

CITY LIVES : WOMEN WORKERS IN THE BOMBAY COTTON TEXTILE INDUSTRY

1919-1939

Radha Kumar

*Thesis*  
A ~~thesis~~<sup>s</sup> submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of  
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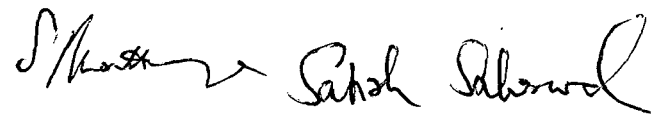
Centre for Historical Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal  
Nehru University.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled "City Lives :  
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by Radha Kumar of the Centre for Historical Studies, School of  
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based on original sources, and has not been submitted elsewhere for  
any other degree.

  
Chairman

  
Supervisor

Radha Kumar  
(Candidate)

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## INTRODUCTION

As shown by its title, the concern of this thesis is to describe, and occasionally analyse, the lives of women workers in Bombay city : in health as in sickness, as wage workers and housewives, in worship or on strike. Much of the terrain on which women played out their lives was common land shared with men, but within these barren acres lay deserts of segregation. At work they were herded into unskilled departments and paid lower wages than their male counterparts; at home they cooked, washed, cleaned and suckled their babies, whilst their husbands gambled and drank. My interest is in marking the boundaries both of common land and of isolated territory, charting their development and mapping their changing faces; from the life of a village to that of a city; from the joint family to the nuclear one; from employment to retrenchment. During the period colonies of mill weed took hold above surface, while under the surface of working-class housing lay Government faults and Municipal fissures; the busy moralisms of indigenous philosophers silted over springs of family life; tussocks of maternity were transformed into mountains of motherhood; and increased industrial planning laid waste the wage work of women.

The major themes in this thesis are : a the development of an industrial city and the relations of interdependence between the city and its working class; b the growth of the working class

and the position of women within it; c the wage work of women, attitudes towards it and changes within it; d the labour movement and the class-consciousness of women.

My first attempt then is to understand the development of Bombay as an industrial city through studying the lives of its working class women. By and large, such cities are created around the proletarians who sustain industrial enterprises. Though they were dispossessed of their heritage as that heritage was created, pushed into the least desirable living areas and crowded into small spaces, yet it was the proletarians who were the original inhabitants of Bombay city. Bombay became a city when the mills moved in; its development kept pace with the expansion of the industry and the increasing number of mill workers whose presence required housing, shops, restaurants, transport and entertainment. Continuity, however, was not established by the presence of these men, but by their wives. It was only as men began to bring their families to live with them in the city, as the sex ratio of women to men increased, as children were born, registered and grew up in the city, that it lost its forlorn temporary air and its population turned from transient into city dwelling.

What I have said so far may sound obvious. After all, the process whereby Bombay changed from a vast waiting room into a city of urban men and women was very slow, by no means complete in the period under survey. Nevertheless, substantial changes

did take place, notably in attitudes towards the working class family. And these changes affected not merely the family itself, but also the wage labour of women, the structure of the labour force and the definition of the wage.

Always an important part of any community, the family became vital for administrators, planners and employers in the 1920s and 1930s. It was at this time that Family Budget Surveys were sponsored, investigations conducted into infant and maternal welfare, and charitable activities supported. At the centre of all these doings stood the concept of woman as mother - in particular, the working class woman as mother of the second generation proletariat.

In fact, this concept has dominated practically all statements regarding women : not merely those made by capitalists, bureaucrats and philanthropists; but also those made by Marxists, trade-unionists and labour historians. After all, few academics have chosen women as their subject of study : and when they have, they have tended largely to focus on women as mothers - or, women as the means of human reproduction. The problem of typification is not one that affects women alone - in the same way labour history has, more often than not, been taken to mean trade-union history. To this extent, then, women have been studied as objects : as the recipients of charity; of reformist or statist ideology; as wombs; their reproductive capacities affected by disease, illiteracy or superstition; as put into purdah, married off in childhood, etc.

Most feminist studies begin with a polemic, however mild it may be. It has been only in the course of the feminist movement that



historians have attempted to rectify old wrongs by situating women as the subjects of human action rather than its objects. The dangers of objectification have been pointed out by E.P.Thompson in a discussion of the concept of class :

"There is today an ever-present temptation to suppose that class is a thing ... 'It', the working class, is assumed to have a real existence, which can be defined almost mathematically - so many men who stand in a certain relation to the means of production. Once this is assumed it becomes possible to deduce the class-consciousness which 'it' ought to have (but seldom does have) if 'it' were properly aware of its own position and real interests..."<sup>1</sup>

Though this passage refers specifically to assumptions about the working class, the same can be said of attitudes towards women, both as wage labourers and as housewives. But what assumptions constitute these attitudes? Premise One : that women are, and therefore identify themselves as, sisters, wives and mothers; as family goddesses and domestic drudges. This is their primary "role" and therefore, even when they are wage workers they lack class-consciousness, since wage work is for them only a secondary influence in their lives. Thus capitalists complain of women's "lack of commitment" to wage work : the reasoning being that women are supported by their men, or can be, and therefore wage labour is not essential to their survival.

With this same premise, trade-unionists argue that women are "docile" and exert a restraining influence on the militancy of the labour movement. Underlying both views lies the definition of women's wage labour as being "supplementary". In fact, this definition is a complex

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1 E.P.Thompson : The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin Books, 1977, p.10.

one. Actually, the women employed by the Bombay cotton textile industry were not working to supplement their family wage : almost 40 per cent of them were widows and at least another 30 per cent supported their husbands and children<sup>2</sup>. All the same, it appears to have been accepted that women were to be paid less than men. Rationalising this, the argument of the capitalists of course was that women's wage labour was supplementary : but why was it that women themselves did not demand equal pay for equal work? Was it because they too saw their wage work as supplementary, even when it was not? My argument is that the issue was so complicated by distinctions of time and piece work, and by the sexual segregation of work, that this question of equal pay for equal work did not really arise. The winding and reeling departments were staffed almost entirely by women; they rarely worked as spinners and never as weavers. In this context, asking why women did not demand wage parity with men is like asking why spinners did not demand the same wages as weavers.

Moreover, the notion that workers had a "right" to earn a family wage was not a prevalent one. It was introduced only in the late 1920s and early 1930s and was defined with reference to the male worker alone. As it came in hand in hand with retrenchment for women, it cannot be argued that women accepted lower wages because they did not expect to support a family on them. Women accepted lower wages because that is what winders and reelers were paid; they

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2 Kanji Dwarkadas : Forty-five Years with Labour, Asia Publishing House, 1962, p.98.

did not demand a wage sufficient to support a family on because that concept itself did not exist - they made do with what they had, and when they couldn't, borrowed.

Logically, the notion of women's wage labour being supplementary can only follow on the acceptance of the idea that the man's wage ought to be a family wage - that is, that it ought to be the primary wage. If this notion itself was not a widespread one, then women's wage labour could not have been supplementary. My contention is that it became so only at a certain period of time, after the introduction of the concept of the family wage.

One of the reasons for extending this argument on supplementary wage labour was the implications it seemed to hold in differentiating the class-consciousness of women from that of men. If women's primary identification of themselves was as a sex, then this influenced their class-consciousness, rendering them docile. Such was the reasoning which Marx himself espoused :

"By the excessive addition of women and children to the ranks of the workers, machinery at last breaks down the resistance which the male operatives in the manufacturing period continued to oppose to the despotism of capital."<sup>3</sup>

However, Marx does not argue that women were "docile" because their wage labour was intended to supplement the family income. On the contrary, he quotes an English capitalist as saying that he preferred to employ married women as they were "docile" because

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3 Karl Marx, Capital, Vol.I, George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1943, p.393.

they had families who were "dependant upon them for support"<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, Marx also says that the employment of women led to promiscuity and callousness towards their children, often taking the extreme form of wishing their children dead. He places the high rate of infant mortality in a direct causal relation with women's wage labour<sup>5</sup>. For Bombay, at any rate, this argument can be refuted : infant mortality declined steadily in this period, both while the employment of women increased and while they were retrenched. So the explanation for the earlier high rate of infant mortality has to be sought elsewhere : probably in the conditions of hygiene, sanitation, etc., provided by the city.

In both these statements by Marx we can see that he swallowed entire the moralisms of capitalists and of the state when talking about women workers. It would be frivolous to mock Marx the paterfamilias for not anticipating contemporary feminism<sup>6</sup>, were it not that subsequent generations of Marxists, especially in India, have seen fit to dismiss feminist theories altogether, because Marx did not mention them. Perhaps this is why Indian labour historians - until very recently - have not found it necessary to describe the militancy of women workers even when discussing strikes

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4 Karl Marx, op.cit., footnote 2, p.400. The inference is a rather complex one, since men, who also had families dependant on them, were not seen as docile. In fact, this capitalist sees dependant families as providing that extra incentive to re-inforce women's innate docility.

5 Ibid., pp. 395-397.

6 Actually, Marx did anticipate one of the fundamental tenets of feminism when he implied that men controlled their wives' labour power : "Previously, the workman sold his own labour power... Now he sells wife and child. He has become a slave dealer." Karl Marx, op.cit., p. 393.

in which they have played prominent roles. Or perhaps it is because they have seen the true beginnings of the Indian labour movement in the development of trade unions. In their view whatever militancy was displayed by workers before the rise of trade unions was of a sporadic and rudimentary nature, exhibiting perhaps a spontaneous resistance to capital, but with no continuity and lacking "nous" (that is, the ability to judge weak points, chances of success and so on). For protagonists of this view, the gradual ascendancy which trade unions (in particular, the communist unions) achieved over the labour movement marked the beginnings of genuine class-consciousness amongst Indian workers.

One might add here that for most of these historians the formation of leftist trade unions was set in motion by "foreign-returned" communists of the Royist or Dangeite variety : in other words, through interventions into the existing labour movement. It is possible however to argue that trade unions arose out of the genesis of the labour movement . For example, in the Bombay cotton mills, as Richard Newman and Dick Kooimann have shown, continuity of organisation existed long before trade unions defined workers' movements. Both Newman and Kooimann have pointed out the importance of jobbers as leaders of the mill workers, exercising a certain degree of control over their agitations and mediating between them and the managers<sup>7</sup>. Many of the communists' first contacts were

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7 Richard Newman : Labour Organisation in the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1918-1929, unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 1970.  
Dick Kooimann : Koppelbazen, Kommunisten en Economische Krisis : Arbeidersorganisatie in de Textielindustrie van Bombay, 1917-1937, Rodopi Press, 1978.

jobbers - and jobbers headed several putative trade unions.

The major problem with these two illuminating studies is their assumption that a labour movement can be adequately described by defining its pattern of leadership. Raj Narayan Chandavarkar has, in this context, made an important corrective to this assumption in an analysis of what he calls "neighbourhood politics"<sup>8</sup>. His argument is that there was a close connection between the home and the workplace in terms of the organisation of strike relief funds, meeting and discussion places on the one hand; and on the other, in terms of working class preferences for privately owned chawls and shops to mill-subsidised housing and grain shops. This connection, he says, actually formed political consciousness in many ways :

"The permanent social relations of the workplace, and of the industry, pushed strikes which began within the limits of the workplace into the wider arena of the neighbourhood... Conventionally, we should consider a strike, or a form of industrial or even political action, as an event which related directly to the workplace and concerned particular groups of workers. However as industrial action was forced into the streets and neighbourhoods, the effects of industrial disputes was generalized. In this wider context, the parochial disputes of a mill, or a group of mills, were placed before the mill districts as a whole... As a result, the apparently limited nature of industrial disputes became essential to the process by which the social experience and the social consciousness of the working class as a whole was forged."

So far so good. It is however possible to go a little further

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8 Raj Narayan Chandavarkar : "Workers Politics in Bombay Between the Wars", in Baker, Johnson and Seal (eds.), Power, Profit and Politics, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

9 Ibid., p.63.

than this and enquire at what point and in which way strikes "which began within the limits of the workplace" were contained within it, rather than pushed out into the neighbourhood. The "conventional" wisdom described by Raj Chandavarkar is clearly of relatively recent origin in the light of what he says. For the early labour movement in the Bombay cotton textile industry certainly showed that industrial action took place within the streets and neighbourhoods. Logically then the conventional wisdom of the period could not have assumed that strikes related "directly" or solely to the workplace. Can this assumption be traced to changes within the labour movement itself and given a historical origin?

My contention is that it is in this period that we see increasing efforts being made to separate home and workplace, to render more effective the division between consumption and production, between the public and the private. Throughout the period we see the "modification of managerial techniques"; not merely in the rationalization schemes of the 1930s, but in the grudging welcome of trade unions, badli control systems, undercutting the jobbers' influence - or, for that matter, giving maternity benefits, providing creches, and the like. E.P.Thompson has pointed out that the development of managerial techniques was accompanied by the "growth of new forms of paternalism"<sup>10</sup>, and that both were directed towards securing a stable labour force. Stable, that is, not numerically

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10 E.P.Thompson, op.cit., pp. 222-23.

but emotionally. The Bombay mill areas, in the 1920s and 1930s, were the theatres in which a battle for order took place, rationalising the turbulent emotions of human beings who attempted to resist the alienation which capitalism brought in tow. Various methods were adopted to induce stability, from the direct ones quoted above to more indirect ones : such as the preaching of a "gospel of abstention", medico-charitable work, and new moralities on working class sexuality and the family. If the worker did not display the right property-owning instincts towards his or her labour power, then he or she had to <sup>be</sup> taught to do so. One of the ways in which this ideology was grounded was by dropping the "her" from the clauses stated above - that is, by removing women from the labour force, turning the male worker's labour power into the property of the family (as was done through the introduction of the family wage), and thereby giving women a vested interest in preserv<sup>e</sup>ing and regenerating men's labour power. The leap from this to seeing women as conservative - conserving their husbands' resources literally as well as morally - requires no great muscular effort.

From this it will be seen that I make something of a departure from orthodox feminism by suggesting that women can indeed be described as conservative or "docile". However, to qualify this statement, I am saying rather that the conservatism of women is a historical creation of fairly recent origin and that the implication that this conservatism is innate or "biological" is false. To go further, I have tried to show not merely the



falsity of this notion but the ideology underpinning it and its historical roots in material changes. It is, after all, unlikely that the simultaneous appearance of rationalization schemes, the retrenchment of women, the sexual division made between wage labour and domestic labour, and the growth of trade unions was purely co-incident. Links can be made between rationalization, women's retrenchment and their being pushed into the home : an act which, as I argue in subsequent chapters, took place for the first time from the 1930s onwards. New definitions of the industry, of the labour force and of the family make their entrance together, even though each acts as chorus to the other's protagonist. Taken together, they mark a shift in the nature of capital itself, a movement from its earlier equalizing form to one newly sophisticated in the social - and sexual - division of labour.

## CHAPTER I

### THE BIRTH OF A CITY

#### I Introduction

I have chosen to begin this thesis with a description of the transformation and expansion of 'Bombay town and island' into a city because I felt this was important in understanding the constitution of its working class, their patterns of living, struggling and reproducing. I say this not only because the move to Bombay in search of work marked a sharp break in terms of living conditions, health and family life; but because workers' lives as city dwellers and their lives as wage-earners were not one and the same. At moments the interests of the city and the interests of industry came into conflict : as during the cotton textile workers' strike for daily allowances in 1918 :

"After the strike had gone on for a week, the Municipal Commissioner reported to the Government that owing to the insanitary condition of the chawls, the health of the city would deteriorate. The workers while at work could make use of the sanitary conveniences, inadequate as they were and are, provided in the mills, but when the mills were not working, as a result of the strike, the sanitary conditions in the chawls where there was no flush system but only basket system in the privies became insufferable and disease would have spread from one end of the city to the other if the strike had continued for a longer time. Sir George Lloyd ... who was then Governor of Bombay asked the mill-owners to end the strike by conceding the reasonable demands of the workers, but they refused to listen to his advice. He then brought pressure on them by threatening to withdraw all police protection from the mills ...

The millowners were thus forced to give way and the strike ended."<sup>1</sup>

In an article written in 1903, Georg Simmel talks about the attempt of the individual to "maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society"; to resist "being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism."<sup>2</sup> (Though the Bombay worker was not familiar with the concept of individuality, the story of the development of the city is also a story of how the working class attempted to resist being swallowed up by their employers; of how they tried to retain some measure of control over their own lives. Often these attempts took the form of retaining traditional village ties, living in caste or community based areas; but sometimes they consisted of choosing between options provided by the city.)

Unlike Tatanagar, Bombay was a city with diverse interest groups operating within it. Though it would be inaccurate to say that this plurality was to the workers' advantage, it did allow a certain limited space for manoeuvre - as between private landlords and mill-subsidised housing - even though privately owned tenements were more expensive than mill housing, they were preferred because checks on sub-letting and over-crowding were rare; because meetings could be held on the premises; and because the millowners' control over their workers' lives was restricted.

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1 Kenji Dwarakadas : Forty-five Years with Labour, Asia Publishing House, 1962, p. 19.

2 Georg Simmel : "The Metropolis and Mental Life", in Donald E. Levine (ed.), On Individuality and Social Form, The University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 324.

## II The Dark Satanic Mills

Before the mills moved in Bombay Island was a pleasant place, a conglomerate of villages bounded on both sides by hills and studded with coconut plantations, mango groves and pipal trees. Until 1864 these villages formed the major administrative divisions used by the British, who had transformed the Fort area into a town resembling the "neighbourhood of London."<sup>3</sup> But as Bombay became an increasingly important trading centre, as industries started to develop and its population grew, the town itself was forced to extend its boundaries, spreading from the southern tip of the island into its interior.

The villages of Mahim, Varli, Parel and Mazagaon were already loosely linked with the town: first under the Portuguese and then by the East India Company. A causeway ran from the town through Varli to Mahim, built between 1843 - 45; Mazagaon was a landing pier for the East India Company; the Governor lived in Parel; and one of the earliest cotton mills was built at Chinchpookly in 1860, bordering Mazagaon on the east and Parel on the north. Villagers often found seasonal employment in the shipyards, ordinance factories and cotton presses owned by Europeans; and during outbreaks of plague or famine swelled the population of the town.<sup>4</sup>

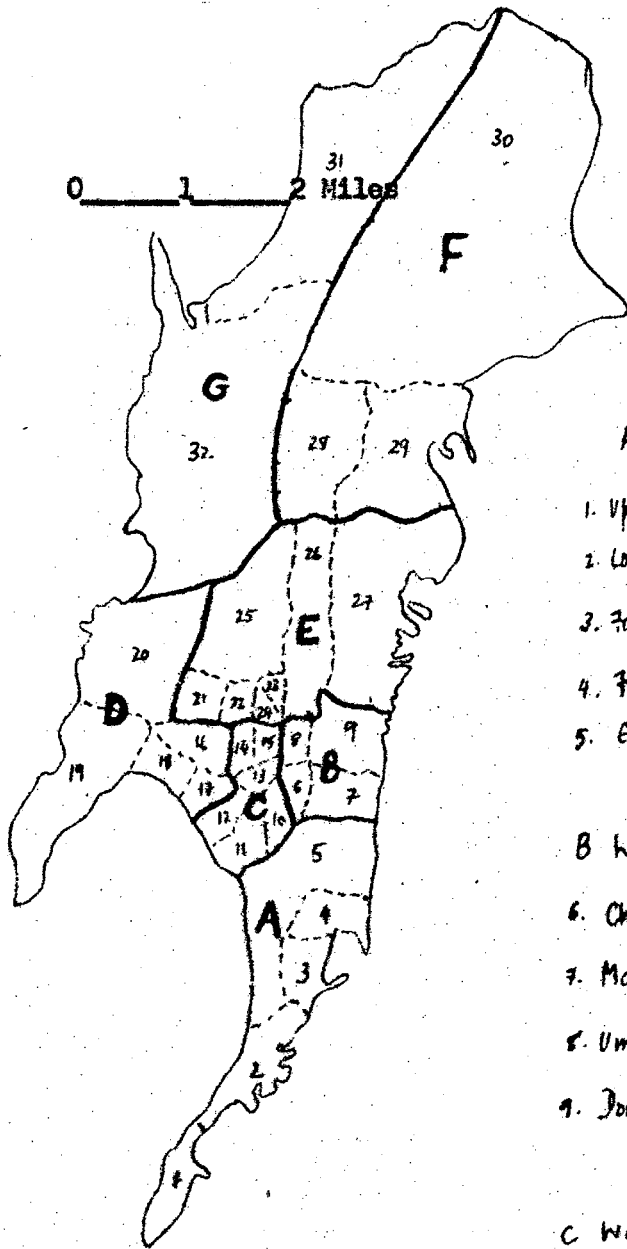
These villages were now incorporated into the town. In 1864, the year when the great firms of Bombay were brought near disaster

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<sup>3</sup> Bombay City Gazetteer, Vol. I, p. 10. Henceforth referred to as B.C.G.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 159-160; also footnote 3, p. 159.

I BOMBAY CITY BY WARDS AND SECTIONS. 1919



Source: Dick Kooimann, Koppelbazan, Kommunisten, on Economische Krisis, Rodopi Press, 1978. Map I.

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|--|--|
| <p><b>A WARD</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Upper Colaba</li> <li>2. Lower Colaba</li> <li>3. Fort South</li> <li>4. Fort North</li> <li>5. Esplanade</li> </ol> <p><b>B WARD</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Chakla</li> <li>7. Mandvi</li> <li>8. Umarchadi</li> <li>9. Dongri</li> </ol> <p><b>C WARD</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Market</li> <li>11. Dhobi Talao</li> <li>12. Fataswadi</li> <li>13. Bhuleshwar</li> <li>14. Khambarnwada</li> <li>15. Kharan Talao</li> </ol> | <p><b>D WARD</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Khelwadi</li> <li>17. Girgaon</li> <li>18. Chaupati</li> <li>19. Walkeswar</li> <li>20. Mshalaaxmi</li> </ol> <p><b>E WARD</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. Tardeo</li> <li>22. Kamatipura</li> <li>23. First Nagpada</li> <li>24. Second Nagpada</li> <li>25. Byculla (Madanpura)</li> <li>26. Fadwadi (Chinchpokli, Chorupada)</li> <li>27. Mazgaon</li> </ol> <p><b>F WARD</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28. Parel (Lalbag)</li> <li>29. Sewri</li> <li>30. Sim</li> </ol> <p><b>G WARD</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>31. Mahim</li> <li>32. Korti (Prabhadevi)</li> <li>33. Korti</li> </ol> |
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by their own wild speculation,<sup>5</sup> the Government defined the limits of Bombay as being the "island of Bombay and Colaba and Old Woman's Island", subdividing it into 11 areas.<sup>6</sup> In the next year they created a Municipal Corporation, entitled the areas "wards" (as befitting a corporation), and reduced them to 10 in number. However, the town continued to expand rapidly, and in 1872 the wards adopted "sections". At this point there were 6 wards and 26 sections. The more distant villages of Sion and Sewri, on the north-western coast of the island, were reduced to sections in this scheme, thus perpetrating the first inequalities between wards which were later to grow pronounced. F Ward - that is, Mahim, Varli and Sion - comprised in fact nearly half the total area of the island and the sections forming it remained underdeveloped until the 1920s and even then were developed only spasmodically.

Between 1872 and 1909 the newly reconstructed Bombay town became a city and its wards were re-organised with the addition of 1 ward and 6 sections.<sup>7</sup> A major effect of this re-organisation was the splitting up of the former F Ward into F and G Wards, with Mahim and Varli now relegated to G, while F took in Sewri and Parel. Even though the balance of space was marginally evened by the creation of two very large wards instead of one enormous one, these municipal re-shuffles did little to alter important disparities -

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5 B.C.G., Vol. I, p. 453.

6 Ibid., p. 30.

7 Ibid., pp. 30-1.

sectional boundaries remained unchanged and no attempt seems to have been made to plan their industrial development, even though most of the mills were built during this period.<sup>8</sup> It was in fact only after the mills had taken over the centre of the island that the Bombay city administration began to worry about their lack of forethought. Within the space of 50 years Bombay had become a primary centre for the cotton mill industry of India - from 10 in 1864, the mills numbered 85 in 1908. One-ninth of the city's population were cotton mill workers and most of them lived huddled together around the mills. The mills themselves were concentrated in E Ward and parts of F and G Wards. The actual area occupied by them was over a quarter of the island and bang in its middle. By 1915 the congestion of Bombay city was causing sufficient trouble for the Bombay Development Committee and the Indian Industrial Commission to suggest that no new industrial concerns should be allowed to establish themselves

"except in the north-east of the island or in south-eastern Salsette, without the sanction of the Municipality, which should be withheld in cases where the location of the proposed industry is likely to produce congestion or is otherwise unsuitable; and that an adequate scheme of drainage and water supply should be put in hand to prepare the areas set aside

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8 Notably one of the few attempts at redistribution made by the Municipality concerned itself with "resettling" the workers - an attempt made under the aegis of the Bombay Development Department in 1927, and again with the Matunga Labour Camp in 1937. The former was unsuccessful because the rents charged were higher than in privately owned chawls and the transport facilities were practically non-existent; the latter was built on marshy ground and was the unhealthiest living area in the whole of Bombay - without exception.

for development, not only for industries but also for industrial housing."<sup>9</sup>

(which implies that the areas so far developed by the growth of the mills had not been provided with either adequate drainage or water supply and had not been planned with housing in mind).

There was a sharp demarcation within the city, between the office buildings and residential areas of the south and the mill areas of the north. As the mills moved in the Governor moved out of Parel to the tip of Malabar Hill where he lived amongst the Bombay bourgeoisie - in D Ward.<sup>10</sup> This concentration of power in a small area left a large tract of land open to the mills, stretching from the middle of the valley to the north. Even so a few mills crept into D Ward, establishing themselves on Tardeo Road at the foot of the Cumballa hills, overlooked by the houses of Parsi merchants, European traders and British civil servants. These few miles apart, the industry was concentrated in the central and northern portions of the city, from Grant Road to Sewri, Varli and Dader. Below Grant Road was A Ward, comprising Fort, Colaba and Esplanade : all the industrial head offices were/and so was the Mint, the Arsenal, the University, various clubs and playgrounds and the Government offices. Its east coast held dockyards and was a centre of ship building in India. Bordered on the north-east by

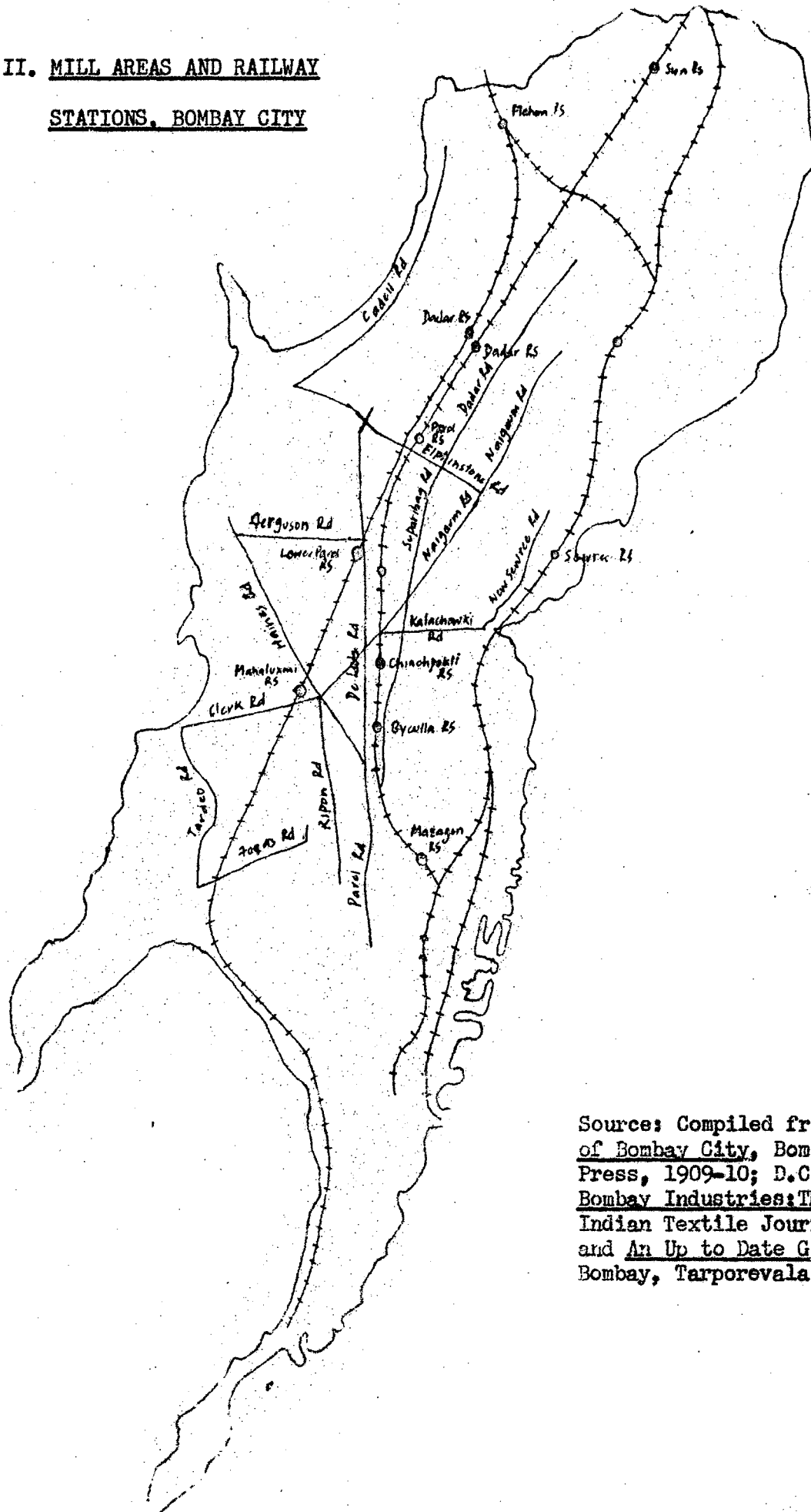
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9 Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1918, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1920, pp. 188-89. Henceforth referred to as I.I.C.

10 The Governor moved to Malabar Point in 1883, after the death of Lady Fergusson (his wife). Interestingly, it was only 2 years after this move that Parel was converted into one of the busiest residential areas of north Bombay.



**II. MILL AREAS AND RAILWAY  
STATIONS, BOMBAY CITY**



Source: Compiled from Gazetteer of Bombay City, Bombay, Times Press, 1909-10; D.C. Rutnagar, Bombay Industries: The Cotton Mills, Indian Textile Journal Ltd., 1927; and An Up to Date Guide to Bombay, Bombay, Tarporevala and Sons, 1934.

the great trading markets of Bombay, this area was lovingly dubbed the "heart throb of the city" by its daytime inhabitants : the prosperous controllers of Bombay's wealth.<sup>11</sup>

In 1920 this part of the city was marked by its huge buildings (in a ragbag of European architectural styles), its wide streets and spreading lawns; while the industrial area consisted of large overhanging clouds of smoke, mean little alleys, ramshackle tenements erected for quick profit, sparse vegetation and dirt. The worst affected of these areas was E Ward : the smallest of the wards housing mills, it had almost as large a number of them as G Ward. 27 mills destroyed all vestiges of the former villages of Mazagaon and Nagpada, sweeping away their 'pre-capitalist' occupations of fishing and snake charming. In the wake of the mills came two major railway lines and three railway stations, adding their quota of smoke to that belched forth by the mills. 44 per cent of the tenements in Bombay were situated here, between and around the railway lines - contributing a population density of 72,000 per square mile to this little ward in 1931. In comparison the population density of F Ward was 21,700 per square mile while that of G was 27,700.<sup>12</sup> The sex ratio in all three, on the other hand, was much the same : 173 men per 100 women in E, 172 in F

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11 B.C.G., Vol. I, pp. 144-45.

12 However, these figures are not really representative of industrial areas because both F and G Wards were sprawling and their industrial areas tended to be concentrated in individual sections - such as Varli in G Ward and Parel, Dadar and Sewri in F. Unfortunately no breakdown by sections is given but it seems likely that population density in these industrial enclaves would be much higher.

and 173 in G.<sup>13</sup> (Strangely enough, these are the lowest ratios per ward for Bombay in 1931 - only D, quite predictably, is lower, with 168 men per 100 women).

This similarity apart, the three industrial wards of Bombay city were marked by dissimilarities in their physical appearance. Of the three, G Ward seems at first sight to be the best planned, with its mills dispersed over the entire section of Varli, broken up into individual units and ranged side by side (see Map III). Physically G Ward was a study in contrasts : the deforestation of Varli by the mills was stark in comparison to the thickly wooded acres of Mahim, neighbouring it; this was the only part of Bombay to retain its mango groves and coconut plantations in 1927.

In part, the more 'even' spread of mills in G Ward may be because they came up here later than in D and E Wards. With the exception of 2 mills built in the late 1870s, all the 40 odd remaining mills in Varli were constructed between 1883 and 1921. Premier, built in 1921, was in fact the last mill to come up in Bombay, in the period under survey. However, this explanation alone cannot suffice, for F Ward, where again almost all the mills were built between 1888 and 1914, retained large areas in which other enterprises held space, such as the G.I.P. railway complex, the Sewri port and dockyards, etc. Unlike this, and unlike the other industrial areas in Bombay, Varli alone seems to have been entirely given up to the mills, and the explanation for this surely

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<sup>13</sup> Kingsley Davis : The Population of India and Pakistan, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1951, pp. 144-45.

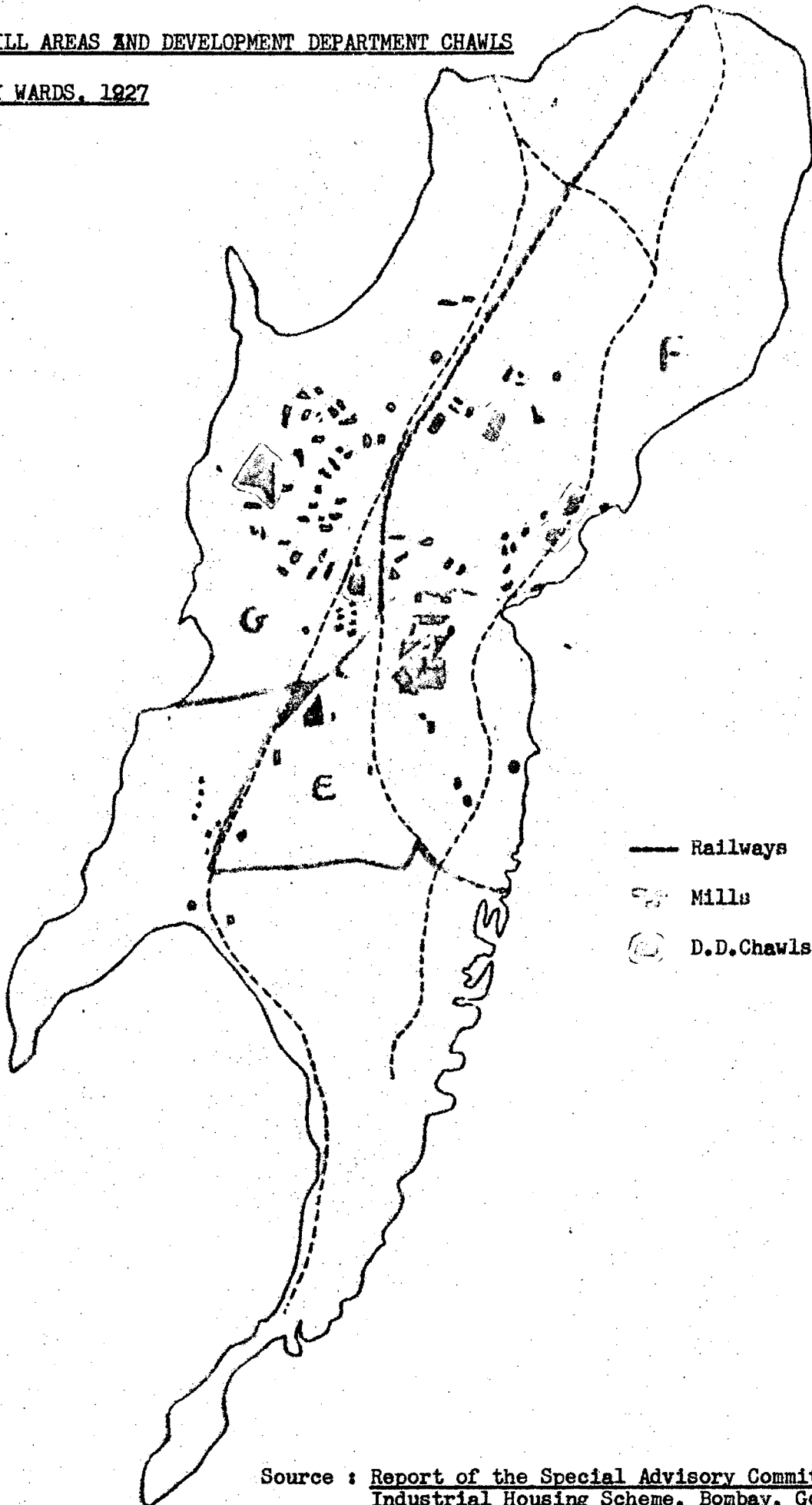
lies in the fact that it was not earlier domesticated by colonial powers as Parel and Sewri were. Under the Portuguese Parel and not Mahaluxmi was the centre of administration, with the old Government House located within it; the east coast from Sewri to Colaba formed a major port area and it was only as Bombay developed into an industrial centre that the west coast (Verli and Mahim) became important as providing links with the mainland. Hence this part of Bombay remained underdeveloped much longer than other parts did and fell easy prey to the mills in their search for land.

Looking at the dates of mill-building two distinct phases in their growth appear : the first between 1860 to 1885 and the second from 1885 to 1915. The first mills to be built in Bombay were in Tardeo and they soon spread eastwards, from Tardeo into Byculla, Chinchpookly and Mazagaon. Only one mill was built later than 1885 in this area: the Simplex Mill of 1915 in Byculla. All the other mills built after 1885 were in F and G Wards, scattered over Parel and Dader and concentrated in Verli. As there is no indication of the Municipality's hand in this move outwards, it seems likely that overcrowding and lower land prices were the two decisive influences in it.

By 1885 then, just as F and G Wards were beginning their 'march to progress', E Ward's industrialization was complete. In contrast to the other two wards, the mills in E Ward stood out in blocks, often sharing the same compound. The Chinchpookly-Ghorupdeo mills in particular formed a massive unit of 9 mills, 4 of

MILL AREAS AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT CHAWLS

BY WARDS, 1927



Source : Report of the Special Advisory Committee on the Industrial Housing Scheme, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1927.

which were owned by the Sassoon family, whose mills are featured again and again in strike records of the period.<sup>14</sup> One of the earliest mills in Bombay, the New Great Eastern Spinning and Weaving Company, built in 1860, was the first of this complex; followed by the Alexandra Sassoon Mill in 1868. The next mill to be built was in 1874 and after this we find 4 or 5 being built all together between 1882-83.<sup>15</sup> The plots they occupied are shown in earlier maps as gardens, across the road from the famous Victoria Gardens. It appears that each successive mill pushed back the boundaries of the gardens until they hit the road, leaving the Victoria Gardens to stand in solitary splendour. Even here an intrusive mill established itself, comfortably within the boundaries of Victoria Gardens, forming a strange adjunct to herbaceous borders and flowering trees and providing a blanket of smog for pleasure-seekers.

This must have been the only pleasant mill-site in Bombay ; while the Varli group of mills had only each other to look at, the Mahaluxmi-Haines Road mills faced a Municipal Dhobi Ghat which stretched for nearly half a mile across the road. As for the Chinchpokly-Ghorupda complex, the size of the compound and its walls must have blotted out the greener pastures ahead.

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14 One cannot, however, hypothesize from this that sharing a compound increased the militancy of mill-hands. Evidence shows the contrary : while the workers of the Rachel Sassoon Mill (one of the mills in the complex) seemed always ready to strike, they were rarely joined by their neighbours in Alexandra Sassoon, Manchester, New City of Bombay or New Great Eastern.

15 See Map III for complex. All information on mills, their dates of building or locations from D.C. Rutnager : Bombay Industries : The Cotton Mills, Indian Textile Journal Ltd., pp. 75-200.

### III Housing

Of all the mills, the Ripon and Clerk Roads 4 were the most conveniently situated for housing. Bordering them were the Madanpura chawls, one of the two major living areas for industrial workers in E Ward. Neither Madanpura nor Kamatipura were force-fed housing colonies, such as the Development Department later constructed. Both were fairly old tenement areas and though the Bombay Improvement Trust owned a certain number of chawls in them, the large number of tenements here were privately owned. Not that this meant that they were better than the Development Department chawls in terms of the quality of housing provided : in fact they were substantially worse, with open drains, no system of sewage disposal, common taps set out in the yard, very little ventilation, no windows and a minimum of space. They were chawls which arose helter-skelter and with an eye to quick profit, but they were what the Advisory Committee on the Industrial Housing Scheme described as "strike-free" : that is, they were not owned by individual employers and so there was little fear that during strike periods workers would have to face ejection from their homes as well as cessation of wages.<sup>16</sup>

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16 "The employer is not an ideal house builder, if for no other reason because it makes his employee doubly dependant on him for his wages and for his home; in case of dismissal he loses both. If therefore equally good accomodation is provided by an outside agency like the Development Department on equally easy terms, the operative will prefer to be housed in a building which is not owned by his employer; he wants what has been described as a 'strike-free' house. If ever there is a surplus of houses the mill chawl is the one which will be first emptied." Report of the Special Advisory Committee on the Industrial Housing Scheme, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1927, p. 15. Henceforth referred to as I.H.S.

The religious composition within the three working class wards shows that E Ward had the highest number of Muslim inhabitants. Of its 8 sections Madanpura (also known as Byculla) was the most popular Muslim residential area, with 29 per cent Muslims to 57.4 per cent Hindus in 1931.<sup>17</sup> Between 1921 and 1931 the ratio of Muslims to Hindus had increased from 31:100 to 51:100 in Madanpura. Though the proportionate distribution of Muslims in Kamatipura was only 5 per cent lower than in Madanpura, the ratio of Muslims to Hindus was much lower since Hindus constituted 71.8 per cent of the population of Kamatipura in 1931. Perhaps these ratios explain why Madanpura was singled out for mention as a Muslim area while Kamatipura (the only other section in any of the working class wards considered noteworthy) was known for the density of its population, the variance of its accommodation and its general insanitariness. At moments of political (not industrial) tension riots occurred in Madanpura, in particular during the Nationalist movement of the 1930s. Certainly it was towards Madanpura that the Ali brothers directed their especial energies when canvassing for Hindu-Muslim unity on the Congress platform.<sup>18</sup>

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17 The real Muslim residential colony lies in B and C Wards, being the triangular area formed by Chakla, Umakhadi and Khara Talao. Here Muslims outnumbered Hindus by more than 2:1. Madanpura pales by comparison - though its total area was more than twice that of the triangle, its population density was less than half that in the triangle. It seems likely that it was known as a Muslim area only because among the working class areas it ranked highest. (All figures from the Census of India, 1931, Vol. IX, p. 13. Henceforth referred to as C.O.I.).

18 Ravinder Kumar : "From Swaraj to Purna Swaraj : Nationalist Politics in the City of Bombay, 1920-1932", in D.A. Low (ed.): Congress and the Raj, 1977, p. 92 and pp. 80-81.



Within Kamatipura, on the other hand, it was caste divisions which were singled out for mention, as represented by differences in the housing occupied. While caste Hindus (mainly Kunbis and Marathas) lived in the tenement buildings provided either by the Improvement Trust or by private landlords, the dalits (Dheds and Mahars most of them) were relegated to tin sheds made of "zaolis" - that is, pieces of kerosene tins, opened up, hammered out and fitted together. Often these pieces of tin were kept in place with stones. Depressing as the chawl blocks were, these tin huts were infinitely worse : built in a long, low row like warehouses, their roofs crowded with rubbish and a thin wall providing privacy between sheds, they had, in areas like Tardoo, no taps, no lavatories and no water. Each big shed was divided by cloth drapings into 4 or 6 rooms, and one family occupied each room. None of the sheds were high enough for an adult to stand up in without hitting his head and dislodging pieces of tin.<sup>19</sup> In certain places, such as the Matunga Labour Camp, tin sheds were officially constructed by the Improvement Trust and workers had to pay as much as Rs. 4 per month for one of them.<sup>20</sup> This was a high rent considering that others could pay as little as Rs. 2 for a single room tenement, built of cement, standing in a building with water, taps and lavatories.

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19 Royal Commission of Labour in India, Vol. I, Part I, p. 516.  
Henceforth referred to as R.C.L.I.

20 G.R. Pradhan : Untouchable Workers of Bombay City, Karnatak Publishing House, Bombay, 1938, p. 17.

In the tin shed areas an uneasy compromise with village life existed : chickens and goats were herded into the cloth and raeli compartments along with their human possessors, while buffaloes imitated their existence in sheds across the lanes. Women queued up to collect water or wash clothes at a distant public tap, replacing the well. The lanes running between tin shed and buffalo house were not tarred but of plain mud.<sup>21</sup> The air that breathed over them, however, was not that of the villages but of the mills.

Polluted by the same air, chawl blocks were not enlivened by the presence of familiar animals, though stray dogs and cats assembled at their doors to ferret out edible rubbish. Taps set on each floor kept the women queuing inside the compound instead of outside it; no great distances had to be traversed in order to reach a lavatory or to baths, but these were boxy, damp and unlit and there was often not enough water to clean them. As for cooking, the women in the chawls had a choice which the women in the tin sheds did not : they could cook either inside their rooms or outside in the passages, but in both cases there was no light to cook by and the smoke remained trapped with them.<sup>22</sup> It was of course impossible to cook within the tin sheds : dried up though the remains of kerosene adhering to the tin may have been, there was always imminent danger of fire, and the cloths compartmentalising

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21 BeGalaLa, Vol. I, Part I, p. 516.

22 G.R. Pradhan, pp.Gita, p. 16.

the tin sheds added to it.

Few of the chawl rooms or tin sheds had windows.<sup>23</sup> Light and air were intended to be admitted through the doors, which were markedly below height level in the case of the tin sheds and not much better in the chawls, where light was further cut off by the passages from which the doors opened.<sup>24</sup> Commenting on these, Professor Patrick Geddes laid down : a door ought to be sufficiently wide and high to permit a pregnant woman carrying a pot of water on her head to walk through it with ease. This dictum was not obeyed by the chawls to follow, namely the Development Department ones. (Describing which Geddes said caustically that they "ware-housed" rather than housed people).<sup>25</sup>

The tin sheds and chawls had two features in common : sub-letting and overcrowding, due partly to the housing shortage and partly to budgetary restrictions. As it was rents varied widely - the same space of 10' into 10', built with the usual materials (masonry and chuna), commanded vastly differing prices, ranging from Rs. 2.8.0 per month to Rs. 7. Between 1920 and 1940 rents rose

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23 Exceptions to this are the Development Department chawls and the Matunga Labour Camp tin sheds. The former were completed in 1927, while the latter were built in 1937, so they may be said to be profiting from experience. In both shuttered windows were originally affixed, but were soon removed and iron bars put in their place. Apart from these iron bars the windows were simply open spaces in the walls and in the monsoons, which lasted for two months, pools of water would be driven into the rooms.

24 R.C.L.S., Vol. I, Part I, p. 514.

25 Geddes quoted by M.K. Natarajan : "Social Work and the City", in Clifford Manshardt (ed.) : Bombay, Today and Tomorrow, Bombay, Taraporevala and Sons, 1930, p. 37.

so dramatically that people within the same income groups as they were in 1920 were paying in 1938 three times as much as they did 18 years ago for the same class of tenement.

TABLE I.1  
PROPORTION OF INCOME SPENT ON RENT, 1921-1938<sup>26</sup>

Income group	Proportion of families in each income group			Proportion of income spent on rent		
	1921	1931	1938	1921	1931	1938
Below Rs. 30	2.7	12.3	19.0	8.4	16.6	26.2
Rs. 30 to Rs. 40	11.0	20.2	30.4	8.5	15.2	20.4
Rs. 40 to Rs. 50	33.7	26.2	18.2	6.8	13.2	17.5
Rs. 50 to Rs. 60	21.8	16.3	10.4	7.7	12.4	14.4
Rs. 60 to Rs. 70	19.6	10.0	11.9	6.6	11.8	14.4
Rs. 70 to Rs. 80	6.8	5.2		6.8	11.1	
Rs. 80 to Rs. 90	2.8	4.1	10.1	6.9	10.7	13.0
Rs. 90 and over	1.6	5.7		6.4	10.2	

These figures show not only that rents increased enormously but that in actual terms the conditions of the working class were steadily growing worse rather than better. Where in 1921 only 2.7 per cent of the total families surveyed earned below Rs. 30, in 1938

26 Constructed from figures given in the Family Budget Surveys conducted by the Bombay Labour Office in 1921-22 and 1931-32. See F.B.S., 1921-22, pp. 54-5, and F.B.S., 1931-32, pp. 18-19. Figures for 1938 from Report of the Rent Enquiry Committee, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1939, pp. 7-9. Henceforth referred to as R.E.C.

there were almost eight times as many in this income group. 67.5 per cent of the families surveyed in 1938 earned below Rs. 50 while in 1921 the figure was only 47.4 per cent. Such were the effects of the Depression. What is striking is that major increases in rent as well as in pauperisation were effected by 1931 - that is, in the very early years of the Depression; thus testifying to the old truth that the hardest and the fastest hit are always the poor.

Even if we do not blame the Bombay administration for not controlling this wild increase in rents, we can certainly blame them for making no attempt to standardize rents between 1920 and 1940.<sup>27</sup> In fact decisions on what rent to demand seem to have been purely arbitrary as they cannot be co-related to types of landlords and while it is possible to say broadly that rents in southern areas were higher than those in the north,<sup>28</sup> there is considerable variation in them. Interestingly, it is among the millowner-landlords that we find the widest variation of rents,<sup>29</sup> and it is difficult to establish who actually decided the amount of rent since the normal method of leasing out rooms, both in the mill chawls and in the tin sheds, was to place them in the hands of a

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27 For an example of Government initiative on rent-standardization see R.E.C., Vol. III, Oral Evidence. The entire volume is a collection of arguments as to why rents should not be standardized. Moreover, the majority add, if any forms of control are to attempted then they should be offset by state subsidies so that profits are not cut into.

28 See foot-note 8 for an explanation of why rents in the north were lower than those in the south.

29 See Appendix A for a list of the housing provided by mill-owners and the rents charged.

contractor.<sup>30</sup> The rake-off from sub-letting often went to him, which explains why a blind eye was turned to the practice even when it was explicitly forbidden, as in the mill chawls. In these, as in Government owned chawls, official regulations placed a limit of 4 to 5 people per room, but surveys elicit cases of 15 or more people living in a room of 10' into 12'. According to one report :

"In one room on the second floor of a chawl I found six families living. Six separate ovens on the floor proved this statement. On enquiry I ascertained that the actual number of adults and children living in this room was 30."<sup>31</sup>

Added to the smoke of the ovens was that from the lamps - makeshift arrangements of tin filled with kerosene, from which smoke billowed, unfunneled, into the room. These lamps were often kept burning all through the night so that people did not stumble over each other while leaving for the night shift. Considerable quantities of carbon dioxide thus entered directly into their lungs, giving rise to various lung infections, from bronchitis to T.B.<sup>32</sup> During the monsoon pools of water would collect in the rooms, lavatories and chawl compounds, leaking through the roofs or coming through the doors or windows (both of which were most often simply gaping holes), and these pools of stagnant water would breed innumerable diseases, from influenza, pneumonia, typhoid and cholera to amoebiasis and gastro-enteritis.<sup>33</sup> In 1921 5.04 per cent

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30 I.H.S., p. 4.

31 Report of Dr Florence Barnes, R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 23.

32 G.R. Pradhan, op.cit., p. 12.

33 R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 516.

of the total deaths in the city were from "phthisis and other respiratory diseases"; 3.21 per cent from dysentery and diarrhoea; and 7.88 per cent from pneumonia. Total adult deaths for 1921 were 3.21 per cent of the population of the city; this was an improvement over 1920, in which year 4.62 per cent of the total population died.<sup>34</sup>

The state of these areas was drawing considerable comment from a variety of quarters. In February, 1920, the *Sanj Vartaman*, an Anglo-Gujarati daily, reported :

"There is not the least exaggeration in the description given by Sir Thomas Holland in the Imperial Legislative Council of the wretched slums in which the labouring population is housed in Bombay. Hundreds of children meet their deaths every day in these slums, and cholera, typhoid and influenza work havoc in them. Who is responsible for housing the labourer in these slums? The responsible parties are surely the mill-owners of Bombay, the Bombay Municipality and the Government of Bombay. The mill-hands must be rescued from their present plight. His Excellency Sir George Lloyd has taken up the question and it is hoped that he will take early steps to put the scheme under execution."<sup>35</sup>

In spite of Sir George's intentions the "plight" of the mill-hands remained the site of a classic tug of war in which each group attempted to foist responsibility on to the other. Industrialists fought the Government, traders and industrialists fought each other and different branches of the Government bickered amongst themselves. (mainly about fund allocation). The major issues over which these struggles were conducted were : Who was to provide

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34 Annual Sanitary Report, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1923, p. 4 and pp. 32-3.

35 Sanj Vartaman, Bombay, 21st February, 1920, p. 15.

housing for the mill workers - mill-owners or the local administration? Were wages to be raised or prices controlled? Were rents to be brought down or state-subsidised? Commissions came and went yet the questions remained the same, seemingly unanswerable. From the Indian Industrial Commission of 1918 to the report of the Indian Tariff Board of 1927 to the Royal Commission of Labour in India of 1931 to the Rent Enquiry Committee of 1938 to the Textile Labour Enquiry Committee of 1941 : the same questions are repeated, and they are punctuated with the same semi-colons.

Yet from 1918 through to 1941, each Commission and Committee had answers to these questions and they were all minor variations on the same theme, threaded through with a note of eternal pragmatism. It was acknowledged that responsibility for redeeming the housing shortage lay both with the mill-owners and the local administration. It was recognised that mill-owners had done little to fulfill their responsibility; but in extenuation it was pointed out that certain "progressive" mill-owners had built a small number of chawls on mill compounds for their employees but the workers had been reluctant to take advantage of them since to move into chawls in mill compounds would be a to increase their dependency on the employers; and b would allow their lives to be regimented (that is, it would become increasingly difficult for a worker to take ad-hoc holidays, return to the village for harvest-



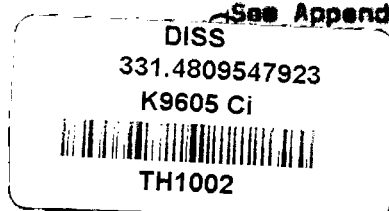
ing, etc.).<sup>36</sup> At the same time it was pointed out that local administration had acknowledged their responsibility by building chawls, both under the Improvement Trust and the Development Department, but initially these chawls had not been in great demand due to their location and high rents. Hence the returns on capital costs were low and the State could not be expected to be the sole bearer of this financial burden.

In answer to these problems (actually just the one problem: who was to pay?), all the Commissions and Committees felt that the first endeavor should be that of the local administration. That is to say, they felt that local administration should undertake the task of initial financing and construction but subsequently the mills should step in, either leasing the chawls from them and renting tenements out at subsidised rates to their workers; or forming some sort of Joint Board (via the Mill Owners Association) to deal with leasing and renting. This latter was suggested as a solution to the workers' reluctance to rent from their employers'.

Although these proposals were made time and time again the Government did not enact them. Their position, loudly enunciated, was that they wished to allow the mill-owners to consolidate their position. However, it was taxes on the industry which provided the

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<sup>36</sup> Though the reluctance of workers to occupy mill-chawls is constantly emphasized in official documents, the single record of these chawls states that they were in great demand. See Appendix A.



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revenue for the administration's construction work<sup>37</sup> when, in one historic experiment, they did take the step of building chawls as part of a grandiose scheme for developing Bombay. These were the Development Department chawls, whose construction was initiated by Sir George Lloyd on the 3rd of August, 1920, when he introduced a Bill for the levying of the cotton cess in the Legislative Council. The purpose of the cess was to garner revenue for a new workers' housing scheme which was to be a "vital part of the whole development programme." The scheme was to build chawls in Naigaum, Sauri and Varli (now Anglicised to 'Worli'); and it was to serve the dual function of accommodating workers and moving them northwards. This latter function is what was referred to when the scheme was seen as part of the "development programme" which had already furnished Varli to the mills, and under which the creation of facilities for the industrialization of the north was an important directive. To this end the Bombay Development Directorate was founded, in 1920, amalgamating the roles of the Bombay Improvement Trust and Development Committee, though not officially replacing them. Surprisingly, both the Bill and the scheme were pushed through in a hurry. Contrary to the usual practice, the Municipality had not been consulted while the scheme was being formulated, and before they could catch their breaths their protests were over-

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37 That is, Rs. 1 per bale of cotton - the cotton excise tax introduced by Sir George Lloyd in 1920; which the mill-owners grumbled about until 1926 when they rebelled against it.

ruled. The reason given was that had time been taken to consult them starting the scheme would have been delayed for one and a half years until the next Council session, as sanction to introduce it had been received from the Central Government only just in time for the current session.<sup>38</sup> But another reason, hinted at by the disaffected, was that Sir George wished the scheme to redound to his credit and hence was speeding it to completion within his term in office.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these indications of administrative vitality, by 1924 less than a third of the planned construction had been completed, namely 207 chawls with 16,344 rooms (of the projected 50,000). At this stage the Directorate decided to halt a while, rent out the rooms they had built and re-check demand. Perhaps a more decisive reason for this pause was that they had already exceeded their projected capital outlay per room several times over - by about 250 per cent - but this was not emphasized until later, when they decided to give up further construction altogether. In the three years that they "tested" the scheme, one-third of the rooms were occupied; not a bad record considering that the chawls were in areas with poor transport facilities, inadequate markets, no temples, schools or hospitals; that the buildings often stood alone, amidst deserted mills at night; and the rents were at best Re. 1 per month over the rates paid in southern chawls and at worst

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<sup>38</sup> I.M.S., p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

as much as Rs. 4 over - and this was after two reductions in rent had been effected between 1924-26. In other words, a worker occupying one of these tenements could end up paying between 20-25 per cent of his income out in rent and receiving isolated, unlit and depressing surroundings in exchange. If in spite of this array of off-putting conditions, one-third of the rooms had been occupied, then this was testimony to the housing shortage and to the demand that the Directorate was "toasting". Yet the final report of the Advisory Committee to this scheme drew the conclusion that demand was insufficient and explained this by stating that the population of Bombay had decreased, and that thus their initial estimate of a shortage of 50,000 rooms was an overestimate. Hence they recommended that no further construction be undertaken, adding that rents ought to be lowered once again (they were not). Further proposals were that blocks of chawls be rented to "large employers of labour like the railways", or to contractors. Both suggestions are somewhat off track, since the major deficiency in housing affected mill workers specifically, and the influence of contractors was already being deplored. One suggestion which was not included in the Report, but which was published in the Minutes of Dissent of Mr Surve, was that the help of the trade unions be taken in renting out tenements.

Several factors can be adduced in the failure of the scheme : firstly, its haste, the ill-consideration it received while being planned - from its costing to the decisions on materials used in

building<sup>40</sup> the location of the chawls, preparation for habitation in terms of water supply and drainage, etc. Secondly, the high rents charged on completion and the implied lack of interest in making the scheme an eventual success - as shown by erroneous conclusions as to lack of demand. And finally, but perhaps most significant, the constant dislike of the mill-owners for the cotton case, which flared into revolt in 1925, resulting in a 20 per cent wage cut for all workers and leading to a general strike.

#### IV Conclusion

It may seem as if I have gone into unnecessary detail in portraying the changing face of Bombay city; the organization of physical space in working class wards and the actual developments in housing in these areas. But I wanted to emphasize three points:

1. The north-south divide and the development of a process whereby the "working people were virtually segregated in their stinking enclaves."<sup>41</sup> With this divide, the rich could

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40 Instead of masonry and chuna the Development Department (a branch of the Directorate) decided to use re-inforced concrete because they felt that blocks built of this material would last longer. However, the result of using re-inforced concrete was that the chawls were especially hot during the summer, and cold during the winter. Another reason why the workers did not want to occupy these chawls was that they had strict rules about sub-letting and overcrowding, which private chawls did not have. See L.H.S., p. 22.

41 E.P. Thompson : The Making of the English Working Class, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1964, p. 321. E.P. Thompson is here referring to housing in Manchester and Leeds in the 1840s.

ignore the conditions in which the workers lived for much of the time, but occasionally they were forced to take note of the situation : as in the case of the 1918 strike, described in the Introduction to this chapter. Such moments reminded them that their lives were intimately linked to that of the working class, who produced for their needs. And as these reminders accumulated, the rich also realized that it was in their interests to institute judicious reforms and neutralize the situation.

2. The importance of caste and community ties as providing routes into the city, both in terms of jobs and housing. J.F. Bulsara called these chawl areas "islands of communal settlement".<sup>42</sup> It is certainly true that they provided sources of support for members of their community, but there are few records of communal disturbance between 1920 and 1940. What these caste and community based colonies did constitute were important bases for political leaders : the tin huts for Phule and Ambedkar; the Madanpura chawls for the Ali brothers, etc.
3. The importance placed by workers on extracting the maximum degree of freedom within their given conditions of existence: such as choosing to live in privately owned rather than mill-owned chawls; and the emphasis on "strike-free" chawls.<sup>43</sup> That

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42 J.F. Bulsara : Bombay, a City in the Making, Bombay, 1948, p. 61.

43 See foot-note 16.

these factors were of greater importance than rents, for example, shows that class, or political, interests could often dominate narrow economic ones. Clearly the workers of industrial Bombay had an understanding of the relations of power in which they were enmeshed : there was no need for an exterior leadership to explain their situation to them. In fact, what we see over the period is a cutting back on their flexibility, pushing out their earlier methods of resistance, such as wildcat strikes, ad-hoc holidays, a constant go-slow consisting of innumerable tea breaks, bidi breaks, etc. A gradual metamorphosis of these anarchic forms of resistance took place between 1920 and 1940, finally replacing them with trade union representation, collective bargaining, etc. How this metamorphosis took place and what the different forms of "ordering" working class consciousness were are the concerns of the following chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### MORALITY, SEXUALITY AND THE FAMILY

#### I Introduction

What emerges clearly from any study of Bombay city in this period is how unconcerned the mill-owners were about the health and housing of their employees. Of the three major employers in Bombay the mill-owners were the worst : both the Post Trust and the Railways were Government owned and they provided more and better housing for their workers than the mills did.

It can be argued that the reason why the mill-owners did so little was that it suited them to keep the workers' families in the villages as this shifted the burden of reproduction away from them, into the country-side. This meant that they did not really have to pay a family wage, and therefore cut the costs of labour power. Moreover, labour was at this time in plentiful supply and no high degree of skill was required of the majority of mill-workers, so the issue of reproduction - of the next generation of mill-workers - was not a matter for concern.

Herbert Gutman has pointed out how in Lowell, an industrial town in North America

"the Lowell capitalists thrived by hiring rural women who supplemented a distant family's income, keeping them a few years, and then renewing the process. Such steady labour turnover kept the



city from developing a permanent proletariat and so was thought to assure stability."<sup>1</sup>

But we are not talking of a small factory town. Bombay was a port city, soon to become a major metropolis. Even when out of work, a certain proportion of the migrants stayed in the city, with relatives or caste brethren. Though they were in a minority, they swelled the population of the city - not by a few hundreds, but by a few thousands. These, together with the thousands of badli-workers, formed a kind of permanent semi-proletariat.<sup>2</sup> What's more, they and the daily and time workers were not young and docile girls, but men of varying ages : many of them married and with families in their villages. Separated from their families, alone in the city, they constituted a huge consumer group for Bombay's pimps and prostitutes, alcohol distillers and card-sharpers. Between 1911 and 1921 there was a rise in the number of prostitutes in Bombay city and they were concentrated in certain of the working class areas. Simultaneously, there was an increase in drinking and gambling in working class chawls.<sup>3</sup>

1 Herbert Gutman : Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, Pantheon Books, New York, 1979, p. 26.

2 In 1921, for example, over 16 per cent of the mill-hands employed by the Bombay Cotton Textile Industry were "substitutes, spare-hands and other persons not working 'full-time'", (A.R. Burnett-Hurst, Labour and Housing in Bombay, London, P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1925, p. 49. The actual figure for this group was 20,900). I am not here suggesting that a higher proportion of this group were single immigrants, as contrasted with full-time workers; but it seems plausible to assume that at least as many men within this group would have left their families behind as would full-time workers.

3 See C.D.I., 1921, Vol. IX, p. 24, for figures on prostitution between 1911 and 1921. Interestingly, the changes in the distribution of prostitutes in this period, and their concen-

If early capitalism could tolerate - nay welcome - a transient host of workers on supplementary wages, the city (one of capital's creations) could not : the shifting population and their ignorance of city patterns of living; the high rates of mortality and disease; the rapid increase in "vices" such as gambling, drinking and alcoholism; all these cried out for attention : and their cry was heard. From among the ranks of the Bombay bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie there arose a horde of social reformers, toting dispensaries, pamphlets and slide-shows, who tended to settle like locusts over E, F and G Wards. These reformers were not of the old breed, who were concerned with righting traditional wrongs such as child marriage, the ban on widow remarriage, etc. They were a new breed, who were concerned with ordering and stabilising the lives of industrial workers; who wanted to reform their conditions of existence on the one hand; but on the other, wanted to reform their consciousness. The role of this group was to build a bridge between the bourgeoisie and the working class : from the one side to introduce petty-bourgeois morality into the ranks of the workers; from the other to focus some attention on the "stinking enclaves" in which the working class were segregated and to press for reform.

Moreover, the interwar period, particularly from the late 1920s onwards, was one in which the industry was undergoing sub-

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tration in 5 sections seems to indicate the centralisation of this business by the municipal allocation of brothel space. For the increase in drinking and gambling see the Report of the Excise Committee appointed by the Government of Bombay, 1922-23, Vol. II, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1924.

tantial changes, directed towards systematising its form of production. Marx pointed out that for this process to be effective what was needed was a "Gospel of abstinence", which would further the interests of capital by encouraging the worker to be productive, stable and "ascetic."<sup>4</sup> The role of social reformers was to preach this gospel. In the following sections I have tried to detail the areas in which asceticism was propagated and the forms through which it was hoped to be achieved.

## II The Gospel of Abstinence

Between 1920 and 1940 there was an increasingly open discourse on the three "vices" of the working class : alcoholism, prostitution and gambling. Interestingly, all three were related, in this discourse, to housing, almost as if morality was determined by it. The thesis which remained constant in these two decades was that bad housing led to immorality (that is, the three "vices" mentioned above). But there is a certain grandeur of vision attached to mention of these "vices" in the 1920s, a kind of mystery and vagueness, which is lacking in subsequent statements of the 1930s. Arguments became increasingly functionalist and commentators of the 1930s described in concrete terms the housing provided, in order to substantiate charges of immorality or to clarify the relationship between housing and morality. This change can be best seen by comparing, for example, the statement made by Sir George Lloyd in 1922 :

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Marx : Das Capital, Vol. I, p. 150.

"The importance of housing cannot be overstated. It is the main cause of drink and vice, according to Mr Charles Booth; it is of all causes the most patent in the creation of morally and physically degenerate types. As the authors of 'The great opportunity' point out, 'Good houses mean the possibility of home life, happiness and health; bad houses spell squalor, drink, disease, immorality and crime, and in the end demand hospitals, prisons and asylums in which we seek to hide away the human derelicts of society that are largely the result of society's own neglect...'"<sup>5</sup>

with those of Mohsin Bhaiji, describing the housing of Muslim workers, and G.R. Pradhan, describing the housing of Harijan workers, both in 1937 :

"The figures compiled by us show that seventy-five per cent of the families stay in one room tenements, out of which sixteen per cent are putting up in single room tenements shared in common with others. The size of such rooms is not more spacious than 100 or 120 square feet, and however advantageous the common rooms may be to their inmates, they distinctly increase overcrowding. To accommodate four persons in rooms of such dimensions is to deny the sanctity of family life, decency of living and the privacy of the sexes, matters so essential for the healthy growth and efficiency of the members of society. It shows that we are putting a premium on vice, reckless life and moral degradation."<sup>6</sup>

"A married couple sleeps in the same room with other members. In some cases I was told if there are two or more married couples in the same room, each couple takes advantage of the room by turns, or women sleep in the room and men outside the room and arrange anyhow for conjugal union. Even if there are more than one couple sleeping in the same room they cannot afford to have, and also they cannot have, any partition between the two couples sleeping there. Privacy which is necessary for happy and successful conjugal relations

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5 I.H.S., p. 17.

6 M. Mohsin Bhaiji : "Housing and Rent Among the Muhammeden Working Classes of Bombay", Journal of the University of Bombay, Vol. VI, July, 1937, p. 118.

is denied to them. Can one imagine two married couples sleeping in the same room with children around them and among so many things - a 'zoli' or a cradle, cots and utensils? On account of insufficient space the natural sex functions of the married couples take place with the full consciousness of the presence of other inmates in the same room. It is not strange, therefore, that boys and girls of tender age exhibit sex symptoms earlier."<sup>7</sup>

As we can see from the above statements, what was happening in this period was that sex was being brought under public scrutiny, was being analysed, dissected and debated, rather than merely judged.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the earlier unspecified and sweeping identification of "bad" housing with immorality, the late 1930s reveal the breaking up of the category "housing" into its elements, each of which is identified with a separate ailment. Space becomes the vital determinant of morality: overcrowding leads to promiscuousness, since it rends the veil of secrecy which ought to shroud sexuality. Privacy was equated with space, in this view: not to cook in, clean in, sit in, move in, or breathe in; but enclosed space to copulate in. It was almost as if this function of space constituted the last and foremost bastion of "decency", the stable

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7 G.R. Pradhan, op.cit., p. 13.

8 Michel Foucault, in his History of Sexuality, describing changes in attitudes towards sexuality from the late 17th century on, aptly summarises them thus: "Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of a public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses." (Michel Foucault, History of Sexuality, Vol. I, Allen Lane, London, 1978, p. 49).

family and the industrious worker. (In the same way, drainage and sanitation were quoted as the chief causes of disease and mortality; and the lack of ventilation was cited as impeding the due process of cooking).

Notably, this emphasis on "privacy" was accompanied by an increasingly public discourse on its relevance, need and function. As shown above, not only did reformers grow more vociferous in their demands for improved morality, but they went into more and more precise details in their speeches, writings, etc.; prescribing the nature of this morality, defining its constitution. Essentially, their conception of morality was a Christian rationalist one. Christian because it placed communal cleanliness high on its scale of moral life, not merely in terms of sanitation but also of sexuality (monogamy); and because it did not simply prohibit, but replaced: it suggested starting coffee or tea shops to replace liquor and opium consumption; to curtail promiscuity it suggested gymnasiums and magic lantern shows.<sup>9</sup> Hinduism on the other hand could prohibit but it seldom replaced. Their conception was rationalist because it attempted to impose order on disorder, and because it recommended certain actions not because they were good or "right", but because they were functional: giving either economic reasons, as for limiting gambling and drinking; or medical

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<sup>9</sup> Report of the Excise Committee Appointed by the Government of Bombay, 1922-23, Vol. II, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1923, pp. 26-7. Henceforth referred to as E.C.

reasons, as for providing maternity benefits.<sup>10</sup> Often both medical and economic reasons coalesced, as in the debate on alcoholism:

"The investigations of Dr Latinen have shown that alcohol in temperate doses is the principal cause of miscarriages, still births and involuntary abortions. Alcohol is responsible for the condition of women and girls who, though of sound mind, are taken advantage of through the temporary suspension of their higher faculties as the result of drink; thus it serves as the chief instrument in the fall of women. It debases love to the level of lust, removes the restraints of reason and conscience and causes most of the marital infidelity of the world. In this way, alcohol, more than any other thing, creates the commercial demand for immorality."<sup>11</sup>

and :

"So far as my experience goes, they (men) spend the whole amount (of their earnings) on drink within three or four days and the remaining days of the month they live on the earnings of their wives..."<sup>12</sup>

Alcoholism, thus, was responsible for promiscuity and financial profligacy; but alcoholism itself was caused by bad housing :

"We know that we have to provide the proletariat with such surroundings that they are not driven to the liquor shop as the only refuge from the sordid greyness of their daily lives..."<sup>13</sup>

So we come full circle. In spite of this simple reasoning, philanthropists did not believe that in improved housing alone lay the

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10 I am indebted to Jacques Donzelot for making this distinction between religious and economic or hygienic reasons. (Jacques Donzelot, The Policing of Families, Pantheon Books, New York, 1980, pp. 108-110).

11 E.C., Vol. II, p. 77.

12 Ibid., p. 48.

13 Ibid., p. 4.

remedy to overspending, prostitution, gambling, drinking and the like. Not only did education and 'harmless' entertainment (like the talkies) have a reformative role to play in curbing these vices : major change was to be achieved only through a stable family life.

From the mid to the late nineteenth century, new conceptions of the family had begun to surface in India. A reformulated version of motherhood was extolled by the western educated intelligentsia and the rising professional class. The prior proud self-subordination and the sacrificial tendencies inculcated in Hindu women grew diminishingly important in this conception, which emphasized the role of the mother in "moulding" the minds of her children.<sup>14</sup> The propagandists of this philosophy were Brahma Samajis, Arya Samajis and Theosophists; utilitarians and secular liberals: they opposed the caste system and the notion of hereditary hierarchy which it implied. They believed in women's rights as elaborated by J.S. Mill. Some of them read Havelock Ellis on sexuality. All of them agreed that woman was not merely a womb, but also a mind : albeit that this latter quality was undeveloped, while the former was overdeveloped. (A corollary : they felt that the over-frequent expansion of the womb had stunted the mind; thus the former had to be restrained to allow for development of the latter.)

14 See, for example, the debates on child marriage in Dayaram Ghosal, The Status of Women in India : A Handbook for Hindu Social Reformers, Bombay, 1889; and the discussions of The Sarda Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 in the Indian Social Reformer, Jan-Dec., 1929.



Under this conception it became important to educate the wife to play companion to the new citizens of present India and mother to future citizens of the new India. Female Education Societies abounded in the 1870s and for several decades after. As they accomplished their goals, educated women were encouraged by their reformer husbands to come out of their homes and preach the gospel of the new woman. From the turn of the century onwards movements against purdah, child marriage, dowry, etc., grew and took on new strength as bourgeois women joined them. By 1920 it had become an essential part of this activism to carry the message to the lower classes : through Infant and Maternal Welfare Societies; sewing classes; adult literacy classes; and of course slide shows, lectures, pamphlets, etc.

Much of their work was done in collaboration with the Government. In 1922, Kanji Dworkadas questioned the Bombay Legislative Council on the opening of a Welfare Centre under the Lady Lloyd Scheme, at the Varli Development Department chawls. He asked whether the Government would look with favour on applications to start a free maternity home in these chawls. The answer was affirmative and the Infant Welfare Society was asked to start a small home in the Development Department chawls. Another one was also opened in Dalisle Road, "in spite of the strong active opposition of the Municipal Health authorities", who apparently felt that if funds were to be given at all, they should be given to them.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kanji Dworkadas, op.cit., p. 36.

These groups also undertook the training of mid-wives in order to combat the use of "dais"; country midwives whose operations were decried as insanitary and dangerous to the health of both mother and child. By 1931, there were 10 Municipal and 20 Infant Welfare Society midwives working in the Bombay chawl areas.<sup>16</sup>

It is significant that most of the activities of social work groups concerned themselves with health; in particular, with the health of children and therefore of women. Given the rates of infant mortality in the early 1920s, this is not really surprising.

TABLE II.1

Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 births, 1920-27<sup>17</sup>

Year	Bombay City	Bombay Presidency
1920	556	183
1921	672	178
1922	405	169
1923	414	160
1925	359	162
1926	394	195
1927	319	161

These figures show clearly what conditions were like in the city. Infant mortality in 1920 was three times the figure for the Presidency as a whole; in 1921 it was almost four times that in

<sup>16</sup> R.C.S.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 375.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 26. These figures actually are not fully representative, according to the R.C.S.I., since some of the women who returned to their villages for confinement registered their children in the mofussil.

the Presidency. These however were the years of the influenza epidemic which killed over 100,000 people in Bombay city in 1919. Such epidemics germinated in working-class wards; most of the people who succumbed to them lived in one-room tenements. Infant mortality rates in these tenements, in fact, show a considerably higher rate of death than the averages given.

TABLE II.2  
Infant Mortality per 1000 Births by Number of Rooms, 1922-1937<sup>18</sup>

Number of Rooms	1922	1927	1936	1937
1 room and under	472	490	272	273
2 rooms	436	203	235	215
3 rooms	422	222	231	215
4 or more rooms	300	195	98	95
Roadside/Homeless	364	-	-	-
Hospitals	124	88	-	-
Infant mortality rate for total population	405	319	249	245

The huge difference between the infant mortality rate for the whole population of Bombay city and the rate for those living in one-room tenements, in 1927, is probably because only 53.6 per cent of the total births were in such tenements, while the equiva-

<sup>18</sup> Figures for 1922 and 1927 from the R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 26. Figures for 1936 and 1937 from the R.E.C., Vol. I, p. 109.

lent percentage of deaths was 83.<sup>19</sup> The low proportion of births in one-room tenements is due to the large increase in numbers of women having their children in hospitals : 35.8 per cent of the total births were in hospitals, only 6.8 per cent of whom died. The rise in numbers of hospital deliveries reveals the hollowness of complaints that working class women preferred to patronise "dais". Clearly, when viable alternatives were offered, working class women availed of them.

Equally, the infant mortality rates for homeless people have very little significance, since there very few births on the road from 1922 onwards : only 4 in 1927 and 13 in 1936, while there were none at all in 1937. The figures of deaths would naturally be higher than those of births given the conditions in which homeless people existed.

There was, as we can see from these figures, a considerable improvement in the infant mortality rates between 1920 and 1940. What were the reasons for this? Partly it was due to improvements in sanitation and the slow combatting of epidemics of plague, influenza and malaria; partly it was due to the increased health care being provided by social workers and state-subsidised welfare measures; partly it was due to a rise in the age at marriage and to the enactment of maternity benefit legislation; but largely it was due to a steady decline in the employment of women, from 1931 onwards. Between 1931 and 1939, the fall in the figures of women employed by the cotton textile industry showed a decline of

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19 Figures for 1927 from R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 26.

over 20 per cent. Before going on to describe the reasons for this decline I would like to trace the connections between maternity, health and wage-work.

### III Wage-work, Maternity and Mortality

"... the health of the woman workers is more affected than that of the male workers by the present conditions of living. She is a wage earner as well as a domestic drudge and has to sustain the strain doubly. She cannot pass even 15 minutes (except time spent in going to and coming from work) of a day in open air. Her bodily growth is stunted on account of over-work. Even in her delicate condition she cannot get rest, and sometimes she has to work upto the moment of confinement ... She cannot get fresh and warm food... After one or two months of her delivery, according to the pecuniary circumstances of her family she again joins the mill. Naturally this cannot but affect the health of the women, many of whom look pale and anemic."<sup>20</sup>

Kanji Dwarkadas' study of women workers in the India United Group of Mills shows that 60 per cent of them weighed between 71-90 lbs. and that 82 per cent of them were between 4'7" and 5' high. Almost 10 per cent of the women workers in the Sassoon Mills, he found in another survey, had their first child when they were under 20 years old. A few had had three children by the time they were 20.<sup>21</sup>

The working day of such women stretched from 14 to 18 hours, though the hours of their wage labour was limited to 8-10. (Official regulations in fact restricted the hours of women's wage-

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20 R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 196.

21 Kanji Dwarkadas, op.cit., pp. 120-23, and p. 101.

labour to 8 in a day, but these were often extended unofficially to 10). Their duties encompassed cooking, cleaning and child-care, apart from wage-work. The lunch time meal they would cook before leaving for work at 7 a.m.; after returning from the factory at 6 or 7 p.m., they would cook dinner. Their children either accompanied them to the factory, where they choked on cotton dust; or were fed opium to keep them quiet and left in the care of older children, unemployed relatives or neighbours.<sup>22</sup> Rates of still and premature birth were much higher for these women. A survey conducted by two women doctors, Dr Margaret Balfour and Dr Shakuntala Talpode, between 1927 and 1929, showed that not only were the rates of still birth among women mill-workers much higher than those among non-working mothers (115:1000 as compared to 108:1000 among non-working women), but that there was a considerable difference in these rates according to the time upto which the woman worked before confinement. Those who ceased to work before they had reached the seventh month of pregnancy had a still and premature birth rate of 115:1000, while those who worked beyond the seventh month had a rate of 194:1000. Moreover, the rates also varied according to whether the women workers did all their housework themselves or were helped by relatives. Questioning another group of women on this, Balfour and Talpode found that 52.7 per cent of them did their own housework, and the rate of still and premature birth among them was

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22 Re.C.S.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 392.

312:1000. Among those who did not, the rate was only 125:1000.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly the decisive factor here was rest. Women who did all their housework themselves, women who worked beyond the seventh month of pregnancy, had no time off at all except for those few hours spent sleeping. (One could assume that such women were amongst the lowest income groups, but Balfour and Talpode state that they questioned women from the same income groups). The importance of rest is underlined by the conditions under which the two doctors conducted their survey. 1928 was the year of the great strike in Bombay, which paralysed the cotton textile industry, resulting in the closure of almost all the mills for a period of 6-8 months. As a result of the strike, their collection of material for the survey was disrupted, since many women went back to their villages for the duration of the closures. Balfour and Talpode had completed about half their interviews before the strike began. They resumed interviewing women workers six months after the strike ended :

"It was found that whereas the proportion leaving off work before the seventh month was formerly 47 per cent, it was now only 26 per cent. The 74 per cent who continued to work after seven months had now a still and premature birth rate of only 81 per 1,000 as compared with 194 per 1,000 before the strike. It looked as if the women were stronger after the prolonged rest and more able to carry on till near the end of pregnancy without ill effects to the child."<sup>24</sup>

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23 Dr Margaret Balfour and Dr Shakuntala Talpode : "The Maternity Conditions of Woman Millworkers", in the R.C.I.L., Vol. I, Part I, pp. 362-63.

24 Balfour and Talpode, op.cite., p. 362.

They could well have substituted the last phrase with "with good effects for the child." The weight of children born after the strike was much higher than before the strike, though it still didn't reach the average of 6 lbs per baby (for all India). After the strike, new born babies weighed, on an average, 5.71 lbs. Before the strike the babies of women who stopped working before the seventh month of their pregnancy weighed 5.60 lbs, while the babies of those who worked beyond the seventh month weighed only 5.31 lbs.

The differences in pre and post-strike maternal health conditions are so great that one wonders whether the sole cause for this change could have been that the women had had a long period of rest from work. Surely changes in diet too would have been important factors? And if most of the women went back to their villages, wouldn't they have had a more nutritive diet there? The flaw in this reasoning is that both women workers and working class housewives would have returned with their families to the villages during strike periods such as this one, and therefore one would expect an improvement in the health of both kinds of mothers. Yet Balfour and Talpode say that their investigations showed that the incidence of still and premature births were greater during the strike period for working class housewives than they had been in 1927, before the strike. At the same time, we have seen that these rates went down in the case of women wage workers during the strike. Furthermore, according to Balfour and



Talpode, many women did not go back to their villages during the strike. The standards of living of these women were enormously worsened during this period, particularly as regarding food.

"The strike began in the last week of April and ended in the last week of November. Wages were paid for most of April, therefore it was probably not till June that full inconvenience was felt. Many of the people went to their villages and returned when the strike was over, but probably these too felt the pinch of want. Many remained in Bombay and lived as they could. Interrogated, some said their husbands got other work, but mostly in the nature of temporary jobs. Some sold their bits of furniture and cooking utensils and lived off the proceeds. Some got credit for foodstuffs from the shopkeepers which they had to repay after the strike was over. Some had relatives who helped. Some got a meal a day from charitable funds. One woman had a blind stepson, who went out and begged and brought home 12 as. to Rs. 1 per day. She said 'we managed on this, but with difficulty.' That was the general trend of reply 'we got through, but with difficulty. We were sometimes hungry.' And it may be taken for granted that it was the mother of the family who suffered most. While there was anything, the husband and children got it, and in addition to the scanty feeding she had the strain of constant anxiety."<sup>25</sup>

If in spite of scrimping and straining, almost starving herself and living in constant anxiety about where the next meal was coming from, the woman worker bore healthier babies after the strike, and her still end premature birth rate had fallen by over 50 per cent, then this clinches the case for rest.

Balfour and Talpode have shown that "the maternal organism was exhausted by excessive work and poor diet." The marginal improvement in diet which may have occurred when women went back

to their villages was clearly not sufficient to cause any improvement in their health, or rather, in the health of their foetuses. What Balfour and Talpode do not tell us is the extent to which illnesses entailed by city life affected the health of the working class woman, debilitating her constitution. A report of the Tate Mills, on cases treated by their women doctor, shows how frequently women wage-labourers fell ill, and that these illnesses were engendered by their conditions of working and living.

The number of cases treated in these seven months implies that almost every woman employee of the mills consulted the doctor while she was attending the mills. As we can see from the figures, gynaecological problems were amongst the least significant of the ailments which women suffered from. Several of the "diseases" were induced solely by conditions at work : such as headaches, arthritis or myalgia; and some were at least partially induced by working conditions : such as asthma, phthisis or eye, ear, throat and skin infections. Yet the only connection in which improvements of working conditions were suggested was that of maternity; Balfour and Talpode, for example, suggested that in the last months of pregnancy women workers be allowed to sit and work rather than work standing.<sup>26</sup> And a standard suggestion of social work organisations, one which was finally legislated upon in the mid-1930s, was that rest rooms be provided for pregnant women (note : not for women suffering from headaches or arthritis), and crèches for children.

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<sup>26</sup> Balfour and Talpode, op.cit., p. 365, and again, p. 366.

TABLE II.3

Welfare Work : Tata Group of Mills : Report on  
Female Operatives Treated by Lady Doctor<sup>27</sup>

Diseases and number of cases treated	Sept. 1923	Oct. 1923	Nov. 1923	Dec. 1923	Apr. 1924	May 1924	June 1924	Total
1. Ailmentary system (dyspepsia, diarrhoea, constipation, dysentery and intestinal worm).	53	53	64	81	87	45	66	449
		+		+				
		stom-		stom-				
		atis		atis				
2. Eye, ear, throat, skin.	33	43	37	49	53	45	74	334
3. Infectious fevers: malaria and dengue.	39	38	45	47	36	39	47	291
4. Muscular and articular system (nyalgia and arthritis)	14	27	21	16	27	12	26	143
5. Respiratory system (bronchitis, pneumonia, phthisis, bronchopneumonia & asthma)	20	21	15	21	19	22	19	137
6. Blood, lymphatic & ductless glands.	11	16	25	19	14	18	9	112
7. Nervous system (headache).	18	13	20	19	16	14	10	110
8. Gynaecological.	4	3	7	14	5	9	13	55
9. Injuries.	7	4	4	1	9	5	7	37
10. Urinary system		1	3	2			1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>1675</b>

27 Compiled from the Labour Gazette, volumes for Oct. 1923 - July 1924. I have changed the order of the diseases, giving them here by the scale of numbers treated. Henceforth referred to as L.G.

Almost a third of the women treated suffered from stomach infections, engendered partly by the poor sanitation in the chawls, but partly also by infected drinking water, both at the chawls and at the factories. The state of water tanks was so bad in some factories that in October, 1930, all the workers of the Khatau Makenji Mill went on a one-day strike, demanding that the water be purified by both scientific and religious means (that is, they asked for a water inspector to check the tanks, and a priest to perform purificatory rites). October was the month in which a cholera epidemic hit Bombay briefly. The Management agreed to both demands.<sup>28</sup>

It is noteworthy, however, that philanthropists did not take up any such issue; and that neither Marxist trade - unionists nor reformist leaders of the labour movement were involved in this strike. It seems that the ideas of workers as to their problems, in this context, or the issues which they acted upon, were quite different from those of social workers, reformers and philanthropists. While workers were agitating against retrenchment and for more wages, bonus or daily allowances, philanthropists were discussing maternity benefits and child marriage.

Debates on the payment of maternity benefits in fact began almost a decade before the Act was passed, soon after the Washington Conference of 1919 which recommended that legislation on this issue be enacted by all Governments. Though one mill-owner in Ahmedabad and one in Sholapur were already paying benefits, no

mill in Bombay did so before 1921.<sup>29</sup> Between January, 1921, and March, 1922, 9 mills in Bombay introduced maternity benefit schemes, that is to say, a little over 10 per cent of the mills in Bombay paid such benefits. In fact, of the 9 that did, 2 - the David Mills No. 1 and 2 - discontinued their schemes after three years, at the end of 1923. According to information given by them, 65 women applied for and were paid the benefit of two months wages in 1923 alone, which gives us an idea of the popularity of the scheme. No reasons were given for discontinuing it, but perhaps the Management decided the scheme was expensive, and since few other mills paid benefits did not see any reason why they should continue to do so. These were the only mills in the Sassoon group to pay benefits before the Maternity Benefit Act of 1929.

Under all the schemes two months wages were paid, for one month before and one month after confinement. In the Pearl Mills this latter sum was paid six weeks after confinement, even though the amount given continued to be four weeks wages. Moreover, the Management did not seem to have gone to any pains in disseminating information on the working of the schemes:

"It was noted that the women worked right up to the end of the month in expectation of receiving the wages earned for the month as well as the benefit. The benefit was however not given and such cases have now decreased."<sup>30</sup>

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29 The two mills were the Ahmedabad New Textile Mills and the Sholapur Spinning and Weaving Company. For information on mills paying maternity benefits see R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 35.

30 R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 36.

In the Premier, Standard, Swadeshi and Tata Mills women were positively encouraged to work until one week, or "at least" a fortnight, before confinement. The Premier Mills actually regulated this by giving leave only two weeks before confinement and for six weeks after it. Their rules governing the payments of maternity benefits followed those formulated by the Tatas :

"Rules and Regulations of Maternity Allowance

1. Any woman who has continuously put in at least 11 months service in the mill or any of its dependants may work a claim for maternity allowance.
2. The claim must be supported either by the mill doctor or any qualified medical practitioner, male or female.
3. The allowance given is to be for a period of two months, either one month before confinement or any other period suitable to individuals as the Manager shall decide, but not exceeding two months in all, and the amount paid shall be two months wages inclusive of all the usual allowances.
4. The date of payment of the allowance is to be at the Manager's discretion, and in no case shall the total amount of the allowance be paid in advance at once.
5. Every woman claiming this allowance must give an undertaking to the effect that, during the period for which she takes the allowance, she will not work in any mill, or factory, or engage herself in any occupation outside her home at all.
6. Should a woman go to her native place for confinement, she will leave her full address behind in the Manager's office, and will send intimation of delivery to the Manager, who may remit to her the necessary amount."<sup>31</sup>

Clearly a formidable amount of paperwork was necessary in order to collect the allowance. But the real catch was in Regula-

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<sup>31</sup> Published in the Indian Textile Journal, January 1925, p. 47. Henceforth referred to as I.T.J.

tion 1, in the use of the word "continuously." In effect, this could be interpreted in such a way as to disbar women who participated in strikes, took ad hoc leave, were sick, or absent from work without leave for any reason. In fact, this proved to be a problem in the early 1930s, after the Maternity Benefit Act of 1929 was passed. But I am anticipating events.

In spite of Regulation 1, reports suggest that the Tata scheme was the only one which was at all effective. In an article published in October, 1921, G.M. Broughton said that there were no "actual" maternity benefit schemes in Bombay apart from that of the Tatas. She also discussed the recommendations of the Washington Conference, and compared them with the existing situation in Bombay : where the Washington Conference recommended six weeks maternity leave before confinement and six weeks after, the common practice of women workers was to take two weeks off before confinement and two weeks after. At regular intervals during the working day, mothers would take time off to nurse their babies, but this practice had not been systematised through legislation, nor through individual factory rules.<sup>32</sup> Since most women were piece-workers, taking time off to nurse their babies meant losing money; moreover, since there were no regulations allowing them to take time off for this purpose, their freedom to do so was dependant on the attitudes of their nakins (supervisors).

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<sup>32</sup> G.M. Broughton : "Maternity Benefit for Indian Industrial Workers," I.T.J., October, 1921, p. 19.

In 1922, Kanji Dwarkadas attempted to move a resolution demanding the introduction of legislation for maternity benefits in the Bombay Legislative Council, but was refused permission to do so by Sir George Lloyd, on the grounds that such legislation could be handled only by the Central Government. Sir Ibrahim Rahimtoola, one of the Rahimtoola family of mill-owners, added that the Government felt that legislation on the lines of the Washington Conference recommendations was "unnecessary at present."<sup>33</sup>

For the next two years, the matter rested there. Then, in July 1924, S.K. Bose moved a resolution in the Bombay Legislative Council, urging the Central Government to introduce legislation for the provision of maternity benefits "in all organized industries of India." The Bombay Government decided that such legislation would be premature, but they conceded that the matter required some investigation.<sup>34</sup>

In August, 1924, N.M. Joshi introduced a Bill in the Bombay Legislative Council, which proposed the following measures for the provision of maternity benefits :

1. It prohibited women's employment for six weeks after confinement and allowed her the right to stop working six weeks before confinement, on the production of a medical certificate. Under the Bill, pregnant women were entitled to a maternity allowance which would be paid by the local Government, out of a fund called the Maternity Benefit Fund.

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<sup>33</sup> Kanji Dwarkadas, op.cit., p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 37.



2. If the woman was to die during confinement, the benefit would be paid to whoever undertook to care for the child.
3. All employers were prohibited from dismissing women who were absent from work either six weeks before or six weeks after confinement. Any employer breaking the provisions of the Bill would be liable to a fine of upto Rs. 500.<sup>35</sup>

In 1926 this Bill was defeated. After another two-year gap, R.S. Asavle introduced a Bill in the Legislative Council, for the provision of maternity benefits. The Bill, proposed in July, 1928, two months after the general strike had started, was along the lines of N.M. Joshi's Bill, with one important difference : it placed the responsibility for paying benefits on the shoulders of mill-owners and not the Government. Even so, the Government's attitude towards maternity benefits remained unchanged :

"Government opposed Mr Asavale's Maternity Benefits Bill, to grant such benefits to factory women, on the grounds of impracticality, cost, etc. However, Government was defeated, and the Bill has been sent up to a Select Committee, who have been given carte blanche, even in regard to the main principles, to redraft the Bill, if necessary, and to examine the best way of distributing and meeting the cost."<sup>36</sup>

The Bill produced by the Select Committee, which was finally passed as an Act on the 15th of March, 1929, had the following provisions :

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<sup>35</sup> L.G., report : "Mr Joshi's Proposed Bill on Maternity Benefits," August 1924, p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Fortnightly Reports, Home Department, Political, Knight to Haig, No. S.D. 882, August 8.

1. It entitled women workers in Bombay factories, and in certain other cities in the Presidency, to maternity leave and benefit for seven weeks; three weeks before, and four after, confinement. A flat rate of 8 annas per day was to be paid to each woman, and the entire cost was to be born by the employers.
2. The benefit was to be paid only on production of the birth registration certificate, that is, after childbirth.
3. The Act required women to work until the first week of the ninth month of pregnancy.
4. It required six months continuous service of the woman in order to entitle her to claim the benefit.<sup>37</sup>

The problems created by all the provisions of the Act were enormous. As shown by Balfour and Talpode, it was before childbirth that the woman needed rest most - and yet under provision 1, she was given only three weeks before confinement. If she were to take more than that off, she would lose her claim to the benefit. Secondly, the payment of the benefit only after childbirth meant that the woman could not use it to buy better food for herself, etc. Finally, the requirement of six months of "continuous" service permitted the same misuse by employers as the Tata regulation had done. The Textile Labour Enquiry Committee Report of 1940, in fact, quotes cases in which this regulation had

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37 R.C.L.I., Vol. I, Part I, p. 367.

been misused (or perhaps, had been used as intended?), and also lists the various ingenious ways by which this regulation allowed capitalists to evade the payment of maternity benefit. The guiding principle in all these evasions was a strict interpretation of the terms of "service." That is, any break in service meant that the qualifying period for claiming the benefit would have to be re-worked. Thus, if a woman was discharged and then re-employed, the qualifying period would not include her previous months of wage-slavery, but would start from her re-engagement. The same interpretation applied to strikes and closures.<sup>38</sup>

In December, 1933, the Act was amended. While one of its amendments extended the qualifying period from six to nine months, making it even more difficult for women to claim benefits, another added a new twist to the system of evasion. Under the 1929 Act, a woman who was discharged from work upon the closing of a factory was held to have been dismissed. Dismissal entitled her to claim the benefit, if she had completed the qualifying period of work.

The amendment said :

"A woman entitled to maternity benefit shall not be deemed dismissed within the provisions of section 8, if she is discharged on account of the closing of the factory in which she is employed."<sup>39</sup>

Between August 1932 and August 1933, there had been twelve strikes of women workers alone in the cotton textile industry.

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38 Textile Labour Enquiry Committee Report, 1940, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1942, Vol. I, pp. 307-8. Henceforth referred to as T.L.E.C.R.

39 L.G., December 1933, pp. 264-65.

The two major causes of these strikes were reductions in wages and retrenchment. Several mills had closed down owing to the depression, and many were cutting down on the numbers of workers they employed, especially in the "unskilled" departments of winding and reeling. Framed in this context, the amendment withdrew one of the few rights of women workers, paving the way for capitalists to close down their mills with minimum liability.

Yet another amendment raised the period for payment of maternity benefit from seven to eight weeks, but, in a period of soaring prices and growing unemployment, retained the flat rate of 8 annas per day. The sole improvement in these amendments was that one of them divided the period of payment into pre and post-maternity, and allowed half the benefit to be paid before confinement, so that it was possible for the woman worker to use one month's pay to buy nourishment for her foetus.<sup>40</sup>

The conditions regulating the payment of maternity benefits seem to improve as the numbers of women employed decrease. In fact, the Act itself seems to have been passed only as a palliative to the introduction of rationalization schemes from 1928 onwards, which retrenched workers in all occupations, but particularly in the unskilled departments of winding and reeling. The great strike of 1928 was against the introduction of rationalization schemes and retrenchment. The strikers lost their demands but were presented with the Maternity Benefit Act. Though there is no direct evidence to support this thesis, it appears plausible

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40 Annual Factories Report, 1934, in L.G., August 1935, pp. 960-67.

to interpret the speedy enactment of Asavia's Bill (after six years of procrastination), as being a sop to make rationalization slightly more tolerable.

Unfortunately for this ploy, the depression created conditions in which even the payment of maternity benefits became a cost which the mill-owners wished to avoid. In fact the depression was, in this context, convenient for the mill-owners since, in the face of mass closures, rationalization appeared as a side effect instead of a goal. After a last attempt to oppose rationalization, in the general strike of 1934, when the workers again lost their demands, it was accepted as a fait accompli of the depression.

It was therefore in 1936, after the industry had taken a turn for the better, that some slight action on implementing the Act was taken. With women now constituting less than 16 per cent of the labour force in cotton textiles, mill-owners could afford to make a few gestures in the right direction :

"The usual period of maternity benefit leave is two months, but having regard to the exceptional nature of this type of absence, a woman should be allowed to retain a lien on her job for a period of three months when the absence is due to maternity."<sup>41</sup>

Given that this statement was merely a recommendation issued by the Mill-Owners Association to all its affiliates, it was no more than a gesture. The Association did not have powers of ratification. The two other actions on maternity benefit which

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41 Mill-Owners Association, Circular No. 561/45 A dated 6 March 1936. Henceforth referred to as M.O.A.

followed this one were of the same kind. In December, 1936, the Municipality offered to issue birth certificates "free of charge" on condition that the applicant produced a certificate from her Mill Manager, saying that the birth certificate was required in order to settle maternity allowances.<sup>42</sup> In March, 1937, the Mill-Owners Association formulated a "standard form of notice to be given by women operatives going on maternity leave." The notice included a statement from the Mill Manager, addressed to the Municipality, requesting a birth certificate, and copies of the form were circulated to all Mills affiliated to the Association. It was suggested that these forms "should be made available free of charge to women operatives who wish to go on maternity leave."<sup>43</sup> However the forms were printed in English, and no suggestion of translating them seems to have been made, so they would have been incomprehensible even to women who could read.

Records kept by the Government as to the working of the Maternity Benefit Act in Bombay Presidency indicate that the rate of claimants for maternity benefits was consistently lower in Bombay city than in Ahmedabad or Sholapur, even though the number of women employed by the Bombay cotton textile industry was far greater than those employed in Ahmedabad and Sholapur. It seems likely that the reason for this was the high proportion of widows employed by Bombay mill-owners. The women employed by the

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42 M.O.A. Circular No. 5379/3 dated 22 December, 1936.

43 M.O.A. Circular No. 1285/37 dated 25 March, 1937.

Ahmedabad and Sholapur cotton textile industry were drawn from the immediate vicinity of the two cities, and tended to be married to workers in Ahmedabad or Sholapur, or to be their relatives. By contrast, a large number of the women workers in the Bombay mills were migrants from the Konkan; many of them widows who had been pushed by circumstances into leaving their villages.<sup>44</sup>

TABLE II.4

The Working of the Bombay Maternity Benefit Act, 1929,  
for the years 1933-1939, in Bombay city,  
Ahmedabad and Sholapur<sup>45</sup>

Year	Av. No. of women employed daily	Av. No. of women who claimed maternity benefit, Section 6 (1)	No. of women who were paid maternity benefits for actual births	No. of other persons who were paid maternity benefits, Section 7	Total am. of maternity benefits paid.	Claims paid per 100 women employed
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>B O M B A Y C I T Y</b>						
					Rs. as. p.	
1933	21,744	961	771	9	18,208 8 0	3.5
1934	22,155	1,362	1,248	10	28,780 5 0	5.7
1935	26,350	1,589	1,405	18	36,420 5 3	5.4
1936	23,977	1,924	1,846	22	48,428 13 0	7.8
1937	26,689	1,705	1,510	19	40,911 6 0	5.7
1938	28,882	1,841	1,677	20	44,599 15 9	5.9
1939	24,837	1,970	1,767	22	47,769 10 0	7.2

44 See the F. B. S., Ahmedabad, 1927, for a discussion of this.

45 Compiled from the Annual Factory Report, 1933-1939.

Cont'd... Table II.4

A H M E D A B A D								Rs.	a.	p.
Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
1933	11,175	1,349	1,270	8	30,411	4	0	11.3		
1934	11,150	1,830	1,756	7	43,131	8	0	15.8		
1935	10,386	1,426	1,339	8	33,873	0	0	12.9		
1936	9,528	1,294	1,179	5	31,068	0	0	12.4		
1937	10,168	1,105	968	4	26,625	5	0	9.6		
1938	10,624	1,210	1,035	3	27,643	6	6	9.8		
1939	9,502	1,397	1,247	5	33,708	2	6	13.2		

S H O L A P U R								
Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1933	4,352	452	311	4	7,595	8	0	7.2
1934	4,080	535	473	35	11,286	9	9	12.4
1935	4,236	620	567	1	11,350	14	3	13.4
1936	3,879	514	477	-	9,876	6	0	12.3
1937	4,229	486	438	1	8,874	15	3	10.4
1938	4,998	584	522	-	10,893	10	0	10.4
1939	5,266	692	624	1	14,216	11	9	11.9

As against this, the Bombay mill-owners did not pay fewer claims in proportion to claimants than the Ahmedabad and Sholapur mill-owners did. Though the proportions of women who claimed maternity benefits to the totals employed daily were much lower in Bombay than in Ahmedabad or Sholapur, the proportions of claims accepted to total claims were much the same in all three centres, with a few qualifications. Of these, the most striking is that in 1933 Ahmedabad mill-owners were by far the readiest payers of maternity benefits, while the Sholapur mill-owners were



clearly the most reluctant to honour obligation. As the years wore on, however, all three centres stabilised into an even 90 per cent payment of claims:

TABLE II.5

Proportions of women workers who claimed maternity benefits and proportions of claims paid, 1933-1939, in Bombay city, Ahmedabad and Sholapur <sup>46</sup>

Year	Proportion of women claiming maternity benefit to total women employed daily, (in %)			Proportion of claims paid to total claims made, (in %)		
	Bombay	Ahmedabad	Sholapur	Bombay	Ahmedabad	Sholapur
1933	4.4	12.1	9.5	80.2	94.1	75.5
1934	6.2	16.4	13.1	91.6	96.0	88.4
1935	6.0	13.7	14.6	88.4	93.4	91.5
1936	8.0	13.6	13.3	95.9	91.1	92.8
1937	6.4	10.9	11.5	88.6	87.6	90.1
1938	6.4	11.4	11.7	91.1	85.5	89.4
1939	7.9	14.7	13.1	89.7	89.3	90.2

After the 1933 Amendments, the amount of the benefit, at the rate of 8 annas per day for the eight week period, should have been Rs. 28. At no point was this full amount paid in any of the three centres, though over the years the amount paid gradually increased in Bombay and Ahmedabad. For some reason it actually decreased in Sholapur, which at all times paid substantially less than the other two centres did.

<sup>46</sup> Computed from Table II.5.

TABLE II.6

Average amount paid per claim, 1933-1939, in Bombay city, Ahmedabad and Sholapur<sup>47</sup>

Year	Amount (in Rs.)		
	Bombay	Ahmedabad	Sholapur
1933	23.3	23.8	24.1
1934	22.5	24.5	22.2
1935	25.6	25.2	19.9
1936	25.9	26.2	20.7
1937	26.8	27.4	20.2
1938	26.3	26.6	20.9
1939	26.7	26.9	22.8

#### IV Conclusion

Between 1919 and 1939, reformers grew increasingly pre-occupied with the moral attitudes of workers, their sexual proclivities, and the health and welfare of their children. I hope now to show that these concerns centred upon a notion of the working class family and a desire to reform it.

Describing a parallel reform movement in France in the 1840s and 1850s, Jacques Donzelot suggests that one of the major objectives of this movement was to privatize the home and to transform it from the seat of "autarchic power" into the seat of "labour power." As part of this process of transformation, it was also necessary to change the family space from a "social one"

47 Ibid.

into an "enclave of surveillance and peace." In using the phrase "social space" Donzelot refers to the practice of sub-letting, which he links to the old family mode of production in which artisans took in apprentices as lodgers, or in which joint families lived and farmed together. This, he says, made the family into "a relay in the daily rounds."<sup>48</sup>

When contrasting this to the new idea of the family as an "enclave of surveillance", Donzelot is referring to two things:

1. The new sexual morality which decreed that the earlier, social, form of living was "immoral", and wished the home to be an area in which the nuclear family alone would dwell. As ordained by this morality, the ideal space would be one in which adults would sleep separately from children and boys and girls would be segregated, so that morality could be monitored. We have seen that in Bombay the first step towards achieving this ideal was the prohibition on sub-letting, followed by demands from philanthropists that a legal limit be set on the numbers of people living in any one tenement. The number they chose as ceiling was 4 to 5 people : that is, the nuclear family.
2. The second point he makes is that the new morality held the wife to be a regulator of the family conscience and behaviour. Donzelot describes the premises of this morality thus:

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48 Jacques Donzelot, op.cit., p. 37.

"The industrial labour of girls, single women, and poor wives was recognised as an occasional necessity, but not as their normal lot in life. If the man were to improve his situation through stability and professional merit, the woman would be able to remain at home and make use of abilities that would turn it into a true interior domain ... This inflection that was introduced into the feminine career gave men back the impression, if not the reality, of their former patriarchal power by guaranteeing them the primary responsibility in providing for the home, and placed women in the position of constant watchfulness over their men, since wives would have an interest in the regularity of their husbands' professional and hence social life, as their own chances of betterment depended on it."<sup>49</sup>

One of the most frequent complaints of trade union leaders from the 1950s onwards, in India, has been that women exercised a restraining influence on their husbands' militancy, that they were strike-breakers, anti-communist, etc. So common is this complaint that it has almost become a truism, leading to an analysis of women's character as essentially conservative. In the next chapter, I try to show that such conservatism is in fact a recent historical phenomenon and that it is linked with the increasing privatization of the home, the development of the nuclear family and its transformation from an autarchic productive unit, into a unit of consumerism and the reproduction of labour power.

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49 Jacques Donzelot, op.cit., p. 40.

CHAPTER III  
REFORMULATING REALITY

I Introduction : In Search of A Family

Attempts to define the working class family are present in many Government reports of the period, from the 1922 Family Budget Survey conducted by the Bombay Labour Office onwards. So far a flexible form, the family was transformed by the 1922 report into a "unit", comprising father, mother and children. This unit was termed the "self-contained" family, and held to be representative of working class families in the period. 82.1 per cent of their sampled budgets were of this kind. The average size of a working class family, according to this Survey, was 4.2 : 1.1 men, 1.1 women and 2 children under 14, "exclusive of 0.6 dependants living away from it."<sup>1</sup> The Survey defines "dependants" as consisting of "relatives living away from the family and partially or wholly relying for their maintenance on the remittance from Bombay."<sup>2</sup>

In the Family Budget Survey of 1932, the "self-contained unit" was renamed the "natural family", outlawing at one stroke

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1 Working Class Family Budget Survey, 1921-22, Bombay Labour Office, Government Central Press, Bombay, 1923, p. 7. Henceforth referred to as F.B.S.

2 F.B.S., 1921-22, p. 6.

the joint family of several centuries. Here again the "natural family" was held to be the form representative of working class families, but, strangely enough in the face of this claim, the proportion of natural families to total families surveyed seems to have dwindled from 82 per cent in 1922 to around 66 per cent in 1931-32. The size of the family too had dwindled, from 4.2 in 1922 to 3.7 in 1932, while the "number of dependants living away from the family" rose slightly to 0.69.<sup>3</sup> This decline in family size is rather puzzling, given that the 1932 Survey shows an increase in the numbers of joint families, from 17.9 per cent in 1922 to 34 per cent in 1932. The compilers of the Survey suggest that the seeming decline in family size is due rather to differences in sampling method between the 1922 Survey and the 1932 Survey than to actual changes. According to them, the 1922 Survey revealed a larger family size because it chose to sample families of "father, mother and children" primarily, while the 1932 Survey showed families "as they were", that is to say, it included childless couples.<sup>4</sup> While it is true that the sampling procedures of the 1922 Survey were somewhat selective,<sup>5</sup> they did include figures for childless couples. Moreover,

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3 F.B.S., 1932-33, p. 11.

4 F.B.S., 1932-33, p. 8.

5 Attempts were made to select as far as possible a self-contained family consisting of a husband, wife and children. It was, however, discovered that families were made up of more than two adults and these were, therefore, included." F.B.S., 1921-22, p. 4.

though the fertility rate probably declined between 1921 and 1931, so did rates of infant mortality, so there were more live infants proportionately in 1931 than in 1921. My estimated fertility rates show that there were 1020 births per 1000 mothers in 1921, while there were 791 births per 1000 mothers in 1931. These are figures for live births only, since still birth figures for these two years were not available. When we consider that the average rate of still births per 1000 mothers from the "mill-worker class", under the best conditions, was 115 in 1930, then we can estimate by how great a degree these fertility rates are an underestimation.<sup>6</sup> I have given them here only for the comparison between 1921 and 1931. However sharp the decline in fertility rates might have been in this decade, it was offset by a decline in the figures of infant mortality: while in 1921 there were 348 children aged between 0-5 per 1000 women aged between 15-45, in 1931 the comparative figure was 507:1000.<sup>7</sup> If anything, the family size would have increased rather than decreased.

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6 These fertility rates have been calculated by dividing the total number of married women aged 15-45 by the total number of live infants aged 0-5, and then adding infant mortality figures for those particular years. Infant mortality figures for 1931 were not available, but I had figures for 1927 and 1936 (See Table II.2), so I calculated the infant mortality rate for 1931 from these two sets of figures. For the figures of married women aged 15-45 and infants aged 0-5 I used the census of India tables on Age, Sex and Civil Condition, for 1921 and 1931. See C.O.I., 1921, Vol. IX, Part II, pp. xi-xiii and C.O.I., 1931, Vol. IX, Part II, p. 167.

7 C.O.I., 1921, Vol. IX, Part II, p. 24; and C.O.I., Vol. IX, Part II, p. 170.

This thesis is corroborated by the 1930 Labour Office Enquiry into the family budgets of cotton mill workers in Bombay city, which gave remarkably divergent figures for size of the working class family. According to this survey, the average size of the family was 5.46 people, of whom 3.58 lived in Bombay and 1.88 away. This latter number is three times that of the 1932 survey. The fact that the 1930 enquiry referred to cotton mill workers alone is not particularly significant in explaining the difference between family sizes given in it and in 1932, for around 70 per cent of the 1932 budgets were also of cotton mill-workers. Equally, the argument that due to disturbed conditions the head of the family may have sent some "dependants" to the village, while providing a plausible explanation for the swell of out-city dependants, leaves a further problem : if these people properly belonged to the in-city family, then its size would have been 4.76, a number which is considerably larger than that given in the 1932 enquiry.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, between 1921 and 1931, the proportion of "dependants" to actual workers rose sharply. In 1921, 39 per cent of the total population of Bombay city were "dependants" while 61 per cent were actual workers; in 1931, 51 per cent were "dependants" while only 49 per cent were workers.<sup>9</sup> Equally, the proportion of the population under 15 years old to the total population

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8 "An Enquiry into the Family Budgets of Cotton Mill Workers," p. 476, Bombay Labour Office, 1930, published in the L.G. Jan., 1931, pp. 473-89.

9 C.O.I., 1931, Vol. IX, "Cities of Bombay Presidency", Part I, p. 20.



showed an increase : from 21.1 per cent in 1921, to 24.4 per cent in 1931, to 26.1 per cent in 1941. At the same time, there was a decline in the numbers of people married :

TABLE III.1

Percentages of the Population Married, Unmarried and Widowed to the Total Population, by Sex<sup>10</sup>

Year	Married		Unmarried		Widowed	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1921	59.83	55.75	37.01	29.67	3.16	14.58
1931	59.70	53.81	38.38	35.05	1.92	11.14
1941	53.19	48.50	43.80	39.75	3.01	11.75

The decline in numbers of people married appears to be due in part to a increase in age at marriage. This was most noticeable in the decade 1931-41 (See Table III.2).

In the 10-15 age group, this increase in age of marriage took place mainly between 1921 and 1931; but in the 15-20 and 20-25 age groups 1931-41 were the decisive years. It would appear from this that we see a continuous rise in the age of marriage : while 31 per cent of the women aged 10-15 were married in 1921, only 13 per cent of them were married in 1931; while 73 per cent of the women aged 15-20 were married in 1931, only 58 per cent were married in 1941. The equivalent decline for men

<sup>10</sup> Compiled from the "Age, Sex and Civil Condition Tables" C.O.I., 1921, Vol. IX, Part II, pp. xi-xii; the C.O.I., 1931, Vol. IX, Part II, p. 167, and C.O.I., 1951, Paper No. 10, "Area Tables B on 7 sample, p. 2.

TABLE III.2

Age, Sex, and Civil Condition : Variations in Proportions of Married Population, Bombay City, 1921-41<sup>11</sup>

Age	Men*			Women*		
	1921	1931	1941	1921	1931	1941
0-5	0.7	0.5	1.1	1.0	0.5	0.6
5-10	1.8	1.9	1.5	4.8	3.3	2.4
10-15	8.2	4.7	3.1	31.0	13.8	12.7
15-20	25.3	33.3	16.8	75.4	73.2	58.3
20-25	54.8	53.3	45.5	86.5	85.5	83.6
25-30	75.2	81.9	70.5	86.4	89.9	87.2
30-35	85.8	87.7	85.3	81.0	86.9	84.7
35-40	88.4	91.0	88.3	71.1	72.8	74.8
40-45	88.5	90.6	88.4	64.2	62.3	61.3
45-50	86.6	87.7	86.2	47.0	42.3	43.6
50-55	82.6	85.4	81.8	33.9	35.3	35.8
55-60	80.4	79.2	77.2	33.2	25.4	24.7
60-65	75.9	76.2	71.9	21.1	22.8	18.6
65-70	70.4	72.3	66.7	22.1	21.4	16.7
70 +	67.7	70.0	62.8	18.6	20.9	16.3

\* These figures are percentages of married men or women within each age group to the total population of men or women within that age group.

is from 8.2 per cent to 4.7 per cent in the age group 10-15 in 1921 and 33 per cent to 16.8 per cent in the age group 15-20 between 1931 and 1941. In general men got married much later than women did, and women were widowed far younger and in far greater number than men were.

<sup>11</sup> Compiled from the "Age, Sex and Civil Condition" tables, C.O.I., 1921, Vol. IX, Part II, pp. xi-xii; C.O.I., 1931, Vol. IX, Part II, p. 167, and C.O.I., 1951, Paper No. 10, "Area Tables B on Y Sample", p. 2.

Even though the age of marriage was rising, and overall, fewer people were getting married, there was a rise in the number of married men who brought their families to the city. The proportion of this category to the total figures for married men was : 48.9 per cent in 1921; 49.9 per cent in 1931; and 53 per cent in 1941.<sup>12</sup>

Taken together, these factors seem to indicate a rise in the numbers of working class families in Bombay city, and a rise in the size of these families. That is to say, there were a larger number of unmarried sons and daughters living with their parents than before, and the number of "dependants", which include widowed parents of wage earners, etc., had risen.

The decline in numbers of people marrying in this period, and the rise in age of marriage was caused partly by the spiralling retrenchment of women which reduced the numbers of wage-earners per family quite considerably and aided in the growing pauperisation of the working classes in Bombay city. The extent of pauperisation is shown by an increase in the numbers of families earning below Rs. 40 per month.

When in 1932, the Family Budget Survey defined the "natural family" as consisting of "members who have a right to be fed, housed and clothed by the head of the family, that is to say, the wife and unmarried children of an individual,"<sup>13</sup> it

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12 Percentages compiled from the same C.O.I. tables which were used to compile Table III.2.

13 F.B.S., 1932-33, p. 6.

sounded like wishful thinking. Women constituted 21.95 per cent of the labour force in the cotton textile industry by then, and in around 30 per cent of the natural families surveyed by the Family Budgeteers the woman (wife and mother) worked. All of them were in the Rs. 30-50 income groups, and most belonged to families whose total income was less than Rs. 40. 27 per cent of the total budgets considered by the Survey were in this category, and there was no way in which they could make ends meet had the woman not worked.<sup>14</sup> Given these conditions, it is difficult to understand the foundations on which this straw man, the patriarch of the modern "natural family", was built.

Yet the statement was made, and made in the context of rapid rationalization of the industry and its consequent retrenchment of women. Two points are noteworthy about the statement : first, that this definition of the family contravened customary "law" in India, under which parents had a right to be supported by their sons, brothers acknowledged a responsibility to each other, to widowed sisters and daughters-in-law and even to distant relatives. This is not a semantic point, since the size of the family, and the financial obligations of its "head" had a distinct bearing on the budgets considered adequate to support a family. The smaller the family, the lower the costs of maintaining it, and hence the lower the wage required.

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14 F.B.S., 1932-33, pp. 9-14.

The second point is that this statement makes explicit the notion of a "family wage", that is, that the wage of the man alone should suffice to support the whole family. Notably, none of the earlier official reports made this point : though the woman's wage appears always to have been a "supplementary wage" (i.e., it was not expected that women would support their families entirely), the man's wage was not earlier considered to be a "family wage."

Given the changes in industrial organisation which were to follow, this statement of a "family wage" sounds prophetic. According to the 1932 Family Budget Survey, the proportion of workers to dependants was 41.4 per cent as to 58.6 per cent;<sup>15</sup> in 1944 this proportion became 34.9 per cent as to 65.1 per cent. While women workers constituted 22 per cent of the total workers in the 1932 Survey, by 1944 they constituted only 18 per cent. And, as far as the number of wage-earners per family was concerned, there was a continuous decline in their figures from 1920 to 1940. While in 1921 46.5 per cent of the families surveyed by the Family Budget Survey had two or more wage-earners, in 1932 there were 43.8 per cent of such families and in 1944 there

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<sup>15</sup> These figures are rather different from those given on p. 69 here. A probable explanation for the difference is that while the figures on p. 69 were for all Bombay, these represent mainly cotton textile workers' families. The fact that there was a higher proportion of dependants to workers for such families could indicate a larger family size.

were only 33 per cent.<sup>16</sup> The sharpest decline seems to have been between 1932 and 1944, which fits in nicely with the thesis that rationalization and the one-wage-per-family concept came in hand in hand.

When placed in this context, the 1932 statement on the "family wage" begins to read like a declaration of intent. After all, if 41.4 per cent of working class families in 1932 lived on the wages brought in by two or more workers, then it is difficult to believe that wives and children of male workers felt they had a "right" to be supported by their husbands and fathers. Yet this right was formulated by the 1932 Survey, and by 1940 the "family wage" had come to stay : according to the Textile Labour Enquiry Committee's report, it was not to be expected of the woman that she work since her domestic duties, which had first priority, would preclude wage-work. If at all the woman did engage in wage-labour, then it was economic hardship which forced her to do so, and her wage was intended to "supplement" the family income.<sup>17</sup>

This point about the woman's wage being a "supplementary wage" was also made by the 1932 Family Budget Survey, in a slightly different context :

"The controversy regarding the demand for equal pay for equal work is an old one but even to this day statistical proof is wanting, at least so far as the Indian working class is concerned, as re-

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16 For all these figures see F.B.S., 1932-33, p. 12; and F.B.S., 1944-46, pp. 13-15.

17 T.L.E.C.R., p. 305.

gards the extent to which women workers have to support dependants, especially children under 14 years of age. During the present enquiry information was specially gathered on this point and separately tabulated .... only in nine cases had a female worker any children under 14 years of age to support and in no case was the number of dependants more than two."<sup>18</sup>

This conclusion is somewhat peculiar, given that a fair proportion of women workers were widows. In a survey of the Saseoon Group of Mills, made between 1937 and 1941, Kanji Dwarkadas found that over a third of the women employed there were widows :

TABLE III.3

Classification of Women with Husbands Living and Widows, According to Age Groups<sup>19</sup>

Age group	Total women workers	Women with husbands living			Widows		
		No.	% to total in age group	% to total in category	No.	% to total in age group	% to total in category
below 20	74	71	95.9	2.8	3	4.1	0.2
20-25	781	675	86.4	26.6	106	13.6	6.8
26-35	1851	1258	68.0	49.5	593	32.0	38.0
36-45	1006	439	43.6	17.3	567	56.4	36.3
46-55	359	93	25.9	3.6	266	74.1	17.1
Over 56	30	5	16.7	0.2	25	83.3	1.6
Total	4101	2541	62.0	100.0	1560	38.0	100

<sup>18</sup> F.B.S., 1932-33, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Kanji Dwarkadas, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

As can be seen from this table, a large number of widows were between 26 to 35 years old, and within the 36-45 age group widows outnumbered women with husbands living. Moreover, 55 per cent of these widows had children and 25 per cent of them had more than two children:

TABLE III.4  
Children of Widowed Women Workers, 1941<sup>20</sup>

Age of Women	Number of Women with				Total children
	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 and more than 4 children	
Below 20	-	-	1	-	1
20-25	24	13	7	2	46
26-35	150	95	45	26	136
36-45	149	95	51	42	337
46-55	74	39	24	17	154
Over 55	6	3	1	1	12
Total	403	245	129	89	866
% within each category to total	46.5	28.3	14.9	10.3	100.0

Certainly women with more than two children would have at least two "dependants under 14 years of age." Equally, even if those within the 36-45 age group had children who were wage-labourers, and adding to the family income, surely few in the

20 Kanji Dwerkadas, *op.cit.*, p. 104.



25-35 group would? And finally, would not these children, according to the methods of categorization used by the Family Budget Survey, be "supplementing" their mother's income? Would not she, as "head of the family", be the "principal breadwinner"? And, according to the principle of the "family wage", enunciated in 1932, would not this entitle her to a wage which, if not equal to the male wage, would at least suffice to support her family on?

So much for the rights and wrongs of widows. Kanji Dwarkadas, in the same survey, shows that of the women with husbands living, 25.9 per cent were married to men who were unemployed. 63.3 per cent of these men had wives who were between 20-35 years old.<sup>21</sup> Commenting on this figure, Kanji Dwarkadas notes :

"with regret that the husbands of 859 women were unemployed and the principal breadwinners of the family were the women themselves."<sup>22</sup>

Clearly he was a man to call a spade a spade, unlike the mealy-mouthed Labour Office budget-makers. Not that this directness could be of much help to women workers, to whose wage-work the label "supplementary", which was affixed in 1932, continues to adhere even today.

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21 Kanji Dwarkadas, op.cit., p. 100.

22 Ibid., p. 99.

## II The Slough of Labour

"Should any allowance be made for the possible earnings of a wife? It has been argued that, under a proper interpretation of the term 'living wage standard', a wife should be spared for the duties of the household and for looking after the children. She cannot be and should not be expected to supplement the earnings by extra paid work...

To this an important consideration has to be added, in our case, an argument of another type. An allowance for the earnings of the wife can only be made if it is always or at least ordinarily possible for the wife to obtain suitable gainful employment. On this point the evidence of the family budget studies is overwhelmingly clear. They show that in a vast majority of cases the wife was not, in actual fact, in any employment."<sup>23</sup>

So far I have shown how the attitudes of the State, of capitalists and of reformers towards the working class family all tended to re-inforce the notion that women's wage labour was "supplementary" to the family income, which was earned by the male labourer. And we have seen in addition how this attitude revealed itself more strongly as the years advanced (and so did capitalism), culminating in the statement quoted above. I have tried also to show that when statements of this nature were first made they reflected intent rather than fact, since women's wage labour was anything but supplementary, being in a greater number of cases the sole family income. Furthermore, I have suggested that the intent underlying these statements was not to turn women's wage labour into supplementary labour but to assert that the "primary role" of women was to reproduce labour power. It follows from this that

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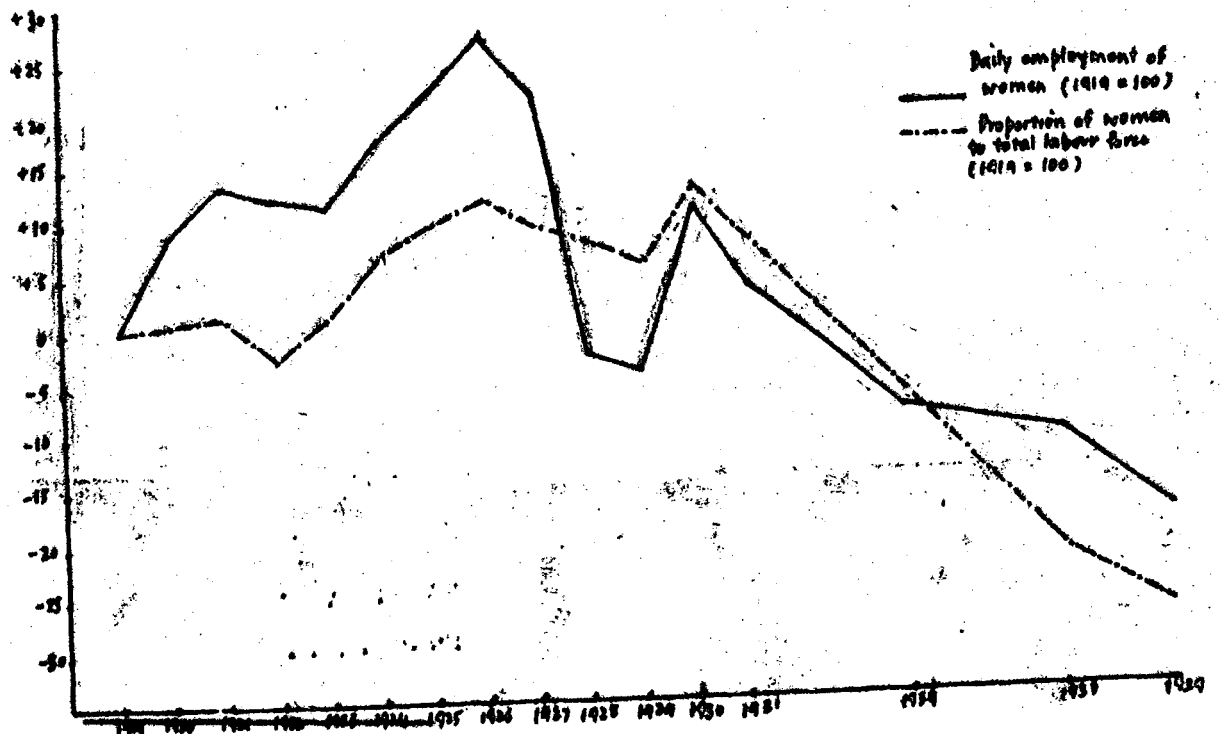
23 T.L.E.C.R., p. 305. Interestingly, male workers did not demand in Bombay, as they did in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, that women be retrenched and a family wage paid. See Heidi Hartmann : "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex", in Zillah R. Eisenstein (ed.) : Capitalist Patriarchy and the case for Socialist Feminism, Monthly Review Press, 1979.

to instate women in this position it was required that they be gradually withdrawn from wage labour. And in fact from the late 1920s onwards there was a steady fall in the number of women employed.

In 1919 women constituted 20.3 per cent of the labour force. In 1930, this proportion rose to 22.9 per cent, but from 1930 onwards there was a consistent decline in their numbers, from 18.9 per cent in 1934 to 14.9 per cent in 1939<sup>24</sup>. In absolute numbers, the peak year for the employment of women was 1926.

Graph III.1

Average Daily Employment of Women In the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1919-39<sup>25</sup>



24 M.D.Morris : The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 66.

25 Ibid., p. 66.

This graph shows that while the highest number of women workers in the industry was in 1926, the proportion of women workers to the total labour force was highest in 1930. Between 1926 and 1930 the fall in numbers of women employed was over 20 per cent : in fact, there was a corresponding fall in the numbers of men employed. 1928-29, the years of the great strike, saw a decline of almost 30,000 in the total labour force as compared to 1926. It is not surprising, therefore, that 1930 should show a sharp rise both in the total labour force and in the numbers of women employed. What is intriguing is that this was the year in which the proportions of women workers to the total labour force was highest, higher even than in 1926. In fact, between 1929 and 1930, the rise in the numbers of women employed was about 7 per cent greater than the increase of the total labour force. Why was this? Does it show that women were quicker to rejoin work than men, and if so, why? One possible explanation, supported by the evidence of Drs Balfour and Talpode, is that fewer women in proportion to their total numbers went back to their villages during the strike than men did. The women employed by the cotton textile industry were, after all, either married and living with their families in Bombay, or widows who had been forced to leave their villages by the reversion of property, pauperisation, or ill-treatment by their families. In either case they would have weaker links with their villages than many of the men who had come to Bombay alone in search of a living, leaving their families behind. Unfortunately, figures are not available to prove this hypothesis for all workers, but Kanji Dwarkadas' survey of women workers in the Sassoon Group of mills shows that roughly 30 per cent of them were

married to men working either in the same mill or in the cotton textile industry; that slightly over 30 per cent were married to men employed by other enterprises; and that almost 40 per cent of them were widows<sup>26</sup>.

Several questions are raised by these statistics. It is, after all, fairly unusual to find that such a large proportion of women workers were widows. In contrast, relatively few women workers in either the Ahmedabad or Sholapur textile industry were widows. Why was Bombay different? Where did these widows come from? What castes were they and under what circumstances did they migrate from their native villages and come to Bombay in search of work?

When we look at birthplace statistics for women mill workers we find that over 60 per cent of them came from Rutnagiri, and over 90 per cent from Bombay Presidency. The 1921 Census shows that 60.8 per cent of the women working in the Bombay cotton textile industry came from Rutnagiri; according to the Mill Owners' Association survey of 1940, 76.8 per cent of women mill workers came from the Konkan. (An increase in women's immigration from Rutnagiri can, however, be discounted, as the "Konkan" included Bombay Sub-urban, Poona and Thana. On the other hand, we cannot assume a fall in immigration either, since the Konkan excluding Rutnagiri supplied a fairly small proportion of immigrant mill workers : approximately 9 per cent in 1921<sup>27</sup>). Furthermore, Kanji Dwarkadas' survey of the

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26 Kanji Dwarkadas, op.cit., p. 98.

27 C.O.I., 1921, Vol. IX, Part II, p. xiv.

India United Group of mills shows that 65.7 per cent of the women workers came from Rutnagiri<sup>28</sup>.

These figures grow in significance when we see that in 1921 35.5 per cent of the total work force in the Bombay cotton textile industry were immigrants from Rutnagiri<sup>29</sup>, and around the same in 1940<sup>30</sup>. These figures would tend to indicate that a fairly high proportion of the mill hands from Rutnagiri were women : an indication which is substantiated by the Mill Owners' Association's proportionate district-wise breakdown of figures by departments. According to this breakdown, 23.2 per cent to the total immigrant workers from the Konkan were in the winding and reeling departments - that is, were women. Moreover, a high proportion of the women immigrants from Rutnagiri worked : 25.7 per cent of them in 1921 were workers; and at least 76.6 per cent of this figure were employed by the cotton textile industry<sup>31</sup>.

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28 Kanji Dwarkadas, op.cit., p. 98.

29 C.O.I., 1921, Vol. IX, Part II, p. xiv.

30 R.G.Gokhale : The Bombay Cotton Mill Worker, Bombay, the Mill Owners' Association, 1958, p. 17. The figure for total immigrants from the Konkan is given as 45 per cent of all mill hands. Of this, the proportion coming from Rutnagiri would probably be slightly over 35 per cent but it seems dangerous to hazard too precise a guess.

31 The C.O.I. of 1921 gives a breakdown of women mill workers by birthplace. They are divided into two categories : I. Mill operatives; II. Insufficiently described occupation. Both categories are put down as mill workers, but the totals thus arrived at outnumber the figures given for "average daily attendance", so I have taken the numbers in category I to give the percentage 76.6 and the two categories together for the percentage 25.7. The numbers for total women immigrants from Rutnagiri I got from birthplace statistics.

Given these figures, one would tend to assume that the ratio of women to men would also be amongst the highest for Rutnagiri immigrants. However, in 1921 the sex ratio of Rutnagiri immigrants ranked fairly low in E, F, and G Wards, taken by birthplace :

Table III.5  
Sex Ratio According to Birthplace, E, F, and G Wards, 1921-31<sup>32</sup>  
Women per 1000 men

Birthplace	E Ward		F Ward		G Ward	
	1921	1931	1921	1931	1921	1931
Nasik	842	633	868	795	700	660
Ahmednagar	830	792	856	781	746	734
Bombay city	814	787	841	813	804	791
Poona	766	755	803	713	646	568
Kolaba	633	703	669	597	693	727
Hyderabad (Deccan)	589	307	755	655	446	582
Thana	586	653	614	782	710	758
Rutnagiri	581	614	619	585	613	687
Kathiawar	573	525	604	606	512	719
Satara	555	634	563	573	564	614
Ahmedabad	528	533	516	488	328	657
Madras	490	607	395	550	370	466
Surat	474	611	429	622	590	723
Cutch	404	592	447	586	421	279
United Province	253	308	149	136	93	105

As we can see from this table, Rutnagiri ranked eighth in E

32 Compiled from the C.O.I., 1921, Vol. IX, Part II, pp. ix-xi; and the C.O.I., 1931, Vol. IX, Part II, pp. 165-66.

Ward in 1921 and seventh in F and G Wards. Immigrants from Nasik, Ahmednagar, Bombay city, Poona, Kolaba and Thana showed a higher sex ratio in all three wards, the difference approaching 200 between Rutnagiri and Nasik, Ahmedabad or Bombay city. By 1931, a slight evening out in sex ratios can be seen. However, Rutnagiri did not move up in place : in E Ward it retained its position of eighth, with Satara replacing Hyderabad; in F it was downgraded to eleventh; while in G it remained seventh.

How then do we explain the high proportion of women workers from Rutnagiri in comparison with its relatively low sex ratio? Firstly, the number of immigrants from Rutnagiri was far larger than the number of immigrants from any other part of the Presidency - particularly so for women immigrants. Even so, as has been shown, a higher proportion of Rutnagiri born immigrant women worked than from any other area, so this is by no means a complete explanation. According to one trade union activist, the reason for the large number of women workers from Rutnagiri was that the Muslims had had virtually no influence in the Konkan and therefore the ideology governing customs such as purdah, sexual segregation, etc., had held no sway<sup>33</sup>. This too can be at best only a partial explanation, for the Konkan would include Poona, Thana and the Bombay Suburban district. But if we put this together with Burnett-Hurst's statement that overpopulation drove large numbers to emigrate from Rutnagiri<sup>34</sup>, then we have something of an explanation for the huge number of

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33 Interview with D.S.Kulkarni of the Shramik Sangathana and formerly of the Lal Bavta Union, June 16, 1980.

34. A.R.Burnett-Hurst, op.cit., p. 10.



women workers from Rutnagiri, albeit that there are few details available to flesh out this explanation.

The large majority of women workers from Rutnagiri were Marathas or Kunbis. This caste constituted the greater proportion of women workers<sup>35</sup>; others were the Dhed, Mahar and Chamar sub-castes of the dalit community; and amongst the Muslims the two main groups were the Bohras and Sheikhs. Much has been said about the caste-class nexus, some of it asserting that caste undercuts class-consciousness and class unity; some of it asserting, on the contrary, that class weakened caste alliances. As can be expected, the problem was a more complex one. That workers defined themselves through caste groupings has been amply shown by Newman's study of the jobbers; equally, we know that the relations of caste helped to provide jobs, housing, support during times of need, etc.

Recent labour history in Europe and America has shown that the earlier, static view of community ties acting in opposition to class solidarity was a false one. As Ira Katznelson says :

"Under some circumstances, ethnic and racial ties may actually stimulate collective class activity ... Herbert Gutman has found that the process of industrializing native and immigrant rural and artisanal cultures in the United States, which has regularly recurred, has repeatedly provoked the kind of class-forming collisions that E.P.Thompson found to be the core elements in the making of the English working class ... Different though their particularistic pasts may be, most American workers share a heritage of material and cultural traumas, as well as common experiences in their present labours, which provide the potential for collaboration. Indeed, as Gutman shows, the highly differentiated community lives of ethnic workers often served

as separate but re-inforcing sources of refuge and energy for rebellion."<sup>36</sup>

The same is probably more difficult to show for Bombay, but it is not merely clear that women workers saw themselves as identified by caste groups, but that caste groups could often provide a source of opposition to the managers. In the former case, we can see how deep caste affiliation went through the following anecdote :

"While I was working at the India United Mills, a group of Konkani Kunbi women winders came to me and said they had come to know that all women workers of their caste were going to be dismissed. I told them they had been told a lie, but it shows how deep their fears go..."<sup>37</sup>

In the latter case we have the example of a strike in the Jacob Sassoon Mill. The women workers of the winding department went on strike on the 9th of February, 1935, demanding an increase in their wages for January and asking for the dismissal of the winding master, who they said was harassing them. The strike lasted for two days, after which the women "resumed work unconditionally". A week later, the same women were on strike again, this time against the introduction of a 9 hour day beginning at 7.30 a.m. The other "cause" for this strike was that the European manager of the mill had touched the food basket of one of the women and had polluted it. We know that food pollution was a serious grievance :

"Food that has to be prepared in the early morning makes a big demand on the woman worker, and her anxiety is not at an end when the meal has been prepared. It

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36 Ira Katznelson : City Trenches : Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States, Pantheon Books, New York, 1981, pp. 13-14.

37 Kanji Dwarkadas, op.cit., p. 122.

must be kept from contamination of every kind till it is actually eaten. The fear of having it touched or even shadowed is one cause of the difficulties that sometimes prevent mills from employing members of the depressed classes in the same room with caste women. Curious bundles, wrapped in cloths that have seen much use, are poised high on machinery or hung from a nail on the wall, and it is strange to think that if the covering of one were but touched the contents would be flung away, no matter how hungry the owner might be."<sup>38</sup>

On the surface this might be construed as supporting the view that caste/obedience undermined possibilities of class solidarity, but in conjunction with the history of the strike it can be seen as demonstrating quite the contrary. After all, it seems likely that the caste regulation on food pollution was used deliberately to humiliate the mill manager, since even under the best conditions it would have been difficult to extract an apology from him. In conjunction with their defeat in the earlier strike, under which the women may have been chafing, this gesture of accusing the manager of being a "pollutant" displayed, at the very least, a finely-attuned sense of malice.

There was always, as I have tried to show, a fairly ambivalent attitude towards women's wage labour. While from the early 1920s onwards (as the numbers of women workers decreased steadily) there were attempts to deny recognition of women as "workers" - or rather, to deny that they were a substantial enough category of workers to merit recognition - it was only from the 1930s onwards that women began to be actually de-registered from the ranks of the "productive classes".

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38 Janet Harvey Kelman : Labour in India, George Allen and Unwin Limited, 1923, p. 76.

The official elucidation of the reasons for women's retrenchment focussed on the Maternity Benefit Act and the Act restricting women from working at night :

"The percentages for both women and children employed are the smallest since 1920. This may be due to the enforcement of the Maternity Benefit Act as well as to the fact that male labour can be got very cheaply. Another factor that would affect the percentage of women employed to men is that, owing to the provisions of the Factories Act women can't be employed at night. The number of mills working night shift has materially increased..."<sup>39</sup>

M.D.Morris also cites this latter point as a reason for the decline in numbers of women employed by the cotton textile industry, but this does not seem a sufficiently strong reason given that the Act referred to was passed in 1911 and women began to be retrenched only at the end of the 1920s. Moreover, between 1911 and 1926, women's employment in the cotton textile industry increased steadily, so it seems fair to conclude that this Act had little, if anything to do with the retrenchment of women. Finally, if we look at changes in the labour process which occurred around the time that women began to be retrenched, it becomes clear that mechanisation was the most important factor in the decline in numbers of women workers.

The prohibition of night work for women was suggested by the Washington Conference on Labour. Notably, Indian mill owners in Bombay ratified this recommendation before it was actually enacted by the Government<sup>40</sup>. It is significant that the prohibition

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<sup>39</sup> Annual Factories Report, 1934, quoted in the L.G., August, 1935, p. 965.

<sup>40</sup> Report of the Indian Textile Tariff Board, 1927, Vol. II, Bombay, Government Central Press, 1928, pp. 352-54. Henceforth referred to as I.T.B.

became a grievance only when competition from Japanese mills was depressing the market for Indian cotton textiles<sup>41</sup>; but it is questionable how serious a grievance this really was, since mill owners did not demand the lifting of the prohibition, and it was already clear that they saw increasing mechanisation as the solution to their problems.

The cheese winding machine was introduced in the Bombay cotton mills in 1925, changing the winding process from one entailing some amount of hand labour to one using machines. In March, 1926, women colour winders in the Rachel Sassoon Mill went on strike against being made to use cheese winding machines and remained on strike for 5 days. At one point during the strike the management called the police in to take the strikers off "the mill premises for throwing bobbins around"<sup>42</sup>. In spite of this indication of high spirit, work was resumed unconditionally after 5 days. Mill-owners felt that strikes of this kind were not caused by "serious" grievances but by the desire for a holiday from the daily grind of labour. If this were the case, then here is clear evidence of how women workers resisted the alienation capitalism brought in tow.

Soon after this more dramatic changes were heralded by the use of the Universal winding machines. Fundamentally, the introduction of these machines simplified the winding and reeling processes, compressing them into one. As these machines wound straight onto the cheese or the beam, which could be dyed, reeling yarn into hanks

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41 I.T.B., 1927, pp. 352-54.

42 L.G., April 1926, p. 11.

for dyeing became unnecessary. Pirn winding too was introduced at the same time, speeding up the winding process.

Even while these changes were being introduced, mill owners denied their efficacy :

"Mr. Majumdar : You have given us 4 pies per lb as the cost of winding on the pirn-winding machine. What is the increase of production on the loom due to the use of that?

Answer (Mr. Wadia) : You are talking of Northrop looms. I am talking of the use of pirn wound bobbins on the ordinary loom against the usual weaving on ring bobbins. We found absolutely no increase in the loom production and we find that it costs us more...

Question : We were told at some places that there is an increase of production of about 5 per cent by the use of Universal winders.

Answer : I should say that 5 per cent is the highest figure. But consider this point : if you use the winders you must put in rather more twist on your weft than you would if you spin direct onto the weft cop. Moreover these winders are very wasteful. For instance, our waste comes to 5 or 6 per cent from re-winding.

Question : That is because you are re-winding mule cops. Supposing you are re-winding from the ring bobbins?

Answer : Our experience shows that there is no benefit from re-winding from ring bobbins. If ring bobbins are properly made and properly shaped, you cannot get more than 33 per cent more weft onto the re-wound pirn, and for the sake of this 33 per cent more it does not pay us to incur an additional expenditure of 4 pies to re-wind the stuff.<sup>43</sup>

Yet we know that mill owners, instead of ceasing to use these "wasteful" machines, which Mr. Wadia dismissed so contemptuously, actually steadily increased investment in them. According to the 1934 Indian Textile Tariff Board :

"economies have also been effected in the matter of numbers employed in the departments preparatory

to weaving by the adoption of high speed warping and winding, improved types of cheese and beam dyeing plants which facilitate yarn being dyed in the cheese or in the beam, thereby saving the cost of winding it into hanks before dyeing and re-winding again on beams for weaving. A large number of mills had also installed universal winding machines which enabled a larger quantity of weft to be carried by the shuttle, thus reducing stoppages for weft replenishment at the loom."<sup>44</sup>

The use of these machines was recommended by the Indian Textile Tariff Board of 1927, whose schemes for rationalization the mill owners put into effect almost immediately. The great general strike of 1928 was against the realization<sup>a</sup> of these recommendations, and was prefigured by a strike of women winders in the Jacob Sassoon Mill. On the 2nd of January, 1928, 250 women winders of this mill refused to work in protest against the notice posted by the management saying that from the 1st of February rates would be "reduced by 1 to 4 pies for 10 lbs of yarn produced in respect of certain counts of yarn in order to bring them down to standard rates."<sup>45</sup>

In the afternoon of January 2nd 350 spinners joined the winders. The next morning all the workers in the mill joined the strike. The management threatened a closure, whereupon the strikers went to Apollo, Rachel, E.D.Sassoon and Alexandra Mills and brought the workers out. By the 5th of January workers of the entire Sassoon Group of mills were on strike. Commenting on the situation, the Labour Gazette remarked :

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44 I.T.B., 1934, Vol. I, p. 48.

45 L.G., February 1928, p. 16.

"The dispute was primarily due to the proposed reduction in rates of wages in the winding department but the real cause of its extension to the other mills was the proposed introduction of new systems of work in accordance with the recommendations of the Indian Textile Tariff Board."<sup>46</sup>

This statement implies that wage reductions were in no way linked to the recommendations of the Indian Textile Tariff Board. In the case of women workers, however, the standardization of wage rates (recommended by the Board) actually led to a fall in absolute wages :

Table III.6

Average Daily Earnings in the Winding and Reeling Departments, 1921-37<sup>47</sup>

Occupations	Ave.daily earnings, in Rs.				Percentage increase/decrease			
	1921	1926	1934	1937	1921-26	1926-34	1934-37	1921-37
Winding Dept								
Naikins	2.31							
Drum winders	0.76							
Cheese winders	0.88	0.77			-12.5			
Pirn winders	0.69	0.85	0.72	0.68	+23.2	15.3	-4.6	-1.5
Grey winders		0.73	0.62	0.62		-15.1	0	-15.1
Colour winders		0.93	0.84	0.79		-9.7	-6.0	-15.1
Reeling Dept								
Naikins	1.27	1.85	2.10		+45.7	+13.5		
Reelers	0.84	0.68	0.64	0.56	-19.1	-5.9	-12.5	-66.7

46 L.G., February 1928, p. 15.

47 Computed from the following surveys of the Bombay Labour Office : Wages and Hours of Labour, 1921; Wages and Hours of Labour, 1926; General Wage Census, 1934; and the T.L.E.C.R., 1940. All published by the Government Central Press, Bombay.



The official argument in favour of wage standardization was that it would, by imposing a minimum wage rate on mill owners, infinitely better the position of most workers, even if it cut the wages of the higher paid.<sup>48</sup> But statistics compiled by them would, in fact, show the contrary :

Table III.7  
Frequency of Monthly Earnings, 1926 and 1931<sup>49</sup>

Limits of monthly wage	Proportion of operatives earning monthly wages within the limits shown in 1st column, by department.				Percentage increase/decrease in number of operatives earning within the limits of 1st column, by department	
	Winding		Reeling		Winding	Reeling
	1926	1931	1926	1931	1926-31	1926-31
Below Rs. 10.	12.4	7.4	16.8	10.1	-5.0	-6.7
Rs. 10 to Rs. 15	17.0	33.3	30.2	55.9	+16.3	+25.7
Rs. 15 to Rs. 20	26.2	39.3	26.4	33.1	+13.1	+6.7
Rs. 20 to Rs. 25	24.8	17.0	19.3	1.9	-7.8	-17.4
Rs. 25 to Rs. 30	12.0	3.0	4.9		-9.0	-4.9
Rs. 30 to Rs. 35	4.7		0.7		-4.7	-0.7
Above Rs. 35	2.9		1.7		-2.9	-1.7

Several points are clarified by this table. We see, firstly, that wages began to concentrate in the Rs. 10 to 15 and the Rs. 15 to 20 groups between 1926 and 1931. In 1926 almost 25 per cent of women winders earned between Rs. 20 to 25, another 12 per cent earned up to

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48 I.T.B., 1927, Vol. I, pp. 204-06.

49 Computed from the Wages and Hours of Labour survey of 1926, op. cit., p. 98, and the F.B.S. of 1922-33, p. 37.

Rs. 30 and 7.6 per cent earned above Rs. 30; but in 1931 only 17 per cent of women winders earned between Rs. 20 to 25 and only 3 per cent earned above Rs. 25. Though there was a slight drop in numbers earning below Rs. 10 from 1926 to 1931, this drop in no way compensates for the pauperisation of women who previously earned above Rs. 25. Most of these women had, by 1931, been distributed within the Rs. 10 to 15 and Rs. 15 to 20 categories.

Secondly, we notice that reelers in both years earned less than winders : in 1926 only 7.3 per cent of women reelers earned above Rs. 25 per month, while in 1931 only 19 per cent of them earned above Rs. 20. Again, we can see the tendency for wages to concentrate in the Rs. 10 to 15 and Rs. 15 to 20 income groups, but by far the largest number of reelers earned Rs. 10 to 15 in 1931 : almost 56 per cent of the total women in the department. In 1926, on the other hand, only 30 per cent of all reelers earned between Rs. 10 to 15.

Finally, we can see that in both periods there was a huge variation in wages paid by different mills for presumably the same work, but that in 1931 the limits within which this variation took place were narrower than in 1926. This can be seen both in the decrease in numbers earning below Rs. 10 in 1931 and in the more marked decrease in numbers earning above Rs. 20<sup>50</sup>.

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50 A note of caution regarding official surveys of wages was sounded by Burnett-Hurst. His own, more limited, survey of mill hands living in Parel showed that in 1917-18 80 per cent of women workers earned below Rs.10 and another 15.6 per cent earned between Rs.10-15. Only 4.4 per cent earned above Rs.15. While quoting the 1921-22 F.B.S. figures, which gave the average wages of women workers as Rs.10.0.10 in 1914 and Rs.17.6.6 in 1921, he states that

In all fairness, these are not arguments against wage standardization per se. What emerges from them is that wages were not actually standardized over the period; instead the range of their variation was narrowed, leading to the pauperization of women workers. In this context, arguments for standardization, in effect, provided a rationale for lowering women's wages.

### III Conclusion

As we have seen, the effects of rationalization were felt most drastically by women. Reelers were made redundant by developments in industrial technology; the huge fall in numbers of women workers which we see in this period was partly caused by the shutting down of reeling departments in some mills. It is unfortunately not possible to give breakdowns of increases or decreases by departments for the period under survey, since the wage censuses did not always cover the whole industry, but gave "representative figures"<sup>51</sup>. However, even a cursory reading of these censuses shows that several occupations in which women were employed ceased either to employ women, or ceased to exist as occupations. After 1926, for example,

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Contd... f.n. 50

his own average monthly wage for women workers in Parel in 1917-18 was Rs.8.8.6, and comments : "It would appear that either the cotton mill industry is badly paid compared to other occupations (which is not the case), or that the budgets selected were taken from 'better class households' and are not typical." A.R.Burnett-Hurst, op.cit., p. 130-31.

51 The 1926 Report on Wages and Hours of Labour, for example, did a survey of 19 representative mills.

we find no women waste pickers (a task taken over by machines); no women doffers in the Frame Department; no women cheese winders (cheese winding was rationalized out of existence); no women creelers in the Warping Department; and no women washers in the Bleaching Department. After 1934, there were no women employed in the Carding Room, neither as machine tenters, nor lap carriers, nor fly collectors. Nor were there any women hand folders left in the Folding Department : yet another casualty to the machine<sup>52</sup>.

It would be paltry to assume that women were not aware of the potential consequences of rationalization : the 1928 strike is in itself evidence of their knowledge. The years to follow not only substantiate this evidence, they also show the development of unionisation amongst women. Between late 1930 and 1932, unions intervened in almost all strikes by women, the most active union being the Girni Kamgar Union, followed by the Bombay Textile Labour Union. The extent of their activism is best reflected in the Sassoon Alliance Silk Mill strikes of 1932. On the 4th of August, 84 women winders went on strike demanding a raise of 5 paise per lb of silk. On the 5th they were joined by 300 weavers (a rare occasion), also demanding a raise in wages. The management responded by giving notice of closure and within 2 days the strike was over and "work was resumed unconditionally". The next month winders went on strike again, in the same mill. This time their numbers had increased from 84 to 185. Their purpose was to protest a reduction in working days, from 24 to 15.

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52 Information garnered from the 1921 survey of Wages and Hours of Labour; the 1926 survey of Wages and Hours of Labour; the 1934 General Wage Census, and the 1940 T.L.E.C.R.

The strike lasted for 5 months, with the management closing down the mill and throwing 639 people out of work. S.V.Parulekar of the Bharat Textile Labour Union intervened in the strike and a group of "volunteers" set up a strike fund in September. Little was collected since the workers were by now out of jobs. At the same time, a strike committee was set up with 15 workers on it and 5 B.T.L.U. leaders. Through October, November and December the Committee distributed rations - one paili of rice and one seer of dal - to 550 people. The strike fund ran out towards the end of December. Anticipating this, on the 16th of December, around 50 women workers went to the mill at 11 a.m., and asked for an interview with the manager, who prevaricated, asking them to send a deputation instead. The women, however, refused to move away from the mill gates unless their demand for an interview was granted. At 11.30 a.m., the police were called in to "disperse" them. Dispersed, the women recollected at some distance and held a meeting at which they "condemned" the management's refusal to see them and the manager's calling in of the police.

This information was reported in the Labour Gazette issue of January, 1933<sup>53</sup>. In February, the Gazette carried a brief note to the effect that during January "rations" were distributed four times to 400 people. Because the management said they did not intend to re-open the mill for some time, they added, the strike was "presumed concluded with an inconclusive result"<sup>54</sup>. Doubtful irony, to find

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53 L.G., January 1933, p. 14.

54 L.G., February 1933, p. 12.

that the consequences of your action were not only inconclusive, but were concluded by actions out of your control.

Several points can be made about this strike. The first, that women were not only militant, but could be unionised. Secondly, they were aware of circumstances which affected them, such as rationalization (this point should not need to be made, since it is an obvious one. But given that few have felt it necessary to make it, I do). Thirdly, they clearly wished to preserve their jobs, that is, were not uninterested in wage labour.

This latter point was emphasised by official reports in a quite different context :

"the variations from month to month of work available for a department led to variations in the numbers of workers required and hence to the maintenance of a labour force somewhat in excess of average requirements. Secondly, it is said that through course of time the excess number has been suffered to grow and that it has been found difficult to reduce it as the workers themselves are willing to share work and are opposed to a reduction. While realizing fully the difficulties in the way of reducing this excess of workers, we are of opinion that a large permanent excess is in the interest neither of workers nor of employers and that steps should be taken immediately to reduce it. We realize that action cannot be very rapid, but we also feel that no effective action may be taken if some continuous pressure from without is not exercised."<sup>55</sup>

This statement was made by the Textile Labour Enquiry Committee's report of 1940, at a moment when the decrease in numbers of women employed was acute. It is intriguing that statements about the overstaffing of departments employing women (the one quoted above referred to the Winding and Reeling Departments) grew in length

and emphasis at around the same time that women were being retrenched : notably, the 1934 Wage Census said much the same as was said in the paragraph quoted above - with the important exception that they do not suggest that overstaffing was desired by women, or that solidarity led many to give up the possibility of more work and increased wages in favour of more jobs :

"As regards operatives in reeling, they are usually women, and, as is well known, till very recently in most mills in Bombay city a larger number of women were employed than were required with the result that the women, although they might work for all the days in the month, had not sufficient work every day for part of the time and also their hours of work were shorter than of other operatives. Recently, however, some of the mills have increased the hours of work in departments where women are employed and there is, moreover, a tendency not to employ more women than are actually employed. It would appear that these factors must have operated in showing that the wages of reelers in 1933 were the same as in 1926 in spite of the cuts effected by several cotton mills in Bombay city."<sup>56</sup>

The effect of women's retrenchment can, in fact, be seen in the increase in the number of "dependants" in working class families from 1921 to 1932; and even more strikingly from 1932 to 1944. The Census of India of 1931 shows that between 1921 and 1931 there was a 12 per cent decrease in the number of workers in each family with a corresponding increase in the number of "dependants"<sup>57</sup>; the Family Budget Surveys of 1932 and 1944 show that in 1932 the ratio of workers to dependants within the family were 41:59<sup>58</sup>, while in 1944

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56 General Wage Census, 1934, p. 92

57 C.O.I., 1931, Vol. IX., Part II., p. 163.

58 F.B.S., 1932-33, p. 16.

this ratio had fallen to 39:64 :

Table III.8

Earners and Dependants in Working Class Families, 1932 - 1944<sup>59</sup>

Income group	Earners in family men:women, in per cent		Earners:dependants in family, in per cent	
	1932	1944	1932	1944
Below Rs.30	89.1:19.9		34.9:65.1	33.3:66.7
Rs.30 to Rs.40	76.3:23.4	54.3:45.7	42.8:57.2	37.1:62.9
Rs.40 to Rs.50	72.3:27.7	79.6:20.4	47.2:57.8	33.0:67.0
Rs.50 to Rs.60	76.4:23.6	89.8:10.2	42.6:57.4	33.3:66.7
Rs.60 to Rs.70	80.9:19.1	89.6:10.4	37.2:62.8	33.0:67.0
Rs.70 to Rs.80	79.6:20.4	84.6:15.4	43.7:56.3	33.6:66.4
Rs.80 to Rs.90	78.9:21.1	78.4:21.6	46.1:53.9	40.2:59.8
Rs.90 and over	87.9:12.1	-	42.8:57.2	-

... Several points can be made on the basis of this evidence. Firstly, though the ratio of dependants to workers appears to have risen by only 3 per cent, this is offset by a fall in the ratio of female to male workers of 6.5 per cent - more than twice the increase of the number of dependants. As we know, from 1934 onwards, the male labour force expanded while the female labour force contracted (See Appendix III). Hence the full extent of women's retrenchment does not

59 F.B.S., 1932-33, p. 16; and F.B.S., 1944, p. 12.



show up proportionately to an increase in the number of dependants in the working class family, even though it clearly affects the ratio of workers to dependants<sup>60</sup>.

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See S. Bhattacharya, "Capital and Labour in Bombay City, 1928-29", In Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XVI, Nos. 42-3, October, 1981, pp. PE 36 - PE 46, for an analysis in the rise in number of dependants in the working class family and its connections with rationalization and the retrenchment of women.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has described attitudes towards women's wage labour and attempted to explain how they arose. Connections between the development of the city, the industry and the working class have been interpreted in the context of women's wage labour and the ideology governing their retrenchment. Links have been formed between new conceptions of working class sexuality, the working class family and attempts to re-form it, health and infant mortality, and women's wage labour, rationalization and retrenchment. (The basic argument has been that the period 1919 - 1939 saw a shift in the development of capitalism which led to new attention being focussed on the conditions under which labour power and the labour force were reproduced. At the same time as attempts to "rationalize" the labour process took place there were also attempts to "rationalize" the process of reproduction - attempts which over time led to the complete withdrawal of women from wage work, pushing them back into the home.

The major thrust of this thesis has been to describe how and through which means this "rationalization" was achieved. The argument that has recently been put forward by some labour historians that capitalists were not interested in encouraging the development of a permanent proletariat as it suited them to allow the costs of reproduction to be borne by the village is of limited validity, since it only takes into account the immediate interests of capitalists. However, the development of Bombay as a city revealed the tension between the day to day

requirements of the cotton textile industry and those of the city and its inhabitants led to constant modifications both within the growth of capitalism and of the city. Thus, the process whereby capital grew was one which transcended the interests of capitalists in any given period of time.

In this context, the first chapter discusses the importance placed by workers on extracting the maximum degree of freedom within their given conditions of existence, such as choosing to live in privately owned rather than mill owned chawls because they were "strike-free". That these factors were of greater importance than rents, for example, shows that class, or political, interests could often dominate narrow "economic" ones. Clearly, the industrial workers of Bombay did not need to have certain power relations explained to them. In fact, the point at which an 'outside' leadership entered the Bombay labour movement was the point at which the industry was undergoing substantial changes aimed at re-organising the production process.

To be effective, this process of re-organisation required a "Gospel of Abstinence" which would encourage the worker to be productive, stable and "ascetic", a gospel propounded by social reformers. This gospel took the form of a "discourse" whose ironic object was to privatize the public by publicising it : that is to say, subjects such as sexuality, the working class family and street life were brought under public scrutiny by those who disparaged the openness with which the working class led their lives. Chapter 2 deals with this discourse and its underlying motive : to organise the process

of reproduction ( i.e., the reproduction of labour power and the labour force, not of capital). This organising took several forms. Firstly, it redefined the working class family - not merely in speech, but also by actions such as the introduction of the family wage and the treatment of women's wage labour as supplementary ; the emphasis on motherhood and the introduction of maternity benefits and creches.

When women's wage labour was first described as supplementary, the description reflected intent rather than fact, since at that point most women workers supported their families. In fact, a chronology of the events of that period would suggest that underlying these statements was an assertion that women's "primary role" was as reproducer. For while ideologues prated of woman's lack of commitment to wage work, labelling it supplementary, and philanthropists glorified "motherhood", the industry retrenched women in large numbers.

This, briefly, has been the main argument of the thesis. What has been lacking has been any description of how the process of rationalization was seen by its victims in the working class and in which way they reacted to it. Time and space have proved something of an impediment to such description, but I would like to make some points on the matter here, as prelude to further work.

From analyses of strikes of the period we can see that responses to the threat of rationalization were immediate and often spear-headed by women. The major issues of protest were cut backs in the working day, cuts in wages and cuts in the numbers of workers

employed. Carlos Casturiades, in an article on the history of workers movements, has said that these can be seen as centring on attempts to define the work day : from the side of capitalists to shorten and concentrate it; and from the side of workers to retain some part of its flexibility<sup>1</sup>. Women were particularly affected by this, since they snatched moments of rest at intervals in the work day, during which they also suckled their babies, visited the creche, and so forth. Examples such as the 1928 and 1933 strikes show the extent to which women attempted to defend what they saw as their "right"; and the 1933 strike shows how cuts in wages and the concentration of work - in terms of hours - were inextricably linked. A cut in working hours meant a cut in wages - but as the cut in working hours effectively meant the abolition of all intervals for rest, lower wages actually meant less money for the same amount of work.

Originally, retrenchment too meant an increase of workload, with a smaller number of women having to do the work of those retrenched. But as greater numbers were retrenched, the threat was more clearly seen, though perhaps not located in the context of "motherhood" ( i.e., the need to organise rproduction more efficiently). That there was a struggle against this is clear from statements that women were prepared "even" to work shorter hours and accept lower wages so that more of them could retain employment. Unfortunately, as trade unions did not take up these demands, there are very few records to show how women did analyse a situation in which they were being retrenched while the male work force was being expanded.

1 f.n. next page.

A more detailed search for historical materials such as literature, folk songs, perhaps even workers diaries (one of which has been found in North India), may yield sources which would illuminate women's consciousness of the issues raised above. At the moment, however, there seem to be few pointers as to where to look. But as historical research into these issues has only grown in the last five years, even in the West, and is just beginning in India, we may well hope to find richer material in the future.

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f.n.1, pre. page

Carlos Castoriades, "On the History of Workers Movements", Telos, Vol.30, 1976-77.

APPENDIX A

HOUSING : NATURE OF ACCOMMODATION PROVIDED

Firm	Nature of housing	Rents Rs. a. p.	Remarks
Municipality	Line system and semi detached houses.	.....	.....
Colaba Land & Mill Company	184 Rooms average 10'x11' chawl system.	4 0 0	Verandahs, latrine accommodation line chawla built about 6 years ago. No difficulty in letting the accommodation to the mill-hands. Mill is isolated in Colaba.
	226 rooms, 13'-10"x12' 8" in lines of 26	to 6 0 0 6 0 0	
Bomanji Petil Mill.	157 Rooms, 12'x10' with kitchen 4'x10'	2 8 0 to 3 0 0	
Manockji Petit Mill.	150, 12'x10' with Kitchen 4'x10' 227, 10'x10'.	Old 2 0 0 to 3 0 0 New 4 0 0 to 4 8 0	150 new chawls, flush latrines 97 old -flush latrines. 120 old basket system. All occupied.

Firm	Nature of housing	Rents			Remarks
		Rs.	a	p	
Kohinoor Mill	10, Three storied blocks, 618 single rooms 10'x12', 183 double 12'x14'.	6	8	0	Built in 1921 at a cost of 15 lakhs. About 250 rooms normally vacant. Attributed to Bombay Developing chawls. Irrecoverable rent per year Rs. 9,000. Bathing palces and flush latrines.
Morarji Goculdas Mill.	Four storied block verandah, 28 rooms, 10'x10'. Two storied block, 32 rooms, 12' 9" x 11'-6". Single line 22, rooms, 12'x12'	5	8	0	7 Rooms let to outsiders. Flush latrines and bathing arrangements, workers apparently not very appreciative and further building abandoned.
Dinshaw Petit Mill	Three storied block 98 Rooms 56 rooms in lines back to back	2	0	0	Rooms in demand. Flush latrines and washing accommodation.
Century Mill	19 lines, ground floor, back to back of 24 rooms in each 456, 10'x11' verandah	5	0	0	A good housing schemes, flush latrines, washing accommodation, shops, school. In good demand.
Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Co. (Textile Mill)	216 Rooms 94 single line system, 9 1/2 x 11 1/4 26 back to back, 9 1/2 x 10', 96-2 floored chawl, 10 1/2 x 9 1/4.	2	8	0	Utilised to fullest extent.
Victoria Mill	30, 10'x10'	7	8	0	Flush latrines, three storied chawl.
Assur Voorjee Mill	148, 10'x 11'	6	0	0	Basket system, few rooms vacant and some let to outsiders. (chawl near Railway line)



Firm	Nature of housing	Rent			Remarks
		Rs	a	p	
Bombay Dyeing & Manufacturing Co. (Dye works)	96 rooms, line system back to back.	2	0	0	
Messrs. B.D. Sassoon & Co. (David Mill)	255, 16 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> x 14 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> 9, 12' x 12'	7	0	0	
Jacob Sassoon Mill.	190, 16' x 10'	4	8	0	Fully occupied.
Meyer Sassoon Mill.	16, 10'-7" x 10'-1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> " 26 C.I. rooms. varying sizes.	3	13	0	
		4	12	0	
		9	6	0	
Bombay Dyeing & Manufacturing Co. (Spring Mill)	504 rooms - 8, three storied chawls, Development and improvement Trust principle 12' x 10' 6" 144 line quarters in six lines, 10' x 12'	5	0	0	New housing scheme.
Tata Mill	Six blocks, two storied buildings 161 single room 10' x 12' One block two storied 20 double 12' x 14' rooms.	3	8	0	Flush latrines and washing accommodation.
		10	0	0	Flush latrines and washing accommodation. All occupied.
		13	0	0	

(Bombay Collector's Office, Factory Department, Old Customs House: section No. 357  
Annual Report on the administration of the Indian Factories Act in the Bombay for  
the year 1929. (Annexure No. 12)

APPENDIX B

MATERNITY BENEFIT SCHEMES IN BOMBAY COTTON MILLS \*

Name of Mill	Details of benefits given	Remarks
1. David Mills	Wages paid a month before & a month after confinement, i.e. 2 months	There is no maternity benefit scheme in existence at present. A scheme was introduced in 1921, but was discontinued at the end of 1923. A lady doctor was employed upto April 1923, & the No. of cases dealt with during that year was 65, the women being paid two months wages each.
2. The Indian Bleaching, Dyeing & Printing Works	-do-	A scheme was introduced in October 1921.
3. The Currimbhoy Mills Co. Ltd.	(a) 2 months wages are paid before & after confinement. (b) 2 months leave is also granted on completion of 9 months.	A scheme was introduced in November 1921. No lady doctor is provided.
4. The Standard Mills	Full wages are paid for one month before and one month after confinement. (The medical adviser of the Mills are of opinion that it would be to the interest of the females to keep to their normal work upto a week or at least a fortnight before confinement. The advisability of changing the free period to a fortnight before & one month after confinement is being considered)	The scheme was introduced in the Swadeshi Mill No.2 from March 1921, & in the remaining mills from January 1921. A lady doctor was employed at the Swadeshi Mill No.1 but the appointment was discontinued from September 1924, as it was found that the female operatives had no objection to being treated by the male doctors
5. The Swadeshi Mills No.1		
6. The Tata Mills		
7. The Swadeshi Mill No.2 (formerly known as the Bombay United Mill)		
8. The Fawulbhoy Mills Ltd	2 months wages are paid, 1 before & 1 after confinement	The scheme was started in January 1922.
9. The Premier Mills Ltd	Maternity allowance is paid for 2 months. Leave granted was before & 6 weeks after confinement provided (a) that the woman completes her at least 11 months service in the Mills continuously.	The scheme was started on the 1st October 1921

<u>Name of Mill</u>	<u>Details of benefits given</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
10 The Pearl Mills Ltd	(b) that she makes a declaration binding herself not to engage in any kind of physical work outside her home for the purpose of earning her wages during the two months for which the allowance is being paid to her  One month's pay is paid in advance & another month's pay is paid 6 weeks after delivery	The scheme was started on the 2nd March 1922. It was noted that the women worked right up to the end of the 2th month in expectation of receiving the wages earned for the month as well as the benefit. The benefit was however not given & such cases have now decreased.
11 The Ebrahimhoy Pebaney Mills Co. Ltd	2 months wages are paid, 1 month before & 1 month after confinement	The scheme was started in October 1921
12. The Khatau Makanji Spinning & Weaving Mill Co.	A free dispensary is provided at the mills under a qualified doctor who attends maternity cases assisted by a nurse of the creche when necessary.	Negotiations are at present being made with a view to providing free beds at a maternity home.
13 The Colaba Land & Mill Co.		No scheme exists at present. A maternity home was opened @ Oct.1916 but owing to poor response was closed @March '19.
14 The Maneckji Perit Manufacturing Co. Ltd.		No scheme is in existence at present. An attempt was made @1922 to organise a scheme with a view to enlarging it if successful by providing a room in one of the mill chawls, with a bed & necessary furniture to be used as a sick room & for laying in. Management was conducted by the social service League & the room was in charge of an experienced nurse. Since no advantage was taken of the facilities afforded by the Mill authorities for laying in arrangements, the qualified nurse, who occupied free quarters in the chawls, vacated of her own accord & no other has been thereafter engaged in her place.

\* N.B. A maternity hospital called 'The Nawrosji Wadia Maternity Home & Free Dispensary' has also been established in the Mill area solely for the benefit of the work people.

Table from RCLI, Vol.1 Pt 1, p.357 - collected by Bombay Labour Office, 1927.

### MATERNITY BENEFITS

1. The usual period of maternity benefit leave is two months, but having regard to the exceptional nature of this type of absence, a woman should be allowed to retain a lien on her job for a period of three months when the absence is due to maternity. (Vide Circular No 561/45 A dated 6th March 1956)
  
2. Standard Form of Notice for Claiming Maternity Benefits: With a view to encouraging the payment of maternity benefits in two instalments, one pre-maternity and the other after birth, a standard form of notice to be given by devices. Mills should adopt this form especially where they have less suitable forms or no forms at all. Copies of the form should be made available free of charge to women operatives who wish to go on maternity leave. (Appendix 'H'). (Vide Circular No. 1285/57 dated 25th March 1957)
  
3. Birth certificates would be issued by the Municipality free of charge if a certificate is produced from the Mill Manager saying that the birth certificate is required to settle maternity allowances under the Bombay Maternity Benefits Act, 1929. (Vide Circular No. 5379/3 dated 22nd December 1956)

**NOTICE TO BE GIVEN BY WOMEN OPERATIVES GOING  
ON MATERNITY LEAVE AS REQUIRED UNDER THE  
BOMBAY MATERNITY BENEFITS ACT.**

Date.....

The Manager,

.....Mill

Dear Sir,

I beg to state that I expect to be confined within one month, I, therefore, request you to grant me leave for two months.

(1) I beg to claim four weeks' pre-maternity benefits, and the necessary medical certificate for this purpose is subjoined below. I shall claim the remainder of the maternity benefit, to which I am entitled under the Act, after I have obtained a birth certificate.

OR

(2) I request that the whole of the benefits I am entitled under the Maternity Benefits Act may be made available to me when I produce the birth certificate of my child.

I undertake not to work anywhere else during the period for which I receive maternity benefit.

I am, Sir,  
Your most obedient servant  
(Name).....

Dept.....T.No.....

Certified that the woman is likely to be confined within the next four weeks.

.....  
(Mill Doctor) or  
( A ny Registered Medical Practitioner).

Date .....

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