection about the fieldwork

Feminist scholar Ann Oakley in her much cited book chapter, *Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms* (1981), which is based on analysing her experience as a feminist interviewer interviewing mothers and sharing the same experience like the participants she was interviewing, points out that if both the interviewer and the interviewee share the same gender socialisation and critical life experiences, like motherhood in her case, the relationship becomes non-hierarchical in nature and the social distance is minimised. Since I was part of the same class and gender the participants belonged to, participants used the phrase "you

know" on several occasions to imply the shared understanding of belonging to the same social group. This was also the case with interviews conducted by the MRAs.

I was aware of the power hierarchy within the interview setup and I was sensitive in gauging a participant's willingness to answer a question instead of directing them to do so by letting the participant choose how they wanted to answer and when they wanted to stop. I did not probe much when the participant was describing a distressful situation. I would usually continue with other questions and wait for the participant to feel comfortable and ask about clarification only if something was unclear when they were describing the distress they faced. I also offered for them to take a few minutes break before carrying on with the interview if distress was apparent.

The MRAs were also sensitised to this fact as they would hold more power because they held the interview guide and were in charge of conducting the interview. In this regard, I and my MRAs took every care to ensure that the participants did not feel exploited at any moment as they were sharing intimate details from their daily lives with a stranger. I also tried to play the part of a 'therapeutic listener' (Oakley, 1981, p. 51) as women's experiences of performing the double shift not only led them to undergo physical strain but it also had a deep impact on their mental wellbeing and they could not share these details about their everyday life struggles with their family and friends. The majority of the female participants mentioned feeling really good after taking part in the interview and mentioned that no one has ever asked them about these issues before. The male participants were not as expressive, and they mentioned that they usually had discussed the questions that were asked with their friends and colleagues.

Before the start of every interview, the MRAs and I asked if the participants had any questions after reading the participant information sheet that was given to them. We showed them the contact details on the sheet, I gave my contact details including my cell number, and

they were given a copy of the participant information sheet to take with them in case they had any questions after the interview was over.

The MRAs were not married and were very young in age, so I designed a relatively detailed interview guide for them. During the fieldwork the MRAs informed me that the male participants, as one of my MRAs put it "took them under their wing", and that they received a lot of advice from the male participants about the problems of conjugal life.

The MRAs used some of the strategies mentioned in Schwalbe and Wolkomir's essay (2001) on using the masculine self as a resource while interviewing men. Firstly they suggest using symbolic expressions of control, such as letting the participants choose the date and time of the interview. The MRAs did this as did I with the female participants, although in my case the rationale was to make the female participant feel comfortable rather than to transfer control. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) also suggest that interviewers should allow the participant to ask the first question, to allow them to feel more in control, this was done by the MRAs. The MRAs told the participants to ask any questions before the interview was started, and the participants generally asked questions regarding what the role of the MRA was, where they lived, what they studied and how they would use the data from the interview. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) suggest a probing question should be framed as a question that is in continuation from what the interviewee said, like "Since you brought it up, could you explain it a bit more…", the MRAs used this strategy quite often and it resulted in quite candid responses from the male participants.

3.7 Reflection on data analysis

Qualitative researchers have often reflected on the role emotions play on the researchers during the analysis and interview process which is largely unrecognised in the literature on methodology, the focus being on expecting the researcher to achieve reflexivity without

engaging with emotions by remaining neutral (Backett-Milburn, 1999; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

This research involved interviewing, analysing and interpreting data gathered from members who belonged to my own social group and as a feminist researcher maintaining reflexivity was challenging at times, especially when I heard descriptions related to gender discrimination, and harassment that women faced within their everyday lives, or when I heard audio recordings of men expressing their belief in men's rights and the naturalised role of the woman as the housewife and man as breadwinner, during the transcription process.

The process of analysis became more fluid once I came across the reflexive accounts by Mauthner et al. (2003) and Backett-Milburn (1999) reflecting on their time during the analysis process and how reflexivity can be achieved with time, distance and detachment and engaging in discussion with other researchers about the work to gain critical feedback. Presenting my initial analysis during the bi-weekly colloquium in the Sociology department and receiving comments from the group helped me gain some critical perspective of my work. Over time, through comments I received on the analysis drafts submitted to my research board members, I was able to achieve distance and detach myself to the extent that I could be critical. I also wrote multiple drafts of all the analysis chapters, in which I received comments and was able to gain detachment from the emotions that were involved when I submitted the first draft of the data interpretation.

3.8 Analysis

The interviews were translated and transcribed into English by me. The analysis process began for the women's data during the interviews themselves, and continued throughout the transcription process and afterward. The analysis of the men's interviews began during the transcription process, and continued on after the transcription was complete. Analysis of the women's transcripts and transcription of men's interviews were done simultaneously to help

me in identifying any distinct patterns early on (Hennink et al., 2011). I first identified broader themes that were common across the female transcripts, like childhood aspirations, parents' role, resistance against in-laws, husband's role, balancing act and so on. Each transcript was read repeatedly while transcribing and during coding.

Once the men's transcripts were completed, I began identifying the common themes in them, like socialisation in childhood, breadwinner role, wife's role, infantalisation, domestic conflict, gender equality and so on. The identification of broader themes was done by multiple reading of all of the transcripts and a more detailed coding schema was developed (Seale, 2003) with the help of Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) coding software NVIVO (released in March 2020), a more detailed coding schema was developed. The initial broader coding was done on the basis of the interview guide, like gender equality, husband's role, wife's role and so on, while further sub codes were created under the broader codes, such as 'for gender equality', 'against gender equality', 'the contradictions'. Two separate coding schemes were created for men's and women's transcripts as my initial reading of the transcripts suggested that men and women were motivated by different things and had very different perceptions of the domestic field.

After the initial coding was completed, the transcripts were coded again to verify the initial coding process (Charmaz, 2014). During this second time I engaged in writing memos on what the themes were suggesting by analysing the coded themes across cases. A constant comparative approach was used to conduct an in-depth exploration of gender relations and how they played out within the structure of a family. Commonalities and differences between the cases were identified to find the diverse ways in which participants engaged in negotiation and compromise in their everyday lives. Using this approach I continually refined the codes and developed more sub-categories to further explore themes that directly resonated with the broader question of my research about conflict between ideals and practices.

The first analysis chapter (Chapter Four) will explore the theme of socialisation of female participants from birth to marriage and will demonstrate how their own historic socialisation shapes their gendered habitus prior to their marriage. The second analysis chapter (Chapter Five) explores the female participants' experience within the urban middle-class household as young professional wives, how their habitus is reconstituted as a result of this experience and how and why women opted out or felt compelled to compromise on their ideals of gender equality. The third chapter (Chapter Six) explores male participants' experience within the urban middle-class household as young professional men, how their habitus is reconstituted as a result of this experience, although they felt less pressure to compromise on their ideals.

Using the Bourdieusian theoretical framework of habitus, field and distinction I position the findings within the broader cultural context as well as exploring the interplay between agency and conflicting practices and ideals within gender relations in greater depth, generating a more nuanced understanding of how agency interacts with context to produce and reproduce gender relations.

Chapter 4: Discourses of gender equality and traditional norms: Formation of women's gendered habitus

I really believe in it [gender equality]. The entire interview I have spoken about it but the society doesn't <u>really</u> [emphasis hers] follow it. That's the problem.

-   Tuhina (female participant)

People are not fools; they are much less bizarre or deluded that we would spontaneously believe precisely because they have internalized, through a protracted and multisided process of conditioning, the objective choices they face.

- (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 130)

4.1 Introduction

The formation of the habitus is linked to individual history, where social agents develop a socially constituted "sense of the game" (1992, p. 118), within the field, that accounts for the practices in everyday life (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990b, 1993). This chapter will explore the ways in which *bhadro*[29] married women in urban middle-class families, with social and cultural capital, are socialised from their childhood till they are married to develop a "sense of the game" (1992, p. 118) within their gendered habitus.

Throughout the data, there is a resonance of fear of uncertainties in conjugal life, both actual uncertainty and future uncertainty, like one participant mentioned how she had to perform the breadwinning role after her husband lost his job, another participant spoke about having faced domestic violence[30] at her marital home whereas others spoke about the possible uncertainties that guided the formation of their habitus when they were young. The habitus of each female

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[29]Being *bhadro* means that members of the *bhadralok* middle-class are expected to behave respectably.

[30]As per the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, 2005 domestic violence constitutes any form of violence, namely physical, emotional, verbal, economic abuse perpetrated against women in domestic relationships otherwise known as intimate relationships in the global north. Domestic word is expansive as it includes within its definition the abuse women are subject to by relatives other than the husband, as they live in a multi-generational family set up.

participant is inscribed, from an early age, by the internalisation of the need for protection against possible patriarchal injustices which becomes a part of the gendered habitus. This need for protection is seen as an objective choice by the time young girls become adults.

The fear of uncertainties in conjugal life leads young girls from urban middle-class families to focus on academic success and economic independence by drawing from discourses of gender equality. This chapter will discuss how traditional gendered habitus is embodied through conditioning and enforcement of a socially constituted system of structures that are constantly aimed at focussing on practical functions, for example, ensuring that young women return home at a socially respectable hour. Thus, young women are socialised to behave respectably while also excelling academically and becoming economically independent. This chapter will therefore, analyse the implications of simultaneously being socialised to observe heteronormative gender roles within the domestic field,while they are also being socialised to adopt certain ideals of gender equality by pursuing career and academic success to meet the class habitus of being liberal and well read.

Drawing from discourses of gender equality as well as upholding the norms of feminine respectability, where it is necessary to be *bhadro* to belong to the respectable Bengali middle-class, leads to the formation of a complex habitus for young women. The norm of respectable femininity reproduced through constant negotiation between opposing ideals and practices shapes women's complex habitus. Often the ideals drawn from discourses of gender equality conflict with patriarchal class expectations and may result in impacting the process of reconstitution of patriarchal traditions.

Table 2: Participant details

Sr. No.	Name	Age group	Education	Current Occupation	Selection of partner	Living status	Married for	Husband's education
1	Ananya	25-30	Medicine	Doctor	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Less than 1	Medicine
2	Anindita	25-30	M.Tech	IT Professional	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	2-5 years	Engineering
3	Anita	40-45	Masters	Corporate Auditor	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors
4	Anusree	35-40	Bachelors	School Teacher	Arranged by family/friends	With in laws	Above 10	Bachelors
5	Anwesha	35-40	Masters	School Teacher	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Above 10	Masters
6	Aruna	30-34	Masters	Urban Planning	Arranged by family/friends	With in laws	2-5 years	Medicine
7	Arunita	30-34	Engineering	IT Professional	Love Marriage	Without in laws	6-9 Years	Masters
8	Asmita	35-40	MBA	HR*** Manager	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters
9	Bani	30-34	Masters	Account Manager	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters
10	Barnali	30-35	PhD	College Lecturer	Love Marriage	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters
11	Bina	25-30	Masters	NGO*	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	1-2 Years	Masters
12	Brishti	25-30	Masters	Govt. Service	Love then arranged	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters
13	Chitra	30-34	Bachelors	Self employed	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Above 10	Engineering
14	Malini	30-35	Bachelors	School teacher	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors
15	Manisha	35-40	Masters	School teacher	Love Marriage	With her mother	Above 10	Masters
16	Mrinalini	35-40	Masters	NGO*	Love Marriage	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters
17	Nandini	35-40	Pursuing PhD	Lecturer PT**	Love Marriage	Joint family	Above 10	Masters
18	Nandita	35-40	PhD	College Lecturer	Love Marriage	Joint family	6-9 years	Bachelors
19	Jui	25-30	Masters	School teacher	Love Marriage	Without in laws	6-9 years	Masters
20	Oindrilla	35-40	Bachelors	Choreographer	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors
21	Oishi	35-40	LLB	Lawyer	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors
22	Parna	35-40	Masters	School Teacher	Through matrimonial ad	With in laws	Above 10	Bachelors
23	Payel	25-30	Bachelors	Fitness instructor	Love then arranged	Without in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors
24	Ranjana	35-40	Bachelors	School Teacher	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors
25	Ratna	35-40	M.Phil	College Lecturer	Through matrimonial ad	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters
26	Raya	35-40	PhD	Govt. Service	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	PhD
27	Richa	35-40	Masters	Teacher	Arranged by family/friends	With in laws	Above 10	Engineering
28	Ritu	30-35	Engineering	IT Engineer	Love Marriage	Without in laws	2-5 years	Engineering
29	Rooprekha	30-34	Masters	Service Sector	Through matrimonial ad	With in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors
30	Sanjukta	25-30	Masters	Service Sector	Love Marriage	With in laws	2-5 years	Bachelors
31	Sarani	35-40	Masters	School teacher	Love Marriage	With in laws	Above 10	Masters
32	Satarupa	30-35	Bachelors	Service Sector	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors
33	Sayani	30-34	Medicine	Doctor	Love Marriage	Without in laws	2-5 years	Medicine
34	Joyee	35-40	Masters	School Teacher	Love Marriage	With in laws	Above 10	Masters
35	Shruti	25-30	MBA	Govt. Service	Love then arranged	Without in laws	Less than 1	Masters
36	Sramana	35-40	Masters	NGO*	Love Marriage	With in laws	Above 10	Masters
37	Suchismita	35-40	PhD	College Lecturer	Arranged by family/friends	Joint family	6-9 years	Masters
38	Sumedha	25-30	Bachelors	Family business	Love then arranged	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters
39	Sunetra	25-30	MBA	HR head	Love then arranged	Without in laws	2-5 years	Masters
40	Tuhina	30-34	Masters	Lecturer	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters

*NGO - Non Governmental Organisation

** PT - Part Time

*** HR - Human Resource

4.2 Childhood and socialisation

While growing up, women in the study talked about the restrictions imposed on them by their parents, when they were young and how they negotiated with these restrictions. These restrictions reveal the ways in which traditional norms are practised and how young girls are socialised into them. While young girls were socialised to adhere to traditional norms of feminine respectability, they were also encouraged to maintain their academic performance in school. This section will first discuss the importance of educational attainment as a member

of the urban middle-class and then discuss the process of embodiment of restrictions for the maintenance of class respectability, both of which structures the habitus when girls are growing up.

4.2.1 Focus on educational attainment

Historically in this region, educating daughters has been fashionable within the middle-classes since the mid-19th century to meet the ideals of companionate marriage (Raychaudhuri, 2000). The existing literature identifies that the focus of the middle-class in India on educational achievement of young women is to meet the ideal of companionate marriage (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Twamley, 2012, 2014) and to meet the parental expectation which is driven by the fear of their daughters' uncertain future within a patriarchal society (Narayan, 1997). In fact studies on companionate marriage ideals in contemporary India show how educational attainment is the norm where both bride and groom expect each other to be highly educated especially among culturally dominating classes (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Twamley, 2014).

For the urban middle-classes in Kolkata the motivation behind placing the normative expectation on girls to aspire for educational attainment is more complex. According to the narratives of the female participants, education of young women is encouraged for the following reasons – 1) to meet the ideals of companionate marriage 2) to continue the practice of raising educated children in their role as mothers and 3) to meet the class habitus of gender equality, which is understood by the class members as the practise of equal right to education of children. All participants in the study had attained varying levels of higher education degrees from a three-year bachelor's degree to professional degrees. Therefore, for young women, aspiring to higher levels of educational attainment informs the class habitus as well the gendered habitus. Participants who mentioned having excelled in studies in school went onto enter professional fields, such as medicine, law, and management, and the majority of

the participants who completed a three-year bachelor's degree went on to complete a master's degree (see **Table *2*:** Participant details).

All the female participants expressed that when growing up, the primary concern of their parents was their academic performance in school. Some participants who did not live near renowned schools in Kolkata, travelled for hours to get to these schools. Aruna says, "I would leave home by 6:30 am to reach [the school] by 8 am every day and then travel back and be home by 4 pm [to attend a Christian missionary English medium[31] school in Kolkata]." Therefore, for Aruna, most of her day was spent travelling to school and attending school. In the case of another participant, Barnali, her mother moved to Kolkata with her when she was in the tenth grade to provide her with better educational opportunities. Barnali says, "My mother was very focused on ensuring I had better opportunities when I went into higher studies. My father stayed back in his workplace, and we came down to Kolkata for my studies." Thus, girls' parents not only encouraged them to get educated but also placed importance on accessing quality education that would help them gain access to better professional opportunities. When talking about growing up, all participants mentioned that education was an integral part of their everyday life that was supported and encouraged by their parents. But when women were asked about the roles played by their parents within the domestic field, nearly all participants (with the exception of only three), said that their parents followed gendered division of labour at home. Sayani says,

> Belonging to a middle-class Bengali family, my parents, especially my mother put a
>
> lot of stress on my studies. As in "you have to do well in your studies, everything else

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[31]*English medium* school is a policy related term, commonly used in India to signify schools where the medium of instruction is in English (Annamalai, 2003, 2005). In India, there are two types of English medium schools, one is run by state education boards and the other is run by private education boards. The English medium schools run by the state are mainly under state education boards. The private Christian missionary schools, which are mostly English medium, are under private education boards.

can wait, studies come first." Therefore, I did not do much domestic work at all because my parents wanted me to focus on my studies. So, I had the impression that I had to study and get good marks and do a job when I grow up. That is what my perception of growing up was but then all this household work after getting married, I had no clue that I had to do.

In the case of Sayani, emerging forms of both autonomy and constraint can be observed. In her interview, Sayani described her mother as never having had a say in the family and therefore, living without autonomy according to Sayani. Here, Sayani is drawing from her understanding of the meaning of gender equality which is based on the discourse of freedom of choice for women to voice their opinions; she mentioned how her mother challenged the constraints of living without autonomy by prioritising Sayani's education, thus making an attempt to generate conditions of autonomy for Sayani.

Participants mentioned that focus on educational attainment made them less prepared to undertake the traditional carer role after marriage. In the case of Sayani, discussed above, she spoke about not having performed housework at all while growing up, yet taking up the role of a caregiver traditionally assigned to married women within the domestic field, after she married. The reproduction of class habitus through focus on educational attainment helped some of the participants to reconcile their understanding of the discourse of gender equality which they believe is achieved when equal right to education is given to every child. Raya says,

The upbringing that I have had, a guy also gets the same upbringing. When I ask people, I ask my relatives, my friends, as I am very curious, they reveal the fact that they are much happier when a son is born than when a daughter is born. Equality to me means what difference does it make if a girl is born, or a boy is born? I see no difference. So, the first idea of equality to me is that. Whether it is a boy or a girl, they

will study and grow up in the same manner with the same opportunities and lead their own lives.

Thus, as women grow up, they understand the meaning of equality as equal focus on educational attainment for boys and girls. The current literature suggests that focus on educational attainment within the middle-class is primarily driven by the motivation to conform to the ideal of companionate marriages (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008). However, in my study, there was an observable difference between women who grew up as a single child compared to women who grew up with male siblings. In cases where women participants grew up without any male siblings, girls did not get initiated into the practice of performing the domestic chores before they were married. In cases where women grew up with male siblings, this was different. Anita, who grew up with an elder male sibling, recounts,

> When we were kids, my mother used to ensure that I and my sister would pick up our plates after eating but it was not the case for my brother or my father. If we forgot to do it, my mother used to scold us [she and her sister]! But she would never *ever* [emphasis hers] tell my brother to do anything at home.

As Anita's story demonstrates, women who had male siblings observed how men were excluded from all domestic expectations, while women were scolded for not participating in domestic arrangements. When asked about why men do not do household work Ananya, compares herself with her brother and recalls,

> While growing up I was used to helping out [my mother] at home, although it was *voluntary* [emphasis mine]. So naturally I am more responsible after getting married towards household work. But my brother will never do it, as he never did it [while growing up].

Ananya is younger than Anita by a decade, over time the insistence on performing housework may have shifted from being compulsory to voluntary within households with siblings from both sexes. Women who had male siblings, through self-reflexivity, recognised the inequality between how each sex was treated and identified, the social process that positioned them into the care-giving role earlier than participants from single child families. Ananya, in the quote above, uses the word "naturally" to signify her self-reflexive observation about the gender hierarchy that operates within the domestic field where married women are normatively expected to be caregivers.

4.2.2 Maintaining class respectability

Women also mentioned various ways in which they are socialised into the class habitus by internalising specific and gendered class expectations like dressing modestly, staying at home, gender segregated socialisation, and other such gendered expectations. Women interviewed discussed being socialised to identify and practice the distinction between being respectably feminine and being classless. All of the women in the study spoke about how they had a specific time in the evening they had to be back home when they were living in their natal home and stressed that they always had to keep their parents updated about their whereabouts when they were out of the house. Shruti says,

> My father is very strict, he always made sure I was good in studies, he would always ensure that I always came back home before dark. This continued till the time I was married. He [her father] would call me if I am out, to check when I will be back home. Once I am back home, he doesn't even talk to me, but he always wants me to be home in front of his eyes. I mean he will watch TV or do something else, but I have to be home.

When asked about her relationship with her father, Shruti spoke about how her father focused on her academic performance as she grew up but her narrative also indicates that she had to

follow the class habitus of respectable femininity by meeting the expectation of her father who had control over her whereabouts until she married. Thus, women's habitus embodies the need to spend the majority of their time at home and be home at a respectable hour. The control Shruti's father maintained reflects how the girl's parents place themselves in the position of the protector of their daughters. Among most women interviewed, the role of protecting a woman's honour and respectability transferred from the parents to the husband, when the woman married, as was the case with Shruti. Thus, young women begin to view constraints on their bodily movement and the need for being protected as a part of their habitus. Asmita recalls, "When I was in school, I had to come back home by 9 pm. That's how strict my mother was." This restriction to get home at a respectable hour was there for all the participants, and shows the extent of influence of the class habitus on the gendered habitus in inscribing respectability in women.

Adhering to a time curfew for returning home, like 9 pm, also meets the normative expectation of class respectability placed on urban middle-class women. Thus, habitus is embodied within young girls by constantly aiming at meeting a practical function, in this case their safety. Young women are therefore socialised to internalise regulation of their bodily movement without considering these constraints as disciplinary or external to their embodied habitus, so this is seen as simply being commonsense rather than a restriction related to their gender. The practice of keeping daughters safe, is a complex one as girls' parents are both driven by a plausible fear of violence as well as the fear of not being able to maintain the virginity of their daughters, a socially recognised symbol of purity (Narayan, 1997; Puri,

1999; Phadke, Khan and Ranade, 2011). Raya spoke about how this expectation of respectability is negotiated by women during annual festivals like the *Durga Puja*[32],

> During *Durga Puja*, when I was a teenager, my mother *allowed* [emphasis mine] me go out but I had to return home by 10 pm, so that control she had but she gave me freedom at the same time, and she ensured that I was safe.

In this quote, Raya highlights two issues for women growing up in patriarchal cultures, the persistent engagement of women in negotiation with traditional norms and the gendered nature of the burden of safety which is embodied within the gendered habitus of young girls. The traditional norm of exerting patriarchal control on bodily movement of women is therefore perceived as a benevolent act of protection and safety for women. Thus, traditional gendered habitus is embodied in young women by demonstrating that following the rule that restricts their freedom of movement serves a practical purpose such as their own safety, rather than being a perpetuation of patriarchal control.

Some of the women (all of whom were above the age of 35) spoke of being accompanied by either parent when they went out with friends or to their tuition classes. This accompaniment of young women is a class expectation performed by girls' parents to maintain the purity of their daughters. Thus, both educational attainment and staying at home are markers of being respectable rather than socialising in mixed gender social circles or being away from home beyond a respectable hour. This finding when compared with Abraham's (2001) work on how culturally sanctioned gender segregation leads to desexualisation of the urban youth in Mumbai, then in the case of urban middle-class Bengalis it can be inferred that maintaining their daughters purity can also lead young women to look at themselves as desexualised

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[32]It is a four day (sometimes five day) annual Bengali (religious Hindu) festival that takes place in autumn to celebrate Goddess Durga's, the ten handed Hindu goddess, annual visit to her natal home on earth.

beings and may lead to passivity towards one's own desires for intimacy (discussed further in section 4.3.2).

Girls are also socialised into the practice of normative respectable femininity in the way they dress, especially when they are in public. Some participants talked about dressing modestly when they were asked what restrictions they had while growing up. Ananya attended a Christian missionary (English medium) school where girls wear the western uniform of a skirt and blouse to school. She said,

> My parents used to make sure that the length of my skirt was much longer than what was prescribed by the school, which was supposed to be just above the knees. Mine were always much below my knees [she laughs].

Since girls are expected to dress modestly by Indian society, if they attend a school where the required uniform does not meet the mark of respectable class and cultural expectations, the parents intervene. A cultural conflict can be observed here where English education is aspirational as a result of globalisation, but cultural markers like dress are regulated through women's bodies. In Ananya's case, she was made to wear a longer skirt than required thus following the norm set by the school while also meeting the cultural expectation of dressing modestly. This restriction on her dress was the result of a negotiation between accepting the recommended length of the skirt stipulated by the English medium missionary school and maintaining class respectability in the society, marking girls' bodies as a medium through which class respectability is maintained.

Another participant, Anindita, when asked if she thinks about what others will say about how she dresses said, "Since I normally dress up in a *decent manner* [emphasis mine], I don't have to think about what people will say about what I wear". Therefore, women dressing in a 'decent manner' is the class norm and the idea of being 'decent' marks a line which women

cannot cross without risking their feminine respectability. The socialisation of women to dress modestly places the responsibility of maintaining class respectability for themselves and their families on them, and this persists throughout women's lives.

The norms of feminine respectability in the majority of the women interviewed are perceived as non-negotiable within the urban middle-classes of Kolkata. In practice, the need to maintain the mark of respectability is embodied by young girls through the way they dress or how long they stay out of the house. Following these rules determines what the society will think about their character, and they carry this concern into adulthood. Thus, the gendered habitus is a product of such historically enforced practices. Another determinant of a woman's character is whether she drinks alcohol publicly, although this is more acceptable in a strictly family setting. Asmita says,

> My mother used to be very strict about rules [that I had to follow growing up] and that has helped me a lot to know when I am crossing the boundary. Like if I do something wrong now, I can see my mother's disapproval in my mind. Even today if I drink alcohol at a party, I hear her disapproval in my head. The fear that she had put in me in my childhood guides me even now.

From Asmita's account it is evident that women are raised to self-police their behaviour and to worry about whether their actions are crossing the invisible line of feminine respectability. Further, if they do cross that invisible line, like in the case of Asmita here when she drinks alcohol at a party, they are socialised to experience a sense of guilt for doing so. The fear of breaking the rules of respectability structures their gendered habitus. Asmita's account of her fear of crossing the invisible line of respectability could also be linked to the fear of becoming a victim of rape, and being subject to victim blaming (discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.3) thus, losing one's respectable class position.

Apart from control over women's bodies, parents also impose the traditional norm of gender segregated socialisation, by restricting free mixing between girls and boys. Tuhina, when speaking of being allowed to go on a class trip by her father, says,

> My father surprised us all by allowing me to go. Of course, it was easier for him because I was studying in a girl's school…I don't think he would have *allowed* [emphasis mine] me to go if there were boys going [on the school trip]. In fact, I don't remember having a boy as a friend when growing up, because everywhere I went, there were only girls, my school, my tuition, my dance classes. Everywhere my mother would take me, so no freedom. My parents were very protective and would always pester me to study.

Tuhina's narrative is also reflective of the ways in which girls are socialised into the normative practice of maintenance of virginity before marriage through gender segregation. Thus, there is a negotiation young girls are socialised to engage in, an exchange between being protected and giving up personal freedom. Women's bodies become the site for exerting patriarchal expectations by socialising young women to internalise the need to maintain virginity through gender segregated socialisation. Another participant, Nandita, spoke of how she hid the fact that she had a boyfriend when she was in school from her parents even though her parents had a love marriage themselves. This fear of her parent's condemnation supports the dominance of the norm of gender segregation within the class and how girls are socialised to develop a "sense of the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 118) that mixing with boys without supervision would mean a violation of the norm of feminine purity. Nandita says,

> You know how our Bengali middle-class households are, I could not just go out and meet a boy and date. I never had any such objection from my parents, and neither were they narrow minded or anything of that sort because even they had a love

marriage. But somehow, I felt that this is not something that you share with your parents and I also thought that first let me see if things work out between the both of us and then I would tell my parents.

Participants used the phrase 'you know' to indicate that the knowledge that is being shared by the participant is about a norm that is in practice, and which they would expect the interviewer, also a member of their class, to understand, as did Nandita in the quote above. Nandita also identifies how she felt her parents did not actively stop her from mixing with boys but rather expected her to regulate her own behaviour to be consistent with class habitus. Thus, Nandita's behaviour is regulated by her without her parents directly asking her to obey any specific rules. In the case of her boyfriend, Nandita felt that hiding the relationship from her parents was justified as she did not want them to actively enforce the norm of protecting the virginity of their daughter, by asking her to end the relationship, which she believed they would have done had they known about her relationship. Therefore, she continued her relationship while maintaining the class habitus by keeping her parents uninformed about her relationship.

Nandita's fear of her parent's reaction to her relationship may well have been justified, as other women interviewed discussed the negative sanctioning that they experienced if they fell in love during their teens and their parents came to know about their relationships. Satarupa said,

> [When growing up] we used to stay in a government quarter and my husband also stayed in the same building, so that is how we knew each other. We fell in love when I was in the 10th standard and he was in college. Our neighbours got to know about our relationship, and they were the ones who opposed and disclosed it to our parents. They told my mother to keep a close watch over me. My parents did not think that I should get into a serious relationship at such a young age. So, at that time, during the initial

years my parents were against my relationship, instead they asked me to concentrate on my studies. My husband who was in college came over and talked to my parents and assured them that he also wanted me to study and have a career. But there was resistance from them so I told them I will only marry the person I love. Gradually my husband got a good job and then they agreed [to our marriage].

In these cases, the girl's parents encouraged their daughters to get married once they had started college and their boyfriend had started working, and as a result they all got married while they were still studying. This also indicates how the role of breadwinner is embodied into the gendered habitus of men as the parents of Satarupa gave their consent to their relationship only after he got a job to become the provider to their daughter.

Women in the study who later did not question the performing the double shift (10/40) when they were married, spoke of the socialisation that happened when they observed their mothers performing the caregiving role. Shruti says,

Whatever I do now [as a married woman], I try to picture my mother. I have seen how my mother handled so many roles, it's inspiring, I know I can't do it as well as she does. She will also think of everyone before [she thinks of] herself. Though I don't support the fact that she doesn't think of her needs. But since I have seen her doing it since childhood, it is there at the back of my mind that [married women] should think of others' needs first. Moreover, my mother does everything in a polite manner without being loud or talking back. Although I am not like her in this area. I am like my father, I am outspoken…From earning a living to managing the house, everything [my mother] manages herself. Nowadays people have maids, cook and nursemaids. My mother never had a maid and she managed a career and her family, she raised my brother and me single handedly. Until now she doesn't have a cook. Even *now* [emphasis hers]…I stay with my husband, I do all the cooking. We both have lunch at

our workplaces, but I really get astonished as to how my mother pulled it off by herself. I am so tired after getting back from work. So, when I think of her, raising her two kids and doing everything single handedly, I find it inspiring.

In a rare scenario where a female participant's mother was engaged in paid work, the daughter was socialised to observe the balancing act of performing the double shift, thus when Shruti married, she reproduced the world that produced her. Shruti's statement also demonstrates how women are praised by other women for upholding the gendered habitus, as Bourdieu says that the habitus lives by making "a virtue of necessity" (1992, p. 88). In a field where the conditions are pre-determined, like women playing the role of caregivers within the domestic field, social agents (women) adapt their behaviour to transform the necessary condition (caregiving) of their gendered habitus into a virtue. In this way the habitus "reproduces the world that has produced it" (1992, p. 128). It can be further inferred that if caregiving was a virtue and not a necessary condition within the domestic field then maybe mothers would encourage their daughters to prioritise care work rather than discouraging them. As Shruti, who grew up with a male sibling, mentions that she only began housework after getting married and identifies her necessary condition to be a caregiver within the domestic field as a virtue as her mother was positively sanctioned by other social agents within the domestic field when she (Shruti's mother) performed the traditional caregiving role. In the previous section (section 4.2.1) mothers were seen as prioritising their daughters' academic performance when they were home instead of enforcing the caregiving role on them, and that even for mixed sibling households, education of girls was the first priority followed by initiation into housework. Therefore, the gendered habitus is perpetuated by transforming a necessary condition (women performing care work) into a virtue but it could be possible that performing care work is not fully accepted as a virtue by married women although they may echo it since it is seen as a virtue by other social agents within the domestic field.

4.2.3 Internalising the need for protection

The socialisation of young women lead them to consider the home as their safe and rightful place; this is embodied within young women through living in a society where violence is perpetrated on women when they are in public - molestation, sexual abuse etc. (Chandra, 2018; *The Telegraph*, 2021), and women are socialised to be home at a stipulated hour or being answerable to family members for not being home once work outside is done. They also negotiate the cultural expectation of staying home especially during the night to maintain the norm of feminine respectability (Phadke, Khan and Ranade, 2011). The majority of women interviewed did not resist the internalisation of their place as primarily limited to the domestic field or being *ghoroa*[33] as this process began from their childhood.

Parents try to inculcate a sense of respectability in their daughters by ensuring that their daughters are raised in a protected environment and parents socialise women from young age to internalise the need for protection, and to develop the expectation that need to be guarded by their parents, and later by their husbands. Sarani recalls,

> I was hardly aware of the outside world as my father never allowed me to venture outside the house on my own. He would let my friends come over to our place, but I was not allowed to go to theirs. I only went to school every day. In other cases, I was always accompanied by my mother or a member of my family if I had to venture out. My father was very strict, he did not allow me to speak to people in our neighbourhood. He told me everyone was bad, and I should stay [at home] away from everyone and not speak to strangers or neighbours. My dad would encourage me to read so I would read a lot and do well in my studies. So, if I had to describe my childhood in one word, it would be 'protected'.

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[33]It is a Bengali word which is used to signify a person, especially women of marriageable age, who have developed a sense of feeling at home only when they are physically at home. Thus, they (women) learn to consider the act of physically being at home as a meaningful way of expressing their gender identity as respectable middle-class women.

Sarani here explains how she was socialised into identifying and following the invisible mark of feminine respectability by internalising the need for women to be *ghoroa* by being encouraged to take up activities which would not require one to step out of the house, thus she speaks of being encouraged to read at home and excel in her studies as these activities do not require women to step out of the house. This is also a process through which parents socialise daughters to see the domestic field as their field of accomplishment, which helps them to become good wives and obedient daughters in law in the future. Although such practice of strict seclusion and gender segregation as described by Sarani here was rare, girls were expected to inform parents about their whereabouts at all times when they were unaccompanied by them.

Ramasubramanium et al. (2009) has referred to the continued demand in matrimonial ads for domestically accomplished *ghoroa bou* within the urban middle-classes in contemporary India as a way of maintaining the gender stereotypes. In other words, this demand indicates the prevalence of gendered hierarchical structure within the domestic field. The norm of maintaining respectability, internalising the need for protection and the knowledge of the demand for a homely bride[34] or *ghoroa bou*[35] in the marriage market within the urban middle-classes of contemporary India are interrelated. Since this interrelation is complex, it would be challenging to ascertain which of these factors holds more significance for perpetuation of gendered hierarchy within the domestic field.

From the narratives of the women who had an arranged marriage, the significance of being a *ghoroa bou* was clearer due to the demand in the marriage market for the same, which can in

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[34]Polzenhagen, F. and Frey, S. (2017) in their book chapter 'Are marriages made in heaven? A cultural-linguistic case study on Indian-English matrimonials' have analysed English matrimonial advertisements published in Indian English language newspapers or the marriage market for the English speaking urban middle-class, where 'homely bride' is a very common term used in such ads to signal the expectation of a bride who is used to spending more time at home.

[35]*Ghoroa* has been defined in footnote number 32. *Bou* is a Bengali term which means wife.

turn then be seen as an important reason for socialising young girls to feel at home within the domestic field. As Anusree says, "My father-in-law wanted a *ghoroa bou* who would be able to run the household efficiently and balance both the household responsibility and do her job well. So that was their expectation." As a result, the reinforcement of traditional norms as well as drawing from discourses of gender equality, like higher education and engagement in paid work, could be seen to be contradictory are in fact guided by demand for *ghoroa bou* in the marriage market. It should be noted that the definition for *ghoroa bou* has changed over time, and when compared to women of previous generation, who were mostly housewives *ghoroa bou* now signifies a wife who is accomplished at performing the double shift as mentioned by Anusree in the above quote.

The overall pattern emerging from the data across cases is one in which young women spend most of their time outside of school hours at home. This process of socialising young girls to maintain respectability could lead them to familiarise themselves with the normative expectation of becoming a *ghoroa bou* when they reached the marriageable age. Anita said,

> I belonged to a very conservative family, we [my sister and I] were not allowed to leave the house so my friends used to come down...even if we were going out, we would always be accompanied by our mother...she accompanied me till *I finished college!* [emphasis hers]..."

Thus, young girls, and even young adult women, are socialised by their parents to feel the need to be protected. It is important to note here that Anita identifies her family as being conservative in comparison to the norms enforced by her friends' families, so it must be acknowledged that not all urban middle-class families are conservative in the traditional sense, nor are all parents as restrictive of their daughters as Anita's parents were. Nevertheless, through the process of socialising young girls to internalise the need for

protection which is constantly aimed at meeting the practical reason of maintaining women's safety, the traditional gendered habitus sustains itself. Tuhina says,

> There are certain limitations [growing up] in a Bengali middle-class family and I had been following that. I never demanded from my mother that I want to go out with my friends, whatever may be the consequences. I did not do that. They had only my best interests in mind.

Therefore, once girls begin to develop the "sense of the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, no. 118), they regulate themselves without any external coercion. Thus, we see how women belonging to urban middle-class families rationalise the restrictions imposed on them by their parents as benevolent and for their own protection.

Moreover, given the various statistics on violence perpetrated against women in India (see Chapter 2, section 2.8), the enforcement of the norm of maintaining feminine respectability by maintaining purity of young girls is a normative expectation that the parents of young girls negotiate with by exerting control over bodily movement of young girls. Another participant Raya recalls an incident of domestic violence that led her cousin sister[36] to commit suicide,

> My cousin sister would not have committed suicide if she had anywhere to go, she was forced to commit suicide not being able to bear the torture at the hands of her in-laws, parents disown their daughters once they get married. So, a woman who faces domestic violence needs to make a decision to live alone, if she has the financial resources.

Therefore, having financial resources by engaging in paid work is seen by the participants as an important criterion to be able to resist any form of patriarchal injustice that they might encounter especially within their homes.

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[36]Her paternal uncle's daughter. This translation is from Bengali. In Bengali language gender is specified when talking of family relations.

Raya's observation in the quote above is similar to what is found in the literature on domestic violence in India, girl's parents do not support their daughters when they face domestic violence (Subramaniam and Krishnan, 2016). Thus, the focus of women to engage in paid work may not entirely be to follow the class habitus to espouse ideals of work force participation by drawing from discourses of gender equality, but it may be there to create conditions for exercising agency against possible patriarchal injustices within the home, like domestic violence. Arunita says, "My mother said whatever you do, once you are a married woman, we won't be there to solve any problem in your in-laws place. 'Whatever you face there [marital home], don't come to us. You have to adjust.' " Most parents of the women interviewed advised their daughters to adjust when they informed their parents about the issues they faced at their in-laws place but in case of physical violence, mentioned by one participant, her parents supported her financially as well as emotionally. They also let her move back into the natal home so that she did not have to face any more physical abuse.

The following segment is on mixed messages women receive in their adulthood and how these messages influence how women make sense of their gendered habitus.

4.3 Adulthood and mixed messages

Women interviewed continue to receive conflicting messages after they grow up as parents expect their daughters to focus on engaging themselves in paid employment and at the same time follow the traditional expectation of heteronormative marriage once they reach a marriageable age, and are financially independent. However, the focus on paid employment leads women to develop agency to resist the imposition of the marriageable age by their parents for a certain number of years before they are married.

4.3.1 Focus on paid employment

Women in the study attributed their motivation to earn a living to certain factors that they heard from their parents while growing up – 1) the rise in consumerist culture and 2) to

generate conditions for women to exercise agency against the possible violence. Ratna explains these below,

Sanhita: Which family member inspired you the most?

Ratna: I would have to say that it was my father. He would always tell me that my education was important and I had to become financially independent when I grow up. He would tell me that I have to be economically strong by doing a job no matter what that job was. That [choice of profession] was not important as long as I had a job…

Sanhita: Why did you think your father stressed on the fact that you should be financially independent?

Ratna: Because we live in a patriarchal society so whether women are working [earning a living] or they are housewives they are always under some kind of domination. If a woman is not economically strong she cannot protest in many places. She has to accept abuse silently. But if she is financially independent she would be able to raise her voice. This was something which my father said and always wanted to me to be prepared for, so that I would never have to tolerate any abuse in future and I would be able to stand up for myself if I needed to...we hear these horror stories of women being abused, in the media, from our friends and family. So, my father wanted to ensure that my married life was settled, he thought I would have to face less obstacles if I was financially secure and people [in laws] could not treat me in an inhuman manner…

In this quote, Ratna identifies the need for financial independence for women in patriarchal societies to increase their ability to exercise agency in matters related to everyday life and to counter patriarchal injustices. If wives meet their own financial needs, it is assumed (by

women and their parents) that this will result in women resisting possible violence in intimate relationships. Thus, women's habitus is underpinned by the fear of violence where she might be susceptible to abuse. Ratna went on to add,

> One more thing is also there, he [my father] felt that since everything is so expensive and our lifestyle is changing, it would be difficult for a guy in a middle-class family to run the household through one single income, so the financial support of his wife would help the family in leading a better life. This was another reason I think behind him wanting to encourage me to be financially independent. He felt that when both the partners are working they would be able to complement each other regarding the financial expenditure of the family like my father and my mother. The direction in which our society is moving, it is impossible to live without both the partners earning money, so my father was able to foresee that. I feel these two are the main criteria behind his support.

It is evident from Ratna's quote above that due to the rise in consumerist culture post liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s, women's economic independence is seen not only as a profitable proposition because she adds to the financial corpus of the family, but also supports men to perform their role as the breadwinner for rest of the family. Joyee, when asked about the importance of earning a living, demonstrated the concerns marriage can bring up for women. She says,

> Taking care of the basic needs for yourself and of course next comes your family...but at least, see if the husband is there to look after the family at least you should be having a little financial independence of contributing towards your family, or if you are alone looking after yourself so that you just don't get...you just don't have to you know get hooked onto someone who is not worthy of you so I guess I'm saying it right anyway [laughs]...

Towards the end Joyee mentions that an important purpose related to women gaining economic independence is that they gain bargaining power in the marriage market and increase their chance of finding a groom who is desirable to them. Apart from this, meeting one's personal needs is seen by most women[37], as the primary reason for women's motivation towards achieving economic independence. Financial independence of women is important, however Joyee adds that women's income should be "little", later on in the interview she identifies her husband as the breadwinner and herself as the carer within the domestic field. Therefore, while the traditional gendered habitus is in some ways challenged as women become financially independent, the roles of other members within the domestic field tend to remain constant which limits women from transforming the gendered hierarchy within their family.

The women interviewed are reluctant to place themselves in the role of the breadwinner and are currently negotiating their place in the domestic field as that of providing financial support only. Joyee spoke about supporting her husband financially during her interview without overtaking his role as the breadwinner. Other women interviewed also spoke about how they are supporting themselves and helping their family by being financially independent. Thus, the role of women as earners is perceived by women to be that of providing financial assistance and therefore distinct from the role of the breadwinner traditionally ascribed to men.

Ratna explains, in the quote at the beginning of this section, that at least part of the insistence on women earning a living came from exposure to media reports about domestic violence and from listening to experiences of women facing abuse. Another participant, Rooprekha, mentioned violence against women when asked about the empowerment of women,

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[37] This theme was also found in men's data, see Chapter 6.

A woman must have a source of income even if it is low paid like giving tuitions at home or running a catering service from home, the kind of work doesn't matter, but women must use their education to earn a living…when you go out to work it gives you access to social life…If you are not financially independent, then you will stay in an abusive relationship and bear domestic violence…Your upbringing, getting good education, earning a living together they give you a sense of empowerment. You become self-confident.

Rooprekha in the quote above draws from discourses of gender equality and she understands that earning a living empowers women to stand up against patriarchal injustices by providing them with confidence.

When it comes to earning a living, most women talked about how a career helps them to have an identity outside that of wife and mother. Thus, having a career helps women reconcile with the ideals of equality outside of the domestic field. Asmita says,

My career is my identity. My salary is not very high so I can't say I earn a lot of money, but whatever little I earn is justified because at work I am not somebody's wife, somebody's mother. I am Asmita.I am what I am. I am the only me out there, so that is a place where I can be myself, it's my identity. Everyone in my office knows me as I am so I am not going to give away my identity at any cost no matter how much money I have or earn, it's beyond that.

Asmita, like many other women interviewed, expressed how earning a living is a way of performing their identity as an independent woman who has an existence beyond being a family caregiver. Women draw from the discourse of gender equality, as Asmita did, to express why having one's own identity, as an economically independent woman, is important to them.

A few women also mentioned how their habitus is not determined solely by the fear of plausible violence but also other future uncertainties. Tuhina says,

> Nowadays I see memes on Facebook which says that a woman does not have her own house. I really liked the message as its true, because she goes from her parental house to her in-laws house, so which is her own house? Its one of my wishes, I really want to buy my own house because no one knows about the future. If there comes a time in future where I suddenly have to move out then I should have a place to go to. I think each and every woman should think about securing their future. Because anything can happen, nobody has seen the future.

The source of uncertainty is not always related to violence that women might face at home; as Tuhina says, there are unforeseen circumstances which women might not have accounted for. For example, Anita had to start earning a living after her husband lost his job, entering full time employment quite suddenly. Unlike other participants (37/40), her father had discouraged her to pursue a career while growing up, although she was encouraged to get educated. Based on her educational qualification, she was able to find a job and she is now the unwilling breadwinner in her family, Anita says,

> Doing this job made me realise that financial independence is real independence and every woman should be financially independent so *that* [emphasis hers] experience [has] changed me a lot. There is so much uncertainty in life, that is what I have now realised. When my parents realised their mistake [not supporting her to engage in paid work], they were supportive during the transition phase [housewife to breadwinner]. Actually, I was very thankful to my parents that they had taught me how to adjust myself in every situation, which is why I didn't break down.

During the interview Anita goes into more detail on how she resents her husband for letting her carry the financial burden of running the household, while she is still responsible for raising her child and looking after the domestic responsibilities. The expectation to earn a living, in the majority of the cases, was enforced by women's parents, and in only two cases did women start earning because their husbands wanted them to do so.

4.3.2 Enforcement of marriageable age

Srinivasan (2005) has identified that although modernisation has increased women's educational levels and awareness, they are still required to meet the normative expectation of getting married at an appropriate age. All the participants within the study got married between the ages of 20 and 28. Some women interviewed identified how heteronormative norms are enforced by a girl's parents who are answerable to members of their class. Thus, enforcement of marriageable age is not only a part of the gendered habitus but also a part of the class habitus of urban middle-class Bengali families. Malini says,

> Bengali parents especially, girls' parents hit the panic mode once the girl gets closer to 25, 26, they feel like the world will break down and they feel their daughters will become *buri*[38] and will not find a groom who will marry them…Guys are lucky that they can at least give the excuse of establishing their career. Due to parental pressure girls are also forced to tie the knot sooner than guys. No matter if their daughter is a doctor, or an engineer, or well established in her career, till she gets married, the Bengali parents don't feel they can rest till their daughter is settled [married]. There is both the pressure from the society, who keep asking the parents, and the parents, who enforce it on their daughters.

What Malini says about parents panicking if their daughters arrive at the "marriageable age" of 25 and remain unmarried, is supported by the fact that most participants did get married

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[38] An old maid/spinster.

around the age of 25. Malini also talks about how men and women are encouraged to pursue a career, but women are expected to prioritise the traditional norms ascribed to married women within the domestic field once women reach a marriageable age. Malini says that "guys are lucky" as they can continue to prioritise their career. This change in normative expectations led many women in the study to express passivity towards the practice of marriage. Aruna says,

> Sanhita: Why did you decide to go for an arranged marriage?
>
> Aruna: Because I wasn't interested in marriage! So my parents had to find me someone, you know, to take care of me so [pause]. When my parents began insisting on finding someone [a husband] who will take care of me [pause] I was just not ready... marriage never crossed my mind, I was busy with my career…I was not interested [shaking her head to say no].
>
> Sanhita: So when your parents told you about the guy who was going to come to see you, how did you react?
>
> Aruna: "Let him come"...he had to come, so he came...

Aruna's statement above is reflective of how gender segregated socialisation during childhood aimed towards maintaining purity of young girls may impact women's gendered habitus when they become young adults. It can be inferred that gender segregated respectable upbringing may have led Aruna to be passive towards aspiring heteronormative conjugal life in her adult life. She draws on the socialised need for protection to justify her parents' decision in arranging her marriage.

Female participants like Aruna, who followed the norm of maintaining purity without falling in love during their teens were able to negotiate with their parents regarding the age of marriage, and they generally got married later around the age of 25 to 28 than those who fell

in love in their teens, they got married earlier depending on how soon the groom became financially independent rather than their own economic independence. Aruna was able to resist getting married until she turned 28. Aruna continued on,

> Sanhita: So, you did not resist? As you said you were not interested in getting married.
>
> Aruna: The resisting part was all done beforehand. For three years that had continued then I gave up and gave in...I told my parents "Okay! I don't mind! Go ahead...call whoever you want to!" So my husband was the first and the only person I met [for arranged marriage]...he was the first one I met and we went ahead.

Several follow up questions were required to understand why Aruna was not interested in marriage and how she negotiated with her parents regarding exercising her choice. She said she had been able to resist her parents' expectation for three years before she gave her consent. Most women like Aruna, who agreed to an arranged marriage, showed passivity towards following the traditional norm of heterosexual marriage. I argue that it is because they were following opposing norms of pursuing career, excelling in studies, and maintaining purity and feminine respectability. The normative expectation of reconciling contradictory norms constitutes a complex gendered habitus that results in the enforcement of marriageable age through passivity.

Even women who fell in love after they went to college expressed passivity towards following the heteronormative expectation of marriageable age. Sayani said, "Actually I was okay with staying in my house with my parents and my boyfriend staying in his house; We were having phone conversations but maybe it was not okay with him [laughs] so he wanted to get married."

This quote shows that socialisation aimed at maintaining purity and feminine respectability may lead women to be passive towards conjugal life instead of desiring it. As Sayani says, she

got married when her boyfriend wanted to get married, but she herself was passive towards getting married. Most women interviewed got married because their parents said it was time to get married. This passivity towards the idea of marriage is a common trend in the majority of the women, who did not see marriage as something they felt they needed to pursue. Instead, the consensus among the participants was that marriage is inevitable so they don't need to actively pursue it. Thus, eligible for marriage is therefore determined by the class habitus that socially enforces the marriageable age.

The influence of the class habitus on the gendered habitus is evidenced by parents feeling that they are answerable to other members of their class when it comes to the enforcement of marriageable age on their daughters. Tuhina recalls her parents were genuinely concerned about her education and career, rather than worrying about marriage, and thus resisted the norm to enforce the marriageable age. She says,

> I still remember many relatives started talking about my marriage and said that I had reached the marriageable age. Both my parents did not succumb to the pressure. They told them, 'she will finish her studies, find a job and then she can get married'.

Tuhina's narrative reflects that her parents negotiated with the class expectation to get their daughter married within the marriageable age by drawing from discourses of gender equality by focussing on Tuhina's education and economic independence. As Tuhina mentioned her parents had to constantly negotiate with their class members and continually resist the class expectation to enforce the normative marriageable age.

When women completed their education and became financially independent, barring a few cases where women fell in love during their teens, parents encouraged their daughters to marry arguing that marriage is necessary for their daughter's security as the parents will not be alive forever. This reason was accepted by the majority of the women interviewed as they

had been socialised in childhood to feel that they required protection. This quote from Brishti sums up what majority of the participants said when asked about why they got married,

> My parents won't be there forever so they felt that someone should be there with me after they are gone. Then security, both financial and physical, is also another reason [why I married]…and my father was in a hurry as he was retiring so he wanted me to get married before that…I was not in a stable job then, but whatever my husband [then boyfriend] was earning, we thought we would be able to manage.

Focus on women's economic independence as evident in Brishti's quote above is driven by the need to meet personal needs rather than be the breadwinner for the family, this is contrary to the normative masculine expectation for men to be the breadwinner. Therefore, even though the gendered habitus of women is in the process of transformation as more and more women enter paid work, the influence of relative norms, like men's role as breadwinner or women's need for protection, create the need for women's continued dependence on men.

Rooprekha suggests another reason why women accept heteronormative marriage as inevitable. She says,

> Even now in our society, women cannot live on their own because women have to face so many difficulties, like someone might ring the bell at night and go away just to scare her when she lives alone. So, it is tough for women to remain mentally strong and withstand all of these issues when she attempts to live on her own. If she decides to stay alone, she has to face so much harassment from her neighbours, landlord and other people in the community. It is for this reason that girl's parents want their daughters to get married and have someone to be by her side, even the girls themselves want to get married just to have someone by their side with whom they can share their life with.

So Rooprekha feels that, on one hand economic independence is important as it gives women the resources to exercise agency to resist against patriarchal injustices at home. On the other hand, not getting married is not a reasonable choice as Rooprekha here lays out very clearly the fate that lies for women who might choose to live alone. Dommaraju (2019) postulates that Indian women remain in unsatisfactory intimate relationships due to the social stigma of living alone. Thus, it can be inferred that given the social stigma against women living alone in India, economic independence might not result in women seeking to end or resist unsatisfactory intimate relationships and further make them dependent on their husbands and his family.

Tuhina explains how women are socialised into internalising the need to have a man as a source of support in order to survive in a patriarchal society. She says,

> In reality men are much more dependent on women as women care for them. But what happens is that from an early age, girls see their mothers depending on their husband or their father for social support, so we get into this mindset and think that we need a man. If we try to come out of this mindset, even for a few days then we will see that girls can easily live alone, we don't need a man by our side.

The conflict between the need for protection and becoming economically independent led a few women to make observations about the dependence of men on women's labour within the domestic field. Interestingly, very few participants specifically identified that they had been socialised to believe that they needed a man by their side. However, the majority of the participants did discuss their husband's dependence on women's labour within the domestic field. While the expectation of heteronormative marriage was perceived by most women to be an inevitable conclusion, Tuhina identifies that it may provide support to men to enable them to solely focus on performing the role of the breadwinner while their wives and mothers focus on care work.

4.4 Conflicting ideals and norms

This section explores the way women draw from discourses of gender equality and how it shapes their ideals of equality which may conflict with the traditional gendered norms, the section explores this contradiction in participant narratives. We have seen how women's economic independence is still contingent upon meeting the markers of class respectability and demands of the domestic field they inhabit. Policy discourses aimed at empowering women in India have thus led to women with social and cultural capital living a dichotomous existence. Parna explained her idea of what gender equality means,

> In the olden days, girls would not be allowed to receive education or have a public life. Now women are given education, they should use this to help the society, that is what I feel is modernism. Helping the society, her family with her income, managing her domestic responsibilities, she can do it all. Being modern does not mean you will do whatever you like, smoking with your friends in public. If you want to smoke, do it at home or in a private space, why will women smoke openly? To prove that they are modern? Then women dress in short clothes to prove how they are modern in their outlook, but one should show their modern outlook in work not in how they dress or behave in public. A woman is modern when she becomes a pilot or an IAS officer [civil servant], not by wearing revealing clothes then clicking pictures and posting them on social media.

Living in a culture which traditionally practices 'classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 278), embodying certain ideals of equality like entering male dominated professions in the public sphere is prevalent within the traditional feminist discourses in India. This leads young women, like Parna, to reconcile the conflict between her understanding of gender equality, which is drawn from discourses of freedom of choice, as well as her practice of feminine respectability by adopting the ideal of limited choice. Narratives of women like Parna who

follow the balancing ideal reveal that women draw from discourses of gender equality that promote women's right to have freedom of choice. Such ideals interact with pre-existing norms of feminine respectability within the middle-classes to reshape the ideal of freedom of choice to mean freedom of choice with limitations. In the quote above, Parna gives the example where women who smoke in public break the norm of respectable femininity within the middle-classes and therefore break the norm of limited choice.

Given the existence of conflicting discourses of gender equality in India, namely the discourses of freedom of choice and traditional feminism (see section 1.3 in Chapter 1), may also help shape ideals of gendered division of labour within the domestic field. It may be possible that such conflicting discourses that encourage the visibility of women's participation in the male dominated 'public sphere' (Walby, 1989, p. 228), may render women's labour within the domestic field as invisible. Sayani says "Whatever a man can do, a woman can do that is it. Maybe physical work is, physicality, there is some disparity…[but] it is mostly in the mind." This common definition among the women participants, stresses that if a woman can prove herself in the male dominated public sphere, she will have achieved equality. Therefore, young girls adopt certain ideals from complex discourses of gender equality like freedom of choice which is re-interpreted as limited choice as they enter the public sphere as well as adopt ideals of normative heterosexuality by observing practices of gendered division of labour at home.

The women interviewed found other ways to reconcile the conflict between the ideals of equality, mainly academic success and access to the public sphere that they interpreted as gender equality, as well as ideals of heteronormativity, like the expectation of care work. In such narratives, at times there existed a conflict when navigating between the expectation of equal division of work in the workplace and unequal division of labour within their home.

This led some women to attempt to reconcile this conflict through the rejection of discourses of gender equality altogether. Brishti says,

> I think its [women's empowerment and equality] a farce. A complete hogwash. In fact, I am against women's day. In fact, I am against the celebration of any day. I feel that everyone should stand on their feet…financial independence is empowerment for anyone.

When Brishti was asked to explain why she rejects the discourses of gender equality, she states "when men also start supporting women like women support men, from that day onward there will be gender equality." It can be inferred that embodying certain ideals of gender equality like pursuing higher education and workforce participation along with the practice of gendered division of labour within the domestic field may result in unresolved contradictions in married women.

When asked to explain her rationale for rejecting ideals of gender equality Brishti identifies that the practice of gendered division of labour is not addressed adequately by her understanding of the meaning of gender equality. Brishti's narrative points out the failure of policies for women empowerment that are driven by economically motivated reforms, such as prioritising the economic independence of women to bring equality in gender relations without considering the invisible barriers like dominant cultural norms of respectability and care work placed on women. Such contradiction can also indicate how the traditional gendered habitus is challenged when women identify gendered division of labour within the domestic field as a form of inequality and therefore reject the discourse of gender equality altogether.

For another participant, Raya, the contradiction between her understanding of ideals of gender equality and the practice of gendered division of labour is apparent; she mentions how she

fights for egalitarian practices at her workplace and fights for perpetuation of gendered division of labour within her home. Raya says,

> My office colleagues question me about [my thoughts on gender equality] when I say that if the mother dies then the child has to face a lot more problems than if he/she loses their father, as I champion gender equality at work, they say how come I am contradicting myself? Then I answer that of course a father can raise a child, but a mother is irreplaceable…mothers who don't spend their time with their kids, and even in cases where the fathers spend more time with them, their kids face many challenges while growing up…

Brishti's statement before elucidated that the ideals of gender equality that women embody do not adequately address the practice of gendered division of labour at home. In Raya's narrative, this contradiction within existing practices and understanding of gender equality discourse within her class leads her to follow her class habitus by following the balancing ideal. It could be that since the instituted rule at her home is gendered division of labour, Raya's gendered habitus doesn't question this practice within the domestic field.

Raya's socialisation could have contributed to her contradictory outlook. During the interview Raya expressed that while growing up she would accompany her mother who was a feminist activist fighting for women's rights. Raya observed her mother demanding equal rights for women in the public sphere and at home she observed her mother as the primary caregiver. Therefore, her understanding of the meaning of gender equality is therefore related to women's position in the public sphere.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I traced the socialisation of women participants from childhood till they were married by analysing the ideals of gender equality they embodied from childhood as well as

the traditional norms they observed as practices to understand the complex formation of their gendered habitus.

In childhood, girls receive contradictory messages as they are asked to prioritise their academic performance while they are simultaneously socialised to conform to the norm of feminine respectability by embodying the need for protection. All this together has an impact on the formation of women's gendered habitus.

In their adult life, women continue to get mixed messages about focussing on their career until they reach the marriageable age when they are then asked to prioritise marriage over their career. However, such conflicting messages received by young women - prioritisation of education while observing gendered division of labour, pursuing a career as well as prioritising marriage after reaching the marriageable age - leads to the creation of a complex gender identity as women navigate between the public and private sphere.

Most of the women interviewed rejected the dominance of feminist discourses as it contradicts with their understanding of the traditional gender roles which is structured by growing up within a patriarchal society. The disruption in gender identity as social actors make sense of contradictory discourses is sometimes reconciled through negotiating the meaning of gender equality.

South Asian feminist scholars have suggested that newer forms of patriarchal controls emerge as "women slip through the borders of traditional patriarchal controls" (Azim, Menon and Siddiqi, 2009, p. 4). However, since academic excellence of young women was prioritised at home by their parents and by women themselves, I observe the addition of a temporal element as well as spatial element to the concept of patriarchal control. The temporal element within patriarchal control helps reshape patriarchal traditions over time, through generations. The spatial element within patriarchal control is influenced by the structure of the society, like

living in neoliberal India. I further argue that traditional patriarchal control is dynamic in nature as it adjusted to the change when middle-class women began entering the public sphere which was traditionally dominated by men in pre-liberalised India.

Chapter 5: Women's agency and habitus: Navigating the domestic field

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the ways in which young married women in this study negotiated the rules within the domestic field after marriage. Continuing from the previous chapter on women's socialisation, this chapter will analyse the ways in which the habitus is reproduced within the domestic field once women are married and how their everyday life is determined by the rules existing within the domestic field. As seen in Chapter 4, the conflict between discourses of gender equality and traditional normative expectations generate a complex gendered habitus for women within the domestic field. Women's narratives reflected that in certain cases they had greater autonomy in the public sphere compared to the domestic field, like consuming food of their choice. This negotiation between traditional normative expectations of care work within the domestic field and participants' own understanding of the discourse of gender equality gives rise to varying degrees of conflict and tension within women's habitus.

This chapter draws from the accounts of female participants about their role in their marital family and how they negotiated the normative expectation to prioritise care work over paid work, which is referred to in the literature as the balancing act where women perform both unpaid care work and paid work (Milkie and Peltola, 1999). Women in this study show varying degrees of resistance to the care work expectations of their marital family. Thus, young married women negotiate with the traditional rules in the domestic field about how women will perform their gendered habitus. The extent of negotiation depends on the chances women have of effecting the desired transformation depending on their experience within the domestic field. Given the objective conditions of the field to prioritise care work, all the participants in this study exercised agency to pursue higher education and earn a living and they mostly resisted barriers within the domestic field that prevented them from doing so. As

a consequence, young married women often faced various forms of negative sanctioning for contesting the normative expectations within the domestic field.

The majority of the women participants contested the normative expectation of care work within the domestic field through acts of resistance, especially where traditional gendered expectations stood between practicing certain ideals of equality that women grew up with before marriage, like pursuing higher education or earning a living (see Chapter 4). Women resisted directly through confrontation or indirectly by passively subverting the rules of the domestic field by drawing from discourses of gender equality to navigate these barriers. However, when it comes to performing the role of the primary caregiver for their children, women in this study considered this as their primary role, though most women also expected their husbands to help out with childcare.

This chapter will analyse the hetero-normative gender roles performed by married women in the home and how their exposure to discourses of gender equality, combined with contradictory normative practices within the domestic field, impact the process through which women undertake the role of becoming a multitasking 'domestic goddess' (Donner, 2008a). The table below outlines the themes most prevalent within the data and the issues with which the majority of women participants agreed.

Table 3: Themes most prevalent within the data obtained from female participants (N=40)

Themes	% of female participants (% of N)	Example statement
Mothers are primary caregivers	95%	"But if I have a baby, I have to give time to my baby." "No one can understand and tend to the needs of the baby like the mother." "The child will constantly feel at a loss if the mother is missing for long hours"

Prioritising care-work	90%	"In our workplace there are many policies to support less workload, like I have planned to work on fewer clients than I do now so that I can make time for my child or handle those clients where I do not have to work during late hours and sit in meetings at night."
Outsource domestic chores to maids and nurses perform	85%	"Yeah we have got two maids, a cook and a nurse maid, because I am not at home I have to spend money behind the maids, they help me balance my responsibilities at home so they do all the responsibilities which I am not able to perform when I am at work."

As urban middle-class Bengali women or *bhadramahilas* have accumulated educational and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) through access to higher education, paid employment, foreign travel and agency in their children's upbringing, it can be assumed that they are in a position to begin the process of changing the normative gender roles within their families and have choice over following the class habitus of respectable femininity. However, despite having accumulated educational and cultural capital, middle-class women continue to negotiate with the invisible barriers of cultural norms especially within the domestic field when they attempt to detraditionalise gender relations.

5.2 The balancing act

5.2.1 Prioritising domestic chores

The habitus is driven by common sense behaviours that are aligned to the logical characteristic of a particular field (Bourdieu, 1990b). As practices are repeated by each passing generation, over time they are considered to be logical and commonsensical to the social agents within the domestic field. The normative expectation of care work is thus inscribed within young married women occupying the domestic field through "historically and socially situated conditions of its production" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 55). Participants described how they navigate the normative expectation placed on married women to prioritise

domestic responsibilities over career and to continue to perform the act of balancing the double shift (see Table 3). Rooprekha, while describing this act of balancing normative expectations within the domestic field, says,

> From the perspective of a married woman, I can say that if I was very career oriented then my career would demand more time, I would need to spend time on networking as networking is part of my job. If a woman is career oriented and wants to progress professionally, then marriage will become a hurdle for her. See I feel that since I have taken the decision to get married, *I have to balance* [emphasis mine] between work and family. Moreover, my child's upbringing is my responsibility so I cannot sacrifice that for my career. So, I have to let go of networking and growth in my professional career…women who cannot balance it, they should not enter marriage and I feel that that is a *choice* [emphasis mine] you have to make as a woman, it is not their fault.

Rooprekha mentions how married women "have to" meet the expectation of prioritising their domestic responsibility by either choosing between marriage and a career, or, if they want to have both, they have to prioritise their role within the domestic field. Her narrative reflects the conflict between the socialised role to be undertaken by married women, like giving time to perform her caregiving role at home, and her understanding of the meaning of gender equality, as Rooprekha draws from the discourse of gender equality that promotes freedom of choice. She mentions the 'choice' she has made in carrying the responsibility of the double shift. The act of balancing according to Rooprekha and many other women in this study means prioritising family responsibilities over career which is part of the normative expectation women have to negotiate with once they are married.

The norm of prioritising family responsibilities is so deep rooted within the gendered habitus in urban middle-class women that one participant, Manisha, who faced domestic abuse from

her mother-in-law and is currently living separately from her husband with her own mother, says,

> I am thankful I had a nasty married life because of which I could concentrate more on my career. If I would have had an ideal married life then I would not have been able to be so career oriented, so everything has its pros and cons.

Being able to succeed in her career and meet the normative expectation of performing domestic responsibilities is seen by Manisha as a contradiction – women cannot do both equally well, but rather must choose between them. For Manisha an 'ideal married life' is where women put their career progress on hold. Although when in practice she met the normative expectation of prioritising care work after marriage by putting her career progress on hold, it did not help her achieve the ideal married life she had aspired for as she faced domestic violence.

Manisha's narrative also reflects what happens when young married women face patriarchal injustices within the domestic field, they draw from discourses of gender equality that promote women's engagement in paid work. Thus focusing on prioritising academic success from a young age, helps women to create conditions to exercise more agency when facing constraints and uncertainties after marriage.

While talking about the balancing act, many women identified that performing the double shift had a negative impact on women's career progress. Malini, who also performs the balancing act by prioritising her domestic role, states that,

> If a working woman tells you that she can balance both [home and work] equally then she is lying. It's just not possible. I know it because I see it happening in my case. A stay-at-home mother is able to spend more time with her kid than I can, so I sometimes get frustrated and think about leaving my job to get more time with my kid.

I mean I would be fine [financially] if I did not work and became a stay-at-home mom…a woman can't balance both perfectly on her own. So, the family helps to *fill the gap left by me* [emphasis mine], like my mother-in-law is there to manage when I am not there. But if I did not have my mother-in-law at home, I would not be able to balance both.

During the interview Malini talked about how she once had lied to her employers to get leave so she could teach her son at home as a way of prioritising her caregiving role. Malini belongs to the minority group of women who do not directly resist the normative expectation of prioritising care work. In fact, Malini has come to the conclusion that the practice of performing the balancing act while navigating between two conflicting ideals, is misleading as it is an impossible ask made of married women. Malini indicates in her narrative that in practice her career is never a priority. She maps her own experience onto the experiences of women like her who also practise the balancing act to explain how performing the double shift is an impossible ask that is made from married women who engage in paid work.

Malini also mentions the role of her mother-in-law and this reference helps to illustrate the gendered nature of care work within the domestic field. She points out that the normative expectation for married women to perform both roles perfectly without any support from the family needs to be questioned. However, she expects support in performing care work within the domestic field from her mother-in-law and not the men in her family.

Moreover, Malini expects support from her mother-in-law only when she has exhausted herself by performing her caregiving role. She negotiates with her workplace and deemphasises her own physical well being so that she can maintain the gendered habitus within the domestic field. During the interview Malini mentioned how she did not find time to visit the doctor for her back pain since she is always engaged in care work. In fact, she could only make time for the interview as she was visiting the doctor that day. Malini also

mentioned that if she had been at home she would have had to perform caregiving duties and would not get the time to rest that the interview afforded her. Overall, her narrative indicates the gendered nature of care work within urban middle-class families in contemporary India.

There is a conflict that arises within women's gendered habitus, as they navigate between the discourse of gender equality, which suggests that women should have the choice to pursue a career, and the traditional normative expectation of performing the balancing act, which requires women to prioritise the role of a caregiver. It appears that this contradiction is reconciled by Malini through conforming to the traditional expectations by prioritising her domestic role and rationalising the physical presence of her mother-in-law as a way to "fill the gap left" by her as a source of support for her absence within the domestic field. She thus refers to her place within the domestic field as an objective condition of her embodied habitus. Although she performs the double shift and care work for the entire family including her parents in law, she sees the lack of active engagement of her family members in care work as a support as they do not oppose her engagement in paid work.

A few of the women in the study brought up the act of surveillance as care work that they feel they must perform to "fill the gap left" by married women at home when they go to their workplace. Some women mentioned that remote surveillance of their home is a way to reconcile their own absence from the home. Video surveillance is used by married women within the urban middle-classes to ensure that they are able to extend their presence at home by tracking what is happening in the home while they are away from it. These women feel that electronic surveillance helps them to meet the expectation of prioritising their domestic role while allowing them to retain their paid employment. Priyanka, while talking of how she balances the two roles of carer and earner narrated the need for surveillance,

> I have cameras installed at home, so that when I go to the office, I can check on what
>
> is happening at home. I check for myself if my daughter is okay when she is with the

nurse maid, if my mother-in-law is okay. If I see any of them fall ill or spot any problem, I call and check on them and ask the nurse to give them medicine. To compensate for this time, I work beyond my office hours, there is a lot of coordination I have to do, I try to do it very holistically, so as a practice I don't draw a line between office and home. I do office work at home to compensate for being more attentive to my home when I am at work. Now someone in the office can say that I am paying less attention to office work, but it's always there in my mind, both work and home responsibilities run together in my head.

The conflict between the norm of prioritising domestic work as a married woman and her desire to earn a living is evident in Priyanka's expression of her difficulty in drawing a line between the two roles, resulting in her attempt to perform both roles simultaneously throughout the day. Ananya, who is newly married and is uncertain this early on in her marriage (three months) of how she will navigate these issues, says that,

You need strong family support to raise a child, women cannot raise a child and maintain their career together [on their own]. I see that in the case of one of my female colleagues [a doctor], she has installed a webcam at home as she leaves her child with a nurse maid and she watches it [on a video feed] during her work hours over here. So, it does affect one's output at work…So I don't know what's waiting for me in future.

Although unsure about how she will perform the balancing act once she becomes a mother, she acknowledges that women compromise on their output at work to perform their primary caregiving role at home, and video surveillance is an extension of that. During the interview, Ananya mentioned how men from Bengali middle-class families who were doctors did not want to marry her when she was looking for a groom, as she was in a profession (gynaecology) that men felt would take time away from her caregiving role at home. However, she wanted to marry a doctor as she expected a doctor would understand the

demands of her profession. So as a compromise she married outside her community, into a Marwari[39] family. This was the only case within the participants where an arranged marriage took place outside one's community. So Ananya had to negotiate with her choice to marry within her own community, the urban middle-class Bengalis, even before getting married to be certain she would be able to give time to her career. Her narrative suggests the strong dominance of the cultural norm for a Bengali married woman to be a *ghoroa*[40] wife and for them to prioritise their caregiving role within the domestic field.

Despite the changes taking place in occupational patterns for women in India (Sarkar, Sahoo and Klasen, 2019), class expectations about the type of occupations women should pursue remain strong. Women interviewed suggested that there is existing pressure on women to adopt teaching as a profession, although it is perhaps less dominant than it once was, with today's women expressing the desire to join other professions (see ***Table 2***: Participant details). However, women assert their personal choice while choosing careers to the point at which they face no resistance from family (both marital and natal). For nearly all the participants, parents did not discourage women from exercising their preferred career choices, however there were some exceptions. Anwesha describes her experiences saying,

> My father's philosophy was that if I became a teacher then I can handle both my work
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> responsibilities and run the household. So then I concentrated on becoming a teacher.
>
> So now after getting married, I feel that he got it right. I get vacation during summer
>
> and winter; the work pressure is less compared to other jobs. Although I must admit

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[39] They are an emigrant community from the Indian state of Rajasthan, who have historically spread throughout the country to trade. Traditionally the members of a Marwari family operate like a business firm (Timberg, 1973).

[40] It is a Bengali word which is used to signify a person, especially women of marriageable age, who have developed a sense of feeling at home only when they are physically at home. Thus, they (women) learn to consider the act of physically being at home as a meaningful way of expressing their gender identity as respectable middle-class women.

work pressure is increasing by the day. But still, teaching as a profession is very suitable and respectable for women, especially once you get married, its perfect.

Teaching was not Anwesha's first choice as a future profession, as she wanted to become a journalist. However, accepting the normative expectation of feminine respectability instead of asserting her personal choice helped her meet the class expectation of respectability and perform the traditional gender role within the domestic field after marriage. Anwesha's father's decision is a very popular choice among other participants who also are teachers. Ratna says "If I worked in the corporate sector or in the IT sector then it would have been extremely difficult to balance family and work together." Anusree also adds,

> Women who work in the IT or in the private sector have longer work hours, so they face more trouble in balancing their family responsibilities. In my case, I get time in the evening and in the morning to tend to my household responsibilities.

All the teachers (including some of the college lecturers) in the study talked about the time they had due to the nature of their job to perform their duties at home. This perception points towards an interaction between two norms, the dominant older norm of women being caregivers and the contemporary norm of women having careers to both meet their ideal of gender equality and meet the rising standard of living within a consumerist culture. Even though women express that they are exercising a choice, they still may face sanctioning from their marital family, which is described by Anusree as "trouble", if they do not prioritise domestic work.

The teachers in the study, when asked about how being in the teaching profession helps them balance their roles, draw comparisons with women who are employed in other sectors, especially the IT sector, to express how having time for home is an expectation that women have to meet in addition to meeting the expectations related to paid employment. One of the

women interviewed also mentioned leaving a full-time job in management to work part-time after marriage so that she could give time to family. In fact, in the IT industry in India, the attrition rate for women goes up after 5 years of working, and one of the contributing factors is performing the double shift after marriage (Singh, Ganguli and David, 2017; Gupta, 2020).

Other participants, like Anindita, Anita and Sanjukta who all work in the financial sector, also mentioned that they value being able to work from home or have a low work-low pay policy when they have to provide childcare or engage in domestic work, as they find these types of policies to be female friendly. Therefore, women constantly have to negotiate with their personal choices and with the class habitus as well as the gendered habitus within the domestic field.

5.2.2 Prioritising time for family over having a social life

Another aspect of performing the balancing act that was brought up by the majority of the participants was the lack of time for social life. Anusree narrates how caring for her family's is a priority for her, and says that she can only consider going out to meet friends if all her domestic chores have been completed, the place of meeting is near her home so she can return home at a reasonable time and if her in-laws permit her to go. She says,

> Since I am working [in an office], I can't give them [family] time throughout the day, so when I am home, I *have to give them all the time* [emphasis mine]…Before marriage, I did not have to think about all these things before going out. But being married I cannot suddenly meet my friends if I wanted to, I have to plan ahead.

In practice, women's narratives reflect that they do not have any time left after performing the double shift, as evidenced by Anusree's statement that she has to plan ahead to go out. She goes on to explain how she is expected by her in-laws to finish all her chores before she feels she might be allowed to go out.

Anusree's account also shows that married women are expected by their in-laws and even themselves to live without a social life, so that they can prioritise care work for others at the expense of having time for themselves. This expectation from young married women within the domestic field highlights the highly gendered nature of care work in an urban middle-class family in Kolkata. Thus, social agents who hold a symbolically privileged position within the domestic field, such as the parents in law, enforce the norms of the field on agents holding the least power, the daughter in law. In Anusree's case, we can observe how the objective conditions of the field attempt to structure the habitus which serves to maintain the gendered habitus within the domestic field.

With the exception of three women, most of the women interviewed, like Anusree, talked about spending their time either working in the office or towards performing their caregiving roles at home. Although most women speak of giving up their time to socialise as part of adjustment to married life, Raya points out that it is a sacrifice, so it is more severe than a simple act of adjustment,

> But my adjustment [no time for social life] is basically a sacrifice, no doubt about it…now when I go travelling with my son, I consider him to be my friend, so my need for hanging out with friends gets covered by a large extent…after returning home from office, my target is to give all my time to my son. It is important for a mother to give her time to her child.

As a part of meeting the normative expectation of becoming a mother within this class, one is expected to dedicate all the time one has after work in upbringing of the child. Raya feels that she does not have time for socialising with her friends which she describes as a sacrifice for her as she had time for socialising before she became a mother. She misses her social life so much that she designates her son as her friend to compensate for the lack of time to nurture other friendships in her life. During the course of the interview, Raya goes on to narrate what

she was told by her son's psychologist who said her son was more mature than other children of his age, and that because he behaves like an adult he feels left out by his own peers. Raya thinks that this is because she treats her son like a friend and talks to him like he is an adult. Although Raya is an exception in fulfilling the need for friendship through her son, many of the participants in the study, both male and female, described their mothers as being their friends.

5.2.3 Becoming a part of the marital family

Apart from not finding time for leisure, all the women in the study who went on to live with their in-laws talked about how living with in-laws after marriage meant having to 'mould' themselves into the way in-laws lived their lives. Thus, when married women enter the domestic field, they are normatively expected to learn and follow the rules that operate within it as a part of their gendered habitus. When asked about the process of becoming a part of their marital family, women who lived with their in-laws mentioned how it was a normative expectation that married women will adopt the choices of their marital family over their own personal choices. Asmita explains,

> In your [natal] home you were the most important person. Once you get married, you are the least important person. Everything changed overnight [after getting married]. I had to adopt my husband's choice of food, time of eating food, his sleeping pattern to adjust to my in-laws schedule…from the smallest things you will have to adapt to everything that happens in their house.

Thus, the domestic field assigns social agents their position within it and young married women have the least symbolic power within the domestic field. It is evident in Asmita's statement that married women in a patrilineal kinship system are expected to subjugate their personal choice to uphold the choices of their in-laws in the process of solidifying their position within the marital family. Women as described by Asmita, are placed at the bottom

of a hierarchical structure within their marital family where they undergo the process of forgoing their existing identity and instead perform an identity that is acceptable to the husband and the in-laws.

Some participants expressed how the process of becoming a part of the marital family meant placing the choices of others before their own personal choices. Anusree says,

> I was married so it was *not enough to just think about myself* [emphasis mine] as I did before my marriage. Before my marriage, I used to have my lunch at home around 1 [pm] but when I came to my in-laws place, I saw them having lunch after 2.30 [pm], sometimes at 3 [pm]. But I would feel very hungry as I was not used to eating so late, it was a tough ask. So, what I would do is I would put myself down for a nap after taking a shower. Then when it was time to eat lunch, my mother-in-law would wake me up. Obviously now after 12 years of marriage I don't have to sleep to curb my hunger. I have gotten used to it. In fact now when I visit my parents place, I eat late there. Now I have moulded myself into the ways of this [her marital] house.

Anusree's account illustrates how accepting the rules of the domestic field without resistance may have a bearing on the physical well-being of married women. Anusree describes how the identity of a married woman is restructured once she enters the domestic field as she must learn what is required of her in order to meet the normative expectation of her in-laws. Within urban middle-class families, the normative expectations placed on married women led to the process of embodying the identity of the *ghoroa bou*.

5.2.4 Navigating household politics

Bourdieu (1990b) likens the concept of field to a game involving players who are engaged in a struggle to claim authority over that field. He says that over time a player begins to develop a "'feel' (sens) for the game…the sense of the direction (sens) of the history of the game that gives the game its sense" (1990b, p. 82).Within the domestic field, household politics is a

game which helps to determine the hierarchical position of each social agent within it. Once new players, such as married women, enter the field they use various ways to navigate it as they realise that household politics is inscribed within the field and when social agents engage in household politics it gives meaning to the domestic field.

Women in the study were asked about the kind of conflicts that keep recurring within the domestic field and how they negotiate such conflicts. Navigating household politics meant that in their everyday life, young married women sometimes accepted passive aggressive behaviour from their in-laws and sometimes directly confronted them regarding matters they (married women) considered to be "small". Women's narratives reflected that young married women, who are relatively new players within the domestic field, were singled out by their mothers in law, and sometimes their fathers in law, who were older players and were made the target of household politics. Women's narratives reflect how women were indirectly made to realise that their position within the household was not secure and thus, they were made to feel vulnerable within the domestic field. Brishti explains,

> Small things [keep recurring] like for example, when I keep something in a particular place [at her marital home], I find it misplaced [after I come home from work], this happens a few days in a row, then I tell them [in-laws] about it but it happens again. Then I find that only my clothes are being left out when everyone else's clothes are being taken out for doing laundry although we all put our clothes in the same basket.

Brishti's narrative illustrates her feeling that she has no control over her own belongings. Her narrative also indicates how she is made to feel vulnerable within her marital home. Other women also acknowledged that household politics occur over matters they consider to be "small" or insignificant. Ratna says,

Small issues that keep on recurring [at home bother me]…what annoys me the most about them is that they are persistent problems. If you [in-laws] don't like something about me then you should tell me directly, why gossip!

Ratna's narrative illustrates how navigating daily politics causes her mental stress. She then went on to explain how she was able to negotiate with her husband when navigating household politics, as she initially felt everyone was against her,

I did not get the support I needed from him [husband] in those initial days [of marriage] since we had an arranged marriage. When I used to tell him about these incidents at home and what people were saying about me, he would first ask me to *check if I was the one who was having a problem* [emphasis mine], obviously that did not help the situation…As these incidents kept on happening every now and then, slowly [with time] my husband began to understand that there might be two sides to these issues. Although he doesn't correct his mother even now, he tries to stay as neutral as possible. This is something I value, the fact that he does not side with them anymore.

Like Ratna, other women, when navigating household politics on issues where they feel they were wronged, expect their partners to take their side. However, when that does not happen, they negotiate with their partners and accept the next option which is for their partners to stay neutral, so that they don't have to put up resistance against every member of the household. It could be possible that even Ratna's husband develops a sense of the game when he observes how various players fight for authority over the field, this development indicates how the game of household politics is deeply inscribed within the field and gives the field its meaning.

The burden of navigating domestic politics and the fact that women in most cases did not find anyone on their side, indicates the hierarchical and gendered structure that exists within urban

middle-class families. This example from Ratna's life shows how navigating domestic politics is also a part of the care work women are expected to perform every day to assert their position within the domestic field.

Most married women who stayed with their in-laws described facing passive aggressive behaviour from their mothers-in-law. Anusree explained,

> I got married at 23, I was very young, so it was difficult for me to read my mother-in-law's mind, *she would not say anything but all of a sudden stop talking to me and act coldly* [emphasis mine]. I did not know what I had done to upset her…I had to try to guess and correct myself and if I guessed right then she would again talk normally… I don't know if I should say this but when I got married, *I used to fear* [my in-laws; emphasis mine] and I would always worry that I might upset them so I had to be careful about everything I did. Now with time, I don't fear as much as I know their expectations, so I try to act accordingly.

Anusree in the quote above talks how facing passive aggressive behaviour from her mother-in-law was a part of her everyday life as a newly-wed bride. However, over time as she developed a sense of the game, she could maintain an objective distance and see the act of passive aggressiveness as a part of the game thus nothing she needed to feel scared about. Most married women in the study also tended towards maintaining peace when they were at home rather than challenging their in-laws. Rooprekha says,

> I wanted to buy a new TV [big screen] but I could not as my father-in-law likes his old TV. But what I had done very purposefully is that I never got into a confrontation if I did not like something, as *I don't stay at home all day* [emphasis mine]. I do not see why I should get into a confrontation for something that I can adjust to. I withdrew myself from trying to make changes in their household, there is no point in having a

confrontation for such things. I also did not want to do it, so it was a personal choice to maintain the peace.

Rooprekha in this situation compromised on her preference to buy a new television so that she could maintain peace within the domestic field. Rooprekha's narrative indicates how players develop a sense of the game, since married women want to maintain their mental wellbeing within the domestic field they find ways to navigate around household politics. However, this negotiation between maintaining peace and desire to watch television, means that Rooprekha, who holds the least symbolic power, must compromise more than older players with more power within the domestic field. Through experience, she has learned the limitations of transforming the objective conditions of the domestic field. Although she rationalised her acceptance of this predicament, as her in-laws spent more time at home than she did, her mentioning this issue indicates how she could not reconcile with it and if she had full control over the choices she made at home in her everyday life, she would not have made this compromise. Forgoing the choice to watch television at home seemed small as home is only a part of her life, she suggests that when she is away from home, she can exercise more control over her choices. Other women in the study have also indicated that they have more control over their choices when they step out of their home than when they are at home.

Joyee, broke down in tears during her interview while describing her experiences with navigating daily politics at home,

When I overhear [my mother-in-law] gossiping about me to her relatives, I just ignore it. Moreover I don't have the time [to confront her about it] because I've got a lot of [chores] to do which are planned one after the other…but when my children overhear the gossip about me at home…

At this point in the interview Joyee began to cry and had to pause the interview for a few minutes. She was clearly very upset by the thought that her in-laws say negative things about her in front of her children. Although Joyee says she ignores the behaviour of her mother-in-law, the strain of ignoring negative gossip appears to have an impact on her mental well-being given the mental state she presented when discussing this situation in her interview. She also brings up the issue of having to navigate household politics when she is already pressed for time balancing two roles together, and she is concerned that such politics at home impacts not just her but her children.

Apart from having an impact on the mental well-being of women, navigating domestic politics can also act as a barrier for women intent on performing the double shift. This is what Parna had to say when she was asked what she would like to change for married women in the home,

> The worst part of living in a *songsar* [domestic field] is that you have to endure daily politics and backbiting, you have no choice, I hate it, it creates mental disturbance. It's a *part of living* [emphasis mine] in a *songsar,* you have to accept it…there always is a cold war going on between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law regarding who the son will favour more.

Women, whether they accept the traditional gender norms at home or question them, have all talked about the politics they have to navigate at home when they get married. Parna performs the double shift but states that for married women navigating domestic politics is a "part of living". In this way, all the players engage in the game of household politics even if they personally do not identify with the objective of household politics which is to assert the gender hierarchy within the domestic field.

5.3 Acts of Resistance

Bourdieu says that those who dominate the field, in case of the domestic field in patrilineal cultures like India the field is dominated by the parents in law, have to "reckon the resistance of the dominated agents" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 88).Women in the study have shown varying degrees of resistance when faced with the expectation to follow traditional gender norms by either questioning the norms or by resisting against following the norms. Most of the acts of resistance are on issues that women had full control over before getting married, but which they had to fight for after getting married. The issues that arise are things such as their basic right to nutritious food, access to education, and earning a living among others.

5.3.1 Earning a living

The majority of the women in this study had to navigate the expectations their in-laws had that they would prioritise their domestic responsibilities over their career. While some women practised this norm, most women questioned the practice and many of them actively resisted the pressures to prioritise the role of the caregiver within the domestic field over their career.

Women, like Ritu, Aruna and Mrinalini who were professionally based in other cities took lesser pay to relocate to Kolkata after getting married so that they could stay with their husbands. In the case of Mrinalini, she took a lower paying job to stay with her husband in Kolkata after getting married, but then her husband relocated to another city for career growth soon after their marriage and she now lives with her in-laws and her newborn child. She says,

> This [living without my husband was an]adjustment I had to do…Sometimes I feel I don't do justice with my office work the way I used to do it [before I got married]. For a person like me with a small kid to take care of and running a household where the husband is away, I am unable to give my best to my job…So these sacrifices are there once you get married and become a mother.

While she narrates this experience as a part of the process of adjustment she had to make after getting married, her narrative shows that even though she doesn't get support from her in-laws or her husband, she did not consider giving up her desire to pursue her career. When asked if she would leave her job, she said she would never consider it, and the majority of the women in the study agreed with Mrinalini's view, also stating that they would not give up paid work. While maintaining the expectations of her in-laws, Mrinalini is compromising on her personal choice of career progress. Yet, it is evident that she is also resisting the structural constraints as she continues to earn a living to meet her ideal of gender equality.

Women also spoke of negotiating with the cultural expectation to work nearer their marital home and let go of opportunities that might require them to travel to other parts of the city. Sarani had to navigate this expectation of her mother-in-law while maintaining her choice to pursue her career,

> During my masters when I got a job offer, it was a bit far from [the marital] home. I joined the job to gain experience. At that time, I had to travel a long time [to get to work] which took up a lot of time. But even then I had to complete my chores at home before I could sit and study. So, my mother-in-law raised an objection and wanted me to leave the job. But I did not.

When faced with a direct order to conform, Sarani resisted conventional expectations, and instead exercised her choice to pursue career growth. However, not following the conventional expectations meant that she had to compromise on the time she had for studying. Parna, also dealt with the expectation to work near home and prioritise care work by compromising on her personal choices regarding the nature of paid work she wanted to pursue. She says,

I wanted to do a government job but [for that]I had to go far away [in the city] and I had crossed the eligible age as I had to wait for so long, so I curtailed my ambition and started looking for a private job, that meant lesser pay and lesser job security. So I compromised on my goal. But luckily the timing of the school [she works in] is such that I can perform my domestic responsibilities perfectly.

While narrating how she had crossed the eligible age to apply for a government job, she said that she had to stay at home and raise her daughter until she became a teenager as her husband wanted their daughter to be raised by a stay-at-home mother. Through those years she kept on trying to find ways to pursue her personal choice to have a career. When she got the job that enabled her to negotiate with the conventional expectation of the in-laws she argued, "My husband was not supportive at first when I [told him that I] wanted to take up [a private sector] job, but as the timing of my job is same as my daughter's school, he agreed. I am grateful to God."

Women in this study used various negotiation strategies, many of them actively resisted like Sarani and some resisted passively, like Parna, by waiting to pursue their personal choices and negotiating with conventional expectations so that they reconciled with her ideals of equality by earning a living.

Women who used passive resistance techniques to negotiate with conventional expectations had to compromise on their mental well-being. For example, Parna went into a severe depression, she says,

Since I could not run my life according to my choice, I just wanted to break free and leave [my in-laws' home]. But my father would not let me do it, so I had to stay and adjust. I was so depressed. I did not feel like doing anything or waking up in the morning. Years passed...things are better now that I can earn a living.

The discourse of gender equality played a role in how Parna waited for many years to prioritise her choice, to earn a living. The conflict arising out of navigating between opposing expectations – her ideals of equality vs. normative practices - caused Parna to undergo years of depression, until her child was old enough and she was able to negotiate with her husband so that she could exercise her own choice to pursue a career. Thus, as married women navigate between opposing ideals, it may cause mental or physical suffering or at times, both.

Unlike Parna, who experienced depression, Malini's narrative showed the impact of constrained choices on her physical well-being as she navigated between her choice to earn a living and her efforts to meet conventional expectations. She says,

> Recently I had to do a course for my promotion at work. I used to stay up all night to catch up on my studies as I did not find any time for my studies during the day. I had to do all the work in the morning, then go to work, get back [home] then first teach my son, prepare him for his exam the next day then wait till he falls asleep and then I could continue with my studies and go and sit for the exam next day, I did not sleep throughout the duration of the course. It was just too much! Right now I am so glad the course is over.

Malini belongs to the smaller group of women (10/40), who are more inclined to follow the conventional expectation than resist it actively. These women do not suffer from poor mental health as much as other women interviewed do because they accept the conventional role and conform to the expectations of their in law's, thus they seem less conflicted overall. However, this acceptance of the traditional role does not remove the consequences of performing the double shift on women's physical health as these women expressed not having time to take care of their physical well being, Malini mentioned she had to delay visiting the doctor as she had to prioritise care work.

However, the majority of the women interviewed resisted passively against conventional expectations by pursuing their choice to earn a living even if they faced sanctioning in the form of criticism from their marital family. Asmita says, "My in-laws criticised me at every opportunity they got, but I did not let it get to me, every day they told me I was a horrible mother, what more was left to hear! It was a very painful period for me." Asmita said she was sanctioned by her in-laws on a daily basis as she chose to put her child in a crèche while she was at work, even though she did not actively resist by voicing her opinion, it had an impact on her mental well-being when she was at home. Despite this she passively resisted by not conforming to the expectation of her in-laws and continued paid work. Priyanka, argues that going out to earn a living helps her maintain her mental well-being,

> So adjustment to me is just maintaining distance [from my marital home]. I only stay at home on days off from work. When I am home, I avoid speaking to my mother-in-law to maintain peace…*Everyday* [emphasis mine] my mother-in-law keeps saying that my child is not getting proper upbringing because I go out to work...at home I am always blamed for everything, as a daughter in law, you always end up being at the receiving end…I just wait to go out to work every day.

Thus, when Priyanka's ideal of equality comes in conflict with the traditional gender hierarchy within the domestic field, she finds that moving out of the domestic field helps her to reconcile this conflict within the domestic field, this suggests that in certain cases economically independent women may have more agency outside the domestic field. Going out to work every day is a part of the negotiation against the sanctioning Priyanka faces at home from her in-laws for breaking away from the gendered habitus within the domestic field, as they (in-laws) see working outside the home as a sign of poor parenting skills for a mother.

Another participant, Bani, faces similar accusations to those faced by Priyanka. In Bani's case it is her father-in-law who sanctions her. When talking about the conventional expectation she has to negotiate with on a daily basis at home, she says,

> [I experience] gender discrimination. My father-in-law is very orthodox [in his thinking]. Due to circumstances, he might look modern…Well he is kind of a mixed character. He doesn't like that I am working. But he has no other option but to allow it. In fact, he is happy with any promotion I get, he shows off to people like anything but at the back of the mind, he is *not* [emphasis by participant] happy at me being out of the home working.

Bani points out the contradiction between what her father-in-law says in public and what he practises at home. He publicly supports those egalitarian ideals that form the middle-class habitus like praising his daughter in law's success at her job, but when it comes to practising equality at home, he maintains the gendered habitus and the traditional gender hierarchy within the domestic field. Bani not only identifies this contradiction in her father-in-law's gendered habitus, but she also questions him directly. She says,

> My father-in-law constantly keeps saying in front of my son that [my son] stays the entire day with the nurse maid, and then he tells me that my son feels lonely because I go to work. In front of my son he will say this. So, he doubts my parenting skills and criticises me in front of my son. So, I question him back, 'why does [my son] feel lonely when his grandparents [her father and mother-in-law] are there [with him]? Aren't you guys his family too? Just because I am at work, why do you make my son feel that he should miss me and that he is alone with his nurse maid? You guys also stay with him!'I try to tell my in-laws that if they keep saying this in front of my son, he will think that I am actually doing some injustice towards him. My son will learn gender discrimination from them. The most problems and arguments I have with my in-laws are regarding the gender biases they have.

In case of Bani, she believes her father-in-law will ingrain gender discrimination in her son. To counter this, she draws from the ideals of gender equality she was socialised into to resist accepting the conventional expectations of her in-laws within the domestic field despite the trouble it causes her.

The narrative presented by Bani, Priyanka and Asmita and others like them, suggest a dominant normative expectation within the domestic field that mothers should perform primary caregiving activities rather than outsourcing it to nursemaids or day care centres. In most cases, outsourcing caregiving duties lead to sanctioning.

5.3.2 Resisting barriers in pursuing higher education

Participants who got married while pursuing higher education, faced varying degrees of opposition from their in-laws, sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly when they wanted to continue their studies. But in the majority of cases, the husbands encouraged their wives in pursuing their degrees. Sarani not only completed her final year of undergraduate degree but also her two-year master's degree after getting married. She explained her experience this way,

> It was difficult to continue my studies, it was very difficult [after getting married]. My mother-in-law made it difficult for me, even though my husband was supportive, but he had to go out to work. So, at home, I could sit and study only after completing all my household responsibilities.

Despite the pressure to give up her choice to pursue her degree she resisted the conventional expectation of her in-laws. However, she was only able to exercise her personal choice to continue her higher education so long as she met the conventional expectations of her in-laws to perform the caregiving role, and by completing her domestic responsibilities before studying. It is likely that this resulted in loss of sleep and took a toll on her well being, both physically and mentally.

Priyanka, who went to Europe for two months to complete a course as a part of her career advancement scheme said, "When I was in Europe, [my mother-in-law] told some lies about my parents, when I got to know about it I lost my cool. I protested that day [on the phone]." When Priyanka described this incident, she said that she felt her mother-in-law created this situation purposefully to distract her from her studies, which had an impact on her mental well-being and on her performance in her training. However, she exercised her agency when facing structural barriers from her in-laws to not be distracted from pursuing her own career goals. Priyanka's situation and her reaction to it, reflects how ideals of equality can work to actually reconstitute the gendered habitus of married women. Again, it must be noted that there is also a conflict between the meaning of gendered habitus for the in-laws, who were socialised more traditionally, and for young married women, who had a more complex socialisation. Thus, married women's habitus is reconstituted as they draw from ideals of equality to directly challenge certain patriarchal traditions.

In cases where women did not prioritise their domestic responsibilities over work, they faced heavy sanctioning from their in-laws. Nandita, recalls her experience,

> I feel I probably could have done better research [for my PhD]. It could have been more extensive. But you can't help it, you have to compromise a little on your career goals because I was also raising my daughter at the same time. She was two years old when I completed, those two years were very tough. Very, *very* [emphasis hers] tough for me!...Because *every day* [emphasis hers] we were having fights at home; with my husband, my mother-in-law blaming me… obviously [my husband and mother-in-law]expected me to know everything about raising a child. If [my daughter] wasn't sleeping or wasn't eating properly or something, it was all my fault. I was of course under so much pressure already with the PhD, I was exhausted when I got back [to my in-laws] home. I couldn't take this kind of situation, that too every day! Obviously, I

> lost my cool too at times and got mad at [my husband and mother-in-law] for blaming me…after a point the situation at home became so unbearable for me that during the last five to six months of my PhD, I moved into my mother's house with my daughter. I returned to my in-law's place only after I submitted and completed my degree.

Nandita's narrative shows that she was never conflicted about completing her degree although she did feel that the pressure from her in-laws and husband to take on the sole responsibility for caregiving after becoming a mother, which led her to compromise on the quality of her research. Her mental well-being was impacted due to sanctioning by her marital family when she did not meet their conventional expectations to prioritise her caregiving responsibilities. Nandita's experience is an example of how the field attempts to structure the habitus when it faces resistance from the agents occupying the field. However, by continuing her research even after facing sanctioning, she resisted conforming to the normative expectation and negotiated a way to exercise her personal choice to complete her degree by leaving her in-law's home to stay with her mother while finishing her degree.

Like Nandita, Anusree and Manisha also went to live with their parents when they had exams as a way of negotiating their right to exercise their choice to pursue higher education against having to prioritise care work as was the case in their in-laws' home. It must be noted that the rigidity of marriage as a social institution in contemporary India and the social stigma attached to divorce, helps married women to go back to their marital family if they leave it when they cannot adjust to the rules of the domestic field as it is socially desirable that marriages do not end in divorce or separation.

Malini was one of only a few women who prioritised her caregiving role to meet the expectation of her in-laws even when she was facing pressure to prioritise her education such as during exams. She explained her rationale for this approach,

> After marriage, my studies got affected even though I continued my studies. But there was a huge difference between studying before marriage and studying after marriage. Even if there was an exam the next day, I was expected [by my in-laws] to prioritise my domestic responsibilities before studying. This was reflected in the exam results. I performed badly.

In her narrative, although she met the expectations of her in-laws, it resulted in poor academic performance. Yet despite getting no support from her in-laws, she chose to continue to pursue her degree. All of the women who were pursuing their further education after marriage, negotiated with their in-laws, and all of them resisted pressures to cease to pursue their degrees. It is likely that socialisation based on drawing from discourses of gender equality (see Chapter 4) reshapes women's gendered habitus in a manner that they embody the need to pursue higher degree as a part of their habitus.

5.3.3 Food

Women in the study who lived with their in-laws described food as an essential part of the process of adjusting after getting married. Food was used as an instrument of control to reinstate the traditional gender hierarchy within the domestic field. However, women resisted against such control as they identified these instances as an opportunity to question gender discriminatory practices within the domestic field. Joyee, described how her mother-in-law discriminates between she and her husband,

> [At dinner] my husband is always served the bigger piece of fish[41] [to eat] and the smaller one is kept for me, or the piece that no one would eat, like the head or tail of the fish. My mother-in-law continues to do this even after ten years of marriage…When you come back from work, you are exhausted and your body needs nourishment, it needs food. So then when you are hungry and you see that your

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[41]Traditionally for Bengalis, the daily source of protein comes from consuming fish.

husband is being given a lot of food and you are being deprived, you feel terrible. But I straightaway confront my mother-in-law; she then gets perplexed and acts as if she doesn't know what I am talking about, but nothing changes…my mother-in-law's mentality will never change. Somehow, I feel that she can't treat her son and his wife equally. I feel something is wrong in her head and that is the scenario everywhere in other families too.

Joyee identifies the practice of depriving her of food by her mother-in-law as a discriminatory practice and directly questions her mother-in-law. However, she says that her direct resistance towards being discriminated against did not result in any change in her mother-in-law's attitude or behaviour towards her. The traditional gender hierarchy constituted in her mother-in-law's gendered habitus reproduces the domestic field as it was historically determined. Joyee identifies that her mother-in-law is ingrained with a deep-rooted conditioning that requires that she practice discrimination against her daughter-in-law. Joyee further rationalises her argument by adding,

I mean it's not like we are poor. We are an upper middle-class family, we are definitely not poor, but my mother-in-law [pauses]…I don't know why she just keeps repeating this habit. It's a very cheap thing to do, I feel terrible talking about it, but then *you can't fight against it* [emphasis mine], right? We have to accept it.

While Joyee has always resisted when being discriminated against, she indicates that her repeated resistance does not result in an actual change in the behaviour of her mother-in-law towards her, thus showing how the habitus is resistant to change once practices are embodied within a person, in this case her mother-in-law. Joyee identifies her mother-in-law's behaviour not as an isolated act but she is fighting a structural barrier and that she cannot bring change alone. Therefore, the discrimination that is practiced at home she has to "accept it" as a part of life as she has tried to do what she can do on her own by resisting. Although

Joyee is unable to affect change at the relational level, she is able to reconcile the apparent discrimination she faces within the domestic field by using her relatively symbolically powerful position within the field of paid work to reconcile with the unjustness present in the domestic field,

> It is so mean [that my mother-in-law tries to deprive me of food at home] so then I console myself by going to my workplace the next day to order a plate of biryani during lunch time. That is my way of treating myself when things get bad at home. At work the next day, I look forward to [eating a big meal].

Like Joyee, Priyanka also faced the problem of hunger at her marital home during the initial period after getting married and she tried to negotiate with the existing conditions within the domestic field which were unfavourable for her. She describes how she overcame it,

> My mother-in-law put so much spice in the food, I was not used to it, I fell ill [after consuming food cooked by her mother-in-law] so I stopped eating. I would have only one *roti* and one *sondesh*[42] every day. This continued for a long period of time, I kept starving myself. I could not cook for myself as my mother-in-law would take it personally. I was not even allowed to hire a cook. She is still very possessive about the kitchen, she thinks it is her life, her domain. When I tried to cook, she was not satisfied, and she would put spice even in the dishes I cooked so I could not eat…it led to the deterioration of my health. I lost ten kilos in one month. So when I went to the doctor, they prescribed vitamin supplements to me.

Thus, maintaining control over food is a way to symbolically dominate the ones who hold a lesser position within the domestic field, like the daughter in law. Participants like Priyanka, who identified this act of control over food as discrimination, struggled to reconcile between the conflicting ideals of equality and patriarchal traditions that attempt to subjugate women.

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[42]Bengali sweetmeat made from milk.

This internal struggle and their lack of symbolic power within the domestic field to exercise change not only impacted her physical but it can be inferred that it also had an impact on her mental well being. Her physical health deteriorated as she lacked nourishment, and was not always able to obtain proper meals at home. Her drastic weight loss did not draw the notice of anyone else within the domestic field which reflects how women's health can remain invisible within the domestic field. Priyanka mentioned that it was her mother, who advised her to eat outside of her in-laws' home,

> My mother said that I have to eat, even if it's fast food. I began to gorge on street food when I went out for my job. My mother said, even if I get a liver problem from outside food it's still better than not eating at all. I started gaining weight, I brought snacks home to fill me up when I was home. So, when I am at home, I eat minimum food like boiled potato, some boiled lentil and rice. Rest I eat out when I feel I want to eat something.

Like Joyee, as discussed before, Priyanka was able to exercise greater agency once she left the domestic field to go to her workplace. Another participant Anusree said, "I don't eat lunch at home every day as I go to school, I only eat lunch with everyone on Sundays so then I follow their routine." As a way of negotiating with the expectation of her in-laws, Anusree is able to let the choices of her marital family prevail for one day while she exercises her choice on the other days when she is at work. Married women, who struggle to exercise their choice to eat nourished food within the domestic field, resist the imposition of control over their food habits by exercising their choice when they go out to earn a living. Existing literature also indicates that paid work often confers more autonomy to women engaged in paid work than women who are engaged in unpaid domestic labour (Jayachandran, 2021). Thus, married women's agency varies as they enter the public sphere, and it appears that they may have the least agency within the domestic field.

5.3.4 Financial control

Few women (3/40) in the study mentioned during the course of the interview that they had to negotiate the expectations of their in-laws to forgo financial control of their earnings. The women who faced this expectation actively resisted against forgoing control over their finances. Having been socialised to draw from ideals of equality (see Chapter 4), married women mostly do not expect that they would have to negotiate such an expectation after getting married. In fact, women interviewed identified such an expectation from their in-laws as archaic and unjust. Anwesha, described her experience this way,

> My in-laws think like people used to hundreds of years ago, they expected that if they get an earning wife for their son, she will hand over all her earnings to them and if I need money then I would ask for an allowance from them. So [they expected that] my earnings will be totally controlled by them. From the very beginning I objected to this, I couldn't believe they could even expect such a thing. I vehemently opposed it and did not accept their wish. So, then they started to brainwash my husband against me and told him that since I earned more than my husband, I was arrogant and disobedient. Since it was an arranged marriage, my husband obviously trusted his parents more than a stranger…I am a single child, my parents also got angry with my in-laws when they heard [my parents in law's] demands. So, to that their [in-laws] reply was that they are the parents of *the son* [emphasis mine], they are not getting the respect they deserve as they bore a son!

Anwesha in her statement above points out that for married women, earning a living is not enough to exercise agency when negotiating with patriarchal expectations however it generates conditions within women's habitus to put up resistance against the marital family's expectation that young married women's earning should be controlled by her marital family.

Anwesha's account also highlights the cultural significance of giving birth to a son where a patrilineal kinship system is followed. Anwesha's account here shows how her socialisation through embodying certain ideals from the discourse of gender equality helped her to immediately perceive this demand from her in-laws as unjust, and therefore, she actively resisted and did not acquiesce to their demands.

Women who talked about facing this expectation from their in-laws, also mentioned that they had the support of their parents who had raised their daughters to counter patriarchal injustices (see Chapter 4). Moreover, women also rationalised that being a girl child they also have the responsibility to care for their own parents so giving away financial control did not seem like a reasonable ask. Aruna, when asked about the most recurring problem she faces at home, says,

> This example would be completely unusual [pauses] …finances…my in-laws expect that my earnings should go completely to them…I disagree with that…my thought process was that I'll keep some [money] for myself as I am an independent working woman with free will, so I need money to meet my expenses, and then I will share a part with my family and a part with his family…that's how logically I would go about [dividing the income]. I wouldn't think about what others [before me] have done or what tradition I am expected to follow. It does not matter to me, so I will always adopt the logical approach...My parents also told me that it's my decision to make regarding what I want to do with my money. Moreover, my parents have one focus, I shouldn't spend everything I earn so that I can have savings and that should be for me…

Aruna's account shows how she exercised her agency to negotiate the expectation of her in-laws by actively resisting against following a traditional norm as she did not find it 'logical'. She expressly draws from ideals of gender equality, like what it means to be an independent woman and having free will which is embodied in her habitus to explain her act of resistance

against behaviour that is deemed by her habitus as lacking common sense. Within the domestic field her parents also helped her to exercise her agency by stating that she has the right to take a decision on how she will spend her money. She, therefore, opposed the normative expectation of forgoing control over her earnings as it did not reconcile with the ideology she was socialised into about the need for women to earn a living and have financial control over their earnings to resist patriarchal injustices. The demands made by the in-laws of Aruna and Anwesha, were deemed to be reasonable behaviour as their habitus was structured traditionally, unlike younger married women, whose habitus is reconstituted by adopting certain ideals of equality like women's right to earn a living and spend money as they choose to. Thus, this indicates how gender identity can be reconstituted over time as well as how patriarchal traditions may be reshaped.

Sometimes women are not directly asked by their in-laws but the subject is hinted at when in-laws try to get more information about a woman's expenses to identify how their earning is being utilised and whether it is being contributed towards the marital family. Mitali described her experience,

> I contribute a portion of my salary to my parents. If a son can contribute a part of his salary to his parents, then I can also do the same. Even for this my mother-in-law interfered and asked how much money I give my parents. So, I told her why should I have to tell her that? I don't need to and I'm not going to tell her that. I told her, 'I'm not going to tell you how much I earn and I'm definitely not going to tell you how much of my earnings I contribute to my parents.'

Mitali also draws from the ideals of gender equality to resist her in-laws' expectations. She makes a relative comparison between what a man is expected to do, spend money on his parents, and how she feels that she has the right to be an equal and act in the same way a man

does. In fact, her mother-in-law's economic dependence on her husband baffles Mitali. Thus, young married women's habitus is determined by dynamically evolving patriarchal traditions.

5.3.5 Speak softly

Bourdieu says that "embodiment of femininity is inseparable from an embodiment of distinction" (2001, p. 28). Thus middle-class femininity is inscribed through excessive regulation of women's bodies, even their speech (Lawler, 2004). A few of the women in the study spoke about how they resisted the class habitus where married women are normatively expected to be soft spoken, a marker of feminine respectability embodied within the habitus of young women. These women pointed out how defying this expectation is immediately censured by both their husbands and in-laws thus, class habitus is reproduced through the act of feminine respectability within the domestic field. Sanjukta, in response to a question asking if she thinks about *what people will say* ('*lokey ki bolbe*') before doing something, said,

> I saw that my in-laws were worried about what people would say [*lokey ki bolbe*], when I would lose my temper and raise my voice [at home]. They would correct me immediately and ask me to speak softly as the neighbours would hear it. So they were really concerned about what people would say if they heard my loud voice. When I tell them that all the doors and windows are closed, no one cares but they [my husband and in-laws] will not let me speak in a higher voice…so whenever I raise my voice, all three of them say in unison that I need to speak in a softer voice or else what will people think about our family! So, my in-laws always think about what people will say. They are *bhadralok* in the truest sense. They are very concerned about their public image and do not want to tarnish it. Maintaining their *bhadro* image is very important for my in-laws, but I don't get it so I don't follow it.

Sanjukta explains how odd she finds the expectation by her in-laws that she should not raise her voice, and she counters their expectation with a logical argument and stating that she finds

their fear to be irrational. During the interview, she also pointed out that since she was never asked to speak softly by her parents, it registered as something odd when her in-laws asked her to do so. Sanjukta also narrates how the urban middle-class in Kolkata perform their *bhadro* image by placing the burden of respectability on married women, in this case requiring Sanjukta to be soft spoken at all times. This is reflected in the fact that her in-laws were more concerned with the register of her voice, as it would lead to their family defying the class habitus, rather than the content of what she was saying.

Another participant Joyee, who tries to call out her mother-in-law's discriminatory behaviour against her, says,

> My husband doesn't say anything, he is a very calm person. But when my voice gets loud [when arguing with my mother-in-law] while pointing out the discrimination [against me], then [my husband] corrects me. But I don't usually raise my voice because I know that I shouldn't. However, I do it when the need arises...

Thus, Joyee self regulates and does not find the act of her husband correcting her as odd. There is over ten years age gap between Sanjuka, mentioned before, and Joyee. The differences between the two women who were born ten years apart in how they react to being told to keep their voice quiet, indicate that the habitus is dynamic and may change over time. While Sanjukta finds this restriction on her voice as illogical, Joyee who was born a decade earlier, does not disagree that she should speak softly. So even though Joyee resists gender discriminatory practices within the domestic field by calling out her mother-in-law, she accepts – at least to some extent - the respectable feminine norm of being soft spoken. In Joyee's narrative, her husband's silence draws attention to how the structure operates within the domestic field, and how it enables her mother-in-law to continue her discriminatory behaviour against those who hold the least symbolic power. Here too, the register of Joyee's

voice becomes the concern, rather than the reason for which she raised her voice. Ratna, who also resists the norm of women as soft spoken through reasoning,

> If people [like my in-laws] wanted to be understanding, then they would not have started the quarrel to begin with. My husband tries to tell me that I should lower my voice and calm down in such situations, but I am only reacting. If there was no action to begin with, I wouldn't have reacted. I can't change myself. I mean, I cannot accept lies, so I stand up [to my in-laws].

Though Ratna's husband tries to censure the register of her voice, she says she will not stop resisting. She identifies herself as having agency, and she exercises agency by resisting against the unjust practices of her in-laws. In both Ratna's and Joyee's case, their husbands only break their own silence on the subject of their wife's conflicts within the domestic field to ensure that the rules instituted within the domestic field, regulated through the gendered habitus of the social agents within it, are always maintained.

5.3.6 Becoming mothers

For Bourdieu, submission and resistance are both inscribed within the logic of symbolic domination (Lawler, 2004). He says that "if, in order to resist, I have no other resource than to lay claim to that in the name of which I am dominated, is this resistance? Is this submission?...Resistance may be alienating and submission may be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated, and there is no way out of it" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 155). When women become mothers they are not only able to exercise greater agency but they are also able to impact change at a relational level as they gain a higher position within the domestic field as primary caregivers for the successors of the in-laws family. By claiming themselves as primary caregivers, they submit to the symbolic domination of the structure of the field that they have mostly resisted against so far (see subsection 5.3.1 – 5.3.5). All the mothers in the study spoke of how becoming a mother, and claiming themselves as primary

caregivers for their children, created a "deeper bond" between the husband and the wife. As a result, they were able to negotiate better with their husbands and their in-laws to effect change that impacted not just them but the entire family, such as hiring help or living separately from their in-laws. Asmita, who spoke of having to navigate household politics and facing resistance from her in-laws when she exercised her choice to place her son in a nursery says,

> After my son was born, daily quarrels [between me and my in-laws) kept on happening. So, I was able to convince my husband to get separated from my in-laws. I felt that the kind of hostile environment [at my in-laws home] would not be healthy for our child as he was of an impressionable age.

Like Asmita, Anindita, also began living separately from her in-laws after the birth of her son, although in her case her husband did not move out with her so she stayed with her son without her husband for a few months and her husband now stays the night with her and their child. She says,

> I did not want my child to see all the quarrels that happened everyday at home. I just want to give my child a healthy environment so that he can develop normally. Then I earn so much money, if I can't stay the way I want to at my own home then what is the point…I wanted to keep things a certain way, decorate a certain way and I could not do it there. I am not going to get back this time, this age [the present]. I am not going to have these desires when I grow older so that's why I shifted. This decision was not a mutual decision. My husband did not want to [live separately from his parents], but I had to separate [from my in-laws].

Her narrative reflects the conflict that women undergo when they meet the externally validated ideals of gender equality like earning a living but find themselves conforming to non-egalitarian practices at home. Anindita justifies her action to sever ties with her in-laws

by pointing to the need for a healthy environment for her child, and she also draws from the ideology of gender equality to exercise her personal choice in how she wants to live her life. Her narrative also reflects how she questions the lack of choice she had in making any changes at her in-laws home and how it drove her to decide to live apart from her in-laws, even when it meant largely living apart from her husband who did not move in with her and their child immediately after she moved out, but instead he waited a few months before he did so. Like Anindita and Asmita, there were others - Ranjana, Satarupa, Chitra and Anwesha - who all moved out of their in-law's home after becoming mothers. In part, they were able to do so due to the increased agency they felt they had due to the relational changes as mothers within the hierarchical family structure, and also because they submitted themselves to the role of primary caregivers for their children which allowed them more agency over those children.

For Priyanka, who was denied food in her in-laws home and felt that she could not change this, described how things changed for her once she had a child,

> My mother-in-law is very possessive about the kitchen…it is her life, her domain but thankfully I was able to get a cook after my baby was born and I gave [my mother-in-law] the reason that the baby needed to eat bland food, so then I was able to get a cook to cook food for [me and the baby].

Priyanka used the needs of her child to negotiate for her own needs, which had been denied in her marital household. For Priyanka and others like her, having a baby provided more agency to impact change in intimate relationships, such as those with their husbands and in-laws. Apart from a few exceptions, the majority of the women who participated in the study identified the mother as the primary caregiver. So, when negotiating in intimate relationships they act in the best interest of their children in accordance with normative expectations, but

also negotiate for themselves, by submitting to the structure that produced their embodied habitus by meeting the traditional normative expectations.

5.4 Conclusion

Bourdieu (1990b, p. 55) says, "exercising choice is what drives the habitus, Bourdieu interprets individual choice as 'the art of inventing' ", however (as we discussed from sub-section 5.3.1- 5.3.6) for women, the choice to pursue professional success which is inscribed in the habitus is limited. The extent of choices available to the women in this study are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints they find themselves in which is in relation to their external circumstances outside the domestic field and the normative expectation within it.

Women in this study resist and question the practice of gender discrimination at home. Some women directly question the discrimination they face at home, while some women question the struggle they face when they want to exercise their personal choice. Many women's accounts of their everyday lives revealed a story of resistance against traditional gender norms.

When it comes to playing the role of the 'domestic goddess' at home, women identified have identified that balancing or the act of multi-tasking which is a normative expectation placed socially and culturally on married women, needs to be questioned, as they find themselves struggling to meet the demands to perform the double shift and prioritise their caregiving role.

While all of the participants accept the 'double shift' to a certain degree, especially after becoming mothers, for the majority of the women in the study the role of 'domestic goddess' is practised though resistance and questioning. Even women, who do not directly question the contradiction between having to take on the double shift at home and the conflicting ideals of

gender equality, do exercise resistance in other areas of their lives,such as their right to receive higher education and earn a living.

Women in this study resist gender discrimination in various ways, some women question the discrimination they face outside their home, while other women question their lack of choice when it comes to playing the role of the 'domestic goddess' at home. Of the women who directly question the contradiction between their understanding of the discourse of gender equality especially for women to have the freedom of choice and the normative traditional caregiving practices at home, they exercise both active and passive resistance to stand up against having to conform to the dominance of traditional gender norms at home.

Married women use phrases like "I have to balance" and "part of life" to describe the contradiction in between their understanding of egalitarian ideals and the gender discriminatory practices they partake in. Of the women who directly question the contradiction between their ideals of gender equality and the practice of patriarchal traditions in the home, most exercise both forms of active and passive resistance to stand up against having to conform to patriarchal expectations.

Bourdieu says "the dominated, in any social universe, can always exert a certain force, inasmuch as belonging to a field means by definition that one is capable of producing effects in it (if only to elicit reactions of exclusion on the part of those who occupy its dominant positions)" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 80). In other words, it is not that women lack agency in entirety but rather, there is no 'innocent' position (On, 1993). On (1993) says that there is no resistance which is "not in some way complicitous with power" as we see in subsection 5.3.6 where women use their heightened social position within the family to gain more agency.

According to Lawler (2004), the complex relationship between one's habitus and the objective conditions of the field one inhabits might lead women to behave in a manner that

might seem 'regressive', though it is not because they are 'lacking' in any way, but precisely because 'people are not fools' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 130). Thus, people adopt strategies to ensure that they are able to exercise choice either through resisting the pre-existing objective conditions or by submitting themselves to the normative expectations of the field. Thus, fields then become sites of struggle. For women who conform to the objective conditions of the domestic field, their habitus is seen as a virtue by them and their marital family, and they are praised for their care work. Thus, submission can be liberating through positive sanctions.

Chapter 6: Discourses of gender equality and men's gendered habitus

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I answer a part of the fundamental question of this research on how gender relations in urban middle-class families in contemporary India are being shaped by discourses of gender equality and patriarchal practices within the family. I do this by exploring married men's understanding of the discourses of gender equality and the process through which these discourses structure their habitus within the domestic field.

I present the accounts of the male participants and analyse the ideological complexity between men's understanding of discourses of equality and the traditional gendered habitus of men. Most participants in this study leverage their class position as exclusive and distinct through markers of class distinction, such as promoting women's education and companionate marriage. These ideals are espoused to affirm that Bengali middle-class men are more refined and liberal as compared to men in the rest of India, and especially compared to states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh which were identified by them. This chapter will assess the way men think about women's position as well as their own position in society. Thus, this chapter will not only help unpack a phenomenon that is largely missing from the evolving discourse of gender in South Asia but also provide an insight into the way men interpret the discourse of gender equality and make sense of their habitus in contemporary India.

As discussed in chapter two (see section 2.1.1) Bourdieu (1996) identifies family as a *field* with its own rules, and within this domestic field social agents within the family hold variable symbolic power. As discussed in chapter five, married women hold the least symbolic power within a patrilineal family system. When men and women enter different fields, the relative symbolic power may be contested in some fields, like the workplace or educational institutions, where women may fight collectively for equal rights like protection against

sexual harassment in the workplace (see section 2.7 in Chapter 2). This is unlike the domestic field where the hierarchical superior position is almost always held by men and their parents (Osella and Osella, 2006) and married young women as well as married young men follow the rules instituted by the groom's family as a part of the patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti, 1988).

In the context of changing gender relations in neoliberal India, where middle-class women have entered the public sphere traditionally dominated by men, I will analyse the inherent nature of men's gendered habitus that may produce the need for them to maintain their traditional gender role within the domestic field. This chapter intends to contribute towards developing an understanding of middle-class men's perception of women's participation in the public sphere and its implication on their domestic arrangements within the family.

I argue that the policy discourses of gender equality and empowerment (discussed in section 2.4 and 2.7 in chapter 2) like institutional reforms in fields like schools and workplaces, lead men to understand the meaning of gender equality as women's entrance into the public sphere. In the majority of cases, men continue to internalise the traditional gender hierarchy within the domestic field to make sense of their normative position as the breadwinner within a patriarchal culture. The interplay between the egalitarian discourses and the traditional gendered habitus shows that men's gendered habitus is in a state of flux as men express their understanding of women's balancing ideal within the varied realities of rising consumerism as well as rising patriarchal backlash against feminist discourses.

As discussed in chapter two, for the well-educated Bengali urban middle-class, awareness of women's rights is the prescriptive norm. However, there are implications regarding drawing from discourses of gender equality in a class that is part of a society where men tend to resist the transformation of traditional gender relations at home. The lack of symbolic power of women within the domestic field combined with the symbolic privilege offered to men within the same, leads to a complex process through which men's gender identity is re-imagined.

Figure 2 represents the ideological positioning of the three groups of male participants I identified - those who are speak for the discourse of gender equality (pro gender equality), those who are covertly against the discourse of gender equality (contradicted) and those who are overtly against the discourse of gender equality (pro men's rights).

Figure 3: Visual representation of men's belief in gender norms within the domestic field
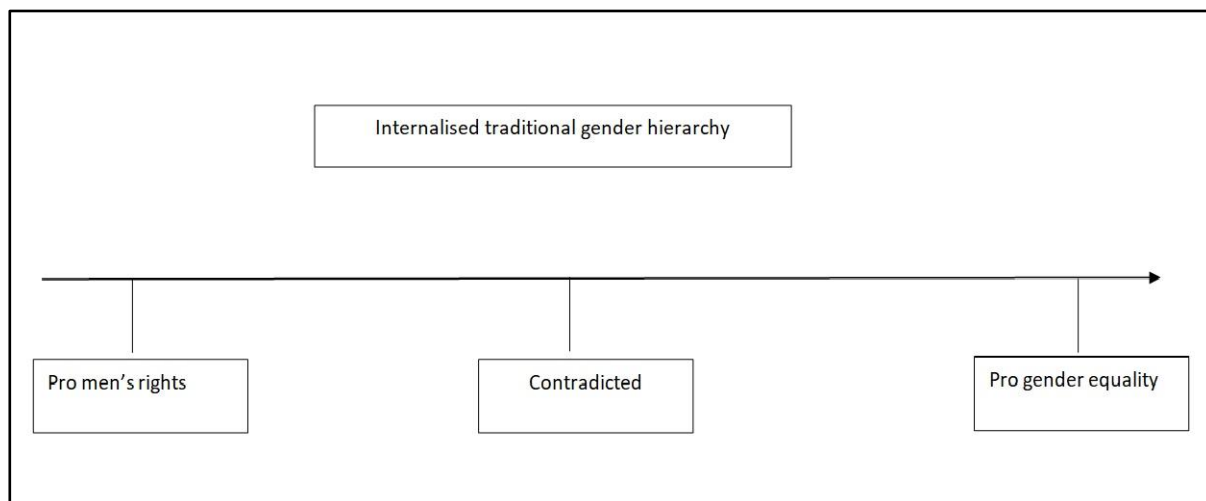
Despite the differences in their espoused beliefs regarding the discourse of gender equality, all of the three groups have internalised the traditional gendered hierarchy within the domestic field to varying degrees and they use this knowledge to help them justify their patriarchal domestic arrangements, thereby maintaining their symbolic privilege.

There remains some fluidity when it comes to the complex nature of men's habitus which is influenced by different discourses – gender equality and men's rights. To represent this complexity embodied within men's gendered habitus, I have placed the three distinct categories on a continuous line to indicate the fluid movement between the groups that was evidenced in the narratives of the men interviewed, where some men were more ideologically inclined towards the previous group or the following group.

The group of men who speak for gender equality identify the inequality in intimate relations and thus, identify the need for transformation of traditional gendered habitus within the

domestic field. However in practice, their traditional gendered habitus within the domestic field remains unchanged. Men who are covertly against the discourse of gender equality and men who are overtly against the discourse of gender equality, both these groups support men's normative position as the breadwinner within the domestic field.

Men who are covertly against the discourse of gender equality express contradictions between holding onto their symbolic privilege within the domestic field and espousing egalitarian beliefs by drawing from discourses of gender equality. The third group, men who are overtly against the discourse of gender equality, are not conflicted like the other two groups. For these men, the possibility of detraditionalisation of the gender hierarchy within Indian society leads them to engage with the discourse of men's rights in an effort to make sense of their patriarchal socialisation.

The following table shows the patriarchal socialisation process of men in their childhood by indicating their statements about their mother's role within the domestic field. In the case of all of the male participants, their fathers played the role of the breadwinner within the domestic field. However, there were variations in interpretation of the socialisation process depending on which group the men belonged to. The first column includes the three groups of male participants based on their outlook on gender equality at the time of the interview. The second column indicates the percentage of male participants who belong to each group. Finally, the last column shows two statements (indicated with serial numbers) from each group of men about the role of their mother in their childhood.

Table 4: Mother's role in childhood

Total Male participants (N) = 30

Groups	% of N	Sample statements
For GE	10%	(1a) "My father had a transferable job. So my mother raised me alone so to speak… She did everything. But she ensured that we do not take

		for granted what she did, so she would ask us to help her at home like she would ask me to fill up the water filter, then ask my elder brother to bring groceries."
		(1b)
		"My mother was a schoolteacher. Luckily, we both entered home from school at the same time. I used to spend time with her the most."
Covertly against GE	33.33%	(2a)
		"I grew up under the care of a nurse maid instead of my mother, as she was working [paid work] and she had an evening shift. Therefore, my mother left for her work when I returned home from school…So the nourishment and care provided by a mother to her child, I missed that, and I felt bad. It was not an ideal environment for a child to grow up in."
		(2b)
		"My mother was not very well educated; she had studied till the 8th standard. But she is a smart lady. She herself went to enrol me in an English medium school against the wishes of the elders of my family to do so as people did not prefer English medium education when I was young like now. Apart from this she did take care the family, 30-35 people lived together, a big joint family. *Songsar* was her domain, she did everything for everyone."
Overtly against GE	56.67%	(3a)
		"Look at my mother's case …my mother did not work in an office. She is not a loser in any sense. She does not think that her life is like hell because she is a homemaker. So, for that reason if a woman thinks that being a homemaker is making her life hell, then she is wrong. My mother raised three kids and now that we are successful in life. It is because she gave us time and cared for us and raised us. So, I made my wife understand that."
		(3b)
		"She [mother] has given her life for everyone [caring for the family]. Only one thing she does not do is take time to care for her own health."

GE = Gender Equality

The dominance of the normative expectations placed on urban middle-class married women (the mothers of male participants) to perform the traditional caregiving is evident in all the statements in Table 4. However, men who are for the practise of gender equality (1a and 1b), which comprise only 10% of the sample of men interviewed, were included in the process of caregiving by their mothers, through participation (1a) and observation (1b). This inclusion in caregiving work in childhood may have influenced the shaping of their gendered habitus to draw from the discourse of gender equality.

Statements 1b and 2a, show how women's economic independence may not necessarily result in transformation of invisible barriers of dominant cultural norms that expect women to be the primary caregivers within the domestic field. Although in statement 1b the participant does not resent his mother's engagement in paid work he does mention that they got back home at the same time. Therefore, within the domestic field he observed his mother as the primary caregiver. In contrast, in statement 2a the participant resents his mother's engagement in paid work therefore he does not appear to be contradicted about the practice of traditional gender roles within the domestic field. In statement 2b we see how caregiving role played by his mother is seen as a virtue.

Statements 3a and 3b, both reveal the deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs about the symbolically privileged position of men in Indian society. Together the last two groups form the majority of the male participants who overtly (56.67%) and covertly (33.33%) believe in the perpetuation of the traditional gender hierarchy within the domestic field. However, men who are overtly against the discourse of gender equality believe in maintaining patriarchal privilege not only within the domestic field but also within Indian society as a whole.

The chapter will discuss how these three groups of men, those who idealise gender equality, those who are covertly against gender equality and those who are overtly against gender equality, make sense of their gendered habitus within neoliberal India, where women's

engagement in paid workforce is perceived as profitable and helpful in meeting the demands of conspicuous consumption of the urban middle-class. However, men's traditional role as the primary breadwinner mostly remains resistant to change.

6.2 Men who idealise the discourses of gender equality

Men in this group (10%, N=3/30), as seen in Table 4, highlight the constraints that challenge men's agency within the domestic field as they attempt to practice equality by drawing from the discourses of gender equality. These constraints often lead men to uphold the traditional gender relations within the family. As shown in Figure 2, the men in this group tend to incline toward upholding their understanding of the discourse of gender equality. They not only speak for gender equality, but they also identify the constraints behind perpetuation of traditional practices within the domestic field and in the broader society. The men in this group have come to the conclusion that it is not women who need to make more effort to become equal, but rather it is men who have to give away their symbolic privilege. Akshay says,

> To me gender equality can be achieved when gender roles become independent of genders like women's responsibility to manage the household and raise children would mean that even a man would be able to do these things. A husband can also stay at home and raise the child, cook and care for the household. The man should not be ridiculed for performing these roles.

Akshay also explains how men are negatively sanctioned through ridicule when they try to take on the traditional gender roles performed by women. Therefore, middle-class masculinity is normatively constructed by distinguishing itself from middle-class femininity, which normatively expects women to perform care work. In addition, Akshay acknowledged women's double shift as visible labour instead of viewing it as a natural essence of their biological sex. He observed the sacrifices women make, when they get married in a patrilineal

culture where they (women) are expected to adjust to the rules operating within the domestic field of their marital home which are enforced mostly by the husband's family. He went on to describe this process,

> My wife has made the bigger compromise. When she used to stay with her parents, she would not have to take on any responsibility. But after coming to our home, she had to take on the responsibility of running the household almost overnight. That's the reality for married women. She has had to cook food, serve food, clean the house, and wash clothes. She does everything like a full-time housewife. She does all this she does after coming back from her job at 8 pm. If there are guests, she serves them tea and snacks. So, she was the one who had to make such a huge transition and take on so much responsibility. She has compromised a lot for my family, my compromises don't match up to hers.

Women interviewed were clear that this is the reality for all women in patrilineal societies, especially when they are also engaged in paid work, but Akshay, was one of the few male participants who was able to identify women's double shift as an invisible barrier towards practicing equality within the family. He adds that,

> There is a huge difference between the life of an unmarried girl where she can be carefree and a married girl where she has to suddenly take on the responsibility of running an entire household and care for all her husband's family members. I did not have to do anything when I married her, she had to do everything. Overnight her life changed, she had to come and call a stranger's house as her own, away from her family, her home.

Recognising women's domestic labour as work, led him, and other men like him, to identify the need to observe the privileged position men have over women who perform double shift.

Samiran, one of the other participants who spoke about the need for men to be involved in performing household chores, met with obstacles from his mother when he attempted to subvert the traditional gendered expectation within the domestic field. Samiran said this,

> You have to do household chores if you want a happy marriage. If you are willing to get married, you should be able to take up the challenge of helping your wife with the household chores. This is the key. Stipulated division of household work is not the key to a happy marriage. Marriage means equal partnership, so no one should feel more pressure [to perform house work]…But my parents, especially my mother, do not like this at all. Her wish is that my wife should be the one taking the initiative and handling the household cooking, not me. So the rifts between them are related to that…This issue has persisted for the longest time and does not go away.

Samiran here indicates that practicing certain ideals by drawing from discourses of gender equality may challenge traditional norms. Such a challenge is resisted by his mother, who enforces the traditional gender roles within the domestic field. He said during his interview that his mother did not have an education as women of today do, and had only performed the role of caregiver after getting married. Samiran identifies that his mother's habitus is resistant to the transformation of gendered division of labour.

In a way, the proposed idea put forth by men in this group of giving up of symbolic privilege challenges Bourdieu's idea of gendered habitus. Bourdieu proposed that a complete rejection of the gendered habitus was necessary to dislodge the phallocentric worldview (McNay, 1999, 2000). Men in this group find ways in which to negotiate with the normative masculine expectations within the domestic field. Men's mothers want to structure the gendered habitus of social agents, such as their daughters' in-law, or their sons, in a traditional sense. But men in this group are able to self-reflexively observe the gendered division of labour at home.

They draw from discourses of gender equality to identify women's double shift as an invisible barrier towards transformation of gendered division of labour at home.

6.3 Covertly against discourses of gender equality

The narratives of some men revealed that while they do not speak against the discourses of gender equality, the practices within their everyday lives help in perpetuation of traditional gendered division of labour at home. Their narratives suggest that they constantly negotiate the contradiction between the normative masculine expectation to be the breadwinner and be the head of the family as well as draw from discourses of gender equality, that define their class habitus as urban middle-class Bengalis in neoliberal India.

As shown in Figure 3, men in this middle group experience relatively high levels of contradiction, especially when they move between the public sphere and the private sphere. As a result of this contradiction, some men within this group gravitate towards espousing that gender equality has already been achieved through women's participation in the public sphere as the public sphere was traditionally dominated by men.

In the following three subsections below, I discuss how men draw from discourses of gender equality to interpret women's economic independence as achievement of gender equality. I also analyse the impact of embodying patriarchal masculine expectations as well as contemporary ideals of gender equality on men's gendered habitus within the domestic field.

6.3.1 Interpretation of gender equality

While talking about what gender equality means, Kuntal, whose wife teaches at a college in Kolkata, says, "I believe we are living in a gender equal society now. Especially when I look around me [within the urban middle-class *bhadralok* families], there is no question that when it comes to gender equality, men and women are equal now." This statement is reflective of how his class habitus makes sense of the prescribed ideals of equality of gender. If we look closely at his statement, he uses the phrase "there is no question" to indicate that the

possibility of unrealised equality between genders is problematic. Thus, men interpret their awareness of certain discourses of gender equality as well as women's participation in the public sphere, like the workforce, as achievement of gender equality.

While explaining gender equality Kuntal uses his personal life as an example and states that his wife is "considerably more active" than him, as she is a multi-tasker who balances her professional commitments, her home and provides childcare. He is in awe of her balancing act and thinks that "women in today's day and age can do anything". While her husband appears to have great respect for his wife's ability to multitask, it also seems that he may not recognise the ways in which his own symbolic privilege to abstain from care work may lead to his wife being required to multitask.

In the case of Kuntal, who supports empowerment of women to conform to the class habitus, his traditional gendered habitus appears to prevent him from questioning the gendered division of labour at home. Thus, Kuntal's habitus reconciles the contradiction between espousing egalitarian beliefs and maintaining symbolic privilege by observing women's double shift as a virtue and a natural part of them being a woman.

Kuntal's tone while talking about gender equality is that of amazement, in his mind there is no space to believe that gender equality may have not been achieved yet. This is the case for most participants, who tend to believe that they see their partners as their equal, and this was especially true of male participants whose wives were employed in paid work. But unlike Samiran (in the previous group) who identifies the need for transformation of the traditional gender role of men within the domestic field, Kuntal here talks more generally, and in practice, the hetero-normative gender roles in his home has remained unchanged. Another participant Arunava says,

> I think it (gender equality) exists in our society now...nowadays women are financially independent in most cases, they are not dependent (financially) on their husbands. Women nowadays think of themselves as being equal to men and this is a huge change from what it used to be in previous generations.

So, like most male participants in this group, he believes that gender equality has become the norm within his class and goes on to include the society as practising gender equal norms. Arunava observes a change when he compares women of his generation who pursue paid work with women from previous generations who were mostly housewives. He feels that gender equality has made it possible for women to begin thinking that they are equals so he finds that compared to women of previous generations, women belonging to his generation are more comfortable in thinking of themselves as equals. The logic of practice embodied within the gendered habitus leads men to perceive women's double shift as a virtue. In terms of gendered division of labour, men may be symbolically privileged within the domestic field but they do have to negotiate with the masculine expectation to be the breadwinner.

Another participant, Rishi, when asked about his class and its treatment of women says,

> I have travelled across the country due to my political work, so I can say this with certainty that our society is far from achieving gender equality. I know of elite Bhadralok families in this city who still harass and heckle their daughters' in-laws if they bear a girl child. I believe that people who are so called lower classes are actually liberal, as they don't care about the gender of their children since everyone in their family is looked upon as an earning member and they can't afford the luxury of having a member sit at home and not earn. In fact, I find *Bhadralok* families are more inclined to sustain the patriarchal mindset. A lot more.

Rishi brings up an important point that urban Bengali middle-class women have to carry the expectation of class respectability, while women from lower classes do not necessarily carry

this expectation. Thus, for Bengali middle-class women, forgoing the opportunity to participate in paid work might be seen as a virtue as women will be able to perform their primary caregiving role at home and maintain the respectability of the class, but for women with fewer resources there is no choice to remain home with children. Rishi states that when it comes to upholding traditional hetero-normative beliefs and sustaining oneself, the choice is obvious. In classes who are not wealthy and who are economically struggling, it makes sense to think about family members regardless of gender as human beings who make an economic contribution to the family income rather than looking at them in terms of distinct, socially prescribed gender roles. Rishi further suggests that since in *Bhadralok* (urban middle-class Bengali) families, money is not an issue, there is more freedom to make the choice to uphold their patriarchal beliefs, which likely also means they are more likely to be resistant to transformation of traditional gender roles within the domestic field. However, for Rishi, gender equality is equivalent to women's participation in paid work. Rishi was the only participant whose wife was also interviewed and, in her account, she mentioned how traditional gender norms of performing care work were performed by women in their family while the men in the family never performed any household work. She gave several examples, she mentioned that her husband Rishi waits for his food to be heated in the microwave by his wife or mother instead of doing it himself. Thus, even if men espouse egalitarian ideals to conform to the liberal class habitus, the gendered habitus within the domestic field appears to remain more resistant to change.

6.3.2 Gender equality and its impact on the domestic field

Some participants in this group partly gravitate towards the idea that gender equality is yet to be achieved, but they too interpret the achievement of women's participation in the paid workforce as a mark of gender equality. However, these men are more circumspect about

gender equality having already been achieved, like Animesh says that he learned about gender equality and women's empowerment in schools and colleges,

> I supported my wife when she wanted to work. So I allowed her to be empowered. Not everyone will think like me… In school and colleges we are taught about women's empowerment and gender equality but the society's mindset has not changed. That's why real change is not happening. Once the mindset changes, then women will be empowered.

Animesh understands the achievement of gender equality as economic independence of women. By *allowing* his wife to engage in paid work he indicates his superior role in the gender hierarchy within his family. 'Allowing' his wife to engage in paid work places him as the head of household which is a persistent masculine expectation men have to negotiate with. Animesh brings up another fact about how we learn about the discourse of gender equality, he mentions people learn about it in schools and colleges. Thus, he talks about how awareness about discourse of gender equality is generated outside the domestic field. This suggests that the perpetuation of traditional gender norms within the domestic field remains unexamined.

In this group of men, awareness about the discourses of gender equality does exist. However, this awareness is prescriptive in nature, and it is in constant conflict with their gendered habitus which places the expectation of normative masculinity on them. For example, Dibyendu, who is a college lecturer and is married to a college lecturer, when asked about his views on gender equality claims that,

> There are lots of theories on gender equality. There is the fourth wave [of feminism]. Then there was the breaking of the glass ceiling. But gender equality to me is a practical problem. Like in my case, my wife who teaches in a college, when she asks for a gift from me like cosmetics or something, I feel she is then being a part of

patriarchy, I mean she can very much pay for that gift herself so why is she asking
me? So women switch sides according to their convenience, in the example I gave,
where is she standing up for equality? She might teach about it in her class but then I
buy her that gift. So where is she practising equality?

While Dibyendu questions the contradictory practice of his wife, there are many insights
regarding men's internalised symbolic privilege that are suggested in his statement. First, like
other men in this group, he understands the practice of workforce participation of women as
an achievement of gender equality. He draws from discourses of gender equality which talk of
women's participation in the public sphere to develop his understanding of the concept of
gender equality. However, he does not mention the possibility of persistence of gender
inequality in heterosexual relations when men assume a hierarchically superior position to
women as the head of the household. Secondly, his narrative does not reflect the complexity
of gender relations in a patrilineal family system, he sees his wife having the freedom to make
choices independently. He possibly alludes to the discourse on women's right to have
freedom of choice. As discussed in the previous two chapters, women mentioned how their
choices are constrained within the domestic sphere as they negotiate with the expectations of
other social agents, like the husband and his family. Thus, Dibyendu's understanding of the
concept of gender equality is more aligned with the feminist discourses of freedom of choice
rather than the existence of complexity in gender relations in cultures that practice patrilineal
kinship system.

Dibyendu's statement conveys the tension between the discourses of gender equality, drawing
from which certain ideals are practiced by the middle-class in India to uphold their hegemonic
position within the Indian society, and men's traditional gendered habitus which reinforces
normative masculine expectations. In his narrative, he mentioned that he received expensive
furniture to decorate his unfurnished bedroom from his father-in-law during marriage, an

exchange of gift. However, this practice is not understood as equal to the practice of him gifting his wife, as gifts are normatively expected to flow from a woman's family into a man's family.

Bourdieu says that the logic behind any practice is logical only up to the point it seems meaningful to those who dominate the field. Thus, Dibyendu's narrative indicates how his traditional gendered habitus perceives the discourse of gender equality as a problem as it allows women to gain advantage over men. His narrative does not recognise that like men, women are possibly developing their own understanding of the discourses of gender equality as they negotiate with the traditional gendered habitus.

Dibyendu continues, "So women will try to gain advantage whether there is gender equality or not. No, let's leave it, I don't think I should be expressing this, let's leave it, it won't be politically correct." So, his statement reflects how he negotiates between his traditional gendered habitus and his class habitus. Thus, espousing his belief in the discourses of gender equality is seen as important to him as a member of the urban middle-class especially when speaking outside the domestic field. He then goes on to add, "Well if someone thinks that women are marginal and they should be given reservation[43] then who am I to judge?" Yet in the context of his previous statements, he seems to suggest that he feels strongly against any reservation for women in any field.

On the topic of why men do not perform housework, Dibyendu, was clear that for him, there is no contradiction regarding the practice of gendered division of labour at home, he says,

> Don't think that men cannot do housework. You see, there is nothing that men cannot
>
> do, I can do everything, from cooking to cleaning. But why will I? I have done

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[43] This term is a policy related term in India, 'reservation' policy in India is equivalent to policies regarding diversity hiring or affirmative action in the global north. In India, the reservation policies in education and job market are there to break caste hierarchy and increase inclusivity for those belonging to lower castes.

> everything during my hostel years, no more…I have left all the household work for
>
> my mother, my wife and my maid.

He appears to have internalised his symbolic privilege within the domestic field, thus he rejects the practice of men engaging in housework. As middle-class masculinity is reproduced by abstaining from housework, this helps in maintaining the gendered as well as the class habitus. Therefore, he says even if men can perform housework, they should uphold their symbolic privilege and not do so. Dibyendu seems to use his symbolic privilege within the domestic field to sanction his wife for believing in the discourse of gender equality. Though he abides by patriarchal traditions at home, he does not recognise the contradiction with his politically correct statement in support of gender equality. This example illustrates the ways in which men can reconcile with their understanding of the concept of gender equality in order to maintain their gendered habitus while they also continue to perform the normatively ascribed role of the breadwinner within the domestic field. Another participant Lewis, who is a doctor says,

> Well it's a socio-cultural issue that men will earn, and women will do housework. But
>
> I think it is bullshit. I feel men should not depend on women for [care] needs, they
>
> should know how to do it; so that if there is an emergency they can handle it. Like
>
> when my wife went to attend a conference and my mother-in-law, who usually takes
>
> care of our daughter, fell ill, I had to feed my daughter then.

It appears from his statement that Lewis is willing to participate in caring for his daughter only when women are unavailable to perform their primary caregiving role. Thus, it shows how the process of daily childcare is gendered in nature. He feels very proud that he "had to feed" his daughter on one occasion, which suggests that he is generally detached from the process of daily childcare. However, this statement represents a step towards changes in Lewis' traditional gendered habitus as he performs a role he usually sees being performed by

the women in his family. At the same time the story can also be seen as one of patriarchal resistance towards changes in traditional gender roles as Lewis only performs care work on rare occasions, thus, avoiding engaging in the regular practice of care work at home.

Another participant, Sayantan, who expresses that he is for the achievement of gender equality, but he also appears to maintain his symbolic privilege within the domestic field. He says, "So last year when my father's *batshorik kaaj*[44] was supposed to be held, my wife had to go to the office. She had explained to me beforehand why it was important but still I got mad at her and demanded she stay back. I was angry at her for going to the office that day and she had to bear the brunt of it [his anger]." His statement suggests that he doesn't understand that the source of his anger could be that his wife is prioritising her career over her domestic responsibilities. This act by his wife where she does not prioritise her domestic role challenged his gendered habitus, leading him to sanction his wife for deviating from her traditional role. Thus, it can be observed here how women may be sanctioned if they deviate from meeting the normative feminine expectation to prioritise their domestic responsibilities. Since men hold more power within the domestic field than young married women, when men's habitus is challenged, men may attempt to structure the domestic field to ensure that social agents within the domestic field follow traditional gender roles.

Sayantan goes on to add that,

> If a man and a woman are allowed by society to lead equal lives, then they are equal. Even today, I can safely return home late at night, but my wife can't. So, we are not equal. Since we live in a society, society has to give us equal status, then we will be equal.

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[44]A Hindu ceremony performed on the occasion of a person's first death anniversary.

His narrative reflects that he is more cautious than the others in this group as he has laid the burden of achieving gender equality on the society itself, and he says he will accept whatever the society tells him to do. This shows the dominance of the gendered habitus on men's practices. Like Sayantan, Lewis also states,

> Girls and boys should be treated equally right from birth, by their parents, schoolteachers. That is most important, a girl's father should not discriminate between a girl child and a boy child. If a girl gets used to equality, she will grow up to value it, so when they are adults or when they get married, they will earn it themselves when they are deprived of it. But in 70 percent of families, parents are not happy when a girl child is born. That's why there is inequality.

Lewis's logic seems to come from the point of view that if a girl is raised with equal values by her parents and teachers, then when she is an adult she will demand equality. It is important to note that Lewis appears to be suggesting that being aware of the discourse of gender equality and practicing it are both inherently the responsibility of girls and their parents. He gives an example of his friend's elder sister to point out what he means by gender equality being the responsibility of the girls' parents,

> She scored very well in her engineering entrance exam and was selected by a highly ranked college, but her parents did not allow her to go there. They said they have a son in whom they will invest their money. The daughter will get married, so what is the point?

However, in practice, while Lewis presented himself as being quite upset that his friends' sister did not get to study engineering, he made his own wife leave her job in engineering after their marriage and advised her to pursue a career in teaching instead so that she can prioritise her responsibilities at home. While he admits that leaving her engineering job led

his wife to be depressed, he did not express any sense of responsibility about the impact of his decision on his wife's mental health or her career aspirations. His narrative is focussed on his role in ensuring his wife followed the gendered habitus by prioritising her caregiving role over her career aspirations. In this way, Lewis was able to reconcile with his habitus which was facing a challenge by his wife's focus on her career rather than her responsibilities at home.

Lewis goes on to describe that his wife is now a teacher in a college, which is a respectable job for women, and he is happy with her job change as she comes home earlier than before and is able to appropriately balance her work and family responsibilities. If we refer back to Figure 2, Lewis is contradicted as some of his actions appear to be inclined towards pro-gender equality while some are more inclined towards the other end (pro-men's rights).Therefore, while Lewis speaks for gender equality socially when he is asked for his opinion, in practice, he has done the exact opposite with his own wife.

6.3.3 Urban middle-class distinction

Men in this conflicted group also use class distinction to justify why the rule of equality doesn't apply to the class to which they belong. Sayantan distinguishes his class (urban middle-class Bengali) from other classes when talking about women's empowerment. He says,

> Women's empowerment is needed in places where women are still dominated by men, like Rajasthan, MP [Madhya Pradesh]. Those states need empowerment measures for their women, not us [middle-class in West Bengal]. Here women are misusing empowerment, here men and women both should be given power, if they [men or women] misuse then they should be punished for it.

As discussed, states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and the condition of women in these other states are frequently used by urban middle-class men in Kolkata (the

capital city of West Bengal), to mark themselves as a distinct group who empower the women who belong to their class. Thus, gender is an axis around which the class identity of urban middle-class Bengalis is constructed. They do so by defining everyone outside their class as the 'other'. These 'other' groups are then identified as perpetrators of barbaric, uncultured practices and treatment of women's bodies are used as a mark of class distinction by the urban middle-class Bengali men to claim their superior class position within contemporary Indian society.

By using class distinction and comparing women's advantageous position within his class as opposed to women who belong to the 'other' states, Sayantan and other Bengali middle-class men in Kolkata are able to highlight how women in their class have nothing to fight for as they are already empowered. These men also feel that Bengali middle-class women subscribe to the rule of gender equality in an effort to gain advantage over men.

Another participant, Subhranil mirrors Sayantan's thoughts, saying, "There should be empowerment of women in places in India like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan but not our women. The women in our class are ahead of men." Subhranil feels that empowerment of women cannot happen where women are already privileged. He then goes on to explain what he means by women having privilege or being ahead of men,

> In places like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, where women don't get equal opportunities to get educated, where government schemes meant for women's empowerment, like Sarva Shikha Abhiyan or Beti Bachao, do not reach the girls there. Women there show no signs of development, there women are married off at 12-13 years of age, so women's empowerment is needed there not here because in *those* places, men dominate women. In those places, from the point of domination, men are still ahead of women.

Participants in these first two, for gender equality and covertly against gender equality, groups mentioned the role of their mother in instituting traditional gender roles within the family. Men in the gender equality group identified it as unequal division of labour; while men in this group, who are conflicted, identified the double shift as women's achievement of equality. Supratim says,

> If we are being able to maintain equality then why would we need empowerment of women? We don't need it here in Kolkata. It is needed in remote areas in India where there are instances of female foeticide even today. In our class we are modern, men and women are equal, we don't need empowerment here.

Again, men use various strategies to maintain the gendered habitus and follow the class habitus, by equating the absence of the practice of female foeticide within this class, he is indicating that equality has been achieved. Thus, if we look at figure 2, he tends to incline towards men's rights although he does not expressly say so. Subhranil also adds,

> Women are physically weak. That being said, women are now ahead of men, like we see in public transport, reservation for women, obviously that is not equality.

Thus, he brings to fore the tension that exists between the discourse of equality and men's gendered habitus which is a product of patriarchal socialisation. Although he has not expressly mentioned men's rights, he tends to incline towards the discourse of men's rights as he considers men's weakened position in the society as being due to the enforcement of the ideals of equality through instituting empowering policies for women. Animesh when asked about a recurring conflict at home says,

> One other conflict that we had was my mother did not want my wife to do a job. My mother wanted her [his wife] to be a housewife like her and manage the household. My mother made it clear that her son was married so that she could get the wife to

care for his mother and himself. But at that time I had supported my wife and went against my mother on that. That was a big conflict…But what happened was that after entering the job, she [his wife] has stopped caring about the family. She needs to balance both office and her responsibilities at home, there should be a balance. So that is what I would like her to do. That's all. I don't want to change anything else about her.

My mother had raised objections about my wife doing a job. Her [his wife] main job is to run the household. I agree with my mother, doing a job [paid work] should be done after taking care of running the household. So this balance I think is necessary in a wife…So we had an argument about it at home where my mother confronted her and told her [his wife] that her main job is to run the household and care for her husband. The office job is her hobby. She has to balance it that way.

Both mother and son devalue the daughter-in-laws' participation in paid work, sanctioning the daughter-in-law to restore the traditional gendered habitus within the domestic field. In fact, to maintain the man's role as the breadwinner, the wife's engagement in paid work is redefined as a hobby; which allows Animesh and his mother to reconcile the conflict within their gendered habitus which was challenged by the change in the wife's habitus as she engaged in paid work.

The expectation of meeting egalitarian ideals outside of the domestic field contradicts with Animesh's gendered habitus within the domestic field, therefore he meets the class expectation when allowing his wife to earn a living but also attempts to structure the traditional gendered habitus within the domestic field by ensuring his wife follows the traditional gender role of prioritising caregiving within the domestic field. Men who described their wife's engagement in paid work as a hobby mentioned how they adapted to the narrative of upholding egalitarian ideals when pacifying their wives who questioned the expectation of

balancing act, which in middle-class urban homes in Kolkata is the expectation to prioritise domestic responsibilities over career. Overall, within this group of urban middle-class Bengali men, men's habitus appear to be challenged when women engage in paid work.

6.4 Overtly against discourses of gender equality

The participants in this group do not believe in the discourse of gender equality. While they are aware of the current discourses around gender equality, they feel that traditional gender roles are natural and therefore find the concept of gender equality as unnatural and even re-interpret it to make sense of their gendered habitus. Men in this group conform to the normative masculine expectation of being the breadwinner and the head of the family without any contradiction.

6.4.1 Perception regarding wife's engagement in paid work

When asked about why women engage in paid work, Swapnendu lists four reasons – "1) time pass [45]. 2) To prove to society that women are equal. 3) Out of desire for economic independence. 4) Out of family needs".

Regarding women's work force participation he lists out four reasons, all the reasons mentioned by Swapnendu are very different from the normative masculine expectation placed on men to be the breadwinner and be the head of the family. Swapnendu mentioned in his interview that he was determined to marry a stay-at-home wife, this suggests that while he acknowledges that women's economic independence may contribute to the family income when needed, but in practise he subscribes to the normative expectation of the male breadwinner and female carer. Men in this group express that men's normative role as breadwinner and women's economic independence are distinct. Another participant Utpal, IT professional, says,

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[45] The Oxford English language dictionary defines this term as the action or fact of passing the time, typically in an aimless or unproductive way. The term originates from Indian English (Timalsina, 2021). It can be understood as a hobby in this case.

> Look it is not about money, she [his wife] works [paid] because she is passionate about it [economic independence], she enjoys it. It is not anything more than that. To run the household, what I earn is enough. I don't take money from her. She works [because] she likes to do it.

So, when women engage in paid work, men rationalise this as trivial, like engaging in a hobby. Men do not deem women's labour force participation as significant enough to transform the traditional gender roles within the domestic field, especially when it may challenge men's role as the sole breadwinner. Thus, the resistance generated by men's habitus within the domestic field in accepting women's paid work as equal to men may be a way of protecting the symbolic privilege of men over women. This means that women not only have to perform the double shift but have to negotiate with the invisible resistance from men's gendered habitus within the domestic field.

Throughout the interview Utpal mentions various ways in which upholding traditional gender roles is ideal for him. He says, "If the wife's nature is good and is able to accept you as you are then its good for you. Otherwise, if she tries to change you then it can sometimes destroy your family". He goes on to say,

> Ideal marriage for me would be when I would get back from office; my dinner would be served on the table, ready for me to eat. My wife would lovingly call me to eat dinner. Then my wife would do all my work for me in time like giving me tea, getting my clothes ready. That would be ideal.

At first, Utpal speaks of how changing the traditional structure of the family can destroy the family. He implies that if each player or social agent within the domestic field does not uphold traditional gender roles or resists the reproduction of the traditional family, as a unit of patriarchal culture, then the patrilineal family system will cease to exist.

For Utpal and others like him, the symbolic privilege of men inscribed within the gender hierarchy of the traditional family reveals that men may have a lot to lose if detradtionalisation of gender roles within the domestic field takes place. The following quote of Utpal demonstrates that he is quite aware of his privilege, as he expresses how upholding his symbolic privilege and dominating the domestic field structures his gendered habitus. Uptal says repeatedly in his interview, "Well its not about money, she works because she is passionate about it and she enjoys it." In saying this, Uptal is suggesting that just because his wife is working (paid work), he should not be required to give up his traditional role of being the sole breadwinner in the family and the symbolic privilege of abstaining from performing housework. Thus, Uptal reconciles the contradictory practice where both men and women earn a living, but only the wife works in the home, by generating a narrative that his wife has achieved equality as she is *allowed* to work by her husband and his family. This definition of women's paid work as a hobby suggests that it is not mandatory like his engagement in paid work; this interpretation allows him to maintain his masculine normative expectation as the breadwinner.

Anup, also works in the Indian IT sector where women outnumber the men at the entry level. However, after five years of working in the industry, the ratio skews in favour of men (Gupta, 2020). Anup says, 'I don't believe in this term [gender equality]. I don't feel equality is required." The majority of men who are overtly or covertly against gender equality, generally stated that equality is not required because men are the ones who are disadvantaged as women take over their traditional roles and occupations. Thus, men interpret the challenge posed by the discourse of gender equality to their habitus as a disadvantage and justify the need to stall women's empowerment.

Despite recognising the work put in by women at home or by women who work the double shift, most men in this group do not view this as a struggle or burden for women, but instead

as a personal choice that women are making to fulfil their desire to engage in paid work. Thus, men distinguish women's engagement in paid work as a means of achieving personal fulfilment and men's engagement in paid work as a way to provide for the greater good of the family. This view of women's double shift allows men to reject discourses that may come in conflict with their patriarchal socialisation. Anup makes a further argument that, "Women in most houses don't take the financial responsibility of running a household, why should men take household responsibility?" This argument can be linked to Utpal's narrative, as he also stated that he does not take money earned by his wife. Thus, to maintain the gendered habitus, men may not take money from their wives but may blame them for not taking the financial responsibility of the household, as a way of maintaining the traditional gendered habitus within the domestic field.

Men who are against the discourse of gender equality are careful when expressing how they support women's wishes and desires to engage in paid work. It appears that men in this group do not wish to be seen as preventing women from achieving economic independence, and so they define women's empowerment by the employment status of women. Men further suggest that women's empowerment according to this definition, is primarily the responsibility of women to achieve, Pranab says,

> If a woman has a dream of earning a living as they used to do before marriage and then asks you [as future husband] that she would like to continue her job after marriage, then I feel she should be allowed to do the job. Not all her desires should be accepted but then her certain desires should be allowed to be fulfilled. So, I feel she should be allowed to do the job as she also has the right to dream, we cannot crush all her dreams, how will she survive? But if I had a lot of money then my wife would not have considered working.

Pranab is not contradicted about his hierarchically superior position in the society therefore he expresses how only men hold the power to crush the dreams of women. Harshit was the only participant in this group of men, who claimed that he directly benefited from his wife's economic contribution to his family. He identified how marrying a woman who is engaged in paid work ensures financial security for a longer time rather than receiving dowry for one single time during marriage, he says,

> Well I consider my wife herself a dowry as she is bringing money [every month as salary] into the family. That acts as a financial support. Her job is a security, if she did not bring a salary, in that case I would have had to bear the entire financial responsibility of my wife, to fulfil her basic needs.

No other male participant claimed their wife's employment status as a dowry. However, by claiming women's economic independence as dowry Harshit's statement reflects that in a patrilineal kinship system, women's economic independence can benefit men and their family materially. Therefore, when men and their families allow women to engage in paid work, it might not just be to meet the class habitus of professing support for egalitarian ideals but also to gain materially from women's double shift.

6.4.2 Patriarchal re-interpretation of gender equality

Men in this group use various ways in which they protect their symbolic privilege, one of them is by re-interpreting the meaning of gender equality in patriarchal terms. Anup who prioritised marrying a housewife says,

> I married her because she was not working, that was a requirement I had when I was deciding on my bride. Moreover, I don't think that if a woman who is working is getting to have the best life or is independent. Look at my mother's case, she is the most important member to me and my family, not my father. My mother did not work in an office, she is not a loser in any sense and does not think that her life is like hell

because she is a homemaker. So for that reason if a woman thinks that being a homemaker is making her life hell, then she is wrong. My mother raised three kids and now that we are successful in life [it] is because she gave us time and cared for us and raised us. So I made my wife understand that she has to take care of my parents who live in our ancestral home and care for the family here in Kolkata so I knew that since she is a full time homemaker, she would be able to care for the family in both these places. I feel women from the interior, villages feel that they have accomplished a lot more if they have a job. Women in Kolkata don't feel that. They take it as a part of life and are able to balance both.

Anup's internalised patriarchal belief that traditional gender roles are ideal leads his habitus to re-interpret the conflicting discourse of gender equality to mean that practicing traditional gender roles are a mark of gender equality. The patriarchal re-interpretation of the meaning of gender equality also suggests how the discourse of gender equality within contemporary Indian society has made a significant impact and therefore, created the need within men's gendered habitus to reshape their patriarchal beliefs. This re-interpretation also helps men's gendered habitus to make sense of the dynamically evolving gendered habitus of women, who engage in paid work. The habitus of social agents with symbolic power, or those who dominate the field, allows for the use of the generative capacity of the habitus to attempt to draw from discourses of men's rights to preserve their symbolic privilege. Echoing Anup's thoughts, Utpal adds,

I don't see why gender equality should be given so much preference. In this day and age, everywhere you go, you see people talking about a lot about feminist issues, they are talking about women's empowerment...but if we look at women who actually fought the odds like Mary Kom [a female Olympic boxing champion from India] or Mithali Raj [female Indian cricketer], they never asked for preferential treatment. The

> biopic on Mary Kom's life shows how she alone fought against injustices without the help of any feminist organisation. She never claimed more preference just because she is a woman. She became a champion through her own merit. So I feel gender equality is [the same as] giving women more preference.

In Utpal's statement given above, it is evident that feminist discourses of equality doesn't reconcile with his traditional gendered habitus. Thus, he, and other men like him, equate discourses of women's empowerment by re-interpreting what empowerment means to them. Utpal equates the call for women's empowerment espoused by discourses of feminism as women wanting preferential treatment. For him, and others like him, this means that men must protect their symbolic privilege not only within the domestic field but also in the public sphere where men traditionally held a dominating position. Therefore, in Utpal's narrative holding onto his privilege is a part of his gendered habitus and this does not seem contradictory to him but rather his view helps to restore logic within his traditionally socialised gendered habitus. Moreover, terminologies like empowerment and gender equality begets patriarchal re-interpretation when they are part of state policy. So, for men, who are ideologically against feminist discourses, to accept the meaning of egalitarian ideals, they need to be re-interpreted. Without this reinterpretation, there will remain an unresolved contradiction within men's gendered habitus. In fact, we saw evidence of this contradiction, in the narratives of the men in the previous two groups. Utpal takes the example of Mary Kom, a female Indian Olympic boxing champion, to elucidate how he feels her lone fight for gender equality is less challenging to the men's gendered habitus than collective action by feminists who fight collectively for gender equality through the field of feminism. In Utpal's words,

> Women who are capable, they face hardship like Mary Kom did, they don't take refuge under some women's rights group, they don't complain, they fight their battles alone. That is true empowerment. Women should be given opportunities as per their

merit [46] not their gender. Basically, quality should be given more preference than equality.

It is very evident in his statement how Utpal's patriarchal socialisation drives his habitus to make sense of a conflicting term like women empowerment by appreciating women who face hardship and struggle. However, a single struggle does not result in changing the rules of the game, and so these types of narratives do not challenge his symbolic privilege. Further, the resistance of his gendered habitus towards the acceptance of any gender equality measures/policies is evident as he espouses his belief that "quality" should be given preference over equality. Utpal uses this rationale to reconcile the challenge felt by his gendered habitus which is resistant to losing the symbolic privilege to dominate the public sphere.

Agni, like Utpal who mentioned Mary Kom, goes further back and refers to historical female rulers like Queen Victoria of England (and the British Empire), Queen of Jhansi from India and Razia Sultan also from India, to express his perspective that women have always been empowered. Agni's patriarchal socialisation draws from these stories of powerful women from world history to demonstrate the pointlessness of trying to achieve gender equality for women in general who can never be equal as they were not born with the same symbolic privilege as men. Agni says,

> Human beings concern themselves with gender equality to demonstrate how aware they are of the society they live in. If God had intended us to be equals, then he would not have separated us as man and woman. God intended that both man and woman will live with what they had been given. I feel this concept of gender equality should

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[46] He refers to individual merit. This is part of an ongoing discourse in contemporary India on individual merit vs. the reservation policy (usually known in the global north as diversity hiring or affirmative action) for increasing inclusion of people belonging to lower castes into the workforce.

be erased from people's minds as this is a personal matter not something the society should bother with.

Agni, like Utpal, re-interprets the discourse of gender equality in patriarchal terms to make sense of the conflicting ideals within his gendered habitus. He gives examples of women who were born with power and he clearly feels that if one is born into privilege, then one should not be made to give it up. Agni also alludes to the pressure of being politically correct by professing his awareness about gender equality to align with his class habitus even when he does not subscribe to the ideals of gender equality himself. The pressure of being politically correct as result of existing discourses of gender equality in the public sphere impacts his habitus and leads him to reject the idea of equality entirely by firmly holding onto his masculine privilege.

Like Utpal before, Agni reiterates how some men perceive the discourse of gender equality as a crisis that should be erased as it poses a challenge to men's gendered habitus. Men resist fields like feminism that directly challenge the rules operating in fields traditionally dominated by men, but can accept a single example of a woman who has strayed from traditional gendered roles within society such as Mary Kom or Mithali Raj. Men are able to rationalise these singular instances of women fighting against the odds as being part of women's empowerment, but do not see merit when women organise themselves to fight as a group for gender equality through the field of feminism. Agni further elaborates on this issue,

> Women in India were always empowered, what we see now as empowerment of women is just a marketing gimmick. This is now being forced on us, I feel a woman is empowered when she gives birth to a baby. If my mother is not at home, the ray of light will be missing. If my mother was the MD[47] of a cola company and stayed outside for her professional gain, people might dance around and rejoice but to me she

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[47] Managing Director

is empowered when she is back home and she gives me a glass of water when I am thirsty. That is empowerment, so all women are empowered.

Here Agni has put forth his understanding of the meaning of empowerment very clearly -he would rather see his mother and his wife as caregivers who look after him and men in general, rather than someone who concerns herself with her career. For men in this group, when women aspire to professional success it is perceived as a selfish pursuit because it doesn't directly benefit the domestic field. In this way men's traditional gendered habitus perpetuates with each passing generation by reproducing the world that inscribed masculine privilege in men for being born as a man. He says he feels he is being forced into following the discourse of women's empowerment because of his class position and his narrative reflects that his gendered habitus feels conflicted because of negotiating with the expectation of being a liberal man. He then gives justification for his views which further reveals this conflict. Agni says,

In the Hindu religion, we have gods who are women, so women in our culture have always been empowered. I don't understand why it is such a headache nowadays, I refuse to give it as much importance as it demands, if women have merit then they will get their place. Why, women play football! Although the men's football team gets more importance, but this discourse of equality and empowerment on women is theoretical. In reality, our women have always been empowered.

Agni's statement above reflects the resistance to women's empowerment within men's gendered habitus. Agni reconciles his gendered habitus with his class habitus that espouses women empowerment policies by claiming that women have always been empowered, alluding to how women are praised as goddesses, thus framing women's double shift as a virtue rather than a burden, therefore, negating the need for women empowerment policies. Like previous participants in this segment, Agni resists the discourse of gender equality

despite his awareness about its concept as a way of reconciling the contradictory ideals of equality and patriarchy.

6.4.3 Discourses of men's rights

The traditional gendered habitus of men within a patriarchal culture, gives men symbolic privilege over women. Thus, feminist discourses of equality and women's empowerment may pose a challenge to men's traditional role as the sole breadwinner. This challenge leads the majority of the men in this study to follow discourses of men's rights. The emerging field of men's rights in India, upholds men's symbolic privilege and eliminates any challenge posed by the competing discourses of feminism. As discussed in the previous section (6.3.2), men re-interpret feminist discourses and attempt to incorporate this re-interpretation into the discourse of men's rights. Men in this group tend to do this by claiming that Indian society has achieved gender equality and men are being left behind as women are taking away men's symbolic privilege. One man from this group Subhro says,

> Women are much ahead of men now. Women are ahead at home and outside. Recently there has been a lot of discussion and debate around men's rights, and I am for this movement. We are expecting that changes will happen in the next decade and men will reclaim their rights. At present, men are more disadvantaged than women.

Subhro's remark alludes to the impact of discourses of the men's rights movement in India and how these discourses have been able to reach men like Subhro by promoting ideas about men being disadvantaged for being born as a man in today's society. Subhro says that he not only believes that India has achieved gender equality, but he also feels that women in Indian society have gone past men and that men are now the ones who need to claim for equal rights as they are under privileged.

Diptesh, a government employee, presents a rationale which might explain why men in this group who form the majority of the male participants in the study chose to talk about men

being left behind and women getting more privilege, "Due to women's empowerment, women are now getting more jobs, and men are therefore having lesser job opportunities. So, all these empowerment measures are prioritising women in paid work and men are getting left behind."

Diptesh's statement suggests the pressure of normative expectation on men to be the breadwinner. Diptesh feels that the discourses of empowerment are responsible for challenging Indian men's gendered habitus. This belief of Diptesh could be due to the limited availability of jobs in organised sectors, like the IT industry and service sector, which are preferred by the urban middle classes (Fernandes, 2004). From the above statement, it appears that men perceive women as taking away jobs from men who are negotiating the pressure to follow the normative expectation of their family's breadwinner. It could be possible that women's paid work in the sectors preferred by the urban middle class where jobs are limited creates added pressure on men to follow the normatively ascribed role of the breadwinner. They therefore draw from discourses of men's rights to express how discourses of women's empowerment need to be countered.

Diptesh goes on to compare women engaged in paid work and housewives to further his argument, he says, "Women who earn money think housework is a joke and they mock housewives. So, women's empowerment is fine but not at the cost of depriving men." Diptesh's statement reflects the various arguments that men in this group have put forward to hold onto their traditional gendered habitus within a patriarchal society.

According to the narratives of the men in this group, who make up the majority of the male participants, women can achieve equality up to the point which does not challenge men's gendered habitus. Therefore, women are expected to continue to perform the double shift as men's habitus continue to negotiate with the pressure to perform the role of the breadwinner as well as meet the class habitus of being progressive by supporting women's engagement in paid work. Thus, patriarchy reconstitutes itself by adapting neoliberal values. Women's

engagement in paid work is seen as a profitable proposition by urban middle class as women can engage in the rising consumerist culture without financially depending on men. Diptesh goes onto say that,

> Gender equality might sound good, but it *cannot* happen" [emphasis his]. To have gender equality, women have to give up their privileges, like [dedicated spaces for women] in the metro, how is that equality? If women get privilege everywhere then where is equality?

He refers to dedicated spaces for women in the metro in Kolkata, where one-fifth of each coach is reserved for women travellers. This dedicated space for women was instituted to prevent molestation of women in public places to ensure that women can travel safely (Tandon, 2013). As for jobs in India, affirmative action exists for caste based hiring, but not gender based hiring especially for women in urban areas; women living in villages in rural India have reservation in jobs in *panchayat* (local rural governance) (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004). Therefore, the habitus of urban middle-class men appears to perceive reservation for rural women in rural governance as a challenge although it does not directly challenge men's job prospects in urban areas.

Diptesh, and men like him, who mentioned women's privilege in jobs were referring to women who would compete with them in urban areas where there is no policy regarding reservation in jobs based on gender, especially in the service sector where there is the highest concentration of workers from the urban middle-class. Diptesh then goes on to add that women do not prioritise their paid work as opposed to men who are normatively expected to do so. He says,

> These women who take advantage of reservation, then they become negligent towards their paid work. They take a salary then they give more priority to their housework

and not to their job. At that time when they want to escape work they forget about equality. So, to have equality that women are talking about they need to stop taking privileges. If a woman leaves office at 5, the office lets her go as she is a woman, then who does her work? All her male colleagues! When she takes childcare leave then who has to do her work in the office? All her male colleagues! In the meanwhile, she has fun with her leave, the authority should scrutinise and restrict such leaves that women take.

Literature on the ideal worker norm speaks to the dominance of neo-patriarchal capitalist work culture that treats women as outsiders especially in the organised sector (Belliappa, 2013). Diptesh's statement indicates men's opinion on the existing work culture which he believes treats men and women as equal. As men follow the existing work culture, they tend to perceive women's negotiation of the double shift as a way of avoiding paid work.

Here Diptesh talks of women prioritising housework themselves, yet another participant in this group Utpal mentioned that the only condition on which his wife was allowed to work was that she would always prioritise her domestic work, suggesting that any perceived shortcomings of women's work in the office may be more about meeting the care expectations of their husband and in-laws that lead women to prioritise home over career, rather than women's own choice. Moreover, Diptesh's statement indicates the normative expectation that women have to negotiate when they enter the public sphere to prioritise paid work like men. Thus to become empowered as a woman means to some extent forgoing their identity as women, who give birth or have periods, thus women are expected to not claim for policies that are supportive of women's engagement in paid work. This finding can be related to the finding of studies on women's participation in the Indian IT sector (Radhakrishnan, 2009; Gupta, 2012), where the ideal worker norm is defined in masculine terms and women

face an invisible barrier as they attempt to conform to the ideal of prioritising paid work like men, who are traditionally expected to prioritise their career.

All participants, regardless of their understanding of the meaning of gender equality agreed that the mother was the natural caregiver for the child. Therefore, if a woman has children, she not only has the responsibility of housework but childcare. Child care in India is not marketised, so women do not have access to a crèche in their workplaces and they are sanctioned at home for putting their child in a privatised crèche (see Chapter Five). Diptesh's framing of childcare leave as being "fun" indicates men's understanding of women as natural caregivers who enjoy all aspects of caring. Men in this group also use class distinction as did the men in the previous group (covertly against discourses of gender equality) as an argument for stalling discourses of women's empowerment within the urban middle-classes. Debanjan says,

> Women in our class are ahead of men. But in places in India like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, where women don't get equal opportunities to get educated, where government schemes meant for women empowerment, like Sarva Shikha Abhiyan, do not reach them. They are the ones in need of empowerment, there is prevalence of child marriage there, men dominate in those areas. But not within our class.

Like Diptesh and Debanjan, Arjun and Pranab also put forth patriarchal arguments against the discourses of gender equality. Arjun believes that it's not possible to achieve gender equality, saying, "The biological balance of earth will be destroyed if one tries to achieve gender equality." Pranab attributes negative motives to women saying,

> In today's age women are not required to be empowered. The problem happens because women want to subjugate men, if women want equal power then they have to

work equally like men. Women want equal rights, but they will not work as hard as men in the office and subjugate men.

The idea that women are negligent towards their paid work is a strongly held belief by this group of men who are openly against the discourse of gender equality. However, within the domestic field these same men enforce the idea that women must prioritise housework over their professional commitments. What may be missing from men's understanding of discourses of gender equality is a discourse about men's choice to abstain from participation in housework and depend on women's care work to prioritise their career. Arjun is not only against discourses of gender equality, but he rejects the idea of gender equality as preposterous. He says,

> If you send women into the air force they will die, their bodies are not meant for such jobs. If one woman can [it] doesn't mean it's for all women. Women who try to be gender equal, they lose their femininity, they become manly. A woman who sports short hair, doesn't apply make-up has hormonal imbalance [meaning they are not feminine].

Arjun's analysis reflects how the feminine is constituted in opposition to the masculine ways of distinction. Thus women become manly if they perform roles that are traditionally assigned to men. Men like Arjun, argue that they must keep the public and private sphere as male dominated. Men in this group perceive discourses of gender equality in opposition to the established traditional norms. Debanjan says,

> This scenario has changed. We see women are reaching the top positions. So they are empowered…But women's reservation is not required. I can see women being able to reach where they want professionally without any help so I feel special reservation for women in jobs should not be there. Moreover, you know how it is in India, there are

so many reservations in jobs, so it is a problem especially for the ones who are men and who are general candidates. So, 33 percent reservation for women would be a burden for general male candidates. So, what if there are general candidate women might be a part of 33 percent, its unfair on men. If they appear in an entrance exam and all women qualify it on merit then I have no problem but they should not get special treatment.

Majority of the male participants who make up this group interpret the ideological conflict in binary terms – men vs. women, traditional gender role vs. gender equality. By re-interpreting the definition of equality, undervaluing women's paid work and supporting the emerging discourses of men's rights, men indicate the impact gender equality discourse may have had on their habitus and demonstrate how their actions are driven by the need to maintain their traditional gendered habitus of being the breadwinner.

6.5 Conclusion

Men in this study asserted their primary claim to the role of being sole breadwinner for their family to express the normative masculine expectation which is negotiated by men, thus distinguishing themselves from women who engage in paid work. The majority of the male participants justify this claim by saying that women have already achieved gender equality if they participate in the paid workforce, therefore promotion of gender equality should be stalled. Men who speak against gender equality, want to stop the discourse on gender equality as their gendered habitus is challenged by changes in traditional patriarchal practices such as women engaging in paid work. Men rationalise the need to stall gender equality by expressing the possibility that women will take away men's jobs when men have to negotiate with more pressure than women to engage in paid work as they have to play the role of the breadwinner. In this way, gender roles are distinguished, women are praised for performing their traditional caregiving role within the domestic field while men continue to prioritise their career.

The men interviewed have provided many rationales for why men should be allowed to perform their primary identity of breadwinner without having to compete with women for paid work, and have expressed the view that women's participation in the workforce has direct implications on their primary identity. Bourdieu (1990a) suggests that when the habitus is subject to crisis, it has the potential to create new practical dispositions. It is through this generative capacity of the habitus that men appear to support the emerging discourses of men's rights in India.

The majority of the male participants who are explicitly against gender equality say that egalitarian ideals are more or less utopian but not practical to carry out in real life where there are more practical considerations and implications like following the normative masculine expectation of the breadwinner.

Those who are covertly as well as overtly against gender equality revealed that there is an external pressure on them to be politically correct. This is a part of their class habitus as urban middle-class men who are normatively expected to participate in the discourses on gender equality and espouse egalitarian beliefs. In the case of men who were covertly against gender equality, men were confident about espousing their patriarchal beliefs but they were careful to add something at the end of their statements to meet the class expectation of sounding politically correct. This attempt by men to qualify their opinion with politically correct ideology demonstrates the conflict that happens when discourses of gender equality interacts with the traditional gendered habitus of men within the domestic field.

Some of the participants' narratives suggested how men's gendered habitus perceives a collective action for gender equality, like the field of feminism, as a challenge to patriarchal traditions. From their narratives it seemed that men's gendered habitus was more tolerant of individual women fighting for specific privilege, such as entering a male dominated profession like boxing or cricket, because these individual cases may not directly challenge

men's primary identity as the breadwinner. Thus, they praise individual women who fight for empowerment on their own. Men's habitus re-interprets the meaning of discourses of gender equality in patriarchal terms.

All men interviewed, with the exception of three participants (who spoke for gender equality), believed that achieving gender equality is the responsibility of women and their parents. They did not recognise that they were privileged when it came to the practice of gendered division of labour at home, and they made sense of their gendered habitus by upholding their traditional role as the breadwinner. With men abdicating all responsibility for domestic labour, women who enter the workforce have no choice but to prioritise their domestic work in line with socially normative expectations. On the other hand, men have to negotiate between professing egalitarian ideals to conform to their class habitus as well as follow the traditional gendered expectation of being the breadwinner are also left to navigate the pressure to live upto such contradictory normative expectations.

Chapter 7: Discussion & Conclusion

7.1 Summary

This thesis began by asking the question, why do married women from middle-class families in Kolkata, who are economically independent, with social and cultural capital, continue to perform the double shift? What are the structural barriers that help perpetuate gendered division of labour at home? After analysing the narratives of my respondents, both married men and married women, I have demonstrated the role played by both men and women in maintaining the gendered habitus within the domestic field. In the analysis, I explained the processes behind the perpetuation of gendered division of labour at home through internalisation of historically determined practices which inform the class habitus as well as the gendered habitus within the domestic field. I argue that men's assertion in claiming the role of the primary breadwinner may have contributed towards resisting the transformation of gender relations and undermining women's double shift, helping to perpetuate the idea that women's balancing act is a virtue.

The analysis has been organised in three substantive chapters. I began by analysing the socialisation process that women undergo as they grow up by internalising both the class habitus and the traditional gendered habitus. Then I moved onto analysing the impact of young women's socialisation on women's gendered habitus after marriage, where married women live through the inherent contradiction between their ideals by drawing from discourses of gender equality, such as engaging in paid work and pursuing higher education, and their practises by meeting the normative expectation within the domestic field that requires them to prioritise their caregiving role, giving rise to conflict and tension when they are home. The final chapter analyses the impact of the discourse of gender equality on men's gendered habitus and how men reconcile the conflict between their privileged position within

the domestic field and their class habitus which draws from discourses of gender equality to express their liberal outlook.

In this final chapter of my thesis, I mention the key findings from my research and then go on to discuss the contributions of my research towards the wider academic discourse on gender equality, middle-class gender norms and gendered division of labour. Finally, I conclude by discussing the limitations of my research and provide suggestions for future research.

The key findings of my research are that women's contradictory socialisation process, internalising certain norms of respectable femininity inscribed within their class habitus and practising ideals of gender equality encouraged by their parents creates a complex gendered habitus and that it plays an important role in resisting against the perpetuation of the normative expectation of prioritising caregiving role within the domestic field, although such resistance results in compromised mental and physical well being for young married women.

Within the domestic field where men are symbolically dominating, they find that discourses of gender equality are more or less utopian as they seem to lack practical logic. Bourdieu (1990a) suggests that when the habitus identifies a crisis it has the potential to react by creating practical dispositions. When men's gendered habitus sees the challenge posed by discourses of gender equality to their traditional gendered habitus they begin to find the emerging discourses of men's rights as more logical. Thus, for both men and women, behaviour is determined by their subjective positioning within the domestic field, whether they are symbolically dominated or dominating.

Both men and women look at women being *allowed* to participate in male dominated public sphere as a marker of achieving the ideal of gender equality. Women identified the ongoing negotiations they enter into in their everyday life to draw from discourses of gender equality, while men found the traditional gendered habitus within which their symbolic privilege is

inscribed as ideal and leading them to negotiate for maintaining their gender privilege. Therefore, when discourses of gender equality enter a patriarchal society, the gendered habitus for men tends to remain unchanged. They face no pressure within the domestic field to take up roles that are traditionally ascribed to women, like nursing, childcare or housekeeping but to continue to maintain their traditional role as the breadwinner. Women's income was essentially perceived as a means to fulfil women's own personal needs and not to provide for the family, which remains as men's role.

The overwhelming majority of the men in this study believed that achieving gender equality is the responsibility of women and their parents. Men identified women as natural caregivers and felt that women enter the paid workforce only on the condition that they will prioritise their domestic responsibilities. Women, who fail to meet these expectations which function to maintain the traditional gender roles within the domestic field, may experience negative sanctions from other members of the domestic field, such as their husbands and or mothers-in-law, as well as other members of their social class.

It is important to note that the urban middle-class, through its rejection of the practice of dowry, domestic violence and the promotion of the education of their daughters, has kept itself separate from the legal arena where rules regarding gender justice within the family operate in India. Therefore, women and men in this study discussed how women in the Bengali urban middle-class hold a superior position as compared to women belonging to other classes and communities, by mentioning the names of 'other' states, because women in this class have access to education and are *allowed* to engage in paid work. The common understanding espoused by most participants, both men and women, is that women from this class are better placed in society than women of other classes where women are much more likely to undergo physical violence or pay dowry.

7.2 Gender and Middle-class in India: Drawing Conclusions

The literature on the middle-classes and its interaction with gender identity in contemporary India has studied the ideal of balanced femininity performed by women from many lenses (Puri, 1999; Donner, 2002; Phadke, Khan and Ranade, 2011; Belliappa, 2013). The literature on Indian men's experiences, though not specific to the new middle-class or men in Urban India, does add to the literature by bringing in the subjective perspective of men with respect to gender relations when performing the normative breadwinning role for the family (Osella and Osella, 2006; Jeffery, Jeffrey and Jeffery, 2008; Jeffrey, 2010; Twamley, 2014). In the following subsections I will situate my findings within this existing literature on the gender, marriage and middle-classes in India.

7.2.1 Middle-class, marriage, women and gender norms

Within patrilineal and patrilocal Indian context, married women have limited choices to begin with as choosing to challenge the gendered class habitus, they would run the risk of severing ties with their natal and marital family and ending up without any social or material support (Dommaraju, 2019), so they accept their role of a multi-tasker in the marital home, making this trade a patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti, 1988). Once married, the brides are subject to the dominance of the elder women in the marital home. In this space where terms are dictated by the elder women in the family who were also subject to the same terms by their mother in-law, the brides accept it as a bargain in exchange for having peace and gain respect in the eyes of her natal and marital family. In this exchange as a part of the bargain, participants in my study were able to exercise their choices, like attaining higher education, engaging in paid work, enjoying a restricted public life and greater agency as mothers.

Puri's (1999) study of urban middle-class women during the early 1990s found that normative hegemonic codes of heterosexuality ensured the practice of respectable sexuality where strict adherence to premarital chastity was socially expected and this expectation was internalised and reproduced by young women in their everyday lives. This is similar to the findings related

to women in my study who discussed their ways of negotiation with the cultural expectation of gender segregated upbringing. However, in my study women also challenged the cultural expectation of gender segregation on multiple occasions through means of subversion by keeping their relations with men as secret instead of abstaining from engaging in a relationship. Although generalisation is not possible or desired, in my study the degree of women's negotiation varied according to their age, women who were above the age of 35 spoke of a strict gender segregated upbringing where subversion resulted in social sanctioning by their own family members as well as their neighbours, whereas women who were younger than 30, spoke of having male friends while growing up, although they subverted the cultural expectation of premarital chastity by not being open about their relations of love to their family. Such cultural norms of pre-marital chastity (Puri, 1999; Abraham, 2001) or guarded sexuality (Phadke, Khan and Ranade, 2011; Kothari, 2013) that are inscribed on women's bodies within the middle-classes in India normatively restricts sexual intimacy to heteronormative marital relationships.

As discussed in the literature review (section 2.6.2) when it comes to class expectation on 'good' (Nambissan, 2009, p. 286) education, middle-classes in different parts of India encourage young girls and boys to pursue higher education. According to existing literature, middle-class women are encouraged to become educated to meet the ideal of becoming good mothers, companionate wives or to have financial security (Narayan, 1997; Donner, 2008a; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2008; Nambissan, 2009; Chickerur, 2020). There has been a steady shift towards a neoliberal market economy (Drury, 1993) which was followed by an unprecedented rise in consumerist culture (Fernandes, 2011). The earlier focus on career expectation for urban middle-class women to become teachers (Donner, 2008b) as has been highlighted by some of the schoolteachers in my study shifted towards becoming part of the

new knowledge economy thus seeking careers in IT industry which created the new middle-class in India (Arun and Arun, 2002; Radhakrishnan, 2009; Belliappa, 2013; Gupta, 2020).

Belliappa's (2013) study on English educated middle-class women working in the IT sector in Bangalore, a self-reflexive project, explored how women negotiate the neoliberal ideals of individual choice and as a result disengage with the collective feminist movement. Like Belliappa, my study began with a similar motivation of self-reflexivity to question my class hegemony in framing the meaning of gender equality discourse in contemporary India. Belliappa found that women remain as outsiders within a neo-patriarchal capitalist work culture. My study adds to Belliappa's work by revealing the strategies married women as well as married men adopt when they occupy the domestic field, where conflicting discourses of gender equality coupled with discourses of traditional feminism determine the neo-patriarchal practices within the family. Thus, maintain women in the position of the primary caregiver.

In my study a few women who worked in organisations that had work from home policies, although on reduced pay, relaxed leave policies during off peak season, felt that such policies were women friendly and made it possible for them to achieve balance. Married women in my study expected support not only from their family but also from their workplaces and many of them mentioned in their narratives how they felt that women in the Indian IT sector would have to end up choosing between work and family because of the way the industry is structured around being an ideal worker who prioritises work (Belliappa, 2013; Gupta, 2020). Thus, this study, although did not set out to analyse women's live in their workplaces but rather study the constraints married women faced within their family contributed by developing a more nuanced understanding of the problem behind married women negotiating the expectation of balancing home and paid work and shifting the focus of existing literature on negotiations and constraints within the workplace towards negotiations and constraints within the family when married women perform the balancing act.

7.2.2 Middle-class, marriage, men and gender norms

As discussed in the literature review (section 2.1.3), middle-class men in South Asia and their negotiations with normative masculine expectations have received very little academic attention. This current study is one of the first studies to contribute towards a nuanced understanding of Bengali middle-class men's habitus within the family. This study is an addition to the sparse but rich literature on men, specially upper caste and upper class men, from other parts of India which explain the masculine expectation that men negotiate with to be the head of the family and play the role of the breadwinner (Osella and Osella, 2006; Jeffery, Jeffrey and Jeffery, 2008; Twamley, 2013, 2014).

The normative masculine expectation of solidifying men's identity as the breadwinner possibly leads men to forgo any association with care work which is posited in binary terms and largely agreed as feminine work. Interestingly, men in my study spoke about the need for longer paternity leave thus revealing the underlying conflict between the normatively determined practice to abstain from care work but also their individual desire to be more involved in care work. The theoretical underpinning of habitus and field within which rules are invisible, yet men and women follow them, this demonstrates the role social norms play in determining individual choice, which are not freely determined.

In my study, the underlying pressure to follow normative masculine expectation within the domestic field to head the family and be the breadwinner was symbolically challenged in cases where men married full time employed women, in most of these cases men negotiated in various ways within the domestic field sometimes taking the help of their mother to maintain the traditional gendered habitus, thus ensuring that their wives prioritised their home. However, many men in this study apprehending possible tensions and negotiations in their married life if they married an employed wife instead chose to marry stay at home women, in these cases their wives expressed the desire to engage in paid work to them but

then men positioned themselves as the head of the family and used their symbolic privilege to maintain the traditional gendered habitus by discouraging their wives to engage in paid work.

Men in my study drew from traditional feminism discourse (referred to in the Introduction, pp. 17) to explain how they saw women as having more privilege in the workplace than them, they stated that their class has achieved gender equality as their class promotes women's education and work force participation (see Chapter 6, section 6.3.1), these expectations have been established in the literature on the middle-class in India (Donner, 2008a; Nambissan, 2009; Kothari, 2013).

In reality, the number of women accessing higher education in West Bengal is the same as Rajasthan, higher in Madhya Pradesh, and lower in Bihar (Ghara, 2016). I mention these Indian states as they were mentioned by the participants themselves using class distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and referring to women from Indian states like Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh as 'other' women. They believed that these 'other' women from these other states were in need of empowerment and educational opportunities instead of women from the urban middle-class living in Kolkata. One possible explanation for such perceptions within this class about women's position in the society with respect to their educational attainment in comparison to 'other' states in India could be due to the image presented in the media about violence against women in these 'other' states rather than based on actual data provided by the government of India (Phillips *et al.*, 2015; Chandra, 2018).

The findings also contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of emerging gender based movements in contemporary India, like the men's rights movement. Through the introduction of married men's voices within family research in this region, this research has helped to understand the impact of liberalisation on men's gendered habitus. This research adds further depth to the limited research that exists on the evolution of the men's rights movement in contemporary India (Chowdhury, 2014; Basu, 2016). This current research

helps in understanding the impact of the men's rights movement on Indian men's gendered habitus and provides insight into men's understanding of the global discourse on gender equality as well as how they navigate between the conflicting ideals of traditional heteronormative Indian family and discourses of gender equality.

7.3 Contribution to the wider academic discourse on gender equality

My research began by attempting to situate the self-reflexive experience of navigating between individual choice and normative constraints as a married woman engaged in paid work, within the wider academic discourse on gender equality and the balancing ideal. In conclusion, the current research contributes to a developing a nuanced understanding of "a 'deeper' level of reality" (Kabeer, 1999, p. 441) by analysing the taken for granted patriarchal norms and its interaction with conflicting discourses of gender equality which influence the practices within the urban middle-class families in India.

Feminist scholar Kabeer (2021) states that higher participation of workforce in men across the globe is consistent with the normative role of men as the family's breadwinner. Ferree (1990, p. 874) in her analysis of gendered division of labour from a feminist perspective argued that the gendered nature of paid work as well as unpaid work "blocks" the achievement of gender equality in both the domains. Scholars analysing the influence of institutionalised heterosexuality on intimacy in heterosexual relations caution that despite adoption of companionate ideals, gender inequalities may continue to persist in intimate relationships (Jamieson, 1999, 2011; Twamley, 2012, 2014). Further, Kabeer et al. (2016) highlighted that when states pass legislation to bring gender equality, such laws invariably fail to bring the desired societal change because such measures come in conflict with traditionally instituted cultural norms which take longer to change.

Bacchi (1999) has argued that contemporary gender equality policies are instituted with the underlying assumption that women will be equal if they have access to paid work. Thus, most

policies focus on employment generation for women as a priority but pay little attention to the normative constraints placed on women to participate in paid work (Bacchi, 1999). In contemporary India, the steady decline in women's work force participation despite India's economic growth post liberalisation has puzzled researchers studying this phenomenon (see Chapter 2,section 2.7). The failure of gender equality policies to account for the cultural constraints against women's participation in the workforce as argued by Bacchi and Kabeer could result in a lower rate of participation in the workforce.

In this respect, findings from my research helps to create a deeper understanding of the normative constraints men and women negotiate with to maintain the class habitus as well as the traditional gendered habitus within the family. Through an in-depth analysis of urban middle-class men and women who hold social and cultural capital, this study has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the existence of structural barriers that perpetuates the gendered division of labour within the private sphere. This study has also brought to light the struggles that young married women undertake with respect to their participation in the workforce from the relative position of the domestic field which is fore grounded in the rising consumerist culture in neoliberal India where her income is essential in meeting the class habitus of conspicuous consumption. This study contributes to the understanding of gender inequality in South Asian context by bringing in the relational complexity where women negotiate with the normative expectations of other social agents within the domestic field, such as their husband's parents.

Studies on the conflict in norms between adopting ideals of gender equality and continuing the practice of gendered division of labour in Nepal, Middle East and North Africa, other regions which practice "classic patriarchy" (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 278) has found that state interventions regarding women's right to education has done little to result in increased work force participation of women (Moghadam, 2004; Karshenas, Moghadam and Chamlou, 2016;

James-Hawkins, Qutteina and Yount, 2017; John, 2020; James-Hawkins, Al-Attar and Yount, 2021). A study on middle-class women in Bangladesh found how women's informal power when staying in nuclear families increases and they have greater say in the day to day decision making of the family than women living with their in-laws (Hussein, 2017). In this regard, this current research provides an in-depth understanding of cultural norms which act as invisible barriers even as men and women with social and cultural capital draw from discourses of gender equality, but continue to practice the gendered division of labour at home. Thus, this research contributes to related research on women and gender equality in the global south and beyond.

7.4 Field, Habitus and Distinction: The theoretical implication

This research brings three Bourdeusian theories – habitus, field and distinction - together to study the dynamics of gender relations and practices of traditional gender norms within urban middle-class families in Kolkata. Using Bourdeusian theory, I identified the inherent conflict within the gendered habitus of men and women, resulting from the reproduction of the gendered habitus socialised through practicing drawing from discourses of gender equality and observing patriarchal traditions. Thus, the concept of habitus helps explain the formation of gender identity within a "historical matrix" (McNay, 2000) which is dynamic in nature rather than determined by a static structure (2000, p. 13).

McNay's (2000) interpretation of the habitus-field couplet and its implication for understanding individual agency in gender relations is also relevant to this study. The habitus-field couplet along with class distinction (1984) helped in understanding the process of interaction of social agents within the field they inhabit and how the field and the gendered habitus as well as the class habitus structure each other. Further, this research helps in

connecting these three theories to understand how social agents' habitus is mostly determined by the structural rules of the domestic field (family).

In Chapter 5, female participants illustrated the ways in which married women espoused certain ideals by drawing from discourses of gender equality when they inhabited the field of paid work while following traditional gender roles within the domestic field. In Chapter 6, we saw that for male participants', this contradiction was evident, when they equated the achievement of gender equality with women's participation in the workforce. However men's embodied traditional gendered habitus was evident when they spoke of practising gendered division of labour at home.

Using Bourdeusian social theory I illustrated the complexity of the ways in which agency is exercised by social agents in the context of the domestic field through the integration of the concepts of field, habitus and distinction. The integration of Bourdieu's social theory in to feminist research has generated interest among feminist researchers around the world (Skeggs, 1997; McNay, 2000; Adkins, 2004; Thapan, 2006). The integration of field, habitus and distinction helped in gaining deeper understanding of the dynamics of gender relations within the domestic field and the resistance of social agents towards transformation of traditional gender norms.

Bourdieu (1990b) says the generative nature of the habitus produces behaviours embedded in common sense, like practicing traditional gender roles. Further, such behaviours "are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logical characteristic of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate" (1990b, p. 56). I observed how women's role as the primary caregiver when they become mothers is positively sanctioned as they are praised by men for their mothering and caregiving behaviour. Women's success in the domestic field as primary caregivers once they become mothers is seen as a virtue.

I also observed the ways in which urban middle-class habitus inscribes dominant norms of respectable femininity within women's habitus. As discussed in Chapter 2, historically determined dominant norms of respectable modernity influence the habitus through which social agents negotiate power relations within the domestic field. Bourdieu himself equates the embodiment of femininity with the embodiment of distinction (Bourdieu, 2001), and in my research it was evident how class habitus positions women to conform to the dominant norms of respectable femininity. In the case of my female participants, respectable femininity is embodied by becoming an ideal mother. Further, respectable femininity is also embodied through the concept of the multi-tasking goddess, the internalisation of the idol of the ten handed Hindu goddess *Durga*, whose visit to her natal home (the earth) for four days during the year is marked as the biggest festival in Kolkata.

I must acknowledge that although Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and distinction has been useful in framing this study theoretically, throughout the analysis I drew from other concepts like hegemonic masculinity, discourse, capital, empowerment to study individual subjectivities of men and women within the middle-class. This study could also have been theoretically framed by using Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of patriarchal bargain where "middle-class women strike a 'passive bargain', upholding ideals of respectability, thereby shoring up symbolic capital for a 'good' marriage and class privilege'' (Twamley and Sidharth, 2019). Kandiyoti's concept could have been a useful framework to understand how men and women exercise agency within gender relations; however, the structural and normative expectations that interact with individual choice in shaping individual subjectivities made Bourdieu's concepts more useful for this study.

7.5 Conclusion and recommendation

There were several issues that participants highlighted as participants described their daily struggles that need to be studied further to contribute towards policy development. Women

stated that the existing leave policies regarding childcare favoured women as caregivers. However, the implication is that women are then recognised by the state as the primary caregivers. Future research in this area could shed light on how leave policies impact the paid work life of young parents.

Although my study did not analyse the role of parents regarding how intimacy is reproduced within young married men and women. I did observe that there was a possibility for the generative capacity of the gendered habitus to challenge normative constraints, this demonstrates the possibility for greater agency among women along generational lines within urban middle-class families. However, this cannot be concluded with certainty from the present research as I did not interview parents to understand their perspective. Thus, in future intergenerational research within the middle-classes in India can provide greater insight into this phenomenon.

Future research could also analyse the impact of existing paternity leave policies on new fathers. Most male participants and female participants mentioned in their narratives that the existing leave policy for new fathers does not adequately address the needs of new parents. Such research could also have an impact on the gender discourse in this region and possibly help in re-imagining care work as gender neutral work.

Women participants mostly depended on outsourcing their domestic duties to hired domestic help and nurse-maids while they are engaged in paid work. There have been studies expressing the nature of exploitation, discrimination and low wages to which women who are hired as domestic help are subject to (Ray, 1999; Chickerur, 2020). Future research on women's participation in the workforce could analyse the neo-patriarchal institutional structures, where care work is normatively expected to be performed within the private sphere by women, by analysing the responsibility of organisations employing young parents. There is also a need to explore the needs of young parents that may contribute to policies on creation

of day care centres in the workplaces, could possibly begin to detraditionalise gender relations both within the private and the public sphere. Further research in this direction is necessary to understand this issue.

This research also opens up an avenue for further discussion on the hetoronormative nature of marriage itself, where marriage is assumed to be culturally sanctioned if it is between the socially identified genders of man and woman. The negotiation of power within same sex couples in India, especially the urban middle-class, which espouse hetornormative gender relations as equal and normal, needs further questioning and scrutiny.

Although outside the scope of this research, women participants also referenced the way in which schools identify mothers as primary caregivers and expect them to be available during the day, even when women are engaged in paid work. Further research on the impact of schools in perpetuation of traditional gender relations seemed necessary as most mothers in the study talked about the school's role in their everyday lives.

One important part of the gender equality puzzle in India is the role of the mother-in-law in enforcing traditional gender norms within the domestic sphere. I recommend that this research be used to inform future research on the role of extended family in perpetuating gender inequality by observing or interviewing the mothers-in-law of married women to gain a more in depth understanding of the intergenerational power dynamics within the family. My current research also helps to open up new ways of understanding constraints placed on women in negotiating gendered boundaries of class and culture as they try to access equal opportunity.

A limitation of this research is that I did not interview married women who left paid work after getting married or becoming mothers. I only interviewed women who were still engaged in paid work. Thus, understanding why women fall out of the workforce would be another fruitful avenue for future research. I was told about this phenomenon by female participants

themselves who talked about their colleagues leaving jobs because engagement in paid work did not permit them to perform their roles at home, as well as by male participants who chose to marry women who do not work outside the home because they wanted to maintain the traditional gender roles within the family. Some participants identified this phenomenon as most prevalent in high income families as the lack of an income from the woman did not impact the socio-economic status of the family.

In conclusion, this study has helped in understanding the role played by dominant social norms, domestic, class and cultural, in hindering women's progress in the workforce. I have also gained a more nuanced understanding of this issue by identifying the forces and competing voices of men and women as they resist and struggle with the transformation of gender relations in contemporary India.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Men

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MALE PARTICIPANTS

TOPIC – FAMILY BACKGROUND

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Tell me about your childhood	Memorable incident, dreams/aspirations
2)	Relationship with parents	Mother, father and siblings, if any

TOPIC – MARRIAGE CEREMONY AND RITUALS

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Evolution of Bengali marriage ceremonies over the years	Rituals that have been added/removed

TOPIC – PARTICIPANTS' MARRIAGE

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Meeting your spouse	How were parents convinced (if love marriage)?
2)	Spouse's relationship with your parents and family	

TOPIC -COMPROMISES AFTER MARRIAGE

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Compromises you made after getting married	Compromises made by your spouse
2)	Work-family balance	Family's role, domestic help's role;

TOPIC –FAMILY DISPUTES

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Give examples of recent family disputes	How do you get to know about them?
2)	Family disputes observed when growing up	Examples

TOPIC – FAMILY VALUES/STRUCTURE

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Family values most important to you	
2)	Significance of your family in your life	Most important member

TOPIC – CHILDREN

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Mother's role in the upbringing of the child	
2)	Father's role in the upbringing of the child	

TOPIC – PERSONAL OPINION ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Opinion on the recent #MeToo movement	
2)	Opinion on the subject of prevalence of domestic violence law (498A)	
3)	Opinion on gender equality	Has it been achieved? / How can it be

achieved?

2. Women

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

TOPIC – FAMILY BACKGROUND

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Tell me about your childhood	Memorable incident, dreams/aspirations
2)	Relationship with parents	Mother, father and siblings, if any

TOPIC – MARRIAGE CEREMONY AND RITUALS

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Evolution of Bengali marriage ceremonies over the years	Rituals that have been added/removed

TOPIC – PARTICIPANTS' MARRIAGE

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Meeting your spouse	How were parents convinced (if love marriage)?
2)	Spouse's relationship with your parents and family	

TOPIC -COMPROMISES AFTER MARRIAGE

	Questions	Probe/Prompt
1)	Compromises you made after getting married	Compromises made by your spouse

2)	Work-family balance	Family's role, domestic help's role;

TOPIC –FAMILY DISPUTES

	Questions	**Probe/Prompt**
1)	Give an example of a family dispute between you and your husband's family	

TOPIC – FAMILY VALUES/STRUCTURE

	Questions	**Probe/Prompt**
1)	Family values most important to you	Natal and marital family
2)	Significance of your family in your life	Most important member

TOPIC – CHILDREN

	Questions	**Probe/Prompt**
1)	Mother's role in the upbringing of the child	
2)	Father's role in the upbringing of the child	

TOPIC – PERSONAL OPINION ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

	Questions	**Probe/Prompt**
1)	Opinion on the recent #MeToo movement	
2)	Opinion on the subject of prevalence of domestic violence law (498A)	

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared by the principal investigator at any time.

_____

> All the data collected will be kept securely on a password protected personal computer and a password protected hard drive, which will only be accessed by the primary investigator (Sanhita Chatterjee).

3. Signatures

_____   _____

Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]   Signature   Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

_____   _____

Name of researcher [IN CAPITALS]   Signature   Date

4. Contact details for further information

Principal Investigator:

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Colchester CO4 3SQ
Email: sc18258@essex.ac.uk
Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Demographic Questionnaire

GENERER

GENDER
  a) Male
  b) Female

AGE
  a) 20-25
  b) 25-30
  c) 30-35
  d) 35-40
  e) 40 -45

YOUR HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION –
  a) Bachelors Degree
  b) Masters Degree
  c) PhD/MPhil
  d) Higher secondary (school level)
  e) B.Engg (Other specialised degrees, please specify
_____)

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF SPOUSE –
  a) Bachelors Degree
  b) Masters Degree
  c) PhD/MPhil
  d) Higher secondary (school level)

MARRIED FOR –
    a) Less than 1 year b) 1-5 years c) 6-9 years d) above 10 years

PROFESSION/JOB TITLE

_____

FAMILY DESCRIPTION (CURRENT LIVING STATUS)
a)   JOINT FAMILY
b)   LIVE WITH PARENTS/ LIVE WITH IN LAWS
c)   NUCLEAR FAMILY
d)   OTHERS (PLEASE SPECIFY)

            NUMBER OF CHILDREN -
a)   NO CHILDREN
b)   ONE
c)   MORE THAN ONE
d)   PREGNANT/ WIFE IS PREGNANT

            CURRENT JOB STATUS
a)   ON SABBATICAL
b)   WORKING FULL TIME
c)   WORKING PART TIME
d)   FREELANCING
e)   OTHERS (Please specify ....)

YOUR DAY/DAYS OFF DURING THE WEEK –

_____

            SELECTION OF MARRIAGE PARTNER
a)   ARRANGED BY FAMILY/FRIENDS
b)   ARRANGED THROUGH MATRIMONIAL COLUMNS/WEBSITES
c)   LOVE
d)   ARRANGED BY FAMILY/FREINDS THEN LOVE
e)   OTHERS (PLEASE SPECIFY)

_____

Participant Information Sheet

A study on the status of Bengali married men and women belonging to bhadralok families in South Asia

Invitation to participate

You have been invited to participate in this research. Please read the following information carefully which will tell you what your contribution will involve and how your data will be processed. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information.

Background on the Project

The objective behind undertaking this project is to explore the status of married men and women in *bhadralok* families. We are mainly going to explore your journey from when you were single to your journey as a married person through a set of open ended questions. There are no right or wrong answers, you only have to express what you feel about each topic mentioned in the question, sometimes you might be asked to share your personal experience about a topic. If at any moment you feel that answering a certain question may cause you stress, you can choose not to answer the question or ask for a break for a few minutes. Since this research is mainly about studying the everyday life of the *bhadralok* families, you will be asked questions about your close relatives (mainly your spouse, your sibling, your parents), your relationship with them and your experiences of being married. We will ask you about the expectations and experiences of your close relatives regarding your marriage.

Your contribution

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are highly educated, married and belong to the *bhadralok* class in Kolkata. If you choose to participate in this study, I will arrange an interview with you at a time and place convenient to you. The interview will be conducted in either English and/or Bengali as you choose. The interview will last for approximately one to two hours. The interview will be digitally recorded (audio) and you will be asked to not disclose potentially identifying information (name, address etc.) about yourself during the interview. But if you do, it will be anonymised and changed to ensure that your identity is kept confidential at all times. Before the start of the interview you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire about yourself (age, gender, occupation etc.). Your comfort will be kept in mind throughout the interview.

Informed Consent

Should you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form before the beginning of the interview. Once the audio recorder is switched on, an oral consent will also be taken from you on record before you are asked the questions.

Withdrawal from the Study

You are free to change your mind about being interviewed at any time. Please remember that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw at any time during the recording. You do not have to give a reason if you don't want to. If you chose to withdraw at any point during the recording of the interview, the data associated with you will be destroyed. It will not be included in the research.

What happens to your data afterwards?

Your interview will be translated and transcribed by the researcher (a copy of your transcript can be made available on request) and analysed. Any names used accidentally and other identifying details will be changed and will not appear in the transcripts to protect the confidentiality of every participant. The findings will then be written up for publication in an academic journal and may be used in grant applications for further study on this topic. Sometimes quotes from the interviews will be used in the research but every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity is maintained at all times. The researcher will ensure that your personal details and your data will be secured at all times. All the data you provide will be kept securely on a password protected personal computer and a password protected hard drive, which will only be accessed by the primary investigator (Sanhita Chatterjee).

Funding

This research project has been funded by the University of Essex Graduate Small Grant & Training Bursary

Ethical approval

This project has been reviewed on behalf of the University of Essex Ethics Committee and has been given approval.

Concerns and complaints

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the study or you have a complaint, please contact the principal investigator of the project. If you are still concerned and you think your complaint has not been addressed to your satisfaction, please contact the student's supervisor. You may also contact the Director of Research in the principal investigator's department or the University's Research Governance and Planning Manager if the student and her supervisor are unable to resolve your concern. Contact details for all of these individuals are given below.

Contact details

Principal Investigator:

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Phone: +919903335816

Appendix C: Participant Details

MALE

MALE PARTICIPANTS DETAILS											
Serial No.	Name	Age group	Living status	Highest degree	Occupation	Children	Selection of partner	Married for	Wife's education	Wife's job	
1	Agni	35-44	Joint family	Masters Degree	Software developer	None	Arranged by family/friends	2-5 years	Masters Degree	Housewife	
2	Akshay	25-34	Joint family	Bachelors Degree	Marketing Executive	None	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
3	Animesh	25-34	Live with parents	Bachelors Degree	Banker	None	Arranged by family/friends	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
4	Anup	25-34	Joint family	Bachelors Degree	IT** Associate	1	Arranged by family/friends	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Housewife	
5	Arjun	35-44	Joint family	Bachelors Degree	Self Employed	None	Arranged through Matrimonial Ad	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Housewife	
6	Arunava	25-34	Joint family	Bachelors Degree	Consultant	1	Arranged by family/friends	6-9 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
7	Debanjan	25-34	Joint family	Bachelors Degree	Self Employed	1	Love then arranged	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
8	Dibyendu	35-44	Joint family	Masters Degree	College Lecturer	None	Love then arranged	6-9 years	PhD	Employed	
9	Diptesh	35-44	Nuclear family	Bachelors Degree	Government Service	1	Love Marriage	Above 10	High school	Housewife	
10	Gourav	25-34	Live with parents	PhD	College Lecturer	1	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Masters Degree	PT*	
11	Harshit	25-34	Nuclear family	Masters Degree	PhD Scholar and singer	None	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
12	Krishnendu	25-34	Nuclear family	Masters Degree	College Lecturer	1	Love then arranged	2-5 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
13	Kuntal	35-44	Live with parents	MD	Doctor	None	Love Marriage	above 10	PhD	Employed	
14	Lewis	25-34	Nuclear family	MD	Doctor	1	Love then arranged	6-9 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
15	Pradipta	35-44	Nuclear family	Bachelors Degree	Associate Manager	1	Arranged by family/friends	Above 10	Bachelors Degree	Housewife	
16	Pradyut	35-44	Nuclear family	Bachelors Degree	Self employed	None	Love Marriage	Above 10	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
17	Pranab	25-34	Live with parents	Bachelors Degree	Civil Engineer	1	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
18	Prithwish	25-34	Live with parents	Masters Degree	School Teacher	None	Love Marriage	Less than 1	Masters Degree	Studying	
19	Rishi	25-34	Live with parents	Masters Degree	College Lecturer	None	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
20	Samiran	25-34	Nuclear family	Masters Degree	Data Analyst (IT)	None	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
21	Shovan	25-34	With wife's parents	Masters Degree	Developer (IT)	None	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
22	Sayantan	35-44	Nuclear family	Masters Degree	IT Engineer	2	Love Marriage	Above 10	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
23	Subhendu	35-44	Nuclear family	Masters Degree	Banker	None	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
24	Subhranil	25-34	Live with parents	Masters Degree	Self employed	None	Love Marriage	Less than 1	PhD	PT*	
25	Subhro	25-34	Live with parents	MD	Doctor	1	Love then arranged	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Housewife	
26	Supratim	25-34	Live with parents	Bachelors Degree	Civil Engineer	1	Love then arranged	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
27	Swapnendu	25-34	Live with parents	Masters Degree	Teacher	None	Love Marriage	2-5 years	Bachelors Degree	Housewife	
28	Tapan	35-44	Nuclear family	MPhil	Teacher	1	Arranged by family/friends	Above 10	Masters Degree	Housewife	
29	Tushar	25-34	Nuclear family	Bachelors Degree	Software Engineer	None	Love Marriage	6-9 years	Masters Degree	Employed	
30	Utpal	25-34	Live with parents	Bachelors Degree	IT Associate	1	Arranged by family/friends	6-9 years	Bachelors Degree	Employed	
*PT - Part Time Work											
**IT - Information Technology											

FEMALE

Sr. No.	Name	Age group	Education	Current Occupation	Selection of partner	Living status	Married for	Husband's education	Children
				DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF FEMALE PARTICIPANTS					
1	Ananya	25-30	Medicine	Doctor	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Less than 1	Medicine	None
2	Anindita	25-30	M.Tech	IT Professional	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	2-5 years	Engineering	1
3	Anita	40-45	Masters	Corporate Auditor	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors	1
4	Anusree	35-40	Bachelors	School Teacher	Arranged by family/friends	With in laws	Above 10	Bachelors	1
5	Anwesha	35-40	Masters	School Teacher	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Above 10	Masters	1
6	Aruna	30-34	Masters	Urban Planning	Arranged by family/friends	With in laws	2-5 years	Medicine	1
7	Arunita	30-34	Engineering	IT Professional	Love Marriage	Without in laws	6-9 Years	Masters	1
8	Asmita	35-40	MBA	HR*** Manager	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters	2
9	Bani	30-34	Masters	Account Manager	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters	1
10	Barnali	30-35	PhD	College Lecturer	Love Marriage	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters	None
11	Bina	25-30	Masters	NGO*	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	1-2 Years	Masters	None
12	Brishti	25-30	Masters	Govt. Service	Love then arranged	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters	None
13	Chitra	30-34	Bachelors	Self employed	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Above 10	Engineering	2
14	Malini	30-35	Bachelors	School teacher	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors	1
15	Manisha	35-40	Masters	School teacher	Love Marriage	With her mother	Above 10	Masters	3
16	Mrinalini	35-40	Masters	NGO*	Love Marriage	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters	1
17	Nandini	35-40	Pursuing PhD	Lecturer PT**	Love Marriage	Joint family	Above 10	Masters	1
18	Nandita	35-40	PhD	College Lecturer	Love Marriage	Joint family	6-9 years	Bachelors	1
19	Jui	25-30	Masters	School teacher	Love Marriage	Without in laws	6-9 years	Masters	None
20	Oindrilla	35-40	Bachelors	Choreographer	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors	1
21	Oishi	35-40	LLB	Lawyer	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors	1
22	Parna	35-40	Masters	School Teacher	Through matrimonial ad	With in laws	Above 10	Bachelors	1
23	Payel	25-30	Bachelors	Fitness instructor	Love then arranged	Without in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors	None
24	Ranjana	35-40	Bachelors	School Teacher	Through matrimonial ad	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors	1
25	Ratna	35-40	M.Phil	College Lecturer	Through matrimonial ad	With in laws	2-5 years	Masters	1
26	Raya	35-40	PhD	Govt. Service	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	PhD	1
27	Richa	35-40	Masters	Teacher	Arranged by family/friends	With in laws	Above 10	Engineering	1
28	Ritu	30-35	Engineering	IT Engineer	Love Marriage	Without in laws	2-5 years	Engineering	None
29	Rooprekha	30-34	Masters	Service Sector	Through matrimonial ad	With in laws	6-9 years	Bachelors	1
30	Sanjukta	25-30	Masters	Service Sector	Love Marriage	With in laws	2-5 years	Bachelors	None
31	Sarani	35-40	Masters	School teacher	Love Marriage	With in laws	Above 10	Masters	None
32	Satarupa	30-35	Bachelors	Service Sector	Love Marriage	Without in laws	Above 10	Bachelors	None
33	Sayani	30-34	Medicine	Doctor	Love Marriage	Without in laws	2-5 years	Medicine	Pregnant
34	Joyee	35-40	Masters	School Teacher	Love Marriage	With in laws	Above 10	Masters	2
35	Shruti	25-30	MBA	Govt. Service	Love then arranged	Without in laws	Less than 1	Masters	None
36	Sramana	35-40	Masters	NGO*	Love Marriage	With in laws	Above 10	Masters	1
37	Suchismita	35-40	PhD	College Lecturer	Arranged by family/friends	Joint family	6-9 years	Masters	1
38	Sumedha	25-30	Bachelors	Family business	Love then arranged	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters	2
39	Sunetra	25-30	MBA	HR head	Love then arranged	Without in laws	2-5 years	Masters	None
40	Tuhina	30-34	Masters	Lecturer	Love Marriage	With in laws	6-9 years	Masters	1
*NGO - Non Governmental Organisation									
** PT - Part Time									
*** HR - Human Resource									

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