MAPPING CASTE, GENDER AND PRIVILEGE: A STUDY OF CHITPAVAN BRAHMAN WOMEN IN PUNE

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BY

Shraddha Chickerur

15CWPG01

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

(P.O.) CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, GACHIBOWLI

HYDERABAD- 500046

TELANGANA

INDIA

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **'Mapping Caste, Gender And Privilege: A Study of Chitpavan Brahman Women in Pune'** submitted by **Shraddha Chickerur** bearing registration number **15CWPG01** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies, Centre for Women's Studies, School of Social Sciences is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Related article have been published:

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1. GS801	Feminist Theories	4	PASS
2. GS802	Gender Studies: Concepts and Contexts	4	PASS
3. GS826	Feminist Research Methods	4	PASS
4. GS828	The construction of class : An overview	4	PASS

Deepa Sreenivas

Dr. Deepa Sreenivas

Research Supervisor

महिला अध्ययन केन्द्र
Centre for Women's Studies
सामाजिक विज्ञान
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
Hyderabad-500 046

Prof. Sanjay Palshikar

Research Co-Supervisor

Professor
Department of Political Science
School of Social Science
University of Hyderabad
C.R. Rao Road, Gachibowli, Hyderabad-500 046.

Deepa Sreenivas

Dr. Deepa Sreenivas

I.C. **Head of the Centre**

अध्यक्ष HEAD (I/c)
महिला अध्ययन केन्द्र
Centre for Women's Studies
सामाजिक विज्ञान
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
Hyderabad-500 046

30/4/21

Prof. Y. A. Sudhakar Reddy

Dean of the School

DEAN
समाज विज्ञान संकाय
School of Social Sciences
हैदराबाद विश्वविद्यालय
University of Hyderabad
हैदराबाद-500 046., भारत
Hyderabad-500 046. INDIA.

DECLARATION

I, **Shraddha Chickerur**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled '**Mapping Caste, Gender And Privilege: A Study of Chitpavan Brahman Women in Pune**' submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Dr. Deepa Sreenivas,** Centre for Women's Studies, and **Prof. Sanjay Palshikar**, Department of Political Science, is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diplomas.

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For *Shashi Aji*.

My maternal grandmother, Kamal Rajwade was renamed Shashikala Paranjpe after marriage. The youngest of three daughters, she was married at the age of 13 years. Although she went to school after marriage; with three children and a joint family to care for, she was unable to finish her education. A diligent worker, quick learner and generous to a fault, she taught herself whatever was required to support her entrepreneurial husband. A complete people's person, she will forever remain the bright light who shone on innumerable lives through her generosity, hospitability and intellect.

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Chapter One

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES ON THE RESEARCHER AND THE RESEARCH: AN INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I narrate the personal journey that led me to the topic, discuss the methodology employed, the fieldwork process, and reflect on my position as a feminist researcher in the study.

My beginnings

I was born in Mumbai but have lived in Pune from seven years of age until I returned to Mumbai for postgraduate studies at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). It was a comfortable childhood in a mostly homogenous upper middle class locality of the city. My parents belong to different sub-castes of the Marathi Brahman community- my mother, a Konkanastha[1] from a well-known family in Sangli, a town in southern Maharashtra, and my father, a Deshastha Brahman from Mumbai with ancestral roots in Karnataka, which reflect only in our surname. From what I heard, my parents grew up in comfort and are well educated. While the distinction within the Brahman community's sub-castes was part of dinner table jesting, it was not a subject of serious deliberation. I grew up knowing that I was Hindu and Brahman. In 1993, amidst the riots that shook Mumbai after the demolition of Babri, I learned about being Hindu. I have vague

[1] Chitpavan Brahmans were originally from the coastal area of western India, which is known as Konkan and hence they are also known as Konkanastha Brahman.
I prefer the spelling Brahman, Brahmanical whereas retain Brahmin and Brahminical when quoting other scholars who prefer the latter. Both mean the same community.

memories of the tense environment, night vigils being organized in our locality, and being rushed out of school because of bomb scares. We moved to Pune in a year or so for reasons that had nothing to do with the riots.

I also knew I was born because my parents could afford another child after two daughters and wanted a son. Son preference is a widely studied South Asian phenomenon. In some parts of Maharashtra, the crudest manifestation of this is girls named ‘Nakusa/Nakoshi’ which means ‘unwanted’ in Marathi. These are third or fourth daughters, who face discrimination and psychological problems (Sekhar and Hatti 2010). In my case, however, this was a matter of light-hearted banter rather than any overt or covert discrimination.

My political awakening started with an undergraduate course on Women and Development conducted by the Centre for Women's Studies, University of Pune, while studying in Fergusson College and more concretely since my Master's program in TISS, Mumbai. The questions which guide this thesis arose throughout this period. What follows are broad strokes relevant to the study.

I arrived in college with a worldview passed on by my upper-caste educated, right-leaning, liberal, urban family. For example, the narrative around reservations was that 'we' did not have seats reserved for us like 'them' and needed to work hard to secure a good college and study further, something that the respondents in this study echoed. Too young for the 1990s Mandal agitations, I remember some friends joining anti-reservation rallies in 2006 and the discussions that ensued. It slowly dawned upon me that a lot of ideas which seemed like common sense were actually received without any thought on

my part. For example, when a veteran social worker[2] questioned my political convictions during end-term fieldwork in TISS, I realized that voting for Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), among other things, was received wisdom. It was not something I had arrived upon on my own but just picked up from my family's right-leaning ideological discussions.

I 'found' feminism before I 'discovered' caste[3]. The undergraduate course mentioned above formally introduced me to feminism. It was an ideology and a perspective of looking at the world, which I quickly took to; by reading, discussing within and outside the classroom, and participating in urban feminist movements in three cities. Caste, the tangibility of it for others' lives, and the privilege it bestowed upon me, which was invisible so far, was a 'discovery' I made in TISS, Mumbai, during my undergraduate years. In an extremely diverse campus where we all entered and stumbled around to find our way, I noticed that my close friends were upper middle-class girls from metro cities. There was a Marathi connection with classmates from different parts of Maharashtra, but it did not translate into a cohesive group. What stood between us was not just class and urban-rural differences but also caste, and it took me some time to figure this out!

Learning what caste (and race) has meant to people and exposure to various texts on the subject as a part of my coursework profoundly affected me. For the first time in TISS, we were encouraged to read Ambedkar's prolific writings, but I read Annihilation of Castes (AOC) a couple of years later. I began to slowly understand and introspect upon how

[2] As a part of our post graduate course in Social work in TISS, we were expected to do a block fieldwork placement i.e. work for an entire month in an organization as student social workers. This social worker was the director of the NGO where I worked and my fieldwork supervisor.

[3] This is a part of a larger pattern wherein a lot of upper caste middle class women identify with feminism and then, if ever, do they arrive at a critical analysis of caste. I explain this further in chapter two while reviewing literature.

caste bestowed certain forms of capital on me, privileges that were not universal but sources of great inequality. I enrolled in TISS in June 2007, and a global Chitpavan *Mahasammelan*[4] took place at the end of the same year in Pune. My mother's siblings and cousins streamed into our home to attend this gathering. My mother wondered if she was allowed[5] to participate, and there were jokes about no one stopping her, given her looks- she is very fair with 'Konkanastha' features. I was home during the semester break, and on visiting my dance teacher, she casually wished I was available in Pune since only Konkanastha girls were performing in this gathering. Since I share my mother's complexion[6], I could have passed off.

Having just started reading about caste as a social structure that perpetuates great inequality in society, many questions raged in my mind- What is the need for this kind of a gathering in 2007? What does this *Mahasammelan* say about caste today? How has the Brahman community shaped up in recent years? Do they share the discomfort that I was experiencing, of the upper-caste privilege I had recently discovered?

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[4] *Maha*- great, *Sammelan*- gathering

[5] She chose not to attend but could have attended if she wished to, as a daughter of the Chitpavan community.

[6] Audre Lorde describes the simplistic way in which we understand society, as a set of oppositions "dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior " (1980:1). According to Lorde, it is not the differences between us, but the misnaming of those differences and the refusal to recognize the misnaming and the effects these distortions have on human interactions which perpetuates inequality. One example of these is embodied markers which indicate social location. Skin colour, along with other markers like language, dialect, proficiency in speaking English and attire are some of the overt markers of caste (Meenu 2015). Unlike skin colour, the rest are a result of socialization and habitus which we will dwell on in chapter six. The correlation of caste and skin colour is a lived reality for most Indians (Herbert 2013). Fairness is equated to beauty and associated with the 'upper' castes whereas dark or dusky skin is associated with 'lower' castes. Fairness as beautiful and superior connects with colonial mindset and maps onto a racist discourse of whiteness being superior. Caste has been likened to racial discrimination and skin colour is one of the first distinguishing features in classifying human beings (Menon 2011). The Chitpavan Brahmans are distinguished by their fair skin and light coloured eyes and take pride in it (Gadgil 2016). However, not all Chitpavan men and women are fair or have light coloured eyes.

Introspection was integral to various exercises meant to shape students into conscientious, self-aware social workers during our TISS coursework. I remember being shaken by my classmates' diverse experiences, which were part of confidential discussions that ensued in these exercises. A classmate talked about the caste violence in his village and wanting revenge, which has stayed with me.

This introspection continued through my engagement with feminism. I started working in rural areas of Madhya Pradesh, followed by villages in rural Pune, Himachal, and Bihar with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). How I was received at various places that I visited due to my work led me to question the journey, my own, and that of my foremothers, which brought me to this juncture. How was I confident of being received amicably, with some respect and dignity? I did not feel out of place in most places because of the way I was received. I was a single woman, travelling to places I had never visited before, which meant always calculating and ensuring public and private safety. Often in my work[7], I was the youngest and at times one of the few women in a roomful of men. However, I felt unfettered in my mobility – to study and work wherever I pleased (subject to financial limitations).

This inquiry then arises from my quest of unravelling privileges and obstacles that accrue from being Brahman and a woman.

[7] Starting from a village in Dindori district in Madhya Pradesh, I worked in Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi with various organisations and travelled to other states too.

Methodology

"Where is your questionnaire?" asked Shashi, my first respondent, a couple of minutes into the interview. As an octogenarian[8] whom I had set out to interview, Shashi wondered about my apparent lack of preparation. Having completed her doctoral studies and then taught research, among other things, in a university for several decades, she gave me a piece of her mind about methodology. After hearing her out, I told her what I wanted was a free-flowing conversation about her life, whatever she chose to say about it. While I had a broad set of areas to be covered, she could start telling me about her life. I would ask questions as and when required. I wanted a narrative where she was in control of what she wanted to share, how much, and ask me questions when she felt like it. Shashi was not entirely convinced but relented, and the interview resumed.

It is usually powerful persons who can protect themselves from the researchers and question the research design (Priyadarshini 2003). Researching Brahman women, like me, many of whom were much older than me, meant that the relationship between the researcher and the researched was not only blurred at times but one could not assume that the power differential was always inclined towards the researcher.

Sharmila Sreekumar adopted the term 'dominant women'[9] to convey the simultaneity of being oppressed by gender regimes and the privilege that may accrue to women through other configurations, despite admitting that the term is awkward (2009:13). The women that appear in this study are also 'dominant'— privileged by their 'upper' caste, (more

[8] She will appear again later in the chapter, introducing the section 'Interviewing Women' where I provide more details about her.

[9] Sreekumar uses the term despite finding it awkward since it allows her to "frontalise the power relationship between women" and see these women as gendered subjects (2009:13). The word dominant indicates the presence of an 'other' and that relationship of power is crucial to both Sreekumar's study and this study.

often than not upper) middle-class[10] location. However, as women, they are subject to the gender regimes within the home and outside. As we will see in the chapters that follow, some acknowledge this privileged location and engage with the gendered aspects of their identity. Every social location has a viewpoint, and members of a dominant group also can use their social location as a resource that they deploy in producing knowledge. It is in the uniqueness of a particular standpoint, in its distinctive characteristics, that we find knowledge (Harding in Brooks and Hesse-Biber 2007:17).

This exploratory study seeks to understand the contemporaneity of caste in the lives of the women the Chitpavan Brahman community. I collected the life narratives of Chitpavan Brahman women in Pune city to:

1. Generate narratives of 'better off' (Krishnaraj 2005) or dominant women (Sreekumar 2009) to complicate the category of 'woman' (Tharu and Niranjana 1996)
2. To learn more about caste as a lived/embodied experience of women (Thapan 2006, 2007)
3. To explore how a study of privileged women can contribute to the contemporary theory of gender (Tharu and Niranjana 1996).

What are the processes that contribute to the construction of a self? The self is implicated in social temporality; an account of oneself includes the conditions of its emergence (Butler 2005). Growing up in a Brahman household in Pune has shaped my identity in tangible ways, along with several other experiences and encounters. My quest to study caste came from my gradual awareness of the unequal privilege which was bestowed

[10] A sub-section in the review of literature details the overlap between caste and class for upper-caste Indians as well as the making of the middle classes in the colonial period.

upon me: an upper middle class, Brahman woman, a privilege which accrued from my birth rather than any effort on my part. This study uses an autoethnographic entry point- my experiences as a Brahman woman inform the research. My experiences also form part of conversations with the women interviewed, at times as shared experiences and at other times, to share differences across similar themes. My stories were a starting point in connecting the self to the social (Taber 2012).

Here we take a brief detour into autoethnography, which "is a self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay 1997:9). It is both the text and the method, like ethnography. I contend that the features of auto-ethnography which are methodologically important—placing the self visibly within research, attention to the multiple shifting identities of the researcher and the researched, attention to emotionality and subjectivity, analytic reflexivity (L. Anderson 2006; Reed-Danahay 1997; Taber 2012) coincide with the tenets of feminist research philosophy. We will explore aspects of feminist research methodology relevant to this study shortly.

Despite an auto-ethnographic entry point, I chose not to interview anyone intimately connected to me from within the circle of my family and friends in the city. As a feminist researcher, I did not intend to maintain a value-neutral, distanced stance. However, the reasons for not interviewing my 'own' were— one, interviewing people who knew me could elicit responses potentially geared towards, i.e., either aligning or refuting my beliefs and ideological inclinations. My political beliefs are well known to my inner circles and frequently unpopular. My questioning of gender norms, sexist messages, and

jokes, posing awkward questions about privilege, questioning Islamophobia, or being antagonistic to the right-leaning, BJP voting consensus within my extended family has led to in-person and online altercations. Two, maintaining confidentiality would be a problem. The third reason was that despite studying my own culture (at least partially), I need some distance from the 'data' to make the familiar unfamiliar (Clifford 1986) to analyze it. I felt it would be easier to do this when the life narratives were not of the people I call my own. While T.N. Madan (1975) chose to study his community of Kashmiri Pandits but in a different village, I decided to study a different set of people from my city.

The study focuses on how caste is seen but also not seen. Caste is social, economic, political, and cultural. Expressions of caste are part of a community's own collective struggle to claim or rearticulate their identity. My work will show some ways caste manifests across these threads. My ethnographic foray is informed by changes shaping social research.

The methodological revolutions in social science research started with questions about basic tenets like positivism (Giddens 1978) and created a 'crisis of representation' (Clifford 1986; Reed-Danahay 1997) in the 1980s. Validity, objectivity, ethics, research relationships, and the presentation of research were under scrutiny. Scholars deliberated on the very purpose of research, especially ethnography, and the power dynamics pervading various aspects of the process (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). Feminist theoretical interventions contributed to this churning about the nature and processes of research. The

idea of disembodied scientific objectivity, where knowledge produced was a view from nowhere (Haraway 1988), was heavily criticized alongside discussions on what 'objectivity' in research should look like (Harding 1993). Feminist researchers insisted on 'situated knowledges,' a view that acknowledged the processes of production and the researcher's location, i.e., her positionality. The researcher's location with respect to the researched, the various power differences between the two, and how the researcher's subjectivity affects analysis (Mauthner and Doucet 1998) are significant. Feminist epistemologists suggest placing the inquirer and the subject in the same critical plane, facilitating what Sandra Harding has called 'strong objectivity' (1987:9).

Feminist methodologies demand cogent accounts of how people come to occupy the standpoints that they do in particular contexts (Kannabiran and Swaminathan 2017). They call for 'accountable knowledge,' which entails engagement with reflexivity and positionality, does not perpetuate existing stereotypes, and where the analysis can be traced back to participants' narratives (Mehta 2015:43). Feminist research values women's experiences, scholarship insists on looking at the everyday, mundane, and quotidian as important in countering conventional disciplinary knowledge creation (Edwards and Ribbens 1998; Smith 1987). When the starting point is women's lives, it is imperative to ask why certain activities are assigned to women? What are the consequences of such assignment for other social institutions; why body and emotional labour is assigned to one group of people and 'head' work to another[11] (Smith 1987). "The

[11] When I talked about caste with women the matters that came up were adherence to rituals or lack thereof, reservations, food habits, religion, how they treated 'others', *sanskaar* or values in socializing children and so on. Towards the end of one interview session, two men entered the hall where we were seated. They had come to meet the woman I was interviewing. She included them in the discussion on caste. This group discussion lasted for barely two-three minutes before I took their leave and yet the issue of *kool kayda* or land reforms was brought up by one of the men. Looking at my field notes I realized two things- One, both

cognitive goal of feminist researchers is to reveal the operation of gender" (Longino and Lennon 1997:26).

The subjects of knowledge are embodied, visible, socially, and historically located. They are multiple, heterogeneous, and not unitary, homogenous, and coherent (Harding 1993). Ideologies of womanhood, of becoming a woman[12], are as much about class, race, as about sex (Mohanty 1991:12), and of course, caste. The obvious axis of privilege which the women I interviewed have is caste and class. However, in focusing on privilege, I cannot be blind to the various kinds of power structures operating in their lives. A mere glance into history shows us that caste privilege for Brahman women cannot be thought of as complete autonomy. These women negotiate with power structures too, but this work attempts to study these complex dynamics without reducing these to prescribed frame of agency and autonomy.

I undertake the following theoretical and methodological commitments in this study – drawing upon women's daily life experiences as a means of analyzing society (Edwards and Ribbens 1998; Frankenburg 1993; Personal Narratives Group 1989; Smith 1987) and that these experiences need to be mapped onto larger socio-political and cultural processes to analyze them (Frankenburg 1993; Scott 1992; Sreekumar 2009). Furthermore, to draw upon theoretical and substantive scholarship on caste, gender, culture from within and outside India to comprehend the narratives collected. This is a

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the men were Brahman if not Chitpavan. This was not explicitly mentioned since she only introduced me by saying I am researching Brahmans. Two, the issue of land reforms which led to substantial losses for the Brahman community was not brought up in hours of conversations with women. However, it did come up in two-three minutes of unsolicited discussion with two men. This reiterates that there are differences in the spheres that men and women occupy.

[12] Mohanty is referring to Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".

study of representations of the various voices of the women interviewed during my ethnographic foray in Pune city.

Ethnography is about the career of truth rather than the truth itself[13]. Feminist ethnography is defined in comparison to or more precisely as a critique of mainstream ethnography. Feminist ethnography pays attention to relationality by looking at the power differentials between women. An analysis of positioning is crucial to how feminist ethnographers theorize (Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar 1993; Stacey 1988; Visweswaran 1994). Lila Abu-Lughod insists that "To be feminist entails being sensitive to domination; for the ethnographer, that means being aware of domination in the society being described and in the relationship between the writer (and readers) and the people being written about " (1993:5). She clarifies that feminist ethnography is not an emancipatory project for the subjects of the ethnography. Here too, the idea is to examine the ways Chitpavan women are dominated and dominant, how they negotiate with their circumstances and how caste is a resource in these negotiations.

In engaging with the being and becoming of Chitpavan Brahman women, I explore caste consciousness by foregrounding gender as an analytical category. It is both the lens I use and the subject matter of my study (Geetha 2002). By asking the question 'what does a Chitpavan Brahman woman's life look like,' I seek to explore the changing notions about casted-ness and womanhood in the specific context of a city.

Dismantling the universal category of 'woman' has informed feminist epistemological and methodological discourses. Feminist ethnographies explore various meanings and

[13] Sanjay Srivastav said this about social research in his keynote lecture at a conference in University of Hyderabad.

experiences of being women in different conditions and expose presumptions of any one way of being a woman (Abu-Lughod 1991). Being and becoming a woman has different meanings across regions, time, as well as structural markers like caste. Similarly, feminisms also take on different shapes in different places and contexts (Visweswaran 1994).

How do we conceptualize women and write about them? Nita Kumar suggests a nuanced way out of objectifying them or thinking of them as actors. She asks us to focus on the structures within which women exist and which control them and locate the subversive ways women exercise agency within a normative system. She calls for a modified Foucauldian approach, "which discusses subject as constituted, as formed by discourse, but also the subject that resists, that can invariably fashion other discourses" (1994:8). She insists on retaining the subject for political reasons but qualifies this further-

> Even while we want to act for the liberation of women, we must acknowledge that women, as such, have never been liberated or repressed. Rather there has been a succession of discourses about femininity, about purity, virtue, honour and womanhood that have displayed knowledge and power differently at different periods. The patterns of these discourses have been androcentric and patriarchal: man as subject, the rational knower. The constitution of man as subject is a power ploy. So must the constitution of woman as subject be seen to be (1994:9).

Constituting women as subjects of research, as in this study, is a political move and must be recognized as such.

About Narratives

Narratives are stories with a specific timeline, social context, events, and a conclusion. Within a research situation, accounts that form narratives "are already 'edited' as they emerge – that is, reduced by location, time, format, and interlocutor – for a specific research purpose at our request " (McAlpine 2016:40). Thus, these are co-constructed by the researcher, along with the researched. The act of constructing a life narrative forces the author to move from accounts of discrete experiences to an understanding of why and how life took the shape that it did. Not only do personal narratives highlight individual courses of action, but they also reflect the structural context in which those courses of action evolve. Paying attention to the self-definition of the narrators is essential in dealing with personal narratives (Personal Narratives Group 1989).

In this study, the narratives are generated through interviews and therefore are oral. The interview in a research setting is a performative act where a narrative is constructed, identities enacted, actions justified, and events are retrospectively recounted (Atkinson and Delamont 2006:167). Oral sources are inherently incomplete since they depend on memory, thus generating partial truths. Memory is an active process of making meanings rather than a passive depository of facts. Memories are constructed and reconstructed as a part of contemporary consciousness (Popular Memory Group 2006:51; Portelli 2006).

Thus, an essential point in the narrative analysis is to remember that narrative accounts are constructions; that experience is constructed through various accounts (Atkinson and Delamont 2006; Scott 1992). While women's experiences are important, they are not to be essentialized. “It is not individuals who experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience… Experience here becomes that which we seek to explain, that about

which knowledge is produced" (Scott 1992:25–26). By emphasizing the necessarily discursive character of experiences, Scott makes a bid for historicizing experience. Feminist epistemology reminds us that knowledge will have marks of the material and cultural conditions in which it is produced (Lennon, p.39).

In my ethnographic foray in Pune, I resorted to what Anne Hardgrove (2004) terms appointment anthropology. One cannot access urban, middle-class people without seeking out a time and place in advance, i.e., through appointments only. After seeking appointments, access to the women was easy, as discussed in the section on interviewing women.

Fieldwork: Proposed plan

I started my pilot study in December 2016 but had to take a break and resume it in March 2017. I interviewed a three-generation triad as well as a first-generation woman in another potential triad. While a friend put me in touch with one triad, the other I chanced upon through my visits to the Chitpavan Brahman Sangh. At this point, I only sought oral consent, where I clearly stated their rights before beginning our interview-confidentiality, permission to record, and freedom to refuse to answer specific questions or stop the interview or recording at any point they wished. They also knew they were part of a pilot, and I was going to develop my fieldwork plan based on my interaction with them.

Based on the information gathered during my pilot study, I proposed the following plan of action for my fieldwork in Pune-

1. Case studies of three generations of Chitpavan women within the same household
2. Interviews of Chitpavan women achievers/public figures
3. An organizational profile of the Maharashtra Chitpavan Brahman Sangh, Pune
4. *Kulavruttanta* or genealogies of *kulas*/clans within the Chitpavan group

The ethnographic material was supplemented by literature on the caste group- academic and journalistic. Each of these sites for data is explained below

1. Three generations of women from the same family. David I. Kertzer critiqued the polysemous usage of 'generation' and categorized four ways in which the term is used- as kinship descent, as life stage, as a cohort, and as a historical period. While the essay primarily discusses quantitative studies, some of his criticism is valid for our purpose. He recommended that generation be used in the genealogical sense to denote a broad universe of kinship relations. Furthermore, he underscored the difference between the genealogical generation and cohort effect, the latter being "an effect exerted upon people by life experiences attributable to the historical slice of time in which they have lived" (Kertzer 1983:128).

Another significant point emerging from his critique is the suggestion to analyze linked dyads/triads of descendants. This is precisely what my study aims to do, examine the triads, i.e., three generations within the same household, to understand intergenerational continuities and discontinuities. I delved into women's lives from successive generations to explore the shifts in their trajectories. I subscribe to 'generation' as kinship descent, from among the four stated above.

"Age and generation are important...not only in representing different stages of the life cycle but because people of different ages embody different systems of patriarchy, different gender regimes. They bring to the present traces of different pasts" (Walby in McDaniel 2001:200). My study aims to understand the changes in the gender regimes across generations of Chitpavan women using the registers of education, work, upbringing, and marriage.

A rationale for studying families is that individuals

> are closely embedded in intimate relationships and share common understandings with others that directly influence the course their lives will take and the kind of roles they are destined to play on the historical stage, whether in leading parts or lost among the multitudes of supporting actors (Vatuk 1990:114).

Thus, by talking to successive generations of women within a family, I hope to trace thought processes as well as material, social and cultural resources integral to the lived worlds of gender, caste, and their connections with education, labour, and culture. What interests me is the positioning of women and their relationship with being women and being Brahman.

Some of Karl Mannheim's reflections on generations are also helpful to my study since he paid attention to historical, social, and cultural processes in 'The Problem of Generations'. He maintained that generation is a social location based on the biological rhythm of birth and death but not deducible from it. There is a tendency inherent in every social location whereby individuals sharing social location are "limited to a specific range

of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically specific action" (1952:291). The kind of experiences available to the successive generations of women in the same family can help us understand the labour that produced and reproduced ideologies of caste and gender, what is retained, modified, and discarded. These case studies or mini-genealogies of Brahman women's education, labour, marriages, careers, etc., present a picture of the changes and continuities within a Chitpavan household. The criteria for these triads were that all three women should have spent most of their lives in Pune, and the youngest woman should be at least 20 years of age. It would enable a conversation about her life and decisions around education, work, marriage, caste, gender roles.

2. Individual Interviews with Chitpavan women. Interviewing Chitpavan women who are deemed as achievers across various fields was intended to document 'success stories' of women outside of the domestic and seek opinions and insights on the subject at hand from women who interact with all kinds of people as a part of their work. These include educationists, politicians, social activists, theatre persons, artists, and scientists. The idea was to look for women known either in the city or specifically in their work area to do something beyond the home.

The interviews were aimed at two kinds of information- One, their reflections on caste and gender, based on their work and public interactions. Two, to understand how successful women have lived their lives, what kind of support networks, opportunities, and challenges they have faced, and so on.

How do different women make choices around their work and what kind of arrangements are necessary for middle-class women to pursue a career were some of the questions I wanted to ask women engaged in various types of work. This stemmed from research locating 'work' in the lives of middle-class women. Labour is a recurrent theme in Dalit women's narratives, whereas the research on 'work' that middle-class women did was limited to categories like work-life balance[14] (Krishnaraj 1986). This has to do with the circumstances under which middle-class women were allowed to work and the kinds of work accessible to them. The idea was to locate these aspects from women's lives within the larger processes shaping gender roles in the region's social, political, and economic fabric.

3. Organisational Profile from the Chitpavan Sangh. The Chitpavan Brahman Sangh is an association that runs a marriage bureau exclusively for Chitpavan Brahmans, a *Mahila Manch*[15] , and a senior citizens' group. They have a monthly newsletter and funds for educational and medical loans and scholarships. The *Mahasammelan* mentioned earlier was held in 2007, and the Sangh was instrumental in organizing this gathering of almost one lakh Chitpavan Brahmans in Pune. I thought that a profile of this organization, its library, and details of its activities and its publications would provide a sense of the evolution of this group's collective identity.

4. Kulavruttanta. The word *kula* means clan and *vruttanta* is an account. *Kulavruttanta* are books which collate family histories of a specific clan. The lines

[14] In a critical review of research in Women Studies, Maithreyi Krishnaraj lamented the attention to ‘poor women’ and the lack of research interest in the changing contours of middle class women’s lives and work (2005). She critiqued the use of Western theories sex roles and role conflict which were used to study educated employed women in the 1970s and early 80s (1986).

[15] Platform for women

quoted below are a part of a booklet titled *Kulavruttanta: Atmanandacha Ek Anubhav* (A rewarding experience).

> Compiling a *Kulavruttanta* is tedious and painstaking work. One has to think about it day and night; collect information through references using all communication channels. Only then will it beget the shape of a treatise. Till date, just the Chitpavan community has published more than 100 *Kulavruttanta*. This is quite an achievement and we should be rightly proud of it (Limaye 2001:41 translation mine).

I was asked to speak to Sharadchandra Limaye by a staff member of the Chitpavan Brahman Sangh. He was a government employee who had busied himself with associational activities of various kinds after retirement. He was involved in compiling the third edition of the Limaye *Kulavruttanta* along with two others. Mr. Limaye and his two colleagues spent a sizable amount of time, effort, and even travelled great distances across the state in order to track down families and create an updated database of all the branches of Limaye family tree.

Such *Kulavruttanta* were meticulously compiled and revised for over one hundred *kulas* or clans within the Chitpavan Brahmans. The kind of information available in these documents, the nature and extent of information on women given that a patrilineal mapping is the norm, the changing formats over the years can throw light on the community's evolving ideas. The effort, time, and resources required in putting together a *Kulavruttanta* and the motivation to do so is an example of the investment made towards protecting and preserving one's caste identity. While I examined the two editions of the

Limaye Kulavruttanta, the material therein did not yield any interesting insights which could contribute to my work.

Fieldwork: Process and Modifications

My fieldwork, from November 2017 till May 2018, involved interviews with over 60 women. My starting point was the Chitpavan Brahman Sangh (henceforth C.B. Sangh). Their office is in Sadashiv Peth the heart of the old city[16], in the Konkanastha Brahman stronghold. I walked into the office building's ground floor hall on a weekday and struck up a conversation with a bespectacled, sari-clad woman in her sixties sitting at a desk near the entrance. She was a staff member who looked after the marriage bureau. After I briefly introduced my project, some questions followed — "Chickerur is …?" I replied it is a Kannada surname, but I grew up in Pune. "Brahman?" I nodded. She provided basic information about the C.B. Sangh and their activities. She also put me in touch with Mr. Limaye, as mentioned above. I visited the C.B. Sangh office several times to look at their publications, make appointments, and meet a few staff and executive committee members.

I drew up a list of famous Chitpavan Brahman women within the city, starting from names I knew, suggestions from people around me, from the staff of caste associations, and those of a left-leaning feminist magazine editor/activist whom I approached initially to talk about my study. I wanted to interview women across the political spectrum and from diverse occupations.

[16] Rapid changes in the city over the years and proliferation of the IT industry make it difficult to distinguish between the old and new parts of Pune. However, there is a specific section of the city which is referred to as *goan* in Marathi which means village but refers to the area on the bank of river Mutha constituted the core or *polis* from the Peshwa times. For more details on Pune's layout refer to footnote 79.

This list turned out to be mostly women in their 60s or older. My first round of interviews of sixteen women included only two women below fifty years. Of these sixteen women, five had doctorate degrees, ten were post graduates and only one had studied till matriculation. The skewed nature of this first lot raised several issues. While my study is not representative of all Chitpavan Brahman women in the city, I wanted to engage with various positions within this community. Another issue was confidentiality. The more famous a person, the more difficult it is to protect her anonymity. I decided to broaden my scope for individual interviews across age groups, occupations, and fields irrespective of the women being famous in consultation with my supervisors. While looking for women to interview across age groups and professions, I got in touch with an acquaintance who seemed to have many Chitpavan Brahman friends on his Facebook friends' list and had spent his entire life in Pune. He was a great resource and led me to many participants and one triad of three-generation women living in the same household.

I enquired about households with three-generations living together to everyone I talked to, including the women I interviewed. A cousin led me to my first triad, a friend to another, and the rest were suggestions that came up during other interviews.
I conducted more than 45 interviews with individuals and eight three generation triads, i.e., twenty four women. This includes Shashi and the Bapat triad interviewed during my pilot. Details of the interviews are provided in the appendix along with pseudonyms. Only five of the eight triads appear in the thesis as generational triads since the other three were triads with grandmothers, daughters and granddaughters. This meant that owing to marriage, all three generations did not live in the same household.

The women included in this study ranged from 22 years to 90 years. I addressed older women as *Aji* (grandmother in Marathi) as per social convention. Barring three women whom I met twice, all interviews have been conducted in one sitting, ranging from about an hour to two hours. The interviews were conducted at the women's homes, occasionally at workplaces, and a couple of interviews in coffee shops. The following section reflects on various facets involved in the interviewing process. I begin by recounting my first interview with Shashi, who appeared in the section on methodology.

Interviewing Women

I undertook the first interview as a part of my pilot with an eighty-year-old woman in her flat in my eighth month of pregnancy. I found myself facing her nameplate with a Dr written before her name, a fact I was unaware of since I knew only her name, address, and that she had consented to be interviewed. I had been communicating with her granddaughter. This interview was expected to be the first of a three-generational triad. The door was opened by an elderly woman of medium height, dressed in a pastel green *chikankari* kurta and *chudidar* with a waist belt. She had short-cropped hair, more black than grey. She seated me in her living room, a well-kept room with a sofa, a bed, and other bits of furniture, brought me a glass of water, and settled down in front of me. I tried to find a comfortable position to settle into before I began. It took me a minute. She gave me a quizzing look; I said, "8 months", pointing to my belly by way of an explanation. "Do you really need to be here interviewing me in this condition?" was her wry response!

The Doctor before the woman's name on her nameplate, her attire, and short hair; I noted all this with some surprise in the first few seconds of our encounter. The surprise was on two counts- a woman born around India's independence having finished a doctorate and an octogenarian whom I had thought of as grandmotherly, her appearance was different, much more 'modern' than the 'typical' saree clad image of an *Aji* (grandmother in Marathi) I was used to and had therefore anticipated. Similarly, she must have taken in my appearance, clothes, accessories, and finally, the fact of my pregnancy. All of this shaped the interview, which lasted more than an hour, followed by lunch, which she insisted I eat with her in her daughter's flat downstairs. “Cannot let a pregnant woman go unfed,” she said.

An interview, according to Ruth Frankenburg, “is not, in any simple terms, a telling of life, so much as it is an incomplete story angled towards my questions and each woman's ever-changing sense of self and how the world works” (1993:41). I use interviews as a method for documenting women's accounts of their lives. Personal narratives are rich sources because “they illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level constraints within which those courses evolve” (Personal Narratives Group 1989:7). The narratives are joint constructions, as stated earlier, but not only between the women being interviewed and me. I also carried bits of conversations from one interview to another; to provoke thoughts of one woman on a topic or point raised by another in a previous interview. This was not pre-meditated, I realised this in hindsight while listening to my recordings. To give an example- I remembered Radha’s declaration about being exposed to the explosive anti-caste writing of Bagul or Dhasal

when conversing with Soha and asked her about reading these authors (Chapter five). Asawari's critical take on the gendered responsibility of domestic management and its effect on creativity, I posed as a question to Vrinda since she was an artist but from a different generation.

I conducted semi-structured interviews[17], guided by a list[18] of broad areas to cover in my conversations with the women, without worrying too much about the order. Allowing for free flow to the conversation with minimal disruption meant that the women brought up whatever they deemed important in narrating their lives to me. While I exercised some control, mainly in making sure the broad areas were covered, there was plenty of room for spontaneity on my part and on the part of the women interviewed. I also used a written consent form[19], a copy of which each of my participants retained.

The interviews have mostly followed chronological narration starting with birth, childhood, household environment, education, school environment, other significant activities if relevant, marriage, post marriage household changes, work, etc. I never opened my questionnaire for any interview. All the participants were comfortable with the voice recorder. Initially, I would jot down notes but soon realized that maintaining eye-contact was better, so I gave that up. I always sat with my notebook open and pen in hand.

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[17] Semi-structured interview is carried out with a specific interview guide. The list of questions or areas on this need to be covered but the order is not important. While the interviewer has control over the interview process, there is room for new questions and spontaneity (Hesse-Biber 2007:115–16)

[18] Appended

[19] Appended

In some cases, the women struggled to talk and preferred being asked specific questions. Others needed little intervention from me. Apart from ensuring that most of my study's broad areas were covered, my strategy was to let the women control the conversation flow. In doing so, they even asked me questions.

The idea of no intervention in qualitative interviewing (Hopf 2004) stems from an earlier understanding of unbiased, objective research. It requires the researcher to strike a balance between being interested and attentive to the person being interviewed but "avoid giving oneself away by reacting personally to interview-content" (Hermanns 2004:210–11).

What I pursue in this research may be called narrative-biographical interviews (Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal 2004). Still, they differ from the positioning mentioned above since they do not fit in with the feminist commitment to 'strong objectivity' (Harding 1993). The narrative constructed through the interview of a person dwelling on her life is a joint construction. It is not a 'jointly told tale' (Van Maanen 1988) where the 'native' and the fieldworker both author the text presented to the reader. It is joint in the sense that neither the subject, i.e., the woman being studied nor the researcher, i.e., my voice, is made invisible. My participation in constructing the narrative, including reacting to the content and emotion shared in the interview, is fully acknowledged and present in the writing of this ethnographic endeavour. I was involved at three levels—first, in the interview process, in narrativizing the women's lives, secondly, in analyzing the interviews and finally creating a larger narrative of gender and caste which builds on their narratives and its analysis.

As a feminist researcher, I had no intention of presenting the front of an uninvolved researcher but had decided to interview people who were at least two handshakes away; they had not met me before the interview. I wanted to minimize the role that my work and political opinions and the perceptions about these played on the responses of the women I interviewed. However, this does not mean that a researcher can obliterate the effect she has on the responses. Our identity is always defined in dialogue with something; we figure it out not in isolation but through dialogical relations with others (Taylor 1997). An account of oneself is a story of a set of relations with a set of norms (Butler 2005:8). This representation of the self is, at times, individual and, at times, collective, based on the social categories one is identifying with at that instance. In the case of this study, it could be Brahman, Chitpavan Brahman, women, middle-class Indians, Hindu, vegetarian or not, secular, modern, feminist, atheist, young or old, and so on. Given that I shared some of these categories with the women I interviewed, the responses take cognizance of these similarities, shared norms, and differences. My position as a thirty-something married woman with an infant[20] was acceptable to the women interviewed, given that most women were also part of the heteronormative family structure. This greatly facilitated access to and rapport with (most of) the women I approached.

The appointment to meet and the interview was preceded by either a phone conversation (in most cases) or message/email where I presented a brief on my research. My surname

[20] My child was born in January 2017, after which I finished my pilot session. I started fieldwork eight months after delivery. I mentioned these details as and when I was asked about my immediate family. My child never accompanied me to any interviews but child care responsibilities limited the number of hours I could spend doing fieldwork each day.

marks me off as 'not Chitpavan' to those who can distinguish castes and sub-castes by surnames. I was invariably asked about my own caste identity. Despite the focus on the woman's life, the conversations occasionally veered towards my experiences.

While introducing myself, I told the person of my personal and professional details. When I realized that older women especially tended to be uninhibited enough to inquire about my caste, I included that in my introductory piece. I explain how the 2007 *Mahasammelan* sparked off my interest in this subject and that this was primarily a study on caste, specifically the Chitpavan Brahman community. Since a lot of research has been done on lower castes, I decided to study Brahman women.

The way this proposition was received and understood depended on the women's viewpoints on caste and their political leanings. Those indifferent, comfortable, or proud of their caste identity readily agreed to talk to me. Those who had a critical understanding of caste showed some hesitation and needed explanations before being interviewed. A series of emails were exchanged with a political activist before she decided to meet me since she declared that she did not identify as a 'Brahman.' Another, a feminist activist, was amused to be identified as a Chitpavan but agreed right away.

One woman, an educationist and author, initially refused. She did not wish to participate in any study on caste. I stated my position of wanting to critically study caste and requested her to meet me and then decide about participating in the study. She kindly agreed to see me, and we ended up having a conversation where I took notes but chose not to record anything since I did not want to cause her discomfort. She elaborated on why she had refused. She was invited to speak at an all Brahman event about a decade

ago. She had been to literary events organized by Dalits and, in the same vein, agreed to speak in this one too. Her panel discussion was on Brahman *Stree* (woman). She mentioned Mahatma Phule's institutions for education as well as an orphanage for children of widows. She told me that there began a murmur in the crowd the minute she mentioned Phule's name. Though not all the audience, certain sections were animated. She also said that being a Brahman is not about the *shendi* (small tuft of hair which Brahman men traditionally maintained in the middle of a shaved head) or sacred thread but more about what you think and do. This also did not go down well with the audience. She had to apologize to the assembly, which was in thousands, and was escorted home by the police. Newspaper articles and discussions on television followed. She was disturbed by the furore that her statements caused and avoided speaking about caste henceforth. She found it astounding that even taking Phule's name is not acceptable. Another observation she shared was that the other panelists spoke glowingly of Brahman women, saying they were empowered a few centuries ago. In contrast, she disagreed and questioned the source of such historical data. She also suggested that I read H.M Marathe's work on the topic of Brahmanism[21], which I managed to procure and read.

[21] In 2004 Hanumant Moreshwar Marathe, a noted Marathi journalist and author wrote a long essay titled '*Brahmananna ankhi kiti zodapnar?'* which translated to 'How much more will Brahmans be thrashed?' It was published by the Kirloskar magazine and later reprinted as a booklet. In a succeeding book called '*Brahmanmanas*' which contains a selection of the letters responding to this essay, Marathe writes of having received immense response and approval, along with brickbats. The original essay had at least five editions till 2014. This essay can be read as a part of the post-Mandal discourse from the upper caste intellectuals. After having 'established' his own non-partisan credentials in the preface, Marathe lists numerous news reports and speeches where he feels Brahmans were unfairly blamed or the idea of 'Brahminical' was inappropriately connected to events and occurrences. He names and criticises leaders, academics and activists across the political spectrum(Marathe 2004). However, nowhere in his writing does Marathe take any cognizance of the dominance of the Marathi Brahman community in western India and the rampant caste-based discrimination which caused hatred against this community.

In the conversations, I mentioned that my mother belonged to the Chitpavan community during my introduction. This led to questions about her family background. Upon hearing of her natal family, quite often, the first-generation women whom I interviewed came up with common marriage alliances, acquaintances, and so on. Despite my mother not being from Pune, the women were able to locate such common alliances in at least three-four cases, which reiterates the strong kinship networks within the Chitpavan community. One is able to create a large social network of the *'aple loka'* and therefore a means of social support whenever the need arises.

While my status is not that of a complete insider, I share a lot of the specific cultural aspects of the Chitpavan community and share the larger Brahman habitus, which is the theoretical landscape in which the study is located and which it addresses. My embodied Brahmanness- the Marathi that I speak (dialect and pronunciation) how I dress and carry myself are products of the Brahmanised habitus that the women interviewed also inhabit.

The references throughout the interviews included me in the collective 'us', 'ours' (*apun, apla, aplyat* in Marathi), assuming that I had the knowledge that was common sense for most members of the Chitpavan Brahman community or mentioned people, and that I knew whom they were referring to. This was true as often as it was not. It would be too simplistic to assume that the conversations with these women were located 'inside' in the anthropological sense of a shared community. Given how multiple shifting identities characterize our lives, the insider/outsider dichotomy is inadequate in understanding the

processes of power and representation (Reed-Danahay 1997). Nevertheless, these representations of the women were made to 'someone like them'.

I seek these conversations to understand how such representations are constructed and what processes make the image that these women wish to present to me, a fellow middle-class Brahman woman. In case of some of the older women interviewed, the narratives at times seem to be suggestions to a younger (woman) member (me) for my edification. An example of this was the Pavagi grandmother lamenting the lack of domestic skills of the younger generation, "The girls of today do not even know the recipe for a simple thing like *besan ladoo*[22]."

As stated earlier, examples of my own life were part of some conversations. These, at times, served as a starting point for a conversation, like my elder sister's inter-caste marriage and the reactions of my parents and extended family. I brought this up to focus on caste if it had not already happened in the flow of the conversation. At other times what I shared was a natural response to the experience narrated by the women. While discussing what young girls were allowed to do or prohibited from doing, I often spoke about my mother having to stop dancing. She learned classical dance, and some people associated with cinema made a note of her after she won local competitions in her hometown. They asked if she would like to audition as a child artist. Her grandfather asked that she be withdrawn from the dance class and take up drawing instead. However, her cousin of a similar age, who was actively participating in sports, was allowed to continue.

[22] A sweet made by mixing clarified butter, fine sugar and roasted gram flour.

My experiences and anecdotes around non-vegetarian food, how much our family adhered to rituals, menstrual rules (my mother set an example by ignoring them altogether) were some of the many personal snippets I shared with the women. Time and again, I stated that they were free to ask of me as much information as I was asking of them in keeping with the tenets of feminist research discussed in the above section. The purpose was —one, to democratize the interviewing process, where I was not the invisible presence but an involved and responsive individual co-constructing the narrative that emerged. Two, this helped facilitate a dialogue about caste within our daily lives (Frankenburg 1993:30–31). While I will not claim that the interviews were conversations that equally focussed on my life as much as on their own, I always strove to let the women steer the narrative by not leading the conversation.

One way of analyzing narrative-biographical interviews is to understand life on two levels- as narrated and as lived (Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal 2004:262), making it seem like there are two levels to the truth being represented by the woman in question. Instead, I follow Scott(1992), Frankenberg(1993), Tharu (1998), Sreekumar(2009), and others; I treat the narrative as a text, a co-constructed representation of the events, opinions, and experiences which the woman chose to divulge with me in the course of our interaction during an interview for doctoral research. I set this up within a context as best as I can recreate it and analyze what the woman's representation can help us understand about the categories we delve into as a part of this journey.

My study does not claim to be representative of Brahmans, Chitpavan Brahmans, or even those of Chitpavan Brahman women in Pune. The study's contributions are to document

and analyze the trajectories of caste and gender in Brahman women's life narratives and set up a historically informed background to make sense of these narratives. The project is limited in attending only to narratives of women in heterosexual marriages.

The next chapter presents the literature relevant to the study's central concepts, namely, gender, caste, the overlapping scholarship, and a historical overview of Marathi Brahmans. The third chapter is about Brahman women's educational trajectory, starting from the late nineteenth century till the present. I argue that a minimum educational norm continues to operate as a criterion for Chitpavan women's marriage even though education progressively increases with each generation. Chapter four dwells on work and Brahman women's negotiations with working within and outside the household. Domestic management is a term I introduce to describe upper caste, upper middle-class women's engagement with housework and analyze the role of caste in Brahman women's various equations with work. The fifth chapter moves from social reproduction to cultural reproduction of Brahman hegemony and presents how caste is embodied and allows women to push gendered boundaries. The conclusion brings together arguments about being and becoming Brahman women along with reflections on theorizing and modernity.

Chapter Two

NOTES ON CASTE, GENDER AND CHITPAVAN BRAHMANS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the first chapter, I traced the journey which led to questions about caste, gender, and privilege, and the methodology followed in exploring these questions through Chitpavan Brahman women's narratives in Pune city. This chapter is a literature review; it lays out the scholarship that helps me formulate the answers. Starting with sex and gender, we will think about the feminist subject before unpacking intersections of gender and caste.

Scholarship on caste spans across disciplines, and critical reviews are available (Bairy 2010; Deshpande 2003; Jodhka 2012; Mosse 2019). I will draw upon studies that contribute to understanding the modern Brahman self as a prelude to the chapters that follow. The last section deals with the historical overview of Marathi Brahmans, specifically Chitpavan Brahmans. I borrow Sudipta Kaviraj's suggestion of history being presentist, i.e., history is part of the contemporary power play; this overview aims to illustrate what preceded and went into the making of the modern Brahman self (Sreenivas 2010:92).

Notes on Gender

In her primer on the subject, V. Geetha calls gender a grammatical commodity that defines how we address ourselves and others (2002). Gender is related to biological sex and is considered a social construction. Gender is culturally constructed. Some societies

have not two but three, four, or even seven genders, thereby showing that the gender binary, which appears normal, is not inevitable. The concept of gender helped feminists demonstrate that inequalities between men and women were not related to natural, essential differences. It became a way of denaturalizing the differences between the sexes.

However, feminist scholars critically examined the two concepts of sex and gender and emphasized the need to rethink the idea that one was based on the other. For example, Christine Delphy suggested a rigorous rethinking of "the relationship between *division* and *hierarchy*." She argued that this was how sex and gender were related (Delphy 1993:1 emphasis in original). Disrupting the earlier notion of sex as biological and gender as a construction, Judith Butler presented both as socio-culturally constructed. Her performative theory of gender suggests that gender is learned from social norms and repeatedly performed. Everyday actions, behaviour, speech, dress, and the prescriptions and proscriptions around these produce masculinity or femininity (Butler 1990).

The shift from 'women' to 'gender' within feminist scholarship is significant. It drew focus to gender relations everywhere, across all walks of life, and it highlights differences, including differences within women. For this study, gender is both a description and the category of analysis. In this study, we look at the gender roles and how especially caste affects and is affected by gender (Geetha 2002:10). Before that, let us dwell on the 'subject' of feminist scholarship in India.

Who constitutes the 'feminist subject' in Indian scholarship?

Feminist scholarship in India differs from the west. Scholars have dwelt upon the uniqueness of the Indian context (Narayan 2003) and problematized the discursive and institutional hegemony of the west (John 1996). While the very term feminism has been associated with the west, we know that 'the woman's question' emerged in the subcontinent and dominated public discourse in colonial India. As articulated in the nineteenth century, the woman's question within the social reform movement deemed the upper caste women as objects of reform (Chakravarti 1989; Chatterjee 1989).

Unlike upper caste reformers, thinkers and activists like Jotiba Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar worked towards an anti-caste agenda which always included the woman's question (Geetha 1998). Feminists across caste lines have written about how women within the Satyashodhak, Ambedkarite movements (Paik 2016; P.M. 2015) and the self-respect movements (Geetha 1998) received, negotiated with, at times critiqued, and took forward these radical agendas. The positioning of priority within the colonial public sphere[23] — between social reform or political reform —led to the complete sidelining of the caste question (Omvedt 1971). This sidelining inevitably left the question of the 'other women' unanswered in the mainstream colonial public sphere. The problems plaguing lower caste women's lives were left to be addressed by movements of their own, like the Satyashodhak movement, which had radical, anti-caste politics (Bhosale 2009). In the following chapter, we will see how, in the twentieth century, elite, urban, and educated women set aside issues of caste, community, and religion in seeking a universal 'Indian womanhood'.

[23] Here I use public sphere following Nancy Fraser who draws on Habermas. It means discursive relations, as against market or economic relations (Fraser 1990).

Gail Omvedt argues that the origins of the women's liberation movement should be traced back to rural women's organizing. Drawing on the events in Maharashtra, she documents women's militant organizing within the ambit of the communist parties (both CPI and CPI (M)). She critiques the communist movement's treatment of the woman's question. Their stand was "to organize women's issues only as class issues and to use women as a ladies' auxiliary to the general movement" (Omvedt 1975:45). The women who worked within the left at times stayed away from 'feminism', which they associated with bourgeois urban organizing and thinking that was not grounded in the realities of the poor. They believed that the Marxist philosophy decisively included the 'woman worker'. They rejected frameworks like intersectionality as identity politics which diluted the struggle. The Indian left has been severely criticized for inadequate analysis of caste and sexuality.

Thus, the Indian feminist scholarship had complex inheritances; on the one hand, 'woman's question' was defined by reforms for Indian women (upper caste, middle class, often Hindu). On the other, the women's movements in India were tied to the fate of poor, rural women (Omvedt 1975), Marxist/communist thoughts, and radical anti-caste struggles (Geetha 2017).

A radical theory of gender needs to address hierarchies arising from interlocking systems of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, region, race, and so on. Writing in the American context, bell hooks offered a critique of the idea of Sisterhood based on the everyday oppression of women. She wrote about how white feminist activists and academics "were not required to assume responsibility for confronting the complexity of their own experience" (hooks 1986:128) and called for the need to forgo privilege and do the 'dirty

work' of introspecting and building political awareness. A similar demand was made of upper caste, middle class women who represented the Indian women's movements.

In an essay written in 1992, Ruth Manorama recalled Ambedkar's categorization of Dalit women as "Downtrodden among the Downtrodden" (2008). She illustrated with data how the caste system bestows 'accumulative inequalities' upon Dalit women. Dalit women found their experiences missing as feminist subjects; they were not considered the 'mainstream' (see footnote 21). Manorama's essay articulates the concept of 'intersectionality' that emerged within critical race theory.

Intersectionality is attributed to Kimberly Crenshaw (1991), a Black legal scholar who named an older problem. This problem was suggested in the title of the first Black women's studies anthology, "All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave" published in the USA in1982. Intersectionality highlighted the failure of the existing theories and frameworks to go beyond single axis thinking and capture the unique experiences of black women who experienced the burdens of race and gender differently. The title aptly sums up how it is the dominant group in the single category being considered- white women in analyzing patriarchy and black men in analyzing race, thereby rendering black women's experiences invisible.

The concept was adopted and critiqued (John 2015; Menon 2015; Nash 2008). With institutionalization, intersectionality became about incorporating diversity rather than analyzing experiences that are rendered invisible due to race and gender, and also sexuality and caste (Baudh 2021). These critical essays help point out that intersectionality is not a conceptual tool that explains identity formations (Baudh 2021);

that ‘theory needs to be located’ and it can be co-opted as a governing tool (Menon 2015:37). Jennifer Nash’s question to intersectional theorists of whether “privilege and oppression can be co-constituted on the subjective level” (2008:11) is significant in thinking about Brahman women as feminist subjects. In her critique of intersectionality, Menon claims that the categories of caste and gender need “to be prepared to be destabilised by the other” (2015:42). However, destabilisation may not be effective. Mary John writes that destabilisation of the elite upper caste subject can have a limited impact. It could lead to a positive transformation in elite woman’s world without changing the larger social order (2015). This is a fair warning that this study needs to take note of.

In independent India, the trajectories of ‘caste’ and ‘gender’ were divergent since caste had been firmly located as the opposite of modern in constituting the modern secular citizen subject, as we will see in the section on caste. The women’s movements in India have always been plural and arose from various regions, bringing heterogeneous voices (Kumar 1993; Sen 1990; Shah and Gandhi 1992). Given the centrality of socialism and the economy in feminist politics before the 1970s, rural and poor women featured significantly. However, a gamut of political, economic, and cultural changes—in the 1980s and 1990s reframed the subject of feminist politics. The questions of caste and sexuality posed challenges to the mainstream (Guru 1995; Menon 2009), as shown in the following subsection.

However, what remains missing is the theorizing on privilege. This study on urban, upper caste women seeks to provide an account attentive to both privilege and oppression without attempting a reductive analysis that adds or subtracts.

Thinking through caste and gender

What is the relationship of a woman with the caste that is bestowed upon her? How does it constitute and interact with patriarchal structures in which women operate? We will trace the articulations of caste and gender specifically from the region being studied, i.e., Maharashtra, within the broader Indian feminist scholarship.

The first articulate analysis of gender and caste came from Jotiba Phule. The radical Jotiba Phule (1827-1890), aptly called Mahatma Phule, connected the complex matrix of caste, gender, and the exclusive claim to knowledge by opening a school for lower castes and a widow's home, which gave asylum to Brahman widows. Muktabai Salve, a fourteen-year-old girl who studied in his school, wrote a searing essay in 1855 called '*Mang Maharanchya Dukkhavichayi* (The Grief of Mahars and Mangs).' Muktabai questioned the authority of the Vedas in dictating rules over the lives of people like her, who were denied access to these texts. She offers an excellent critique of caste-based social hierarchy, which degraded and dehumanized her people. She rejects a religion which is available only to a few. She questioned the conditions which led to untouchability, poverty, and drudgery among Mahar and Mang communities. She showed how withholding access to education and knowledge led to the perpetuation of the caste structure. She observed that the benevolent British rulers were alleviating the misery of her lot by stopping unjust caste-based practices. She offered a completely different view of social injustice which is outside of the discourses of public-private categories and of nationalism.

Shailaja Paik terms Salve's essay a feminist technology which "connected the micropolitics of personal experiential details with the macropolitics of structural

oppressions of gender and caste politics to examine the specific hurdles of Dalit women" (2016:18).

Tarabai Shinde's *Stri Purush Tulana* (A Comparison of Women and Men), published in 1882, is considered among the earliest feminist texts from western India. Tarabai's explosive writing critiques the combination of Brahmanical values with Victorian ones, which led to the fashioning of new womanhood in the colonial period (O'Hanlon 2000). An 'educated wife' as a sign of being civilized rapidly gained currency. In chapter three, we pick up this thread to show how the nationalist project produced an image of an ideal woman whom the nation could be proud of and its implications for the Brahman women.

Women from the 'lower' castes have always been part of the public sphere. They were active participants in movements, documented in books like *We Also Made History: Women in the Ambedkarite Movement* (Pawar and Moon 2008). Writing about Dalit womanhood in colonial western India, Paik notes "how the interlocking technologies of caste, class, gender, family, community, sexuality, and modern secular education shaped and in turn were transformed by ordinary Dalit women's choices, intimate desires, and everyday negotiations" (2016:15). She shows how, in the complex processes of radicalism, bourgeois respectability and upward mobility, "gender emerged as a fractured and unstable category" (2016:15). Historically Dalit women have never figured in the retellings of anti-colonial struggles or women's reform. Paik addresses this and shows how Dalit women adopted Phule and later Ambedkar's agenda. They even subtly critiqued the agenda in the process of transforming themselves, their families and communities. Charu Gupta's enquiry is an important historical work with Dalit women as 'subjects' in colonial north India. She uses representation in print as a critical tool to

show how "social difference was an enduring aspect of caste gendering" (2016:3). She shows how Dalit women wrote of poverty, survival, labour, and drudgery of everyday life as against middle class women's literature which was primarily about "social reform, nationalism, male patriarchy, and middle class domesticity" (Gupta 2016:268). She disrupts an easy "folding of the self into the collective" (2016:3) to map out individual trajectories of Dalit women's needs, desires but also their questioning of "caste hierarchies and Dalit patriarchies through accounts of intensely material realities" (2016:16).

Thus, the discourses which came from the subaltern firmly enmeshed caste and gender whereas caste rarely figured in the nationalist discourses.

Dalit women were active participants in Maharashtra's various political formations in the 1970s and 80s[24], like Shramik Mukti Sanghatana, Satyashodhak Communist Party, Shramik Mukti Dal, Yuvak Kranti Dal. However, as noted in the earlier sub-section, Dalit womanhood was not focused on within the Dalit or the women's movements. The campaigns against rape, violence, and dowry by the women's movement lacked an analysis of caste (Rege 2018).

> Drawing upon Ambedkar's analysis, caste ideology (endogamy) is the very basis of the regulation and organization of women's sexuality. Hence caste determines the division of labour, both sexual division of labour and division

[24] In her critique of Savarna or 'upper caste' scholarship on caste and gender, Lata P.M questions why Dalit-Bahujan articulations are not considered mainstream. She critiques arguments which draw upon the experiences and writings of regional Dalit and Bahujan women writers which foreground caste, class and gender but find readership through Savarna writing. She mentions an array of Dalit-Bahujan struggles in the 1970-90s in Maharashtra including formation of Dalit Panthers Party, changing the name of Marathwada University, post Mandal agitations which find scant mention is upper caste academic deliberations on caste (P.M. 2015).

> of sexual labour. Brahmanisation is a two way process of acculturation and assimilation and throughout history there has been a Brahmanical refusal to universalize a single patriarchal mode. Thus the existence of multiple patriarchies is a result of both Brahmanical conspiracy and of the relation of the caste group to the means for production. There are, therefore, both discrete (specific to caste) as well as overlapping patriarchal arrangements (Rege 2018).

Rege sums up how the ideology of caste and patriarchy operates on women's bodies. While we take up labour in chapter four, it is crucial to understand endogamy and violence as registers for the perpetuation of caste. The role of marriage and female sexuality in enforcing caste has received considerable attention from scholars. Nur Yalman (1963) examined the association between rituals around female sexuality and caste observed across India and Ceylon's social groups. In one of the foremost essays on women and caste, Leela Dube noted how there are "determinate ways in which women are objectified and become instruments in- even as they introduce flexibility to- the structure and processes implicated in the reproduction of caste" (2003) and went on to examine food, rituals, marriage, and sexuality as arenas where caste is reproduced. Women's role in the reproduction of caste has been significant, and their agency has meant pushing traditional boundaries or fortifying them through their rigid adherence. Both these trajectories have been studied in the case of Brahman women until the twentieth century. Brahmanical patriarchy[25] devised a rigid code of conduct sternly

[25] Uma Chakravarti proposed the term Brahmanical patriarchy and proposed that it was a system based on caste and gender hierarchies developed to preserve control over land, power and ensure caste purity. It defined roles for not just the upper caste women but strict norms of conduct for all sections of society.

imposed on the women within their community, which was fortified during the reign of the Peshwas, with its seat of power in the Pune region (Chakravarti 1993a, 2003). Brahman women's complicity helped the evolution of the caste structure to its rigid form even as their bodies served as the epitome of caste purity. Women's cooperation was enlisted "by various means: ideology, economic dependency on the male head of the family, class privileges and veneration bestowed upon conforming women of the upper classes and finally the use of force when required" (1993, p 580). Thus, women played a vital role in the social reproduction of caste. Their agency and the social, political, and cultural upheavals that the community has been through have shaped the discourses around contemporary Brahmin identity.

In their thought-provoking essay, Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana critique the visibility of a particular kind of women facilitated by feminist activism, which blocks collaborative possibilities with subaltern movements. The essay problematized the politically neutral Indian citizen subject and pushed for engagement with "issues of caste, and religious affiliation/community and with new problems emerging from 'liberalization' of the economy" (1996:234), which were brought forth in the Mandal/Masjid/Fund Bank[26] years. They noted that "The human appears as substantive base that precedes and somehow remains *prior* to and outside of structurings of gender, class, caste and community" (1996:235), and this 'human' who is devoid of historical and social context, passes off as 'common sense.' They highlighted the need to unpack the

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While the lower caste women tilled the land and the upper caste women were restricted to the household. For more see (Chakravarti 1993a).

[26] Tharu and Niranjana use the term to denote the anti-reservations agitations sparked off by the Mandal commission report, the communal conflicts following the demolition of Babri Masjid and the cry for Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the structural adjustment policies adopted in India in the 1990s.

role of caste in the making of the middle class woman since the category 'woman,' and therefore, the field of feminist thought continued to obscure the 'other' woman[27].

In the first chapter, I referred to how I learned about and took to a feminist ideology before learning to think critically about caste, to 'see' my privilege. The understanding of hierarchy based on sexual difference was easier to grasp as an upper caste, middle class woman, whereas the articulation and acknowledgment of privilege based on one's caste (as also class, religion, and sexual orientation) was a much more challenging endeavour with which even the feminist scholarship is still struggling. Rupturing a sisterhood based on 'common oppression,' non- Savarna women, as well as those from minorities, (religious, sexual and those based on non-binary gender identities), have deepened the feminist knowledge and practice.

The pressing need for "re-examination of gender relations as fundamental to the broader ideologies of caste" (Rao 2003:5) upon feminist scholars led to a serious engagement with caste and gender as complicated layered structures rather than discrete entities. Gopal Guru's essay on the National Federation of Dalit Women (1995), Sharmila Rege's proposal of a Dalit feminist standpoint (1998), Uma Chakravarti's *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens* (2003), and Anupama Rao's edited volume *Gender and Caste* (2003)—these texts contributed to scholarship which did not treat caste and gender as separate entities. Anupama Rao asked, "How can theorization about dalit women's difference be politically valuable for us today, when we run the risk of appropriating dalit women's lived realities through inaccessible modes of theorization and textualization that

[27] Muslim and Christian women found space as subjects only to be bracketed into issues of '*talaq'* or divorce respectively (Rege 2018).

point to a persistent neo-Brahminism in academia?" (2009:53). She emphasized on the relationship between gender, caste and sexuality in constituting caste-based communities.

The fracturing of the subject of feminist thought led to many fissures among the larger women's movement. An illustration was the tensions during the National Conference of Autonomous Women's Groups in Kolkata in 2006, between Dalit feminist groups and bar dancers from Mumbai who were newly politicized after the ban on bars that led them to organize for their rights (Menon 2009). In an insightful essay, Susie Tharu observes the effects of such interventions on the elite upper caste self,

> [W]e are confronted with a cultural politics seriously engaged in the making of a new moment in the genealogy of the Indian citizen as agent-self and as humanist individual. It is a moment in which, a citizen-subject beleaguered by the challenges to its authority that have arisen from the struggles of dalit-bahujans, feminists, socialists and a host of others, and drawn by the offer of equality that is held out by a global (free market) liberalism, re-notates those struggles to enable their absorption into its body. As it re-casts the grievances of women and of dalits to present itself as answer, it renders their historical and present-day struggles redundant (Tharu 1996b:1312).

Tharu notes how the upper caste self is adept at re-casting the pressing questions raised from the margins and presents answers devoid of any radical change. Her point resonates with Mary John's warning, noted in the earlier subsection, about politics, which does not change the social order. To address caste privilege specifically, it is crucial to understand its manifestations.

Anupama Rao argued for the need to understand caste as a form of embodiment, the means through which the body is rendered meaningful and expressive. “Caste ideologies draw on biological metaphors of stigma and defilement to enable differentiated conceptions of personhood.” However, I submit that they also bestow power and prestige on persons, thereby rendering “the body a culturally legible surface” (Rao 2003:5). Chapter five addresses the embodiment of caste.

Women are sites of statist discourses, even if not necessarily active participants in development. The postcolonial Indian state had to deal with issues of nationalism and multiple divisions based on caste, religion, region, and linguistic diversity. In the state’s attempt to homogenize and centralize, women become sites of contestations rather than equal participants in development discourses (Rajan 1993). ‘Gender’ helped broaden the scope of feminist analysis, but it was also co-opted. In developmental discourses, ‘gender’ is used as a synonym for women, whereas in academic discourse, it has destabilized ‘women’ as a subject of feminist politics through challenges of caste and sexuality (Menon 2009). Dalit women, politicized as a result of their invisibility from the Dalit and the feminist movement, contested the homogeneity of the experiences of Indian women (Guru 1995; Paik 2016; P.M. 2015; Stephen 2012a, 2012b). As a result, scholarship on gender and caste has focussed more on dalit-bahujan women (Kapadia 1996; Rao 2003; Rege 2006).

Some theorists have put forth the notion of ‘lower’ caste women having more mobility and freedom as compared to strict sanctions on the mobility and sexuality of upper caste and particularly Brahman women, like Ilaiah (1996). This formulation has been criticized. Jenny Rowena also criticizes the concept of ‘Brahmanical patriarchy’ for

contributing to the notion of more freedom for Dalit women as compared to upper caste women (Rowena 2012).

Anu Ramdas is a co-founder of the Round Table India, a blog that has become a space of critical conversation on caste. She observes how writings of mainstream, anti-caste feminists locate the Dalit home as a site of violence without examining the structural violence which frames Dalit lives. She is searing in her critique of this as a "prejudice generating exercise" (2012a). She argues that "the refusal to engage with caste while attempting gender equity in a caste stratified society is self-defeating and devastatingly disruptive for feminist struggles of women from the lower castes, untouchable castes and adivasis" (2012b). She points at the imbalance of discourse creation wherein Dalit-Bahujan women's writing and speech appear in blogs without institutional resources, whereas mainstream feminists enjoy academic patronage.

While violence is a significant register within scholarship on caste and gender (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1991), it is marginal to Brahman women's narratives, which form the basis of my study. Accounts of the atrocities in Sirasgaon and Khairlanji[28] illustrate complexities into which gender, caste, and sexuality are mired together. Women from lower castes or minority religions are denied a victim's status, as evident in the judicial discourse on rape and sexual assault right from Mathura and Rameeza Bee's cases in the 1980s to Suzette Jordan in 2012. However, crimes on a middle class woman receive attention, unlike those on a dalit or a tribal woman (Agnes 2015). In her "Reviewing a Caste Atrocity at Sirasgaon", Anupama Rao reports how one interlocutor

[28] Both were caste-based atrocities in Maharashtra which involved sexual assaults on women. See Anupama Rao's essay (2009) and Anand Teltumbde's book (2008) respectively for critical accounts of these incidents.

was incensed by news about a Brahman woman's *mangalsutra* being snatched in a local train receiving more reactions than an assault like Sirasgoan and wondered if it had to do with the woman's surname (2009:63). This points to a 'readymade status'[29] available to upper caste, middle class women, as one of the women interviewed put it. I hope to flesh out this readymade status and show how it operates and advantages Brahman women in the following chapters.

Khairlanji was an important milestone not because of the extreme cruelty of the atrocity but because of the resounding protests and organization of Dalits that followed. Both accounts show us how the judicial processes and the state machinery perpetuate caste rather than abolishing it. Dalit women intellectuals and activists took feminist groups to task over their silence over Khairlanji (Forum Against Oppression of Women 2009).

Violence provides a good illustration of how caste and gender as analytical categories produce different kinds of experiences for women across the caste hierarchy. An analysis of violence against women reveals that the incidence of dowry deaths, violent control, and regulation of women's mobility and sexuality is frequent among the dominant upper castes. However, Dalit women are more likely to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault, and physical violence at the workplace and in public (Rege 2018). I emphasize the absence of violence from Brahman women's narratives presented here, not to be taken as an absence of domestic abuse, workplace harassment, and other vulnerabilities in the lives of upper caste women, but to indicate the impact of caste

[29] Neelima's quote on 'readymade high status' appears in chapter 5 in a sub-section on education as a value.

privilege. 'Upper' caste urban women as gendered subjects do not foreground sexual violence, unlike Dalit women (Guru 1995).

Work on non-dalit women highlights the role of endogamy, which Ambedkar emphasized as an important means of enforcing caste. Work on women, land, and marriages among Jats in Haryana (Chowdhry 2007) shows that the response to non-endogamous unions depends on the caste and class of the people involved and insists that these threats to such unions need to be understood with regard to the political economy which they may destabilize. Janaki Abraham emphasizes the shifting boundaries of endogamy across time and context and the nature of its enforcement (Abraham 2014).

Two important contributions on privileged women have been an ethnographic work on urban middle class women in Calcutta (Donner 2008) and a study of dominant women in Kerala (Sreekumar 2009). The former brings out women's agency in a submissive state of motherhood but treats the middle class women as almost a homogenous group. Sharmila Sreekumar uses the term 'dominant women' to describe the women of relative privilege and maintains that the term "allows for simultaneity of being oppressed and not" (2009:13). She problematizes the category of 'ordinary' women noting how it gives the deceptive impression of being "artlessly apolitical, of being faintly democratic, unassertive and acceptable" (2009:20). However, 'ordinary' women have social sanction through discourses which facilitate the ease of being 'ordinary.' She says that "the hegemony of the 'ordinary' lies in its ability to ignore the claims of 'others' to dignity, equality, and often enough, humanity" (2009:20–22). Thus, the intersection of privilege, normativity, ordinariness, and ideality consolidates a position of dominance for some women. We will be encountering such lives in the chapters that follow.

The literature on gender and caste has emphasized women's role in the upkeep of caste and examined various mechanisms through which this is done. However, their agency in reproducing caste is not adequately addressed. One finds Brahmin women represented as 'political agents' and members of right wing groups such as Rashtriya Sevika Samiti (Bacchetta 2004; Sarkar 1992; Sarkar and Butalia 1995; Vindhya 2007) or under the broad label of the 'urban' woman in contemporary debates (Srilatha 1999; Thapan 2004). Thus, we do not have contemporary narratives of Brahman women's lives which could allow us to understand the complexities of privilege interacting with patriarchy. This study hopes to fill this gap.

Now we examine the scholarship on caste.

The Caste-d lifeworlds of Brahmans

"What does it means to be a Brahmin today?" Ramesh Bairy's sociological exploration (2010) on Brahmins in Karnataka lays the foundation for my work on Chitpavan Brahman women in Pune. Bairy's project is to sociologically describe what has been considered a homogenous 'other' of caste studies so far.

> The question of the 'presents' of caste…: what is happening to the hierarchal principles of caste, the meanings and the kind of legitimacy that actors inside the world of caste are according to their 'caste-ness,' the objective and subjective forms that caste takes in contemporary society and the 'modernity' of caste expressions (Bairy 2010:4).

According to Bairy, existing studies could be crudely clubbed into the twin registers of legitimation-contestation and dominance-resistance. That this framing is limiting and

there is more to the worlds of caste than these twin registers can offer becomes his rationale for setting up his study the way he does. He engages with the work and criticism of M.S. Srinivas, Andre Beteille, Dipankar Gupta. He especially disagrees with the thesis that caste is disappearing except in democratic politics. The studies that focus on caste from below or the 'lower castes' are distinguished from earlier work by their realization that caste continues to determine individual life chances today.

Bairy's critique to this approach is their sole framing of the caste question as one of dominance, leaving out deliberations on "internal structuring of caste consciousness and change" (2010:11) without giving a sense of the lifeworlds of the communities under consideration. These studies locate caste in certain people and places and thereby invisibilize the 'casteness' of others. So caste is particularised to certain spaces and people "in politics, 'lower castes' and their movements and assertions, governmentality, villages, private/domestic realm, 'tradition' and so on and consequently its erasure from the converse- urban, secular modern, 'upper' caste' etc.- which is problematic" (Bairy 2010:15). Intellectuals like Jotiba Phule, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, Periyar and later anti-caste movements and activists highlighted and analysed the ability of caste to reinvent itself. They pointed out how elite castes had used their privilege by shrugging off markers of caste and becoming the spokespersons of modernity.

Bairy marks a decline in caste studies in sociology and explores work in other social sciences like political science and history. He notes the contribution of historians like Bernard Cohn and Nicholas Dirks in showing the far-reaching effects of colonial rule on our understanding of caste but notes that these overemphasized the governmentality of caste.

The Brahmin is a prominent figure in discourses on caste, but scant literature describes who the Brahmin are and what kind of changes have taken place in their lives. So the Brahmin comes across as a unitary, homogenous figure. Bairy illustrates this by looking at MSS Pandian's essay on Brahmin and non-Brahmin genealogies. The Brahmin appears unitary and stable while also speaking for the nationalist, the secular, the Hindu, and the modern. How can the Brahmin straddle so many contradictory pulls and still be stable and unitary? According to Bairy, such a thesis leaves no room for the negotiations of a Brahmin with secularizing and modernizing pulls that might cause disconnect with his/her will to dominate (2010: 26).

Chris Fuller warns us that "caste must not be analysed as if it were an autonomous and monolithic institution with either a uniformly determinant role in structuring society or a consistent set of meanings attached to it" (1996:15). Therefore, I pay attention to the dynamic, modern nature of caste, the various sites where it appears, and what it structures. Bairy proposes that when caste is viewed only as a means of dominance, the internal structuring within caste groups, the various negotiations of the actors with their 'caste-d' selves, the challenges from the 'others,' the new spaces of caste enunciation get left out. Bairy views 'caste in/and/as identity'. Identification is simultaneously a process of othering. It is a given culture that provides context to identify as someone. Identity is internal and external- what one thinks of oneself and how one is perceived, and the reactions to that perception (Bairy 2010:38–39).

Bairy presents a complex picture; he points at the contradictory self-identity of Brahmins - it is not exclusively in dialogue with the other nor only through one's contexts. Some may even convince themselves that they are now outside caste. Privatization of caste is

one strategy adopted in making sense of their casteness. Bairy also looks at the idea of the community under siege and how that affects organizational efforts. For Kannada Brahmins, apart from endogamy being a resilient feature, everyday fields of interactions, ostensibly secularized, are overwhelmingly contained within the Brahmin fold (2010: 300). This is true of Pune's Chitpavan Brahmans as well. 'Casteness' continues to be a significant resource in the social networks for Brahmans.

Chris Fuller and Haripriya Narasimhan use ethnographical fieldwork and earlier studies to draw up a detailed picture of what they consider an unusual group, a social class in the Weberian sense, of Tamil Brahmans. Their study seeks to explain "how and why privileged status within a hierarchical society can be perpetuated in the face of major social, cultural, economic, political and ideological changes that might have expected to undermine it completely" (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014:4). The central thesis here is the isomorphism of Brahmanism and middle-classness. Fuller and Narasimhan differ from Bairy in saying that Tamil Brahmans see themselves as modern and authentically traditional. An important marker of their modernity is the improvement in the position of Tamil Brahman women. They also consider themselves 'custodians of great tradition of Sanskritic Hinduism, and classical, south Indian music and dance' (2014:211)

Discourses on caste have diversified from thinking of caste as primitive and traditional. Vivek Dhareshwar asks- "Would it be plausible to speculate that caste […] is an entirely modern thing, in the precise sense that its invention, as a double of the secular self, is entirely the doing of the citizen-subject?" (1993:117). Satyanarayana and Tharu write that caste is a subjectively effective identity of a social group, a contemporary form of power that structures social relations and state action. It works in updated forms in modern

contexts and institutions (2011:9–13). In the three substantive chapters, we will see how caste continues to thrive through the everyday, be it educational processes, the structuring of labour within the households, marriages, and cultural sites.

While caste has suffered from public over-identification, especially since the Mandal commission, this burden has been borne by the 'lower' castes (Dhareshwar 1993:121). The suppression of 'upper' caste in the public discourses and secularisation of caste in the making of the modern, post-colonial citizen has received scholarly attention. Satish Deshpande traces the over-writing of 'upper' caste identity by modern professional identities back to the colonial times. The coup of transforming caste capital into modern capital, which was carried out by upper castes, was made to appear as "a story about something *other than caste*, like the story of nation-building for example, or the story of a great and ancient tradition modernising itself" (Deshpande 2013:33).

How were the 'upper' castes able to shrug off caste? The Poona Pact made upper castes the de facto owners of the nation, whereas the depressed classes were reduced to the supplicants. The pact shaped how the upper castes thought about the caste discourse in the future (Deshpande 2013). The state has granted anonymity to the upper castes, whereas initiatives to ameliorate SC/STs required that they be identified by their caste first. This anonymity has effectively hidden the past and present privileges accrued by the upper castes and cultivated a sense of 'castelessness.' Writing about the caste census in the colonial period, Nicholas Dirks says,

> [E]thnographic science ultimately achieved its apotheosis in the colonial census, both because of the massive scientific and administrative apparatus

> that the census represented and because of the way the census had unprecedented effects on the social realities it claimed merely to represent (2001:196).

In the twentieth century, the caste census provided a possibility of fixing caste identity without having to abide by the caste-based norms. The postcolonial census continues to be a "site for the cultivation of castelessness" (Vithayathil 2018).

David Mosse suggests that "anthropological gravitation to the disadvantaged is in part an effect of an apparent exit of elites from the kinds of ethnicities/identities that drew anthropological attention, into metropolitan sameness, abandoning historical identities of distinction in response to complex political-economic changes" (Mosse 2015). Thus, the caste burden is borne by the 'lower' caste, who invoke it as a tangible reality. The 'castelessness' accorded to the 'upper' castes led to the invisibilizing of all kinds of benefits accrued from their caste location. MSS Pandian dwells on the two sets of languages used in talking about caste by those privileged and those who are subordinated by it, and their implications for identity politics in the public sphere. One talks of caste by some other means while the other talks of caste on its own terms. He calls the former 'transcoding,' a regular feature in upper caste autobiographical writing, which is "an act of acknowledging and disavowing caste at once" (Pandian 2002:1735). Lower caste autobiographies evoke caste as a relational identity.

Rupa Vishwanath demonstrates how a framework of thinking about caste emerged between 1890 and 1920 through the 'caste-state nexus,' which curtailed the efforts to annihilate it. This framework sought first to elide and then avoid the problems posed by

lower castes. The key features of the public debates were— one, caste and caste discrimination are religious phenomena. Two, the 'social' realm was prioritized for change through gradualist reform rather than through the state's enforcement of fundamental rights to equality and access. Three, a narrow focus on reservations in education and government employment as a substitute for (and not supplement to) structural change (Vishwanath 2014:2–3).

Sumit Guha's social history of caste spanning centuries discusses two registers- hierarchy and political community. He sets aside religious ideology in the story of caste he tells and is "skeptical of attempts to trace socio-economic institutions to fundamental values" (2013:116). It allows us to think about why despite disregard for ritual purity or deritualisation, the caste system does not seem to disappear. He brings out the pan-religious character of the social form by analyzing the political economy of caste across Portuguese, Mughal, and Maratha reigns. A review of Guha's work emphasizes "that endogamous, hierarchically ranked, occupational groups have thrived in South Asia—and in much of the world—both with and without the support of brahminical concepts" (Lee 2015:330).

There is no Archimedean standpoint to studying caste. This study scrutinizes caste in its presents as lived by 'ordinary' Indians, which is mindful of history (Fuller 1996). It looks at caste as a subjectively effective identity of a social group rather than as an objective structure. I take Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's warning about the danger of making resistance too autonomous and also the dominant too monolithic[30] (1993). This study

[30] Rajan compares how Tarabai Shinde's *Stri Purush Tulana* was read in different ways; the feminist reading of Tharu and Lalita in Women Writing in India and Rosalind O'Hanlon's, who located it as a part of the historiography of the marginalized. She observes that how a particular text is read, whether

tries to unpack how 'upper' castes continue to bring their culture and self-esteem to the secular, modern arena while Dalit life worlds are suppressed (Satyanarayana and Tharu 2011).

Brahmans in Maharashtra- A historical overview

Brahman community in the sixteenth and seventeenth century

> In the daksina desa there is a most happy town called Palshet, an arrow's flight from the port of Dabhol, where Laksmi as well as Saraswati have made their homes. In that town lived a Brahman named Kesava, learned in mathematics, of the sandilya gotra, who was an ornament to the line of the Chitpavans, honoured by Parasurama.

Raghunath, who wrote this, was the son of one Narasimha, born into a family of Chitpavan astrologers and mathematicians from a village called Palshet in Konkan, the western coastal region of present-day Maharashtra. Narasimha moved to Banaras and was rewarded for his work in astrology by emperor Akbar. Rosalind O'Hanlon calls this "a triumph of condensed reference" (2010:216). She says this because Raghunath wrote succinctly of the wealth and intellect of Konkan and alluded to the Chitpavan connection with Parashuram by referring to the arrow.

O'Hanlon has written extensively on the Brahman communities in western India (much of which became the state of Maharashtra in independent India) from the sixteenth

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resistance is celebrated or dominance is privileged, depends on the purpose of the intervention and suggests that women's writing needs to recognized also for its conformism and not just as resistance (1993). I find some of her suggestions important for my analysis.

century onwards. She terms this period from the sixteenth century till the eighteenth as 'early modernity.'

A late-nineteenth-century historian, R.B. Gunjikar, identified the following eight sub-castes among the Marathi Brahman: the Desasthas of the Deccan uplands, and the multiple small communities of the Konkan littoral: Chitpavans or Chiplunas, Karhades, Senavis or Saraswats, Devarukhes, Kiravants, Padyas, and Palshe (O'Hanlon 2010:206). O'Hanlon admits that it is difficult to discern the origin of these sub-castes and their names and suggests that these were probably mutable over time.

The early modern period brought its own challenges for the Brahman community. The Deccan Sultanate required scribal specialists, which led to hereditary posts that became well defined over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some families from the Brahman community were able to consolidate wealth and prestige well before the Peshwa regime, which gave Brahman men financial and governing power. Chitpavan Brahmans were known to have *khoti* rights, i.e., the right to collect revenue, keep village accounts, and be influential local figures, right from the seventeenth century.

A significant number of Brahman scholarly families migrated from the Marathi region to Banaras in the north. They made great strides in Sanskrit scholarship across various disciplines.

The scholar households facilitated quasi-filial networks of teachers and students; they functioned as libraries of manuscripts, which was a significant resource- intellectual and material- apart from a source of livelihood. O'Hanlon suggested

> The scholar household in this setting was not a 'private' sphere in any simple sense, contrasted with the 'public' of the city and its political and intellectual life. It was part of a wider network of pedagogy which itself constituted an important dimension of the Brahman 'ecumene'(2011:261).

The Marathi Brahmans in Banaras thought of themselves as the ecumene or *sista*[31] , i.e., elites, and benefitted from the disjunction between royal authority and authority on matters of Hindu religion, which characterized the Mughal framework. However, this system fell apart, and the power shifted to the regions as the Mughal rule waned, and the Maratha king Shivaji gained power from the mid-seventeenth century.

Given the rapid changes taking place in this period, the Brahman communities in the Maratha region were embroiled in establishing their own hierarchies and defining degrees of Brahmanhood. There was continuous in-migration of Brahman communities into the Konkan region- for example, the arrival of Portuguese displaced Brahmans from Goa in the 1520s, who landed up in the Konkan littoral. This influx led to disputes between the local and the migrant Brahman communities.

O' Hanlon mentions a dispute between the Devrukhe and Chitpavan[32] , which occurs in various sources. Such disputes were sent for resolution to Banaras. The Brahmans in

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[31]Madhav Deshpande writes that, "The word *sista* is used by the traditions of Dharmasastra as well as Sanskrit Grammar to refer to a community of social and linguistic elites whose socio-cultural and linguistic behaviour was considered to set the norm to be described by the respective texts of Dharmasastra and Sanskrit Grammar, and to be emulated by others" (1993:75).

[32] Writing about early modern India, Rosalind O' Hanlon narrates, "Some two hundred years earlier, a wealthy Chitpavan Brahman, Vasudeva Citale, was overseeing the digging of a tank near Vasai in the Thane district of northern Konkan, and pressing local people into serving as labourers in the project. A group of Brahmans from the town of Devarukhe were travelling along the road past the tank. They refused the Chitpavan's pressure to join in the work unless he was willing to get his hands dirty along with the other labourers. The infuriated Chitpavan cursed the whole Brahman community of Devarukhe, since which time

Banaras held *dharmasabhas*- i.e., assemblies to deliberate on ritual rights and letters of judgment signed by those present in these Brahman assemblies were sent back to the disputing parties. Thus the Brahman communities in Banaras "were impelled to engage in new ways with what it meant to be Brahman, and to search for new ways of asserting and justifying Brahman authority" (O'Hanlon 2010:204).

The issues at stake in such deliberations were regarding entitlement. It was not only about being considered a Brahmin but also to be able to act as one and be received as one by others. This recognition was dependent on the person's lineage, history, reputation, and also the social relationships and customs and practices (O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008:285).

These discussions over who is a Brahman reveal the concerns of the administrative-political elite, which emerged in the early eighteenth century.

> …the requirements for certain kinds of dignity in personal comportment, livelihood and family conduct and the concord in the conduct of social relations helped to secure the authority that Brahmin men of business were coming to enjoy in the wider world of diplomacy and alliance building. The same qualities also established social distance from lesser and plebian people and particularly from competitor scribal communities who were not Brahmins. The Brahmin communities of the Konkan carried their skills and advantage with them as they moved into the service of the Maratha state (O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008:386–87).

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other Konkani Brahmans had withdrawn from social relations with them, regarding association with them as unlucky" (2010:212).

In the seventeenth century, the Brahmins in Maharashtra were known to work as village accountants, were involved in farming, trading, and these pursuits kept them from following their rituals in a prescribed manner- proper bath, reading sacred books, and sacrifices[33]. Thus the de-ritualisation of caste, which D.L. Sheth spoke of in the context of independent India (1999), had commenced much earlier, with Brahman men taking up 'secular,'i.e., non-caste-based occupations, and freeing themselves up from the performance of rituals.

The Mughal Empire was beneficial for the community owing to the opportunities it presented. Brahmans found employment in revenue systems in regional states. Brahman families combined "scribal skills, religious prestige and access to cash" and thereby accumulated significant property (O'Hanlon 2011:254).

Thus, the foundations of the eighteenth century 'Brahman Raj,' which lasted till the British defeated Peshwas and colonized the region, were laid down in the earlier two centuries.

The Peshwas

The Chitpavan Brahman community rose to prominence in the history of Western India in the eighteenth century. In 1713, Balaji Vishwanath Bhat, a member of the community, was appointed as the Peshwa, the title given to the prime minister of the Maratha ruler of what roughly constitutes present-day Maharashtra. Balaji's descendants continued as Peshwas and ruled the region till 1818 when they were defeated by the British.

[33] A south Indian Sanskrit poet noted with sarcasm that not only had the occupations taken precedence but instead of the Vedas, Brahmins taught their boys the language of the Yavanas (the Mughal or Muslim) in pursuit of state service but at the cost of traditional learning (O'Hanlon and Minkowski 2008:400)

Scholarship on the community's occupational patterns suggests that they have never had an exclusively traditional occupation associated with their caste, which led to great flexibility. They branched out into many new professions in the eighteenth century, as seen earlier and even more so in the nineteenth century (Patterson 1970:395–96). They had no recognized aristocracy or caste Panchayats, which governed their way of life. Their literacy served them in maintaining dominance over the Maharashtrian society (Johnson 1970).

David Washbrook argued that the Maratha Brahmans- by which he means the Brahmans from western India and includes various sub-castes, including Chitpavan Brahman- offered a new modern 'secular' Brahminism. They learned the Mughal revenue field survey techniques to maintain their influence at the ruler's courts after the arrival of the literate Kayastha community from the north along with Mughal rulers. Tamil Brahmans later followed this model. Washbrook observed,

> Even more dramatically, they also promoted the increasing dominance of 'the pen' over 'the sword': where those with command of cash could buy military power, displacing the importance of the hereditary warriors who, previously, had supplied the majority of India's rulers. Notoriously, at the turn of the eighteenth century, the Chitpavan Brahmin Peshwas, who had been the administrators of the Rajas of Satara—heirs to Shivaji's first, expansive Maratha kingdom—swept aside their erstwhile masters to take over effective leadership of the Maratha Confederacy for themselves. For a rare moment in India's history, Brahmins enjoyed the powers of kings (2010:609).

The Peshwa rule was known as ‘Brahmanya Raj,’ where caste-based norms became legally enforceable. The Peshwas played one set of Brahmins against the other, projecting themselves as the upholders of the Dharma and reinforcing their superior position. They limited access to the Vedokta rituals- rituals conducted by reciting Vedic hymns- to a select few (Chakravarti 1998).

Scholars propose that the Peshwa government in Pune endeavoured to shift the discussion on caste from individual sub-castes to corporate identity and the ideal social practice of Brahman. In 1735, Balaji Bajirao brought out *Yadi Dharmasthapana*, a list of orders which established Dharma. There were 51 items listed in this Marathi document that touched upon the social, domestic, and ritual lives of Brahmans. It insisted on separation from other castes by warning against any practices considered as plebeian. Brahmans were to maintain restraint and dignity in dress, comportment, and sociability and were forbidden from any physical labour. Similar injunctions on bodily dignity were made to Brahman women; for example, they were to carry water on their head rather than hips (O’Hanlon and Minkowski 2008:410–11).

We saw the investment in the maintenance and upkeep of caste that the Peshwas engaged in- both as arbitrators in sub-caste disputes and as the authoritative voice which sought to keep the entire caste structure in place and the Brahmans firmly on top.
Authority drawn from caste was contested over instead of being fixed. The de-ritualisation and deviance from strictly caste-based occupational pursuit were underway

even in the seventeenth century. This also signals the constructed nature of caste-based identity, which transformed itself with changing circumstances.

Brahmans and Colonial Modernity

While dismantling the Peshwa regime, the British rule appeared to be adding administrative and political power to the Brahmans' erstwhile religious authority. A strategic position of mediating between the British and the Indian masses was available to the Brahman communities. The literacy and numeracy skills that the Brahmans traditionally possessed helped them transition with the changing environment of western education and professions introduced by the colonial rulers when the rest of the society was mostly illiterate. However, there were disjunctions in the journey 'from priest and landlord to colonial 'scribe'' (Washbrook 2010:600).

The colonial encounter led to various changes in the Indian social fabric and impacted caste structures. The elaborate rules for maintaining caste, especially for Brahmans, were slowly done away with during the colonial encounter. The limitations on occupations and professions wore away, and Brahmans entered a variety of modern professions. Due to the colonial administration's caste census, one was identified as a Brahman without the elaborate rites and rituals mandated during the Peshwa regime. This paved way for the 'secularisation of caste' (Sheth 1999), explained in the subsection on middle classes.

Marathi Brahman students were found aplenty in the schools[34] and colleges of Poona and Chitpavan Brahmans, in particular, were noted for their English skills. Lower administrative posts requiring knowledge of English were known to be Chitpavan

[34] In 1886, 911 of the 982 students registered in New English School in Pune were Brahmans (Phadke in Rege 2006:21). Of the 384 Indian employed in the administrative services which were an elite group, 211 were Brahmans (Omvedt in Rege 2006:21).

preserve in the nineteenth century. Along with literacy in the vernacular, English gave the Chitpavan Brahman monopoly in the latest communication methods in the region. While foreign rule led to the 'political collapse' of the Chitpavan (Johnson 1970:101), they managed to retain their hegemony and arguably monopolized education and administrative jobs.

Contestations to this monopoly also need to be accounted for, as we will do in the subsection on Ambedkarite counterpublics.

Eleanor Zelliot asks-Why were early educational efforts all non-Brahmin in origin when Brahmin reformers in Maharashtra were exceptionally concerned, even radical (2002:35)? She lists the enormous efforts of Jotiba Phule and Savitribai, Sayajirao Gaikwad, Vitthal Ramji Shinde, Shahu Maharaj, Bhaurao Patil, all of whom were non-Brahmin, a fact that Zelliot insists is a critical part of their persona and work. She acknowledges the support and even the environment set up by Brahmins, who critiqued untouchability and the caste system, thereby facilitating social changes. She emphasizes that in the century preceding India's independence, the education of Dalits was primarily an indigenous effort whose effect can be seen in the educational and cultural progress of the Dalit communities in Maharashtra.

Sabyasachi Bhattacharya sets up important theoretical propositions about education in nineteenth and twentieth century colonial India. He specifies that here education is about institutionalized systems and not in the broad sense that someone like Bourdieu uses it. Briefly, he states that—One, the asymmetry in access to education due to differences in class/gender/caste/tribe was set up within a broader hegemony of the colonial power, i.e.,

the cultural hegemony of the colonizers. The colonial state attributed cognitive authority to Western metropolitan culture. Production of knowledge was in the metropolis, and transmission was left to colonies. Knowledge systems of the colonized were marginalized. Two- in these asymmetries, inherent inequalities in the colonized Indian sub-continent were exacerbated. The privileged, as we see time and again in the Chitpavan Brahman case, benefitted from greater access "to 'English' education, 'modern' knowledge, and consequent access to careers in the new professions" (2002:7). Three- there was an ambiguity in the domain of education where on the one hand, those critical of the colonial hegemonic ideologies propagated 'national education' whereas on the other, 'English education' led to employment and material advancement. Another ambiguity was "an 'intellectual adherence' to egalitarianism co-existing with its denial in the realm of education in practice" (2002:11).

English education opened the world for intelligentsia across castes. Social reformers, mainly from the Brahman fold, spoke primarily of four things- abolition of caste[35], widow remarriage, the abolition of child marriage, and compulsory education (Rao 2010). With exposure to liberal social values, when the non-Brahmans started gaining an education,[36] they attacked the traditional hierarchies. The Protestant missionaries also critiqued the Hindu social order (Pandit 1979). With Jotiba Phule and his associates, there

[35] While Lokahitawadi, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Govind Ranade supported abolition of caste, largely the agenda was taken up more strongly by non-Brahman activists and reformers. One of the most prominent figures amongst the Brahman reformers, Ranade "sought to modernise Maharashtra without disrupting the ties of interest and sentiment which linked classes and castes together" (Kumar 1968:125). Thus, annihilation of caste was not on the agenda for upper caste reformers.

[36] Ramesh Bairy's detailed study demonstrates the endeavour of non-Brahmans to access public services like education and efforts by Kannada Brahmins in pre-colonial India to protect their turf (2010). In western India i.e. present day Maharashtra, while social reformers like Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar supported compulsory education, others, famously Bal Gangadhar Tilak opposed liberal education for the masses (Rao 2008a).

was a movement against Brahman dominance. Phule's argument was "that Brahmans used their secular powers to protect the orthodox religious values with which they identified or to aggrandize their personal positions in some more material way" (O'Hanlon 1985:11).

The Chitpavan community tussle over the upkeep of caste continued; scholarly writing on their fraught engagement with caste status, their own and others' (Chakravarti, 1998; Chousalkar, 1988; Lonkar, 1988; O'Hanlon, 1985), demonstrates their struggle in maintaining caste order during the colonial period. There was a long drawn dispute between elite families in Satara, who called themselves 'Maratha[37]' and the Chitpavan Brahmans of western Maharashtra, about granting Kshatriya status to the former, whereby they could have rights to chant hymns from the Vedas in their rituals. The latter had at stake their claim to administrative power as leaders of the Marathas and as executors of religious authorities in caste and religious disputes (O'Hanlon 1985:26). A public debate held in 1830 finally settled the dispute, which had started around 1820, and the decision favoured the Marathas led by Pratapsinh. The decision was not just symbolic defiance of Brahman power but had practical implications- in recruiting and dismissing palace priests, relationship management between different Brahman groups, and how caste discipline was maintained. The rise of the Maratha identity and increasing claimants to it in the late nineteenth century Maharashtra made a solid anti-caste rhetoric possible. It created a basis for demands for share in social benefits to all representatives of Maharashtra (p. 48-49).

[37] This term was initially used to indicate people from the Marathi speaking region. A second, narrower usage was to indicate the few elite families claiming a Maratha Kshitriya status. The term underwent change, gained great significance under the British rule and was to gradually become one of the symbols of Marathi traditions (O'Hanlon 1985).

Based on the Bombay Presidency Census data, the table below gives us a sense of the community's population in proportion to the total Brahman population (Phadke 2007:37).

Table 2.1- Population of Chitpavan Brahman in Bombay Presidency from 1891-1931

Census Year	**Total Brahman Population**	**Deshastha Brahman**	**Konkanastha/Chitpavan Brahman**
1891	11 lakh 8 thousand	2 lakh 89 thousand	1 lakh 17 thousand
1901	10 lakh 53 thousand	2 lakh 98 thousand	1 lakh 14 thousand
1911	10 lakh 68 thousand	2 lakh 97 thousand	1 lakh 11 thousand
1931	9 lakh 14 thousand 757	3 lakh 2 thousand 530	1 lakh 19 thousand 611

The well-defined community of Chitpavan Brahman dominated politics in the colonial western Indian region. Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, an active political organization, was predominantly Brahman, as evident from the recurrence of Chitpavan members in its managing committee in the late nineteenth century (Johnson 1970). The association of the Sabha with other outfits across the country led to the birth of the Indian National Congress. However, the Chitpavan Brahman men could not work collectively, and Pune witnessed the angry dissensions resulting from differing ideologies (Johnson 1970; Rao 2010). Their political leadership lacked non-Brahman support[38]. These leaders did not question the hierarchal relations of the Hindu society. We look at both these aspects further in this chapter.

[38] While there are several examples of individual Brahman men and women standing up against or writing against caste- the most famously cited instance was that the Bhide *wada* was offered to Phule to start his school for girls and Ambedkar's close associate Sahastrabuddhe who moved the resolution to burn Manusmruti- none of the collective efforts of the Brahman social reformers were designed to address or annihilate caste.

The peasant's revolt against money lenders in Deccan in 1876-78 led to the organization of elite Chitpavan landlords and money lenders. As the leader of these landlords and money lenders, Bal Gangadhar Tilak claimed that his cause was *rashtravadi,* i.e., nationalist, and regarded Lokahitawadi, Phule, and Ranade as 'destroyers of Hindu religion, culture and society' (Rao 2010:19). Tilak's nationalism[39] stemmed from the fact that the peasants were appealing to the 'foreign rulers' to intervene in the situation.

Interestingly, other Chitpavan Brahman leaders like Lokahitawadi were fighting for the peasants' cause against Tilak, making any homogenous political categorization of the community incorrect. Parimala Rao argues against painting a monolithic identity[40] of the Chitpavan community. While much of the political leadership was Brahman by caste, the nationalists mostly came from affluent families, whereas reformers like Agarkar, Lokahitawadi were from poor families. The former were protecting land interests, whereas the reformers were advocating social and economic measures using colonial agency to empower the traditionally disadvantaged. Ranade and Lokahitawadi even wrote critically of the Peshwa times (Rao 2010).

The table below, adapted from Richard I. Cashman's book on Tilak (1975:222–25), gives us a glimpse of the social background of some of the significant men who constituted the Poona Brahman elite from1880 to 1920 –

[39] See Parimala Rao's book Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism: Discrimination, Education and Hindutva (2010) for more on Bal Gangadhar Tilak's politics and ideology.

[40] Sumit Sarkar questions the use of the term elite for the Chitpavan community by stating that in 1864- the Chitpavan Brahman caste included 10,000 beggars and 1880 domestic servants (Sarkar 2005)

Table 2.2- Prominent among the Poona Brahman (1880-1920)

Name	**Caste**	**Father's Occupation**	**Family's Economic Status**	**The generation which migrated to Pune**
Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1858-1892)	Chitpavan	Clerk	Extremely poor	First
Waman Shivram Apte (1858-1892)	Chitpavan	Brahman pandit	Well to do but wealth lost during Waman's childhood	First
Dr. Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837-1925)	Saraswat	Landowner	Wealthy	First
Chintaman Gandhar Bhanu (1856-1960)	Chitpavan	Clerk	A small income, well connected during Peshwa times	First
Lakshman Balwant Bhoptkar (1880-1960)	Karade	The chief clerk of court	Moderate income, not wealthy	First
Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar (1850-1882)	Chitpavan	Government Reporter	Wealthy	Migrated during Peshwa times
Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915)	Chitpavan	Clerk	Poor but respectable	First
Wasudeo Ganesh Joshi (1856-1944)	Chitpavan	Money Lender	An estate valued at 2000 rupees, lived	First

			comfortably	
Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1947)	Chitpavan	Clerk	Poor	First
Narsinh Chintaman Kelkar (1872-1947)	Chitpavan	Clerk, *Mamlatdar*	Large landowners	First
Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar (1872-1948)	Chitpavan	Money Lender, *Mamlatdar*	Poor	First
Mahadev Ballal Namjoshi (1853-1896)	Chitpavan	Merchant	Poor	First
Balwant Ramchandra Natu (1855-1914)	Chitpavan	*Sardar*	Wealthy, aristocratic	Several generations ago
Shivram Mahadev Paranjpe (1864-1929)	Chitpavan	Moneylender	Property valued at 150 rupees	First
Raghunath Purushottam Paranjpe (1876-1917)	Chitpavan	Farmer	Moderate means	First
Vinayak Ramchandra Patwardhan (1847-1917)	Chitpavan	Lawyer	Moderate	Second
Mahadev Govind Ranade (1942-1901)	Chitpavan	Private Secretary	Moderate	First
Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920)	Chitpavan	School Master, *Khot*	Moderate, lengthy lawsuits over land	First

The non-Brahman political leadership was skeptical of political reforms that were perceived to benefit Brahmans. The Indian National Congress also had an over-

representation of Brahman leaders from the Marathi region. While there were tussles in power due to ideological differences mentioned above, Gandhi's arrival proved a decisive break in national politics. It also facilitated non-Brahman leaders' entry to the Congress, which spoke of social equality (Patterson 1954).

The murder of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a Chitpavan Brahman, triggered a violent backlash on the community in various parts of Maharashtra, which can be seen as a culmination of decades of simmering anti-Brahmin sentiment (Pandit 1979).

After independence, the Congress in Maharashtra was a Maratha stronghold, with a rare Brahman leader like N.V Gadgil seen to make common cause with non-Brahmans. Brahmans lost land when the state implemented land reforms after independence[41]. However, many Brahmans populated the lower administration of the colonial government and consequently managed to capitalize on positions opened in independent India's new administration. A large portion of the Brahman community also worked in lowly positions such as clerks and teachers.

Various political formations of the Dalits like the Independent Labour Party of the 1930s, the Scheduled Caste Federation, the Republican Party of India, and in the 1970s, the Dalit Panthers posed a challenge to the elite collaboration of Brahmans and Marathas.

Communist and Socialist parties continued to draw leaders from the Brahman community well into the 1970s and 80s but were restricted to urban centers without a rural base.

[41] Land reforms were taken up in two phases across the country, through the passing of several acts. For details of the history of agrarian land and the effect of reforms on agricultural land holding in Maharashtra, see Deshpande (1998).

Their indifference to social inequality was one of the reasons for failing to be popular among the masses (Pandit 1979).

Pune was the political and symbolic center of western India, where militant nationalism, orthodox Brahmanism, and anti-caste activism found a place. Here it was not just political power and wealth but also the community's numerical strength in proportion to the city's total population, which helped Brahman political dominance until independence. It also translated to their dominance in educational institutions, administration, and professional employment. Today, however, the city is described as the cultural capital of Maharashtra, which, I argue, is also a manifestation of the significant Brahman imprint on the city.

Brahmans and Colonial middle classes

The assumption that class and caste are separate categories is wrong (Satyanarayana 1991:2716). Writing about the complex relationship between caste and class in India, scholars note how middle classes formed during the colonial moment drew heavily from the Brahman and other literate groups (Fernandes 2006; Fuller and Narasimhan 2014; Jodhka and Prakash 2016; Joshi 2001). Middle classes in India, as elsewhere, were significant in defining what it meant to be ‘modern.’ The cultural entrepreneurship of the middle classes gave them a hegemonic presence in the colonial times (Joshi 2001). In his book, which draws on work in North India, Sanjay Joshi observes that highlighting the cultural aspect of the middle class project is not meant to underestimate the economic or historical context in which this class emerged. Belonging to the upper strata of the Indian society meant that the men of these communities had access to literacy and education. Further, Joshi emphasizes the need to understand nationalism, religious revivalism,

language, representational politics, and even feminist politics to an extent in shaping the contrary pressures constituting the middle class in the colonial era. We take up these themes in chapters three and five.

In a volume published in the 1960s called '*New Brahmans*[42]', D. D. Karve highlighted Maharashtra's importance in India's development as a modern nation and focused on the role played by Brahmans in this process. He termed as 'new Brahmans' those who adapted to the changes ushered in by the colonial rule. He wrote of the liberal education received and influences of Mill, Spencer, Mazzini, Garibaldi on this group. They were taken by ideas of liberty, equality, and emancipation of women. However, Karve hastened to add that they did not abandon their heritage despite the inevitable changes to their lives (Karve 1963:4).

I argue that the cultural project of fashioning a distinctly modern identity that Partha Chatterjee addresses in his essay 'Our modernity' (1997) was a hegemonic project. In chapter five we will look at scholarship which shows how in western India this project was led mostly by Brahmans. However, this is not to say that Brahmans were the only players in the public discourses on modernity. In fact, this hegemonic endeavour of nationalization (of modern knowledges, the arts, and culture) was in many ways shaped by the challenges from and contributions by non-Brahmans. The producers of nationalist modernity sought to distinguish it from Western modernity and the modernity that was being negotiated from a non-Brahman standpoint.

[42] He included three sub-castes among Marathi Brahmans- Chitpavan, Deshastha and Karade in this volume.

There were other standpoints which critiqued the hegemonic discourses of the elite men, like Pandita Ramabai. Her scholarly critique of the both the religion she was born into and the one she converted was combined with work which looked beyond caste and sought to address the material conditions of deprivation that women lived in.

Gender roles were an important register for performing both tradition and modernity, as noted earlier, since "both tradition and modernity have been, in India, carriers of patriarchal ideologies" (Sangari and Vaid 1989:22). Uma Chakravarti dips into colonial and indigenous writing "to document the 'invention' of a tradition in the nineteenth century" (1989:104). She presents how a glorious past was created for India in the process of developing cultural nationalism. One element among the several that contributed to the fashioning of a Hindu- Aryan identity was the woman's question. The Vedic *dasi* was invisibilized from these discourses, which sought a golden period for Indian womanhood in ancient India. The focus was firmly on the upper caste Hindu woman.

> [W]hat was gradually and carefully constituted, brick by brick, in the interaction between colonialism and nationalism is now so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the middle classes that ideas about the past have assumed the status of revealed truths…. It has led to a narrow and limiting circle in which the image of the Indian womanhood has become both a shackle and a rhetorical device that nevertheless functions as a historical truth (1989:36).

The class and caste connotation of this kind of historiography is made evident by Chakravarti, where one kind of womanhood is sustained at the expense of the other. Abrahmani feminists have argued that there were four major positions on the women's question: Brahminical revivalist (Tilak), Brahminical reformist (Lokahitawadi, Agarkar, Ranade), non-Brahminical reformist (V.R. Shinde), and non-Brahminical revolutionary (Phule, Ambedkar) (Bhagwat in Rege 2006).

Women's contestations were caste and class bound, worked towards extending gendered boundaries, and played into the fractured modernity of their class. Elite women invented and appropriated the symbols of fractured modernity and exerted power to nominate and represent modern Marathi women. The claims of the women's organizations 'unmarked' by caste were contested by the Ambedkarite women publics (Rege 2006).

This idea of the modern yet tradition loving Brahman persists from the colonial times to the present. It figures significantly across studies on Brahmans, as mentioned earlier. While Fuller and Narasimhan (2014) insist that Tamil Brahmans are both modern but also traditional, Bairy (2010) presents a more complex picture of oscillations in Brahman identity and identification. They also narrate how Brahmans from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka respectively became urban citizens.

Deepa Sreenivas's analysis of Amar Chitra Katha pushes Sanjay Joshi's formulation into the 1970s. She explains how the comic books provided a canvas for "hegemonic ambitions of a modern Hindu nationalism; a refined, brahminised, yet modern, masculinity" (Sreenivas 2010:4). Asserting the cultural domain as the main site of

politics, Sreenivas shows "how the upper-caste middle class consolidated its position in the post-Nehruvian context" from the 1960s to 1990s.

The Brahman community has been part of the Indian middle classes since their very origins. They are shaping and simultaneously shaped by the contradictory pressures[43] of middle-classness and modernity.

D.L Sheth's thesis on making the new middle classes proposes two dimensions in the 'secularisation of caste': deritualisation and politicization (1999:2504). He argues that the former meant a delinking of caste from various forms of rituality, specific occupations, and norms around commensality and endogamy. About politicization, he observes that 'interest' and identity have fused to form common interest groups who seek representation and make way for new stratifications. Sheth's concepts of de-ritualisation and secularisation are useful, even if one may disagree with parts of his argument.

Caste has pervasive effects on markets and the economy; it acts as a resource and network for hoarding advantages and perpetuating inequality. Discrimination is built into economic and market processes, which has received little attention in social sciences (Mosse 2019). David Mosse pinpoints two reasons for this- the treatment of caste as a 'social disability' rather than an issue of political economy and how caste was framed within the political. According to Mosse, the revolution in electoral politics brought about by the Mandal report was relatively autonomous from 'caste economics.' Public policy diverts attention from the pervasive effects of caste on everyday life.

[43] For an elaborate account of these contradictory pressures on the middle classes to straddle both tradition and modernity during the colonial times, read Sanjay Joshi's "Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India" (2001).

> What is required is indeed a multi-level view of caste as a social structure of the economy made evident at the macro level through large-sample surveys and at the micro level through reflexive observation of interactions that reveal caste-socialized subjectivities, the wider social structure being, as it were, incorporated as attitudes, thoughts, and historically embodied dispositions—that is habitus. In Bourdieu's terms, caste is both part of such subjectivities and the social field that produces them with its unequal distribution of material and symbolic capital (Mosse 2019:1261).

Contextualizing the rise of engineering education in India, Ajantha Subramanian's 'Caste of Merit' demonstrates how technical knowledge went from being the stronghold of 'lower' caste artisans to becoming a register for demonstrating state power, economic progress, and upper caste status. She shows "how the democratic ideal of meritocracy services the reproduction of inequality" and argues that "social stratification is endemic and not anomalous to contemporary democracy." Like her scholarship, my study also fills a gap in understanding "upper-caste self-definition and maneuver" (Subramanian 2019:3).

I agree with Ajantha Subramanian's observation that while class remains an important form of stratification, it has not replaced caste. She notes, "continuities of caste affiliation, stigmatization, and ascription within the most modern institutional and social spaces reveal the irreducibility of caste to economic differences" (2019:13).

Non-Brahman counterpublics

The Brahmanical thought of each era has been challenged. Buddhism and Jainism emerged from a discontent with the dominant religious thought. The Bhakti tradition of the thirteenth century, the Mahanubhav, and the Varkari sect proposed philosophies that stood against social hierarchies. Scholars have argued the bhakti tradition was not aimed explicitly at achieving social justice. "Bhakti primarily creates publics. In this process, caste and gender differences are sometimes a social problem and at other times an accepted aspect of the fabric of culture to be preserved and even honoured" (Novetzke 2016:20).

Men and women across castes critiqued inequality and transcended caste boundaries in defining and practicing the Bhakti tradition. Some of the most well-known ones were Namdev, Chokhamela, Janabai, Bahinabai, Eknath, and Tukaram.

The emancipatory message of the Varkari tradition was brahminised and said to be the most damaging of the cultural legacy of the Peshwas (Lele in Rege 2006:22).

Jotiba Phule's Satayshodhak Samaj was arguably the most critical intervention in the contestation to caste in modern times in the Marathi region. Phule re-imagined history and put forth a revolutionary vision with emancipatory gender roles for the annihilation of caste.

Caste got transcoded—written and represented as something other than caste (Pandian 2002) in writings by Brahman men (and women). It was relegated to as 'religious' or 'social.' The nationalist imagination relegated both the caste and the women's question to the periphery and projected a universal Indian identity. Lower castes and women were

rendered inadequate citizens-in-the-making. Scholarship points out the continuities of this treatment of caste in the considerable debate that sparked around the anti-Mandal agitations in the 1990s (Rege 2006; Satyanarayana 1991).

The Satyashodhak and later Ambedkarite public spheres had a different language that spoke about caste on its own terms. They drew on a variety of sources like the Buddhist, Jain, Bhakti literature. Phule argued that a nation could not be formed out of a society based on caste hierarchy.

In the post-colonial public sphere, the modern Indian citizen subject had no caste (Deshpande, 2013; Dhareshwar, 1993). However, caste was brought within public ambit by Marxist and/or anti-caste groups like the Dalit Panthers and the Yuvak Kranti Dal. Comrade Sharad Patil's conceptualization of the categories of *Brahmani* and *Abrahmani* were subject of debate and critique (Rege 2006).

Mass-based counterpublics sparked off by Phule and Ambedkar provided a discursive platform for contesting normative gender roles, countering Brahminical strongholds like the priesthood.

> … counterpublics that challenged the nationalist relegation of caste to the private, fashioned more emancipatory meanings of modernity. These counterpublics came to be stigmatized as props of the British, much in the same way as Pandita Ramabai came to be branded as betrayer of the nation (Rege 2006:33).

Women of the 'lower castes' were included in the non-Brahman counterpublics in the colonial and post-colonial times, not as bearers of tradition or objects of reforms but as active participants of anti-caste struggles (Paik 2016).

After a brief overview of the non-Brahman counterpublics, we look at the associational activities of Brahmans. Patterson speculates that some of these resulted from non-Brahman othering of Brahmans, which peaked with violence that ensued after Gandhi's murder. Ramesh Bairy has used non-Brahman othering through organized movements and writing as a register to understand the construction of and ambivalence in the identity of Kannada Brahmans.

Associational Activities

Of the sixty-four *kulavruttanta*, i.e., genealogies or family histories published in Maharashtra between 1914 and 1963, forty-nine *kulavruttanta* were those of Chitpavan Brahman. Margaret Patterson studied these Chitpavan family histories or *kulavruttanta* as sources of historical information on social change and social structure. These family histories were compiled from family records, collections of historians of the region, sourced from pilgrimage centers. Even school enrolment lists dating back into the nineteenth century, high school and graduation announcements were used to obtain data on family members. Denial of a request to access the Peshwa Daftar[44] to trace family members led to organized action by some of the Chitpavan members. Pressure from the association which was recetnly formed, lobbying by a Chitpavan Legislative Assembly member, and a personal appeal to the then Chief Minister (Patterson mentioned his caste being Karhade Brahman, which is a different sub-caste from the Marathi Brahman

[44] Peshwa Daftar refers to a huge mass of records in Marathi and English, maintained by the Peshwas.

group); all this led to the government granting access to the records to these family history writers in 1938. The man who was refused permission, Krishnaji Vinayak Pendse, published a booklet on guidelines on writing a *Kulavruttanta*. Patterson termed this as the 'institutionalization of Chitpavan history writing' (Patterson, 1996, pp. 397–398).

Why were the Chitpavan families so keen on documenting their family histories? Patterson summed up the reasons thus- "family history writing emerged out of the background for historical documentation of the Peshwai, out of the absorption and adaptation in the nineteenth century of the Western models and from a traditional propensity for classification" (pp. 402). The large proportion of Chitpavan family histories of the ones written in the early twentieth century is noteworthy.

The Maharashtra Chitpavan Sangh in Pune started as Chitpavan League in 1993 and was registered in 1937 under the Society's Act, 1860. The main activities are disbursement of loans and scholarships to needy students and running a marriage bureau. There are various similar organizations throughout Maharashtra, other states, and even abroad, in areas with concentrations of Chitpavan populations. Many individual *kulas* also have active networks and organize annual gatherings with some regularity. They take up projects like renovating and refurbishing their local village deity's temples. Several business and networking events have also been organized, especially after 2007.

Dinkarrao Javalkar was a prominent leader in the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra who wrote in the 1920s of an imaginary Brahman Parishad set in 1950. This text was a response to Bal Gangadhar Tilak's opposition to legalizing inter-caste

marriages. Javalkar[45] described Brahman women as "husband-beaters, smokers and prostitutes entering mixed marriages with non-Brahman men" and also of Brahman men who were unable to control women (Rege 2013:14–15).

In 2007, the Maharashtra Chitpavan Sangh was instrumental in organizing a *Mahasammelan* in Pune, almost one lakh Chitpavan Brahman gathered from all over the world. This is the gathering I referred to in my methodological notes. This gathering prescribed a code of conduct for women regarding their role towards family and community, prescribed a dress code, and endorsed endogamy for 'national interest' (Rege, 2013).

In 2017, a similar event took place in Dubai, illustrating the global spread of the community and the economic condition of most of its members.

Caste privilege

Privilege is distinct from earned advantage because it is systematically available to people belonging to a particular social group. However, being privileged makes it easier to acquire earned advantages. Privilege is multi-faceted and regenerative; it cannot be set aside. "Privileged people are thus typically privileged through having a whole number of inter-related and mutually reinforcing advantages" (Matthews 2013:25).

Privilege is not the opposite of disprivilege but the creation of the one leads to the perpetuation of the other. The latter can imply at least two things. It is the lack of specific embodiment—speech, conduct, appearance which is considered 'normal' and/or the specific skills and resources i.e. various kinds of capital, which the disprivileged

[45] Javalkar considerably revised his position on women later.

persons/groups are forced to compete for or acquire along a pathway filled with obstacles. Privilege then, becomes a pathway which is devoid of obstacles.

There are various aspects of caste privilege discernible in the contemporary Indian context. Writings of Deshpande, Dhareshwar, Tharu and Niranjana cited earlier show us that 'upper' casteness has allowed Brahmans to convert their caste into modern forms of capital, adopt a modern, secular, and 'casteless' identity as urban citizen subjects of independent India. The next chapter shows how elite women were able to set aside concerns of women from lower castes and minority religions and speak for all 'Indian women' in the early twentieth century. Caste privilege makes available subjectivity like the '*pragalbha grihini'* or the cultured housewife to Brahman women, discussed in chapter four. This creates a dignified space for the urban upper caste women to negotiate the division of labour within the household and ably reproduce caste. I will show how cultural capital becomes a part of the collective self image of being modern progressive citizens and the educational norm keeps updating across generations. As I will argue in detail in chapter five, caste privilege has given Brahmans an upper hand in shaping cultural discourses, in this case, of what is called *Marathi Sanskriti*.

In the next chapter, we look at the educational journey of the Chitpavan Brahman women in Pune.

Chapter Three

EDUCATING BRAHMAN WOMEN

We begin this chapter with a lengthy description of a woman's educational journey narrated by her daughter Medha. At sixty-one, Medha had retired from a satisfying career in creating public media. When I met her, she lived with her husband in Pune but spent a few months in the U.S. every year with her only son and his family. I interviewed her in their comfortable living room overlooking a verdant terrace balcony.

> Medha: Let me tell you about my parents. My mother was from Konkan, one of ten siblings. Father also from Konkan and spent his first few years there. Looking at their lives, I feel my mother was quite forward-thinking. The village she grew up in was *Annasaheb* Karve[46]'s village. The village had only the old 7th class, which was called the Final back then, there was no further education available. After that, one could do teacher's training. My mother approached Anna, and he said, come to Hingne. She went there, and because of that, her thoughts developed and sharpened (*vicharanchi mashagat*), a different world, a reformed world (*sudharak jag*).

[46] Dhondo Keshav Karve (1858-1962), also called *Anna*, was a a social reformer who contributed immensely to women's education. He married Godubai, a child widow after his first wife death, who was known as Baya Karve.

Karve had started widow remarriages; Anna (Karve) was there, Baya was there, who was earlier a widow and then married Karve. Gangutai Patwardhan[47] was there, she was a thinker from the Women's League. So it was quite a progressive environment. So in her totally receptive age, she was in Hingne. So from Konkan to Hingne and [she met] all the women who had stepped out during the freedom struggle. My grandfather was a *bhikshuk*[48]- philosophical and spiritual environment; all families back then were poor since there was not much to go by. From there to here, she found a big platform, and she was quite intelligent, had stood first in her class, was observing the women who were part of the independence struggle. She realized that only this Final and training [was not enough] and then worked for a couple of years and then married. Her salary was 75 rupees (emphasizes this) back then, it was handed over at home [for household expenses] since there was a need, but that experience of financial independence and its importance was firmly imprinted in her mind. She got married. My father was from a village; he was the *Khot*[49] , but his father passed away early, and it was a hollow business. There used to be quite a few siblings back then. My father went to the Army during the Second World War, a short service commission, and after the war, he

[47]Gangutai Patwardhan was an educationist, one of the early graduates who went on to study in England. She led an unconventional life by entering into a marriage with a widower on the condition that they would observe the Gandhian principle of Brahmacharya i.e., celibacy.
[48]A person who ran his home on the offerings given in exchange for conducting small rituals and *pujas*.
[49] The *Khot* was a big landlord, who had the right to collect revenue over large parts of land. In the Konkan region, land was rugged, fragmented and villages were isolated. The *Khots* also controlled police and local courts. They were traders and moneylenders too. Many Chitpavan Brahmans got appointed in these positions under the patronage of the Peshwa (Tucker 1977). They lost their powers with the advent of colonialism and later because of land reform laws in independent India.

was in State Transport. Mother only did STC (teacher's training). She decided that she wanted to study. Some time had passed; my brother and I were born. She had never studied English, and realizing its importance, she studied English on her own. She went for a class and then directly sat for SSC when I was about four. My father used to get transferred; we were in a small place where a college had started recently. She put me in class one and started attending college, although I was just four or so. My elder brother was going to school. *Aai* (Mother) was the first woman to go to college in that village and that too, a married woman. When she started going, the professors were hopeful that now girls will start coming. My mother said that my daughter is very young, I need to give her priority, so then I had permission to sit in her class after my school was over, quietly, drawing or something. (Laughs)

Shraddha: This is interesting; we keep saying that such an environment is necessary.

Medha: Yes. So the transfers were ongoing.

Shraddha: Was all this acceptable to your father?

Medha: Yes, it was a nuclear family, just them. The rest of the family was in the village. My father was not even SSC, but surprisingly he never felt that she [my mother] would study and get ahead. Some of his friends and my uncles even told him that he was letting her study, she will dominate (*dokyawar basel*), and he said I do not mind. If she studies, I will learn

> something new, and I will also indirectly get educated. He was quite open-minded. She went to a different college due to transfers, and again because of her, more girls started coming to college. This famous professor was amazed at her coming to study so late, a married woman from the middle-class.
>
> She took Hindi, had a scholarship from the state government because of some exams she had passed, and needed to be in Pune for her master's in Hindi. Now looking back, I feel that my father's support was not superficial. They kept my brother in a hostel in Mumbai; I was in Hingne, my father in another town, and my mother in Pune. Four people in four places; during her B.A. year. It must have been inconvenient for my father. Nevertheless, he was ready to do that. He took pride in her intelligence and that she was studying. He was proud of her. After B.A.[50], B.Ed and then she started working in a school as per convention.

For a woman born in 1930 in a village in Konkan, Medha's mother was fortunate on several counts- she hailed from a Chitpavan Brahman family, that too from Dhondo Keshav Karve's village. She was born in the decades preceding India's independence when the tremendous debates on social reforms had decisively inclined the public opinion to educate women. The immensely supportive stance of Medha's father towards her mother's education needs to be situated in the socio-cultural changes of the time. A sparingly educated man's support towards his wife's educational endeavours cannot be reduced to normative behaviour for a man of his social group as the snide comments from

[50] Bachelor of Arts and Bachelors in Education

his peers suggest otherwise. However, the discourses around women's questions at the time should be considered as well. The account suggests that very few girls, and only rarely, married women with children were attending colleges in the early twentieth century. Not only was the husband supportive to the extent described by Medha, but so were the teachers. They facilitated Medha's mother's presence in the college by allowing her child, four-year old Medha to sit in the classes after her school.

What led to this encouraging of women's entry into institutions of higher learning? What were the discourses on women's education? What role did caste play in facilitating Marathi Brahman women's access to education? How did the norms change, especially from the late nineteenth century onwards to the present times?

Meenakshi Thapan uses 'postcolonial habitus'[51] to emphasize the class-based nature of the habitus where post-coloniality has impacted the lives of upper-caste women with social, cultural capital and access to English education. Poor, low-caste women did not have access to this kind of habitus (2006:200). In fact, the relationship between English and upper caste women was an important means of domesticating this colonial language and rendering it an Indian language (Chandra 2013).

However, to make sense of this postcolonial habitus and how it functioned in the case of Chitpavan Brahman women in Maharashtra, let us delve deeper into the historical context.

[51] Bourdieu's idea of the 'habitus' is a mediating concept between the individual, structures, and practice; it encompasses " the individual and the social, the subjective and the objective, the possibilities for both reproduction and resistance existing simultaneously and through the habitus" (Thapan and Lardinois 2006:21–22). Thapan uses postcolonial not just to convey a historical period but the extraordinary social condition in which a nation finds itself, a condition which shapes the habitus in specific ways. A dominant postcolonial habitus is produced and reproduced through family, educational systems and other discourses like those of language, culture etc. and it embodies its subjects (Thapan 2009).

A brief history of Women's Education in the late nineteenth century Maharashtra[52]

> Society can be said to be thoroughly ruined when [women] start wearing glasses for short sight caused by studies, when their cheekbones begin to protrude, when they become weak and their progeny short-lived, when their religious restrictions are loosened, when they deride a Hindu religion and harbour a wish to accept an alien religion or become atheists, when their pure and simple Maharashtrian speech becomes adulterated with English words, when they get access to vulgar books like Reynold and Boccaccio which turn their naturally tender minds wayward, when they develop contempt for Hindu customs and caste practices and feel like imitating the foreigners' customs and manners in their entirety, when they drink alcohol to their hearts' content along with men and develop a taste for forbidden foods, when they desire to indulge in English ballroom dancing, when they start to insult their parents-in-law, husbands and other kith and kin at every step, when they begin to like love marriages, when they enter courts of law to break their marriage bonds because their husbands are stupid, ignorant, illiterate, poor, and therefore unloveable, when they abandon their homes to act on stage, when they begin to believe that love is blind and the path of elopement sweet! (Kosambi 2008:2 translated by Kosambi)

[52] Maharashtra was the state formed in 1960 from the Marathi speaking region of western India. In the colonial times, this region consisted mostly of Marathi speaking people spread across three distinct administrative units- the Bombay presidency, Central Provinces and Berar and the princely state of Hyderabad. In independent India, Bombay State was formed out of the Bombay Presidency. 1950s were a decade of tussles over the demand for a Marathi state and also specifically about Bombay city which had a sizeable non-Marathi elite. States of Gujarat and Maharashtra were carved out on linguistic lines in 1960. 'Maratha' was the term used before independence to indicate what is today called 'Maharashtrian', whereas Maratha later became the name of a single largest caste group of the region.

N.B. Kanitkar, an outspoken conservative who opposed women's education, provided this long list of ominous effects of letting women become educated and thus 'free' in his play titled *Taruni Shikashan Natika* or Young Women's Education in 1886. The printed version of the play saw several editions. The play was performed every week and viewed by educated and uneducated masses of Poona (Chandra 2013), which indicates the consumption of this kind of ideological stance against women's education and ensuing freedom[53]. Famous compositions of Ganesh *melas* condemned educated women, reiterating that the private space was the only legitimate place for good women. An illustration of verses used to critique the women (Karandikar in Rege 2003:43)-

There is an ethical and religious crisis,

women too now follow men,

she too prefers to learn numbers,

she can no longer draw the rangoli

but serves it as salt that too

on the kheer

and the rotis are burnt from below

but never mind! She now speaks English.

[53] A study of the trends in modern Marathi theatre, starting from the late nineteenth century shows that the plays of the 1880s to 1900 displayed a fear of the modernity specifically pertaining to "[c]hastity of women, sanctity of religion, exclusivity of the caste system and purity of language" (Kumbhojkar 2016:18). Most plays depicted education has being a corrupting influence on women and leading to social unrest, much like the one presented in the verse in Kanitkar's play.

Kanitkar was, among other things, the uncle-in-law of Kashibai Kanitkar[54] (1861-1948), one of the most famous examples of the 'new woman' of the nineteenth century.

Due to the politicization of caste identities in early twentieth century Maharashtra, gender and sexuality became axes of demarcating non-Brahman and Dalits in the public sphere (Rao 2012a:247). Ganpati and Shivaji *melas* or gatherings were sites of politicizing public space (2012:251) and contesting identities. Pamphlets making sexual innuendos at Brahman women became one way of countering Brahmanical hegemony within an aggressive non-Brahman political culture.

Much writing on the perceived threat of westernization of Indian women was found in other parts of the subcontinent too. Social parody, like Kanitkar's, was a popular medium expressing concern about this threat. Stalwarts of the Bengali theatre were known to use this theme for the guaranteed popularity of their plays. Women's education was deemed as a way of aping the west, and instead, feminine virtues were emphasized, in tracts like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's *Paribarik Prabhanda* (essays on the family) (Chatterjee 1989).

We take a short detour into the tragic fate of Bahuli, which has been included since it is an incident that took place in mid-nineteenth century Pune. This incident illustrates the stiff opposition to women's education and how much things have changed for the women whose lives are presented in this study.

[54] Kashibai Kanitkar was married to Govindrao Kanitkar at the age of nine. She is the author of the first feminist utopia—*Palkhicha Gonda* (the Palanquin Tassel), in Marathi and one of the first women to attempt fiction in Marathi language.

***Bahuli cha haud*- A testimony to the victims of social change**

There is a water tank called *Bahuli cha haud* or the doll's tank in the old city area of Pune. *Bahuli* was the nickname of Kashibai, a young girl who was being educated in the mid-nineteenth century by her reformer father despite societal opposition to women's education. The story goes that some people fed her a sweet with crushed glass mixed in it. Kashibai died of internal bleeding. According to the epitaph on the tank, Kashibai lived from 1869 to 1877.

Kashibai's father was Dr. Vishram Ramji Ghole (1833-1900), a social reformer from the Gavali community and Jotiba Phule's contemporary. His work as a member of the municipal body, on farmer's and anti-caste issues has been honoured by naming a street after him. Inspired by the revolutionary Phule couple's efforts for women's education, he had decided to educate his daughters. Accordingly, *Bahuli,* i.e., Kashibai, his elder daughter, was given English education at home. Despite criticism and harassment from caste fellows and relatives, Dr. Ghole continued his daughter's education. However, he was helpless in preventing the untimely death of his intelligent and active daughter.

Dr. Ghole continued his mission and educated his second daughter Gangubai and even got her married much later, at the age of sixteen to a doctor, defying social convention.

In the memory of his daughter, Dr. Ghole built a tank in the old city in 1880. Pune was supplied water from Katraj lake at that time. The water from Katraj was to be made available in this tank where people of all castes could access it. Dr. Ghole wanted to keep *Bahuli's* memory alive. The tank is a testimony to the difficult path of women's education (Aditya 2017).

The New Woman

The reforms for women can be divided into three trends - 1. The Reformist trend envisioned full-fledged changes at a slow pace which were rationalized using tradition or *shastras* (Dadoba Pandurang, Telang, Kashibai, Ramabai, Karve, M.G.Ranade). 2. The Revivalist trend wanted to combat western influence by a revival of Indian tradition (Tilak, Arya Samaj) and 3. The Radical trend included those with a radical vision based on equality like Phule, Savitribai, Agarkar, Pandita Ramabai, and institutions like Satyashodhak (Wamburkar-Utagikar 2009).

Despite harsh criticism and the cruel treatment meted out to *Bahuli*, women's education gradually became accepted[55]. The 'new woman' of the late nineteenth century, the predecessor of the women we encounter in this study, was a central figure in the debates which occupied colonial Indian society. The women's question assumed political significance as one of the many issues whose resolution was imperative for forming a free Indian nation (Chatterjee 1989; Mazumdar 1985). Education in colonial India was proving to be an essential means of familial mobility (Karlekar 1986). Views on women's education were crucial in the discursive churning, which gave birth to modern Indian society.

Positions on whether and how much women should be educated were extensively discussed in newspapers and magazines. The British colonizers' discourses- of missionaries and governing officials- assumed the stance of a civilizing force that could

[55] Shailaja Paik's research on colonial and postcolonial experiences and everyday struggles of Dalit women in Pune provides a detailed and complex account of Dalit women's education which is fundamentally different from the narratives in this thesis. She provides a view from the standpoint of caste disprivilege within the same city where *svaabhimaan* (respect) and *svaavalamban* (self-reliance) were crucial in Dalit pursuit of education (2014).

help Indian women. The low status of women in Indian society was highlighted, and Indian intelligentsia's disregard for social reform was used to justify colonization (Forbes 1996:13).

The initial impulse for social reform came from the newly educated urban men wanting to address the glaring issues which afflicted Indian women- child marriage, ill-treatment of widows, denial of education to women. Some like Jotiba Phule provided an extensive analysis of the systems and processes underlying the oppression of women and other castes in the hierarchical society. Jotiba Phule (1827-1890) was a thinker, activist, and anti-caste intellectual from the Mali caste, considered shudra. He worked extensively on the eradication of untouchability, the caste system, and women's emancipation. He and his wife Savitribai Phule were pioneers of women's education in the region. He started the Satyashodhak movement and connected people across castes and religions to question social inequality.

The first school for girls was started in Pune city by Jotiba and Savitribai Phule in 1848. Brahmans in Pune like to point out that this school was started in Bhide*wada*, the abode of a Chitpavan Brahman who supported Jotiba's cause.

A group of reformers and intellectuals was taken by cultural nationalism and concerned about the Western influence on Indian society. The nationalist argument about a golden age in ancient India followed by the dark ages created a perception of the past which "has led to a narrow and limiting circle in which the image of Indian womanhood has become both a shackle and a rhetorical device that nevertheless functions as historical truth" (Chakravarti 1989:36). During the interaction of colonialism and nationalism, this

rhetorical device was used for the reconstitution of a host of interconnected issues, including the woman's question. This led to creating a Hindu Aryan identity. This self-image boosted the self-esteem of the emergent middle-classes, suffering due to colonization of the Indian sub-continent.

The 'new' woman, as imagined by such nationalist ideology, was neither westernized nor coarse, like 'lower' caste women. She was also differentiated from the women of earlier generations by being educated and allowed certain mobility while ensuring that the inner, spiritual core of the home was protected and preserved (Chatterjee 1989). Bal Gangadhar Tilak[56] wrote the following in Mahratta, his newspaper on 24 August 1884-

> The present system of education followed in schools and colleges is the source of a great evil. No true Hindu would like to see India lose its nationality its individuality as a separate nation... Nobody can be ignorant of the fact that it is the fair sex that has to play a prominent and a difficult part in the work of increasing the human species. The method in which our delicate sex is to be moulded is far from being productive of immense good (Rao 2008a).

The nationalists saw women as custodians of traditional cultural values (Mazumdar 1985). While men were educated and taught English to undertake employment, women's education aimed at creating companionate wives, good mothers, and class socializers. The colonial state took cognizance of the need for trained professional women only in the

[56] Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) was a nationalist and arguably one of the most popular leaders of the Indian Independence movement who strongly advocated for *Swaraj* or self-rule. He had a long political career and ran the newspapers Kesari and Mahratta along with his associates. For a critical reading of Tilak's work, see Parimala Rao's book *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism: Discrimination, Education and Hindutva* (2010).

last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, to service the medical and teaching sectors and, thus, reach out to more women (Chakravarti 1998).

Thus, of the three reform agendas related to women- an increase of age at marriage, widow remarriage, and women's education[57]- the last was regarded as the least threatening since the first two dealt directly with women's sexuality. However, educating themselves was an arduous journey for the early nineteenth-century women. Not only were they denied an education, but they were also denied the right to speak what was considered proper Marathi[58]. Their self-expression was not only discouraged but destroyed if discovered[59].

Since the colonial state and reformers alike realized that the domestic sphere in upper-caste homes was unalterable through legal reform, there was a need for change from within the household. They felt the need for a female constituency who would mediate between the public and private. Thus, 'schooling'[60] of women was an important way of ushering in middle-class reform (Chakravarti 1998:201). Brahman men taught Brahman women English[61] as a means of embracing modernity but also to produce 'normative

[57] The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act was passed in 1856, Child Marriage Restraint Act or Sarda Act was passed in 1929.

[58] Kashibai Kanitkar's mother-in-law was a daughter of a *shastri* (a learned man) and yet had to say *mumai* instead of Mumbai (Kosambi 2012:10) as it was not considered appropriate for a woman to speak 'good' Marathi.

[59] Many of Reverend N.V Tilak's mother's poetic compositions were found and burnt by her husband (Tilak 2012). To take an example from another part of the subcontinent, Rashsundari Devi's autobiography shows how she learnt to read and write in secret (John 2013).

[60] Chakravarti traces a historical trajectory of efforts to make women 'governable' from eighteenth century texts which prescribed codes for perfect wives who were devoted to their husbands. Women's agency was experienced as a threat and *stridharma* was meant to keep women's sexuality in control. While women's roles were not static, colonial presence rendered it imperative to reassemble and restate reforms for women. The purpose of this 'schooling' of women was to fashion them into companionate wives, good mothers, and class socializers. It was an important subject of discourses within reform across the subcontinent (1998).

[61] Chandra draws upon English and Marathi language institutional records, newspapers, magazines, and other literature from Bombay Presidency to illustrate the gendered nature of the linguistic discourse in

gendered subjects' (Chandra 2013:23). Caste and sexual boundaries were reified in this process which contributed to an 'Indian hetero-nationalism' (2013:80).

The wives of social reformers, some of the earliest women to become educated, became the 'site' on which social reform played out (Kosambi 2008:2). Accounts of Kashibai Kanitkar, Ramabai Ranade, and Lakshmibai Tilak show how they painstakingly learned to read and write, mostly on their own with occasional help from well-wishers[62]. Kashibai's autobiographical writing speaks for those who walked the tightrope of educating themselves through various means and being derided continuously by family members for this transgression on one hand and matching up to their husbands' ideas of the intellectual companionship on the other.

The Poona Native Girls' High School was the first school managed by natives, which provided matriculation level education to girls in British India. Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar, Shankar Pandurang Pandit, and Vaman Abaji Modak formed Maharashtra Girls Education Society (MGE), the parent body of this girl's high

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colonial India. She shows how "social categories of Indian society shaped the history of English" (2013:13). She shows how English was associated with ideal upper caste femininity which rendered upper-caste heteronormative conjugality as normative.

[62] Reverend Tilak briefly tried to teach Lakshmibai but he wanted quick results and his patience ran out. However, Lakshmibai, like many other women from those times struggled to read and write with the minimum knowledge that she gleaned from her husband. She was to go on to write poems and in fact complete his epic *Christiyan* which is Christ's life in verse of which Tilak wrote 10 parts and Lakshmibai wrote the 61 of the rest. Tilak on his death bed did not envision that it would be his wife who would complete it but wrote to a missionary woman willing her to inculcate a poetic inclination in his daughter so that she may complete his unfinished task (Tilak 2012). Kashibai Kanitkar was initially rejected by her husband Govindrao for her dark skinned plain looks and declared that he wanted an educated partner. This propelled Kashibai to educate herself in a clandestine manner. Her brother helped her when she visited her parents. In her marital home, she had to hide her textbooks and memorize while doing household tasks and face taunts when someone found her reading (Kosambi 2008). Ramabai Ranade had a supportive husband but faced hostility from women from her marital family for her forays in education and public life. Uma Chakravarti offers an interesting contrast of Ramabai's education and public participation against that of her widowed sister-in-law, Durga. Durgabai was never offered education or an opportunity to re-marry. Chakravarti suggests that the conflictual domestic situation was a result of the reformers' attention only to the young wife, while leaving the other women in the house to live as per traditional roles and norms (1993b:152).

school. It was started in Huzurpaga, Pune, in 1884, providing education in English, literature, history, geography, etc. In an attack on the school in his newspaper, Tilak opined that it was improper for girls and boys to receive the same education; it would harm the social fabric (Rao 2008b). In another article, he noted that two to three hours of instruction for women was conducive to Streedharma and Hindu Dharma, leaving them with adequate time to finish housework. Going to a school from 11 am-5 pm like boys, where one was imparted Western education, could only benefit the very rich or the orphans who were required to work. It was a nuisance for ten-eleven-year-old middle-class married girls. However, the school's founders maintained that domestic well-being was possible only when the husband and wife were intellectual companions. During a speech at an assembly gathered to set up this school, Prof. Bhandarkar[63] assured the gathering that conjugal bliss (*grihasaukhya*) would not reduce but, in fact, increase when girls were educated (Panse 1934).

Tilak and other nationalists' opposition to women's education stemmed from the threat that it posed to male domination. He objected to secular education with a similar curriculum and same timings as men, being imparted to women, which was adopted in the first high school. Instead, he proposed 'national education' consisting of *Dharmashastras* and a few technical skills. His campaign against education for women, especially English education, intensified after Rakhmabai's case[64] came to light. It was

[63] Prof. R. G. Bhandarkar was an Indian scholar, Orientalist, educationist, and social reformer; he along with Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and Vaman Abaji Modak formed Maharashtra Girls Education Society (MGE), the parent body of the first native-run girl's high school, i.e., Huzurpaga.

[64] Rakhmabai Raut (1864-1955) was born in the Sutar community. Her widowed mother Jayantibai remarried Dr.Sakharam Arjun, a physician with reformist tendencies. Rakhmabai was married as a child but stayed in her natal home and was educated. She refused to co-habit with her illiterate husband. When he went to court for reconstitution of conjugal rights, the court decided against her. Rakhmabai chose imprisonment over co-habitation and wrote impassioned letters in the newspaper about her plight and that

finally settled when she bought her freedom from her husband for a sum of two thousand rupees in 1887, thereby avoiding co-habitation (Rao 2008b).

The opposition of Brahman leadership, nationalist or otherwise, to educational initiatives for women and lower castes is well documented. Phule and other reformers advocated compulsory primary education for all, which nationalists opposed (P. V. Rao, 2008). In 1884, the Sarvajanik Sabha[65] launched a campaign against the Government of Bombay's attempt to reserve scholarships for lower and middle castes in various schools and colleges. They deemed the act discriminated against Brahmans (Kumar 1968:125). However, the colonial educational systems did assist the questioning of caste and gender inequalities[66].

Ramabai Saraswati[67] (1858-1922) was a Marathi Brahman woman, a pioneer in many ways. She mastered *Shastras* or Hindu religious texts and was awarded the title *Pandita* due to her knowledge. However, she critiqued the patriarchal foundations of religions- the one she was born into and the one to which she later she converted. She worked tirelessly for the emancipation of Indian women despite facing ire and criticism from society. Her first book in Marathi, *Stri Dharma Niti* (Morals for Women), written in

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of other Indian women. She acquired medical education and was one of the first women doctors to practice medicine in colonial India. For more details see the a monograph on the case (Chandra 1998).

[65] M.G. Ranade was a member of the Sarvajanik Sabha and this campaign points at the limits of his liberalism. Ravinder Kumar notes that the changes Ranade advocated in his pursuit for rationality and progress, did nothing to address the caste hierarchy in which Brahmins were predominant (1968). G. K. Gokhale's efforts for Dalit education lacked the necessary funds whereas the commitment of other Brahman men like Ranade, Chandavarkar, Bhandarkar were coupled with doubts about hygiene and mental capabilities of Dalit students (Paik 2014).

[66] Shailaja Paik's scholarly work shows the centrality of women's education to the anti-caste movements in Maharashtra. She documents the Dalit struggle to gain education and how Dalit women were transformed due to attaining education and participating in anti-caste politics (2014).

[67] See *Rewriting History* for more on Pandita Ramabai's life and work.

1882,[68] was supported by social reformers and the education department. Her views about gender justice only grew stronger with exposure to America and the United Kingdom (Mudgal 2013).

Pandita Ramabai supported widow remarriage but worked towards other alternatives and designed a curriculum for widows aimed at self-sufficiency. D.K. Karve initially followed Ramabai's ideas when he set up Mahilashram. However, he foregrounded marriage and domesticity for unmarried girls, for whom he started the Mahila Vidyalaya, whereas widows were provided education geared towards economic independence and independent thinking (Forbes 1996).

D.K. Karve started a "Home for widows" in 1896 and a school to educate them and make them independent. He later presented a proposal of establishing a women's university, inspired by a similar institution in Japan, during his address to the National Social Congress, Bombay, in 1915. The proposal was welcomed despite opposition from nationalists. There was a gap of more than thirty years between the first girl's high school and a women's university, established in 1916. It was known as the *Bharatwarshiya Mahila Vidyapeeth* before being renamed as Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thakersey (SNDT) Women's University, following a grant from the Thakersey family.

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[68] This book was meant to finance her travel abroad. Comparing Stri Dharma Niti (SDN) with her book, *High Caste Hindu Woman* (HCHW) written in 1887, Meera Kosambi writes that Ramabai's tone in SDN "of authorial condescension towards its women readers as generally lacking in knowledge, sense, and an independent spirit, and its advice to women on general decorum, education, marriage, and childrearing, had won the acclaim even of social conservatives because, although authored by a woman, it was located within the tradition of an educated social superior (usually a man, but in this case a surrogate male reformer) advising women. The only feminist note in SDN was struck by a couple of acid exposures of women's mandatory internalization of their negative construction by men. This liminal perception of patriarchal tyranny was developed into a fuller analysis of the sacred Hindu books in a separate chapter of HCHW" (Kosambi 2002:194).

Shefali Chandra's work illustrates how the reform minded, seemingly progressive rhetoric around teaching English to women was in fact conservative. Karve made a distinction between elite English education and vernacular-Marathi education which reiterated hierarchies of caste and class. The former was for upper caste women[69] who were also given lessons in domestic virtue whereas English was deemed frivolous for lower caste women (2013).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, girls were sent to school to receive primary education before they were married. A certain kind of training was conducive to being an ideal Indian woman in the late nineteenth century; it became a pre-requisite for a girl's marriage (Karlekar 1986), something that has lingering effects in the Chitpavan community across generations. However, the nationalist attack was so persistent and intense that it slowed down women's education and impacted its content.

Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi is an important figure in the story of Brahman women's education in Maharashtra. Anandibai is famed for being the first Marathi woman to qualify as a medical doctor after travelling to England for her medical degree. She became a doctor in 1886 when most other women could not even access basic literacy. The image of the young woman, who attained a medical degree against all odds, intending to serve her ailing sisters, has captured popular imagination for more than a century now. We look at what part of her story lingers in the popular memory and also dwell on her 'fragmented feminism'.

[69] In Karve's home for widows, Baya Karve who had remarried Karve was not allowed to touch the drinking water pot and expected to eat separately since she was considered ritually impure. While Karve was able to support widow remarriage concretely through his own marriage to Baya, his institutions followed caste-based norms (Kosambi 2007).

Feminism was spasmodic in the 1880s Maharashtra and stopped short of collective action. Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde, Kashibai Kanitkar, and many others questioned patriarchal values and institutions. Anandibai expressed feminist views in her letters at the young age of 15-16 years, in the absence of a robust feminist discourse within the public sphere. She was aware of the complexity of gender relations and her subservient position as a Hindu woman. She was impressed with the nationalist spirit of the time, which made criticism of her own society difficult. Her conforming to the norms prescribed for an orthodox Hindu married woman overshadowed her partially feminist privately expressed views and her progressive pursuit of medical education. Her understanding of women's subordination was privately expressed due to her nationalistic inclination and due to lack of space for women to protest. Her public and private views only coincided with the denial of education and health care to women. Meera Kosambi termed this as Anandibai's 'fragmented feminism.'

On 24th February 1883, Anandibai stood in a crowded hall in Serampore where her post-master husband was stationed and delivered a public address about her intention to go aboard and study. Reproduced below is an excerpt from the public speech where she explained the hurdles in her educational journey thus far-

> I do not mean that there are no means (for a woman to study in India) but the difficulties are many and great. There is one college at Madras, and midwifery classes are opened in all the presidencies; but the education imparted is defective and not sufficient, as the instructors who teach the classes are conservative, and to some extent jealous. I do not find fault with them. That is the characteristic of the male sex. We must put up with

this inconvenience until we have a class of educated ladies to relieve these men.

I am neither a Christian nor a Brahmo. To continue to live as a Hindu and go to school in any part of India is very difficult. A convert who wears an English dress is not so much stared at. Native Christian ladies are free from the opposition or public scandal which Hindu ladies like myself have to meet within and without the zenana. If I go alone by train or in the street some people come near to stare and ask impertinent questions to annoy me. Example is better than precept. Some few years ago, when I was in Bombay, I used to go to school. When people saw me going with books in my hands, they had the goodness to put their heads out of the window just to have a look at me. Some stopped their carriages for the purpose. Others walking in the streets stood laughing and crying out (derisive remarks) so that I could hear (them) ...

Passers-by, whenever they saw me going, gathered round me. Some of them made fun and were convulsed with laughter. Others, sitting respectably in their verandahs, made ridiculous remarks and did not feel ashamed to throw pebbles at me. The shopkeepers and vendors spat at the sight of me, and made gestures too indecent to describe. I leave it to you to imagine what was my condition at such a time, and how I could gladly have burst through the crowd to make my home nearer! (Dall 1888 in Kosambi 1996:3194)

Kosambi presents a complex picture of this remarkable woman. She teases out the tensions between her privately expressed partially feminist views[70] and mostly conventional actions. Admitting that it is a tragedy that she is remembered as the obedient child-wife who fulfilled her husband's reformist ambition, Kosambi 'retrieves' a fragmented feminist image of Anandibai Joshi (1996). Anandibai's account allows us an insight into the complexities in Brahman women's education in the last decades of nineteenth-century Maharashtra.

Educated women writing

The first generation of educated women found their voices and wrote. Meera Kosambi[71] traced a literary tradition of women writing fiction in Marathi and how their ideologies evolved from recording, writing against, and reimagining existing gender norms[72]. These women writers consciously used fiction as a means for social change and wrote from the

[70] Her letters to Gopalrao, her husband, and to B.F. Carpenter, an American woman with whom Anandibai shared a deep bond, are reproduced by Kosambi. In these she documented the physical and verbal abuse of Gopalrao while appreciating his one virtue— his unwavering desire for her education, her belief in gender equality even as she is critical of the 'western' influences, her deep concern for women's health which underlies her decision to study medicine etc.

[71] Meera Kosambi records that Salubai Tambwekar wrote *Chandraprabha viraha varnan* (An Account of Chandraprabha's Separation Pangs, 1873) but Kosambi does not include it in her volume- *Women Writing Gender: Marathi Fiction Before Independence,* citing uncertain authorship. Kosambi however mentions that Salubai predicted in the preface of her book that it will be claimed that an educated man has written the book and not her since she is only a woman. Kosambi also questions the erotic content in Salubai's work and terms it titillating. Salubai wrote that her objective was to advocate for women's education and exhort women to follow the path of true morality and be devoted wives. Kosambi asks how "these noble objectives are compatible with the obsessive descriptions of Chandraprabha's erotic longings and love making" (Kosambi 2012:39) and so on. Kosambi seems to have slipped into the same framework of criticizing women's writing about their own desires through fiction. The result is that Kosambi's volume ends up including only Brahman women, despite the first work of fiction in Marathi being arguably attributed to a non-Brahman woman, Salubai. Women's writing has been criticized for erotic content across centuries. The anthology on women writing in India begins with the example of eighteenth century Telugu poet Muddupalani being called an adulteress and criticized for her descriptions of sex by a social reformer (Tharu and Lalita 1993:3).

[72] The first cookbook in Marathi written by a woman was by Parvatibai. It was a book of non-vegetarian recipes published in 1883. Like others of her time, Parvatibai also felt that educated women did not know how to cook but differed from the others in her enthusiasm for women's education. While her name and address or any details are unknown, the fact that she had documented recipes involving meat indicates that she was not a Brahman woman (Damle 2020).

inner urge for expressing their thoughts on the situations around them. Their writings initially confined to the home and domestic expanded to include the public sphere. They were not satisfied "with the reform initiatives gifted to them by liberal social reformers but instead demanded-or appropriated- rights for themselves" (Kosambi 2012:3).

Krupabai Satthianadhan and Shevantibai Nikambe wrote few of the earliest novels in English by Indian women. These were upper-caste Marathi women who converted to Christianity. While looking upon Hinduism from a place of superiority characteristic of converts, their writings bring alive the lives of Marathi Brahman women in the mid-nineteenth century for an English-reading audience. I draw upon Chandani Lokuge's introductory notes and analysis of two novels they wrote - *Kamala* (1894) by Krupabai, and *Ratanbai* (1895) by Shevantibai- to present a glimpse of their writing.

Lokuge calls *Kamala* and *Ratanbai* 'social novels' (1998, 2004), which depicted the life experiences of an upper caste, Hindu woman's life in nineteenth-century India, and gave plentiful evidence of women's conditions which were in dire need of reform. They addressed British readers as well as the English-educated Indians. Krupabai was influenced by colonialist and missionary discourse but was also invested in the late nineteenth century nationalist ideal of an Aryan woman, who was individualistic but also subscribed to traditional domestic ideologies. In her novel, she portrayed the grim realities of child marriage. She derided the passivity and feeble nature of the typical Hindu wife of the times, socialized to accept duty before self. She emphasizes child wives' experiences and suffering without knowledge of any other mode of existence and their dependence on men. She draws attention to the lack of any outlet or interest outside their homes, which confines them to a cycle of perpetual unhappiness (Lokuge 1998:6).

While Krupabai allows Kamala a feminist stance by freeing her from husband worship-by driving his lover out and then leaving him, she falters when accommodating Kamala's "aspirations for liberation in a society that will not accommodate them" (1998:12). The new educated woman was not supposed to shed her uniquely Hindu virtues of self-sacrifice, domestic duty, and chastity (Chakravarti 1998).

Shevantibai[73] also subscribed to the nationalist idea of the woman as a priestess in the sacred temple of her home (Lokuge 2004:17). In *Ratanbai*, there is a party attended by schoolgirls where Shevantibai managed to present an occasion for a respectable exposure to western lifestyle without offending the strict caste-based codes of the Brahmin girls like Ratanbai. The English hostess ensured that the meal offered is cooked and served by Brahmins. Lokuge reads into such portrayals Shevantibai's pressure to ensure that the right message reached the intended readers, some of whom were parents of students studying in her school for upper caste girls and widows.

Krupabai and Shevantibai use education as a means of emancipation for women. Throughout *Ratanbai,* Shevantibai promoted education for women and simultaneously maintained the highest respect for Brahmanism. Not only does her protagonist find a way to be educated through the support, first of her reformist father and later husband, but even her widowed aunt is saved from suicide and sent to a home to educate herself. She eventually works as a teacher. However, there are clear boundaries to how much and what kind of education is ideal. In *Kamala*, Sai, Kamala's husband's lover, personifies

[73] Shevantibai Nikambe was an Indian Christian woman born in 1895. She was born in Poona and educated in Bombay. She worked as a successful educator, active in reform organizations and a delegate of the All India Women's conference. She had travelled to Europe and America to learn about missionary work (Lokuge 2004).

unorthodox femininity- educated and liberated- scorned upon by both the author and the traditional society.

The new woman for the men writing Marathi fiction from the late nineteenth century till Independence never exhibited independent thinking and subscribed mainly to the script of the *pativrata*, i.e., one utterly devoted to her husband, even in the garb of being modern. Men depicted a limited view of education, which benefitted the husbands and families, and here the writers across political ideologies seem to concur. Women writing in Marathi, starting with Kashibai Kanitkar, envision a more fruitful journey for educated women towards economic self-reliance (Kosambi 2012).

Sangari and Vaid (1989) noted that "the underbelly of every attempt towards identity has been a redescription of women of different classes" (p.12). They distinguished between the 'modernizing' impulse of the movements from the 'democratizing' movements. The latter leads to the democratizing of gender relations, i.e., structural changes- in the division of labour and property distribution. Writing about the modernizing movements in the colonial period, they described their role as "that of "recasting" women for companionate marital relationships and attendant familial duties as well as of enabling middle-class women to enter the professions and participate in political movements in a limited way" (p. 26).

Literacy has played an important role in the shaping of the middle-class, according to Hatekar et al., who also emphasized the demographic angle- "later marriages, fewer children and greater degree of human capital formation" (2008, p. 411). Hatekar et al. studied the age at marriage of Chitpavan Brahman women in 1925-1930. They argued

that a uniquely higher age at marriage of the Chitpavan women as compared to their ancestors and women of other castes was connected to the discursive churning around the emergent nation and ideal womanhood- of what constituted a wife and mother. Initial moves made for women's education looked at them primarily as companionate wives, sites of reproduction, and primary care-givers of future citizens of a free nation. Education was meant to provide them with tools to become better wives to their English-educated husbands and better mothers to their children.

The concerns of elite women differed from 'other' women, from different caste-class backgrounds. The likes of Mukta Salve and Savitribai Phule wrote of human dignity, caste oppression. Savitribai was the first woman to connect and analyse patriarchy and caste together (Mani and Sardar 2008). These women along with men from their communities, sought to fashion a different colonial modernity, one which resisted social evils of caste. However, the circulation of novels like *Kamala* and *Ratanbai* among the native and international audience helped present the elite Hindu caste and gender norms as universal (Chandra 2013).

The twentieth-century representatives of 'Indian women'

The core of the new domestic ideology was 'schooling' of women towards better domesticity, rather than equipping them to utilize the education received beyond the domestic. The women thus educated were modern but were not to forgo their core Hindu values. Newly defined modes of Hindu patriarchy were achieved through these schooled women, who were both subjects and vehicles for retention and modernization of these modes. Anandibai Joshi, made heroic by her strict adherence to traditional ways despite

studying in America, Ramabai Ranade, who described herself as her husband's shadow despite her extensive work, provided illustrations of the perfectly schooled new Indian woman.

Geraldine Forbes, Partha Chatterjee, and others propose a decisive shift in women's lives in the nineteenth century. The new woman of the nineteenth century was supposed to be educated, with a presence in both public and private spheres. These women were part of the modernizing movement, which sought to alter relations between men and women towards greater equality. They married later, had children at a later age, and had increased opportunities for public expression (Forbes 1996:28–29).

I argue that a few women (many of whom left behind writings like Kashibai Kanitkar, Ramabai Ranade, Anandibai Joshi, Lakshmibai Tilak, Baya Karve, Parvatibai Athavle[74]) led extraordinary lives in the late nineteenth century, owing much to their being Brahman women born in times of great flux. However, the idea of a 'new woman' while dominating mid-nineteenth century discourses, actualized only in the early twentieth century[75]. The changes started seeping in for the women in Bombay presidency or present-day Maharashtra in the early decades of the twentieth century. The emergent discourse of the 'Indian nation' and the ideologies of ideal womanhood significantly influenced the demographic changes noted in Chitpavan Brahman women's lives (Hatekar, Kumar, and Mathur 2009).

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[74] Kashibai Kanitkar left behind letters, fiction (Kosambi 2008), and a sketch of Dr. Anandibai Joshi in 1914 (Kosambi 1996), Ramabai Ranade's autobiography was *Amchya Ayushyatil Kahi Athvani* (1910), *Smritichitre* by Lakshmibai Tilak was first published in 1934, Baya Karve and Parvatibai both wrote autobiographies called *Maze Puran* and *Mazhi Kahani* respectively.

[75] In the Bengal province, independent initiatives had made headway in women's education. There were more than a thousand secondary schools for girls in Bengal in 1881-2 and a few girls were studying in Bethune college, there were no secondary schools in Maharashtra (Rao 2007). Women's education in Bengal also faced criticism in the initial stages (Karlekar 1986).

An ideal nation could only be based on an 'ideal' family, and the woman was the key to create an ideal family- by producing healthy progeny, which was a basic requirement for a nation, at a later age; by being a responsible, literate mother who would raise good citizens and a good wife to her educated husband. The age at marriage of Chitpavan Brahman women increased by 10.3 years at the beginning of the twentieth century to 21.4 years when India attained independence. To put this in perspective, Chitpavan Brahman women were marrying after 18 years by 1936, 65 years before the average age at marriage was 18.8 for women of Maharashtra as a whole, in 2001 (Hatekar et al. 2009:44).

This new woman was decisively the upper caste, Hindu woman to the exclusion of all others (Chakravarti 1989; Chatterjee 1989). Interestingly, the issues of caste and community that were set aside to create the normative Indian woman as upper caste and Hindu were central to conversations around reservations. The representatives of 'Indian women' in the early decades of the twentieth century, those before independence, wrestled with these issues. These configurations continue to inform the vocabulary we have inherited and influence the 'contemporary feminist common sense' (John 2000:3822).

The 1920s and 30s marked a turning point; women kept out of political realms demanded and claimed a place in the action of the pre-independence decades. There was a unanimous demand for voting rights for women across women's organizations. However, the stance for reservations created divisions amongst various groups. Eventually, supporters of reservations for women were either won over or accused of disloyalty; 'merit' alone was the criterion for gaining seats. This choice stemmed from women's

own social location and education. Ironically, these women also naturalized their own right to be representatives of and "to speak for all of Indian womanhood, while professing a language of no privileges or favours" (John 2000:3825). Partha Chatterjee suggests that the 'women's question' was resolved within the cultural rather than the political sphere. Others have suggested that it was their overwhelming presence in the civil disobedience movement under Gandhi's leadership, which led to women's political rights rather than ideas of gender equality. However, Mary John argues,

> the issue of women's rights was much more complicated than either of these two views indicate. Conflicts over the relationship between 'social' issues and the abstract language of political rights 'irrespective of caste, creed, race or sex' took concrete form in the protracted problem of reserved seats. Women's organisations were caught in contradictory proclamations of the 'unity of all women', the sameness of their condition, and so on, even as they effectively 'reserved' for themselves – urban, educated, modern and progressive – the right to represent Indian womanhood. These claims to unity had to be maintained, moreover, in the face of the loss of Muslim women's membership, and the effective disavowal of distinct political rights to the 'untouchables' (2000:3827).

In the preceding sections, we have seen a glimpse of a twentieth-century woman's educational journey from her village in Konkan to Pune and then learning English, going to college after marriage and childbirth, and finally working as a teacher. We then saw the historical setup which contributed to a 'postcolonial habitus' for Marathi Brahman women through the nineteenth century's encounter with women's education. I made the

detour into issues of reservations to illustrate how, in the 1920-30s, some elite, urban, educated women were able to claim for themselves the right to represent Indian womanhood. In doing so, they set aside issues of caste, class, and communalism to develop a secular- Hindu identity for the Indian woman. This is significant given the role it plays in constructing 'Indian womanhood' across centuries and how it lingered Indian feminist scholarship[76].

In the sections that follow, we turn our attention to the experiences of women interviewed as part of this study. We dwell on how education figures in Chitpavan Brahman women's lives and the various norms and trajectories in privileged women's access to education.

Education as a pre-requisite to marriage

Nirmala was born in 1925 and the oldest woman I interviewed. She recounted,

> Nirmala: Back then, there was not much attention on children. High school in Kanyashala. Matric in 1943. The 1942 struggle was on. The environment was all about the independence movement, *satyagraha*, rallies of students, lectures of leaders. The environment in the Kanyashala was different. G. M. Chiplunkar[77] started it to promote girl's education, went from house to house and gathered girls, and started it. The teachers there were mostly widows, separated women who had studied in Hingne and become teachers. When I was in school, Varutai Shevde was the

[76] The empty category of the 'Indian woman' was used to draw up feminist arguments on issues like reservations and uniform civil code which were not attuned to differences between women. For a critical view of mainstream feminist discourses up to the 1990s, see Tharu and Niranjana's article (1996), for reservations see John (2000), for a summary of feminist positions on the Uniform Civil Code see Menon (1998).

[77] He was a social reformer who worked for women's education along with D.K. Karve.

principal who was a child widow and a couple of others. Even the male teachers were progressive.

Shraddha: What was considered progressive back then?

Nirmala: The leaning was towards independence, not loyal to the government. The environment was conducive to the freedom struggle. The teachers had come from different circumstances and so taught with dedication, and it was a great environment for us. At that time, non-Brahman teachers were not there. In villages, there were Dalit teachers. My husband used to say he had a Muslim teacher and a Dalit teacher but not in cities. Education had not reached them that much at that time. Students were mostly from the lower class, middle-class since the school was in Shaniwar, a poor community. Mostly Brahman, maybe 2-3 were Maratha. Cannot remember any Dalit. In our heads, there was no caste since childhood.

After Matric, our university was different; it was SNDT. We were not allowed to go to another university. So I went there. It was a lonely area and no transport, so my father kept me in the hostel. That changed my life. The environment there was like school, liberal- we had G. B Sardar, V. M. Joshi, Dr. Agashe; all progressive people. An expert in English, R K Lagu, was like *Durvas rishi*[78]. Even there no Dalit or backward teachers. There was not much education among Dalits then. It was only after Ambedkar

[78] Durvas, an ancient sage, was known for his temper.

> started colleges that they start graduating. The circumstances were bad, and there was untouchability. There was a lot of that back then.
>
> My life changed after hostel. Having to take your own decisions, came in contact with the student movements. The 1942 movement was in full swing. Students were involved [in it] a lot.

Both Nirmala and Medha's mother benefitted from the intellectual and politically charged atmosphere at SNDT. The widows who had stepped out and taken refuge in Karve's institution found gainful employment and economic independence. They had a lasting impression on these young women studying in SNDT.

Not all Chitpavan Brahman women, however, were encouraged to educate themselves. Asha, born in 1931 in Pune, was married right after Matric, at eighteen years of age. She said, "We were all educated, nothing like that, but only till Matric," thus indicating a possibility of a minimum norm of literacy, which was prevalent in those times for women in Chitpavan households before they were married. Of the four sisters and one brother, the only sister who studied further and completed graduation had a health complication, which resulted in hysterectomy. Her inability to bear children caused a delay in marriage and could be the reason for her being more educated than her sisters.

Then, there were families like Malati's, the fourth of five daughters and one son, born in 1938 in Pune. The deprivation of education propelled her mother to ensure that all her children received an education.

> So my mother was in ninth when she got married; she had a scholarship but could not study after marriage. She strongly felt that her daughters had

> to study. There was no issue about whether girls are to be educated in our house; they must be! Moreover, all of us were intelligent; we did well in various ways.

Each of the siblings chose and excelled in different fields. While Malati belonged to a progressive left-leaning household where they were encouraged to study, and their individual successes were celebrated, this was not the case with Asha. Asha's drive and ambition led her to utilize her social network to create a space for herself in the public sphere.

The five households where three generations of women were interviewed provide a glimpse of the inter-generational trends in education. I refer to the first generation women as grandmothers, next daughters-in-law, and the third as granddaughters or granddaughters-in-law. The second generations are daughters-in-law in all five cases. The third generation has three granddaughters- Gharpure, Karandikar, and Ukidwe. The Karandikar family is an exception where the granddaughter is married and lives with her marital family. The women from the other four households live together. All five families have been in Pune for generations. At least the first two generations have lived in the old city, which has residential areas[79] with almost exclusively Chitpavan Brahman residents.

[79] Pune developed during the reign of the Peshwas, when it became the de-facto capital of large portions of the country. The *wadas* built in this era are still found in the old city areas and were mentioned in several narratives. The area around Shaniwarwada which was the residence of the Peshwas, was divided into sections called '*Peth*'. These *Peths* were named after prominent rulers and days of the week. Some of these areas continue to have predominantly Brahman residences, especially the Sadashiv, Narayan, Shukrawar and Kasba *Peth* areas. Sadashiv *Peth* boasts of many good quality educational institutions. It is also host to Chitpavan Sangh office. Paik notes that Sadashiv *Peth*, named after a Chitpavan Peshwa, is the *polis* around which Pune has developed (2014). Thus, Pune has four distinct areas- the old city core which still has a lingering Peshwa and therefore Brahminical influence which developed in the late 1700, the large cantonment areas developed by the British which continue as military governed places, the new industrial zones which contribute to the city's economic boom, and the fringe areas which are developing into a mix of residential and informal economic zones (Butsch et al. 2017).

All five families have been joint families for generations. Each of the women in this generational segment was a Chitpavan woman married into a Chitpavan family, except the Karandikar daughter, married to a Deshastha Brahman.

The tables that follow show their birth years and educational qualifications.

Table 3.1-Birth Year of women from the three generation households

Birth year			
TRIADS	**Gen 1**	**Gen 2**	**Gen 3**
Gharpure	1938	1963	1988
Pavagi	1938	1964	1990
Karandikar	1932	1960	1983
Nitsure	1928	1962	1987
Ukidwe	1938	1963	1991

Table 3.2- Education of women from the three generation households

Education			
TRIADS	**Gen 1**	**Gen 2**	**Gen 3**
Gharpure	Matric	B.Sc Stats and computer courses	M.S. in the USA
Pavagi	Matric	B.Sc Home Sci., MA in Marathi & Sanskrit	MA in Dance
Karandikar	Matric	B.Sc Home Sci.	B.A. and FTII diploma
Nitsure	Matric (not pass)	B.Com	BDS
Ukidwe	Matric, Montessori course	B.Com	M Pharm

They demonstrate the rising levels of education across generations as per the changing social norms for women's education. Table 3.2 also supports the possibility of a rising minimum norm of women's education mentioned earlier. The consistency of having studied until matriculation, given that the five first-generation women came from different backgrounds and places, indicates the possibility of a necessary and sufficient condition for women in order to marry.

This norm of studying up till matriculation increased to graduation for the daughters-in-law, all of whom were born in the 1960s. These social norms are indicative of the predicament of most Chitpavan women, but there were exceptions. Women made their way into the public sphere across generations, like Malati and her sisters.I argue that this minimum social norm for education for women continues to operate across generations. This norm is an important marker of the changing gender roles for the women of this community. It indicates the effect of a modernizing impulse within the community whereby the narrative around women's education keeps up with the times.

If we go back to the debates on women's education, the arguments raised for women's education saw them as mothers and wives in most parts[80]. Literacy was supposed to ensure that women ran their homes in an orderly, efficient, systematic, hygienic manner. Domestic labour was deemed serious business, and women needed an education to perform it well (Walsh 2005). Thus, objections to women's education were quelled with

[80] There were of course exceptions to this view, where women were seen as social actors. Phule and Savitribai had a radical take on women's role in society. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar strongly advocated co-education and envisioned that all kinds of professions and occupations would be linked with brain power and ability; therefore available to both men and women (Rao 2008a). While social reformers i.e. men, saw remarriage as a solution to the 'problem' of widowhood, the widows envisioned for themselves an education and economic independence (Chakravarti 1993b). Women writing fiction envisioned non-normative lives for their women protagonists which did not involve marriage (Kosambi 2012).

an assurance that the well-being of the house was bound to increase with an educated woman at the helm.

After independence, education became normative for both boys and girls within urban middle-class, upper-caste families. However, marriage and domesticity were the predominant factors in deciding the fate of most (but not all) Chitpavan women.

In responding to why she waited to finish post-graduation before marrying, the Ukidwe granddaughter-in-law replied,

> It is a criterion that the girl is a post-graduate in today's times and has not stopped at graduation. And it was my mother's dream to ensure I study as much as I want. Did not think of Ph.D. because I was not interested in research but my M.Pharm. project was interesting. Married after that.

Her statement supports the thesis of a minimum educational norm for women before marriage- a girl from a well-educated, well-to-do Brahman household, to be at least a post-graduate. Her husband, whom she met during their graduation course did not feel the need to pursue education but chose to join his father's business. Similarly, two other third-generation men in the Pavagi and Nitsure family joined the family business after graduation instead of pursuing further education.

We had briefly seen the nationalist ideology, which envisioned a particular kind of 'schooling' (Chakravarti 1989) for girls before they were married. Education led to delayed marriages, right from the early twentieth century. All the women mentioned in Tables 1 and 2 were married after completing 18 years, showing a decisive shift from the pre-pubescent marriages of their foremothers.

Table 3.3- Education of Women and Husbands

TRIADS	**Gen 1**	**Husband**	**Gen 2**	**Husband**	**Gen 3**	**Husband**
Gharpure	Matric	not available	B.Sc Stats and computer courses		M.S. in the USA	Not married
Pavagi	Matric	B.Sc Chemistry	B.Sc Home Science, MA in Marathi and Sanskrit	B.Com	MA in Dance	B. Com
Karandikar	Matric	B. Tech	B.Sc Home Science	MBBS	BA and FTII diploma	B.Com and diploma courses
Nitsure	Matric (not pass)	B. Tech	B.Com	B.Com	BDS	Not married
Ukidwe	Matric, Montessori course	B.A.	B.Com	B.Com	M.Pharm	B.Pharm

While female literacy still lags behind men considerably, Table 3.3 illustrates how the educational gap between husbands and wives is narrowing across generations.

Sixty-two-year-old Nutan, whose son also joined the business that Nutan and her husband had established, had this to say about the differences in educating sons and daughters-

> When my son turned eighteen I gave him a credit card. Everyone said why. I said I want to allow him to handle a lot of money, but I also want to judge for myself how he handles it because I want to give the business to him. Every time someone dies in the family, you tend to look at succession. I wanted him to [take over the business] since we had created so much. He would have a good base, no worrying about admission and all. However, I felt very differently for my daughter. I do not know what she will decide about marriage, what she would do. So she should have her education as far as possible. So I insisted she did MBA. I did not insist that my son do it, but my daughter did it. I feel like Arjun[81] had different arrows in his quiver*;* girls should have as many arrows as possible. So wherever you are, some arrow should be of use, and you should stand on your feet. I firmly believe that economic independence plays a very, very major role in developing your personality and making you. And I still very strongly believe that it is an essential feature of life. How much ever you say what is yours is mine, it is not true. Self-respect grows, comes from money (*swabhimaan ha paishyatun vadhto, yeto*). If you both decide and set it aside for some time, for children and priorities, illnesses in the house could be anything. But capability has to be there. There is no substitute for that.

In the above quote, Nutan displays a clear understanding of a gendered trajectory of a woman's life where she is deemed to be dependent. Nutan had worked throughout her

[81] She is using the metaphor of Arjuna, the third Pandava from Mahabharat, who was an expert warrior with a variety of arrows in his quiver.

life; she started and co-owned a flourishing company with her husband. She equipped her daughter with education to support herself and provide her economic independence in any life situation. Nutan had not, however, considered the possibility of her daughter running the family business.

Her parents also coaxed the Gharpure daughter to go abroad and pursue a Master's course. The Karandikar daughter, who had learned film editing informally, was persuaded to do a course in Film and Television Institute of India. These persuasions by the parents were oriented towards better career prospects. In the light of the general state of Indian women's education, the investment in these girls who are upper middle-class and Chitpavan Brahman, is worth noting.

Education and Marriage Prospects

> There was no compulsion from home, and the importance of education was not just from home but also evident everywhere, [I] would not credit the family with it. All girls with me, even if they planned to get married after graduation, no one was thinking of being without education. You have to study, be a graduate at least and make some use of your brain, not just stay at home as a housewife (*agdi grihini mhanun basaycha nahiye gharat*) – this much was clear from the general environment around.

Avanti, a woman in her late sixties, noted that graduation and then studying further were options available to upper caste, middle-class women in the decades after independence. She further adds

> Avanti: I distinctly remember something that can be connected with being Chitpavan- this was after some 7-8 suitors had been seen, and they refused. My father told me, you are dark and also quite tall and educated; you will complete MSc now. Education was not a problem as such, but all three together were not conducive to getting a good match, he told me clearly, so now you pay attention to your Ph.D.
>
> Shraddha: Oh, the outcome was good!
>
> Avanti: No other future was visible, just the need to do something. If we got a number in UGC, then we would get 500 rupees as a scholarship. That time it [500 rupees] was a lot [of money]. We were living with our parents. At that time, financial independence was not given a thought. Just that, keep doing something till you get married and have something at hand in case you would do something in the future.

Thus, her father's realistic assessment of the marriage prospects for a tall, dark, well-educated Chitpavan Brahman girl in Pune translated into encouraging her to focus on studying further. Avanti recalled this emphasis on education while waiting for marriage as a Chitpavan characteristic. Similar observations about educational attainments have been made about Tamil Brahman women, a degree was known to be an asset in the marriage market, and colleges were 'good waiting places' for unmarried girls (M.N. Srinivas in Fuller and Narasimhan 2014:139). As discussed earlier, education was a qualification for good marriage prospects for Brahman women, whereas it is a resource

for earning a possibly more dignified livelihood for women from a different caste and class background.

Another woman, Deepti, sixty-six, spoke of how marriage prospects influenced decisions around education-

> My father wanted me to be an engineer, and since I had the brains, it seemed possible… Could have got admission for engineering, but my mother said, you are so tall, and then if you become an engineer, how will we find you a husband. I was well built. So, no! It was a big criterion, and then if you are an engineer, then [you will need a] engineer husband and a Konkanastha, that was there.

The difficulty of having to find a tall, Konkanastha and additionally, an engineer groom for their daughter made Deepti's mother decide against letting her study engineering.

'Schooling' in domesticity

A discussion on marriages and caste with sixty-plus Leena, who ran a successful marriage bureau for decades, veered towards how today young people are ill-equipped for marriage-

> Leena: During my time, girls were prepared for marriage.
>
> Shraddha: What does that mean?
>
> Leena: Whatever you need for a life post-marriage was taught to us (*balkadu*) in childhood. Not just at home but also in school. I was in

> Huzurpaga; we had a subject called *Grahajeevan Shastra*, which had a dedicated period. Teachers from our school wrote textbooks. How to keep your house clean? Small, small things like not keeping a wet utensil on the gas, the gas will go waste, isn't it?
>
> Shraddha: Was it written by Konkanastha women[82]?
>
> Leena: *(laughs)* In school, we had thirty stoves, and from the second class, we had *grihajeevan shastra*. In the second class, we did not have a book that started in class five. In second, we were taught to make sherbet. She [the teacher] would make it and give it to us to drink and tell us to try it at home. In the third class, we had banana salad (*kelyachi koshimbir*); how small does it need to be cut for the salad to mix properly; all this was taught. In the fourth class, cucumber salad, practical was fifth class onwards… We had to practice at home in order to be able to make it during the practical exam. There were no sanitary pads, so how to take the cloth, wash it, and dry it—maintaining hygiene and all that. Our teachers wrote the books; they were circulated in our school. This kind of care was taken at school like it was in the house, preparing girls. All schools had stitching, embroidery in those days; there were singing lessons, knitting, embroidery so that you can do a little bit of all this.

The textbooks referred to here were first written in 1954 by Lakshmibai Vaidya, a teacher in Huzurpaga. In the preface of the textbooks, she noted that the books seek to relate the

[82] While this was a relevant question given the subject of my study, Leena's laughter indicates that she read into my question a common joke about Chitpavan Brahmans being calculative and veering towards stingy. Therefore, not wasting gas could be a habit proposed by them, but also any astute housewife.

syllabus to real life as much as possible to enable girls to do all work today and in the future. The books covered a wide range of topics, including human physiology, environment, information about diseases, nutrition and diet, domestic hygiene and cleanliness, tips on cleaning vegetables, fruits, kitchen equipment, and basic to advanced cooking (Vaidya 1954).

While the diet mentions non-vegetarian food, a case for a vegetarian diet is made on a section titled *mausaahar*, i.e., a non-vegetarian diet[83]. However, one section dealt with tips on how to check good meat and fish.

Topics also include conducting oneself while eating, fasting, health rules, diets for pregnant women, unwell persons, storing and maintaining groceries, washing different kinds of fabrics, ironing clothes, some information on child-rearing and care as well as common paediatric diseases.

Avanti, however, categorizes these lessons as 'life skills' rather than preparing the girls for marriage-

> Shraddha: So working after marriage, you were raised to think that?
>
> Avanti: Yes, yes, not that we thought a lot about marriage. Actually, we had home science as a subject in our school till the eighth class; people feel that home science is teaching to be a homemaker, but it was not just that. Some things are useful even today. A small thing, our Parsi sewing teacher, would ask for scissors and would scold us if we gave it with the

[83] A sub-section called 'On the Politics of Food' in chapter five deals with the issue of meat consumption and caste.

> pointed end towards her. These are practical things. They would teach us to fill the hot water bottle without the hand trembling or spilling the boiling water. Stitching, knitting was there but not taught only as feminine skills. That was not the attitude. It was more like life skills rather than grooming the girls as housewives. It was optional later.

The fact remains, as she admitted when I pointed this out, that these were life skills expected only from girls.

Home science was deemed an apolitical discipline by the British and initially promoted in all government schools. However, scholarship on the subject shows how home science became a ground on which various ideological streams converged.

Home Science became part of female education in the 1930s in India, a result of complicated interactions between nationalism, feminist concerns, Euro-western influences (their selective, critical adoption), and Gandhian ideals. Mary Hancock's observations on the development of Home science in Madras specifically are also relevant to the context I am studying. She shows how "[h]ome Science relied on, and in the process helped shape, a set of feminist discourses that were dialectically engaged with anti-colonial nationalisms and with internationalist feminism" (2001:874). Despite the subject being limited to elite women before independence, the template was set in this period and expanded widely post-independence. The home was deemed to be the symbol of nationalist modernity, and Home Science became the discourse in which nation-making was embedded into the domestic.

Hancock argues that Home Science could be called a feminist nationalist project. By insisting that women need to be trained for domestic duties, Home Science did not naturalize women's place in the domestic. However, it did strengthen the gendered differentiation between the home and the world outside. The home was "seen as a site of female action and identity-formation that, with appropriate revision, could meet the needs of a specifically Indian modernity" (2001:899).

Home Science education grew due to women's lobbying efforts in the 1930s and 1940s and international collaborations. Professionalised Home Science education created ample opportunities for women in applied fields like nutrition, hotel and hospitality management, child development. But,

> Home Science education was meant also to instill self-discipline among the poor and among devadasis and prostitutes, and so serve as an agency of their moral transformation and modernization, even while reinscribing inequality and difference. Consistent with Home Science's feminization and nationalization of domesticity, therefore, were disciplinary projects that regenerated societal inequalities, as they asserted racial and national homogeneities (2001:903).

Home Science was also a way of creating 'good' women; disciplined and adept at housework, who were fit for a modern Indian nation. These ideas continued for a few decades after independence.

Conclusion

Access to education has been a struggle for Indian women, indeed even Brahman women. However, once education was available, access to it was decisively in favour of Brahman women in Maharashtra. That led to benefits that reflected in demographic changes within the community. As demonstrated above, increasing age at marriage for women/girls presented itself much sooner within the Chitpavan community.

The chapter has sought to make two arguments in the context of women's education. Despite raging debates on women's rights in the late nineteenth century, I submit that barring a few exceptional women, the changes in women's lives in Maharashtra actualized in the twentieth rather than the late nineteenth century. The demand for education of women, from being taboo, quickly became a requirement as the notions of ideal womanhood shifted with nationalist discourses. I argue that alongside the expectation to enter a heterosexual union through marriage, the Chitpavan Brahman girls of the early twentieth century onwards were expected to have attained a minimum level of education to be qualified for marriage. The education level shifted from Matric to graduation to post-graduation or a professional degree across the three generations studied here.

We saw how some elite women were able to speak for all 'Indian women' in the early years of the twentieth century and, in doing so, set aside complexities of caste, class, and religion. This helped consolidate a hegemonic notion of a seemingly secular but actually upper-caste Hindu image of 'Indian women.'

The last two sections demonstrate the centrality of marriage and domesticity in defining choices about education and the very content of education for the women who grew up in the early decades of independent India.

Chapter Four

BRAHMAN WOMEN'S WORK ACROSS GENERATIONS: TENSIONS AND BOUNDARIES

This chapter deals with Brahman women's work within and outside the domestic. Work is an important register for both caste and gender. We will first examine the concepts involved and set a frame of reference to analyze better Brahman women's access to work and the ambitions, desires, and tensions that they express through their narratives. The introductory section looks at social reproduction, followed by a brief note on the nature of women's work and challenges of measurement in India. It is followed by a section on the role of caste and women's work. While each of these topics can be an independent subjects of detailed study, we will dip into them to set up a framework for analyzing Chitpavan Brahman women's narratives.

Seven sections follow the preliminary review of literature. The first section is an encounter with three generations of women married into the Pavagi household and their ideas about work and their place within the domestic. The second section examines the second-generation women's quest for an identity beyond the domestic, and the third presents changes in marriage negotiations across generations. The fourth and fifth sections dwell on domestic labour, specifically how different women make sense of 'domestic management,' a term I explain in this section. They include concepts like *pragalbha grihini*, *samanjaspana* and how a balance between domestic and outside work is sought. The penultimate section documents instances of discrimination reported in the

narratives. The conclusion brings together the threads of each section and lays out the arguments made about gender, caste, and labour based on the narratives.

Social Reproduction and women's work

'Chool ani mool', a Marathi phrase which means 'a cooking stove and a child' indicates what is understood as a woman's primary role - housekeeping and child-rearing. Household maintenance, cleaning, washing, cooking, shopping for the household, producing children, and caring for children and the elderly are not considered economic activities. These tasks fall outside the System of National Accounts (SNA) production boundary formulated by the United Nations, which are used to measure economic activity. Domestic labour, encompassing all of the above tasks that sustain and reproduce human beings, is not adequately included in calculating a country's economic output. Women across the world spend more time than men in shouldering this undervalued burden.

Before embarking on the discussion of how domestic labour features in our story of caste privilege, let us first dwell on the main concepts- work, labour, and social reproduction.

Hannah Arendt's 'The Human Condition' offers a distinction between labour and work (1958). According to Arendt, action, work and labour were the three fundamental elements of being human. Action was a complex concept which distinguished humans from animals. Action was about self-disclosure, affirming the reality of the world and connected with freedom and plurality. She wrote that labouring includes all the activities required for the sustenance of life. Human beings share these activities with the animal world. They include showering, shopping, housework, childcare. These activities are

repetitive and unending and use a circular concept of time. Labouring activities do not leave anything permanent behind, according to Arendt; what is produced as a result of labour is consumed in the process of reproducing life (Voice 2014).

On the other hand, work has an end; it produces durable objects and creates a world in which humans can exist. It includes furniture, buildings, and cultural objects like books, poems; objects that satisfy something beyond the biological needs of the person making them. Work has a linear rather than a circular conception of time; the objects created through work persist. Work is a strategic activity; it sets up a goal or end (Voice 2014).

Feminists have critiqued Arendt for her lack of attention to the gendered nature of 'labour' that she proposed. She has also been criticized for terming the reproductive labour women perform as 'unproductive,' which has since been reassessed as adding value and virtue to human life (Voice 2014). Arendt's hierarchy between labour and work points at the repetitiveness and drudgery involved in what is now referred to as care work, women's unpaid work, or domestic labour[84].

Feminist scholarship has covered significant ground on the gendered nature of domestic labour. The processes involved in the production, upkeep and sustenance of human beings and the world they inhabit are collectively termed social reproduction. Social reproduction is a concept that arises out of Marxist theory. It "refers to all those activities and processes by which human beings are directly and indirectly sustained materially and

[84] Rajni Palriwala offers a critical summary of the scholarship on the care discourse, which she points out is a relatively new theme. A care crisis, which was common in poor families, has also started afflicting middle income and affluent ones. She categorizes the scholarship on care into four trajectories- the sexual division of labour, social and economic value of women's work, the gendered critique of care regimes, the care economy and the care crisis or deficit and the dynamics in organization of care. She shows how "the practices and organization of caring are embedded in and uphold the matrix of gender, class, race and caste relations" (2021:76).

psychologically. These practices are embedded in historically specific social structures and occur through various organizations such as the state, community and family" (Sehgal 2005:2287). It is not merely biological reproduction or providing basic needs but entails the reproduction of a cohesive social structure.

Scholars have distinguished between processes of social reproduction, biological or human production, and the reproduction of the labour force (Edholm, Harris, and Young 1977). The first process refers to the reproduction of cohesive social structures, the second to the actual production of humans, and the third to the sustenance, physical and psychological, of human beings. Various institutions participate in all of the above processes- the state, community, religious institutions, and the family.

However, many tend to use social reproduction to encompass all three processes, as Sehgal, quoted above, does. So social reproduction includes "various kinds of work—mental, manual, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation" (Laslett and Brenner 1989:383). Furthermore, it includes the perpetuation of entire social systems.

Marxist thought, which is a dominant theory available to us to think through the production of the material world, did not adequately deal with the production and sustenance of labour since it was deemed external to the capitalist process. Paul Smith documented the 'domestic labour debate' within Marxism and followed the arguments of various scholars on the subject. He argued for a distinction between productive labour

and socially necessary labour and stated how, despite being functional to capitalism, domestic labour is external to it (1978).

Domestic labour was extensively discussed in the 1970s. Women in Europe and America rose against unpaid domestic work, which was central to all economic systems . Women's subordination was attributed to the burden of invisible, unacknowledged, and unremunerated work being delegated solely to women. Feminist attention to unpaid domestic labour highlighted the wide range of tasks involved, its importance for capital accumulation, its isolating nature, and invisibility (Oakley 2018). It also led feminists to reorganize Marxist theory (Federici 1975). Campaigns like 'wages for housework' led by Maria Dalla Costa, Selma James, Silvia Federici, and others arising from Marxist feminist groups were part of women's rights activism in some countries in the 1960s-70s. However, they were criticized for being middle class-oriented. It was pointed out that monetizing this work will not address the structural nature of the problem. It would mean that the only explanatory framework available to us is the commercial economy (Gonik 2012).

Feminists sought to incorporate domestic work into economic analysis. They critically analyzed the household as an economic site (MacDonald, 167), pointing out lacunae in the national survey data to study women's labour. Time use surveys have pointed out a huge asymmetry in work hours of men and women and the unequal burden of unpaid work on women[85]. Concepts like time poverty, time stress, household time overhead, etc., were developed to bring out women's predicament concerning unpaid work

[85]'Unpaid work' of women includes a vast variety of activities like subsistence farming on own land, working on family enterprises, community work, volunteering etc. as well as care work. Unpaid work cannot be conflated only with housework and care work.

(Antonopoulos and Hirway 2010; Budlender 2008; Federici 2012; Palriwala and Pillai 2008; Sangari 1993). These efforts have contributed to widening the horizons of women's work in the mainstream discourse.

The Human Development Report of 1995 sensitively noted the complexities of the value of women's work in a dedicated chapter-

> Women's work is greatly undervalued in economic terms. This is due in part to the restricted definition of economic activity. But part of the problem is the notion of value itself. For the purposes of economic valuation, value is synonymous with market value... But many goods and services with economic value are not marketed. In theory, this problem is resolvable if these items could be sold, for a market value could be imputed to them on this basis - as is done for subsistence crops consumed by the producers themselves... Yet much household and community work remains unvalued. The total product of society is thus underestimated - and the economic contributions of many people, especially women, are unrecognised and unrewarded... An additional consideration is that the value of much household and community work transcends market value. This activity has an intrinsic use value or human value that is not captured by its value for exchange (UNDP 1995).

Voices from the Global South argued for a more nuanced interpretation of the complex overlaps between various categories of work and to look beyond binaries of market/non-market, productive/nonproductive, and paid/unpaid. For instance, for Black women,

whose lives were shaped by a colonial labour system, work outside their own families was prioritized over their families' needs. Therefore, caring for partners, children, and older relatives became a way of resisting racial and class oppression (Glenn in Graham 1991:69).

Theorizations of the North are inadequate for the developing world, where the family is the site of both market-based production and subsistence production. Women not only participate in productive activities that sustain their families but also undertake market-based work at home. This makes it difficult to distinguish between domestic and capitalist modes of production.

Feminist usage of the term social reproduction has broadened the Marxist definition to include the work of maintaining existing life and reproducing the next generation. The perpetuation and reproduction of systems of gender inequality (Laslett and Brenner 1989:383) in relation to other systems of inequality are also included in the feminist understanding of social reproduction.

To emphasize an important point- home and work cannot be thought of as a neat binary divided into gendered roles. They are part of a messy continuum and cannot be easily 'balanced.' Conventional ways of analysis are grossly inadequate because they treat paid work as separate from home and the care work it entails (Barbara Pocock in Leahy and Doughney 2006).

Women's Work in India- a macro view

This chapter delves into the work of women- urban, middle class, upper caste, and from the second generation onwards, at least graduates. In the first sub-section, we looked at

the basic concepts and the asymmetrical burden of social reproduction that women shoulder. The next two sections are a way of locating Brahman women within the macro picture- concerning the national frame and in terms of caste. It is hoped that this move makes evident how socio-economic location is instrumental in women's access to dignified work.

More than ninety percent of Indian women work in the informal[86] sector- with irregular work, no unions, or social protections[87]. India's female workforce is highly disadvantaged and concentrated in the lowest rungs of the economy, with a high concentration in agriculture and unpaid family work (Palriwala and Pillai 2008). Indian women's work is concentrated in non-monetized subsistence-level production. Women who work at home do not consider themselves as 'workers' and therefore may not get counted despite hours spent labouring for water, fuel, fodder, and in the fields. The nature of women's work- at home and carried out alongside housework, has not always been market-oriented.

Since the 1970s, most feminist academics and activists have been trying to show how women's work is inadequately represented in our data sets (John 2013). The Shramshakti Report[88] had recommended that all kinds of research studies incorporate the paid and

[86] The informal sector of the Indian economy amounts for fifty percent of its gross domestic product but ninety percent of the workforce is engaged in it. Ninety percent men and 95 percent women are informal workers. In urban areas, eighty two percent of total women workers and seventy eight percent men are informal workers
engaged in informal employment compared to 78 percent among urban male workers" (Sastry 2004).

[87] The unregistered workforce i.e. those working without social protection in India has increased from the 1980s onwards (Palriwala and Pillai 2008). Social protections include medical insurance, pension, accident insurance, provident fund.

[88] Report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and women in the Informal Sector submitted in 1989 was called the Shramshakti Report. It gave a profile of the women workers, gauged the impact of policies on their working conditions and analyzed occupational health, legislative protections necessary for their welfare.

unpaid work performed by women within the home or outside and whether they were employed or working on their own (GOI 1988).

Insensitivity of tools, low awareness of investigators, and stakeholders' prejudices have led to the under-representation of women's work in large-scale surveys like the census and NSS (Banerjee 1989). Women engaged in domestic duties were listed as workers in the NSS (27^{th}, $32^{nd,}$ and 38^{th} rounds). In 1991, through advocacy by feminists, a few changes to the census survey were made to capture women's unpaid family labour and in the training manual of enumerators such that their awareness of and sensitivity to women's unpaid work was addressed (Krishnaraj 1990). In many cases, the male member is the only one noted as the worker with the employer, and the labour of all the other members of the family remains invisible. It renders them invisible in statistical records, public policies, and social protection programs (Swaminathan 2009).

Women receive up to thirty percent less wages and incomes compared to men across sectors. There is a significant increase in education and literacy among women; they are visible in all fields, old and new and appear in prestigious, highly paid jobs. However, even in the formal sector, they experience inequality and discrimination (Palriwala and Pillai 2008).

Feminist economists argued that using time to measure women's work would ensure a more accurate measurement of women's work (Jain 1996). Across all states, not only are more Indian women engaged in unpaid work than men, they spend a lot more time on these unpaid activities than paid work compared to men (Hirway 2002).

Caste and Women's Work

Women's labour- paid or unpaid, domestic or public- is structured by their caste, class, sexuality. The literature on caste and work is segregated along a gender binary. The scholarship dealing with caste and work or occupational mobility tends to study men's work with few exceptions like sex work and manual scavenging, whereas the scholarship on women's work, including but not limited to feminist scholarship, includes a section dealing with caste.

The literature discussing caste and occupational mobility in India (Deshpande 2011; Deshpande and Palshikar 2008; Jodhka and Newman 2007; Mosse 2019; Robb 1993; Vaid 2014) helps me to conclude that while caste keeps transforming, the 'lower castes' continue to be discriminated against. The advantage of being 'upper' caste (economic, social, and cultural capital) ensures control over scarce resources, like jobs.

Traditionally the norms and restrictions on upper-caste women were aimed at maintaining caste honour and upholding compulsory heteronormativity. Lower caste women were, and most of them still are, condemned to caste-defined jobs- from domestic work to cleaning and manual scavenging, labour in other people's farms, and other kinds of work. Feminist debates with Dalit women's groups and intellectuals have raged on the issues of women's work as bar dancers, especially after the ban in Maharashtra and on sex work (Agnes 2007; Gopal 2012; Kotiswaran 2011; Kunda n.d.; Rajan 2003; Sangram-VAMP and Point of View 2008). While reviewing this literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, this indicates how fraught the relationship between labour, caste, and gender is.

According to feminist analysis of the NSS data (2007-08), only fifteen percent of Indian women got direct payment for the work they do, whether in the formal or informal sector across factories, fields, homes as domestic workers or the service sector (Mazumdar and Neetha 2011). This also means that the rest of the women- as artisans, farm labourers, at homes, and in other productive endeavours- work in conditions of dependency, which are inevitably structured by familial bonds such as heterosexual marriage (John, 2013). The family and household are thus, central to women's labour.

More attention needs to be paid not just to the gendered nature of labour but to caste, class, and sexuality-based determinants of women's labour (John, 2013). An important dimension of the relationship of caste and labour is the experience of labour as degrading and exploitative by 'lower' castes who perform work that is deemed 'dirty'[89] (Rao 2012b; Robb 1993). Lower caste women are stuck in precarious, stigmatized work, which marks the Dalit women as low, inferior, and stigmatized (Gopal 2012:6).

Caste and gender bring various contradictions to labour. An overwhelming amount of work for which women are paid is subjected to stigma rather than bringing value and autonomy to the worker. It is also precarious because it subjects the worker to various kinds of vulnerabilities. Apart from lack of social protection and irregularity of work, the lower caste woman's body is potentially sexually available to men across castes, making her further vulnerable to assault (Meera V. in John, 2013). For lower caste women, caste-based forms of labour like manual scavenging, sweeping, and other lowly paid work continue to persist. Studies have shown how work in the unorganized sector is laden with

[89] Ambedkar sought to bring the labour of Dalits under contractual terms 'in order to place a value on stigmatized
labour so as to underscore its productivity (Rao 2012b:27)'.

perils to women's health and reproductive rights; it ends up reproducing the material bases of inequality (Anandhi 2007; Kutty 2010; Shinde 2020). While lower caste women continue to grapple with structural obstacles around work, upper-caste women have had access to formal employment and respectable (stigma-free) occupations, illustrating how these caste groups have benefitted from various forms of privilege that we explore in this study.

Mary John underscores that a "complex domestic relation of power and exploitation, which results in making the unpaid oppressed housewife 'the employer' of the paid servant, requires structures of non-economic forms of discrimination under modern capitalism—race and ethnicity elsewhere, caste in India"[90] (2013:187). She draws our attention to another contradiction. The unprecedented burden of housework and childcare makes women, those among the tiny group with access to 'good jobs,' want to quit. The declining labour force participation of women has been linked to the universality of heterosexual marriage in India, i.e., a 'marriage penalty' which keeps women from working (Afridi and Mahajan 2018). This is a contradiction in an era when even the state has adopted the language of gender equality, and there is a global push for women's rights. We will explore how both these contradictions play out in the lives of Chitpavan Brahman women.

[90] Palriwala and Neetha use the idea of gendered familialism, which says that women's unpaid work in the home guarantees welfare of the family and consequently, women cannot abdicate domestic responsibilities in order to take up paid work. Palriwala and Neetha proposed the term 'stratified familialism' for the class difference produced through 'care deficit' in the homes of paid care providers like cooks, domestic workers, and babysitters. These women are blamed for being unable to provide adequate care within their own homes which leads to the care deficit (Palriwala and Neetha 2011). Their study examined how the state abdicates its responsibility of care provisioning and positions it as welfare measure. On the other hand, middle and upper class women who have well-paying jobs spend the least time in childcare. One can however, imagine that the time spent can still be quality time between mother and child and can be utilized for cultural reproduction.

This brief review starting from social reproduction, domestic labour, Indian women's work, and the role of caste, highlights the need to explore the complexities in social reproduction within Brahman households through narratives of Chitpavan women.

Brahman women and labour

As we saw in the earlier sub-section, women in India are underrepresented and undervalued as workers. The majority of them continue to be part of a vast unorganized sector, shouldering the double burden of paid and unpaid work without any social protection or collective representation.

It is well established that social reproduction is a gendered process; I argue that it is also structured around caste. Caste is one of the social structures which are reproduced through processes of social reproduction. Thus, caste and gender are fundamental dimensions around which social reproduction is organized; they are critical in determining one's relationship with labour.

Thus, in thinking about Brahman women and labour, we focus on the household and the work that these women do in the domestic and non-domestic spheres. We will observe how their domestic labour seems to be decreasing across generations, but the sexual division of labour within the household is skewed to favour men; the responsibility of what I term as 'domestic management' lies squarely on the married women of the households which appear here.

Following scholars of caste and gender, I reiterate that their caste and gender decisively structure Brahman women's work. I will show how, with changes in ideologies, there has been a gradual transition in how Chitpavan Brahman women locate themselves vis-à-vis

work- domestic and non-domestic. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how, for the third generation women, marriage negotiations are centred on their desire to work. The chapter dwells on the role of caste in the context of the nature of work available or mandatory to women. The negotiation of the gendered balance between work inside and outside the home is addressed using concepts like *pragalbha grihini* and *samanjaspana,* which the women's narratives brought up.

I propose that the domestic ideologies that Chitpavan Brahman women subscribe to and their views and actions about work will enable us to trace the evolution of gender roles across generations within the Chitpavan Brahman community.

Emphasizing the importance of one's socio-economic location in determining the content and registers used for domestic labour, Kumkum Sangari asked some crucial questions.

> What was the interrelation between other labour forms and women's 'specialization' in domestic labour? Further, unpaid domestic labour draws attention to those institutions which make it possible- marriage, family, household- as both central to relations of production and as institutions for the organisation and regulation of productive, reproductive and socially necessary labour, though differentially in terms of class and conjuncture (1993:7).

She stressed how caste distinctions are inherently part of the graded nature of domestic labour.

The socialization process of young women in Brahman households in the nineteenth century was to undertake household management under the guidance of older women.

Lakshmibai Tilak[91] (1868-1936) commenced her autobiography, *Smritichitre* (published in four parts between 1934 and 1937), with a vivid description of the tedious housework undertaken by her mother and grandmother in strictly adhering to the purity and pollution rituals which her father upheld. The household labour that befell Lakshmibai is mentioned throughout the book, along with instances of hired help around the house even in dire circumstances. She went to great lengths in maintaining caste after her husband converted to Christianity before she shunned caste-based norms and discriminatory practices altogether (Tilak 2012).

Domestic ideologies substantiate upper-caste women's status and determine their relationships to the labour of men and women of lower castes (Sangari 1993:8). As noted earlier, feminists highlight the invisibility of domestic labour in mainstream economic calculations and the need to 'recognize, reduce, redistribute' the unpaid work of women. Sangari pointed out that unpaid work is, "acknowledged and 'measured' in systemic social and familial structures, through hierarchies of gender, caste, labour, and consumption, as well as in collective stricture and control" (1993, p. 8-9). This acknowledgment becomes significant, and we take this up in the following sections. Sangari cited the example of the upper caste widow and the function of her labour in the operation of the upper caste household.

[91] Lakshmibai's autobiography, *Smritichitre* (2012) is regarded as the first by a Marathi woman and appreciated for its honest and humorous tone. She was a teacher, a poet and had converted to Christianity a few years after her husband Reverend Tilak's conversion.

Uma Chakravarti used the term 'domestic drudges' to describe material and existential conditions and the economic vulnerability of widows[92] in nineteenth-century Poona (Pune). She wrote,

> The accounts of the widows suggest that the widow's association with labour, in part the labour all women performed, was perceived as harder and more menial than that of other women. The phrase 'like a low-class servant' is expressive and it was a likely outcome not just of the labour performed but of the power relations within the family which reduced the widow to a more abject and degraded status than other women. Further the fact that the widow's labour was demanded by, and rendered to others in a household which the widow could not regard as her own, made the performance of such labour more humiliating, causing the widows to see themselves as 'low-class maidservants' and 'slaves' (1989:134).

The careers of many young Brahman men, who became an important part of the middle classes, were dependent on the mobile and free labour offered by these Brahman widows. These women migrated to urban centers as substitutes for dead wives or to support sick ones, as expendable labour (Chakravarti 1993b:135). Despite the raging debates on widow remarriage, the widows themselves wanted to be gainfully employed. Their idea of a suitable social role was not marriage but 'productive labour,' which would be

[92] Deepa Mehta's film Water (2005) based in early twentieth century colonial India was about widows in Varanasi. The film was not allowed to be shot in Varanasi in 2000 since Hindu nationalists thought it portrayed Hindu culture in bad light. The film questioned the glory of the Hindu culture by showing how widows were exploited in early twentieth century India (Chakravarti 2001). The controversy shows how women's representation plays a central role in discourses on culture and identity.

recognized and add meaning to their lives, making them useful citizens (Chakravarti 1993b:143).

Rising cultural nationalism and debates around reforms aimed explicitly at women gave shape to a pervasive ideology of domesticity for the ideal upper-caste Hindu woman. However, women were able to imagine a different life for themselves outside the domestic. There are several instances of women [93] who adjusted, negotiated, and challenged the norm of domestic femininity to create a life for themselves in the public sphere, especially from the late nineteenth century.

We noted in chapter three, how reform movements could be modernizing and democratizing. The role of modernizing movements in the colonial period was that of 'recasting' women for companionate marital relationships and attendant familial duties and enabling middle-class women to enter the professions and participate in political movements in a limited way (Sangari and Vaid 1989:26)'. Education for the late nineteenth century women aimed to create companionate wives and good mothers (Chakravarti 1998; Karlekar 1986; Rao 2002).

How far has the democratizing of gender relations been achieved within the Brahman community? Let us explore the narratives to find out.

[93] Kashibai Kanitkar, Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmibai Tilak, Anandbai Joshi are just a few examples from the Chitpavan Brahman community who appeared in chapter three but there were several others.

Women's Work across three generations- The Pavagi household

Each of the three women was married into the Pavagi family- Hema, the 80-year-old grandmother, Pradnya, the 55-year-old daughter-in-law, and Vrinda, the 30-year-old granddaughter-in-law, 30.

Hema was married into the large Pavagi family in Pune at the age of 19, a decade after India's independence. She came from a small town right after she finished matriculation exams or Matric as it was referred to. Her mother worked as a part-time teacher in a girl's school to supplement her father's salary. She described her family as progressive, even if poor. Growing up in the early decades of independent India, Hema was encouraged to pursue hobbies and 'do something.'

> It was a big deal to be going to Pune. The idea was, oh, she [Hema] would be able to do something. That was how it was at my place. We would act in plays, participate in inter-district competitions. My father had stitched me a shirt-pant because I wanted to play kho-kho; all of us in the team had permission [to wear shorts in order to play].

She came to Pune with dreams of broadening her horizons but was absorbed into the domestic management of the extended Pavagi household for the first few years. Even with hired help, there was a large joint family to care for.

> Knew basic cooking, but my sister-in-law was quite good, seven-eight years older than me, and we got along well. Initially, there was no help.

> Utensils, washing [clothes], there was a maid [94] but sweeping, and smearing cow dung on Sundays. The maids had worked [with her marital family] for generations. She would sit aside and maintain boundaries. Her daughter-in-law and daughters worked for us too.

However, Hema's marital family had incurred a loan, which led her husband to take up a catering business and run a function hall that her father-in-law occasionally rented out. Her husband's government job meant that Hema managed and oversaw operations once he left for work. This business ran successfully with immense support from family and friends. She gives special credit to the tenants from their *wada* (a large residential building with small rooms rented out to tenants, shared toilets, and a central courtyard) for their help. However, Hema's role was crucial in it.

According to Pradnya, Hema's daughter-in-law, the family put a condition that the prospective bride should not be a working girl-

> Shraddha: You never felt like working, doing a job?
>
> Pradnya: They had said not to. And I was quite glad, actually.
>
> Shraddha: Oh, we did not talk about that, when your marriage was fixed? They had conditions?
>
> Pradnya: Only one, someone who is not working, who will look after the house.

[94] The Marathi word *bai* used here means woman, also means hired domestic workers but the politically correct word 'domestic workers' is not what the women would say if speaking in English and so I translate it as 'maid'.

Shraddha: There was a lot to do at home?

Pradnya: Yes, and it worked for me. I didn't really want to. I was quite happy, and my father had decided.

Pradnya was one of three siblings living with her parents in Mumbai; an elder sister and brother.

Pradnya: Father had a plan that all three can go to three medicine faculties- Ayurveda, homeopathy, allopathy.

Shraddha: So you did homeopathy?

Pradnya: No, I completely shattered his expectations, didn't score the marks for it. The other two became doctors, not me and I was more into things around the house, cooking, liked to stitch. So he [father] said, do home science. SNDT. I said, ok, I had no ambition. I think back then, I liked languages, but I didn't say this to him. If he says so, it must be good [for me].

She mentioned being happy to be married into a household looking for a non-working daughter-in-law and entrusted her father with making the right decision for her- in education and marriage.

After two complicated pregnancies, she was expected to help out in the family business.

Pradnya: Whatever had to be done, make curd from a huge quantity of milk, extract cream; unending work, she would [mother-in-law] do it, and I learnt by watching her and then when she wasn't there, I had to do it. It

was all large scale. We would make butter from this big vessel (gestures with both hands) and then make ghee. It has to be done very carefully; you cannot let it spoil. And constant guests. There was maximum work in May, so my mother-in-law's sisters would come to stay here for a couple of months to help out, and then all the children had company. Back then, it was normal to stay with someone like that; now, no one visits for months.

Later I realized that I do not do anything of my own. I was stitching lots, frocks for my nieces, my dresses. We were taught all that in home science. Also liked to read but did not know what to do. A cousin of mine said, you are just wasting life. I had written him a letter when his father died, based on that he said you could write or do something with language. Do an MA. I did an MA in Marathi at Pune University.

Shraddha: When was this, after your children grew up?

Pradnya: 2003. I studied a lot and stood first in the University. I felt that I should not stop here…. So I did MA Sanskrit ... and for the last 10-12 years, I am studying and teaching Sanskrit. It gives me great joy.

Pradnya presents her younger self as having no ambition but felt a desire to do something meaningful beyond her daily chores once her children grew up. We will discuss this in the following section.

Vrinda, Pradnya's daughter-in-law, is a professional dancer who decided to marry into the Pavagi family.

Vrinda: I was trying for a Ph.D., but this is my performing age; ten years down the line, I may not be able to perform, so I have kept that aside. One can gain maturity and do a Ph.D. I also decided that I will keep studying something, not that I will only keep house (*ghar ghar kheltye asa nai*), earning was never my aspect, job, and money. Of course, one needs money, but that was never my focus. Maybe this was because I am from a business family.

Shraddha: What you said is interesting. Your mother did not work? And what about the cousins and others?

Vrinda: Largely homemakers (She uses the English word here).

Shraddha: What gave you the idea of going out and doing something?

Vrinda: Not my mamma, she was sure she wanted to be a homemaker; she really likes it all, so that was her aim in life; keep her house well and raise her children. She has not raised me like that though (*maze sanskaar tase tine nahi kele*); I should have an identity of my own... I don't mean that keeping a house is bad; maybe it is more challenging than working outside. It is always your responsibility at home. Suppose I have to be at home only, I won't mind that, but my inclination is towards arts, and since I know I have the potential, I want to explore it.

Here a shift is apparent in what Vrinda is saying about how she was raised. According to her, her mother wanted to be a homemaker but raised her daughter 'to have an identity of her own.' Vrinda equates housework to child's play when she uses a Marathi phrase

‘*ghar ghar kheltye asa nai,’* which means make-believe play with dolls and friends. She makes it seem like ‘homemaker’ is not enough of an identity. She aspires to an identity beyond the domestic. As opposed to the ‘homemaker’ mother, the daughter as a person in her own right is a clue to changes in socialization of Chitpavan girls across generations. Vrinda acknowledges the challenges of domestic management but does not want to be reduced to a homemaker.

The ‘schooling’ in domesticity that we noted in the previous chapter was explicitly evident not just in the socialization process at home but also in girl’s schools. However, with changing notions of femininity and domesticity, there were changes in how girls were socialized. Hema, born just before independence in a small town, was encouraged to ‘do something’ by her poor but progressive parents. Pradnya was happy to marry as a ‘non-working woman’ into the Pavagi family. She yearned for space for herself later on, which she negotiated when her domestic responsibilities receded. For Vrinda, however, her work/dance was critical in her decision about marriage.

Hema became an entrepreneur when the need arose and ran a business with the support from her family and friends but sought a non-working daughter-in-law. Pradnya’s domestic role included contributing to the family business. Her daughter-in-law, Vrinda, found that the Pavagi family was conducive to her ambitions.

Hema confronted a financially challenging situation that led to her taking on responsibility in the family business. Pradnya’s narrative speaks of a comfortable childhood but not one of luxury. When she married into the Pavagi family, their financial condition had improved. Their financial stability was one of the several reasons Vrinda

cited in choosing to marry Pradnya's son. Thus unlike Hema, for Pradnya and Vrinda earning money ceases to be an important criterion in making decisions around work.

Here 'work' for Pradnya and Vrinda does not fit into the neat binaries of paid/unpaid, productive/reproductive, or market/non-market. Vrinda dismisses money as something that did not figure in her passion for dance. A possibility like this is available only to an elite group of women- the option to work irrespective of money. We shall see in the following sections, more women choosing to do something beyond the domestic. We will pick up this thread in the concluding section.

Despite her immense contribution to the family business, Hema does not think of herself as a working woman. When asked about the differences she notices in the successive generations, she responded thus,

> Hema: Now, even in the smallest of houses, there is a person to mop and sweep. I wonder why. How the woman is doing it is not important. Even for that, there is a reason; girls want to do something outside, not like us, home and only home.
>
> Shraddha: *Aji*[95], you have done so much!
>
> Hema: But I had so much support. Not just the house, everyone from the *wada*. In the last twenty years, (slightly irked) it is a waste of time to speak of this! Girls are working, and everything is available outside. Initially, it was ok, a convenience but now even if you have the time, you

[95] *Aji* means grandmother in Marathi. As someone of her grand-daughter's age I addressed her thus as per convention.

> say it is available in the market, why bother. So now no one wants to make anything. Nowadays, women cannot even tell you the recipe of *besan laddoos*[96], and many have never made them! It is the easiest thing! Fry *besan* on ghee. When it cools, put powdered sugar, cardamom and make *laddoos***.**
>
> Shraddha: Next generation is not *grihinis*?
>
> Hema: When I think of my mother's generation, they would make *kondyacha manda*[97]; it tasted so good. We cannot make it. We would set something aside if it is spoilt. Now the girls do not even bother; get it from Chitale[98]. They make continental dishes which we cannot make, and we do not have a taste for it. What does it mean to take care of a household? What is there, what needs to be bought, if you leave something in the sun, it will last longer. You can have four maids but will the work get done? My mother would say that getting work done is a skill if you know what is to be done and how; only then can you say that I can make do without you. Now the work just stacks up. And we are irritated with them. Even they have problems, illnesses. And [doing the work] genuinely from the heart, not for the sake of it.

Here Hema presented herself as someone located in the home and attributed her contribution to the family business to the support she received. She compared the thrift

[96] A sweet ball made from gram flour, sugar and clarified butter, commonly made in Marathi households.
[97] *Konda* is the rough remains after husking wheat and *manda* is a sweet preparation that requires some skill to prepare. The phrase is used to denote thrift, such that nothing is wasted.
[98] This is a Chitpavan surname but here she is referring to the famous sweets store chain in Pune.

and efforts of her mother's generation and expressed disappointment with young women (like me) for their receding presence in their households and kitchens.

She made an interesting point about 'domestic management' – about the skill of getting work done. She said that a woman needs to know what is to be done and how and only then can she get work done effectively. Moreover, she should have the capability to do it when the hired domestic worker does not show up. We will revisit this in a discussion on domestic management.

Hema's generation of women, born around independence, grew up in a young India, a nation in the making, which struggled with governance. Under the leadership of Nehru, the country's middle class began with a mindset of austerity, of making do with less.

Another of Hema's contemporaries spoke of immense labour and shortages. Kaveri Ukidwe said

> Nothing was available outside in our time; we had to do everything at home; in my daughter-in-law's time some things were available, but now everything is available. You get everything. Ration[99], food had to be sorted, washed, dried. We did not even get enough rice; we would save it for the children and eat wheat flakes. Now everything you get is clean, but we have a habit of not putting it away without minutely going through it. We had to husk it and really sort and clean. Now things are clean. These girls can just put it away without looking at it.

[99] Specific food items and sugar available through the public distribution system was referred to as ration. The system of rationing rice, jowar, sugar and kerosene started in 1939 during the Second World War and by 1946, 776 cities/towns including Pune were covered by the rationing system (Damle 2021).

The Nitsure grandmother also spoke of grabbing a few moments of leisure in the day-

> We had to grind everything at home. Salt, turmeric, *bhajani*[100], and even masala(spices). Then came the flour mill. We owned land near Chinchwad; we had to sort a lot of grain. Earlier it was not clean; now, with machines, it is cleaner. We did not have free time, maybe an hour in the evening. When the children were young, I would send the youngest one off for a stroll with a servant and then do knitting or reading or whatever else I liked.

The first generation women have dealt with food shortages and rationing of grain. Thrift, then, was an important quality to be nurtured by the housewife. The immense labour that these women put in for the upkeep of the home took up most of their time.

Women from the first generation repeatedly mentioned guests or, as they referred to it, "*yena-jaane."* The Marathi term indicates socializing or visitors. Pune as an urban centre meant that many relatives would come and stay over for various purposes from villages- medical, educational, administrative work, to fix marriage alliances and seek out work. The women catered to all these guests, many of whom were part of extended caste networks. Entertaining guests (cooking and cleaning for them) was a part of domestic labour, which led to an investment in the family's social network.

From Hema to Pradnya to Vrinda, we see a shift in how the women think of themselves with respect to work and domestic responsibilities. The shift in their perceptions about

[100] *Bhajani* is a flour made from a mixture for roasted pulses which is used for specific Marathi preparations, like *thalipeeth*- a thick, flat bread made from mixing *bhajani* with water, onion, coriander and so on. It is easily available in stores now but was prepared at home in earlier times.

work and domestic responsibility is determined by several factors, two of which are the changing ideologies circulating in their social networks and the improving material conditions of the Brahman community.

The following sections present two changes in the second and the third generations that the narratives point at- the second generation women like Pradnya sought out an identity beyond the domestic after settling into their domestic lives, while the third generation women foreground work in negotiating their marriages.

'Something of my own' – of women looking beyond the domestic

We will follow stories of two other women whose narratives resemble Pradnya's quest for something beyond the domestic.

Seema Karandikar, 58, grew up in a small temple town, finished her BSc in Home Science in Pune, and was married right after graduation at 22 years of age. She lived in a joint family and was responsible for running the household. She said,

> At home (there were) in-laws, grandfather-in-law, his sister and brother-in-law, father-in-law's cousin. A lot of responsibility, it was not difficult. I knew how to cook. Never had a problem. The environment was ok; the elders had to be taken care of. That there were many people in the house, this was never something that they (her family) thought about (when fixing her marriage). When we were looking for a bride for my husband's cousin, then it struck me.

This remark was made to convey that Seema's parents did not think about the joint family's household responsibility as a criterion in deciding her marriage into this family. So while Seema's family was not deterred by the housework that a large family would mean for Seema, it was something that came up when they were looking for a bride for her husband's cousin. Further,

> My daughter was born in a year, in 1983. A lot of responsibility, so never happened that [husband or in-laws said] you go [work outside]. No one ever encouraged or even suggested that I give competitive exams and all. My son was born four years later.

Despite having sisters-in-law and cousins who were working, Seema cites both her domestic responsibility and lack of encouragement from others around her as reasons for not stepping out. She started making sweaters on a machine at home after her son's birth but stopped because the wool led to respiratory problems.

> Seema: When my son was in the second or third class, I got frustrated, [felt like I was] taken for granted. It is a stage which comes in everyone's life. I was angry. Do what you can, even if you do not earn. I went to a few places and realized that my home science degree was not useful in that sense.
>
> Shraddha: What did you have in mind?
>
> Seema: To do something! Get out of the house for three hours and do something, notwithstanding how much money and all. Something concrete that I step out and do.

She started by teaching stitching to slum women, starting an ongoing stint of working with non-governmental organizations.

Seema mentioned feelings of frustration at being taken for granted, while Pradnya Pavagi, whom we encountered earlier, said she did not have anything of her own, both indicating a crisis of identity.

With Shobha, 58, the grudge, if one may call it that, is against her parents for marrying her off without allowing her to work. Shobha and her two siblings grew up mostly in Pune. Her mother, 86 year old Sharada, finished her graduation through distance learning after her youngest child grew up.

> Sharada: After we came here (Pune), I finished graduation from Swadhayaya classes for older citizens.
>
> Shraddha: Why did you feel like it?
>
> Sharada: I was not doing anything; children were getting so much education and were old also. He (husband) was earning well, so I had a maid for help, not for cooking but for everything else. There was stability. When my son was older, then I started my education.
>
> Shraddha: What did you have in mind?
>
> Sharada: To finish the third year and then work. That was not possible, but I had learnt singing, so I started doing that.

However, this did not mean that Shobha was allowed a different path. She said,

> Mother studied later, and she felt she should earn and all. When it came to us, my sister did commerce and married when she was in M.Com. For me, I did BSc and then did a course in Library Sciences. I felt like they [her parents] did not give us the time. I finished the exam, and the next day I was here to meet (the prospective groom). They started hunting when I was enrolled for B.Lib. During exams, I told them that they should wait till I finish. By the time the exam was over, they had already reached out [to her would be marital family]. So, I felt that if she [her mother] wanted to learn, why not give me time. I was doing well, had topped in the university.

Shobha further added,

> I would have gotten a good job, and there they [in-laws] had clearly said we do not want a working girl. So I cannot blame them [in-laws], saying they did not let me work. They had seen a couple of career-minded girls. They said [to those girls] good for you, but we will not be able to give you a push…
>
> Even if it was compulsory to get educated, it was like, go to a house where you will not have to work. Study and all and then marry into a good family. Girls should not have to earn money; it was better [that way]. Not that girls were not working, many of my friends were. Moreover, my father was unwell. Muscle weakness. That is why he was in a hurry. Else my career would have been good. He wanted to finish off his

> responsibilities. I believe in destiny. Circumstances were such [that I had to marry]. Mother felt she didn't do it, but we had the opportunity [but still could not work].

She tried to do short-term jobs when the opportunity arose, but her mother-in-law did not approve of her working outside. Her husband was working abroad for a few years, which meant additional responsibility for her.

She indicated that the norm for her social peers was that a girl was better off educated and married into a family where she did not have to work. And if a girl wanted to work, she would have to find a suitable family that would 'allow' that possibility. This was not the case for Shobha, as also for Seema and Pradnya.

When Shobha's daughter, Radha, started posing her questions about her life choices, Shobha also started reflecting more on what she perceived as a lacuna-

> Shobha: When Radha first went to college, her horizons started broadening. In school, she had the same upbringing as us, not very different thoughts, and all… College was a little wider, but it was different after post-graduation. When she asked me, you stood first in B.Lib, why did you not work? In our family life (*sansaar*[101]*)*, my husband's career was going on. I had no career, and my role was to support him, and that is what I was doing.

[101] According to Molesworth Marathi-English Dictionary (1996) it means- 1. the world, mundane existence, human life, man's mortal state 2. affairs of life, worldly business, vocations and engagements. All the meanings in the text are from Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary, Shubhaha-Saraswat Prakashan, Pune, Sixth Reprint, 1996.

> In one's later age, it strikes. The fault is yours; you should stand up for yourself; no one stands up for you. If I had done something, my husband would have (pauses); it depends on you and your willpower.
>
> Shraddha: Your mother-in-law was there so you could step out.
>
> Shobha: No, she was clear— no jobs— from day one, she was clear. When my husband was in Germany, I worked part-time for four months as a librarian for four hours. It was not accepted. I did that for four months. Radha would come back at 12.30, and I came at 1. She (mother-in-law) did not say no, but I could make out. So life went on. In retrospect, I should have stood up for myself. I should have asked for time. If you are working, you get into a house where it is accepted. With me, it did not begin like that, so that continued. Even our thinking, that we should have a career, that orientation was not there.

These women were not socialized to be 'career-minded.' Yet, somehow, all three were yearning for something beyond the domestic. The idea of doing something of their own, working- irrespective of money, but to step out of their own accord- was a desire both the mother and daughter, i.e., Sharada and Shobha, shared.

Both eventually got involved in their respective husbands' businesses. The mother helped with typing and bank work; Shobha was actively involved in the account-keeping for her husband's factory when she was interviewed.

I wish to highlight these women's need to step out of the house, of their own accord, to work, to find meaning. In these specific cases, there is no financial obligation fuelling

this desire. Their husbands provided for enough and more to live comfortably. Both had a house owned by the family in which to live. This fact is an important indicator of the material circumstances in which these women were located and sought something beyond the domestic. Financial concerns did not weigh in on the nature of work they sought out. It allowed them to exercise choice within their educational and other limitations. Like Seema remarked, her home science degree opened very few doors for her when she stepped out to find something to do.

Not all Brahman women had the privilege of setting aside financial implications. Pradnya's mother-in-law, Hema, started a catering business with her husband to repay a loan, as we saw in the earlier section. Many other women from the community have shouldered financial responsibility within their families, temporarily or otherwise. While familial norms prohibit women from working, rules can be compromised in case of financial stress. Some families even encourage working women.

However, here we are focusing on this need to have 'something of one's own.' This idea has fired the feminist imagination for decades. This very idea was troubling the suburban housewives in 1960s America. In 1963, Betty Friedan called the identity crises of middle-class American women 'the problem that has no name'(1963). Her deliberations on the 'Feminine Mystique' – an ideal of domestic femininity which was pervasive in all spheres like education, various forms of media, popular culture, literature, helped spark off what came to be known as the second wave of feminist movements. Despite its value as a feminist text, Friedan was criticized for her limited discourse. The text spoke to only a section of women, ones who could afford this kind of lifestyle in the first place.

Another criticism was that Friedan wanted women to necessarily find meaning outside of the domestic.

These criticisms give us clues to contextualize the lives of the women, mentioned above, without losing sight of their lived experiences as housewives in urban, joint family households in Pune in the 1980s and 1990s.

Pune was one of the country's urban focal points that witnessed the autonomous women's movement in the 1970s. It was the venue for the first women's conference- United Women's Liberation Struggle Conference in 1975 (Gole 2017). The ideas around gender equality had started circulating in popular media in the following decades alongside legal reform. There were public discussions and extensive media coverage on 'women's empowerment' (Patel 2004). Within two decades, the state not only paid attention to feminist discourses but had also appropriated some of their language. Many programs rolled out to address 'gender equity' made no changes in the sexual division of labour (Menon, 2009, p.104).

While one cannot pinpoint the reasons for the kind of identity crisis that these women share, the contribution of the discourses on gender equality cannot be denied.

Negotiating Marriage

Table 4.1. Age at marriage of women from the three generation households

Age at marriage			
TRIADS	**Gen 1**	**Gen 2**	**Gen 3**
Gharpure	19	22	-
Pavagi	20	22	26
Karandikar	20	22	22
Nitsure	21	23	-
Ukidwe	21	22	24

It is noteworthy that all the first-generation women were married after the legal age of eighteen years. We saw in the earlier chapter how it was ideological and cultural factors more than the law[102] that helped increase the age at marriage of Chitpavan Brahmin women in the 1920s and 30s, much above the national average (Hatekar et al. 2009). Having considered external factors which affected age at marriage, I focus on women's agency in negotiating marriage.

The first generation had no say in their marriage; the second generation of women had a chance to interact with their prospective husbands. Two out of the five marriages in the second generation were (endogamous) love marriages.

[102] The government of India is considering (as on August 2020) a law to increase the legal age of marriage for girls as a way to improve the health and nutritional status of mothers. This is being critiqued using the very argument that Hatekar et.al. use- it is not legal but cultural and ideological factors that influence age at marriage. Rather than a law increasing the age at marriage for women, what we need is to address poverty and nutritional status of Indian mothers (John 2020).

The noticeable shift between the second to third generation narratives was from marriage determining work to work determining marriage. The third-generation women focused on the need to find a family most conducive to their work. For the Pavagi granddaughter-in-law, Vrinda, a classical dancer, her art was the biggest criterion while choosing a partner-

> Shraddha: Caste wise?
>
> Vrinda: The parents wanted a Konkanastha (Chitpavan).
>
> Shraddha: Do you know why?
>
> Vrinda: Maybe so that it is easier for me to adapt; I feel that is the only point. … While finding a partner, I thought my field is uncertain, so there has to be at least some part that is certain. Our [marital family's] business is dining[103] which has no end. That part was stable. That is essential if you want to do something in the arts without hesitation; the financial aspect must be strong. That is my opinion. So these were my criteria about a life partner rather than the [person's] looks…. And there [her natal house] I was used to a bungalow, my own house. I had lived in a rented place in a housing society while in college, so I know what madness that is. I practice dance, then someone is disturbed, did not want to deal with all that. [Having one's] own house, big or small, is not a problem. And luckily, their house [her in-laws'] even though in the

[103] They own a dining hall.

> old city, it is quite huge and there are servants. That is important, not that one has to do everything.

Thirty-year-old Gharpure granddaughter- Shalini, the sole heir to her father's manufacturing business, was going to start looking for a spouse soon.

> The way I have grown up and my cousins, such a liberal environment is possible only in a Brahman household. I do business. I may have to go late at night; there is troubleshooting during deliveries where we have to be here (in their factory) till 10 and 11 pm. You need support from home, not just from the husband but in-laws as well. And such support is possible only in Brahman families…. Money is also an issue. When I become the director here, I will get more money than my husband or other family members. Maybe, I don't know. This cannot be an issue- how can you earn more than your husband. In non-Brahman families, this is also a reason for not letting girls work.

Third-generation women have a clear focus on finding a marital home that facilitates their ambitions. Vrinda ensured an easy transition from her natal to marital home due to their financial stability, own house, and ability to afford servants. Shalini had marriage plans which are designed around her demanding work life. She was convinced that only Brahman families gave women the freedom to work and grow. The Nitsure granddaughter is a dentist and wants to marry and live in a city where she could practice.

This is significantly different from their mothers or mothers-in-law, for whom work outside the home was based on their marital family's demands.

While endogamous marriages have persisted across generations, the earlier alliances seemed to have paid more attention to the family's reputation and the groom's education, than the marital family's living standards. Women of the first and even second generations have found themselves in homes with less material comfort than their own. Also, as Shobha pointed out, the burden of domestic work within her joint marital family was not a criterion in her alliance but became one for a few years later. However, this is not the case in today's times. A woman running a marriage bureau remarked how the entire process of marriages has become very economically oriented even with all the Brahman families being '*sukhavastu*', i.e. financially well-to-do. She specified this as owning a couple of flats and a car or two, when I asked. Living standards and financial compatibility are important factors in negotiating marriage alliances for the third generation Chitpavan women.

Of more than sixty women interviewed as a part of this study, seven women were unmarried and two, divorced. Of the unmarried ones, two had chosen not to marry while the other five were expecting to get married in the future. The inevitability of marriage and shouldering the responsibility of domestic management recurred across narratives irrespective of the age and occupations in this study.

We would look at two exceptions- one, who was ready to sacrifice marriage if she did not find a partner supportive of her work, and another, who chose not to marry.

Rekha is a social activist in her mid-forties who was committed to her work.

Shraddha: How did marriage happen?

Rekha: At the time of getting married, I decided to do this work and told my father that I will not quit for at least ten years. I will marry a man who is ok with this kind of work or [I] will not marry. That was the extent [of my commitment to my work]. That was accepted. So the boy's acceptance need not be conveyed in words. [I had decided that] we will go to his house; they will not come to our house. The house can tell you what their expectations are, so they may say yes, but the house indicates that the way I behave will not be acceptable.

Shraddha: What were you looking for in the house?

Rekha: For example, I met this boy outside and thought we could go ahead and marry, but when I went to his house, they had a 3x3 feet frame of Gajanan Maharaj[104]. Now a house with this 3x3 frame of Gajanan Maharaj hanging in the living room, their lifestyle cannot be such that a girl working in rural areas will do. If someone has peg glasses in the cupboards, even if they intellectually understand why I am working on banning alcohol, there will be problems at the implementation level. And if there will be a drinking party at my own house, how can I work to ban alcohol in the villages? When you enter the house, you find out the culture in the house, and it is not only related to education. I had decided that I would prefer to marry a Konkanastha man; because I want minimum

[104] A Hindu guru, saint and mystic.

strain in the house. Only then can I go and work as much as possible outside since there are fewer adjustments. I felt the other advantage was that there are lesser family obligations (*gotavala*) and less dependency. It does not usually happen that there are 50 people for lunch today, no one comes without informing, and once in a while, one can adjust. By design, the maximum time for work is possible in a Konkanastha house, commitment is another thing, but just the possibility has to be there.

During festivities, the ritual offering for Gauri is *ghavan-ghatla,*[105] isn't it? If one has to make sixteen vegetables, then there will be no time left. So a lifestyle like this is supportive of my work, hence the choice.

Shraddha: So you did not have a problem with Gauri Ganpati and all?

Rekha: Better if it is not there, but if it is to be done, there is little required and so not a problem as such. There is none of this in my house, and my mother-in-law has not done any of this. I found a house like this by some grace; even daily *dev puja* is not necessary. If you wish, do it; if not, once in 3-4 days is ok. This is a plus point- if that much less time for personal matters, then that much more time for social work.

[105] Gauri is another name for Parvati, Ganesha's mother. In the 10 day Ganesh/ Ganpati festival celebration, Gauri is also venerated. Rekha referred to the offering prepared for Gauri. These are made with rice flour, coconut milk and jaggery; they are traditional offering to the goddess among the Chitpavan Brahmans. The ingredients are available easily in the coastal region, where the community originated. Unlike the elaborate preparations expected in other communities, like the sixteen vegetable preparations she alluded to, the Konkanastha community has traditions that require minimum preparations. For example, many Chitpavan households bring home the Ganesh for one and half day whereas others have it for five, seven or ten full days.

Rekha had conveyed to her parents that her work took precedence over marriage, and she would only marry if she found a supportive marital household. And she was convinced that a Konkanastha man/family would be the best option for her owing to the minimal labour required in rituals. In the process, she managed to negotiate a role reversal in the process of arranging marriages. Traditionally the prospective groom's family visits the prospective bride's home and evaluates compatibility.

Amita was a seventy-plus woman with a successful career. After a professional course in India, she decided to go abroad and used her contacts to secure a job in Denmark.

> So he [father] said go, in 1969, and now I feel he was far ahead of his time when I look back. I was not married; I was not going to get married. He did not bat an eyelid, said go and then go to England, America study, very open to the idea.

Amita had a suitor then, but things did not work out. She went to England and later finished a Ph.D. She worked in various firms, was a planning consultant for the government, collaborated with international agencies, and traveled internationally. Thinking aloud, she said, "I also sometimes wonder that this career, how much of it was possible because I did not get married. Maybe or not, I don't know." She was alluding to an extremely successful, fulfilling work-life wherein she did not have to think about home and dependent people who needed care.

Rekha sought to minimize her domestic management and assumed a Konkanastha household would leave maximum time for her social work. Amita did not consciously choose not to marry but retrospectively wondered if a married life would have allowed

her to have a whirlwind career where in her words, “I could just pick up my bags and go!”

Thus, across time, a space was possible for women to negotiate and ensure a marital life that accommodated their ambitions. This discussion sets the stage for deliberating the conundrum of work and home that the next section takes on.

Work, home and *Samanjaspana*

Now we look at two women, Asawari and Kamal, both born soon after independence, to think about the tension between domesticity and work. Both of them were engaged in creative professions for at least some parts of their lives. Details of their specific career paths are withheld for maintaining anonymity.

Asawari was born in 1949, finished her Masters and was married off and sent to a smaller town from the big city of her birth. From there, they moved to Pune in 1980, and she has been there since. She is well known for her work in media.

Kamal was born in 1952, moved to Pune after fifth class. She married in the final year of her bachelor’s degree, did a professional course, and worked in a profession complementary to her doctor husband. She also dabbled in running a business from home before shutting shop and is now at the helm of a multi-media company.

Both grew up in what Kamal describes as *assal* Chitpavan Brahman families, a word used to convey authenticity and purity. Asawari said,

> In my childhood, it was funny, people used to be ‘Konkanastha and others,’ the latter were not named, and others meant they are inferior

> (*tuccha, kamich*), that is what I grew up hearing, then the surnames ending in E[106] and making specific food items.

This idea of Konkanastha and others, the latter standing for everyone who is not Konkanastha, was mentioned by others too, two of them specifically in jest. Asawari stated how the idea was that if you are not Konkanastha, then the words used to describe 'others' were *kami* and *tuccha,* an idea she did not subscribe to. While the former means inferior, the latter carries a charge of humiliation, disdain, or marking someone as lowly. This notion points to standing apart, a feeling of superiority that the Konkanastha community is known for. She described this as part of the messaging she received about caste in her childhood.

Asawari also wondered whether there was any angle of race involved, given that there have been limited gene pools in the numerically small community. She described herself as a sixth-generation Konkanastha Brahman, an indicator of successively marrying within the community.

> My impression from childhood is that we are fair, good looking (*gore gomte*); not me personally but as a community and intelligent; I believe the latter, and I am respectful [about it].

This idea of genetic intelligence is another characteristic that is commonly brought up. It contributes to the idea of 'merit' and possession of merit. Conversations on merit do not account for generations of privilege and advantages that a habitus like the one that the

[106] A lot of Chitpavan surnames end in the phonetic sound 'e', for example- Lele, Gokhale, Chitale, Paranjpe, Ranade, Watve, Godbole, Nene etc. It is a matter of intra-community jest that these people are thought to be more superior and also at times the butt of jokes.

second and third generation women grew up in, as detailed in the previous chapter. While Asawari speaks of this as an inheritance which she is respectful of, allowing a reading of bestowed advantage, Kamal expressed pride.

> My mother's father and uncle were teachers, so genetically, I got it all from them, a judicious attitude (*sachotichi vrutti*), helping nature, intellect; both my grandfathers were very intelligent. I think I got all the qualities that one genetically gets… sharp intellect (*taila buddhi).*

While not directly related to work or domesticity, the observations about their caste-marked upbringing give us a glimpse of messages about their caste identity that these women grew up with and which influence their identities.

We now look at how Asawari and Kamal position themselves in the household. While they describe a similar time, the lenses they use make a difference in understanding.

Kamal's observations about women's work and how it evolved in the decades after independence were as follows-

> Pre-independence, there was no custom for women to work. It was more after the 1960s that women started to have jobs. Post-independence, there were many variations, that is what I think. Of course, I was born in 1952. These women aimed to get educated and marry in a good household where their education would be useful. So all of them (husband's aunts) married and were well-to-do, but no one worked.

This provides us with a perspective on women's work in the early decades after independence. As seen in the previous chapter, these women were at the forefront of women's education as the members of a community that benefitted from the state's investment in educational initiatives. In the narratives I collected, none of the women I spoke to were illiterate. Even others, older relatives mentioned in the conversations could read and write at least in Marathi, their first language. By the time India attained independence literacy was a norm for women in the Chitpavan Brahman community. However, according to Kamal, the purpose of a woman's education was largely about marrying into a 'good' household where her education was 'useful.' The woman's education was to keep a good house and raise good citizens, according to an ideal notion of femininity and domesticity that was crystallized in the nationalist discourse (Chatterjee 1989; Fuller and Narasimhan 2014; Sangari and Vaid 1989; Walsh 2005). We have explored this 'schooling' of women (Chakravarti 1998) in domesticity in the previous chapter. Kamal continues,

> Women started in the 60s; those who were comfortable did not work, only if the need arose. When education started increasing, those who were educated started working; they did not sit at home. When I got married in 1970-72, not all my friends worked; those who were intelligent, who did post-grad they worked. B.Ed was considered safe, working in schools[107]. The cult of jobs started from 60-65; working in banks, government offices; safe jobs. Till 2000 it is the same, now my friends are retiring. But in the

[107] Due to the Second World War, middle class, upper caste women in cities found employment opprtunities. While schools were one avenue, rationing offices employed women too. Anecdotal experience of one of these women is noted in Chinmay Damle's article on rationing offices (2021).

> initial years after independence, I don't think women worked so much, only if the need arose. It was not very socially favourable otherwise. In Chitpavan households, there was a lot of liberty. If you do not want to work, you can learn to embroider, stitch, sing; nothing to stop [one] from being culturally rich. My grandparents-in-law would watch Bal Gandharva (a famous theatre actor who played female parts) plays. So it's not like women were kept within four walls. The changes in education happened later.

The above quote, which is Kamal's reading of the evolution of Chitpavan women's work, gives us several pointers about what led to women working- financial needs of the family, higher education and individual ambition, and the availability of 'safe jobs' for women. Safe jobs were teaching, banking and government office. The same sectors were deemed acceptable avenues for employment for Tamil Brahman women (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014).

A woman's abilities were considered to be part of the family's assets, and not all abilities needed to be monetized. The second generation women desirous of an identity outside the domestic and the third generation women foregrounding their professional ambitions in seeking marital alliances is a shift from the 'family' to the 'individual' as a point of reference in making choices. Families started with accommodating a certain degree of 'individualism' from the daughter-in-law, but this process was not static. Notions of femininity expanded over time such that the families welcome well-qualified and professionally successful daughters-in-law. This is a decisive change that can be observed across communities, even if not evenly.

In the almost hour-long conversation with seventy-year-old Asawari, a major part was devoted to her lamenting about the depressing scenario in which women continue to remain. Starting from her own life, she highlighted how marriage denied her an opportunity for further study and work. She spoke of a cocooned life which foreclosed possibilities of venturing out for girls like her due to lack of exposure.

> Asawari: Home, family life and family's lineage and honour and all that *(ghar, sansaar, gharana wagare).* That was expected of me. I had to let go of a national scholarship and was married off… I had a Ph.D. scholarship. It was a problem that I was tall; my parents were worried about my marriage. I am not blaming anyone. MA is enough... Why send your daughter to a small town when you can see she is academically strong? I could have easily gotten a good job then.
>
> Shraddha: Was that a trend back then, letting your daughter work?
>
> Asawari: Not even a thought; no one suggested it; they did not think about it. See, the generation born around Independence had to face many constraints, the basic one being economic. Money was not that easily available back then—many constraints.
>
> Shraddha: Isn't that a reason to send your children to work?
>
> Asawari: See, even in my generation, women have become doctors and IAS. But then, to get some exposure, one needs to step out and know something. No brother, father had a touring job so after 7 pm not even the shadow of a man fell on me.

By saying there is no one to blame for the course of events around her marriage, Asawari indicated that it was typical during those times to raise a well-educated daughter who was married off or that she had herself internalized the normative requirement for the time. It could be a stoic stance of someone who knows it is too late to not only change but even regret or criticize. As a daughter-in-law, her main concern was supposed to be the family and its prestige.

'*Sansaar*' was mentioned earlier by Shobha and now by Asawari, implying that it was their preoccupation. A common word in Marathi, *sansaar*, is understood as domestic and worldly affairs. Both men and women participate in the mundane affair of running the household. However, the woman is the locus of the domestic. It was something beyond this domestic locus of *sansaar* that the women in the previous section were in search of, work that gave them something beyond their domestic identities.

The idea of women stepping out of the house drew social disfavour in Pune as late as the 1980s, according to Asawari.

> I struggled a lot with this. We came to Pune in 1980, this (referring to her area of residence) was the stronghold of the Konkanastha (*bale killa*[108]), and this was a well-known family. So one heard- 'what is the need for women of this house to work?' as late as 1980. If I was speaking of the 50s… when I came here (Pune), I came with thoughts of doing something. I've always thought if you have intellect, then you have to do something

[108] Literally means the innermost part or core of a fort which is deemed invincible by the enemy and has restricted entry.

> with it. What is the point of cooking vegetables (*alu chi bhaji*[109]*)* for the rest of your life? That was never something that I could live with. So I did what I could, for whatever it's worth.

The quote from Asawari indicates that the envisioning of women's place in society in 1980s Pune was still what she thought belonged to the mindset of the 50s. The idea of women stepping out, as she did, and making a place for themselves beyond the household, required a struggle. Asawari suggests that the reformed modern woman who was very much located in the household and preoccupied with the family's upkeep was a norm that continued to pervade the women in the Chitpavan Brahman community several decades after independence.

Kamal has a very different take on the 'struggle' around the woman's place, balancing the home and the outside. More than once, in her narratives spanning two sessions, she emphasized that her home was her priority.

> Kamal: And at a certain age, you get that liberty to do what you want. And it requires a certain *samanjaspana* which I think the Chitpavan women have.
>
> Shraddha: What does that mean?
>
> Kamal: That means the tendency to adjust; if you do something properly, then you get results in due course, the ability to understand that. Otherwise, there are conflicts all the time; there is dissatisfaction. That

[109] She is refers to a preparation of colocasia leaves and split chickpeas commonly made in Konkanastha households to convey the tediousness of doing the same thing, each and every day of your life.

> didn't happen in my case. I gave my 100 percent to whatever work I got….. I drew a sphere for myself about how much work to do, not beyond that since the home was still my priority.

In Kamal's narrative, one finds that the location of the woman within the household is unquestioned. The idea of home as the woman's primary responsibility lies at the foundation of a worldview that dictates how you go about your life. While the woman is permitted to have a role outside of the house, it is after she has attained a certain age, which is to say she has fulfilled her responsibilities to the extent of being able to buy time for herself. '*Samanjaspana*' is a loaded term that speaks of a gendered configuration expected of women[110]. The Marathi word *samanjas*[111] helps us unpack what is expected of a woman. Kamal used it to mean—being sensible, reasonable, and willing to adjust or compromise. She called it a virtue that Chitpavan women possess, achieving a certain claim over their own time- through adjustment and avoiding conflicts. It requires the woman to have the ability to harmonize her ambitions and desires with those of her household responsibilities. Furthermore,

> Maintaining the family was always a priority for me, so I was always mentally satisfied that I am doing what I like after fulfilling my responsibilities. My family also prioritized what I like, but I did not take undue advantage of that. What is rightfully yours, if you are satisfied in

[110] Kamal here is engaging in adaptive preference formation. She is retrospectively positing the events such that they appear to fit her expectations of what is a correct role of women and how Brahman women like her are *samanjas* and therefore able to achieve this work-life balance. Feminists argue however, that women, unlike men are often burdened with the unreasonable choice of family/children and career and having to sacrifice or delay one for the other. This is due to systemic causes within the household and the work environment (Leahy and Doughney 2006).

[111] The meaning according to Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary (1996) is—Wise, sensible, judicious, discreet 2 Intelligent, apt, sharp-witted 3 Virtuous, good. 4 Rational, right, fit, proper, suitable, becoming.

> that, if you satisfy others, then you can also be content yourself. In this field [the performing arts], you need family support, and especially for women and girls, they cannot survive without support.

What Kamal liked to do, she pursued after having worked in the family ventures for over two decades, paid off a loan taken to renovate and rebuild their house, and her children had finished their schooling. The satisfaction of having performed household tasks in her case included her financial contributions to the family. According to Kamal, 'What is rightfully yours' is the home and family. Satisfying yourself and others in the family as a homemaker is a precondition to anything else a woman might desire or do. Not only is this a key to contentment, but she also presented this as a way to gain family support in any endeavour outside the home. She gave examples of famous women in her field who balanced household responsibilities with their work. Continuing from the earlier thread, she said,

> Give and take; you need to gain that; it is not readymade. Our women have that kind of tendency; genetically also, it is there. One colleague (names a famous personality) said she would make seven vegetables and deep freeze them if she was going out on a seven-day tour. At that time, no hiring help, and if you want to go work..., do what is required. She is older than me, so her mother-in-law was even older and old-fashioned. Everyone does not get a mother-in-law like mine.

According to Kamal, this kind of work and management of the household was normative even though it is a 'give and take,' which is inevitable.

And yet she also calls what was required of her friend as 'old fashioned', contrasting it with her situation. Her mother-in-law was encouraging and supportive. Kamal was encouraged to finish a technical course and work after her marriage. She declared during our conversation that her life was not labourious.

> Shraddha: How was housework organized in your house?
>
> Kamal: At our place, there was a system of having maids for quite a while. I have not had a hard life (*kastaprat ayushya*). See, our family was big; many people were working [for us]. There was a maid for cooking at both times since my mother-in-law's time. Big family, plus there were students who had to be fed, etc. So maids for housework, it never happened that there was no help. She was educated but did not work, helped with the family business from home. She [mother-in-law] would look after housework. I was working; she did a lot for me. This is a quality of Brahman households, to hold on to each other irrespective of internal conflicts, live together.

Kamal married into a big family who supported students[112] in the city and could afford to hire help for both meals even before her marriage. This facilitated her outsourcing of household labour to hired help, thereby leaving her with time to work in the family business and later pursue her career in media. Her advice to her daughters is also to free up their time from housework.

[112] See Bairy (2010) for an explanation and analysis of the Brahman custom of feeding and supporting poor Brahman boys and its significance in the story of caste privilege (p.78-81).

> Now, my girls, I cannot tell them to stay at home. In fact, I tell them, instead of wasting your energy on housework, use it elsewhere. Do what is necessary but keep a maid and get her to do the work. Give time to children, teach them.

Investment in children[113] is an important part of the performance of domesticity and a way of building ideology and cultural capital (Donner 2008). Kamal is effectively advising her daughters to perform the critical parts of social reproduction themselves while hiring domestic workers for the 'labour' in the way Arendt uses the term- repetitive domestic labour, which is essential but full of drudgery.

However, for Asawari, as we have seen earlier, this responsibility of housework was a burden.

> [Her husband and in-laws' stance was] Manage the household and then do whatever you want to (*kay ujed padaycha to pada*). That is the situation even today. No opposition is co-operation. In my life, no opposition to anything, do whatever you want to do, but our things should happen in this exact way- so whatever is typically served in the meals, etc. Nowadays I have been a bit carefree about things (*bedarkarine*), there are very few years left, let them say what they want. You become an outcaste[114] in the family. She is not going to be like us. For example- I stopped inviting

[113] The idea of 'motherwork' that Patricia Hill Collins proposes in theorizing the experiences of women of colour provides an interesting point of departure in thinking about women's work in raising children. It highlights the social and political aspects of care work. Collins foregrounds the physical survival of mothers and children, dialectics of power and powerlessness and shows that caring involves multiple care givers within and outside the private. She problematizes autonomy as the ultimate quest for humanity (Collins 1994). This serves as a contrast in thinking about Brahman women's relationship with childcare.
[114] She used the English word outcaste here.

> those people for meals who do not matter too much; I have done enough of that. Why do it now? What for? But then you are an outcaste, and it is a kind of a small price you pay. Even in that, the creative pursuit is extremely difficult, extremely difficult. If you do a 12-hour job, at least you have stepped out. To be at home and work like this is extremely difficult, very tiring, and can seem futile at some point. Why all this? This journey is very difficult, and a sane woman should…., well, I feel so many times that those were the sane women who never went this way. Whatever is prescribed… But those who did, they were drained, their intellect and mentally; happened to many women. Being sensitive, being ambitious, and remaining at your own house is very difficult. If you walk away, then it is fine."

The first line conveys that the household is a priority before anything else the woman might engage in. The Marathi phrase Asawari uses- *kay ujed padaycha to pada*- is sarcastic. After decades of diligently fulfilling her household responsibility, upholding norms of hospitality along with her creative endeavours, Asawari decided to be '*bedarkar*' i.e., carefree or daring, in setting aside social norms. She was subsequently treated as an 'outcaste.' Thus, non-conformity to caste norms resulted in feeling ostracised, even if you are a Chitpavan Brahman woman from a well-to-do family with a public presence.

Asawari described her creative journey as extremely difficult, tiring, and futile to the point of mental exhaustion. Despite her fame, her roles- as caregiver, wife, mother- did not accommodate her as an individual of worth outside of gendered roles within the

domestic realm. While Kamal's point of view is different from Asawari's, she clearly states that the domestic was prioritized even if her mother-in-law and family encouraged her education and non-domestic work.

Asawari spoke of feminism as a defining moment of salvation.

> 1975 was the year and then the decade. Had not even heard of the word till then. We did not know how far it will enter the homes and how much revolution it may bring. All of this was being ridiculed in families around us, 'home breakers' and 'we are the ones who stick to our homes' and all that….. I have a lot of respect and appreciation for *Stree Mukti*. We were saved!

Despite her criticism of how the movement shaped up eventually, Asawari's critical positioning of women vis-à-vis the structural arrangement of caste, community, and family that keep them tied to the domestic, may be emerging from her engagement with the women's movement and feminist thought. While she repeatedly mentioned that she was unsure of what part of this was specific about the Konkanastha community, she had this to say-

> Asawari: What I feel is ultimately most troublesome or tiring is being answerable for everything. Even a speck of dust in the house is because of me. The taste of a food item is also because of me, how long!
>
> Shraddha: And you do not see this changing?

> Asawari: Not much; I feel depressed (*nirash*) by what I see in the outside world. And not marrying is not the answer: why the denial? One may want wifehood, motherhood. To do what you want along with that, we have not reached that kind of maturity, I feel (*evdhi pragalbhata aplyat ali asa mala watat nahi*). I cannot say how much of this is Konkanastha and others and all, I cannot say.

Asawari's despondent view stems from being answerable for everything within the domestic realm, and she does not feel this is changing for successive generations of women. She proclaimed that as a society, we had not attained the kind of maturity that allows a woman personhood outside of her strictly defined gender role. She uses the word *pragalbhata* to indicate the development or maturity of a society. We will look at how the same concept of being *pragalbha* is used differently to describe a housewife in the next section.

Asawari proclaimed that the women who chose to toe the line, stuck to their prescribed roles, were sensible. Her statement resonates with what Kamal described as a give and take. The woman upholds the caste norms prescribed for her to gain access to the outside world.

This speaks to the measurement and acknowledgment of domestic management that Kumkum Sangari proposed. Brahman women cater to the needs of the household, the extended family, and their community. This allows them access to various forms of capital associated with being an upper-caste middle-class Brahman woman- economic, social and cultural.

The same configuration of home and work outside comes across very differently in the narrative of these two contemporaries. While one woman questions the hold of this gendered configuration, the other woman enlists it as a support system to be used while negotiating a space for oneself. Here *samanjaspana* is the very fulcrum of the work-life balance, a woman's burden.

Kamal claims to embody that *samanjaspana*, the ability to adjust and rationalize this adjustment as a way of being able to pursue her desired work after having fulfilled her responsibilities. She takes great pride in her Chitpavan identity and looks back on a fulfilling life-

> So now, at sixty-five, I do not feel bored. Each day begins with new work and ends well. Some age-related aches and pains but minor. I get joy from what I do. I never expected money from this field.

However, Asawari questions what she perceives as the underutilization of women's facilities,

> If you look at these women going to recite *Atharvashirsha* [115] at Dagdusheth[116], thirty thousand women, I find it unbearable (*asahya*[117]). My hunch is that three fourth of those women must be Konkanastha. If someone has said recite this, it will give you good karma or whatever; they will go all out to do it (*jeevacha raan karun kartil*). The baggage of

[115] A set of verses which praise Ganpati and are part of commonly taught Sanskrit verses in typical Brahman households.
[116] Dagdusheth Halwai is a popular Ganpati temple in Pune and annually women gather together in hundreds to recite Sanskrit verses
[117] *Asahya* translates as intolerable.

> tradition means they do not have the habit of asking questions. Why recite this? If someone asks me, the disturbance that it will cause, I do not want that. I want stability and the assurance that stability ensures. Let the men do those things. Conditioning is like this; let the man take the challenges. I will maintain the system he puts in place with my utmost dedication. The thought that one is being underutilised in this process does not strike them. I am opposed to this, for my daughter, daughter-in-law, granddaughter—you can do better than this.

This imagery of the women reciting Sanskrit verses on the streets of Pune, which Asawari finds intolerable, makes an annual appearance in local newspapers of Pune during the Ganpati celebrations that span ten days. Asawari emphasizes that it is conditioning that comes in the way of women's questioning of their roles. She posits the *Atharvashirsha* reciting Chitpavan woman as an image of the unquestioning tradition-bound woman dedicated to her family and community, who does not dare move away from what is prescribed and therefore is oblivious to her under-utilization. Asawari's questioning of this kind of conditioning is drawn from her allegiance to feminist discourses which, she claims have been crucial for her. Her statements hold a mirror to Kamal, whose *samanjaspana* is questioned by Asawari's mental exhaustion in balancing her desires and ambition with the domestic's perpetual responsibility.

In the next section, we will meet the *pragalbha grihini*, the cultured homemaker who personifies this *samanjaspana*.

Brahman Women as Pragalbha Grihini, i.e., Cultured Housewives

It struck me that a 28-year-old make-up artist I interviewed used the word 'homemaker' to describe her mother, rather than the commonly used 'housewife.' 'Homemaker' accords dignity to a person by acknowledging the productive and reproductive labour performed by women across centuries. We noted what decades of feminist intervention have done for its recognition as undervalued yet necessary labour. This recognition of the value of housework by women leads to the idea of '*pragalbha grihini*' or cultured homemaker described below.

Chitpavan Brahman women interviewed here have been able to outsource housework to domestic workers. Right from the first generation, most women hired help in washing and cleaning. 'Deritualisation' of caste (Sheth 1999) also reduced the strict adherence to codes of conduct followed by Brahman women in their daily domestic chores- like cooking only after a bath and the menstrual taboos. Other practices like getting the domestic worker to wash utensils outside and rinsing the washed utensils before taking them back into the kitchen were done away with. Receding caste norms enabled women to hire help for cooking, too, if they chose to. Soha is a financial analyst in her early thirties. While answering a question on hiring help, she elaborated-

> Shraddha: You have the house management covered?
>
> Soha: Yes, so this guy (she refers to the one who ushered me in), Aai calls him my housewife (smiled). He has my house management covered.
>
> Shraddha: He takes care of whatever other help?

Soha: Two maids.

Shraddha: He is in-house?

Soha: No, he is not in-house, has his wife and kids, here from breakfast to dinner, six days a week. He has food with us. For 6-7 years. Before that, I managed all of that.

Shraddha: You have had help?

Soha: Yes, my mother-in-law also has always had help. She says I do not want to spend time cutting vegetables. I will do the *phodni*[118]. It has always been like that.

Soha had three domestic workers to take care of all the housework. I term the Chitpavan Brahman women's work within the house as 'domestic management.' While these Brahman women are responsible for running the household, their caste and class position enables them to escape the labour involved in performing housework. Right from the first section where we met the Pavagi family, hired domestic workers have been part of the women's narratives, though almost invisible, much like the labour they perform. The involvement of hired help has increased in successive generations across all the households.

Avanti, a sixty-plus woman, was almost a single parent to two sons owing to her husband's long absences from home due to his employment in a commercial shipping company. She quit a lucrative position when her children were young

[118] Tempering, the act of adding spices and condiments to hot oil before putting in the vegetables is *phodni*. This is critical to the taste of the preparation.

but continued to work in children's development, media, and family counseling. She revised her opinion about being a housewife.

> One of my sisters-in-law reads so much; she is *pragalbha.* Another does knitting and all and has such wide social contacts, it helps. You need such people in society, with flexi-time. So I felt that what we used to say earlier about just a housewife, it need not be that. You can be a housewife. In later seminars and lectures, I would actually proudly say- I am basically a housewife, and my career is secondary to my housewifely duties, but it is important. When I said this to a group of women, they were amazed and said, please explain; this is an interesting concept. Then I spoke about this flexi-time business. I think my family has given me this- even as a housewife; you can have a well-developed personality (*pragalbha*).

The idea of a '*pragalbha grihini'* - a well-developed, cultured home-maker is important for symbolic and material reasons; it is a means of socio-cultural reproduction of caste. This idea of a cultured homemaker- well-read, well educated; who cultivates, and invests in social networks useful for the entire family- resonates with what has been termed as 'status production,' which can be employed to unpack women's role in the reproduction of caste.

Hannah Papanek, writing about women from a class where one income is sufficient to support the family, has elaborated on the various types of work women perform in the

larger category she calls ‘status production work.’ Women produce many goods and services which benefit other family members, whether it is paid or unpaid. What they do affects the family’s relation with others within the community (Papanek 1979). The women embodying this construction are eligible for paid employment because of the cultural capital cultivated by being middle-class Brahman women. They may prioritize families while having the option of engaging in activities outside the domestic- paid or unpaid, utilizing economic resources to outsource the drudgery of housework like Kamal advised her daughters. Alternately, like Avanti or Kamal, they prioritize their families while being engaged in multiple activities which may or may not be paid work.

Social reproduction for middle classes has been described as an active, constructed, and negotiated process, which was built upon the power of one’s structural location but also dependent on one’s creativity (Kaufman, 2005). Thus, s*amajaspana* and *pragalbha grihini* are two ideas that give us an insight into how well-educated middle-class Chitpavan Brahman women negotiate their gender roles. Both of these concepts arise out of the narratives and belie easy categorization in the existing binaries of paid/unpaid, market/non-market; available to analyze women’s work.

Here I reiterate an important condition mentioned in the first section. This ‘choice’ is a function of these women's location [119] within middle-class Chitpavan Brahman households, where money earned is not a criterion (or at least not an important criterion) for the decision to work.

[119] The women’s husbands were either businessmen (Pradnya, Shobha) or in well paid jobs (Avanti, Seema).

The cultural capital of being a middle class, upper-caste woman is reproduced through these women's work within the house and within the community. Thus, they engage in status production work as '*pragalbha grihinis*' in maintaining their families' status and socializing their children who grow up with various forms of socio-cultural capital by default.

On the other hand, as women who step out of the homes and 'have something of their own,' they also support the narrative of the Brahman community being modern and progressive. Recall Pradnya and other second-generation women who wanted something beyond the domestic.

This discursive formulation of a well-read, cultured homemaker who knows skills like stitching, knitting, interested in singing, or theatre and so on; one who has the social contacts which are useful for the wellbeing of the family and the community, is not available to all women. This *pragalbha grihini* seems to embody certain agility- to be at home in different places- within and outside the home. Yet her identity is derived from the domestic despite her being 'more than a housewife.' She is agile in finding work if she wanted to or if the need arose. She embodies the advice Kamal gave to the daughters of not wasting time in 'labourious' housework and keeping the house such that the other household members lead fulfilling lives. And while doing so, she does not herself feel deprived because she inculcates *samanjaspana*, which enables her to be a good homemaker, find enriching ways to occupy her time, and be comfortable in her identity.

The gendered notion of 'balance' between work and home recurred in narratives of the third generation women, as has been found in narratives of Indian middle class working

women elsewhere (Radhakrishnan 2008; Thapan 2007). Caste privilege helps Chitpavan women navigate this balancing act. This privilege is twofold- a history of educational advantage (as seen in chapter three) and upper caste, middle class women learning skills that are not strictly utilitarian (some of which we will explore in chapter 5). Both these developments are modern in the case of Brahman women.

I propose that a *pragalbha grihini* is a contested discursive space. On the one hand, it is available to only upper caste, middle class women who possess inherited cultural capital; on the other, domesticity is stress-inducing, as Asawari pointed out.

In the last section, I will present my argument about the nature of work in Brahman women's life, how they negotiate the tensions between domestic management and work beyond the domestic, and the role that caste plays in these tensions and negotiations. These help us push the theorization on women's work beyond the binaries mentioned earlier and make arguments that acknowledge caste privilege.

However, a small detour is necessary to document instances of gender-based discrimination at work. This section adds another dimension to the various aspects we have mapped around Brahman women and work by acknowledging the gender-based biases which persist despite the various advantages of caste privilege. These may operate in varying degrees of severity; the instances below illustrate the problem of gender discrimination.

‘Lady Scientists,’ ‘Sisters’- Gender Discrimination at Workplace

Workplaces of most women are a male preserve, and women have to deal with gender stereotyping. When asked about instances of discrimination, 31-year-old Deepa Nitsure, a dentist, noted,

> As a woman, not in Pune but in the trust-run clinic where I first worked, a couple of people would come and ask, no big doctor here? I would say I am the doctor who looks after the evening work. No gents? How can we get work done? How can I trust a girl? I told him, do not come here; find another doctor. If someone is skeptical from the beginning, even if everything is done properly, they will still find fault. Even in college, when some girls and boys went together, the boys were called doctors and girls-sister. Initially, we were angry; then, we gave up. Even women did that. Then the boys started telling the patients that we are also doctors.

Deepti, a senior scientist, stated how she was held back by her doctoral supervisor for not being completely dedicated to her Ph.D. and choosing to have children, despite being a woman herself. She also spoke of her experience at work,

> I did not feel anything about gender since I was very junior. When I became a senior, [I] had a few publications and all... I was the first woman to join my division. As one gets senior, new people come and say that they will not report to a woman. My work was

> going on well, promotions initially I got. My work was good. People around would say [things], one scientist said this- because of you, one man loses a scientist seat. When women work, unemployment increases. I would say I came in an open post. It was ok. I could survive all those things, worked on lots of projects,... (lists her substantial achievements). Still, I feel that gender matters. People like to say we have 'lady scientists'. But how do they want these lady scientists? Reporting to them, not as equal colleagues.

Women are welcome in a workspace, like the prestigious institution Deepti worked in till her retirement, not as bosses or peers but as juniors.

Conclusion

I began with the Pavagi women to illustrate how ideologies of domesticity are shifting across generations. Despite her contribution to the family business, Hema located herself firmly within the home and complained about the current generation's lack of domestic prowess. Her daughter-in-law Pradnya, who grew up in the 1970s, married into the family as a non-working girl but sought out something of her own after her domestic responsibilities receded.

Pradnya's educational pursuit was facilitated by efficient domestic management on her part.

> Shraddha: How did you find the time then?

> Pradnya: It was a struggle. It took such perfect planning so that you don't fall short in housework. Not that you get someone else to do your work.
>
> Shraddha: Your sister-in-law was also with you?
>
> Pradnya: Yes. She was younger. We had distributed the work...
>
> I had decided that I will study. I did an enormous amount of work, 12 hours of work. Rise early and finish cooking. There was a maid for chores; we did not have to do everything. We had one for *rotis*[120]. There was one to get vegetables. So it was possible with servants; the other tasks are time-consuming. We decided to split between the two of us; one does the morning cooking, the other cooks in the evening and exchange it the next week. It worked well. No one complained. Everyone had to eat whatever was made.

The household work was performed by the women of the household with 'perfect planning,' and domestic workers were employed for time-consuming chores. On the one hand, planning indicates control over resources to be able to plan. On the other, it also points to the immense effort or 'struggle' as she puts it, required to be able to step out of the house. She had to balance her home and work. *Sansaar*—the familial, domestic world managed and maintained by the woman was the priority for Shobha and Seema, which inhibited them from working outside earlier in their lives.

[120] Indian flat bread which is rolled out daily or for each meal.

Pradnya pointed out that no one complained but are we to assume that this was the extent of the cooperation extended by the other household members? Like Asawari stated, "no opposition is co-operation."

Her daughter-in-law positions herself differently. Recall one of Vrinda's quotes where she likened domestic responsibility to child's play. She retracted her comment somewhat by acknowledging that domestic management was an immense responsibility to shoulder. However, the domestic is less significant in the way Vrinda thought of herself. She told me how she was raised to have her own identity, which was more than a 'homemaker.'

Some background details are necessary to contextualize the shifts that I explore here. The first generation Brahman women were typically educated till Matric and married off to become homemakers. These women lived through food shortages. Rationing offices, education boards, electricity boards, and schools were places where some of these women gained employment.

The trajectory of working women is complicated by class as well as location- urban or rural. Familial ideologies of the middle classes mediate women's entry into the economic sphere in several ways and constrict the political and economic participation of women, which hinders their wider emancipation (Sangari and Vaid 1989). Vibhavari Shirurkar[121], in one of her short stories, 'How can father's family responsibilities be mine?', published in 1933, describes lower middle class women's burden of financially supporting the family after being educated, leading to a delay or sacrifice of marriage (Kosambi

[121] Vibhavari Shirurkar (Vibhavari- Night and Shirurkar- resident of Shirur) was the pen name of Balutai Khare, known as the foremost feminist Marathi woman author from the pre-independence era. She became Malatibai Bedekar after her marriage and wrote extensively and under all three names. Her work on young women's awakened and thwarted sexuality, called *Kalyanche Niswas* written under her pen name, created a controversy as it was considered too bold for the 1930s.

2012:51–52). This illustrates how changes in the kind of work accorded to women translate into changes in the kind of patriarchal forces which act upon women.

An important factor is the material conditions of the Chitpavan community, which improved significantly as a result of the changing socio-economic stages of the country. This transition has been noted in detail by Fuller and Narasimhan regarding Tamil Brahmans (2014) and Bairy (2010) about Kannada Brahmins. Similar economic progress was made by Brahmans in Maharashtra, including the Chitpavan community. It led to a change from the thrift-driven domesticity of Hema's peers and the preceding generations to financial security, which Vrinda's generation can take for granted. These changes also facilitated the reduction in the labour required within the household. The gadgets available, the presence of paid domestic workers, and the availability and ability to afford cleaner food grain and readymade food made housework less labourious as compared to the experiences of the previous generations of women.

Asawari signalled at another important factor- the changing socio-cultural discourses. Deliberations on the women's question before independence were about "women's familial status, their access to education and better legal rights as instruments of reform" (Mazumdar 1985:3). After independence, education, the right to vote, entry to various professions and public offices were accessible to women. Middle class women benefitted from these changes. However " the instruments of political rights, legal equality and education" (Mazumdar 1985:3) which were meant to resolve the women's question, were out of reach for marginalised women. Even those who were able to use these instruments had not experienced significant change with regard to gender hierarchies. Ideas of gender equality were forcefully pushed into the public domain, with cases of sexual violence,

domestic violence, dowry, and Sati making headlines. It led to what is known as the second wave of the Indian women's movement in the 1970s. The 1990s saw the Indian state ratify the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women proposed by the United Nations, signalling their commitment to the cause of women's rights. 'Gender' soon became a catchphrase, effectively absorbed by the state-led discourses and used in a reductive way instead of 'women,' thereby threatening to domesticate the subject of feminist politics (Menon 2009). However, as Asawari suggested, *stree mukti* (women's liberation) did transform lives.

These factors- economic changes at the national level, improvement in the community's material conditions, the intensifying of the discourses on gender equality circulating in the media, contributed to the shifting meanings and place of domesticity in the women's sense of self.

We noted that the 'choice' to step outside irrespective of considerations of money was available to many but not all Brahman women. Their work needs to be analyzed beyond the paid-unpaid binary that dominates categorizations of women's work.

The third-generation women gave great importance to their work and ambitions in marriage negotiations. All married women in the three-generation study had endogamous marriages. They offer the Brahman community's modernity to justify seeking out a (Chitpavan) Brahman husband. Vrinda's narrative illustrates the material factors influencing these women's matrimonial decisions. The choice of endogamous marriage for the third generation may seem like a feminist one, meant to facilitate their ambitions. Endogamous marriage, however, is an important pathway for the perpetuation of caste by

passing on the material, cultural and ideological inheritance of caste privilege to their children. The children further add to and perpetuate this privilege. This is true for many castes.

When confronted with Asawari's predicament, Vrinda had the following to say-

> Shraddha: A well-known artist in Pune, who is about seventy years old, expressed the frustration of being a woman and having creative pursuits, about the pressure of keeping house. How would you react to that?
>
> Vrinda: It also depends on how you create that balance. Of course, for her generation, the family was insistent on the home and *chool-mool*[122] that we do not have. I don't think we will ever be in a situation where we have to quit because of this.

One can see that 'balance' between work and the home is part of these young women's narratives. Smitha Radhakrishnan (2008) observed this gendered notion of 'balance' also recurred in her interviews with Indian women IT professionals in Bangalore and Silicon Valley. It maps on to the *samanjaspana* that Kamal proposed as a way for women to gain mobility and support for pursuits beyond the domestic. However, as noted earlier, this is a lopsided situation that only women are subjected to, constantly negotiating with the home and work as if it is a neat binary.

The third generation of women think of domestic management as just that- something that is to be managed and planned and done away with. Vrinda does not expect to be tied

[122] It is a Marathi phrase which literally translates to cooking stove and child. It denotes the range of household work that is assigned to women, from cooking, to care work for various members, most importantly the children.

down due to domestic responsibilities that Asawari grappled with. She is confident of carrying on with her creative pursuits and sets aside Asawari's predicament as a matter of generational change in what is expected of women. She thus decisively claims a place for herself and women like her, outside of the domestic.

How do we make sense of the *pragalbha grihini* within these shifting domestic ideologies?

Is the idea of the cultured housewife same as the ideal wife and mother figure of the nationalist imagination? How does one make sense of the '*pragalbha grihini*' in the light of the tensions between the homemaker and an identity beyond the domestic? What does it tell us about the working of caste privilege?

The feminist debates on domestic labour in the 1970s focused on various kinds of work performed by women pointing out that the home was a site of production, housework was doubly productive, and it created surplus value (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Federici 1975). These debates were criticized for being oriented to the middle classes and blind to the nuances of race and class (Gonik 2012; Graham 1991). Despite limitations, these debates highlighted the naturalization of housework as a 'force of social labour,' its valorization, and the amount of ideological organization required for their functioning (Fortunati 1995). The case of Chitpavan Brahman housewives allows us to examine how caste privilege complicates this sexual division of labour with the family.

I submit that the pragalbha grihini lies between the tensions of the feminist and the housewife. It is located in a contested discursive space that allows Chitpavan Brahman

women a dignified subjectivity in negotiating domestic management and an existence outside the domestic.

The *pragalbha grihini* is premised on the caste privilege and class position of Brahman women. As urban, upper caste, middle-class, i.e., elite women, they have access to education and respectable jobs or the resources, cultural and financial, to engage in various non-remunerated activities (Ponniah 2017). The domestic worker is crucial for these women to access any work outside the domestic. The domestic worker's labour is not associated with dignity and respect but with stigma (Dhawan 2010; John 2013). Women's socializing and investment in networks is an important pathway of caste cohesion and maintaining kinship ties, as a study on Aggarwal women in Delhi demonstrates (Ponniah 2017). In business families like Aggarwal, working women are not encouraged since work is associated with profit-making. However, in Brahman households, women's work is valued as a measure of self-expression and growth. Working women ensure a modern, progressive collective self-image for the Brahman caste.

The term *pragalbha grihini* immediately conjures up images of the kind portrayed in nineteenth-century conduct books and advice magazines. However, we need to analyze Avanti's subjectivity, who spoke of taking pride in her identity as a housewife. Devoted, ideal wives and mothers of the nationalist imagination were meant to serve— the husband, family, and the emergent nation. It requires a broader reading of how women relate to and negotiate with various femininities, rather than reducing it to a conservative choice of women prioritizing domesticity (Hollows 2003). The *pragalbha grihini* values the time and resources she spends on the family's upkeep and well-being. She takes

pleasure in cooking and eating as also in various hobbies. She engages in a culturally enriching, meaningful domestic life despite having (the cultural capital for) a presence in the outside world. She claims respect for being a homemaker and the unpaid labour which it entails. This can be read as a re-articulation of the feminist critiques of housework and domesticity, stemming from the awareness of the value of status production work or reproductive labour. It is an aspect of femininity where women take pleasure in their ability to do tasks that they enjoy within and outside the home and claim respect for doing this.

This respect and pleasure are firmly rooted in the Chitpavan Brahman women's caste and class positions. Gradation of the labour performed within the home is caste-based; it determines the relations of 'upper' caste women with the labour of 'lower' caste men and women (Sangari 1993). The meagerly paid labour of domestic workers (Neetha 2013) removes the drudgery of housework. The socio-cultural capital facilitates mobility outside of the house, both of which are functions of these women being Brahman and middle class. We saw how Hema mentioned that getting work done was a skill that women need to possess. Kamal wanted her daughters to 'get a maid' and spend their time on childcare, an important aspect of cultivating cultural capital. Cooking, which is closest to the caste-based practices, was often the last chore outsourced to hired help.

We noted how the cultural hegemony of the Brahmans in the colonial period was instrumental in shaping everyday aspects of mainstream middle-class Marathi culture. Educational systems are known to perpetuate and reproduce the Brahminical capitalist values of the elite (Velaskar 2005). The so-called cultural refinement embodied by Brahmans, as a result, is regarded as an anomaly in the 'Other' (Pawde 2013). These

women's pleasure is pride rooted in their ‘culturally rich’ caste-d identities shaped through exclusion.

Ideologies of domesticity are culturally specific; one’s socio-economic position determines them. The burden of domestic management of Chitpavan women is acknowledged in family and community structures (Sangari 1993). Reproductive labour of women contributes to perpetuating and sustaining ideologies of caste and class. Henrike Donner’s work, for example, shows how domestic space is a site for remaking ‘middle-class citizens’ (2008). Similarly, I argue that the *pragalbha grihini* is a pathway for the socio-cultural reproduction of caste privilege. Chitpavan women internalize prescribed gender roles, even as these roles evolve, and their reproductive labour in managing their households leads to the reproduction of social, economic, and cultural capital. Kamal’s statements about *samanjaspana* support this argument; she posits that investing in one’s domestic responsibility towards one’s family is the (only) pathway towards earning time for oneself to pursue what one desires to do.

I argue that *samanjaspana* is part of the ideological veneer required to uphold the sexual division of labour within the household and shoulder domestic management without questioning the normative gender roles in heterosexual marriage. It enables the woman to make the trade-offs necessary to conform to the prescribed gender roles, engage in status production, and negotiate the space to pursue her desire.

Joanna Hollows[123] emphasizes class relations by locating the 'domestic goddess' in a privileged setting, available only to middle-class women. She problematizes 'choice' as a part of individualistic feminism, which connected feminism and middle-class privilege in the 1980s. She reads middle-class femininities as a landscape, a product of choices women make between femininities. While there is the question of those who do not have these choices, this suggests that 'having it all' is also a difficult and compromised choice. It is a balancing act.

Hollows allows a reading of the *pragalbha grihini* not as the valorization of the much-critiqued figure of the *grihalakshmi* but as someone choosing femininity which offers dignified subjectivity, a way out "from the pressures of managing and ordering both everyday lives and feminine selves" (2003:195).

Caste privilege, accumulated across generations, allows Brahman women access to education, mobility within and outside the household, material resources to outsource the drudgery of household labour, and therefore, the possibility of straddling both domestic and non-domestic worlds.

Chitpavan women internalize the inevitability of marriage and the burden of domestic management in the household. Neither Kamal nor Vrinda question the gender roles assigned to them as married women. With changing ideological discourses on gender in contemporary times, the third generation of women can negotiate (mostly endogamous) marriages which accommodate their ambitions. There is a shift in how women view

[123] Hollows draws upon the persona of British celebrity chef Nigella Lawson, her books and her television shows, to unpack the idea of the domestic goddess. Her work allows for a broader reading of middle-class femininities.

themselves, from being primarily engaged in the domestic or '*sansaar*' to negotiating marriages that allow an identity beyond a homemaker.

Women's education is instrumental in the Brahman community's claim of being 'modern' (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014). However, it has not translated into a decisive shift in the sexual division of labour within the Brahman household. Women's balancing act between the domestic and public sphere complicates the community's claim to progressiveness based on democratic gender relations. Gender equality of Brahman marriages- where the women have an identity outside the domestic- is premised on the labour of the 'other,' the hired domestic worker (Menon 2012).

Asawari expresses disappointment at women's internalizing these roles, at the lack of personhood assigned to the women, at being responsible for every speck of dust and every meal. The domestic management of the household, the rejuvenation of family members, and the investments made in the status production of the family/community are all part of the upper caste women's balancing act. These middle-class women can stake a claim on social, economic, and cultural capital, which comes with their location.

Despite her critical introspection on women's position within the community, when questioned about her compliance with the caste network, Asawari bluntly admitted the following-

> Shraddha: You went to a Chitpavan Sammelan?
>
> Asawari: Yes, they were felicitating me, so I went. Even at some other place. I do not agree with all that, but I went.

Shraddha: Why?

Asawari: Why antagonize.

A conceptualization like the *pragalbha grihini* allows for a dignified subjectivity for negotiating boundaries. It is a conceptualization entrenched in the women's middle-class and 'upper' caste position. It facilitates socio-cultural reproduction of caste, even as it offers space between the polarities of the feminist and the housewife (Chickerur 2021).

In the next chapter, we will see how caste is reproduced in the cultural realm and how cultural capital is constituted by caste privilege.

Chapter Five

CASTE, CULTURE, AND EMBODIMENT

How do people experience caste? This was one of the questions that animated this study. Aradhana is a seventy-plus woman who has retired from a career in public media. Given below is an excerpt from her views on casteism -

> Shraddha: What were your experiences of caste at your workplace?
>
> Aradhana: Casteism, a fair bit. Since there was reservation for SC, STs (Scheduled Class and Scheduled Tribes), they would be employed, but their scope of work was limited. I worked under two-three directors, two of whom were SC, and they were angry with, what do we call our people? (Pauses to think) Savarna[124]. One more was also SC, but his program sense was quite good, though he too was angry with Brahmanya, with Savarna. There was this thing about giving a voice to those who have been suppressed, which I agreed with. However, that did not mean that we should be inattentive to our prosperous cultural tradition (*apli sanskritik parampara ji sampanna keleli ahe*), which was already in place, right?

Aradhana described casteism as the anger of officers appointed on reserved seats towards Brahmanya (Brahmanness) or upper caste people in general. She spoke of the pressure

[124] Upper caste

she felt while proposing programs and the fear that her programs would be rejected because they involved Brahman artists.

Aradhana deemed it an injustice when her colleagues tried to dismiss the classical, cultural tradition (*sanskritik parampara*). She seemed to assume that a cultural tradition or canon was universally accepted and valued and was somehow removed from caste. Who developed this cultural tradition? What role did caste play in the creation of this *sanskritik parampara*? How are cultural sites significant in perpetuating caste?

This chapter explores the various ways in which the Marathi Brahmans engaged and continue to engage with culture. A Brahman 'ecumene' has been traced to the Yadava period. This was an elite group engaged in Sanskrit literary production that valorized literacy and adjudicated disputes (Novetzke 2016; O'Hanlon 2011). This ecumene or social and intellectual leadership position of the Brahman was not stable but had to be continuously reinstated through various means. One site for reiterating social status and position was culture. This chapter delves into cultural registers, but other sites exhibit similar patterns of upper-caste hegemony. Historical[125] writing in Marathi, starting from 1816, shows that history became a nationalist weapon against the British for the Maharashtrian elite. It was also instrumental in creating and legitimizing their hegemony over the indigenous masses. A counter-historiography was inevitable, which came in the form of the thought-provoking and egalitarian writings like those of Mahatma Jotiba Phule (Dixit 2009).

[125] Historian Aravind Deshpande has written that the historical writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a manifestation of three conflicts- "(a)British hegemony and imperial viewpoint of history versus Indian national identity, (b)newly emerging Muslim identity versus Hindu revivalist identity, and (c) new challenge of non-Brahman identity/movement versus traditional Brahman identity" (Dixit 2009:19).

In the first section, I argue that the Marathi Brahman community fashioned a Marathi public sphere, a Marathi *Sanskriti,* in the centuries preceding independence. The public cultural sphere became one way to assert a self-identity after relinquishing political power to the colonizers. It led to the consolidation of cultural capital systematically reproduced across generations.

The second section looks at the embodiment of caste among the Marathi Brahman and its gendered dimensions, which emerged from narratives of the Chitpavan women interviewed.

Cultural Hegemony of the Brahman

Culture is an important site for politics. This section presents how the shifting cultural discourses that shaped due to the emerging ideology of nationalism were intricately connected to caste. Using the sites of literature, language, theatre, music, and dance, I demonstrate how the Brahman community dominated cultural processes in colonial times. While I focus on the Marathi Brahman community, the scholarship on dance is not located in the Marathi-speaking region. I hope this work will contribute to the post-colonial scholarship, which suggests that the discourse on cultural nationalism was dominated by the indigenous elite and was an exclusionary process.

Language and literature

Although not the first known literary treatise in Marathi, *Jnanesvari*, written in the thirteenth century by Jnandev, a Brahman saint, is an important, foundational text in Marathi literature. Sanskrit writings in the period preceding *Jnanesvari* detailed the descriptions and regulation of caste relations. Women and the lower castes were excluded

from this Sanskrit cosmos. By translating the Bhagavad Gita into the vernacular language of Marathi, Jnandev made available a discourse of salvation to all the people. However, according to Novetzke, Jnandev's endeavour was limited. It did not enable the participation of women and lower castes in the Sanskrit cosmos (2016:24–25). This pre-modern public sphere was a precursor to the modern Marathi public sphere.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, Marathi literature was mostly poetic and relied heavily on Sanskrit. The majority of writers were Deshastha and Karade Brahman. Ellen McDonald examined the development of vernacular publishing in western Maharashtra in the nineteenth century. Communicative institutions and print technology played a significant role in the colonizers' socio-political control over the colonized and also in the native elite's control over the native masses. The elite maintained a significant difference between the written and spoken styles. This deliberate step necessitated specialists who reworked public communication into ordinary language. The literate groups, predominantly Brahman men, were mediators who controlled communications. Texts were caste property and reading a caste trade (McDonald 1968:593).

Marathi was sought to be standardized by publishing grammar books, dictionaries, textbooks, prose, and literary journals in the nineteenth century. There were colonial state-initiated efforts to establish a uniform Marathi grammar. Writers of grammatical knowledge hoped it would facilitate the learning of Sanskrit or English. When elitist notions of language are challenged through democratic movements, theorization and standardization is a channel used to reinforce hegemony[126]. A similar argument is made

[126] Such processes of standardization of language provoked y the colonial circumstances, Sanskritization and sanitization of languages attempted by the regional elite have been critically documented in other

about the Marathi sphere. The literary sphere started democratizing when Phule and other Satyashodhak writers were getting educated and writing. Enforcing a more Sanskrit-oriented Marathi, which was incomprehensible to lower castes, was a strategy to exclude the lower castes. Standardization of Marathi became a tool for reinforcing upper caste hegemony (Chavan 2009).

Pune was the centre of British efforts to develop Marathi, and Marathi Brahmans became the chief administrators of the system that superseded their own. Five Brahmans compiled the first dictionary of Marathi in 1829. They wrote that it was based on the words common to "the ordinary speech of the Deshastha Brahman and others living in Maharashtra country" (McDonald 1968:598).

Shuddhalekhan or orthography, i.e., the correct spelling of Marathi words, has been a site of persistent regional social conflict. The adoption of Balbodh, a regional Devanagri script, led to the acceptance of Sanskrit conventions in written Marathi. In contrast, the Modi script was used in the medieval period for correspondence and administrative purposes. Colonial efforts to cultivate languages led to many debates around grammar and orthography. English and Sanskrit were the major influences. A primary reference text for schools in the nineteenth century was Dadoba Pandurang's *Maharashtra Bhasheche Vyakaran*, where the Pune Brahmin speech was adopted as the benchmark. Prachi Deshpande's detailed exposition on the subject demonstrates how seemingly trivial issues like dots and signs "emerge as part of larger ones about literacy, historicity, community, and the public sphere" (Deshpande 2016:72). Despite wanting to capture and

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regions as well, like Bodhisattva Kar's essay on Assamese (2008). He notes that grammar was site of wielding power, since it determine what was useful and what was redundant within a language.

represent 'popular usage,' Marathi grammar in the hands of the educated elites was moulded towards the objective of nurturing a 'cultured language.' *Puneri* Brahman speech became *sarvamanya* or universally accepted while invisibilizing other ways and forms of writing and speaking[127]. Thus, written prose was standardized based on the language spoken by the Brahmans of Maharashtra.

The proliferation of publishing gave a boost to Marathi literature. Of the 128 nineteenth-century authors listed in a book titled *History of Modern Marathi literature 1800-1938.* 114 are Brahmans, 74 are Chitpavan, and 9 are Deshastha (Bhate 1939); thus, Chitpavan Brahmans amounted to more than half of the authors listed.

The vernacular sphere was crucial "to the assertion of dominant political and cultural identities in colonial western India" (Naregal 1999:3446). Veena Naregal observes that the native intellectuals from Bombay-Pune consciously used the changing bilingual conditions to articulate a nationalistic discourse and maintain their hegemonic position. They aimed at advancing their status as representatives in the interaction between the colonizers and natives (p. 3450). Newspapers sought to establish the intelligentsia's position as representatives of the natives, first by critiquing the government and later by questioning their legitimacy.

Citing the example of Vishnushastri Chiplunkar's journal *Nibhandamala,* Naregal illustrates the efforts to establish a 'high' vernacular literary canon by the native intelligentsia and the paradoxes in the process. While wanting to project a collective self-

[127] While huge regional variations figured in these discussions, Deshpande shows how the question for a standardized language- spoken and written- was part of the nationalist discourse on standardization. This standardized orthography was deliberately set aside around in the writing of the 1960s which emerged from anti-caste ideological stances and from rural areas. Scholars like V.B. Kolte argued for a more representative standard language which included regional vocabulary and grammar (Deshpande 2016).

identity of the Marathi people, the upper-castes also wanted exclusive rights to speak for this native population. Therefore the cultivation of a 'high' Marathi literary discourse was accompanied with a virulent attack on any subaltern attempts[128] at literary production (p.3452). However, the *Nibhandamala* was not accepted by all educated native intellectuals and did not enjoy consensus as a representative of the 'Marathi' identity. As we have seen earlier, the anti-caste movement gained traction in regional politics and countered the hegemonic position of the upper caste intelligentsia. Literature is one cultural area that has democratized as a result of the strong tradition of anti-caste writing. While one can trace anti-caste literature to the Bhakti movement, it was Jotiba, Ambedkar, later the *Grameen Sahitya,* i.e., literature from the rural areas, and most significantly the Dalit Panthers who were responsible for this development.

Music and Theatre

Writing about the role of music in creating a public cultural sphere, Janaki Bakhle argues that a nationalizing sentiment motivated the work of two musical stalwarts- Vishnu Bhatkhande and Vishnu Paluskar. She traces the journey of music from an unmarked practice in the eighteenth century to a 'classical' high art eliciting pride in the national imagination in the twentieth century. She demonstrates how the Hinduised public sphere was created to streamline and write a history of 'classical' North Indian music (Bakhle 2005). Citing the national success of Paluskar's recognizably Brahmin, Hindu agenda, Bakhle argues against the view of music being secular and non-sectarian.

[128] As an example of coarse language used in *Nibhandamala* and its lack of decorum in writing about Phule and the Satyashodhak Samaj, Naregal cites the following example- "Under the present conditions (it needs to be considered) how wise and really courageous it is for fools like Jotiba to shamelessly bark away at brahmins and to vie for crumbs that may be thrown at them according to the convenience of those in power; similarly, it is worth thinking about how becoming it is in the present political situation (*deshstithi*) to establish sabhas in order to trade abuse amongst ourselves" (Nibhandamala, No 44, August 1877, p 14 quoted in 1999:3453).

Hindustani classical music flourished through *tawaifs* (courtesans) and Devadasis, but these women were invisible in Bombay's history of music. Tejaswini Niranjana unearthed these women[129] and their role in not only keeping alive but also enhancing the music and the musical community. They sustained a vibrant music community by supporting their teachers and some younger pupils and contributed to the freedom struggle (Niranjana 2020). However, they slowly disappeared from the pages of history.

Makarand Sathe's voluminous history of Marathi theatre is attentive to caste politics. Jotiba Phule's *Truteeya Ratna,* a play based explicitly on caste discrimination and creating awareness of gender politics, was rejected by the Dakshina committee which was constituted to support cultural activity and comprised of British and Brahman scholars. Sathe quotes G. P. Deshpande, a renowned Marathi playwright and scholar,

> People, who lost political power, turned to arts. Not only was it a silent protest against imperialism but it also was an attempt of this elite who had lost political power to find the spirit of their self in a new field... this seems to have been the case in the field of music too... I feel that the rise of the Marathi theatre is an inseparable part of the process of the search of self-identity by the elite who had lost their political power. Birth of the modern Marathi theatre is a political event (Sathe 2015:23).

[129] Niranjana's book brings alive the world of music in Bombay in the twentieth century and shows how, women like Gangabai, Gangubai Hangal, Anjali Arondekar and others were active and how they negotiated with modernity. She shows how in their pursuit of respectability, these women separated the body from the voice and only made genteel movements unlike vigorous hand gestures of men singers (a famous example is Bhimsen Joshi). Instead of offering a normative critique, Niranjana suggests that despite a transition from their courtesan and *tawaif* backgrounds, elements of the original compositions and ways persist in the sanitized Hindustani repertoire that we know today.

While Deshpande seems appreciative, Sathe's stance is critical. The above quote underlines the conscious adoption of sites like theatre in the politics of representation, identity, and community.

Using the trajectory of the Marathi Sangeet Natak or musical plays, Veena Naregal traces how the *lavani* and *tamasha*[130] were marginalized and elaborates upon the formal, organizational, and ideological manoeuvres that rendered them irrelevant (Naregal 2010:81). She writes,

> The years before and after Independence witnessed moves by regional elites that determined which regional cultural forms could negotiate and legitimise their claims to state patronage, based largely on colonialist definitions of binaries such as the 'popular' or 'folk' vs. the 'classical'(Naregal 2010:83).

With a growing urban and elitist orientation of theatre, lower-caste forms and performing communities were rendered invisible in mainstream cultural arenas. The Brahmans also dominated Marathi cinema and drew upon the art forms of *lavani, tamashas*[131] of the Mangs, and Kolhatis. These were transformed for the cinema screens and taken back to the smaller towns to be watched at a higher price (Rege 2002).

A lot of middle-class Brahman plays seriously criticized corruption in Brahman priesthood. However, while Phule's play questioned the caste system itself, the former accepted the system and only questioned the corruption within the practices. Middle-class

[130] For a detail exposition of the use of *lavani* and *tamasha* in the Peshwa period, see Sharmila Rege's article- Conceptualising Popular Culture: 'Lavani' and 'Powada' in Maharashtra (2002).
[131] Rege notes the focus was on "native, wild and rustic sexuality" of the woman performing the *lavani* which was to be tamed by the invariably upper caste hero (2002:1044).

Brahmin men ruled the theatre scene and still do, with a few exceptions (Sathe 2015:46). According to the list available on their website, more than half of the Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Natya Parishad's chairpersons have been Brahman men[132].

A study on gender in Marathi theatre and cinema before independence says that colonial modernity

> ...was mediated by the hegemonic Brahmin community whose dominance infused theatre with a Sanskritic influence. It also ensured a continuity of enduring mythological and historical motifs- in both of which the community was closely involved as custodians of sacred knowledge and harbouring ambition to regain its former political power (Kosambi 2015:4).

Thus these four avenues of the public sphere in colonial western India were dominated by the Marathi Brahman community, thereby establishing their hegemony through cultural politics. Systematic involvement in cultural production and reproduction ensured that the community had a firm foothold into what got defined as mainstream Marathi culture.

Notes on Dance

I have traced the hegemony of Brahman men in the fields of language, literature, music, and theatre. However, these certainly do not exhaust the sites of culture. During colonial times, complex processes helped sideline 'lower' castes from their traditional art forms or recast forms to suit nationalist narratives. Dance was one such site, and especially the

[132] https://natyaparishad.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/sammellanthikan/SammelanAdhyakshNavThikan.pdf (Accessed on 11-12-2020)

history of Bharatnatyam, a south Indian dance form, in particular, illustrates the above trajectory within culture.

Devadasis[133], women from specific lower castes, were the custodians of a form of dance variously known as Sadir, Kootu, Dasi-attam, a generous assimilation of various influences deeply entrenched in the social hierarchy (Ganesh 2016). The Devadasis got caught in the vortex of debates on morality, prostitution, nationalizing art forms, and the ideas about women performers in public, between being considered exploited or licentious. The debates raged among the colonial government, nationalists, women's rights activists, anti-caste activists, each using the Devadasis for their own agenda. The idea of sensuality and spirituality co-existing was inconceivable for many the above stakeholders. Discourses on 'ideal womanhood' prescribed respectability to women only if they were part of heterosexual, monogamous marriages or were celibate workers of a social cause (Coorlawala 2004).

The women of the communities traditionally performing the art form got stigmatized[134]; their men became tutors to the elite who wished to learn the dance in its re-casted form- Bharatnatyam. Named thus after a nation-state, the art form took away the Devdasi women's hereditary rights and their livelihood while positioning itself firmly within the then aggressive nationalist framework- as an art form of the emergent nation.

[133] Deva is god, dasi is female servant

[134] Stigmatization of women artists who were earlier valued for their art and knowledge has a long history which feminist scholarship is unearthing. See introduction of Women Writing in India (Tharu and Lalita 1993).

Quite like the middle-class, upper-caste women[135] attending music classes, Bharatnatyam was also available to 'respectable' women who were not dependent on the art for livelihood. It was an addition to their families' cultural capital. The role of Rukmini Arundale and Kalakshetra in this history of recasting Bharatnatyam has been critically documented (Coorlawala 2004; Ganesh 2016). However, the tensions in the discourse around dance are alive and contested by women like Nrithya Pillai and Srividya Natarajan, who belong to the disenfranchised communities (Pillai 2019).

Kathak, a popular dance originating in north India, has obvious Islamic roots but was also recruited in the nationalistic cultural exercise. We have been tracing its origins to understand its linkages with caste. Scholarship on dance has presented critical accounts of women performers or courtesans being sidelined in the process of 'classicalization' of the form, which was then available for respectable middle-class women (Chakravorty 2008; Walker 2014).

Srividya Natarajan's novel "The Undoing Dance" (2018) narrates the story of three generations of women dancers and illustrates how culture and arts were hegemonised by Tamil Brahmans in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, the Marathi Brahman community fashioned a Marathi *sanskriti* or public tradition by systematically excluding certain communities. However, these processes were neither stable nor seamless and were contested.

[135] There was a phase where 'respectable' women were not allowed to perform in cinema or theatre. Dadasaheb Phalke, the noted film-maker, was hard pressed to find women to act in his cinema. This was when Narayan Rajhans (1888-1967), with stage name Bal Gandharav, played women characters and enjoyed immense popularity. Marathi films *Harishchandrachi Factory* (2009) and Balgandharva (2011) based on these two men depict this period. In her book on Marathi theatre, Meera Kosambi dedicates a chapter to Bal Gandharva (2015).

Nancy Fraser critiqued Habermas's idea of a public sphere as one which was constituted by exclusions based on gender and class, and in the Indian context, as we have seen above, this included caste. She drew attention to the competing publics, which bring in new terms for describing social inequality. These competing publics expand the discursive space available to civil society by bringing into discussion those issues which are deemed personal or private in the mainstream public created by the hegemonic social elite (Fraser 1990). The Satyashodhak and Ambedkarite counterpublics posed a challenge to the Marathi Brahmans' hegemonic position, who continued to find new ways to consolidate their position in society.

After tracing the evolution of a Marathi *sanskritik parampara* or a public culture that suited the Brahman community and, more broadly, the upper-caste elite, I agree with and add to the post-colonial scholars who suggest that Indian cultural nationalism was an elitist and exclusionary exercise. These processes brought specific kinds of cultural goods from the public to the private spheres, which were then accessible to 'respectable' middle-class women. The traditional custodians of art forms, especially women, were systematically disinherited and sidelined, such as the lavani performers from the Mang and Kolhati communities (Rege 2020) or the women singers studied by Niranjana (2020).

This section dwelt on the cultural public sphere whereas the next section shifts to the private and individual ways in which caste is reproduced and embodied in the everyday, quotidian sense. I also hope to show how hegemonic ideas from the cultural public sphere percolate into private lives and create caste-d selves.

Caste as embodied

The word 'Brahman' conjures up an image of a man[136]- upper body bare, but for the sacred thread, a tuft of hair on the otherwise shaved head and dhoti (called *dhotar* in Marathi) draped around his lower body. This image invokes caste like no other—the tuft and the sacred thread are markers exclusively reserved for the one who has had his 'initiation' or *upanayana,* also known as the thread ceremony. Thomas Csordas postulated, "the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture" (emphasis in original 2009:5). The body is thus the site or ground on which caste plays out.

Most present-day young urban, upper-caste Brahmans will not relate to this image of the Brahman described above. It is an image limited only to a priest summoned for a ritual or *puja.* The *mangalsutra* is not mandatory for women[137] of the third generation considered in this study, and the sacred thread[138] has become a relic of the past for many urban Brahman men. While some symbols of caste and patriarchy are being discarded, at least by the urban elite, there are various ways in which one's social location is inscribed on the body. What role does embodiment play in understanding caste and gender?

[136] Of course the fact that it is a male body which first comes to mind is also of considerable significance despite various embodied markers which distinctly signify a Brahman woman's body.

[137] The *mangalsutra* is a necklace of black beads and gold which is worn by married women of some Hindu communities. In southern parts of India, a similar adornment is called *thaali*. With the *mangalsutra* as a starting point Sowjanya (2015) critically examines the hegemonic status of the upper caste female body. She argues that what may be deemed as a symbol of patriarchy for Savarna feminists may carry different meanings for Dalit women.

[138] Ramesh Bairy's ethnographic work on Kannada Brahman shows how many urban men do not wear the sacred thread or practice the *sandhyavanade* (the daily ritual of evening prayers prescribed for a Brahman male after initiation ceremony or thread ceremony). Not wearing the sacred thread or ignoring food or purity-pollution restrictions is considered 'normal' by most, including caste activists (Bairy 2010:282).

To find an answer, I examined the narratives looking for the different ways caste is embodied. One's aesthetic senses are fashioned out of the way one is raised. Speaking of growing up in the Brahman dominated old city area in Pune, Rekha said-

> See, right from how your *phodni* [139]smells, to how much sugar you use in your cooking, everything. The Brahmanness of the nose is different, the Brahmanness of your taste, that of your skin is different. If you go anywhere, you cannot forget that you are a Brahman, people keep making you realise that."

Here, the sense one gets from the first two sentences is that the casted-ness of an individual is deeply embodied in various ways that she mentioned. Yet, the last line speaks of Brahmaness as identified by others. Thus, Rekha illustrates Bairy's thesis of caste being both identity and identification, simultaneously given and constructed (2010).

Neelima, a septuagenarian social activist, stated-

> I have a lot of Chitpavan remnants (*awashesh)*; I feel your tongue is something that reveals your caste, and language. So in a meal, if you ask for curd rice and ghee and jaggery, then you know the *Brahmani* influence and language obviously… What you like comes from your sentiments from childhood. My idea of beauty comes from there, and there is no denying that.

The reality of gender, or indeed society, is also experienced through our bodies (Butler 1988). This section reflects specifically on the Brahman body and the 'caste habitus' in

[139] The tempering added to the oil being heated for making any preparation, like tadka in Hindi.

which this body is socialized. It also looks at how embodiment of caste and gender surfaces in the narratives of Chitpavan Brahman women. Drawing upon the topics the women speak of, such as language, education, sartorial norms, and an embodied state which I term as 'caste confidence,' I theorize the embodiment of caste within a site of privilege. Both *sanskaar*[140] and embodiment of caste stretch beyond what my data offers and what this chapter covers. The sub-sections explore various aspects of the embodiment of caste and gender and how these operate to reproduce and, in the process, shift meanings of caste in contemporary times.

Brahmani Sanskaar

"A person's character is not dependent on his caste; it is dependent on his/her *sanskaar*." These were the words of an octogenarian woman while discussing her views on inter-caste marriages. She may have wanted to convey her inclination to give precedence to a person's character rather than their caste. Let us explore who embodies *sanskaar* and what makes a person *susanskrit* (cultured).

According to the Molesworth Marathi-English dictionary (1996), *sanskaar* is "1. a common term for the essential and purificatory rites or ceremonies among Hindus... 2. Purifying, sanctifying, consecrating... 3. Preparing, by any operation of cookery (a dish or article of food or medicine) 4. Embellishing, polishing, finishing, perfecting." Rites of passages within an individual's life cycle that mark major physical and/or psychological developmental stages are called *sanskaar/samskara* in the Indian (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain) tradition. They vary from region to region, class to class, and across castes but have

[140] While I spell the word as *sanskaar*, others have used *samskara* and when quoting, I retain the author's spelling. Both spellings refer to the same concept.

core elements drawn from the Vedas. They are applied to make someone worthy or suitable (*yogya*). *Sanskaar* thus presents the idea that each individual needs to be polished and perfected into being suitable, for becoming a pure Brahman man or woman, or whatever caste or community one belongs to and as per the assigned sex. These are essential processes; setting them aside was not an option if one wanted to be part of a community. The purpose of *sanskaar* is also demarcation and separation.

A typical example of *sanskaar* is that of the sacred thread worn only by Brahman men following an *upanayana* or initiation ceremony, a symbol of a boundary that bestows the wearer with a special identity and access. The non-initiated were considered to be in an impure state and were not allowed to participate in Brahmanical rituals. Initiation meant acceptance into the traditional patriarchal, caste-based social system. The other everyday life cycle rituals include those during birth, marriage, pregnancy, tonsure, first food, death, and so on (Michaels 2018).

The qualities said to be inherent in Brahmans are attributed to the socialization processes taking place in most Brahman households, comprehensively referred to as *sanskaar* in Marathi (and some other Indian languages). Thus, *sanskaar* denotes the process and the product—the values inculcated in children belonging to Brahman families. I argue that *sanskaar* is a pathway of "domestic transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1986). These processes are assumed to be part of every Brahman household, not limited to any sub-caste. The following quotation is from Bairy's study on Kannada Brahmins, in which a former president of a caste association stated "Associations will accept anyone who is Brahmin by birth. That is the first and last criterion. Of course, the fact of birth in a

Brahmin family will itself have given them *Samskara* that make them Brahmins" (2010:189).

I argue that with the socio-cultural and political changes that took place from the eighteenth century onwards, the concept of *sanskaar* shifted from a ritualistic and ceremonial frame rooted in religion to a more ethical, moral frame which drew more generally from the community's culture. The idea of *sanskaar* referred to by the women interviewed in this study aligns more with taste, morals, ethics, language, and behaviour, to an embodiment of Brahmanness. Earlier rites aimed to create an embodied 'pure' Brahman; one eligible to carry out the sacrificial ritual, one who was *yogya,* i.e., suitable for a purpose (Michaels 2018). The repeated enactment of rituals was imperative for the upkeep of caste. However, following the recession of caste-based norms with the advent of modernity (Sheth 1999), these overt rituals gave way to other sites where the Brahmanness of the community was enacted. In a secularised context the significance of rituals gradually reduced, while the notion of raising 'initiated' or cultured Brahman children persisted. Careful cultural upbringing and education became of utmost importance. This shift in the framing of *sanskaar* was aligned with the making of the modern independent nation. Urban citizens slowly let go of (some) rituals but drew upon a cultured upbringing to claim their stake as secular subjects of the new nation.

A quotidian example of *sanskaar* is the morning and evening prayers in Sanskrit and the vernacular, in this case, Marathi, which are recited in Brahman households.

> I had told her to recite the *Ramraksha*[141] so that you have good pronunciation. I had given her Upanishads to read since those are lovely ancient poems. It has nothing to do with *Brahmanya*. I do not know if this is what *sanskaar* is all about.

While denying the connection of this recitation and reading with caste, Padma, an octogenarian, does seem to connect them with *sanskaar*. Language and rote learning are among the first lessons taught to children through the recitation of verses (*shlokas*).

Csordas foregrounded Bourdieu's idea of 'socially informed body' and suggested that the paradigm of embodiment helps collapse dualities of mind and body, subject and object. The socially informed body is one that has all its senses. Beyond the traditional five senses, these include the sense of duty, direction, reality, balance, common sense and a sense of the sacred, of responsibility, of business, propriety, humour, absurdity, practicality, and so on (Csordas 2009:11–12). This body is created through various processes within a habitus, in this case, a 'caste habitus' determined by Brahmanical dispositions.

Bourdieu's conception of the habitus "as a system of perduring dispositions which is the unconscious, collectively inculcated principle for the generation and structuring of practices and representations" (Csordas 2009:7) allows us to think about the psychologically internalized parts of the environment one is in. The psychological cannot be separated from the corporeal. The embodiment of caste involves a complex, continuous process of social conditioning; caste is reconstituted through daily processes

[141] A set of Sanskrit verses about Ram, a Hindu god

that demand attention. While recognizing that bodies are constituted not only through early socialization but also by the individual's creative capacities and driven by the context (Gorringe and Rafanell 2007), here we are examining the role of the former i.e., *sanskaar* as a mechanism of disciplining the body.

I draw upon Ramesh Bairy's work to elucidate Brahman identity formation and the role of *sanskaar* or *samskara* as Bairy referred to the concept. He has referred to a play called '*Nam Brahmanke*' (Our Brahminness) by a Kannada playwright, T. P. Kailasam (1884-1946), to demonstrate the complicated relationship between the 'progressive' and the 'sacred' Brahman persona. The play had an English subtitle- 'A Satirical Farce to titillate and ventilate today['s] Orthodoxy.' The play shows what transpires during the annual death rites (*sraddha*) of a woman married to a Brahmin High Court judge. He has two children- a son who is indignant of the purity-pollution norms and a widowed daughter who is pursuing post-graduate studies. The widowed daughter's education was a statement against the Brahman orthodoxy when Kailasam wrote the play.

The play brings out ambiguities in the characters' identification as Brahman, but they do not reject the identification outright. Kailasam's sketches of the Brahman community's self-identity are "as much framed by non-Brahmin critique as it is by the larger trajectories of secularisation and individuation" (Bairy 2010:233–34, 235).

Bairy's respondents also proposed that *samskara* was "a culture of upbringing as indeed of a genetic make-up that is seen to be unique to Brahmins" (2010:238).

Reproduced below is a long quote from Bairy's book. It is stated by a retired officer employed at a state-owned insurance company, LIC. Earlier generations in his family

benefitted from the state, via subsidized education and government jobs. Now they had transcended their dependence on the state.

> We are all prisoners of our values, values that are ingrained in us by the upbringing that our families and community provide us with. We should behave appropriately, we should be pure, we should not speak harsh or inappropriate, vulgar things, we should not adopt devious means to achieve anything, our intellect is our primary and only instrument for doing well in life, we belong to a community that has given others values of life, and indeed have lived a life according to those values. In short we have been given *samskara* (codes of conduct) which hang heavy over our heads. I am carrying all the baggage and strive to give it to my sons.

The Brahman sense of self is accorded "an inalienable sense of moral collective, a social morality that is the basis of self-description and meaning-making in life" (Bairy 2010:51). This also applies to Chitpavan Brahmans in Maharashtra.

The qualities attributed to the Chitpavan community include perseverance (*chikaati),* discipline (*konkanasthi shista),* being blunt in conveying opinions, cleanliness[142], discerning attitude. This '*Brahmani sanskaar*,' or socialization process that stands for 'good' upbringing, includes gendering of the child. Hence cleanliness was doubly

[142] The concept of cleanliness is intricately connected with the caste system through its norms of purity and pollution. The political economy of caste is dependent on the labour of the lower castes and this includes systems of cleaning. Studies like Stephanie Tam's (2013) have shown how caste systems were implicated in sewerage and tenaciously persist in the face of technical innovations that seek to undo the existing social structure.

important to a Brahman woman who shouldered domestic management[143] and the upkeep of caste norms with the household.

The Brahman as a source of *Sanskaar* or reform

The socialization process was not limited to homes but extended to other places such as schools as well. Huzurpaga, the first high school for Indian girls established in Pune, was mentioned by a few women interviewed. 68 year old Kamal, a media person, shared her school and college experiences,

> There were other schools, Seva Sadan, Kanya Shala, and all, but girls from other categories[144] would also go there. Huzurpaga was a school where girls from mostly well-to-do (*susthititalya*) and Brahman families came. Even our teachers were like that; I do not remember anyone who was non-Brahman (mentions many Brahman surnames), Chitpavan mostly, maybe some Karade or Deshastha. No BC (Backward Caste) teachers. So then those *sanskaar* from school were really important. Right from how to read, pronounce words. We decide that the language we speak is pure, not that saying '*na'* (says it in the nasal sound[145]) is not impure. However, the traditional Chitpavan, Sanskrit- based language was a practice right from school. Those are really huge *sanskaar* that the school gave us. I participated in theatre, elocution competitions- English, Hindi, Marathi.

[143] Domestic management has been discussed in chapter four.
[144] Category is frequently used instead of caste in everyday speech. Reservations for the SC/ST and especially after the implementation of the Mandal commission recommendations, 'category' became a way to casually refer to students who avail of reservations.
[145] In Marathi there are two ways of pronouncing the sound *na*- one is nasal and the other is non-nasal. The Some speakers are considered faulty for pronouncing *na* in some words nasally when it is not supposed to be.

> Good speech, a habit of memorizing, the confidence of being on-stage; all these the school gave us. (She names famous Marathi actresses who are alumni). *Sanskaar*- speak well, clearly/purely, speak wisely (*uttam bolayacha, spashta shuddha bolaycha*), which you cannot forget as they are imprinted on you. I grew up in this atmosphere. Then I went to SP College. SP was also 70-80% Brahman college. Now everything is different, but it was pure (she uses the English word) back then.

This idea of a 'pure' being concurs with the pure Brahman, which several *sanskaar* or life cycle rituals are supposed to imbibe in a person born into the community. Brahman's predominance in Kamal's school in the mid-1950s gave rise to a kind of school environment contributing to the Brahminical field. The previous section elaborated on the role of Brahman in the evolution of Sanskrit-based Marathi. Kamal mentioned famous and successful women who were alumni of the school to illustrate how the socialization in school- of speech, language, comportment styled on Brahman ways become the standard against which all the schoolgirls are measured. Similarly, her comments about her college show the pervasiveness of Brahmans in Pune's educational institutions and, therefore, to the continuity of the 'caste habitus.' Another woman, 56 year old Prerana, the Gharpure daughter-in-law, fondly reminiscenced about Huzurpaga-

> So the *sanskaar* in school was perfect, how should the pronunciation be? Even the handwriting of the A and B[146] division girls you should have seen, so beautiful. We were trained rigorously (*ghotun ghotun*). In fact, we

[146] Students used to be divided into divisions based on their exam performance such that the A and B divisions had the most intelligent girls/boys. Another 67 year old respondent who also attended Huzurpaga noted how the A divisions usually had more Brahman girls. This practice of divisions based on academic performance is common across schools.

> were even taught how to serve a plate properly, in the Brahmani way. Where to put salt, lemon, chutney, the proportion of vegetable and *koshimbir*[147], the latter cannot be as much as the former, chutney, and *koshimbir* cannot mix. You should feel good while having a meal. These things were mentioned maybe because the teacher was also Brahman, casually inculcating values (*sahaj zhalele sanskaar*)[148].

Huzurpaga, unlike the picture painted by Kamal, was open to girls of all classes and castes (Panse 1934). This extension of the '*sanskaar*' – inculcation of a specific cultural disposition, a Brahman one- in a school that caters to students across castes and classes, is spoken of here in a gratifying tone of doing something beneficial for all. *Sanskaar* becomes something that is passed on to the 'other', as uninitiated members of society by the Brahman community. I contend that this feeds into the superior conceptualization of the community's self-image. The idea that the Brahman *sanskaar* create civilized, cultured beings who are beneficial to society as a whole is reflected in statements made by women, which indicate that 'others' get 'reformed' because of increased contact with Brahmans.

In the history of the community, the commonly drawn references to illustrate Brahman socio-cultural leadership are from the colonial period when leaders and reformers prominently featured men from the Brahman and specifically the Chitpavan community, as noted in chapter two.

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[147] A form of salad

[148] Good handwriting and the place of each preparation in one plate were both familiar habits that I had been subjected to. Prerana's narrative brought back memories of how elder women in my family were particular about ensuring that young girls like me were adept at serving food in its proper place. These were part of proper socialization of Brahman girls which Prerana extends to the field of the school.

The post-independence ‘modern’ Indian man, as imagined by nationalist discourse, was located in the urban context and assumed to be ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’ and an ‘improver’ who would “transform the ‘native’ into a modern citizen” (Srivastav 2004:2025–26). We will get a glimpse of the continuity of this idea in the community's collective self-concept through some of the women’s narratives.

Thus, apart from creating a culturally invested discourse on Brahmani *sanskaar*, the community claims a sense of social leadership and responsibility by extending these *sanskaar* to others by way of a civilizing mission. This civilizing can extend to ‘others’ who came in daily contact such as students, as seen earlier, or employees, as in the following case.

What follows is an exchange between 31-year-old Ketaki, an entrepreneur and myself where she talked about the relevance of caste -

> Ketaki: No, it should all be merged. We don’t work like that now; when it (caste) came into the picture, it was a need of that time, but it is not needed today. So it should all be done away with. At the same time, some principles and things that are taught in Brahman families are not taught in others.
>
> Shraddha: Like?

Ketaki: Language or some things. Eventually, with globalization, we should let go. I married the first guy who came up and was done with it, but if he was Maratha and was *ani-pani,*[149] I may not have liked him.

Shraddha: I remember, many years ago, I was showing my cousin photos of a trip I went to, and she commented on how a guy in my photos looked cute. I told her he is single, but from a different community. She said she would marry a Brahman. I asked her how she knows this already, and she said, I cannot marry someone who says *chapati* instead of *poli* [150]!

Ketaki: (Laughs) Yes, if you have to adjust every day, you will not be happy, right? Then in everything – *kagade, kesa, dagda*[151] – I cannot live like this. Even now, I am usually instructing my maids[152] mostly about language- *charayla mula kay gura nahiyet, mansa bhetat, vastu miltat*[153]. Now their language has improved, but they have a different problem. When they go to their villages, they are subjected to taunts- Now that you live in a city, have you become like a Brahman *(tu sharahat rahilis mhanje kay lai bamnasarkhi zhalis ka*!).

Ketaki started with a view where caste was considered a relevant thing in ancient times but needed to be done away with. She then veers towards the 'principles and values'

[149] The differences in pronouncing *na* in Marathi explained in footnote 145, is referred to as *ani-pani*, a derogatory phrase.
[150] Both words refer to the Indian flat bread, made with kneaded dough and rolled out in round shapes; also known as *roti*. This cousin is Chitpavan Brahman and we were probably around 18-19 years old then. It has stayed with me as a peculiar piece of conversation.
[151] She pronounces all these words in a way considered crude or impure and therefore incorrect.
[152] The women she employs in her business venture.
[153] Translation will not do justice to the subtle pronunciations and phrases which are very specific to Marathi language.

which she takes for granted as part of the Brahman consciousness. She seems to imply that some core norms remains intact, even as some things related to caste are allowed to change. Language becomes a non-negotiable for her, part of the everyday which cannot be compromised. She also assumes that 'good' language has no caste dimension. Ketaki's comments reminded me of a similar conversation with my cousin, which I shared with Ketaki. Even before she was of marriageable age, my cousin's singular point of justifying an endogamous marriage was language.

Here, I argue that the comments '*poli* instead of *chapati'* or *'ani-pani*' are symbolic. They signal the holistic embodiment of caste facilitated by the caste habitus. Both Ketaki and my cousin had taken this embodiment for granted in their natal Brahman homes, and they expected it in their marital homes. It resonates with Bairy's respondent's assertion that one's birth in a Brahman household facilitates a certain kind of upbringing- whereby the person embodies Brahmanness- of language, comportment, behaviour and morals. Since these qualities and practices are assumed to be desirable (at least some of them), they are passed onto the 'other' in a bid to create a more civilized society.

The last instance where Ketaki mentioned instructing her employees speaks to the civilizing mission. Ketaki assumed that her wording and pronunciation is the standard and instructed her employees accordingly[154].

These two girls desire an embodied Brahman disposition - not just from their partners but their marital families as a whole. This embodied Brahmanness produced through a

[154] That the women face taunts could be a result of the questioning of the Brahman norm and/or showing the women their place when they are seen as displaying urban sophistication and fancy language in their native villages. The use of '*baman/ bhat*' as a derogatory word to express contempt of the Brahman has also been noted in Satish Saberwal's work in the Punjabi context (Jodhka 2012:44).

caste habitus also plays out in the functioning of caste networks or fields. I will take a short detour to explain.

During my fieldwork, I spent some time living with my in-laws, who are Chitpavan Brahman. My father-in-law went to meet a person regarding some marketing work. That person asked my father-in-law to approach another person and added, "*aplyatlach ahet (He is one of us).*" These were two Chitpavan Brahman men talking to each other. The phrase was meant to convey that it would be easy to approach the third man since he was also Chitpavan, and that the work would get done without hassle. My father-in-law possibly noted this reference and made a point to relay this conversation to me since caste regularly featured in our dinner table conversations. The reference indicates a set of assumptions that one takes for granted about a person because s/he is a Chitpavan; of a well brought up and cultured Brahman person which one can depend on. Bairy extensively described how caste-based networks facilitated Brahman men's migration to cities and assisted their entry into government jobs (2010). It is, of course, true of most communities to look out for their own. Indeed the very existence of a community is for this purpose. However, as Bairy rightly underscored, elite communities sustain, perpetuate, and reproduce their own capital. This inheritance is then passed on from generation to generation but never acknowledged. Success is passed off as 'merit' and hard work, whereas scholarship shows how merit is decisively constituted by caste (Subramanian 2019).

Education as a value

Education, or rather literacy, was the most crucial form of capital that the Brahman community across the Indian subcontinent possessed. It served them throughout the

changing contours of history. Scholarship shows that even as far back as five centuries preceding the colonial rule, Maratha Brahman, as they were then known, had jobs in administrative offices (Guha 2010).

An earlier chapter was dedicated to the journey of Brahman women's access to education across generations, spanning from the late nineteenth century and how from being inaccessible, education became a norm. A Brahman woman should attain a certain degree of education to be able to qualify for marriage. This norm obtains across Brahman communities (Bairy 2010; Fuller and Narasimhan 2014).

Here I demonstrate how education is a value and show the enabling factors for cultivating this cultural capital in Brahman households.

Rucha, a forty-year-old agrarian researcher was home between two assignments abroad when I interviewed her. Speaking about how caste featured in her experience as an undergraduate student of agriculture in a Maratha-dominated college, she had this to say-

> Shraddha: Were there times when you realized there were differences [between her and her classmates] and of what kind?
>
> Rucha: Yes, there is a difference, a tangible difference in the way you approach studies in general. Education is a big asset for Brahmans, so we concentrate our whole life towards it, [we are] job-holding people (*nokardar mansa*), so our life depends on it. So that was always imbibed—study, we have enough to educate you, so study what you like but study. Furthermore, through education, you have to find a job and fill your stomach. It was not like that for the other girls. They were pretty laid

> back. Some girls had scored more marks than me, but I feel like they were not that interested. I was very interested in what I was doing.

Rucha's mother, Aradhana, was able to study further only because her two elder siblings had already started working while she was still in college. However, Rucha and her younger brother had grown up in a financially stable environment provided by Aradhana's government job.

Rucha's seriousness towards her education resulted from an upbringing that emphasized education as the only resource available to Brahmans to make a living. There was no land and other resources which she could live off, possibly unlike her peers at Agriculture College, many of whom belonged to landed families. Studying was imperative, and education was a valued asset.

Rucha is also hinting at reservation which we discussed later. A popular viewpoint among upper caste or 'general' category people like Rucha is that they have to work hard since they are not granted any special privileges. They have to depend on hard work and 'merit' unlike lower caste students who had reserved seats. Reservation of seats in higher education was brought up frequently in interviews. The popular narrative is that of unfairness, of 'meritorious' students missing out on seats despite scoring well because of reserved seats. This argument does not account for the privilege we have been discussing in this thesis or the disprivileges faced by lower castes across generations.

Now consider the following statements from Neelima, whom we encountered earlier, discussing the privileges of being Brahman-

There have been many benefits, one being the big opportunity for education; whatever we ramble about or speak is tolerable. You have a ready-made high status in society, no matter what. Lack of money is never taken to mean inferiority (*Paishyacha daridrya asla tar tya hishobat, heenatechya hishobat baghitla nahi gela*). This may be a part of the Brahman mentality (*Brahmani vrutti)*. Even if it is unbelievable now, there was a time when they did not have money but were known to be disciplined, who maintained the family well, would not borrow as far as possible, measured, practical (*hishobi*); these were the Konkanastha characteristics.

Now when I work with colleagues from different Dalit communities, it strikes me how some things are derivative of caste. Two things. Being able to write, my colleagues are post-graduates, ok, but writing and a good hold on language, a good deal of extra reading; it is my opinion that this is a bit of a Brahman tradition, maybe because of lack of availability in other homes.

I remember this because it was in the Karve family, Iravatibai Karve's daughter maybe, who said—Mother, that house has no books in their house, I do not wish to marry into that family. That this can be a reason, the girl being able to say so and that it was accepted, these three things, it is indicative of a certain cultural journey. That she was privileged and you got it by throttling other people, etc., are all true but that your consciousness can reach that level is the point. Yes, it was at the cost of

> others, Taj Mahal was also built, and fingers were chopped off, it is a fact, but it is a sign of beauty. Similarly, I feel this is a sign (*aalekh*) of intellectual progress and tolerance.
>
> So, these colleagues, not having a vast vocabulary and feeling ashamed of one's language, it starts from there.

Neelima raised several points that need discussion. She illustrated the journey of the community in the last century or so and its social, cultural, and moral moorings. Education became something of a right for women like her, born in the 1940s. Still, Neelima was cognizant of education as a 'big opportunity' not readily available to generations before her. She acknowledges the socio-cultural investment made into children within a Brahman household and also signals at the privilege of having a 'readymade' high status[155].

She said it was **'***Brahmani vrutti,*' i.e., a Brahman tendency not to see poverty as *heenata.* In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, financial poverty was a reality for some within the community. Families lived off barely fertile lands before migrating from the Konkan regions (Patterson, 1970). The characteristics, described as qualities by several of the women interviewed, of discipline and measured, practical behaviour, are said to stem from these origins.

[155] For Brahmans, caste location and cultural capital facilitates economic progress whereas the lower castes are stuck in traditional occupations, which bring them stigma and perpetuates poverty across generations. Thus for them, caste brings degradation and stigma. For one of the most persistence and dehumanizing form of labour that Dalit women continue to engage in, see Shaileshkumar Darokar's article on manual scavenging (2021).

The Brahman is not *heen,* which can be variously translated as deficient or defective[156], low, vile or degraded even when s/he was poor. The reasons are tied to the socio-cultural space and the ritual authority that members of this community occupied and continue to occupy, which provided 'readymade status' for generations to come. The use of *heenata* underscores caste consciousness. The poverty of a Brahman inculcated in them some of the characteristics which they are known for. *Heenata* signals at connections to caste, stigma, and humiliation, which Gopal Guru has dealt with in his volume on the subject (2009). Here, Neelima's comment gestured to a lack of humiliating characteristics in the poverty of the Brahman. This begs the question- whose poverty is *heen*? Has the poverty of others not given rise to characteristics that can be termed as qualities? Are these not worthy of emulation[157]?

The idea of progressiveness that she puts forth in the last few lines concerning gender equality is interesting. She cited the example of a rather famous Chitpavan family, the Karves. We have encountered Dhondo Keshav Karve, a pioneer in women's education. His daughter-in-law was Iravati Karve, a scholar of sociology and anthropology and a prolific writer. Neelima noted how a girl from the family refusing to marry into a household without books is a significant landmark in the cultural journey about gender equality. Here she seems to be mapping this incident as a milestone in Brahman women's cultural journey, from being denied access to knowledge to being able to refuse a marriage alliance in a household that lacked books. We have seen that this journey, which

[156] Molesworth's Marathi- English Dictionary (1996)
[157] Kancha Ilaiah's idea of Dalitization in his searing ' Why I am not a Hindu' proposed that lives in dalitwadas (places where Dalits reside) provide models worthy of imitation for a more egalitarian, humane society. Dalitization of the Indian society is based on the collective consciousness, dignity of labour, democratic processes within the community, and egalitarian gender relations. However, scholars have critiqued the idea of more freedom or mobility for women within lower caste communities(Kannabiran 2009; Paik 2009; Ramdas 2012a; Tharu 1996a).

started as a struggle for the earliest educated Brahman women, greatly enabled the later generations. Neelima acknowledged that this was possible because the girl in question was part of an extraordinary Chitpavan Brahman family, who were pioneers in social reform[158].

The availability of books in the house was a common occurrence across many narratives of these women who grew up in Pune.

Padma, an 85-year-old woman, said,

> My father studied, although he was poor, he completed an MA in English Literature. He studied for LLB but did not appear for the exams, so he was almost a lawyer also. He read a lot; our house was filled with books, thousands of books, and nothing else.
>
> Father gave great importance to knowledge; he made a library for my mother, encouraged her to read, and would also read out to her. Madgulkar's poems, Jyotsna Gole's songs she liked, so he had her go to singing classes. She would read the newspaper, was up-to-date culturally and politically. All the reformers and activists [mentions several all upper caste names] were all classmates in school, and it was an enlightened company, culturally and politically. I grew up in that environment in Pune. Even I had a library.

[158] D.K Karve was a pioneer in women's education; his son Raghunath Dhondo Karve worked extensively to facilitate a discourse on sexual and reproductive health in India. He ran a magazine called *Samajswastya*. Iravati Karve (1905-1970), Dhondo Karve's daughter-in-law (married to his other son Dinkar) was a well-known academic and writer. Her daughter Gauri Deshpande (1942-2003) was a prolific writer.

> When my tonsils were operated, and I had to be home, my father gave me 25 books to read, saying this is a great break! The collection had Sane Guruji, Chingi Gotya[159], Robin Hood, Snow White- English, and Marathi. He would read out English. That is how he inculcated a liking for reading in me. Caste was out of question.

Padma's father carefully nurtured a culturally and politically aware wife and a daughter who were systematically exposed to all kinds of literature in Marathi and English. What Padma seems to imply by the last line is that there was no place for caste in this enriching, progressive environment, thereby portraying herself and her family as the urban, modern, secular citizens, which Vivek Dhareshwar and Susie Tharu have written about.

Soha, a 38-year-old financial consultant, when asked about her caste.

> Shraddha: Did you always know that you were a [Chitpavan Brahman]?
>
> Soha: It was very much a part of the identity. That identity did not tell us to alienate others, but we always knew we were Konkanastha Brahman. There were jokes and jesting and pride all in equal measure. *Kavyashastravinod*, Sanskrit, was very highly valued, so much reading in the house; my parents were particularly well-read, so we were encouraged to read. Marathi till school but later focussed on English. If you have read

[159] A well-known Marathi book series about kids named Chingi and Gotya.

> Marathi literature, all that *sanskaar*, it has all these threads; whether Madgulakar[160] or so.
>
> Shraddha: A Dhasal or Bagul does not enter your library?
>
> Soha: I do not think so. So P.L, Atre, it is all jest.

Radha, an academic, made a comment which prompted this question about Namdeo Dhasal and Baburao Bagul. Radha was talking about her grandmother, from whom she inherited her love for reading-

> She would also read a lot; I got it from her. Slightly spiritually inclined as well. She would do *Dasboth* exams, *Dnyaneshwari* and all. Not so concerned with this world. A lot of Marathi literature, it was not like there was any Bagul or Dhasal but more widely read. Marathi, English. She would go to the library regularly.

Radha's comment and my question about these two specific authors denote the Marathi literary landscape's caste-marked trajectory. 'Good' language is associated with 'being Brahman,' and this association has roots in the very process of how Marathi was standardized, as documented in the previous section. Baburao Bagul and Namdeo Dhasal are two well-known figures whose caste-marked literature[161] seared through the sanctity

[160] G.D. Madgulkar (1919-1977), P.L. Deshpande (1919-2000) and P.K. Atre (1898-1969) are considered as stalwarts of Marathi literature. Each of them was a prolific writer in various forms and genres. They are all Brahman men and draw upon a common Marathi Brahman universe in their writing which the Brahman reading publics could relate to.

[161] Many progressive Brahmans have welcomed diversity in Marathi literature and the questions raised by anti-caste authors; as supporters, translators or well-wishers and avid readers. Dilip Chitre and Namdev Dhasal had a long association; as did Urmila Pawar and Sushama Deshpande. As translators who made Dalit writing available to wider audiences in English, upper caste persons generally tread on tricky ground. Critical reflections on the subject (Kothari 2013; Mukherjee, Mukherjee, and Godard 2006; Sivanarayanan and Rajkumar 2008) show how translations produce some hierarchies even as they undo some others.

of Marathi literature. That this kind of 'hybrid' and 'obscene' (Omvedt 1977) literature does not enter these Brahman women's family collections is hardly surprising[162].

Invisiblizing caste

While Soha, Ketaki, and others grew up knowing they were Chitpavan Brahman, others did not grow up with such awareness of their caste identity. Throughout her interview Padma, the eighty-plus media person mentioned earlier, reiterated how caste was not a part of her upbringing.

> There are several factors in my identity of being Padma Soman, caste being a negligible one. Because I do not do anything regarding caste-I do not fast, there are a lot of pretty images of gods in my house, kept as beautiful things, but those are because I like Indian art and sculpture. I do not perform any *puja*, never did. So I have no advantages as a Brahman, no festivals or rituals, nor do I follow Brahman traditions. What is Brahman about me? Why should I call myself one?

However, Padma did not negate caste as an intrinsic part of Indian society. She narrated an incident which took place decades ago-

> Many years ago, we were working in a community in Pune… In a [interview] schedule that I drafted for the purpose, I included a column on caste. One of my friends said, how can you put this column? I said it is

[162] Speaking about aesthetics in an interview, Sharankumar Limbale, a well-known author and scholar from Maharashtra noted, "The literature that glorifies pleasure gives central place to the pleasure-seeking aesthete. The literature that promotes equality, freedom and justice is revolutionary, and it emphasizes the centrality of the human being and society. If pleasure-giving literature arouses joy and sympathy in people, revolutionary literature awakens consciousness of self-respect" (Limbale 2004:119).

> significant in a social survey. I have included it since it is present in society. It is not something I give importance to, but it is a part of the reality of Indian society. We need to understand the caste design of this community and its social stratification to work here. Still, some of the women in the group opposed; we cannot utter the word caste. I said that is a mistake; this is an unscientific approach to caste. As a value, we deny it but still need to study it. I do not remember what became of it. This was before the 70s.

Here, Padma was distancing herself from her caste identity while insisting on the objective reality of caste-based relations in a community under study. This illustrates Dhareshwar's point about caste not being a subjective reality for upper-castes, but a facticity or an objective given (1993:121). So, as a result of the de-ritualisation, Padma assumed secular selfhood.

Pradnya Pavagi, whom we encountered in the chapter on work, grew up in Mumbai before marrying and moving to Pune.

> Pradnya: My father… extremely influenced by RSS[163], Savarkar[164] . 'S*anghishta.'*[165] So we grew up in that environment, loyal to the Sangh.
>
> Shraddha: You have also attended?

[163] Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is an Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organization. The RSS is the progenitor and leader of a large body of organizations called the Sangh Parivar, which have presence in all facets of the Indian society. The Samiti which she referred to in the next line is the Rashtriya Sevaki Samiti, the women's wing of the RSS.
[164] Vinavak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) was a right wing ideologue. He popularized Hindutva, the Hindu nationalist ideology and envisaged 'Akhand Bharat' i.e. a united Indian sub-continent which was to be the 'Hindu Rashtra', in the early twentieth century.
[165] Completely devoted to the RSS

> Pradnya: Yes, the Samiti classes and all, very nice. The suburb I grew up in had the Brahmani air like in Pune, in the *Peth* area now, not in other places where it is all cosmopolitan. In our society, up, down, on either side, it was mostly Brahman.
>
> Shraddha: Konkanastha or general?
>
> Pradnya: Konkanastha more. So I never knew that I was Konkanastha Brahman. These were never uttered. 'Hindu' (emphasizes the word) was the word. However, it is in our blood, isn't it?

Neelima, who was raised by socialists parents, had this to say-

> I feel in this context that our parents made us blind. We never came to a stage where we said 'no' from full awareness. We had to grow up to discover that there are so many castes, and there is discrimination. We were strictly told to say 'human' when asked what our caste was. Everyone would laugh at me. They should have explained it to us.

These two responses are from women brought up in Mumbai within families which had different political orientations. Being a Brahman or Konkanastha Brahman was an aspect of identity which could be set aside. Instead, the identities which were adopted changed from the left to the right - for one, it was human, and for the other it was Hindu. Within the RSS ideology, 'Hindu' is foregrounded as a unifying factor instead of the divisive identity of caste. As noted by anti-caste scholars repeatedly, the progressive left-leaning forces lacked introspection on caste as much as the right-leaning ones. The human and the Hindu both seem to step away from the structuring of gender, class, caste into

seemingly politically neutral territory (Tharu and Niranjana, p. 236). Thus, despite being staunchly anti- Hindutva, the left-liberals share discursive space with the right-wing on the issue of caste and casteism (Natrajan 2011). Both these ideological positions foreground other identities in a bid to do away with caste. However, what they end up being is 'caste-blind,' as Neelima rightly put it. Replacing caste with human or Hindu allows the burden of caste and its baggage to become invisible without introspecting on privileges that accrue from being upper-caste.

As a point of departure, we look at how the slum dwellers of Chennai that Nathaniel Roberts studied had a different view of what it meant to be human. According to the slum dwellers, to *be human* "was to be instinctively concerned about those who were in need.... To be human was also to be, oneself, *worthy* of being cared for by others" (Roberts 2016:6). According to these slum dwellers, resource monopolization and domination formed the very essence of caste. They referred to upper caste people as 'the rich[166]' rather than through caste names, based their view that latter's superior status was a result of entrenched privilege and wealth. They ascribed traits such as stinginess and selfish pride to 'the rich.' Such a conceptualization of caste set the slum dwellers' understanding apart from the popular one of thinking about caste as natural and immutable (Roberts 2016:63).

The narratives presented here affirm that the emergent Brahman self is not monolithic and coherent; the heterogeneity results from negotiating with modernity. However, the Brahman self can be placed within a large matrix which "renders this self a sociologically

[166] Roberts explains that the use of class terminology was not to escape caste but a theoretical challenge to it. While caste or *jati* connotes something intrinsic to a person, class is mutable, a collective identity which one can enter or exit. By addressing themselves as 'the poor' the slum dwellers were claiming an identity which was not an essence but an accident, an identity which was not stigmatized (2016).

identifiable entity" (Bairy 2010:241). The move to replace caste with some other identity—of being Indian, Hindu, human—serves what Bairy calls the secularising function of the Brahman self-imagination. Speaking from a 'de-casted' position allows Brahmans to assume a universal self-definition[167] (Bairy 2010).

Brahmani sanskaar facilitate an embodied Brahmanness, which reflects not only in language, pronunciation, comportment but also in one's behaviour, morals, and ethics. It is a part of the functioning of caste networks and a caste habitus. We also looked at how 'progressive' ideological positions, whether left or right, allow the displacement of caste without necessarily introspecting on its embodied nature.

On the politics of food

Neelima, who has appeared a few times earlier, had this to say about her mother's fondness for fish-

> My mother used to eat non-veg, maybe as part of her rebellion. Not my father. But then I realized that it did not make him a lesser activist. She would hesitate when her family visited. She had done it in a flow but started liking it. She'd say you think it smells, but that is the real flavour.

I found this slightly surprising. I grew up eating meat once in a while—specifically chicken, fish, and rarely mutton; but with scant awareness of caste-specific rules about eating meat. I thought that most men eat, and some women (both my grandmothers and some aunts, for example) do not eat meat. Most women cooked and served it nonetheless. My mother's family, Chitpavan Brahman and predominantly doctors, stressed the

[167] Ramesh Bairy's central thesis is about the ambivalent and contradictory nature of being and becoming Brahmans.

nutritional value of eggs and meat. My surprise about Neelima's mother stemmed from the fact that it was usually the other way around- men ate, and some women did not.

Neelima posited her mother's meat consumption as a part of social rebellion, in the flow of breaking social norms and questioning hierarchies. Her mother, the eldest daughter of a well-to-do Chitpavan family from Mumbai, had married a social activist and lived in a working-class locality against her family's wishes. As we discussed earlier, she (and Neelima's father) raised the children without caste consciousness. Here, her meat consumption seems to be a choice made to rebel against caste boundaries, a choice that she hesitated about in her family's presence. Neelima insisted that her father was a committed activist, irrespective of his eating habits. Her mother's choice was a political one, which became something that she later developed a fondness for. We will briefly look at the politics of food in India to understand Neelima's parents' choices related to eating meat.

Food, especially cooked food, is political. It creates hierarchies between groups and within groups that can lead to humiliation. Practices of cooking, dining, and ways of serving food belie a quest for power. Prescriptions and proscriptions of food animate caste boundaries (Gorringe and Karthikeyan 2014).

Food is an extensive topic, but we will focus on the consumption of meat since eating (or not eating) 'non-veg' came up repeatedly in Chitpavan women's narratives. Being 'non-vegetarian' is a term unique to the Indian sub-continent. This term indicates the hegemony of vegetarianism. Eating the meat of animals has been an important register to

demarcate cultural difference (Guru 2009). Saraswat[168] Brahmans in Maharashtra were considered inferior to other Brahmans on account of their fish consumption. While there are exceptions such as Kashmiri Brahman, Bengali Brahman, and Saraswat Brahman, who include meat and fish in their diets, most Brahman communities are vegetarian. Historically, the meat of dead animals has been a source of sustenance for many 'lower' caste communities, resulting in their humiliation. The 'politics of vegetarianism', is a way of demarcating difference and traditionally indicated caste. Scholarship on ancient eating practices shows why Brahmanism adopted vegetarianism after being confronted with Jainism and Buddhism (Jha 2004). Contemporary vegetarian-only spaces—whether housing societies or canteens—are another way of indicating caste. Extending Pandian's idea of transcoding of caste by the upper caste, Natrajan argues that vegetarian-only spaces are the 'upper' caste way of appearing to not speak about caste. He is critical of legal recognition of the housing societies wanting to be exclusively vegetarian (Natrajan 2018). The notice put up in the Chennai office of The Hindu (a newspaper) in 2014 was heavily criticized for prohibiting employees from bringing non-vegetarian food as it caused discomfort to others. It highlighted the dominance of upper castes in the newspapers or generally Tamil newsrooms and how the 'discomfort' is couched in terms of a cultural preference rather than as caste hierarchy (Gorringe and Karthikeyan 2014). Analysis of large scale survey data has shown that only about thirty percent or less of

[168] In her culinary memoir, Kaumudi Marathé narrates a mythical story behind the Saraswat Brahman practice of fish-eating. The Gaud Saraswat Brahmans, named after river Saraswati, are said to have experienced a drought which left them nothing to eat. They were unable to study holy books because of having to find food. To help them the river sent up fish to enable the Brahman to continue to study the Vedas (2017). Marathé's narration illustrates how castelessness is easily imbibed in upper caste writing. She uses the word 'tribes' to describe Konkanastha and Saraswat Brahman communities, which her father and mother belonged to.

Indians are vegetarian, debunking the myth of vegetarianism being an Indian norm (Natrajan and Jacob 2018).

We have seen how 'upper' caste, Hindu sensibilities were passed off as 'Indian' in various instances in the first section of this chapter and elsewhere too. Food has been another site for such homogenizing practices[169].

Food choices are not easy terrain solely dependent on 'individual choice.' Beef festivals held by various student groups in universities result from the food politics emerging as a response to rising Hindu nationalism. Laws against the consumption of beef existed for years. However, *Gau-rakshaks* or cow vigilante groups have attacked and killed at least fourteen people- Dalits and Muslims in most cases- since the BJP government came to power in 2014. This is not only a question of food but also one of labour- the livelihood specifically of these communities depends on animal husbandry, leather, and occupations allied to cattle (Human Rights Watch 2019). Such vigilantism has severely affected these communities.

Not just what is being eaten but how it is cooked is also under scrutiny. People from the north-eastern states of India have faced routine discrimination, among other things, related to their food and methods of cooking. A recent film called Axone (pronounced Akhuni) explicitly looks at how the north eastern people living in Delhi face discrimination due to the smell of their food.

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[169] IKEA, the Swedish multinational group's first Indian outlet in Hyderabad in 2018, chose to serve chicken meatballs instead of its popular beef meatballs, in a menu customized for Indian customers. This was despite Hyderabad having a substantial beef eating population and there being no beef bans within the state.
McDonalds had to give a reassurance that their french fries were cooked in vegetable oil and did not use beef extracts in 2001. A survey of cookbooks revealed an absence of Dalit recipes in 'national' and 'regional' cuisines (WS 10 Class of 2009 2009).

Marathi Brahmans (except Saraswats) are normatively vegetarian, but many started eating non-veg food, possibly around the late colonial period. The reasons for eating could be varied- intermingling and working in colonial settings, in offices or armed forces.

Sixty-one-year-old Medha, whose mother's educational journey we have seen in Chapter three, had assumed her father was not a Brahman due to his eating habits-

> Since he was in the army, my father never abided by caste rules (*jaat-paat manli nahi*). My mother did not eat non-veg. He (father) lived in a proper Konkanastha family in the village, but later, he ate non-veg in the army. And he said when you roam around in the world, you should eat. He said children should eat non-veg. So when I asked why doesn't *Aai* (mother) eat, he'd say she is a Brahman. So that is what I thought for years. (Laughs) *Aai* is the only Brahman, father from some other caste, so this is inter-caste. Later realized we are all Konkanastha.

So unlike me, who made the connections between food and caste much later, Medha associated Brahmans with vegetarianism and bought into her father's joke about only her mother being Brahman. The two differences at play here are our age and location. Medha grew up in smaller towns or villages and is at least thirty years older than me. My post-1990 urban childhood exposed me to a world where meat consumption among (urban and upper middle class) Brahmans was frequent. This resonates with Soha's narrative, which appears later.

Susheela was a seventy-five-year-old educator who grew up in Mumbai with her paternal uncle and family, after her father's death. She recollected a nationalist impulse to build stronger bodies-

> We were Konkanastha and vegetarian, but my uncle was in the police and liked to eat non-veg. Even before that, there was a group in Pune. A person called Dr. Moonje in the RSS[170] said that we would gain independence in a few years. We should be able to manage our administration and our defence forces. Young people should enroll in police forces, armed forces. Do not follow eating restrictions. People knew that eating non-veg helps build muscles. So both the brothers had started eating eggs and mutton outside the house. So my aunt learnt to cook non-veg for her husband, and my grandmother gave her permission to do so. She did not even eat onion-garlic.

The exposure to non-vegetarian food was gendered; men were exposed to it first due to their presence outside the homes. Women were unequally burdened with keeping up traditions and norms and also granted less agency. While keeping her own restrictions about food intact, Susheela's grandmother accommodated her son's desire to eat meat. Susheela's aunt learnt to cook meat for her husband, although it is unclear whether she was willing and permitted to eat it. Susheela cooked and consumed meat post-marriage when she joined her husband (a Karade Brahman) in the USA.

[170] Dr. Moonje was a trained medical doctor, an associate of Tilak and a mentor to K.B. Hegdewar who founded the RSS in 1925. Dr. Moonje founded the Bhonsala Military School in Nasik to provide military training to Hindus.

Caste-based norms eventually began fading away, and the question of consuming non-vegetarian food, especially within urban Brahman families, was no longer taboo. Soha's family illustrates how seamlessly Brahmans were able to shrug off the vegetarian norm.

> Shraddha: What about non-veg and drinking?
>
> Soha: Oh, it's become like a religion in the house. My whole extended family, for that matter. My grandfather was a solicitor in a small town, very modest means. He sat my father down after his 10th class, opened a Black Label[171] bottle, and said there is nothing manly about drinking and also about not drinking, so you choose. I don't remember when I first had alcohol, neither does my sister, because Diwali parties had non-veg and liquor.
>
> Shraddha: (a little surprised) At home?
>
> Soha: (Emphasizes) Compulsory non-veg and liquor. (She related a few incidents about how non-veg is part of their family's socializing plans.)
>
> The joke goes- meat became expensive because Brahmans started having it (*baman khayala lagla ani bokdacha bhav wadhla*)!

As noted earlier, while Brahman households are vegetarian, many routinely consumed meat, like Soha's and mine. Soha and I exchanged stories of how our husbands (both Chitpavan) grew up in vegetarian households and were initially taken aback by the eating-drinking cultures of our homes. In segue with Soha's declaration of non-veg being

[171] An expensive brand of whiskey.

treated as religion, eating meat was presented as a sign of being progressive or modern in more than one interview. Twenty-nine-year-old Sayali stated that her maternal grandmother was liberal, unlike her paternal one.

> Shraddha: Liberal why?
>
> Sayali: She is a bit cool; if someone sat next to her and ate non-veg, she did not care but the other one, no egg also in the house. My parents do not eat, so I was not fascinated, but I ate with friends in college. No restrictions but not at home.

The narratives throw light on how meat is permissible, even a routine occurrence on some Brahman tables. This is part of a secularizing process; the obvious signs of caste-based norms disappear, thereby facilitating the belief that caste itself is disappearing due to mere cultural changes. Meat consumption for Brahmans is not a matter of religious sanction but rather nutrition and enjoyment, as seen from the narratives. I want to draw attention to the transition from vegetarianism to the consumption of meat in a matter of decades. It can be noted as a cultural change, a sign of modernity, or moving with the times. However, when juxtaposed against the political context of food in the country, this ‘choice’ of eating or not eating meat signals the ease with which a Brahman can eat it today.

While vegetarianism functions as a hegemonic norm or the kind of meat to be consumed can become a matter of life and death for others, the Brahman do not face

repercussions[172] for eating meat. On the contrary, one becomes 'cool' or progressive if one is open to the idea of consuming meat. The joke about meat becoming expensive because Brahmans consume it, I submit, is at the expense of numerous Dalits and Muslims' lives.

We move on to discuss gender-driven norms on clothes, comportment.

Of clothes, respectability, and progressiveness

Indian women's clothing has been a site of intense discussion and revolutionary action. One of the many vehicles of nationalist discourse, clothing has also been used to demand bodily autonomy, assert identity, and question caste-based norms. While the nationalist discourse was focused on middle class women's sartorial choices (Prasad 2016), the revolutionary actions came from the 'lower' caste women and men. In nineteenth-century Kerala, the breast cloth movement was an intense struggle involving the upper and lower caste communities, British rulers, and Christian missionaries. It has been read as a struggle about caste identity rather than any claim for respect towards women (P.V. 2018). The crux of scholarship on the subject is that sartorial matters are rarely only about the individual. What you wear and how you carry yourself are also about your caste, location, class, and gender.

[172] In 1890 i.e. more than a century ago, some prominent Brahman men in Pune found themselves in a controversy over a cup of tea. Gopal Joshi, the husband of Anandibai was a maverick. He had planned a lecture at the Pune City Mission or Panch Haud Mission and invited many including people like Gokhale, Kanitkar, Tilak and Ranade. All the attendees were served tea after the lecture. While the women attendees did not touch the cup, Tilak insisted on being served by a Brahman. Other men just had the tea. A list of the attendees was published in a newspaper. They were threatened with social boycott over consuming tea and biscuits in Christian space. Tilak claimed to have done repentance rites in Varanasi and Ranade held out for a year and then rendered an apology. I mention it here to highlight the remarkable cultural changes that have taken place in the last century (Sohoni 2017).

In India, there was the matter of Western attire as well. The adoption of Western clothes was controversial, whereas the westernization of Indian clothes was a gradual and subtle process (Prasad 2016). Emma Tarlo's seminal work on clothing noted that adopting western clothes outside and retaining Indian attire inside the home was common for Indian men. She called it the 'moral aesthetic approach'(1996:9). Western attire was mandated in some professions where Indians were employed. The choice of retaining Indian clothing involved not only to support the suffering Indian textile industry but also the desire to preserve Indian tradition.

Consider the following exchange with Amita, a seventy-plus woman born in a Chitpavan family living in the old Pune city. Her grandfather was a judge and was "quite conservative, but he sent his son to study abroad." Her father was an engineer, studied in England, and worked in Mumbai, whereas his wife and children lived in the ancestral home in Pune.

> Amita: Just a good professional Brahman family.
>
> Shraddha: Did he [her father] have a western style of living and thinking?
>
> Amita: I think so. Absolutely western style of living, it was dual in fact. In Mumbai, it was a western-style house. He ate with fork and spoon, and when he came to Pune, he would change into *dhotar*[173], shirt, coat, *topi* when we were young. Eventually, the *dhotar* was gone, but that was much later. So he had these two different things, different in Pune and Mumbai,

[173] It is a long strip of rectangular cloth which is wrapped around the lower body. Called *dhoti* in Hindi. *Topi* is cap.

> and since he was a high-level official, he would be in formal attire, suit and all. Very western in his thinking.
>
> Shraddha: How did this affect your childhood?
>
> Amita: The Pune house was no different. It was like the traditional big *wadas*.
>
> Shraddha: And festivals, rituals?
>
> Amita: There was *dev puja* every day. My grandfather was a devout man (*dev-bhakt)* and performed *puja* post a ritual bath, so a Brahman would come and do *puja* every day. There was an offering (*naivedya)* for that. Then my mother reduced all that. I did not feel anything about eating beef when I went abroad because of all this. It never stopped me from experimenting with all kinds of things in my life."

Amita describes the two worlds that her family and many families in the country negotiated. This dichotomous existence fits with colonial historiography of the 'professional,' 'western,' 'formal' public sphere, and the traditional, religious private sphere. Amita's father embodied this by differing attire and lifestyle in two cities- formal suits in Mumbai where he worked and traditional wear in Pune where his family lived. Nationalism in India provided "an ideological principle of selection" in dealing with western modernity. While it was required to emulate the west in the public sphere, it was imperative to protect the inner spiritual sanctum of the home (Chatterjee 1989:314–15). Thus, what Tarlo calls a 'moral aesthetic approach' was adopted by many elite Indian

men. However, some of these practices- everyday rituals - wore out, just like pants gradually replaced the *dhotar*.

The interesting part of the quotation is how Amita spoke of the impact of religiosity or the lack thereof on her. Her reference to beef- considered taboo for Brahmans- is about her being able to set aside norms of food and propriety that were expected of a traditional Chitpavan Brahman woman. This setting aside of norms is done in a foreign land[174] where the Brahminical norms may have ceased to operate in the way they do in Pune. I propose that her caste and class allowed Amita to do 'all kinds of things', which pushed the boundaries of what was considered appropriate behavior expected of a Chitpavan woman.

I argue that Brahman men display a kind of self-reflexive tendency which assists the evolution of gender roles (in this case, the feminine role) to accommodate the demands of contemporary times. While it is the patriarchal authority that assists or facilitates deviance from normative behaviour, in the process, both feminine roles, as well as patriarchal power, are reconfigured. In Amita's case, her father supported and, at times, pushed her to make decisions that deviated from normative behaviour but which allowed her to lead a fuller life. Amita's father provides support through this self-reflexive patriarchal tendency, of which I will give more examples in the following paragraphs. The above exchange illustrates how sartorial matters were not just about material things, i.e., clothes but predicated greater socio-cultural changes.

[174] Beef eating is the norm in Europe and US. Amita may be conforming to the norms operating in the country she was in. Women like Anandibai Joshi and Parvatibai Athavale strictly adhered to Hindu norms of food and attire while abroad despite deteriorating health. Half a century later, things changed for Amita.

My conversations brought up seemingly quotidian issues of whether the woman was expected to wear nine yards or five yards saree in her marital home. The women led me to read into these negotiations aspects of modernity, progressiveness, or orthodoxy of the said family. As we shall see, even the saree fabric and pattern are fraught with connotations of caste and class.

> Seema: The atmosphere at home was comfortable. We were allowed to do everything. Only he (her father) made sure [that she was appropriately dressed]; he kept having people over for work. I was to dress appropriately. I used to wear many one-pieces in school. I became conscious, it was not told to me, but I somehow stopped. So my father was very particular that I was dressed properly. Since we had some workers coming and all. I was the eldest girl in the joint family.
>
> Shraddha: Grandparents?
>
> Seema: Just grandmother, never saw my grandfather. Proper attire, so used to it that I'd never go without a *dupatta*[175], was not forced. I was so conscious that I felt like I was missing something if I forgot to wear one. I enjoyed it; gradually, in college, I stopped [wearing a dupattas], depending on what I was wearing. I was so used to it.

[175] It is a long rectangular cloth which is worn over the bosom by women who wear loose pants and the long shirt i.e. *salwar kameez*.

Seema, a 42-year-old businesswoman, described her transition from dresses or one-pieces to wearing *dupattas* as she grew older. She alluded to her unconsciously understanding what was required of her as the eldest daughter within a joint family household, indicates how a habitus creates gender norms. However, there was also overt insistence from her father regarding proper dressing. It was patriarchal protection of the woman's body against the perceived threat from 'other' men who frequented their home.

A girl's sexuality is intricately connected with her social location. The norms of her comportment, dressing, and the way she carries herself, therefore, corresponds to her caste, class, and of course, her gender, even if it is subject to individual will. "The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions, which essentially signify bodies" (Butler 1988:526). The scripts of caste and gender are learnt in the habitus one grows up in but are also negotiated.

The women spoke of conforming or being encouraged to set aside prescribed sartorial norms and conveyed their opinions about these norms. Several women indicated their families' progressiveness or lack thereof (usually marital families) through the sanctions or allowance made on their sartorial choices. A few examples-

"My father had stitched me a shirt-pant because I wanted to play *kho-kho*; all of us in the team had permission," said Vasudha, an octogenarian who lived with her family in a small town before moving to Pune after marriage.

"My grandfather had bought everyone cycles. He would say if you have to cycle, wear pants, it should not come in the way. So the only thing was to be covered; what you wear

was not a problem", shares Prerana the 55-year-old woman who grew up in a joint family in the old part of Pune.

This breach in dressing is facilitated by a man, usually the patriarch in the family. In this 'aestheticization of women,' i.e., ensuring proper clothing to facilitate progressive dressing, I argue that the self-reflexive patriarchy of the Brahman men is at work. Deviance from the normative attire is encouraged and presented as a progressive move. These kinds of moves reconfigure gender roles and simultaneously invest in the progressive, modern image of the family/community.

Some women pointed out their marital families' conservativeness where they were asked to wear nine yards instead of the more 'modern' five yards drape of the saree. One of them was the Nitsure grandmother. I asked her about the changes after marriage, the environment in her marital home, located in the old city, also known as the *Peth*[176] area.

> Shraddha: *Peth* environment?
>
> Subhadra: Not much. Just work and clothes. We had more clothes and nicer.
>
> Shraddha: Not that much freedom?
>
> Subhadra: No complaints. We had 7-8 sarees for school back then, my sister and me. I wore printed but not my sister. Printed was what lower-class women wore, not respectable women

[176] Footnote 79 briefly describes the spatial layout of Pune.

> (*gharandaaj baika).* No discomfort about food and all, just clothes and vehicles.

Subhadra Nitsure noted that she had more clothes and nicer ones in her natal home and she had access to more vehicles. Her sister, older than her, refrained from wearing printed sarees because they were not meant for respectable women. However, that changed soon after and Subhadra wore them.

Her daughter-in-law, Kanchan Nitsure, had similar things to say-

> Kanchan: At my mother's, I always wore jeans and skirts and *salwar kameez*, here for seven years I wore sarees.
>
> Shraddha: You were told, or you realized?
>
> Kanchan: No, I was told, I thought ok. This is just one point, but at times I felt bad.

The Nitsure granddaughter did not care for skirts and shorts. Her grandmother remarked, "About clothes, I do not mind fashion, but this fashion of exposing I don't like, but my granddaughters are not like that." She nodded at the one I interviewed saying "This one is quite simple," in an appreciative tone. The conservatism in clothing norms within the Nitsure household persisted even as the dress itself changed with the times, from the mother-in-law wearing a nine-yard to the daughter-in-law giving up other dresses for a five-yard saree in the initial years of her marriage. The daughter-in-law was dressed in a *salwar kameez* when we met, and her daughter was wearing jeans. The grandmother, though still wore nine yards saree.

Seema's father's instruction to his daughter about being 'dressed properly' was due to the frequent presence of 'other' men—from a different socio-economic background—who worked for her father. This idea of respectability and propriety underlies all the above norms. The Nitsure grandmother's appreciation for her granddaughter stemmed from the idea that clothes which expose are undignified. Seema also unconsciously got into a habit of wearing a *dupatta* for a long time to come across as 'respectable,' which became a habit. The time period they were growing up in, along with family environment, class position; all these factors affected the norms of clothes and comportment that they operated within. The gendered nature of these norms and the connections with caste and respectability are evident in the above instances. Subhadra's wearing of printed sarees and her daughter-in-law wearing salwar kameez shows that these norms change with time and across generations.

However, one cannot risk generalizations in this regard. Close attention needs to be paid to the tensions within these norms. While respectability is an important aspect of Brahmanness for these women, modernity or progressive thinking also plays a significant role. For example, a few women from the first and second generation mentioned that they started wearing pants before it became common for women (from their peer groups) to wear them, to indicate their family's reformed or progressive outlook.

The pull of progressiveness and modernity is evident from the women's pointed mention of how their fathers/grandfathers/husbands facilitated a change in clothes against the existing norm or family expectations. Thus, the woman's class-caste[177] location

[177] The section in Chapter two reviews literature to demonstrate how there was an overlap between Brahmans and the middle classes which emerged in colonial India.

decisively affects the norms adopted or discarded in the performance of their gender. I submit that the performance of gender and caste cannot be separated. That which presents as gendered is also caste-d in specific ways. In the next sub-section we will see the possibilities and tensions of embodied caste privilege.

Caste Confidence

The third generation women, born in or after the 1970s, staked a claim to the public sphere, to their ambitions outside the house. This was a result of many factors, including how they were socialized. What was striking for me was the confidence with which most of them spoke about themselves and their place in the world. These women took certain things for granted— their education and ability to achieve what they sought beyond the domestic, both of which have been explored in detail in the preceding chapters. Across fields- as engineers, doctors, pursuing art forms, running a family business, as senior scientists working on international research projects, starting their businesses- these women struck me as exceptionally confident. Certain remarks they made stood out for their ability to push gendered boundaries. I discuss two examples below.

Menstrual taboos such as not entering the kitchen, sitting aside during periods were mentioned by first-generation women and, very rarely, those from the second generation. These were spoken of as old-fashioned things that the women eventually stopped practicing. However, norms such as not entering temples or participating in rituals during menses, are still practiced. 28 years old Tanaya, who ran a salon, had this to say

> I do not know if you want to record this, but all the restrictions during periods, other castes have a lot of that. If someone tells me not to pray to

> god or offer flowers, I will purposely do it. I can do that. Earlier there was less hygiene and those four days you could rest, that is why. Think scientifically! I keep trying to explain it to my girls as well, the ones who work with me. They don't get it.

Here is a twenty-eight-year-old woman who is not just rejecting a gendered norm which she finds archaic but is willing to flout it.

Soha, the financial analyst whom we have encountered earlier, while speaking of her and her sister's marriages, told me that she did not change her surname after marriage[178] without any questioning on my part. Her sister also did the same, "for obvious reasons. We did not see any logic in changing names." The reasons were supposed to be obvious to me- a fellow upper middle class, Brahman woman who was younger than her and who was assumed to hold similar 'progressive' beliefs.

Quite like the *mangalsutra*, which is not mandatory for the third generation, not taking on the husband's surname has become a 'choice' only for the third generation. Apart from Soha, not many exercised it, even among the third-generation women I interviewed[179]. Irrespective of the reasons for doing this, what struck me was how Soha stated this point as a matter of right that needed no explanation.

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[178] This is an example of how, possibly the woman being interviewed responds to her perception of me and what I may be interested in, as mentioned in the second chapter. As a researcher of Gender Studies, Soha may have thought this was interesting to me, and it certainly was. She talked about her marriage earlier and her sister's marriage later in the interview but pointed out the retention of surnames in both instances.

[179] The married women under 40 years interviewed did one of three things- adopt both surnames, change their surname after marriage or a few retained their own (like Rujuta, whom we encounter below).

Of course, one cannot attribute this to confidence entirely; there is individual agency as well as external circumstances which make it possible to flout menstrual norms or keep one's name after marriage.

This confidence which Tanaya and Soha embody was present overtly in other narratives too. Nandita, a 38-year-old technocrat, was introspective. She spoke of caste as something that is embodied and, therefore, not to be shrugged off-

> When people say that they don't believe in caste, they don't discriminate and all. Sure, I don't either. However, other people will know about it from my way of talking, behaviour, and all. (Switches to English) Since it is all part of the way I think, the way I do my things, the way I carry myself; that is all Brahman actually. (In Marathi) That has happened over generations; it is the residue [of caste]. The education that was available over the years. They [Brahmans] were able to do; they were able to read, think, contemplate, and kept it to themselves and did not spread it [knowledge/ education]. That is the worst thing they did.
>
> You know how we get irritated with how these [Municipal] corporators[180] are and the way they behave. My argument is that all of these people, their education started after independence. Education level is going down after independence, whereas Brahman people got good education much earlier, decades ago.

[180] Municipal corporators are elected representatives of the urban governing body.

> How can we expect that cultured behaviour (*susanskritpana*)? Whatever happens, I cannot swear. I will not slap someone even if I am angry. [This is a result of] The behaviour and rational thinking of Brahmans. I will never say I am proud to be a Chitpavan Brahman, I have no contribution in it, I was born in this family, but I value those things which have come to me, those have been passed on over generations since that is what you see in our [Brahman] houses.

Nandita made an overarching connection between being Brahman and embodiment- talking, behaviour, comportment, manner of speech. She firmly located *sanskaar* as a cumulative result of generations of caste privilege- such as access to education and time for contemplation and refinement, which allowed for the emergence of qualities that she valued. She admitted that these opportunities were exclusively available to Brahmans by conscious effort. That was why she did not take pride in her identity despite valuing the cultural capital that her Brahmanness bestows upon her.

The caste habitus manifests into a particular embodied experience, which I will term 'caste confidence.' For Rujuta, a forty-five-year-old scientist who grew up in Pune but travelled and worked across the country, it was quite straightforward.

> Rujuta: Upper caste and upper class give you confidence and a *befikrepana* (carefree attitude) about things, even about yourself. I realized this because initially, my husband would say, how you can dress like this when we had to go somewhere in these clothes.

Shraddha: What were ‘these clothes’?

Rujuta: Unkempt, not ironed, or which look old. How can you wear such clothes, you and your friends? Neat. And neat meant earrings, bangles. I would not wear these things but comb your hair, apply powder. He would say, ‘how can you step out without these things?’ His sister would take time to get ready, but I’d step out as I was. Earlier I did not understand, but later I told him people treat me differently, just looking at my colour. Or like, there is an acceptance (she stresses the word) when you go anywhere, to any house.

I do not feel the need to look neat. From how I speak or based on my face, there is a general acceptance, or no one will throw me out or no bad behaviour, people will speak with respect. Any meeting, or big program, I can go anyhow, even to give a lecture, I’d go as I was. It was not on purpose. I never felt the need. Whether it is caste or class…

Rujuta was consciously reflecting on her own embodied experience as a result of being asked questions on her caste identity. She was perceived in a certain way as a fair-skinned person who spoke in a certain kind of language. This ‘certain’ way of speech and bodily comportment is a result, as Rujuta correctly indicated, of being an urban, middle or upper-middle-class Brahman. This has bestowed a ‘*befikrepana,*’ i.e., a carefree attitude regarding her physical appearance. This carefree attitude allows Rujuta to assume (based on her experience) that she will be received with dignity, irrespective of her appearance. It allows her to set aside or alter the norms of femininity and claim a space in

the public sphere on her own terms. This carefree attitude, I argue, is an embodied manifestation of her social location.

Thirty-two-year-old Jagruti's narrative highlights the importance of the urban location in the making of this caste habitus and the exposure it allows, which has not been significantly addressed. Jagruti grew up in small towns, unlike other women younger than 40 years who feature here who grew up in cities. A friend connected me with Jagruti and told me she was an engineer and had worked abroad.

Jagruti Lele had a pleasant personality and conversation flowed easily. She had grown up in a small town and travelled to a bigger one to get her engineering degree. She always scored well in school and college. However, she did not land a job through the campus process and struggled to secure one later as well.

> Shraddha: How did you not land a job despite a distinction?
>
> Jagruti: I passed all scrutiny criteria; I could clear even aptitude tests but not group discussion. I realized that the problem was communication. Small town and Pune-Mumbai, there is quite a difference, even in dressing. I observed a lot during my interviews in Mumbai, how those people dress and all. People suggested personality grooming classes, but somehow I could not. I decided to improve upon myself.
>
> Shraddha: Was English a problem?
>
> Jagruti: Yes, it was.
>
> Shraddha: There is not as much exposure, right?

> Jagruti: No or never knew about foreign languages, that something like this exists. English was a major issue as well. You feel you may go wrong, and so (you) don't speak. There is a problem, so there has to be a solution. I practiced in front of the mirror. In some places, there is no group discussion but 3-4 interviews. Read newspapers for vocab [improving vocabulary] and picked up words, which can be used, took efforts for that.
>
> Fortunately, my boss was also a Lele. He groomed me for almost a month. He groomed me in the Konkanasta way (*Koknasthi shistit groom kela*). [Got] selected then a couple of months of training. This company had interviewed me in Marathi and English, which worked for me. I was relaxed. You don't get groomed so much in the initial months.

Jagruti points out how growing up in a city versus a small town makes a great difference, especially in cities like Pune and Mumbai. While she identified communication as her weakness, she also mentioned clothes, comportment, and the lack of exposure and knowledge about skills which could be acquired to enhance recruitment possibilities.

In her case, her boss, a caste fellow, decided to invest time beyond the mandated trainings to groom her. The confident well-travelled Jagruti I encountered resulted from many factors put together- her own efforts, her boss's investment, the exposure available to an employee of a multinational IT company to name a few. With Jagruti's example, I wish to highlight the role of an urban location in one's embodiment but also to emphasize that this embodiment is a result not just of caste but a combination of factors. Being born in a

well-to-do Brahman family in a city facilitates the embodiment of what I call ‘caste confidence.’

So far, I have presented a glimpse of *sanskaar* within Chitpavan Brahman households working towards creating an ethical, moral framework for the Brahmans and the norms around clothes and comportment, all of which are not uniform across households. I submit that Rujuta’s *befikrepana* or carefree attitude, Soha’s taken-for-grantedness, and Tanaya’s flouting of norms are rooted in their embodiment of caste. All of this is a cumulative result of being urban upper-caste, middle-class, and Brahman women born in or after the late 1970s. This caste confidence facilitates the feminist impulse that Soha and Tanaya, and others interviewed exhibited in pushing the gendered boundaries.

Research in a completely different context has made connections between caste and confidence, albeit of a different kind. Examining a personality development camp for Bahujan women students, Savitha Babu has posited that ‘learning confidence’ can be a political act to counter devaluation. “Confidence (or the lack of it) was framed here as a characteristic acquired through material and symbolic social capital” (Babu 2020:4). Bahujan histories were presented as those of courage and rising against odds rather than stories of victimhood. Bahujan students are taught to inculcate a redefined confidence that draws on the denaturalization of caste privilege.

Babu’s work, along with the ground covered by this thesis, can help us answer the question- where does caste confidence stem from? I argue that the *sanskaar*, the detailed histories, carefully accumulated social, cultural, and economic capital, ideas of

superiority, being ‘merit’ worthy, and the various characteristics that the women mentioned all contribute to an embodiment of caste I term ‘caste confidence.’

This embodied confidence allows women to push or even reconfigure gender boundaries in small but significant ways. This ability to shun traditional markers like menstrual taboos or choosing to retain one’s surnames, or even eating non-veg and therefore claiming ‘modernity’ stems from their caste location and draws upon their caste privilege.

These women straddle several discursive spaces at the same time. As professionals, they represent themselves as existing in what K. Srilatha has termed as ‘cosmopolitan modernity’ (1999) where issues of caste, religion at times even gender do not seem to matter. However, the very fact of their being in a city like Pune means that their ‘caste-d’ lifeworlds are undeniable. Predominantly Brahman friend circles at school and college are remarked upon as a coincidence; social networks of Brahman friends persist across generations.

Their assertion that Brahman families are the most liberal in supporting women’s education and work can be read as a manifestation of the pressure to uphold the community’s progressive image.

The critique of the third generation women emerging from within creates a complicated picture of the community’s tryst with modernity. Bhagirathi offers a critique of this embodiment of confidence among young women. Bhagirathi is a 69 year old well known spiritual orator, who delivers lectures on ancient Hindu texts like the Upanishads. Her views on domesticity and femininity are critical of the above attitude and comportment

which Rujuta discussed. Reproduced below is a portion of longer quote where she is responding to whether she thinks the community is letting go of its values.

> ...And honestly, a house runs because of a woman's domination, not a man's; that is my opinion… a sweet dominance. She [the young woman of today] has become harsh (*karkasha*). Her freedom is not graceful. We [Bhagirathi's generation] went wrong somewhere. So now people call us names. If our girls behave like this, then what will others say. I do not agree with their stance, their ways of talking and walking, the *befikiri*, it is not good. It is not the sign of a cultured person. The culturally higher one goes, you have to become softer, more appealing to the other. This harshness is not appealing.

Bhagirathi's quote and her narrative were critical of the femininity which she observes among the third generation of Brahman women- their freedom is not graceful, they are more aggressive, harsher, and they're demanding rather than flexible. Their carefree attitude is a problem. She brings up how cultural superiority should make one softer and more appealing and somehow the new generation of Chitpavan women does not appeal to her.

In fact, Bhagirathi proclaimed the following,

> [A]nother failure of my generation is that we have not been able to make our daughters homemakers (*grihini*). We thought our girls should have education, freedom, good health, assistance from the family etc. All this is fine but we lost the homemaker from within the girl. You have a home,

> which you have to manage, you have to love your husband. No one is perfect. Then why so many conflicts now? So many divorces?

Bhagirathi was not alone in lamenting about the lack of domestic skills among third generation women, as we saw in the Chapter four. But she was suggesting much more than that. She was critical of the change in socialization and notes it as a failure of her generation- failure to make *grihinis* out of their daughters. She connects these changes with increasing marital conflicts and divorces. She is lamenting a lack of *samanjaspana* within the younger women.

Earlier in the chapter, a cultural journey was traced wherein a woman's refusal to marry in a household without books was deemed as a milestone, half a century ago. If one were to follow the same trajectory these third generation women could be accredited for being able to shed aside some trappings of femininity and claim space, as a result of their caste confidence. The freedom that they claim in this process, however, is deemed 'not graceful' by some within the community. They are charged with not being true to their gendered burdens of being *samanjas* and *girihinis.*

Concluding comments

Shashi, my first respondent, an eighty-plus woman who appeared in the first chapter, said this towards the end of our interview-

> ...[among Brahmans] too much dressing up and showing off has been reined in from the very beginning. This is not given importance. Wealth is to be shown off not through ornaments, show the spark in your intellect, not ornaments. So then, depending on your saree, you wear a single string

> of pearls, earrings, and a bangle, that's it. If you have gold, you wear bangles, bracelets, necklaces, and gold earrings; appropriate but not showy. You don't have to tell children all this; it gets imbibed. The benefit is that we don't obsess over gold, don't you think so? If you see Maratha women, they wear such big necklaces, as if something for a bull. We cannot wear something like that. Even if we have money, we will not do that. What we may do is get some diamond earrings and a bangle. The cost is more than that huge amount of gold. You'd like that better than being decked in gold. This is the difference, difference in culture. Even food, we are taught not to waste food from the plate. Take only what you need. This is an aspect of education. The mother, grandmother, are educated so they can tell you the meaning- this is healthy, eat more of this and that is unhealthy so eat less. That is because of education, and we give it importance from the very beginning. There is a little more discipline than others and women inculcate that.

This chapter has traced how the Brahman community in Maharashtra has engaged with culture, using registers ranging from music, theatre, language, literature in colonial India to seemingly apolitical sites of clothing, food, and comportment, and socialization in the present times. Shashi provides a perfect set of examples for summing up this chapter. She refers to three kinds of cultural inheritance- better taste (not being ostentatious), frugality and prudence.

Being subtle about appearances is a characteristic of Brahman communities, also evident in Tamil Brahmans (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014). Shashi reiterated ideas of discipline,

being mindful of wastage and raising informed children who have educated caretakers-parents or grandparents who engage in socialization to inculcate proper *sanskaar*. The above quote highlights a certain 'taste.' This Brahminical taste is carefully cultivated, 'imbibed' without explicit instruction.

This Brahminical taste sits neatly with Bourdieu's exposition on the subject, "…tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick-making') of the tastes of others" (Bourdieu 1984:56). He maintains that the taste of the society is actually the taste of its elites and this taste is a function not of economic resources, but one's social origins and cultural capital. The purpose of this taste is to create social difference or distinction.

The Marathi Brahman community fashioned a specific cultural tradition or *sanskritik parampara* that was passed off as mainstream. This played a significant role in the reproduction of caste. This cultural tradition was and continues to be challenged. As we have observed in various subsections of this chapter, taste is flexible. Food, comportment, clothes are updated to suit the changing socio-cultural discourses and material circumstances of Brahmans. In the process, there is a realignment of norms and gender roles. These realignments also provide spaces for women to negotiate gendered boundaries. Various choices discussed earlier—clothes, food, menstrual taboos, rituals, education, and work—that women spoke of are made within Brahman habitus. This habitus transposes a normativity—a Brahminical normativity. This normativity creates a sense of what it means to be Brahman.

The chapter demonstrates how Brahman identity is constructed and reconstructed as a result of tensions and contestations. The privilege that is reproduced and passed on is tangible and manifests into an embodied form of casted-ness.

We began the chapter with Aradhana's experiences of 'casteism,' which she described as lower caste attempts at subverting the *sanskritik parampara,* which she spoke of as universally accepted. In the two sections, I tried to present how the Brahman community in Maharashtra was able to reproduce and perpetuate a cultural canon and forge a social standing for themselves as the 'ecumene'; moral and intellectual leaders of society. In so doing, everyone who did not conform or contested these ideals was deemed marginal.

The Brahman community transitioned to modernity and various aspects of their culture also changed. *Sanskaar,* understood as lifecycle rituals within a strictly religious framework shifted to become a set of socializing practices which create embodied Brahmanness. It bestows morals, ethics, a kind of comportment and beliefs which distinguish the '*aplyatle'* or us from the Other.

Using registers of socialization, clothes, comportment, food, and spoken language, I have argued that each of these seemingly quotidian dimensions is political and part of the socio-cultural reproduction of caste. They create an embodied caste-d self. I term this embodiment as 'caste confidence,' which includes self-perception and the perception of others, i.e., both identity and identification (Bairy 2010). Building on Bairy (2010) and Fuller-Narasimhan (2014) work, my thesis demonstrates how caste confidence feeds into the upper-caste discourses of 'merit', which do not account for how historical processes advantage Brahmans.

Each of these registers is being reshaped and updated to suit the contemporary times- meat-eating is deemed progressive and/or rebellious despite vegetarianism being a hegemonic norm. The community consciously invests in its progressive modern image since it is an important part of collective selfhood. In shifting and reproducing these registers, gender roles also shift and give rise to new gendered norms. In the process, some boundaries are pushed while others are negotiated with. Chapter four illustrated how women invest in some gendered expectations to negotiate more agential roles for themselves beyond the prescribed burden of domestic management.

We also saw how perceptions vary among Chitpavan women. Despite both being around 70 years of age, Asawari is pessimistic about the lack of structural changes in gender roles while Bhagirathi is critical of the carefree young women who are not graceful and lack domestic skills.

In shifting away from caste rules- of food, commensality, dress, and rituals, one can adopt secular selfhood, claim to be progressive or modern, without introspecting upon or giving up advantages of one's caste. Caste continues to shape how one conducts oneself and is received in public. It grants decisive advantages to the 'upper' castes within the market economy and through state policy (Mosse 2019) which favours the privileged without marking them as such.

This leads to what Natrajan calls 'culturalization of caste,' that is, caste passing off as merely cultural difference. For example, the superiority of Brahmans is attributed to *sanskaar* and merit, thus invisibilizing the generational processes of accumulations of various kinds that this study dwells on.

Natrajan warns us that “any analysis which takes these ‘differences’ as the reason why different castes exist and as an unproblematic basis for their separate ‘cultural’ identities, fails to account for the production of these differences” (2018:3). This is detrimental to the annihilation of caste.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

On theorizing

In calling for 'ethnographies of the particular', Lila Abu Lughod argued that writing of "particular individuals and their changing relationships, one would necessarily subvert the problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness" (1991:476). In this ethnographic snapshot of Chitpavan Brahman women in Pune I have sought to provide an account of the dynamic nature of culture and how it becomes a site for fashioning a hegemonic identity. The study provides insights into the lifeworlds of elite women- of urban, middle class, Hindu women who had access to varying levels of education based on which generation they belonged to. Recognizing the problems with the category the 'women', scholars have voiced the need for theorising a feminist subject which is attentive to the differences within women and women's participation in perpetuating inequality (Tharu and Niranjana 1996). This study takes on this challenge by being attentive to how caste works in the lives of privileged gendered subjects within one community. The arguments made here aim to draw attention to the complexities that animate the intersections of caste and gender. They do not claim to represent the entire community. However, the Chitpavan Brahman community provides a vivid illustration for arguments that may be relevant in case of other elite communities.

The narratives present two complex and interconnected sites on which Chitpavan Brahman women's lives operate. One is the interaction between Brahman and non-

Brahmans while the other is the gender hierarchy between the women and men within the Brahman community. The narratives demonstrate how caste manifests across various registers in everyday life, interwoven, and lived through the most mundane processes- be it food, clothing, language or smell, or daily aesthetic. We saw what kind of leverage capital accumulated by being Brahman allows these women and how their lives are complicated by negotiations with caste-d and gendered norms across three generations.

I draw on Gopal Guru's challenge to social sciences to "relate the epistemological with the emotional... to bring together reason and emotion (Sarukkai 2007:4048)." In thinking about Brahman women's lives, I have sought to do justice to their dilemmas, struggles, and conflicts even as I attempt to highlight the privileges they enjoy.

As demonstrated in the literature review, discovering feminism before caste is symptomatic of my social location. The women's studies classroom that I entered was alert to caste as an oppressive social structure but the 'caste' subject was often the 'other' woman. The feminisms I encountered in the classroom alerted me to caste, but rarely dwelt on caste privilege. That my caste location was obvious —through my language, comportment, clothes – to start with, has guided my quest to 'see' caste in a location of privilege; where it was allowed to be invisible to those who were privileged. For elite women, gender hierarchy is a tangible reality whereas caste is not a subject to ponder over. Neelima, seventy-year-old social activist, declared,

> The sharpness with which Dalit activists look at caste, I do not possess that [sharpness] nor do I have that kind of experience of course. And it is upsetting

> at times; I feel like why do I not see it, and why do they see only this all the time?

Having spent decades as a social activist, Neelima is self-reflexive, noting her bafflement about caste. She refers to 'lived experience' and the ability to theorise which arises from it and which she lacks. Lived experience is that which we have not chosen or have any freedom from (Sarukkai 2007). Neelima laments the lack of sharpness in her analysis of caste, unlike her Dalit colleagues and her inability to understand why that is all they see while she cannot.

Being an urban, upper middle class Brahman woman from Pune, my experiences provided an autoethnographic entry point for this study. In thinking about the ethnography of the self, Kalpana Kannabiran writes how "caste consciousness is constitutive of the self" (2008:64) and underwritten in deep seated, unarticulated ways. Rather than explicit caste-based rituals, she argues, it is "micro-practices of being in that social location [seemingly – even self consciously – distant from practices that derogate human dignity], that constitute the self and entrench it in deeply problematic ways" (2008:68). Being an insider means being acquainted with some of these micro-practices. In fact, my introspection on these processes led me to this quest of finding out how caste operates as privilege. I have tried to make some of these micro-practices visible in the preceding chapters.

However, an insider is not omniscient. The study of one's society involves renaming and reframing what we know through analytical categories. One learns about a society only from a particular location within it (Narayan 1993). This study aimed at creating an

account of caste privilege, to show how caste operates in everyday lives of Brahman women. In describing privilege, I have tried to be mindful of not reproducing it. While the focus was not on disprivilege, I hope the preceding account is able to point at ways in which disprivilege is created in the act of consolidating and perpetuating caste privilege- both as embodiment and through accumulation of different forms of capital.

As may be evident in the preceding chapters, I have drawn upon writing on and experiences of 'non-Brahman' women (at times even borrowing from black women's experiences) in order to arrive at points of departure and frames to better understand the operation of caste in Chitpavan Brahman women's lives. For example, the drudgery of labour described in autobiographies like Baby Kamble's *Jina Amucha* is different from those of Lakshmibai's struggles in *Smritichitre,* primarily because of their caste location and the nature of labour they therefore struggle with. My project sought to study "the dominant woman's "self" rather than her "others", after it has been problematised by the latter" (Sreekumar 2009:20).

In saying the above, I wish to clarify that I do not subscribe to a division of women (or men) as Brahman and non-Brahman. Such a categorization almost mirrors the derisive "Chitpavan and others" kind of framing made even if in jest, in some of the interviews quoted earlier. Two problems with such categorization are that it does not account for heterogeneity within each of these categories and it seems to subscribe to the hegemonic construction of knowledge that this thesis is trying to unpack.

In my analysis of the Chitpavan Brahman women's narratives, I use three kinds of concepts. First, existing concepts like status production, lived experience, embodiment

and post-colonial habitus are used whenever they can be applied to configurations or instances in the narratives. These have helped me connect existing scholarship with the narratives of Chitpavan Brahman women. Second, there are concepts that emerged out of the narratives, namely, *samanjaspana*, *sanskaar* and *pragalbha grihini*. I have tried to present the implications of these terms with regard to caste, gender and privilege; implications which the users of these terms may not have fully comprehended. These terms bring out the specificity of the Chitpavan case but can be applied to other situations with some modification. Third are concepts which I have come up with to theorise what is emerging from the narratives. These are 'domestic management' and 'caste confidence'. While these terms arise in the specific context of the Chitpavan women in Pune, they can apply to other elite communities. However, analysing them in relation to other contexts will bring out their strengths and weaknesses as theoretical constructs.

A word on absences and silences

Who did women consider their peers? Who did they include in the 'we' even as 'the other' changed depending on the register we were discussing at that moment? What were their intimate relationships like? How did caste figure in their relationships within and outside marriage? How does parenting in a Brahman household look like? How were masculinities reconfigured across the generations studied?

These are some of the questions readers of this thesis will rightly wonder about. The conversations with the women, given that these were mostly single sessions for at most two hours, could not cover every aspect of their lives. Issues that require rapport could not be broached in this time span. These questions merit further research.

Negotiating Modernity

The thesis is organized according to the themes that emerged from the narratives. Each chapter dwells on a register to unpack how caste and gender norms operate in women's lives across generations. One theme present across chapters which has not been independently addressed is modernity. Modernity ushers in "a set of new practices in the major spheres of life: new practices of production, governance, scientific cognition, education, artistic and cultural creativity" (Kaviraj 2005:516–17). A heterogeneity of pre-conditions and "a historically contingent combination of" these elements causes modernities to be different in different nations (Kaviraj 2004:514).

We have seen how Marathi Brahmans negotiated with colonial modernity in the second chapter. They were integral parts of the debates and discourses raging in the eighteenth century and contributed significantly to the nationalist ideology which emerged in this period.

Nationalism has been called the vector of modernity (Liah Greenfeld in Armstrong 1994). The nation is an imagined political community, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign, and nationalism is a cultural artefact (B. Anderson 2006). It is an invented identity which maps onto the "continuum with religion and estate (or class)" (Armstrong 1994:94). In India, nationalism emerged in the colonial period as the dominant ideology and is an integral part of contemporary Indian consciousness.

Despite being dominant, nationalism was not the only discourse prevalent in colonial India. To take a region specific example, I draw upon a monograph on Marathi literary

theory[181] which makes a distinction between nativist and nationalist discourses. Nativism, according to Prachi Gurjarpadhye, "is a more sophisticated political technology than nationalism in the sense that it does not react to the ideological pressures of colonialism in any exaggerated way" (2014:8). The first generation upper caste elites, which included Pathare-Prabhus, Shenvis and Vaishyas apart from Brahman, were eager in sharing the western agenda but not insecure about their own identities or the native tradition. They had faith that the social problems related to caste and gender will be overcome through the forces of modernization. Gurjarpadhye pins this phase up to 1860s, when it was possible to be a modern liberal Brahmin without feeling a discontinuity with one's native self. Gurjarpadhye's work is mentioned so that the changing contours of the Marathi/Indian tryst with modernity are not reduced to a hegemonic nationalist frame.

However, cultural nationalism did play an important role in the story of Chitpavan Brahmans. Writing about the nineteenth century, Richard Tucker notes the Marathi Brahman's centrality in the emergence of cultural nationalism in western India. He writes,

> From the 1860s onwards the political implications of the religious crosscurrents in Maharashtra became clearer in Poona than in Bombay. Poona was less able to tolerate the broad diversity of movements than the more cosmopolitan city on the coast. The missionary presence in Poona had been far less vociferous and the entire British community lived in the cantonment,

[181] Gurjarpadhye's thesis is that specific texts written between 1865 to 1895, produced modern Marathi literary theory. The six individuals who wrote these eleven texts were Dadoba Panduranga Tarkhadkar, Mahadeo Moreshwar Kunte, Kashinath Balkrishna Marathe, Jotirao Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, and Pandita Ramabai. Four of these are Chitpavan Brahman. She points out their ideological strength and the newness of their morality in creatively borrowing ideas from the West and engrafting them within native cultures (2014).

> isolated from the old city. Poona was an almost totally Maharashtrian city, dominated by a socially close-knit network of orthodox Brahmin neighborhoods in the vicinity of the former Peshwas' palaces. The palaces were reminders that Poona had ruled much of western India until 1818. The old city surrounding them thus combined the traditions of Brahmin orthodoxy and martial glory. It was there that through organizations and polemics the characteristic cultural nationalism of high-caste Maharashtra took shape (1976:330).

I argue that Brahmans, along with other upper castes, managed to appropriate the right to represent and speak for 'Indians.' We saw how elite women in the twentieth century were able to speak for 'Indian women' and thereby to sideline issues of caste, community, ethnicity, and religion from deliberations of electoral politics. This forging of a universal 'Indian womanhood' which was not attentive to the diversity of experience encompassed within, impacted the politics of the women's movements. This right was appropriated across sites and platforms to consolidate a socio-cultural hegemony in a context where Brahman political power was facing challenges.

I have argued that the cultural project of fashioning a distinctly modern identity was a hegemonic project, led mostly by Brahmans in what became present-day Maharashtra. Nationalism thus was and continues to be a part of the unmarked yet Brahmanical cultural discourse, which passes of as universally accepted. It is an exclusionary ideological vision that perpetuated caste hierarchy through various processes, some of which were presented in the preceding chapters.

Brahmans were not the only players in the public discourse on modernity. In fact, the hegemonic endeavour of nationalization (of modern knowledges, the arts, and culture) was in many ways shaped by the challenges and contributions of non-Brahmans (Bairy 2010; Paik 2018; Rege 2006). The producers of nationalist modernity sought to distinguish it from Western modernity and the modernity negotiated from a non-Brahman standpoint. We have briefly looked at non-Brahman counterpublics in the second chapter. Bairy has noted how the non-Brahmin challenge is crucial in formulation of a coherent modern Brahmin identity and renders urgent the Brahmin's need to speak as a secular, i.e., a non-caste voice. However he highlights that it is both the internal contestation as well as the external challenge which contribute to the emergence of an ambivalent Brahmin identity (Bairy 2010:303).

Brahmans have bred a sense of superiority, honed through assiduously performed '*sanskaar*' or rituals stemming from the *Sanskritic parampara* or cultural tradition. *Sanskaar,* i.e., life cycle rituals, is a pathway of domestic transmission of cultural capital. The transformation of the ritualistic basis of *sanskaar* to a more moral-ethical frame, which is non-ritualistic, was aligned with the project of a modern nation and is instrumental in the Brahman claim to modernity and social prestige.

The thesis on the culturalization of caste is important in understanding how casteism persists without being remarked upon. Marathi Brahman hegemony in producing a mainstream Marathi *Sanskriti* reaffirms the argument that culture is a derivative of and produced within the context of caste hierarchies (Natrajan 2011). I have tried to show how caste operates in cultural sites, updating with changing times. The quotidian sites of language, comportment, one's clothes play a role in how one is received by others and

how one identifies. Linguistic skills are a form of cultural capital that continues to persist across narratives and generations. The processes involved in transmitting a set of values, embodied behaviour and comportment breed a specific sense of selfhood. However, the shift in the concept of *sanskaar*-from a ritualistic, religious framework to an ethical, moral frame- allows a sense of modernity which in turn breeds 'castelessness'. This modernity is accommodative; it allows flexible tastes like changing food habits and sartorial norms. In shifting away from norms explicitly based on caste, one is allowed a casteless identity which does not strip off structurally accumulated caste privilege.

Women always bore the burden of a community's status, norms and identity. The concepts of individuality, equality, and freedom which were introduced by modernity created tensions in the existing gender roles. The resulting dynamism ironically, led Brahmans (men and women) to claim a progressive image compared to other communities. I hope to have shown how this claim to being modern and progressive is despite little structural changes in the gender hierarchies within the community.

Being and becoming Brahman women: thinking through generations

Purity of women was crucial to the Brahmanical social order and therefore their sexual subordination was codified and enforced through various means. Upper caste women were associated with the home and with reproduction. Legitimate motherhood was a cornerstone of caste purity. Writing about Brahmanical patriarchy in early modern India, Uma Chakravarti said, " Women's perpetuation of the caste system was achieved partly through their investment in a structure which rewarded them even as it subordinated them

at the same time" (1993a). She too indicates the two sites of caste and gender hierarchies that operate in the women's lives.

In eighteenth century western India, caste purity[182] was prized in the Peshwa reign; thus marriage alliances, admission or prohibition of widow remarriages were important questions. Sexual control of women was a state mandate (Chakravarti 1998).

The discursive churning caused by the arrival of the colonizers decisively shaped gender discourses in India. India's tryst with modernity led to various changes. As stated earlier, one of the most far-reaching outcomes of this tryst was nationalism.

"[N]ationalisms are thoroughly gendered"; gender is a constitutive part of nationalism's beliefs and practices (Puri 2004:110). Women and the nation are related - as reproducers of the nation, as internal and external boundary markers, and as vessels of cultural nationalism. While women are the site on which the debates on modernity, tradition, and nationalism are contested and resolved, women become symbols of the nation. However, they are not seen as equal citizens of the nation. Alluding to the reform movement in India, Jyoti Puri shows how differences among women were reinscribed within nationalist discourses,

> [W]hat was especially suspect in this reform movement was not just that women's status was seen as a gauge of the Indian nation and Indian nationalism; it was that the movement was concerned mainly with middle-class, urban, Hindu and to some extent Muslim women, and not to all women

[182] Chakravarti wrote, "Men lost their *brahmanya* by renouncing it, women lost their Brahmanya through sexual lapses; their Brahmanya lay in their chastity, in their *pativrata dharma* within marriage, and in a chaste and prayerful widowhood" (1998:29)

> across social classes and ethnic groups. In this way this group of "respectable" Indian women were used to mark the internal boundaries of the nation. These middle-class, urban, mostly Hindu women were also positioned as the authentic representatives of Indianness while working-class, tribal, peasant, non-Hindu women, and the communities that they represented, were pushed to the sidelines (2004:118).

The striking paradox of gender and nationalism is that the relation between men and nation is mediated through women. Maleness comes to entail preserving women's respectability and defining what respectable womanhood means to the national identity (Puri 2004). Women respondents in this study hinted at this masculinity in this study, which also performs the function of policing boundaries of caste, as seen in chapter five.

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new feminist subject—modern yet traditional—fashioned in colonial India. It was in the late eighteenth century that Brahman women were able to step out and occupy a space within the public sphere. Debates on education of women took on fraught questions of modernity and tradition within the nationalist frames. Men across caste lines envisioned a womanhood that was appropriate for the emerging nation. Women who were educated spoke, wrote and created their own versions of 'modern' Indian womanhood[183]. They bore the burden of traditional femininity that the cultural nationalist frame insisted upon while negotiating more space in the public domain—like Anandibai Joshi, Kashibai Kanitkar, Ramabai Ranade and the heroines of the English novels of Satthianadhan and Nikambe, who

[183] Kashibai Kanitkar wrote what has been called the first feminist utopia in Marathi, *Palkhicha Gonda* (the Palaquin's Tassle) written in 1928. On the lines of Rokeya Hussain's Sultana's Dream (1905), Kashibai imagines a reformed state run by women with a college for deserted wives, no place for married pupils in schools, thereby delaying marriages (Kosambi 2007).

appear in chapter three. Outliers like Pandita Ramabai, who asked tough questions about religion, caste and gendered hierarchies, faced social wrath. Many women negotiated these circumstances and made space for themselves.

In chapter three, I argued that tangible changes in Brahman women's lives – like accessing school education and delaying marriage beyond puberty—were debated in the late nineteenth but actualised for the large majority in the early twentieth century as a result of changing social discourse. Census data till 1931 shows how Chitpavan women disproportionately benefitted from these changes. These 'reforms' were still fresh for the women born in the 1930s and 40s, i.e., the first generation of this study. They spoke of their parents or others with some pride, as *sudharak vicharanche*, i.e., those with a reformist outlook. *Sudharak vicharanche* implied progressive or modern inclinations—letting women study, late marriages, and a willingness to allow girls to interact with people beyond the family or permission to play sports, participate in extra-curricular activities, etc. Each of these marked the breaching of gendered norms through the combined effect of the changes mentioned above.

All of this constitutes the 'post-colonial habitus' (Thapan 2006) available to Brahman (and other elite) women. The changed social discourse and material circumstances facilitated women's education and entry into the public sphere. This habitus allowed an embracing of limited modernization and evolution of gender roles of women. Women were schooled to be modern, embody middle class respectability without structural changes in the gender hierarchy. It made available music and dance and later theatre as modes of entertainment and as hobbies, even as the livelihoods of the colonial and pre-colonial custodians of these art forms were displaced. The universal feminist subject

dictated by such elite educated women of the twentieth century wanted no special privileges for being 'women' (John 2000). 'Indian womanhood' was deprived of the complexities, tensions and differences which obtained across caste, class, religious and regional lines.

Middle class women had political rights, legal equality and access to education and employment after independence. However various fault lines started showing soon. The 1970s witnessed the resurgence of the women's question. The Towards Equality report[184] (1974-5) reported investment and increase in the higher education of women as the only successful indicator in a story of decline with regard to women's work, demography and political participation. Higher education was the only avenue where women, urban and middle class, were closing the gender gap (John 2001).

Education figures significantly in the story of various Brahman communities as a value or quality. It is the crucial form of capital that allowed Brahmans to prosper in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Brahman collective identity drew upon the progressiveness depicted in the increasing levels of women's education and, since the second generation, their mobility beyond the domestic. This study concurs with Fuller and Narasimhan's observation that women's education is a crucial register to mark the community's self-perceived modernity and progressiveness (2014). I have further argued that women's education was and continues to be a pre-requisite for marriage within the Brahman community. It is an investment in the community's cultural capital- well educated mothers who raise educated, cultured children.

[184] The Committee on the Status of Women in India was set up to assess and report on the condition of Indian women. The document produced was called Towards Equality and is seminal to the women's movement in India since it laid bare the deplorable condition of women across socio-cultural, political and economic indicators.

Urban Brahman women in this study were among elite women who married after turning eighteen, could access education and possibly paid employment—more often than not in 'safe' jobs. Women from the second generation were raised to believe that while education was mandatory, it was not meant to make women independent but ensure marriage into a 'good' family, i.e., a family where the woman was not required to work. If there was a financial need, many rose to the occasion and contributed to the household. Others negotiated circumstances to follow ambitions. Marriage, family, and the household, to reiterate Kumkum Sangari's observations (1993), are central to both the relations of production and the organisation and regulation of productive, reproductive, and socially necessary labour. For the Brahman women, marriage—*ghar, sansaar, gharana* (home, family, and extended family's prestige) was supposed to be their primary concern.

Third generation women have gained wider horizons, evident from the variety of degrees and occupations pursued. Their education is actively encouraged by parents, some insisting on better degrees. Work becomes a central focus in their marriage negotiations. However, the inevitability of the domestic role persists.

I termed the household burden of urban middle class Brahman women as 'domestic management'—to denote the peculiarity of outsourcing housework to others but being responsible for it. The second generation of women worked but were allowed to do so after ensuring that the household was functioning. While feminist scholarship has covered much ground on the unpaid and unacknowledged nature of this work, Sangari points out that this work is measured and acknowledged through caste and gender hierarchies (1993).

Alu chi bhaji[185], a routine Chitpavan preparation mentioned in a critical observation about the continuity of the sexual division of household work, serves as a (context-specific) metaphor for the tediousness of domesticity. For one woman, domestic management is a burden or struggle but for another it is her responsibility; it is not to be questioned but negotiated to her benefit. The latter claimed that Brahman women embody *samanjaspana,* i.e., the maturity and ability to adjust. I argue that *samanjaspana* serves as a discursive device that allows Brahman women to negotiate a presence beyond the domestic and rationalise their compromises within the families. To manage, plan, negotiate, and avoid conflicts to achieve a smooth 'balance' of the home and the outside. These observations resonate with other studies of elite women (Fuller and Narasimhan 2014; Radhakrishnan 2011).

While one woman was compliant with the gendered role assigned to her, the other's stance was critical. This critical stance about women's position vis-à-vis the structural arrangement of the caste, community, and family that keep them tied to the domestic may be emerging from her engagement with the women's movement and feminist thought. While it is challenging to attribute inter-generational changes to a set of causes decisively, it is safe to say that the global conversation on gender inequality has percolated into these Brahman women's lives. Other significant factors are the urbanity and increasing prosperity of Brahmans. Studies on Brahmans in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu amply illustrate the increasing prosperity among Brahmans across generations by tracing genealogies of the changing professions of men –from government service to

[185] It is mentioned in chapter four and explained in footnote 109.

private jobs and many migrating abroad post 1990s. My study demonstrates the consequent changing relationship of Brahman women with domesticity.

The first generation women spoke of the labour that went into maintaining the households, the cooking, cleaning, sorting of grain, making flour and *masalas*, routinely entertaining guests. The second generation women who were house-bound (and not all of them were housebound) expressed a desire to create an identity beyond the domestic. While this may not apply to all Brahman women, many do exercise choice in the kind of work they wished to take up, which is not constrained by financial needs. This 'choice' is a function of these women's location within middle-class Chitpavan Brahman households. Money earned is not a criterion (or at least not a decisive criterion) for the decision to work.

A conceptualization like the *pragalbha grihini,* which appears in chapter four, allows women a dignified subjectivity for 'balancing' home and work, tradition and modernity. The gradual reduction of rituals has given women the space and time to be able to pursue hobbies, engage in other kinds of work (not necessarily paid work), some of which invests in the community. This can be read as part of the secularization of *sanskaar*, discussed in chapter five. The *pragalbha grihini* is a conceptualization entrenched in the women's middle-class and 'upper' caste position and cultural capital. It facilitates socio-cultural reproduction of caste, even as it offers space between the polarities of the 'feminist' and the 'housewife'. The gender equality of these households is premised on the labour of the 'other,' i.e., the hired domestic worker. The democratization of gender relations in these households requires that the domestic be duly recognised as a site for social-cultural reproduction.

There was a generational shift from marriage determining work for the second generation to work determining marriage for the third generation women. These young women had specific conditions that would enable a smooth life beyond the domestic. This focus on the self—the second generation women who were seeking an identity for themselves, embodying a discursive space of the *pragalbha grihini* and finally the third generation women who prioritize their ambitions –I argue, is a the outcome of complicated factors like caste and class privilege, economic well-being but also an evolving idea of gender equality which has led women of this generation to be socialized to become more than 'just homemakers'.

Barring exceptions, the inevitability of marriage and shouldering the responsibility of domestic management recurred across narratives of Brahman women irrespective of age and occupations. Endogamous marriages are justified based on cultural affinity and the openness shown by Brahman families to women's ambitions beyond the domestic. They perpetuate caste by solidifying caste networks.

The third generation of women, who grew up in the India with open markets; an India shaken by the questions raised by the Mandal commission as also the demolition of the Babri. They are urban citizens in a globalized world where Chitpavan Brahman *Sammelan* is organized in Dubai. Education and work outside the domestic is part of their habitus and therefore marriage negotiations. These women represent themselves as existing in a 'cosmopolitan modernity' (Srilatha 1999) where issues of caste, religion, at times even gender do not seem to matter.

Some first generation women grudgingly admitted that education should be put to use, even while lamenting the lack of basic domestic skills among the third generation women, like making *besan laddoos*. The lack of domestic skills and grace within the young women was used to make connections with marital discord and divorces. Their ambitions, ability to stake a claim to work, to negotiate (mostly endogamous) marriages conducive to their work is questioned by older women within the community. *Samanjaspana*, the gendered ability to show maturity and adjust to prescribed roles, needs to be maintained and re-enacted in order for the gender-caste nexus to remain intact. This shows us the pushes and pulls within the Chitpavan women.

Gender roles are reflexive and accommodate the demands of contemporary times. While it is the patriarchal authority that assists or facilitates some liberties from normative behaviour, in the process, both feminine role and patriarchal power are reconfigured, even if subtly. The Brahman claim to modernity is also gendered. Male authority was instrumental in changing sartorial norms and in ensuring respectability. Thus, in negotiating modernity and respectability, norms of femininity are reconfigured. While this may also hold true for norms of masculinity, the topic needs further investigation.

The third generation Chitpavan Brahman women have a choice of eating non-vegetarian food, disregarding rituals or menstrual taboos and pursuing a variety of careers, including in performing arts. I read these as resulting from the women being upper middle class, urban Indians benefitting from percolation of discourses on gender equality and modernity.

The performance of gender and caste, as indeed class, cannot be separated but also needs to be understood as a part of a complex matrix. That which presents as gendered is also caste-d in specific ways. And that which is reproduced as caste is a result of complex negotiations within the caste around women's roles and freedoms. The embodiment of confidence— dressing, behaviour, comportment, manner of speech— which I term as caste confidence is a cumulative effect of generations of caste privilege. It is about both identity, i.e., self-perception as well as identification or how others perceive you. This investment in each successive generation at an individual, family, community and institutional level creates a fetishized[186] form of caste privilege which is called 'merit', a jointly created social attribute. Women make use of this privilege as a resource; not as objects but subjects, in reconfiguring gender boundaries in small but significant ways (Donner 2008; Ponniah 2017; Rajan 2008).

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"It is a polished community, with polished thoughts," said Pradnya Pavagi, using the precise English words while complaining about how Brahmans get bad-mouthed today. Despite the documented records of caste discrimination across centuries, the community's progressiveness is spoken of today without any hesitation or need for political correctness. There is a noticeable shift from the conversations Ramesh Bairy had about being Brahman to my conversations. In the seventeen years between our respective fieldworks, the 'bad odour[187]' around speaking about caste seems to have dissipated.

[186] Satish Deshpande made this point in a webinar on 7th June 2020.
[187] I thank Ramesh Bairy for pointing this out to me in a discussion in 2018.

The modernity and nationalism of the pre-independence period at least notionally disowned caste and embraced equality as an organizing principle of the newly formed nation. However, the nationalism of the twenty-first century, of the post Mandal-Masjid-Market years, looks different. The rising might of the Hindu right-wing forces and electoral success of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2014 and 2019, the Maratha protests for reservations in education and government jobs in Maharashtra state are factors that need be examined to understand their impact in the everyday structuring of caste.

The women appearing here belong to various political ideologies- identifying as *Hindutvwadi*, Leftist, anti-caste, feminist, and politically inactive. Chapter five discussed how opinions on caste could converge across the political ideologies of right and left. One can forgo introspection on caste privilege and adopt identities such as 'Hindu' or 'human' or 'Indian.' However, I hope to have made evident the particularity of their privilege as being due to their caste, class and geographical location in the preceding chapters. While I use the term caste privilege across the thesis, I admit that in the case of these women, it is difficult to pinpoint what obtains from caste and what precisely from class. Narasimhan and (2014) resolve this by theorising an isomorphism between Tamil Brahman-ness and middle-classness. Although, general democratization in Maharashtra in the 1960s enabled several non-Brahman families to enter the middle class, this isomorphism obtains among Chitpavan Brahmans.

I have documented and analysed Brahman women's narratives to show how a partially successful negotiation of those norms allows the community to claim to be modern, and in some cases, modern in an 'Indian' way, and shown how the Brahman claim to modernity is gendered.