

**EVERYDAY TALK AND GENDERED LABOUR:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF ACTION IN INTERACTION BETWEEN
DOMESTIC SERVANTS AND MIDDLE-CLASS BENGALI WOMEN IN
KOLKATA AND DELHI**

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Dated: 2nd April, 2018

CERTIFICATE

This thesis titled '**Everyday Talk and Gendered Labour: An Ethnography of Action in Interaction between Domestic Servants and Middle-Class Bengali Women in Kolkata and Delhi**' submitted by **Anindita Chatterjee**, Centre for Linguistics, School of language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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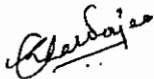
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research work included in this thesis entitled '**Everyday Talk and Gendered Labour: An Ethnography of Action in Interaction between Domestic Servants and Middle-Class Bengali Women in Kolkata and Delhi**' is my original work conducted under the supervision of Professor Ayesha Kidwai at the Centre for Linguistics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and no part of this thesis has been submitted for any degree or diploma in this or any other University in India or abroad.



ANINDITA CHATTERJEE

DATED: 2nd April, 2018

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All theses have their own personal histories, and this is no exception. Though I studied English Literature and Linguistics, my interest was inevitably drawn towards linguistic anthropology that allowed me to study language through the lens of everyday lives. Raised in an orthodox, middle-class Brahmin family, and as a young woman, I questioned gendered practices and disparity drawn between the workers whom I lovingly called *mashi*, yet was told to maintain distance with them. But, I found out that my grand-mother and mother were very close and intimate with *mashi* when no one would be around: they would laugh, talk and have fun with each other as if they were friends. Hence my personal experience led to a search to understand labour relations in its complexity and diversity through an ethnographic approach.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is a tribute to my late grandmother Sobha Banerjee, who believed in my dreams and saw her own aspirations through my goals...

Didu, I finished writing this voluminous thesis but I don't know how to unsettle the hierarchy...

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Abstract

The project examined the different strategies employed to skillfully craft an affective attachment between a *bhadramahila* (genteel woman) and a *kajer-lok*¹ (domestic worker) that is generated bi-directionally through every day routinized practices of domestic duties and work together. The study is located in contemporary Kolkata as well as Bengalis in Delhi (*Chittaranjan Park*), to make a regional comparative analysis of labour relations in Bengali families in order to understand the change and transition with India's entry into the global space. It is within the domestic space that provide a rich and fertile ground to map the ways in which "the multiple participants building in concert with each other the actions that define and shape their life worlds" (Goodwin 1984). The multiple participants are women of two worlds: one is an employer and the other is the domestic worker.

Specifically, my study investigates three distinct patterns of service negotiation through language that are shaped by gender, caste and class inequalities. I study the strategies that a high Caste servant can use to resist and transgress her boundary during different contextual settings, yet the same servant's speech, self-presentation, and bodily comportment are developed to meet the requirements of being a part of a respectable family. The study is framed on how the domestic workers manipulate the discourse of 'love and labor' to achieve their aspirations and goals in life. Hence this bi-directional attachment produces an agency for women in general to generate a voice of their own. My research questions that how the employer-worker relationship turns into an emotional attachment which is strategically used by both parties for their own recognition and aspirations.

To meet these ends the corpus consists of recorded narratives recounting the experiences of participants that reveal the focus of analysis which is two-fold: it evaluates the existing power structures between participants, and it assesses the degree to which widespread Indian discourses about the upward mobility are relevant to the current setting. In terms of power structures, *legitimated domination* (Grillo 1989) of the employer over her domestic worker emerges as a salient theme; however, *affective attachment* (Ehrenreich 2000; Hardt and Negri 2000) and reciprocal dependencies (modified from Shah's 2000 concept of *precarious dependencies*) help

¹Kajer-lok also referred as chotolok or the vulgar populace, are known to be uneducated, using coarse, unrefined language (See Sumanta Banerjee 1989).

to both reinforce and diminish the severity of the power asymmetry. My findings are based on the intense ethnographic participation in seven different households during religious rituals and quotidian life in both Kolkata and Delhi that allowed me to understand labour relations across regions in Bengali households. The South Asian context represents a site in which such scholarship has been underplayed (Mills and Mullany 2011), especially in the areas related to language, gender and labour relations.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

...it is in the everyday life of women, articulating the poisons that enter social relationships, that the act of hearing and recognition gets done, and through which I propose that culture acquires a soul-that it is born. (Veena Das 1995, 178)

A Bengali book named *Aalo Aandhari* was written and published in 2002 by Baby Haldar, a domestic worker, did not receive much attention. However, later in 2006, when the same book was translated into English¹ by Urvashi Butalia, a renowned writer, the book gained its appreciation among literary as well as academic groups. The translated version also attained a huge amount of readership which later gave some recognition to Baby Haldar. This particular account required mentioning to highlight two very important aspects in which our societal structure works: first, despite India's immense linguistic diversity there is a prestige marker attached to English that the British had left behind, and second, the connected association of English with respectability and education. Hence, Baby Haldar's very act of breaking the silence and giving voice to the marginalized as a domestic worker herself did not bring much attention, since she could not write it in English. The narrative forms a nexus to themes that emphasizes the well-formed ideologies and power relations that are woven implicitly through socializing interactions and discursive practices (Baquedano-Lopez 2000; Scheiffelin 2000).

1.1 Research Objectives and goals

The main objective of the study is to explore ideologies of domesticity that associate feminine skills that conceptualizes affect a new meaning within the private domestic space. This ideology has resulted into the feminization of labour, where domestic work has become more promising and permanent form of job among women (Ray 2000). Ray and Qayum in their seminal work on the relationship between the employers and workers had termed it as 'culture of servitude' (2009), which I examine in my study as culture of femininity: an aspect that defines deference, traditionalism, subservience and dependence on the patriarchal conventions. I have followed Ray and Qayum's (2009) way of studying labour relations through a

¹The translated book is: *A life less ordinary*.

relational approach by studying both the employer and worker. In my study, I have focused on three different worker-employer relationships: between employers and part-time female workers, between employers and full time live-in workers, and finally between employers and full time workers (the last mostly prevalent in Delhi). The critical question that comes up are two: first how do the workers negotiate their identities with each other in terms of their work as well as long/short term relationship with the employers? Second, how do both employer-worker craft a mutual dependence through affect that enables the worker to have some agential role in the domestic space?

My approach to these themes are multi-disciplinary, combining language with gender and labour studies. I study how labour relations function trans-regionally in both Kolkata and Delhi among Bengali households with Bengali and non-Bengali workers, and examine the changes taking place in domestic work relations due to the process of urbanization. I also aim to form an understanding of the role of English language as part of an aspirational model among the young domestic workers and their expectations for generational mobility. In the preliminary stage of the research, I realized that the study was portrayed as somewhat one-sided looking through the angle of employers being exploitative. But it is a partial truth, since my observations revealed that none of them (workers and employers) were either exploited victims or selfish exploiters. Hence, this portrayal needed a fresh revision. I, therefore set out to understand the range of labour relations in two different cities to make a comparative analysis. Even if unequal relationships between workers and employers tend to get accentuated within domestic work structures, but in both cases there seemed to be manipulation devised for mutual benefit.

Feminist approaches to studies on service work have been helpful in understanding paid domestic work “as an occupation located within the class structure of a particular historical situation...as part of the societal reproduction system” (Romero 2002, 59-60). Existing scholarship also provides a rich description of how paid domestic work crosscuts class, caste, ethnicity, and gender relations, and engenders inequality within the capitalist market (Dickey 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Ray and Qayum 2009; Zimmerman et al. 2006). It is true that paid domestic work is an essential component for the maintenance and functioning of any Bengali middle-class

households, and the hierarchy between waged and unwaged persists. But I would like to argue that there are also ways in which hierarchy is often challenged and norms broken by both employers and workers in the private intimate domain. Therefore in my study, I examine hierarchy in collective spaces where such emotional attachments are built between women who work together.

1.3 Theoretical Formulations

The theoretical formulation of this research is concerned with the differing lives of women and seeks to provide an understanding of women's engagements through everyday lives and their livelihoods. Analysis of such activity, informed by ethnographic data gained through interviews and prolonged observations of the participants, provides insight into power relations that do not always conform to a clearly definable hierarchical structure and, thus, invite us to take a fresh look at the themes of language, class, and gender as they relate to the domestic workplace context in two different cities (Kolkata and Delhi). Findings suggest that these social constructs are embedded within one another and, in this way, provide evidence to support the notion of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 1989; Defrancisco and Palczewski 2014; Collins 2015). It looks at a cross-cultural research to study women's agency that takes gender, class, and labour as its crucial concern and theorizes language as an important mechanism to understand societies and the construction of identities (Moi 1999; M. Goodwin 2006; Anderson 2000; Speer and Stokoe 2011; Mills 2012). The current study's methods were informed by language socialization research, which places importance on the sociocultural framing of language in tandem with individuals' capacity to deploy linguistic conventions in novel and creative ways (Bakhtin 1986; Ochs and Scheffelin 2008). I consider as a point of departure that the workplace is an important site where gender relations, and relations of hierarchy and authority are produced (de Neve 2004).

Studying daily interactions between the worker and employer is critical for interpreting the micro details of identity formation, since at least a part of identity emerges through what people do and say about *service* or *work* (emphasis mine). This information can help us understand the cultural and social practice of a community of women of diverse relations (C. Goodwin 1984; M. Goodwin 2006; Goffman 1981;

Gumperz 1982). The themes complicates the ambivalent meaning of service as ‘who *isserving* to whom’ and the meanings of service versus duty. By analyzing both social practice and linguistic interaction, I adopt Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's notion of the "community of practice" (1991), which was further developed by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992; 1995) as they redefined community of practice as a social construct that is different from the outmoded beliefs about a particular community of only one location. My study rather builds on the relational aspect, which is simultaneously determined and defined by the different social practices in which each membership engages into.

This study is about the governing relationship between employers and workers, the issues related to work and domesticity within the specific interplay of gender, language and class as experienced both by the workers and the employers. Such a discussion of class and potential for upward mobility is incomplete without considering the concept of agency: to what degree do individuals possess the power to act independently of the forces that conspire to reproduce the existing social hierarchy? This question is central to the current study that investigates the domestic workers’ ability to generate an aspiration for their daughters to escape transgenerational servitude, and the employers’ willingness to use their power to aid them. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977) conceptualization of agency is built on the premise that one’s habitus, which has been formed through the social reality to which one has been exposed, is responsible for determining all future actions. By following the judgments determined by their habitus, individuals act to reproduce the existing hierarchy.

Other work tends to align with Bourdieu in terms of its focus on the socio-cultural embeddedness of individual action (Block 2012). However, much of this literature adopts a less extreme position vis-à-vis the completeness of reproduction. Giroux (1983), for example, finds cracks in the forces of reproduction that individuals can exploit to bring about social change. Similarly, Ortner’s (1984, 2006) Practice Theory emphasizes the constraining character of the existing social hierarchy but also provides a provision through which it is possible to act independently of it. Finally, Archer (2000) points out that some distance from one’s own habitus must be achievable if research like that of Bourdieu has merit. The current study adopts

Bourdieu's (1977) description of power asymmetry as deeply embedded in existing relations of social inequality; however, it follows Giroux (1983), Ortner (1984; 2006), and Archer's (2000) less extreme position on reproduction.

I seek to explain the workings of ideologies and stereotypes that control how daily language is used as an action that governs the cultural and social practice of a particular community. As stated by Duranti "...the process of state formation that creates the conditions for a unified *linguistic market* where one linguistic variety acquires the status of *standard language* (emphasis in original) (2008, 45). In this case, my study examines the way the workers aspire for their children to acquire to learn the prestige variety. Noteworthy in the analysis is the choice to introduce the workers' daughters to English, which, according to popular and official discourses at national and local levels, functions as a tool for upward mobility in Indian society (Gooptu 2001; Patel 2010; Graddol 2010; Dhawan 2010).

Throughout its colonial past, a command of the prescriptive norms of standard British English was directly linked to class: members of the Bengali *bhadralok* 'educated middle class' were distinguished by their access to English-language education and participation in the colonial economy. This stratification persists even today through the education system's inequitable structure. The present-day *maddhyabitto sikkhito sampraday's* 'intelligentsia' privileged access to quality education that emphasizes the learning of high status American and British English varieties (Cowie 2007), reconstructs this colonial hierarchy. The legacy of this hierarchy is observable through the status of English-language proficiency as a symbolic marker of class in India (Agnihotri and Khanna 1997) that can be considered from a Bourdieusian perspective as a mark of distinction (1991).

The focus of analysis is two-fold: it evaluates the existing power structures between participants, and it assesses the degree to which widespread Indian discourses about the upward mobility of English (Graddol 2010) are relevant to the current setting. In terms of power structures, *legitimated domination* (Grillo 1989) of the employer over her domestic worker emerges as a salient theme; however, *affective attachment* (Ehrenreich 2000; Hardt and Negri 2000) and reciprocal dependencies (modified from Shah's 2000 concept of *precarious dependencies*) help to both reinforce and diminish the severity of the power asymmetry.

1.3 Bengal's Encounter with Class formation and making of a respectable women

My study on labour relations in Bengali families has to be firmly grounded in a theoretical understanding of a well-established historical tradition in the formation of a social class in Nineteenth Century Bengal², and its aftermath caused by the partition of India. The terms *bhadralok* (Genteel people) and *bhadramahila* emerged in Nineteenth Century Colonial Bengal to denote a section of the Indian population who were educated and possessed a certain amount of wealth. Besides such economic and educational markers, members of the *bhadralok* played an important role in shaping the intellectual, cultural, and social universe of nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal. The late nineteenth century witnessed the growth of the newly rising educated middle class (*maddhyabitto sreni*) who took pride in calling themselves as *bhadralok/bhadramahila* and constructed an ideology of 'respectability'. The creation of a *bhadramahila* was a social construct to portray women to be an ideal counterpart of the 'Bengali *bhadralok*' (Banerji 2001; Borthwick 1984; Majumdar 2009; Sarkar 2001). The formation of notions of womanhood, and domesticity by inculcating the habits of an ideal '*grihalaksmi*' (good housewife) was a part of the formation of middle class, where hierarchies and patriarchies were sought to be maintained and reproduced (Sangari and Vaid 1989; Chatterjee 2014). There seemed to be a crafted weaving between *bhadramahila*, middle class and family, which needs fresh lines of investigation.

The scholarship about *bhadralok/bhadramahila* is primarily focused on an historical analysis of the emergence of *bhadramahilas* in Colonial Bengal. But the existence of the *bhadramahila* category well into the twenty first century requires fresh lines of inquiry to explain the persistence of this social category as a class formation in domesticity. In particular, Bengali society, of which the *bhadramahilas* constituted a part, witnessed several changes during the post-colonial period. Some changes, such as an increasing numbers of women entered the labor force, and the changes resulted due to migration of Bengali refugees from East Pakistan (currently Bangladesh) created a diversity among *bhadramahilas* that remained specific to Bengali society.

² Bengal included both West and Eastern Part of Bengal which is now Bangladesh.

This study on labour relations in Bengal revived the invisible characters when I was asked by a female domestic worker that: ‘*who is a bhadramahila*’, since she was a victim of riots, and her migration into West-Bengal forced her into domestic work, though her personal history speaks that her father was a *bhadralok*. Hence, it is fundamental to understand the meaning of class through associated links of respectability, refined manners and norms and not just from an economic lens. It is fundamental to analyze class and *bhadramahilas* not as a singular, universal formation but to pull out different segments to unsettle the homogeneity.

My theoretical analysis on class stems from a realization of an empirical study based on conversations with some of the domestic workers who were uprooted from their own land (*bhite-mati*). However, to analyze class relations in India, the theory needs to be broadened by understanding class relations as symbolic, and not simply based on the economic structure (Bourdieu 1984). The subject of class relation is not the significant part of my chapter, but it needs a clarification since my research foregrounds women who work and collaborate together to provide service in the family where they perform their tasks based on class relations: employer who serves the family in the form of duty and the worker who offers service in the form of labour in return of wage earned from the same family.

1.4 The Feminization of Labour: Fashioning women’s work as Paid/Unpaid

Romero (2002) makes an interesting point that though both domestic workers and the housewives are service providers, yet they play different roles within the family: one a waged worker and the other a dutiful wife. The scholarship has examined the structural inequalities embedded within home that become a major site of class struggle, rendering domestic service and labour relations as essentially conflictual (Romero 2002; Dickey 2000). My study focusses on such blurred boundaries of an identity formation through social and cultural disruptions in everyday life that every woman is struggling with. Thus, my study attempts to answer the question that whether it is the economic value of labour that determines a class? Or is it the symbolic and cultural capital that generates the class structure?

The feminization of labour is a rapidly emerging process of globalization which cannot be outlined within the historical feudal system³ where the domestic workers were both male as well as female (Banerjee 2004; Chatterjee 2004; Haskins & Lowrie 2015; Ray & Qayum 2009). The theoretical focus of the research still stands to be challenging to connect *gender* and *domestic service*, but an extremely crucial aspect to understand the wider social networks centres around *Domesticity and Womanhood in the making of Modern India*⁴. It examines the dialectics of relationship between Bengali employers and workers as women who are both service providers in the same family, yet one cannot understand the social hierarchies, and how they interrelate.

The established scholarship on paid domestic services (Dickey 2000; Harriss-White & Gooptu 2000) produced immense work on class constitution and class boundaries, but it is significant to understand that such sudden changes caused due to urbanization and liberalization have been useful for women to enter informal jobs but at the same time formal sector jobs were not open for them. The last three decades have seen a sharp increase in female domestic workers who have accepted the jobs voluntarily, especially in contrast to male domestic workers (Neetha 2004).

1.5 Gender and language

From the inception of the chapter, my study is built on the framework of critical feminist theory, along with linguistic anthropological and socio-linguistic theory. The study is based on relations of labour in Bengali families, as it takes into account the context and historic specificity of how labour operates through class structures (Anderson 2002; Skeggs 1997). Therefore, this approach helps me in understanding the empirical data through the framing of labour relation based on class relation. However, my thesis weaves a relation between language, class, gender and the way the social life functions. My study attempts to theorize the significance of the multiple meanings of 'service' that is associated with ideologies of respectability, especially when the connection is made between '*service offered*' and '*service performed*', and

³Especially prevalent in Bengal, where the family retainers came from the estates owned by the land-owners. These retainers were mostly men and served as domestic workers, rather butlers as emulated by the Victorian British era.

⁴Refer to Hancock, M. (1999)

how is this difference enacted in daily social practices. The framework for this research connects the critical feminist perspective of *Gender* (emphasis mine) that is not sculpted, but it is something that one performs, it is an act, and in fact gender is a verb rather than a noun. Thus Butler (1990) claims that gender is an ongoing process of doing something, as Austin (1955) too stated that “*We do things with words.*”

In conceptualizing the labour relations which are based on a dual meaning of service where one is respected whereas the other is not, ‘the other’ who is a substandard player, also has an active role to play that goes beyond the scholarship of oppression and exploitation, “a dichotomy that flattens out a complex and ambiguous agency in which women can accept, accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest- sometimes all at the same time” (MacLeod 1992, 534). In language and Gender scholarship we do not find the word agency being conceptualized properly, rather the study explores the linguistic practices and social structures. In fact, identity as a category emerges more than agency as such, since we can find in Hall’s seminal article on phone sex workers where the workers exercise ambiguous agency by using traditionally “powerless”, stereotypically feminine speech to become economically independent (Hall 1995).

My study connecting gender and language is not based on the speech styles of females or males, rather it is based on the way how the employer and the domestic workers interact within domestic spaces, and how different strategies are employed to skillfully craft a mutual affective attachment between both the employer and the worker. In my research formulation, agency is not an active resistance, neither is it an emancipatory act of the body, but I would frame it together and term it as an ‘agentive body’. This agentive body is skilled to build affect as a form of support system in creating strategies in order to negotiate the lives for living the dreams.

The research adds to the existing literature on the regulation and training of bodies done in the organizational sectors for the service providers especially in the areas of bodily presentation, interactional discourse and gestural style, as it studies the domestic realm. The question of control, surveillance and agency is particularly raised explicitly in the literature of business and management, even though agency has little role to play (Cameron 2000). In the famous book, *Corporate speak: The use of language in Business*, Fiona Czerniawska (1998) explained that the adoption of new managerial approaches in a context of intensified global workforce has sharpened

awareness of language as a valuable commodity, potentially a source of “competitive advantage”, which needs to be managed rather than just taken care of. Employees’ verbal comportment along with other aspects of their self-presentation is re-presented in bodily appearances such as gestures and dress. Hence, both language, bodily comportment and dress are all treated as a commodified package (Hossfeld 1990; Salzinger 1997). In line with my study on labour relation in the domestic realm, the scholarship on organizational sectors has indeed proved that just like everyone can be a consumer, similarly everyone is also a commodity, which needs proper care, service and packaging so that they can also be represented as a respectable product.

There is a multidimensional way of looking at the theory of style first designed by Allan Bell (1984) as “audience design” in which it was argued that stylistic choices are primarily motivated by the speaker’s assessment will be based on how certain ways of speaking will have a particular effect on the addressees. Hence, looking through this ‘audience design’ certain feminine characteristics were taken to be best suited for the consumers, since feminine verbal articulation were more compliant with the market and consumer assessment. In contemporary workspaces, “Styling” is less known to be a community of practice, and more generated from a prescriptive viewpoint, a notion developed by Cameron (1995) known as “verbal hygiene”. Penelope Eckert (2001, 40) suggested that “the construction of a style is a process of bricolage: a stylistic agent appropriates resources from a broad sociolinguistic landscape, recombining them to make a distinctive style”. This framework also builds on Butler’s theory of ‘the corporeal stylization of gender, the fantasied and fantastic figuration of the body’ (1994, 135).

1.6 The Chapters

The study is animated by many concerns: the changing labour relation between two groups of women in the visible context of the feminization of domestic workers; the question about paid and unpaid work with its associated meanings; and the concept of affect being employed as a strategy to build a dependency paradigm which is mutual. The study is different from earlier ones, as the study focuses not only between relations among two disparate groups of women but it focuses on different locations (Kolkata and Delhi) as well as different contextual situations like: religious ritual and everyday quotidian life.

Chapter One discusses the different locations, sites and spaces. This includes the reason why trans-regional locations were chosen for the ethnography of this research, as it also focuses on the feminization of domestic work seen both in Kolkata and Delhi in recent times. The chapter focuses on Methodology that guides through the way in which the research was conducted within the framework of an ongoing relationship in which the unequal power relation of the researcher, the employer and the domestic worker has been established.

Further, it moves on to describe the methodological outlines of an intense qualitative research in three different stages: from participant observation in different households, to casual conversations and unstructured interviews. In particular, I conducted content analysis of the data through the lenses of interactional sociolinguistics and activity-based approaches. An interactional sociolinguistics approach in the traditions of both Gumperz (1982) and Goffman (1981; 1983) has allowed me to examine details of the utterances at different levels, including the discourse and lexical levels. The entire methodological approach taken in this research has been charted out in this particular chapter, including the issues related to feminist anthropology has been addressed. It also gives a visual representation of the middle-class households. The spatial collaboration, contestation and restricted mobility in certain areas brought out a distinct difference of paid and unpaid work. It elaborates on the different religious rituals that I have covered in this project.

The focus was on the religious rituals performed within private spaces in Kolkata versus the public rituals performed by Bengali families in Delhi. It examined the ritual spaces as a contested site where the governing relationship between employer and the worker alters due to different caste identities. The chapter described in detail the profile of both the employers as well as the domestic workers from Kolkata and Delhi with whom I have interacted. The description included my own observation during ethnographic research in each houses, casual conversations as well as unstructured interviews. I deliberately did not make an attempt to introduce them, it came about in a process gradually as we interacted through the ongoing project. However, a good proportion of the data came from their own testimonies as they described their work and relations in the domestic space.

Chapter 3 is the backbone of this dissertation, providing from qualitative data the mechanism is to understand the manner in which women of disparate identities collectively negotiate affect as a tool for agential representation of their own selves. I propose that the diminished social distance that comes out of intense, daily contact in the intimate household setting fosters *affective attachment* (Ehrenreich 2000; Hardt and Negri 2000) between the participants in ways that influence the local power structures under investigation and highlight deviation from the work on more public professional settings. While *affective attachment* and *bi-directional engagement* represent important considerations for analyzing the overall power structure, it was also important to remain aware of the ever-present influence of class differences. For this reason, the term *ally-ship* is preferable to *sisterhood* for describing the solidarity that emerged from diminished social distance. In line with terminology that points to the salience of class, previous studies have proposed the term ‘precarious dependencies’ (Shah 1999) to articulate the mutual – yet asymmetrical – reliance of employers and domestic workers on one another; however, I propose the term, *reciprocal dependency*, as a more accurate alternative. It highlights the sustained and not particularly precarious existence of employers’ and workers’ bi-directional engagement in working relationships that span multiple years.

Chapter 4 is associated with the earlier chapter in engaging into a bi-directional approach, where the worker’s dependency finds its path in their ambitious goal for generational mobility. I focus on migrant workers’ perception of learning English language as a route to quit transgenerational servitude. The research examines the way in which education, especially among the workers’ children, plays a dual role. It has a value in itself, as a marker of social status. It is also a tool for breaking away from intergenerational poverty through better marital alliance among girls and some professional work for boys. The chapter attempts to answer two important questions: first, being domestic workers what are the aspirational means through which they seek social mobility for their children; second, what does an analysis of the English-language coaching sessions as well as emergent relationships between employers, workers, and workers’ daughters reveal about power, agency, and the reproduction of the existing social hierarchy? As in colonial times, English-language proficiency is strongly linked with the identity of India’s middle-class (Bhattacharya 2005; Donner 2008). Furthermore, the high symbolic value placed on English by the elite has,

conforming to a Bourdieusian conceptualization of the periphery's focus on the centre, greatly influenced attitudes toward English across classes. Graddol (2010: 124) summarizes this influence with the words: "Throughout India, there is an extraordinary belief amongst all castes and classes, in both rural and urban areas, in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill, but as a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression." This vision of English reflects popular discourses that frame the analysis of the excerpts presented in this particular chapter. Such a focus allows for an analysis of language and power through an intersectional lens that incorporates the perspectives of both those who possess symbolic capital and those who seek to acquire it.

Chapter 5 on 'Living within Boundaries' examine the discursive expressions and negotiation of class identities among women from different backgrounds within the domestic space. The aim of the chapter was to examine the meaning of domesticity and how it is perceived among the workers who are waged labourers and the employers who serve the same family in the form of duty. Domestic work is life for some and livelihood for others. How do women perceive this relentless cycle of domestic work that dominates their lives? How do the workers understand their roles as wife and mother which is constructed differently from their employers? The study explores the significance of the multiple meanings of 'service' in conjunction with ideologies of respectability that are associated as a marker of class. I analyze the excerpts in detail in which they discuss about their hardship, struggles and poverty in which these workers have been engaged in, and how they themselves perceive these. Hence, I draw on Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall's (2005) sociolinguistic approach on identity in order to understand the class structure among the employers and workers. Identity is not only constituted in linguistic interaction, but its importance lies in one's social positioning of self and others.

Chapter 6 is on caste hierarchy comparing two trans-regional cities-Kolkata and Delhi. Caste is difficult to discuss about, and since I was not in favour of quantitative survey method, it was difficult to directly ask one's caste identity. Therefore, I selected two different contexts: religious rituals and quotidian daily routine, to understand the structure and organization of work based on caste identity, as well as discussions on work which tended to emerge on issues of caste. In order to fully

understand the intricate complexities of caste in domestic relations it is therefore important to document the perspectives of both employers and workers regarding their relative caste position. This approach unveils an entirely different aspect of the embeddedness of work relations in caste and class hierarchies that unsettles the always presupposed dominant narrative of lower-class and lower-caste workers employed by middle-class and upper-caste employers.

To conclude, the chapter discusses from negotiations of power, dominance and agency interacted through everyday language to finally conclude and aim to provide a brief sketch of the findings of each chapter. Then it addresses the challenges faced in these kinds of research where the mediation of representation is itself problematic. It discusses the challenges and some possible ways in which it could be solved.

1.6.1 TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

The transcription symbols used in my thesis are common to the standard conversation analytic research, however my research framework is not based on conversation analysis, but I have used the symbols for a better perspective that shows between the speaker and the other participants. These symbols were in practice developed by Gail Jefferson, but were later modified by several C.A scholars. I am using Marjorie Goodwin (2006) and Ian Hutchby and Robin Wooffitt's (2008, x-xii) format here.

Symbols	Meanings
(0.4)	Number in the brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second.
(.)	Pause in the talk
[]	Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicate the onset and end of an overlapping talk
[Single bracket represents interruption by the next speaker
(())	A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity. Alternatively, it may indicate the transcriber's inaudible response
Sou:::nd	Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. More the colons, greater is the extent of stretching.
!	Exclamation marks indicates

	animated tone or emphatic tone
Word.	A full stop indicates a stopping fall in tone, and necessarily does not mean the end of the sentence.
Word,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation
Word?	A question mark indicates a rising intonation, and does not necessarily indicate a question.
<u>under</u>	Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis
CAPITALS	Words in capitals mark a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it.
()	Empty parenthesis indicate the presence of an unclear fragment on the topic

CHAPTER 2: MAPPING LOCATION, SITES AND SPACES

The chapter sets out as a journey to locate the sites and spaces that determines middle class lives and practices in order to understand labour relations between the female employer and the worker. I call this a journey because the reason to work on the employer-worker relationship arose from a quest to seek answers about class, caste and gendered practices that I have experienced in my own family. Raised in an orthodox, middle-class Brahmin family, I was socialized and made responsive to act like a Brahmin Hindu girl. My research on this employer-worker relationship stems from a realization that the domestic worker whom we address as *mashi*¹, a kinship term, is indeed euphemistic and polite form of language socialized to portray the power imbalance in a less severe way. Therefore I started my study by looking at the factors that legitimizes and establishes a class identity based on power and hierarchy. In every relationship each person has a role to play, and therefore everyone has a choice they make in their lives. The domestic workers have also made or were forced to choose the profession but they too have an agentive role within the structure of relationships.

This chapter intends to focus on few sections that are necessary to mention before moving on to the analysis of the data collected. Section 2.1 centres on the different locations chosen for the ethnography of this research. It also focuses on the feminization of domestic work seen both in Kolkata and Delhi in contemporary times. The section explores on some of the critical issues that foreground the reason why domestic services among females have been increasing in recent years.

Section 2.2 discusses the methodology that outlines an intense qualitative research in three different stages: from participant observation in seven different households, to casual conversations and unstructured interviews. The interviews were not really structured so it took place during various stages with the same person. The entire methodological approach taken in this research has been charted out in this section.

¹Mashi: It means Mother's sister in Bengali language.

Section 2.3 presents how the middle-class homes were like. The spatial collaboration, contestation and restricted mobility in certain areas brought out distinct difference between paid and unpaid work. Class and ethnicity were used to discuss the ideology of respectability that was bolstered by the conventions of appropriate behavior in applicable locations.

Section 2.4 elaborates on the different religious rituals that I have covered in this project. My study began as a process to understand domesticity as a practice. Within the domestic space, ritual performances by women are regarded as crucial sites for upholding sacrality and preserving respectability of families. My study complicates ritual spaces by showing them the contested sites which are affected by caste identities. The section has discussed that scholars have portrayed the employer as the origin and 'agent' of the practice, and worker as mere passive participants. This linear narrative complicates the complexities of the social practices of purity and pollution rooted in caste relations in India. It is an account that assumes congruence between caste and class, envisioning a world in which the employer is always upper caste and the worker a lower caste. Hence, I have compared both the ritual and quotidian daily practices to fully understand labour relations in terms of power and hierarchy between the employer and the worker in the domestic spaces in different setting which are a contesting sites to exert and invert the ideological hegemonic notions.

Section 2.5 includes the profile of both the employers as well as the domestic workers with whom I have interacted with. I have given a full description of the employers as well as the domestic workers from both Kolkata and Delhi. The description includes my own observation during ethnographic research in each houses, casual conversations as well as unstructured interviews. I deliberately did not make an attempt to introduce them, as it came about in a gradual process as we interacted through the ongoing project.

2.1. Locations

The project is located in two different regional spaces among Bengali families to understand the labour relations in different zones of contact, and map the perception and ideologies of the Bengali families that reside in both cities. Calcutta as well as Delhi has individual histories of partition resulting into the influx of refugees, and

later migrants from several hinterlands. The concepts of ‘respectability’ and ‘authenticity’ is discussed, argued upon and questioned as who is an ideal Bengali *bhadralok/bhadramahila*. I chose the locations as Kolkata and Delhi, keeping in mind to compare the Bengalis located in Bengal versus the Bengalis situated in a trans-regional area. In Delhi, EPDP (East Pakistan Displaced Person) colonies were established to rehabilitate the refugees, and *Chittaranjan Park* was a part of EPDP colony. It was initially not meant for the Bengalis, but it became a Bengali colony especially for those who came from East Bengal to West Bengal and then migrated to Delhi due to a government job transfer.

2.1.1 Calcutta² and its spatial structure

Calcutta developed as a city from where the British capitalist system evolved; it was at the center of production and circulation of goods (Ray and Qayum 2009). Calcutta gradually came to be recognized as a ‘contact zone’, where people from various fields and countries, of varied origin, migrated to the city with their practices and an interest of their own. Therefore, the city was no more a one homogenous space of the gentry Bengalis —be it the archetypal educated-salaried people, the Marwari traders, the students from East Bengal, and the migrant labourers. The city emerged to be a cosmopolitan city at its best before India’s Independence and partition in 1947, but scholars discussed little about the tensions that were already simmering among the diverse communities who sought to fashion the city according to one’s own terms. However, with the partition of the province in 1947, a new group of people came to the city to become its permanent residents.

A new chapter commenced in the biography of the city. I have focused on the ways this new group as well as the other migrant communities from the hinterlands sought to create a space for them in the city in order to become a part of the quotidian urbane Calcutta. A city once well-known for its industrial advancement was slowly being identified into its contemporary scenario of decline marked by third-world poverty (Hutnyk 1996). The unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants from the hinterlands from 1947 to 1975 had caused a slowdown in its economic growth making

² Calcutta was the old name which is preferred to discuss the historicity of the city; the city has been re-named into Kolkata.

it a less developed state as compared to many other states in India (Banerjee 1989). The government and civic infrastructure had to make policies to build squatter settlements temporarily, and were later allotted spaces that were available led to a complete urban transformation of the city (Bose 2010; Chatterjee 1990). The refugees from the eastern part of the erstwhile province of Bengal were spread all over, but a major concentration was in Calcutta where many colonies were built.

Calcutta was newly re-modeled with the existing three different zones: North, Central and South representing different histories that today make up the framework within which perceptions of urbanization, class and domesticity are viewed (Donner 2008). In the early years and even today, North Calcutta, was a resident for the affluent *Zamindars*, which later became a site for *bhadralok* culture to emerge. South Calcutta on the other hand was a place dominated by the British administrators and other missionaries (Banerjee 2004; Bhattacharya 2005; Ray & Quayum 2009), later after independence, South Calcutta emerged as colonies for the refugees.

My research on labour relations, family structure and domesticity within the Bengali families took me to three different nodal points: North, South and East Kolkata. I chose North Kolkata since it still endures the dominance of West Bengalis (*epar Bangla*) which according to the residents echoes an authentic Bengali traditional identity. Patterns of the South Kolkata neighborhoods came into being with partition and massive influx of East Bengali (*opar Bangla*) refugees (*bastuhara*) into the city with almost nothing but in contemporary scenario had managed to become successful middle classes in comparison to some residential areas in North Kolkata (Mukherjee 2008). My decision to explore the different zones was also to understand that how the residents of each locale perceived the town planning in the context of the recent processes of an urban restructuring with new apartment buildings and high rises. This is one of the reason why I chose East Kolkata, since it represents an amalgamation of both West Bengali, East Bengali and migrant residents. All these areas depict distinction in the everyday practices like food, traditional customs and language choice. In contemporary times, it is also central to understand the spatial and family structure of the house, since majority of the joint families in my study are getting or want to be nucleated into apartment spaces. With such a renewed transformation, the spatial mobility will change among the workers and the employers.

Figure 1: A typical North Kolkata gentry house, with wooden window structures called *khori-khori* in Bengali, and the ceiling also has wooden frames known as *kori-borga* in Bengali.



Figure 2: A narrow alley in between the houses, typical of North Calcutta



My project is defined against the backdrop of the developing cartography with rising blocks of multistoried buildings in place of extravagant large mansions, and how such spaces become central element to understand the character of the city and its relation with the people over time. As discussed in detail in earlier parts that North Kolkata still attempts to maintain its long lost glory, but South Kolkata has a very different urbanscape with high rises, flats and apartments. On the other side is East Kolkata which is a mix of both. Hence the three different locations is itself a multi-sited field to support my fieldwork in understanding the labour relations in different spatial locations within Kolkata.



Figure 3: South Kolkata house built into an apartment at Jadavpur.

Apara or neighborhood is mostly heterogenous in character that has a strong impact on its social composition and the different meanings that each locality has (Chatterjee 1990). For Calcutta, these neighborhoods or *paras* are very significant spaces among women and is routinely described in relation to other places of work, marketplace or worship (Roy 2004). The word *para* is viewed as a collective space, with diverse people living in the same neighbourhood, and would often come to each other's help. However, my conversation with the people in such localities suggest that urbanization and nuclear families are eroding the essence of *para* or neighbourhood. The residents of *Manicktalla*, *Shobha Bazaar*, *Shyam Bazaar*, *Jadavpur*, *Hazra*, *Kankurgachi*³ have an affective belongingness to the space where they are situated in. The everyday life captures essential moments that describe our society: it portrays the clattering sounds at home (*ghar*) and the hurried hullabalos in the public spaces (*bahir*).



Figure 4: Fish markets where men go to shop for good fish, as fish is an essential marker of Bengali identity

³The neighbourhoods mentioned above are all parts of North, South and East Kolkata.



Figure 5: A domestic worker working to prepare the food bought from the bazaar outside.

2.1.2 Delhi (Chittaranjan Park)

The first question that would come to a reader is why Delhi has been chosen as a second location. I chose Delhi since it had faced similar consequences like Calcutta during the wake of partition⁴. However, my reason was to look at *Chittaranjan Park*, an area in Delhi which was also marked as one of the E.P.D.P colonies. As told by some old generation residents that in 1954, a handful of the *bhadralok* intelligentsia migrated to Delhi as their jobs got transferred, and they got together to start lobbying with the Government for a residential neighbourhood in any one of the E.P.D.P colonies that were formed. Ultimately in 1960's the lands were assigned to the individuals, in the far flung southern areas of the capital, initially uninhabited and forested. The Members of E.P.D.P. were required to provide some documentation of their residential status, and were required to be “*already living in and economically employed in the capital*” (as told by one of the senior-most residents). Based on these accounts around 2000 people were given plots of land, which then became divided into several blocks from A through K, along with space for Markets and Cultural Centres. During this process many Bengalis from the hinterlands who had not been displaced during the partition also migrated to Delhi with documents and job transfers and settled in the E.P.D.P Colony. Later in 1980, the residents petitioned for the

⁴However, I agree that the western frontier and the eastern frontier concepts are completely different (refer Chatterji, J 1999), but both the sides faced the consequences of partition.

colony to be named after *Chittaranjan Das*, a prominent figure in the Indian Independence movement, which led to the renaming of E.P.D.P as the famous *Chittaranjan Park* or *C.R. Park* (Most of the factual details have been told by the senior residents of C.R.Park)

I was always curious about *C.R.Park* since my Grandfather's brother had a plot of land at *C.R.Park*, and each time he would visit Kolkata we would patiently hear stories about the space which seemed to be very different from Delhi. When I first came to *C.R.Park* for reasons of conducting research, I went back down the memory lane remembering the stories that I had heard as a child. It seemed like mini-Kolkata, a small haven for the *Bangali bhadralok*, who want their *Aajkal*, a Bengali daily, flown in directly from Kolkata. A silhouette of a typical Bengali north Kolkata para where men liked to have their evening tea sitting in the tea stall, along with fish chops in the company of friends, and discuss political affairs, arguments on football or go watch a theatre in the *Bangiya Samaj*.

C.R.Park markets has all its ingredients flown from the Kolkata markets at exorbitant prices, but the essence of being Calcuttan does not stop people from buying. The residents too call *C.R. Park* as a *para* since the community of Bengalis claim it to be a collective space of their own. Though, the population of Bengalis in *C.R.Park* is getting lower in number, but still it is quite a majority. Even then, I would be little skeptical in relating *C.R.Park* with Kolkata. *Chittaranjan Park* is in Delhi and no matter how hard one tries, one cannot remove the influences of Delhi oozing into the Bengali hub. *Chittaranjan Park* has everything that is Bengali, however the essence of the so called Bengali *bhadralok* identity as defined by scholars is lacking. There is a feeling of alienation each time I discussed about Kolkata and its *Durga poojo*, the fish markets and the sweet-meat shops. The Bengalis at *C.R.Park* emulated the Bengali *bhadralok* identity, but reproduced a unique kind of Bengali culture that they asserted as *C.R.Park* Bengalis. It was interesting to understand how the people in *C.R. Park* created a self-identity through a culture and a social group of being a Bengali that is related yet different from Kolkata. One of the residents stated that "*I hate Kolkata, there is nothing left, only politics and adda.*" This statement was very prominent, but interesting enough since he was discussing politics in a *chayer adda* (tea shop adda). The way he said, it seemed that the Bengali *adda* in *C.R. Park* is very

different from the Kolkata *adda*, though the fish, sweet-meat and the grocery stores remain to look like North Kolkata markets. However, the increase of non-Bengali population within *C.R. Park* since late 1990's had a great influence on the second generation residents, who speak in Bengali mixed with Hindi, and they perform all the religious festivals with great pomp and show including the fire-crackers, dancing and *mauj-masti*⁵.



Figure 6: The chaayer adda in C.R Park market was indeed a space for tea, arguments and rings of smoke with male gathering the place is democratic in population.



Figure 7: A grocery shop or popularly known as *doshokorma bhandar* in Bengali where almost everything is available from religious items to day to day need products.

⁵A word typically used by North-Indian Punjabi population meaning enjoyment

Therefore both the locations in Kolkata and Delhi had a character of its own. The situated spaces became more intriguing when they become contesting spaces for construction of an authentic identity. *C.R.Park* was named after the Bengali nationalist leader, now popularly known as *Chit-Park* that has created an alternative Bengali identity on its own terms and ideology.

2.1.3 The feminization of labour: Domestic Service in Kolkata and Delhi context

I chose Kolkata and Delhi for this project as it is pertinent to understand the changing class formations. The Bengali term *bhadralok/mahila* translates as ‘respectable people’ and refer to families with a tradition of family literacy, wealthy enough to do no manual labor, and possibly able to employ a servant. Valorized femininity involves being protected and staying at home to follow the patriarchal duties (Ray 2000). Hence, it is impossible for those who do paid domestic work to achieve respectable status when their very definitions are designed to exclude them. This brings to our mind a question that why the feminization of labour, particularly in domestic services is increasingly high in West Bengal compared to other states. This is extremely pertinent since the urban change as well as liberalization should have helped the lower class women to get into some mainstream jobs, but the women have been still seen to voluntarily accept domestic servitude.

Scholarly research has shown that female workers moved more into unorganized casual sectors especially in service/care economy, because it is a more permanent form of job for them. It has been estimated that 96.33 percent of the female workforce which is about 31.5 percent of the total workforce are working in the informal, unorganized sectors (Patrick 2001). Scholars have recorded the rate of growth in jobs related to service sectors between 1999 and 2004, the highest growth has been seen in the care industry, in private households based as domestic workers (39% growth rate in rural and 19.1% in urban sectors)⁶. These jobs include domestic workers as: cooks, cleaning and mopping, washing, which require almost negligible education, but skill and some amount of training in those specific areas. But these jobs are permanent forms of employment for families who need support for surviving in the city.

⁶ Kundu & Sharma (2001); Ghosh 2013

According to the economists (Banerjee 1989; Ghosh 2007) increasing numbers of females entered into domestic service due to a shift from agrarian economy to a more industrialized economy and a failure of few industries where the women could work, among them the most significant are the jute mills in Bengal, which forced the women to move out of their houses to earn a living as a worker (Chakrabarty 1989; Fernandes 2006). Studies have noted that rural-urban migration is the fastest growing form of migration in India with Delhi as one of the important destinations for inter-state migration (Deshingkar and Akter 2009). Ananya Roy (2003) had aptly pointed out the picture of the domestic world where young girls from rural Bengal were forced to migrate to Kolkata. As young girls, they were brought as domestic workers not only for their own survival but also to provide support to their families in rural Bengal.

In the cities today, “the urban population is organized around the huge migrant and naturally increasing population, organized into the informal economy dominated by insecure work”, and internally fragmented on the basis of caste, language, ethnic, and religious identities (Patel 2006, 27–28). The domestic workers in both Kolkata and Delhi (*C.R.Park*) are quite diverse as they are migrants from other regional areas. There is a demand for domestic workers, and the financial benefits and gains that Kolkata could not provide forced many women to leave their own family, and migrate into Delhi to serve other families as a domestic worker.

2.2 Methodology

In this section I present the methodological scope of this study. Much of my methodological insights that guided my research have been influenced from the theoretical frameworks within Linguistic anthropology and feminist studies as widely embraced within communication studies too. I discuss the questions of positionality, power hierarchies, and ethical concerns, and then explore the idea of a situated knowledge within the field.

2.2.1 Positionality

In feminist ethnographic studies there is a wide recognition of the importance of understanding power hierarchies, both in the contexts where one studies as well as the research setting. Since heterogeneity and hierarchy are my central themes, it is even

more important to recognize the power relations. In addition to discussing power relations between the participants, it is also important to recognize the status differences and similarities between the two groups of participants and myself as the researcher. Both myself and the employers are privileged in terms of our access to quality education and the comforts associated with a middle-class lifestyle. Included as part of this access to education, of course, is the symbolic capital represented by English-language proficiency. The workers did not possess such advantages, and their initial contact with me as an outside researcher reflected their view on me as an outsider. In the initial phase, I was asked to wait outside in the waiting room or *boshar-ghar* by the domestic worker of the household. Nevertheless, it became apparent during the initial phase of data collection that a trusted domestic worker held greater power than even a privileged outsider (researcher) despite mine and the employers' shared position of power in the hierarchy. This observation is in line with the study's larger findings that these power relations in the current context are not as straightforward as they may seem and that the forces that may reproduce this hierarchy are incomplete. As contact with the participants increased and connections were created through the women's shared gender roles, cultural practices, and linguistic ties, however, this vision of the researcher as an outsider gradually diminished.

The experiences were different in Delhi's *Chittaranjan Park*. This distinct difference made a point clear that even though I was a Bengali, I was not a *probashi baangali* (Bengalis residing outside Kolkata) therefore I was treated as an outsider which too was an unequal relationship. I did realize that there was an unequal relationship between the subjects and me as a researcher. One generally assumes that working with the privileged and the marginalized groups of women erodes the possibility of good research since the relationship has already been established to be unequal. But, Visweswaran (1994) argues that disagreement is shown in many forms like: silences, slips and being indifferent and these expressions can sometime draw more explicit information than that could be elicited in the course of the ethnography.

Therefore, to study such relationship between the employer and domestic worker was challenging, and more so for a researcher who tried to invade the domestic space that is only shared by the worker and the employer. As a researcher, I had tried to discuss

my research to a certain limit with both the employers, the workers and their families. My research has not examined only through the linear narrative or perspective of the workers. It has focused on the relationship between the employers and the worker to understand the power relations within a family structure through the voices of women in general without categorizing someone as vulnerable or marginalized or unheard. This project is about the different voices: in the manner in which every women spoke, with a quiet gloomy sense, or a somewhat more excitedly, at times with softness or being conscious that they are monitored so in a surreptitious minute detail in whispering tones, silences, smiles, and tears, that have unveiled their heterogeneous experiences, yet a common life world of being a 'woman'. In my study, I tried to involve my research subjects in the way they perceived the data and how they would have analyzed it. It is true that some did not answer, yet some have contributed important inputs to help me analyze the data collected. The next segment will elaborate on how my research methods had helped me to involve and engage with the workers as well as the employers in my research.

2.2.2 Research Methods and Process

The data analyzed for this dissertation is from an intensive ethnographic study carried out between 2015 and 2016 in seven Bengali households in urban Kolkata and Delhi over a period of twelve months. Based primarily on participant observation, these data yielded a corpus that contains over seven hundred hours of audio-visual recordings that include both daily household interactions and casual employer-worker conversations. However, in this thesis segments of data were taken from the entire corpus which were significant to analyze. To complement the insights gained from this etic perspective, an additional means of data collection incorporated an emic perspective through thirty unstructured interviews with the employers, workers and members of the employers' family. These observations and interviews were videotaped for later review and analysis. While reviewing these audio-visual data, the transcripts were coded manually to highlight emergent themes, which included English language varieties as they related to class, gender, and power. A closer look at the power dynamics suggested the importance of reciprocal dependency, affective attachment (Negri and Hardt 1999), and legitimated domination (Grillo 1989).

Virtually all studies done till date depended on structured interviews, random questionnaires, and secondary sources like advice manuals or any printed documents. Such sources do not necessarily capture the dynamism of the relationship that take place within a household. It is only through conversation that a number of important aspects of sociality and behavior is revealed, including how social actors construct particular contexts, and socialize with the new members which includes the researcher as well (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; Gal 2000; Goodwin. C 1984; Goodwin 2006; Goffman 1981). The reasons for audio and videotaping the everyday actions was to systematically observe details of actual events that took place, beyond the field notes that are taken. Sacks (1984) noted that while recording “other things” also happened, “but at least what was on the tape happened” and the tape can be studied repeatedly.

Field notes are very crucial for every ethnographer as the notes not only provide valuable data but it contributes a dialogic relation between the field, the researcher and the subject. This is therefore a crucial step in understanding the field as well as the subjects, and so it is the first stage of the research that is ‘*knowing and being known*’ (Donner 2008). As an ethnographer, the participant observation is a crucial step in understanding the field site, and also to get closer with the research subjects. However, in my research both observation as well as video-recording helped me to analyze the data in a slightly different way. Video recording of a certain glimpse of the social life is a powerful tool in viewing the entire space. It has a further advantage so that anyone could listen to the tape or view the video and agree or disagree; in other words a kind of grounded replicability is built into the raw data of the analysis (Sacks 1984). In my research, most of the domestic workers in Kolkata urged to watch the video-recording. It was an interesting experience in the manner we all gathered together to sit and watch the video recordings done. Many of the workers as well as the employers of the respective families had important inputs in this research, therefore their involvement in the project is undoubtedly acknowledged.

2.2.3 Journey into the thresholds

My fieldwork consisted of two parts in two different locations and sites. I conducted my research in Kolkata for eight months, and in Delhi (Chittaranjan Park) for another

nine months. In Kolkata, I chose to do my research in three different nodal points to look at certain aspects of labour relations in different neighbourhoods since each depicted a different character of life that influenced the private, especially the women of those particular *para* or locality. There was a distinct cultural and linguistic difference in the neighborhoods that led me to choose the different nodal points. Diversity in class, gender, ethnic identity and issues on migration dominated the discourse on certain localities in Kolkata that determined my ethnographic decision. I worked with four families in Kolkata, and three in Delhi. I must confess that in both cases they were true Bengalis, as they did not entertain researchers much, and entering a private domain in a Bengali household was indeed a difficult process.

In Kolkata, I started my fieldwork with the help of a priest in a temple who had introduced me to the first family in East Kolkata where I conducted my study on *Durga Pooja* within the domestic household. It was a slow beginning but indeed a great start since I could interact with the domestic workers of diverse identities belonging to different caste/ethnicity as well as with the employer and the family members. I was allowed to stay in the family for six days and conduct my research that included video-recording. It was quite intensive and detailed. In those six days, I became quite close to everyone, and began to understand the feeling of being like ‘a part of the family’, it was a good feeling. This *feeling good* (emphasis mine) is an important part of my research, where I too got entangled into. Finally, my rapport with the family members had allowed me to conduct my research even after the six days of *Durga Pooja*, since my research was based on two different contextual situations: one during the religious ritual spaces and the other during the quotidian everyday life. This was the start and then my networks grew through the sources from this family itself. I worked with three other families in Kolkata, spreading out in North, South and East Kolkata. Among the four families that I had worked with, one of them was the earliest *Zamindar* families of Kolkata. Therefore, it was a great privilege to work in that family with such historical and cultural knowledge that gave useful insights about its current family structure and the way people accommodate and adjust to the space they belong to. This part will be elaborated in the section on ‘Fragmented Spaces’.

In Delhi, the experiences were very different from Kolkata. The houses in Kolkata were initially difficult but later they were more than welcoming to conduct the research. However, I faced problems as how to approach the households, especially with this kind of research. Speaking with many people I was told both by the employers and workers that either the employers would again be portrayed as exploiters; or the workers too feel the same insecurity that they would be depicted as thieves or lazy workers. The beginning of my research at Chittaranjan Park was very frustrating, since everyone I knew said no to the research I wanted to conduct. But as an ethnographer, I used to visit the markets every day. There are four markets at Chittaranjan Park, I used to visit two of them almost regularly. My daily routine was to spend time with the vendors in the small shacks and talk about their daily routine, go to the small grocery stores or *mudi-khana* as commonly called in Bengali. These *mudi-khanas* were sites of discussion about the private world in a public space, and it would be interesting to hear the gossips centred on different households. It was indeed through the market that I came across a *chayer adda* (tea stall adda) which was mainly a male gathering where I was the only female odd one to participate. However, this *adda* and the visitors helped me to find the households and had introduced me to my first house where I did an extensive research. From then on I moved on to the second and the third house.

2.2.4 Data Elicitation

I carried out my research in three different stages in both Kolkata and Delhi. The three different stages were participant observation where I observed the family members including the domestic workers as well as the area where their houses were located. The second stage was the video-recording of the religious rituals as well as the quotidian life style that included casual conversations with both employers as well as the workers. In the third stage I deliberately started a conversation initiating with questions to employers and their workers in front of each other to understand how they negotiate with each other, and how power and hierarchy operates within the dynamics of the relationship. I have also made conversations with the employers and the workers separately. The entire process of conversation and observation went back and forth, as it did not operate in a linear order. I also did not concentrate my entire time in one single household, I moved from one to another since I was working on

two different sites and spaces: ritual and quotidian life style. Initially, it was very tiresome, however at the end I found it quite fascinating since each house had its own character and style of living. This gave me quite a comparative approach to analyze not only the diversity of the locations but the heterogeneous relation within the families itself.

The main method employed for data collection is referred to as ‘conversations with a purpose,’ which has been identified as a kind of ‘unstructured interviewing’. This may “appear to be without a structure, but nevertheless the researcher has to establish a framework within which the interview can be conducted; the unstructured interview is flexible but also controlled” (Burgess 1982, 107). Consequently, while no specific list of questions were prepared, I had a framework of themes that I wanted to address, and initiated the questions through a process of dialogic conversation.

The domestic workers chosen for the project were mostly full-time live-in workers and some were part-timers who have been a part of the family for more than ten years in Kolkata. The domestic workers were mostly women, with an exception of one family where there were three full time live-in male domestic workers. However, in Chittaranjan Park the workers did not stay for long in one house. According to the employers, they have a tendency to shift from one house to another, as one of the employers grumbled about workers that “*beraal der moton shobh ghondho shnukhne beray*” (the workers search around like cats move around in search of better fish). The houses I worked with had full timers as well as part timers for five years or so, only with an exception of one house where the workers were working for more than twenty years.

All the family members, including the domestic workers were told in advance about the research, and I got their consent for video/audio taping in their house. They were assured that they could refuse to answer any question or exit the study at any time. All information gathered were kept confidential and all participants have been assigned with pseudonyms. The data was collected from both employers, their family members, priests and the domestic workers. Data was recorded during their everyday domestic chores and also during some religious rituals. I deliberately chose religious rituals to see the exclusion and inclusion activity within the family members as they negotiated their daily exchanges (Dickey 2000; Goodwin 2006). However, in my

methodological process, I have asked the permission to record the religious rituals, or else I have optimized my video recording during the ongoing religious hymns due to the disruption in the traditional belief in certain families.

2.3 Fragmented Spaces

I stepped into the threshold or *choukath* of a Bengali family without having a fully charted out plan of what to do and how to start the research since it was my first day. As I have described my journey into these households which were not just complicated but difficult to get in. The first house was situated in East Kolkata, where I first entered to start my fieldwork during the *Durga Pooja* festival. The house is a five-storey building, built into apartments shared by the two brothers. I contacted the elder brother, whose wife Munmun was in charge of the *Durga Pooja*. She allowed me to enter the house since I had a priest's reference whom the family revered a lot. Hence I was in an advantageous position from the beginning of my research, knowing that I will be allowed to conduct my fieldwork in this particular household.

2.3.1 Crossing the threshold

As I entered the building, I was bit confused, since I did not know where to go. In the ground floor there was a medicine shop, and the first floor had a diagnostic testing laboratory. They were both family run business. Finally, one of the workers came down, asked my name and then took me to the fourth floor. She asked me to wait in the living space till *Munmun* arrived. In the meantime, I was busy noticing the spatial arrangement of the house. The building from outside looked quite simple and ordinary, yet the living space was a complete reversal. It looked posh, elite and stylish. It seemed that the living area was newly renovated and designed in such a manner that I could view only the entire living space. There was a total privacy maintained between the inner (domestic, intimate spaces) and the outer (living and sitting space). I was still on the other periphery where I was treated as an outsider.

Munmun came and listened to my project and said '*nice*', she called her full time live-in workers and discussed the work together. We all agreed on it. The workers seemed more interested and Munmun laughed while saying that "*they are always excited about everything*". Munmun gave directives to serve me some snack with a cup of

coffee, and as I was quite reluctant she requested me to have something as it is a part of Bengali custom. I started chatting with Munmun about the rituals and about her everyday routine to build a certain kind of rapport with her. It was quite interesting to note that on the first day itself she started to speak quite a lot, in fact she introduced her full time live-in workers and made it sure that I could conduct my research properly. On that day itself I could realize an interchange of power and affective relation between Munmun and her full time live-in workers since Munmun was reliant on every small things that she needed.

The collaboration of workers and the employers depended on the norms and regulations that were maintained by the family structures and traditions. In Kolkata, my research centered around four different households and each house retained a unique relation with the workers. In the first house located in East Kolkata, the full time live-in workers were very close with Munmun, and she depended on her workers for everything. Gita, a full time worker said to me nonchalantly that “*we are like family here, we could go anywhere we wanted to*” yet she and all other workers still were obliged to take permission from Munmun to enter her bedroom or to enter the *thakur-ghar*.⁷ Thus, the workers were aware of the power relationship based on their own subject position which itself creates a spatial ordering within the house where they all live-in. All the houses in Kolkata had a similar kind of arrangement where the workers felt that they were needed, and the employers depended on them nevertheless the workers did not have a freedom of space in comparison to the other members of the family, irrespective of the ongoing discourse of ‘*being a part of our family*’.

The situation regarding freedom of movement for the workers was quite subtle since in many occasions their mobility was not restricted but they did not have a complete freedom since they always had to take a permission from the employer. These three houses in East and South Kolkata had similar trends. In fact, when I visited the house I was also treated as an outsider in the beginning, but gradually the process became easier. As a researcher too, I found my spatial movements quite restricted as I did not know where to go and where not to. Interesting to note is that in this kind of situation the full time workers had more power than I had. They would guide me along the way. Thus, the entire process of spatial mobility is quite complex. As a native

⁷Thakur-ghar is a place where the rituals are performed.

researcher, I knew the Bengali traditions and customs so I restricted myself from invading the inner quarters or the *andarmahal*, but what if I was not a native researcher? I would then had the privilege of not knowing the culture and getting into the spaces that I should not have, hence it all depends on who we are and how the people are negotiating with each other.

The extreme exception was the house in North Kolkata where the servants were almost invisible. I had to locate them searching around the entire house. It was once an extremely huge palatial building when it used to be a joint family but now due to financial constraints the property has been divided and the house has been fragmented and portioned in separate sections. The *Thakur-dalan* is the only remaining common space of interaction among the family members. The workers are restricted and not allowed beyond their occupational spaces. In this particular house there were no cooks, since the cooking was mainly an activity done by the female members of the family. The domestic workers did work that included sweeping, dusting, washing, cleaning utensils and at times caring child or aged and running other errands like going to the grocery store etc.



Figure 8: North Kolkata house outside view



Figure 9: The inside view of the house, where there is a separate entrance for servants and Janitors.



Figure 10: With the family being nucleated, the *tulsi-tala* has been improvised in a new space.



Figure 11: The Thakur dalan becomes a space of adda for women across generation of similar class relation.

However, in Delhi the houses were fashioned in a modern way where I could see the kitchen as well as the workers. The differences between Kolkata and Delhi were very subtle. In both Kolkata and Delhi, the domestic worker is directly under the authority of the employer; the work is done by following the commands of the employer. In Kolkata, the workplace was also a personal dwelling where they would be reprimanded by the employer and even pampered by the same employer, but in Delhi the employers mostly maintained a distance with the workers and the house remained only a working space for them. It was depressing for some since most of them were migrants who would often refer Kolkata/WestBengal as '*amader desher barite*' and refuse to call Delhi as their country. Domestic workers were responsible to work on a daily basis and in a continuous manner in return for wage at the end of their month's work.

2.3.2 Domestic Spaces and Women's mobility

Space is a crucial aspect in defining a woman's status determining her position within the home or outside. The respectable status of a *bhadramahila* is defined by her active role in the home, culturally refined manners appropriate to represent and endorse the moral values of the family (Banerji 2001; Bhattacharya 2005). The respectable middle-class women are protected by the patriarch of the family to maintain the respect and dignity of the woman, and she is expected to show deference and modesty through her everyday mundane realities of life that includes both domestic chores as well as ritual performances. Civilized protection was to be found only within the confines of the home or the *ghar*. Tagore, a very progressive writer also wrote "*esho esho amar ghare esho amar ghare...*" subtly hints at a patriarchal security within the home that focuses on domesticity, intimacy and ideas of a happy romantic life. The embodied manifestation of a woman to have *lajja* or shame is closely connected with virtue and respectability.

On the other hand, some women who have to work hard to run their families, and those who are unprotected within the patriarchal structure have been exposed to the public gaze by definitions of being shameless and uncivilized (Banerjee 1989; Banerjee 2004). Women working outside their home or doing paid work, the lower class, poor women are often not considered respectable. Thus the assumption of conduct on the part of domestic workers stemmed from crossing the boundary between the home and outside that is associated with meanings layered with respectability (Gulati & Bagchi 2005; Roy 2003). This is one of the reason why many workers prefer to be full timer live-in workers rather than staying at a squatter settlement where they could be more vulnerable. My research engages with the two groups of women who share vulnerable moments in varying ways, but both the bodies manifest shame or *lajja* in a similar way. Though the meanings of respectability are different among the two groups of women, but they collectively share the notion of *lajja* or shame. Spaces where we are located matters and crossing the boundaries or *choukath* of home or *ghar* is dangerous for any woman irrespective of class, caste or ethnicity. In conversation with one of my research subject (an employer), she recollected that "*Everybody knew that there was a train oborodh and I am a working*

woman, when I returned the next day morning I had to answer so many questions...even when the television channels were providing the answers...”

Fragmented spaces form an integral part of women’s life in deciding and basically restricting women in certain spaces in keeping with their position, stance and status. Though this section has clearly complicated the issues between the paid and the unpaid worker, but it has also described complex relation in women’s life, even if one is a worker or an employer. The vulnerability and the fear of losing the respect among the middle-class women is even more precarious at times which they can share with their workers, but cannot with any other members of the family. Some women who work for their own family are respected and known as an ideal woman, who is performing her duty or *kartavya* whereas the same work when performed by a worker is disregarded and devalued (Anderson 2000; Romero 2002).

2.3.3 Domestic Spaces: Sites of Ritual spaces and Everyday life

A respectable family or *paribar* is fashioned through the quotidian practices of an idealized *bhadramahila* of the house and the chief concern of a Bengali woman is to project herself and socialize other female members as a perfect *grihalaksmi* (a household *Laksmi*), patterned after *Laksmi*, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Thus, the family or *paribar* is a crucial site for generating and conceptualizing normative ideas about politeness, deference and modesty through everyday activities of hospitality, devotion and maintaining a *sanskar* (tradition) that is instilled and passed on through generations (Chatterjee 2014). Therefore, in my research I have divided the settings into two contexts within the same domestic space: one which manifests a traditional part of a woman where she performs the ritual, and what role the workers play in such spaces; and, the other highlights on the daily quotidian routine.

In the households that I have observed, I examined how the employers and the workers manifest their selves in different settings. I have deliberately chosen different rituals to highlight practices of purity and pollution as an aspect of governing relationship between employer and worker. It is accepted that all women perform rituals, but since my project is based on the labour relations I have focused on the employers and workers during the religious rituals that took place within the domestic

households where one is a paid worker whereas the other is a dutiful mother/wife/daughter. They all had a similar view that the religious rituals are performed for the betterment of the family, society, and the welfare of the nation. A domestic servant either full/part time has to perform the everyday routinized work and the employer also needs to supervise and collaborate with the worker to get the work done properly. In this everyday life lies such matters that are extremely mundane, expected and trivial. It probably has no importance in our life. But strangely so, the most significant thing to investigate is this triviality that spreads and clouds all over us. We cannot live without being ordinary and mundane. The research thus examined the dull, quotidian everyday activities, and its impact on our everyday relations.

2.4 Contested Sites and Spaces

The section reveals the diverse relations among the workers as well as the employers. It discusses at length about the asymmetrical positioning of female workers in different contexts in similar spaces within the domestic dwelling. The section explores the different religious rituals that were performed in the four households in Kolkata and the same religious rituals being publicly observed in Delhi by the Bengali Community. It gives a factual detail of the ritual as well as the sites and spaces that acts as a contesting ground to exert/invert hegemony due to diverse caste/ethnic backgrounds. Kolkata being historically and culturally diverse portrayed the similar practice in the performance of such religious rituals that were followed in the four different households. They all maintained their own unquetrade traditional practices which were distinct from other households in Kolkata. It might be the same religious ritual but the customs and norms of the ritual may not be similar even among Bengali families. Going by the people's knowledge and not by an anthropological theory, one of my research participant in Kolkata said that:

“Customs differ among different castes, and also from where we belong, say if we are from epar bangla⁸ then the rules are different and if you are from opar bangla⁹ then it will be different...ghoti and bangal are opposites in every way...”

⁸Epar Bangla: Refers to West Bengal

⁹Opar Bangla: Refers to East Bengal/Pakistan

Henceforth, this space of religious rituals is indeed contested when there is an intersection of caste, class and location. This has helped me to understand not only the diversity of customs but also how diverse identities play a role in these rituals and what kind of roles do each actors have to play. I have studied five religious rituals in Kolkata and two religious rituals in Delhi. In Kolkata, I had the opportunity to enter the households and do fieldwork while their homes turned into ritual grounds, whereas in Delhi, the same rituals were performed in public spaces with great pomp and show. Because I have been raised in Kolkata and have a long-term relationship with its cultural associations, I already have a substantial knowledge of highly significant religious rituals of Kolkata, often times referred as a proverb *baro mashe tero parbon* meaning “thirteen events in twelve months”.

Such events are important in understanding the roles of women within the domestic sphere and their perceptions about rituals and everyday activities of life. I had observed and grew up with knowing what a ritual is, but something that had always intrigued me was the way in which the social spaces were re-created for the performance of particular rituals. The priests are always Brahmins, and therefore form an integral part in the religious rituals where they work in collaboration with the women of the household. The men generally tend to stay detached after undertaking their public duty that included mostly shopping for the purpose of the ritual.

2.4.1 Rituals and Women

A ritual is an established tradition that has been acquired and transmitted socio-culturally. Rituals are sacred acts of piety, considered by their performers to confer upon himself/herself great virtue and value for the individual, and in many cases the welfare of the family, and often the whole clan (Chatterjee 2014). The preparations for the entire ritual are done almost exclusively by women, there can be no doubt that the ritual space enable women to develop what Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) have termed as a ‘community of practice’. In this community, women develop activities together, and ways of engaging themselves in those activities, work out a creative space through ways of relating and talking to each other. However, the ritual itself serves to produce and reproduce women as gendered subjects.

Ritual spaces have been explored in this research to understand the diverse relation among the workers and employers. Religious rituals not just create gendered subjects but there is an inter-weaving of diverse class, caste and ethnic backgrounds. As I was conducting my fieldwork, I observed that the employers played an important role in supervising the entire work, and at times engaged themselves in the ritual practice too. They performed the rituals that included two aspects: one was upholding the patriarchal structure for the well-being of the 'family; and the second, *grihini* or the female employer had an important role in performing these rituals since it identified them as an ideal *bhadramahila*. The success of every ritual meant like passing in every examination for these groups of women, since as employers they too had to prove to their family members that they were ideal *grihinis*. The women of two groups: the employers and the domestic workers with whom I have worked yearned for recognition; the employers wanted appreciation from their family and the workers craved for an acknowledgement from their employers.

2.4.2 Contested Terrains

The contested terrains deal with the zone of active resistance from the workers during the period of religious rituals, because to understand rituals we have to have a clear understanding of caste. As discussed before that it would be a mistake to imagine that an employer would always be an upper caste and the worker a lower caste. The domestic workers belong to various castes, including Brahmins, who are accorded as the highest caste in India, even though they all belong to the marginalized segment of the population according to their economic structure. The diversity in caste/ethnicity inverts the economic structure during religious rituals, as the caste identity is manipulated to exert hegemony over other workers and the employers who are non-Brahmins. Thus, the households become sites of conflict and confrontation among the workers as some Brahmin workers cannot come to terms with the notion of "servitude." But such domestic spaces are also arenas of collaboration as the workers work with each other to perform household domestic chores. The religious rituals bring an immense prospect for the Brahmin workers to cultivate an agency in order to transgress the boundaries of hierarchy, to negotiate and contest social system by embodying their caste identity.

My observation during the religious rituals highlighted that the common expression of ‘Exercising Casteism’ is quite problematic since it manifests the idea of caste as a social and symbolic practice. Domestic spaces have illustrated an important aspect of the associated link between religion and caste in contemporary urban life which allowed the domestic workers to voice that “*a Brahmin woman who cooks holy food is not a servant anymore.*” This was not just voicing resistance of being a servant but questioning the societal structure of caste which manifests her at a higher level than many other workers as well as employers who are non-Brahmins. Hence, they equate non- Brahmin employers and the other non-Brahmin workers at a same level when such religious rituals are performed.

2.4.3 The Religious Rituals

I have conducted my research in four different households in Kolkata where four different kinds of religious rituals took place. They were *Durga Pooja*, *Lakshmi Pooja* (*Kojagori* and *Dipanwita*) and *Singha-Bahini*. All the four religious rituals have different stories and ways of performing according to the different customary practices in each house. *Durga Pooja* is generally the same everywhere but it was only during my fieldwork that I came to realize that there was a huge difference between what the priests called it as a ‘*paribarik pooja*’¹⁰ versus a ‘*sarbojonin pooja*’¹¹. *Durga Pooja* occurs in the month of *Ashwin* or October which is celebrated with much grandeur than the one which is called *Basanti Durga Pooja* that occurs during the month of March/April. This festival among the Bengalis is one of the most celebrated ones whether one is residing in West-Bengal, or they are living outside Bengal. *Durga Pooja* has become a global affair with the diasporic Bengalis celebrating the ritual as a marker of Bengali identity.

Durga Pooja: This Pooja is celebrated with much gaiety and splendour in the Bengali month of *Ashwin* (September/October). The household that I have worked with performed this religious ritual which was indeed a difficult task, since the ritual continues for five days. During my ethnography the priest informed me that this particular *Durga Pooja* was invoked by Lord *Rama* before going to war with king

¹⁰*Paribarik* is a word that means familial

¹¹*Sarbojonin* is a word that means all-inclusive that is publicly celebrated

Ravana. This autumnal ritual was different from the *Durga Puja* which is celebrated during the spring time known as *Basanti Pooja*. *Basanti Pooja* is only done by the Brahmin families, hence there is an angle of caste already embedded into the system. The autumnal *Durga Pooja* is also known as *akal-bodhan* or out-of-time ('*akal*') and to invoke ('*bodhan*'), which Lord Ram did so as to please *Maa Durga* in order to win the battle. In Bengal, *akal-bodhon* is celebrated with much opulence but there is less significance of *Lord Rama* in the bigger picture.

In Bengal, *Durga* as an image remains to be an inspiration for all women. as an icon of empowerment who killed evil forces. In all the households that I have worked believed in *Durga* as a strength and each time I would go out they would say “*Dugga-Dugga...take care*”. When I discussed this “*Dugga-Dugga*” issue with one of the employers, she said that “*Goddess Durga is thought to destroy all evil power, so each time one goes outside the house people chant Durga’s name...*” In Bengal, they chant the name of a female deity for protection and secured life, whereas in most other parts of India it is mostly a male deity that takes over. However, the issue is that in reality even *Durga* is unable to protect the women who have to follow the patriarchal mores.

It was my privilege that I could attend a *baroaari* or *paribarikPooja* for the first time. The opportunity to conduct research during such a grand festival meant a lot of interaction with the family members, the visitors, employer and the domestic workers. The priests informed me a lot about the difference between a *baroaari* and a *Sarbojonin Pooja*, they also gave me details of where the first *baroaari*¹²*Pooja* took place. The religious ritual of this grandeur needed enough financial support to effectively complete the five days of the entire ritual with perfection. It was not just a matter of reading religious scriptures by the priest, but it included serving holy food to the goddess every day that had to be cooked by the Brahmin women. The ritual included several *striachars* (Women’s ritual) which created a space for all women to participate in the ritual irrespective of caste, class and ethnicity. However, I noticed

¹²The origin of the community puja can be credited to the twelve friends of Guptipara in Hoogly, West Bengal, who collaborated and collected contributions or *chanda* from local residents to conduct the first community puja called the *baro-yaari* or the 'twelve-friend' puja in late 18th C. The *baro-ari* puja was brought to Kolkata in 19th C by Raja Harinath of Cossimbazar, who performed the *Durga Pooja* at his ancestral home in Murshidabad (As told by the priest).

while I participated in these *striachars* that widows were not allowed to participate in any of these rituals, they could only sit and watch. I felt that they almost lost their identity after becoming a widow, as the same woman who made arrangements for this ritual every year was barred from every ritual activity.



Figure 12: The deity of Goddess Durga in the East Kolkata household.



Figure 13: The arrangements made for just one day during the ritual (this is done for everyday).



Figure 14: The *grihini* (lady) of the house, who is also the employer is bidding farewell to the Goddess.



Figure 15: The domestic workers are also bidding farewell one at a time.



Figure 16: All playing vermilion.

While making a comparison with Delhi, I remembered what the priest in Kolkata told me that there is a difference between a ritual that is managed within the private household and the one which is left for the public. Though I had observed this religious ritual with same vigour and enthusiasm for five days, and had interacted with people, but the interactions were much less compared to that in Kolkata. I felt that something was lacking, since for some of the C.R. Park members this ritual represented their Bengali identity, and for some these five days were an excuse to have fun. Therefore the entire energy was spent in decoration, food-stalls, theatre, music bands, and on the other side, the religious ritual was also being played on. Being raised in Kolkata, I felt a little out of place in *Chittaranjan Park* when I came to think of the Bengalis in Kolkata or the *Durga poojo* in Kolkata. However, the *Durga Pooja* in *C.R. Park* has created an identity of its own within Delhi. It was

lavish, majestic and opulent. It was only during such rituals that the old Bengali tracks as well as some *Rabindra-sangeet* and *Nazrul-geeti* are played to maintain the Bengali-ness.

I observed that the caste identity was very visible since no other caste could cook the holy food other than a Brahmin lady. This surprised me a lot since *C.R.Park* would always try to establish itself to be extremely liberal and progressive but in this case they had to listen to the instructions of a Brahmin priest who was imported from Kolkata. One evening I asked to one of the members in the committee that ‘*why do they need a Brahmin to cook?*’ She answered that “*In all Shakti poojo we have to be careful, no mistakes can be done. According to Shakto rules only Brahmins can cook...*” Workers who were of a lower caste, and even some of high caste but their low class status made them feel uncomfortable in such lavish public spaces hence they preferred temples. In fact, it was not just them, even I was feeling uncomfortable and out of place since they spoke and interacted with people whom they knew. Whereas in Kolkata I went to a completely new space but became so close with the entire family.



Figure 17: Women serving food to the committee members(Chittaranjan Park, Delhi)



Figure 18: The domestic worker along with her two sons was feeling out of place as she was looking at Vidya Balan's advert on jewellery.

Lakshmi Pooja: The word 'Lakshmi' has been derived from the Sanskrit word *Laksya*, meaning aim or goal, and she is the goddess of wealth and prosperity, both material and spiritual. I have observed Lakshmi Pooja or ritual in two different domestic households in Kolkata, one in East Kolkata and the other in South Kolkata. Lakshmi is the household goddess of most Hindu families, and a favorite of women. The daughters/ wives are attributed as "*Lokkhi meye/bou*" for being graceful, prosperous and looking after the welfare of the family. Although she is worshiped daily, the festive month of October is Lakshmi's special month. Lakshmi Puja is celebrated on the full moon night of *Kojagari Purnima*, which generally happens after the fifth day of Goddess Durga's immersion (Chatterjee 2014)

The household in South Kolkata where I conducted my research is a descendent of East Bengal, therefore the customs and traditions were different from those of a resident of West Bengal. As I started my ethnography, the employer told me that *Kojagori Lokkhi Pooja* is particularly done by the East-Bengalis who have now made a place in West Bengal. She said that she has been carrying the tradition since the time of her mother-in-law. While I was recording the entire day, I was also speaking with her that how she performed the *Pooja*. She said that the preparations for the *pooja* are done exclusively by women, irrespective of class/caste/ethnicity, with the exception of the holy food which is prepared by a Brahmin. The arrangements include the decorations and preparation for the *pooja*, e.g., the *alpana* (a decoration in white rice paste) is drawn at the entrance of the *thakur ghar* (the place where the idols are

worshipped).In this house they did not worship the idol for this day, they had a marble idol but during this day they usually bought a painted pot which had *Durga* along with *Lokkhi*. She said that this was the custom that she has been following since the days of her mother-in law. The *Lokkhi shora* would be placed on the banana stems and grains would be filled inside those stems.They had lit the house with *dhoop* (incense sticks), *dhuno* (incense burner) and lamps in order to welcome goddess *Lokkhi*.



Figure 19:Lokkhi shora or pot used in this household to perform the ritual.



Figure 20: Domestic worker and the employer working together, cutting vegetable for the ritual.



Figure 21: Domestic worker and her children sitting on the floor to eat the holy food.

Another household in East Kolkata where I had conducted my research is a West Bengali family told that they perform the Lakshmi Pooja five times a year. I had the opportunity to observe two different types of the same ritual in the whole year. The biggest of all five *Lakshmi poojas* was the *Dipanwita lakshmi Pooja* that happens during the time when *Kali Pooja* in Bengal and *Diwali* in North India is celebrated. It happens on the fifteenth day of the dark fortnight or *Omobossa*. This *Pooja* known as *Dipanwita Pooja* is celebrated among the people of West Bengal. The preparations for the *pooja* are done exclusively by women, however in this house it was the employer (Mahua) who was mainly involved with the arrangements. Mahua said that they usually welcome Goddess *Lakshmi* with fourteen lamps and drawing *alpana* made of rice paste which looked like the feet of the Goddess, assuming that Goddess *Lakshmi* would step on those feet and enter the house. While Mahua was making three dolls or *putul* which I was very curious about, she narrated to me that she needs to make *Olokkhi*, *Kuber* and *Narayan* and place it on a banana stem. An important part of the ritual is the destruction of the *Olokkhi*. *Olokkhi* literally means that a person or event without *Lokkhi* (luck/fortune), but is used here to indicate a female force of ill fortune that must be disparaged and cast out before the actual ritual or *pooja* begins. It has been a tradition that *Olokkhi* must be burnt and expelled from the house, to enable the advent of the “good woman” or *Lokkhi*, into the home for ushering in wealth and prosperity. As the *Olokkhi* burns, the young male children of the household play and dance, celebrating the destruction of the *Olokkhi*. This part of the ritual serves as a warning to the women observers that a similar fate awaits any woman who contravenes patriarchal morality.



Figure 22: Mahua narrating how the ritual is performed while she was drawing the *alpona*.



Figure 23: The *alpona* with *Lokhi's* feet



Figure 24: The three dolls that Mahua made. The black doll represents *Olokhi*, pink one is *Kuber* and the yellow is *Narayan*.



Figure 25: The *Griha-lokkhi* (household deity) of this house sitting on a pile of grain.

The priest told me that other than the *Dipanwita Lokkhi Pooja* this house also performs *dhanno lokkhi Pooja* which celebrates the harvest season to bring in wealth and prosperity of the family. The earlier grains are distributed within the family members and the *dhanno lokkhi* sits on a pile of new grain that has been harvested. During and after this Pooja, the family members make rice with the grains to sit together and eat so that in the next year also they will be able to eat in the same way.

Singha-Bahini Pooja: This religious ritual is practiced among only few families in Kolkata, who once belonged to the early gentry class in Bengal. It is difficult to write about this ritual since any Bengali could guess that either this or that family must be the one, so without going into much details, I must acknowledge that as a researcher I was lucky to get an opportunity to conduct research and video record in this house. The people in general were socialized to be very conservative and believed equally in both class as well as the caste system, though they were not Brahmins. However, my later research on caste hierarchies can give more details on this issue. I found class overpowering than caste, and caste was a matter of fact to be used so that exclusionary practices could be performed in the name of religion. The domestic workers were not even seen near the *Thakur dalan* (the space where the goddesses resides). The widows were also restricted to enter the space, so they could watch the ritual from a space which had a boundary.

Speaking with the head of the family was my greatest achievement, since I never spoke with any of the existing landlords or the babus of Kolkata. He narrated to me

that this goddess is another form of *Durga* whom their *Kulo-purohit* (priest of the clan) dreamt of while he was meditating. The story goes that the goddess had requested the priest to bring her from a particular place to Kolkata to serve her since she was in pain. The story also has an angle based on religion. The deity assumed that her security was at stake since the Muslims were invading, and so she needed protection. The priest went and found the deity exactly where he had dreamt of, and from then on, *Singha Bahini* as a religious ritual is performed in this house. It was generations old, maybe since two to three hundred years or so. The joint structure of the house has been divided and each one family has turns or *pala* in Bengali which means that each time one family has to bear the cost of the entire ritual. The aristocratic look of the family might disappear but they will not compromise on the cost of the religious ritual. Hence, the ritual was done with all lavish expenses and splendour.



Figure 26: The Singha-Bahini Goddess



Figure 27: A lady serving the Goddess

Saraswati Pooja: Saraswati is the Goddess who signifies knowledge, learning, and music. She is the serene Goddess usually seen with a fair skin in Bengal, riding a swan and seated on a lotus flower. *Saraswati Pooja* is performed to pay allegiance to the Goddess of learning and music. *Saraswati* is mentioned in the Vedic texts and is believed as one among the Brahmanical Gods. Saraswati Pooja is very common among the Bengalis and it happens not only in the private households but also in the public spaces. I had a chance to visit the *Chittaranjan Park Kali-bari* temple to view the Pooja in a public space and also a school nearby. The school-children were mostly from the marginalized section of the population. In the temple, people from diverse backgrounds including me had joined in to give *pushpanjali* (offering to the deity) and some kids with their parents who would first write their alphabet witnessing the deity which is popularly known as *hathe-khori* in Bengali. It cannot be exactly translated but it signifies the onset of writing from that day onward.



Figure 28: Saraswati Pooja in the school.



Figure 29: The children (mostly of the domestic workers) are offering their prayers.

After looking at these public spaces, I got an opportunity to video-record the entire *Saraswati Pooja* that was a happening in a nearby place close to *C.R. Park* which was a housing society and the Bengali community were performing the *Pooja*. The Brahmin ladies made the holy food in the morning and offered it to the goddess, there was also an involvement of men in this ritual in the distribution of the *bhog* or the holy food. In this particular area, it was about the Bengali community who played the major role since they had initiated the ritual and collecting funds. After the non-Bengalis joined in, there was not much interest shown by the Bengali members since they had started the *Pooja*. However, the matter was resolved when they all started to join in to distribute the holy food.



Figure 30: After the ritual ladies sit together and gossip and give *adda* about the events.

Finally, getting to know and record so many rituals were an immense knowledge and understanding of different ways of performing rituals, the different customs, beliefs and values that makes a single ritual diverse in its own ways. However, I still believe that the priest made a clear distinction between a ritual carried out within a family and that same one done publicly has lot of implications. The difference is not in a wrong sense, but a family ritual is more collective and also individual, whereas the public ritual did not have the essence of a collective culture or an individual one. The most important factor that I had noticed in all these public space rituals were that the domestic workers were not at all visible, though they play a huge role in washing dishes, and running errands, but they are completely out of the bigger picture.

2.5 Characters

The characters in my research focuses on two different groups of women, who are diverse not only across class (lower and middle class) but on other variables like: one has access to education and the other is educationally and economically disadvantaged. The purpose of this research is to give voice to multiple actors in domestic spaces that will provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between the notions associated with respectability, education, and work. One who are advantaged and are engaged to perform the duties within their own households, whereas the others who work at other's homes to make a life of their own, and at times search for a safe shelter to live in. Often the workers are located in slums since they have to carry on their part-time domestic work. My interest was in the relationship between workers and employers, I decided to include them both in my data. Only by listening to both sides, would it be possible to understand the nature of their labour relations. In Indian contexts, scholars have worked on employers or the domestic workers and in few cases they have taken a relational approach. I have taken a relational approach (Banerjee 2004; Dickey 2000; Ray & Qayum 2009) to understand the position of two groups of women in two different contexts, spaces and locations. My first question emerged as in how do they negotiate and orient towards each other knowing the existing power and hierarchy within the system? It also often times bothered me that how did they perceive the kinship word *mashi*¹³ since every household family members mostly call them as *mashi* and they too reciprocate the kinship term. In domestic space these relations are generated through the internalized practices and norms of domesticity that are habituated through our daily life in work, duty, responsibility etcetera.

2.5.1 Decision to study both Employers and Workers

Scholarship on domestic workers are becoming very popular for policy and development studies (Sen & Sengupta 2016), however it is also very crucial to understand the relationship between the employer as well as the worker who are both females. Therefore to study about hierarchies in society, where power is embedded, it is indeed important to study both employers and workers (Scheyvens et al. 2003).

¹³Mashi: Literal Bengali meaning: Mother's sister.

Only by doing so it is possible to understand the complex realities embedded in the labour relations between two sides, even if this meant broadening the focus and adjusting the time that I could spend with each of them. Thus, like Dickey (2000) I too chose a relational approach and did an intense ethnography. My conversations with both employers and workers were to understand their perceptions regarding their positions of belonging to different class structure. As a researcher, I wanted to understand the power asymmetries in the relation but we also need to recognize the internal conflicts within this power structure. Thus my research aimed for a more bi-directional process where the analysis of the research could be drawn from both angles and viewpoints rather than a unidirectional one.

2.5.2 The Study: Employers

Initially, I started with participant observation, but as we became closer and developed a rapport with the family members, I started to participate, engage and involve myself in the daily social activities. This process of ‘knowing and learning’ from the contextual situation helped me to understand the members of the house. It also made it easier for me to talk to several of the employers and the family members while I was taking field notes and video-recording during my observation. However, I always kept my schedule open for the timings that the different households gave for discussions and conversation which was my second and third stage of ethnography. In total, I spoke with ten female members (age limit from twenty to sixty), seven male members and five priests. The participant observation included two contextual situations: one ritual setting and the other during mundane daily life. The entire observation was video-recorded, only with certain exceptions when the research participant did not want it to be recorded.

I personally did not prefer to go with a questionnaire and ask certain predictable questions regarding their age, education, work etc. My study did not have a structured interview with any of the employers, rather I initiated a conversation with a question that would trigger the interactional floor. Yes, it is true that the question was strategic in some way like ‘*why do they perform rituals?*’ Or ‘*what do they mean by abhadramahila?*’ Usually my conversation would initiate with a question like the above ones. The casual conversation included the employer as well as the family

members, and some time it also included the priests. My main aim was to know that ‘who these employers were?’ I knew that they were educationally advantageous, culturally refined, and behaved like a *bhadramahila*, nevertheless understanding their issues and problems were difficult. It was also not possible to ask a straight question on who they were?

The employers in general were aware of their hierarchical position which was very clear from their comportment, gesture and the way they gave directives to the servants. However, as some employers told me that they were totally dependent on their servants and could not live without them. Two such employers revealed that they have fewer friends who would support and help them as much as their workers did. One of them commented that: “*They are my friend, philosopher and guide...*” and the other, went on to say “*They are my friends, with them I gossip, they know everything about me, and I know everything about them...ask them?*” It is certainly true that the employers depended on their workers, and relied on them but they were also aware of their own power structure which they could use anytime to get rid of the worker. But the workers were also careful not to cross their boundary actively, rather they tied the employers into an affective attachment.

My casual conversation with the employers went off quite smoothly, only in certain instances they did not want to video-tape when they got emotional when we started discussing about vulnerability and precarity. It was a group discussion, and in the middle of it I had to stop video-recording since one woman was almost in tears as she questioned the meaning of being vulnerable. She stated that “*Every woman is vulnerable...we do not know that when and where we can be in that position, wealth cannot stop from being vulnerable...*” The other women started quoting lines from Shakespeare and discussed about their childhood memory. I tried to change the topic by asking about the domestic workers and immediately they all started to complain that in the recent years the workers have become very demanding and one of them remarked “*Do you know that they are forging BPL cards yet they have T.V, fridge and now they also want a computer...they have everything in their small hutments..*” Many of such remarks and conversations they all had (some of which are video-recorded) described their inner fear of losing the identity of a *bhadramahila*. They conflicted with each other as someone who said that anyone who is *bhadra* or polite

could be a *bhadramahila* and immediately others contested the meaning and went back to history describing a *bhadramahila* to be one who is educated and has refined manners.

The employers in Delhi also had a similar kind of approach like the Kolkata employers that had an ingrained power structure. My fieldwork was in three different households in Delhi's *Chittaranjan Park* and neighboring areas. I spoke with three female employers and other four members of their household who were all female. The employers were around fifty to sixty years of age, whereas the other members varied from thirty to ninety years. I consciously did not ask about their age or education until they voluntarily discussed about it. As I carried on my ethnographic research I did find some differences. In Delhi, some employers maintained a kind of distance, and at certain points mistakenly the workers would refer the Bengali employer as '*madam*' which is a term that is not used in Kolkata. But the employers in Kolkata would always keep separate plates, dishes and clothes for the domestic workers even if they were full time workers since the ideas of purity and pollution shaped domestic work. However in Delhi the employers never used different dishes for the workers. In fact they stressed on washing the dishes properly but I have never come across anyone who have used a different dish, utensils for a worker. It might be possible that most of the workers in Delhi are migrant workers and it is not possible to keep trace that who is what in terms of their caste, ethnicity and religion. The employers have often complained that there are many Muslim workers from Bangladesh who forge their identity as a Hindu widow, and the Bengali employers do not question their whereabouts since they are cheaper and cook well. In Kolkata, when asked about different dishes being used the employers surprisingly do not refer to caste as much, and all they care about is the workers' "hygiene," which reflects their class rather than caste biases.

2.5.3 The study: Domestic Workers

The domestic workers that I had studied were mostly full-time live in workers in Kolkata, some part-timers and some contractual workers who would come often during religious rituals and other festivals. In Kolkata I have worked with both male and female workers. There were ten female full time live-in workers and three male

full time live-in workers, and six part time/contractual workers that I had interacted with in Kolkata. The full time workers stayed in the homes of the employers, yet they also had a home of their own in rural Bengal. The part timers had mostly migrated from rural Bengal and started to live in the shanty slums, often known as *bosti-bashi* meaning a slum-dweller. The part-timers worked in many houses to earn as much as they could to run their family since in most of the cases they were the sole breadwinner of the family and often abused by their alcoholic husbands. Their children often suffered from malnutrition as they lack proper nutritious food, and also do not receive much education. These women work hard for generational mobility but often times their dreams are not fulfilled as it leads into a transgenerational occupation of being a *kajer-lok* forever.

In Kolkata I have worked with workers who have worked in the families for more than five years and have developed a relationship with the employers and the family members. While doing my ethnography, I noticed a different dynamics between the full-timer and a part-timer in the same house. The first house in East Kolkata where I started my fieldwork during the *DurgaPooja* was a place where there were about six female full-timers and five female contractual workers with whom I mostly interacted with. There were many male contractual workers, but I did not get a chance to talk to them. The decision to participate mainly with women workers in the family was a straightforward one, since women were solely responsible for organizing everyday domestic work as well as preparing the holy food. The contractual workers were diverse in nature, some were Brahmin women who have been coming to this family since ten years to cook the holy food for the deity almost every week, and others were lower caste women who also frequently come to wash the dishes and other items. The full-time live-in workers knew me before I actually started the fieldwork so they took the task in introducing me to the other workers. Among all the full time live-in workers two of them were very close rather intimate with the employer, and the employer was also dependent on them. They would do all necessary work for her, including helping her to wear the saree, monitor the work that the contractual workers were doing and finally reporting the details to the employer. Initially some contractual workers were shy and hesitant to talk, but some were strong and aggressive to control the interactional floor.

It is difficult to write a factual piece on domestic workers in general, since there is a lot of diversity among them and observation is an easier method rather than coming into conversation, since many of them were hesitant to talk or they were shy during video-recording. However, there have also been incidences when they were very keen during video-recording and wanted their pictures to be shown on camera. Both the full and part time workers I met, mentioned that the husbands of the employers rarely spoke with the workers. The workers also thought the female lady or *grihini* as their employers even if they did not. The workers could develop a better bonding with them. The second family that I have worked with had a case of inter-generational workers where both the mother-in law and the daughter-in law worked together. Sushila was very hesitant to talk initially since the dynamics within the household was different as both in-laws worked together. Gradually, she became quite free to talk separately but would always remain silent and be fast as she had to run for seven houses where she worked. Her mother-in law who has been working for twenty years was closer with the employer and had built a paradigm of dependency, trust and a sympathy cycle which was bi-directional.

It was quite surprising that in North Kolkata, the servants were almost invisible, and talking with them was not seen as an appropriate mannerism by other family members. As I described my project, the employer accepted it but they would always monitor while I would speak with the servant, hence the servants never came up with proper discussions or any conversations. The elements of participant observation such as daily socializing with some of the workers and engaging in their work gave me certain inputs about the family structure and the relations within the household. In my research I was interested in how employers and workers perceive domestic labour relations, and how they position their relationship within a collaborative space.

To understand this, the qualitative method was a suitable one for this study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002). This method also suited my aim to provide a contextualized, situated description of labour relations (Weiss 1994). My main interest was not on quantitative information but on human relations, and more specifically on labour relations. I believe for the purpose of my study a survey method would not have been suitable, since I did not want the workers to ask straight-forward questions that would further complicate the process. By giving them questions through a set of questionnaire

already presupposes my analysis. This was the reason I never asked them about their age, educational background, the wages that they received or any such straight-cut question that would affect my ethnography. However, in certain situations I did ask them about their caste, when it was obvious that they were Brahmins. I asked the question to tease out the issues of caste and class formation within our society. The issues of partition related to East and West Bengal was even brought out since it had forced women to be the sole bread winners that shred their respectable identity. In my research, I wanted to converse with the workers casually where the topics would emerge through such interactions.

There were some domestic workers who openly said that they hated the job and would never like their children to become a worker anymore. Some were shy, quiet and silent, yet the female workers gradually felt more comfortable enough to speak of their dreams, desires and relationships. Many workers shared many secrets, which they could only tell to me thinking as a stranger, a sounding board but not as a researcher. On the whole, the women workers were more outgoing and talkative than the male workers that I have worked with. The workers shared their perceptions on a wide range of subjects, more generally on their relationship with the employer and their own family.

As I moved to *Chittaranjan Park*, I saw several Bengali workers working at different households, most of them had migrated either from rural West Bengal or from Bangladesh. The migration is a process that has been ongoing, but with such a less pay according to the amount of work load, they were now moving to bigger metropolis, and Delhi was among them. In Delhi, I worked at three different households with different family structure. The first two households were joint families and the third was a nucleated one. In the first household, there were three full-timers but they were not live-in full timer. In both the household I saw that the cook is a Brahmin or an upper caste. The cleaning, washing dishes, mopping floor were all done by other workers. In the houses I worked there were workers who migrated from Uttar-Pradesh and Orissa. One of them was into care service that dealt with taking care of old people, and the rest had the usual work of dusting, mopping, washing and all kinds of work which required daily cleansing and maintenance of hygiene.

In the third household, the cook was a Bengali but the other two workers were Muslims who had migrated from Bangladesh. The workers said that no one gave any work to them since they were Muslims until *didi* (employer) gave work to both the sisters *Sakhina* and *Hasina*. I asked both the sisters about their family and they were in tears, so I did not feel to probe into the details. As most of the workers said in a group discussion that they were in Delhi for earning more money, otherwise they feel the absence of a home in Delhi, they think that it is not their own country. One of them remarked “*e amar desh noy go..eikhane toh aami kauke chini naa, ekta ghorer moddhye bondhi hoye thaka.*” She almost made a remark about bonded labour, yet she wants to work and earn money so that once if she settles properly then her children can slowly migrate too for better education and living.



Figure 31: Domestic worker working at an employer's domestic space (the kitchen)

2.6. Concluding Remarks

The factual details in this chapter indeed depicts a diversity in different locations within Kolkata that contrasts with a trans-regional area in Delhi who claim to have established a neo-Bengali identity which is similar yet different from the Bengalis of Calcutta. However, the question that is raised is who are the real authentic Bengalis? The question of authenticity and identity are juxtaposed as we discuss issues regarding tradition, custom, norms and language.

My interaction with two groups of women led me into a realization that both the women craved for some kind of recognition. They both had dreams, desires and aspirations and possibly no one to hear those voices. Especially when we discussed about *bhadramahila*, both a refined woman as well as a domestic worker showed their pain, anguish and reacted on the issue of being or not being a *bhadramahila*. The relation between the domestic workers and the employers skillfully craft ways to understand each others' collective problems and show a mutual dependence which will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: REVEALING AFFECTIVE ATTACHMENTS

The study is based on the employer-worker relationship, focusing on questions related to gender that overlap with other variables like class, caste and ethnic backgrounds in a collective space. By collectivization, I mean the women of disparate worlds working together in the same domestic space. The aim of the chapter is to understand the manner in which women of disparate identities collectively negotiate affect as a tool for agential representation of their own selves. It is based on a paradigm of reciprocal or mutual dependency, where both the employer and worker deploy a mechanism to fulfill the needs of each other.

This Chapter explores the dialectic of employer and workers' gender ideologies in two ways: First, it examines how gender solidarity is weaved into a collective emotive effort through domestic affection, and second how solidarity is contested by excluding workers through employers' social position that establishes an inherent power over the workers. The continuous discourse of shared but an asymmetrical dependence between the employers and domestic workers on one another led the previous studies to term the relation as 'precarious dependencies' (Shah 2000). I propose to describe the same relation as 'reciprocal' instead of 'precarious', since it is based on a paradigm of mutual need and dependency for each other, as they mutually share their untold stories together. I conceptualize this as ally-ship¹ between the worker and employer even though they are from different subject positions, without undermining the hierarchy and power relation between the employer and the worker. This relational strategy is crucial to understand the way they express their identities of women as being mothers, workers, and employers. What possibilities do these identities offer for the emergence of 'being collective'? (Davis 1986)

The two different locations: Kolkata and Delhi (Chittaranjan Park) were pertinent to compare issues related to migration, and its impact in different contexts among both groups of women: employers and workers. The chapter comprises of following sections. Section 3 is divided into sub-sections. The first sub-section 3.1, examines

¹The word ally-ship has been inspired from Angela Davis's Plenary talk on being collective irrespective of diverse identities at NWSA (National Women's Studies Association) 2017.

the context of two different locations, followed by the theoretical perspective in 3.1.2. Section 3.2 discusses the themes of the chapter in detail. The following two sections focus on data analysis. Section 3.3 discusses ‘Intimate Relations,’ and section 3.4 takes up ‘Reciprocal Dependencies,’ based on worker-employer relation.

3.1 Migration: social mobility or search for sustenance

The focus of this research was not intended to address the question of migration. But many of the research participants in the project including both employer and worker comprised of migrants/refugees. As discussed in the second chapter, Kolkata and Delhi both have their different histories of partition in 1947 that resulted into the influx of refugees, and later migrants from several hinterlands.² The influx of refugees happened in both the Eastern and Western frontier, but in the Eastern frontier the refugees kept trickling in, which was also augmented by a continuous stream of migration from the rural hinterland. The change in demography resulted into a transformation of both cities for which spaces like settler colonies had to be created. Keeping this in mind, I chose to compare the Bengalis located in Bengal and the Bengalis situated in a trans-regional area, especially Chittaranjan Park, an area that was established to rehabilitate the refugees. Earlier, this place was known as an EPDP (East Pakistan Displaced Person) colony, and later the name was changed to Chittaranjan Park.

Kolkata was the largest business centre in the Eastern India that replaced other states in India, but the sudden influx of refugees and migrants caused a slowdown in the economy based on an incongruity between capital and labour (Banerjee 1998). Migration is an ongoing process, but it operated at a very different level in both places. Saying this, I mean that migration in Kolkata started long time back when people from rural West Bengal moved to urban Kolkata seeking better opportunities, a process that Ananya Roy has aptly described as distress migration (2003). Kolkata was no more an alluring place for prospective jobs among the migrant population who perceived migration as a social mobility; instead it remained to be a periphery

²Mainly from Bihar, Orissa, Uttar-Pradesh and Assam.

between rural-urban migrations that suggested a livelihood strategy for poor people (Bardhan 1998). In comparing Kolkata and Delhi, the scenario becomes quite different based on the conversations that I have had with my participants.

In Kolkata, domestic workers who migrate from rural West Bengal to Kolkata without having a place to stay, often opt for a full-time live in service, since it provides them both food, shelter and wages to support their families. The domestic workers are assets for their family, because they serve as an income provider for the rest of the family members. In Kolkata, there has been a rising trend in part-time or *thika kaaj* due to their settlement pattern and migration that took place many years back, which led some to manage their livelihood in squatter settlements. The women who work as '*thika*' or temporary workers survive within the temporary settlements. The workers who join as full-time live in are vulnerable as they have no access for shelter in an unfamiliar space, and this factor pushes them to join domestic service as full-time live in workers. The migrating domestic worker in Kolkata are pushed into this occupation to search for a living, and this is well understood by the employers who are not migrants into the city.

With the rising demand of domestic workers in other cities, there are many women who prefer to migrate to Delhi for better standards of living, and better remuneration as compared to Kolkata. As discussed by Sen and Sengupta (2016), in the case of women's migration, both 'push' and 'pull' arguments tend to work together. Especially seen through my research participants, majority of them came to Delhi with an expectation of social mobility, better education for their children, and higher wages that would secure their children's future. In some cases, marriage migration was also seen to be a common practice since it is still perceived that migration into the capital city (Delhi) seemed to have better prospect than Kolkata. However, in most cases it turned out that the husbands either managed to find temporary jobs or earned less money to run the family, whereas a domestic service job was an easy available permanent job. The women in such circumstances were pushed into domestic services. Initially, the women and her family thought the marriage migration to Delhi as a 'pull' factor since it indexed a status marker, but later it became a 'push' factor when she was again forced into a domestic work in order to maintain the family.

3.1.2 Theoretical Orientation

Hochschild (1983, 7) defined emotional labour as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display for a wage.” Extensive scholarship in organizational behaviour has recognized the importance of emotion by focusing on certain skills, predominantly feminine speech styles (Fisher and Ashkanasy 2000), and how to use emotional labour so that targets can be achieved, or to make better supportive group discussions. Despite the many dimensions of emotional labour that have been addressed by feminist scholars (Hall 1993; Leidner 1999; Lively 2000), the personalized care service of emotions as it is manifested in low-wage domestic services needs to be examined in depth.

Unlike the organizational sectors, the present study considers home as a rich site that provides an arrangement of both a workplace and a personal dwelling; in fact the domestic forms to be an interface between the personalized relation and a working relation that gives affect a new meaning. The framework of affective labor has been mostly applied in workplace situations (Cameron 2000; Fairclough 1992; Mirchandani 2003), and the idea has been popular with feminist researchers because it frames *work* or *service* to those behaviors that are invisible and unrecognized (Frith and Kitzinger 1998). My research expands on a cross-cultural domestic realm by looking at labour relations between the employer and the worker engaged in an affective attachment, through the theoretical framework of gender and class as ‘interactive systems’ that emerges through everyday discourses (Anderson and Hill Collins 2001; Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

Affect is a very complicated mechanism since such formulation seeks for an ideological celebration of feminine skills which are allied with the execution of personalized services, and the issues it raises regarding such services in market transaction. Hence, the most pertinent question that emerges from my study is the way affect is used by women who work for wages as well as those who do not. Domestic or household work is done both by the worker and the employer for the maintenance of the family. While working for the family they both develop affective attachment with every family members, either in need of money or in the form of duty and responsibility. Studies on domestic labour relations have examined a tendency to

preserve certain non-market features, such as personalized relations and maternal benevolence maintained mainly by the employers in the relationship (Dickey 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009). But, in my study, I look at this attachment as being created bi-directionally between the employer and the worker. On one hand, the workers act as a support system for the employers within the family and outside, and on the other, the employers help the workers to aspire for a better future by providing financial support. The everyday expressions of affect are shaped by intertwining oppressions that function at the macro-level (Hill-Collins 1991), and then emerges through different forms of orientation and negotiation in the micro-level discourses (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; McElhinny 2013).

3.2 Themes

In the following sections, I discuss the two main themes that emerged from my classification of the transcripts that the participants in my study expressed: 1) intimate relations, and 2) reciprocal dependence. In the first theme, I discuss the labour relation through the notion of intimate bonding as it takes place between both the employers and workers. This theme illustrates the point of private and public, as the employers get to know the public in the private domain through the conversations with the workers. Here, I understand intimacy through the way both the employer and worker gossip together. The second theme addresses the pragmatism of affect between the employer and the worker through a shared dependency, which is jointly collaborated and so I have termed it as 'reciprocal dependency'. This section is thematically divided to understand the way both groups of women engage into a bi-directional relationship, and how agency plays a crucial role.

3.3 Intimate Relations

The relation between an employer and a worker through intimate, personalized bonding in the domestic realm is itself problematic since they both are from disparate backgrounds. Thus, a question might presumably emerge that how can a worker and an employer be intimate given their different backgrounds? As Arnado (2003) argues, the relationship between the employer and the maid becomes more fascinating because of the subtle nuanced inequality through forms of domination that are alleviated by a sense of intimacy generated within the domestic. The interaction of the

employer and the worker is contextually situated within the private and the intimate setting that builds a bonding which moves from general conversation to gossip that is usually common among friends. But, in this instance they are not friends; hence there stands a paradox in the relationship where the identity position varies from being governing and shared to distant and close. In most cases, the workers serve as a nexus to the outer world or the public sphere, and the employers gather the news from them. My study builds on the relational aspect, which is simultaneously determined and defined by the membership and by the practice in which that membership engages (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). In this section, I discuss the manner in which gossip as a social practice is collaborated between the employer and the worker, which establishes a convergence between the private and the public.

3.3.1 Gossip an activity of group membership

The following excerpts discuss about the way the women from disparate identities gossip together in collective within the domestic space. The excerpts in this section address the framework of 'gossiping' as a gendered behaviour within the situated context, where people talk about others' moral values, manners, and conduct in everyday life.

(1) This video was filmed in a household in South Kolkata, which captured the dynamics between the employer Anupriya, and Basanti, the cook of the family. She was a closer ally of Anupriya since she has been working in the house for more than 20 years. The video captures the moment of gossip between Anupriya and Basanti about another employer, as they work together. Basanti also works as a cook in that household, and so Anupriya is curious to know.

1.Basanti: ei amaar opresion hoyechilo? Tokhon toh besh bhaloi chilo.?
(**this time when I had my operation? Then[*she*] was quite good.?**)

2.Anupriya: haa::aan.?
(**ye::ss.?**)

3.Basanti: tarpor thekei(.)
(**after that only(.)**)

4.Anupriya: shedin aami dekhte gechilaam?shidino bolche je amaar sugar bereche?(.)
(**that day I went to see her? Even that day [*she* said] that my sugar levels have increased?(.)**)

5.Basanti: aar jodio? Baa bolche kintu thik kore sobh mone rakhte parche naa?
(**even though?[*she*]is saying but cannot correctly remember everything?**)

6.Anupriya: //ekhon toh? aar haanteo naa.? ki hoyeche ke jaane? Barir lok thik kore dactar
dekhay naa?
(**// Now even?[*she*] doesn't walk.? who knows what has happened?The family members are not showing a proper doctor or what?**)

7.Basanti: [interrupts] aar bolche kina?

(and[they] are saying that?)

8. Anupriya: // meye asche? kintu meye tar toh khawa dawa hoy na?
([her] daughter is coming? But the daughter is not fed at all?)

9. Basanti: [whispering] ki osudh khawacche ke jaene? Bouta khoob (.)
(who knows what medicines they are giving? The daughter-in-law is very(.))

[Manoshij enters the scene and they look at each other and stop talking; rather they change the topic on vegetables]

Scholars have produced impressive research on the issues and definitions of gossip as a speech activity, where the participants engage in reporting things about each other (Goodwin 2006). It has also been defined as an informal communication about real or fictional people who are not present during the ongoing conversation (Besnier 1989; Eder and Enke 1991). In the above excerpt, the pattern follows the structure of gossip in an informal setting of domestic space, though the relations between the participants are based on disparate class and caste identities. The employer Anupriya and her worker Basanti discuss about another person, who is another employer of Basanti. The initial sequence produced by Basanti starts with both time and information about herself, and then moves on to the other employer's health condition. The structure essentially consists of an invitation sequence by Basanti, where she traces a target and provides some time to the interlocutor to understand the target. Anupriya understands and engages herself to collaborate as she says *haa::aan* or *ye::ss* (Line 2) marked with rising intonation and vowel lengthening that produces the gossip which is enacted through a prosodically voiced utterance resulting into a stylized performance (Coupland and Jaworski 2003).

Basanti's utterance in line 3 gets interrupted by Anupriya's next sequence of providing more information in order to get a more confirmed report. They both engage initially into some kind of newsworthy element about the health issue of another employer, but later the utterances formulate into assessments and judgmental comments. Basanti, was the first to initiate assessments as she says: *even though?[she]is saying but cannot correctly remember everything?*"(Line 5). But, in this instance the utterance is overlapped by Anupriya in line 6, where she seems to have made an evaluation which gets reflected in the pejorative remark about the employer's family members. She asks Basanti that: *The family members are not showing a proper doctor or what?* (Line 6)The next two turn sequences are important to analyze as Basanti interrupts to say something in line 7, which again gets

overlapped by Anupriya as she says: *[her] daughter is coming? But the daughter is not fed at all?* (Line 8). At this stage, Anupriya moves from her initial concern about the employer's health issues to a standard gossip structure of discussing about the family members of the employer with the worker who works in that household. It can be assumed from her question in line 8 that she already knows about certain events but seeks a confirmation from Basanti who is the actual producer of the gossip. Anupriya's question is a preferred marked response to assessment as Basanti swiftly answers it in the final turn as she whispers: *who knows what medicines they are giving?* (Line 9). In gossip, assessments (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987) include common interpretations, including ethical or judgements of value (Besnier 1990), and make the act of experience and interpretation an interactional event. In Line 9, Basanti was about to make a comment on the daughter-in law of the family, but as she saw Manoshij approaching the scene, she carefully controlled her behaviour. The whispering functions to create intimacy and closeness (Merry 1984; Spacks 1986) that Basanti wants to exclusively share with Anupriya and not with others, who might judge their relationship based on the conversation that they were having.

(2) This data was recorded in Chittaranjan Park, Delhi, in the household courtyard where Munni was washing the utensils and Mitali was standing; they both were discussing about another household when I joined in to start a conversation with Munni.

- 1.Munni: abhi kaam ki baat kar rahe hain? Phir us bhabi ne kahan?
(Now I am talking about work? Then that bhabi[another employer]has said?)
- 2.Mitali:[interrupts] abhi kisko di?
(now[she] has given to whom?)
- 3.Munni: bhabi ne kahan hoga?kyuki bahaar bhabi? Naal nahin hain? Paani ayaega kahan se?
(that bhabi must have said? Because outside bhabi? there is no tap?so where will the water come from?)
- 4.Mitali: (()) [inaudible]
- 5.Munni: safai nahin hota hain is liye.?
(it is not being cleaned regularly that is why.?)
- 6.Mitali: o::h:!
- 7.Munni: Phir toh iye accha nahin hain nah?
(then it is not good isn't it?)
- 8.Mitali: iye toh phir thik nahin hain.?
(this is then not correct.?)
- 9.Munni: babuji ne phir bulaya?, Sham ko baath karne ke liye?.
(babuji had again called for?, He will speak in the evening?.)
- 10.Mitali: dekh kya hota hain?
(see what happens?)

[at this point they realized that I was also present, and since I wanted to speak with Munni, Mitali left and went inside the kitchen]

In the above excerpt, Munni initially started with a complaint about her working situation in another household to Mitali. In the initial turn itself, Munni was about to make an assumption when Mitali interrupted in the next turn with a question. Mitali was possibly concerned about Munni's work, so she asked: *now[*she*] has given to whom?* (Line 2). Mitali is also assuming that there must have been a problem and so Munni is unable to work at that household. It can be said that unknowingly Mitali got involved into the activity of gossip with her worker where the central character featured in gossip, is the other employer. Hence, Mitali engages herself into the process of 'othering' by engagement with her worker in the gossip activity (Coupland and Jaworski 2003). The question initiated by Mitali in line 2, actually finds a collective support in the social activity of gossip and so in the next turn, Munni shifts from assumption to statement, though she frames it in a form of a question as she asks *that bhabi must have said?* (Line 3), and goes on to explain and support her evaluation by elaborating on details. In the next utterance, she justifies the reason behind her work problems by saying: *it is not being cleaned regularly that is why.?* (Line 5). Only after this, Mitali gets a grasp of the entire speech event as she displays in her expression through vowel lengthening. In the next turn, Munni seeks for a collaborative stance as she asks Mitali a tag question: *then it is not good isn't it?* (Line 7), which is supported by Mitali in Line 8, in order to build a cooperative relationship (Brison 1992) and to avoid confrontation (Goodwin, M 1990; 2006). However, in the process Mitali forms a partnership in maintaining a 'group membership' with Munni by creating a 'group boundary' with the other employer (Jaworski and Coupland 2005). In this case, I was the intruder since they did not want to demonstrate the gossip session in front of me. Mitali gave a smiling gesture and went into the kitchen, while Munni started to work like all other days.

(3) *The data captures the relation the workers have with each member of the family. In this household, even though Ruma is the employer, Tribhoomi knows very well that she has to take care of Annapurna Debi, hence she is more close to her in a caring as well as calculative way. As usual I was casually talking with them in the living room when both of them started complaining about Ruma and her husband in presence of an outsider (researcher).*

1. Anindita: shute shute kota hoy?
(By what time do you sleep?)

2. Tribhoomi: egarta hoye jay?
(it takes around 11 pm for us to sleep?)

- 3.Thakuma: aami to shuyei pori.?
(I sleep by that time only.?)
- 4.Anindita: tumi shuye poro?
(do you sleep?)
- 5.Thakuma: eo shuye pore.?
(she also sleeps.?)
- 6.Tribhoomi: hmmm.? Aar ora? Jegeri thake?(.)ora kokhon ghumoy jaani nah! (smiles)
(hmmm.? And they?are always awake?(.) when do they sleep we don't even understand!)
- 7.Thakuma: ora?T.B.(.)T.B.(.) dekhteit thake? Tarpore giye shoy.?
(they? T.B.(.) [T.V]T.B.(.)keep watching? Then they get back to sleep.?)
- [I diverted the topic about Tribhoomi's work]

Gossip is a complex phenomenon to understand as it depends on various factors. Like in the above excerpt, the worker and Annapurna Debi both collaborated to gossip about the other members of the household, especially the employer Ruma, who is also the daughter-in law of the family. My initial routine question in line 1 was answered by Tribhoomi, the care-worker. However, Annapurna Debi deviated from the topic by stating that she sleeps on time which tacitly expresses a nuanced meaning about other household members. This gets confirmed when I ask a similar question to Tribhoomi, and Annapurna debi seizes the authority to answer the question by saying:*she also sleeps.?*(Line 5). This gives Tribhoomi an opportunity to produce a gossip activity about the family members. Tribhoomi's embodied behaviour and her smiling gesture shows that the exchange of information is not the chief goal (Goodwin 1980). While Tribhoomi continued to discuss about their (Ruma and her husband's) irregular habits, she gets a collaborative support from Annapurna Debi in the final statement. She further gave more detailed information about what they do instead of sleeping, which according to her is a normal practice. In this case, Tribhoomi, the manufacturer of gossip gained power and status from being able to "control the news," while the buyer of gossip received personal pleasure in being a "privileged insider" (Rosnow and Fine 1976:88). The gossip would have continued, but I intervened in between and attempted to change the topic of discussion.

In all the above excerpts, it is noticeable that the employers or employer like position (in the case of Annapurna Debi) has engaged in the social practice of gossip with their domestic workers. In all three cases, gossip took place within the private domain and was seen as a personal communication since no intrusion was allowed. In the above instances, the employers had transgressed their group membership to create group

boundaries by forming alliance with the workers as they engaged into the activity. Gossip is always jointly created, shared, and at times manipulated to strengthen the social group bonding, often thought as woman's talk (Coates 2004). In my study, I don't identify gossip as feminine discourse. Rather, I see this to be more of public information that is transported inside the private domain. In the two excerpts, the workers (Basanti and Munni) are the producers of gossip, only with an exception in the last excerpt where Annapurna Debi suggested a cue for gossip and Tribhoomi finally started to gossip about the family members.

Besnier (1989) noted that in gossip, trust is an important function to maintain the collective social bonding. The study on gossip as an activity between an employer and a worker implicitly reformulates some of the definition of gossip that asserts collective values rather it has collective interest, though the boundary is already established. However, in certain cases, the producers of gossip have power assertions since they have a control over managing the news. Thus, studying everyday conversations in such contexts can show how language used in the "directly visible immediacy" (Bourdieu 1994, 64-5) is a salient tool in the complex machinery of social difference and dominance, in forming group alliance and creating boundaries.

3.4 Reciprocal Dependencies

The study examines the relation between the diverse identities in order to understand the need for a bi-directional attachment. The central focus is why it functions bi-directionally when existing scholarship has either termed the relation as 'exploitative' or 'precarious dependency'. In my study, the dependency is seen to be a joint activity. It is based on a paradigm of trust, need, and intimate sharing. Hence I have termed it as 'reciprocal dependency' since both the employer and the worker reciprocate each other for their own mutual needs and develop an affective attachment for each other. This affective attachment is also jointly collaborated as it gives agentive role to both the middle-class woman and the worker. For the employer, it is achieving recognition and support within the family; whereas for the worker, it is an aspirational dream to lead a better life and quit trans-generational servitude for their children. The prolonged period of stay in the privatized, luxurious spaces, and in close relation with the employer creates a local intimacy that does not seem unfamiliar. Though many

workers seem to be aware of their subject position, but within the context of such personalized work, domesticity prompts a sense of bonding that is mutually affective.

The section on ‘reciprocal dependency’ is divided into two major sub-sections. The first sub-section 3.4.1 studies the perspectives of both the employers and workers to understand the mutual relationship developed as they both work as either paid/unpaid servers in a collective space. I examine this through the everyday social practices, emergent discourses and the way they manifest their identities that demonstrate a reciprocal bi-directional approach. Second sub-section 3.4.2 is based about articulating family relations through the question of gender identity that indexes performance of household work, sacrifices, contestations, and also at times transgressing the norms of patriarchal conventions. The discussions and narratives here address a common strand of collective stories and voices from both the workers and employers who jointly make a sense of being in a family life, irrespective of their disparate class positions.

3.4.1 Bi-directional relationship

This section examines the manner which emphasizes emotion as pointers of well-being and happiness that is reciprocated by both the employers and workers. Beyond a class/caste barrier there is an interplay of personalized intimate relationship. The intimacy and bonding discussed in the section above brings in the concept of a mutual dependency through which both the groups of women are attached to each other. The domestic workers are fully aware of their dependence on these jobs, the constant uncertainties and the absence of any other alternatives; on the other the employers’ dependence is not factored only on the work done by the workers, rather on personalized care, and support provided especially by the full time live in workers. Hence, this personal nature of the service itself constructs a bi-directional attachment built on the paradigm of dependency, honesty and trust.

The excerpts are divided into two different sections: first is the employers’ viewpoint on how they are dependent, and workers form to be their support system in order to run the family. The second is the workers’ perception of ‘being a part of the family’ and helping the employer. In some perceptions, good behaviour is expressed in terms of provision of good food or financial benefits, over and above contracted wages.

(4) This video was recorded with Munmun (employer) regarding her employers and through some topics it was revealed that it was extremely dependent on her live-in workers not just for her daily needs of work but the necessity to talk with someone.

1.Anindita: accha? tumi Gita mashi ke khoob bhalobasho nah?
(so? you love Gita mashi a lot isn't it?)

2.Munmun: nah! shudu Gitai noy(.) aami sobaii kei khoob bhalobasi(.)abaar boka-boki kori?
oderJao nah joggesh koro? Korlei jaante parbe je Kemon boka khay ora amaar theke.? (No! not only Gita(.)I love all of them(.)but I also scold them a lot? Go and ask t them Once?if you ask them you will come to know that how much I scold them.?)

3.Anindita: Kintu karuna mashi aar gita mashi toh tomay khoob(.)
(But karuna mashi and Gita mashi they both were saying that you are very.)

4.Munmun: bhalo? Tai toh? ashole ora amay chara thakte pare nah aar aamio nah! sottyi bolte
Ki?Kajer jonno oder bokte hoyna. Ora ekhon amaar theke mota-muti sobh kichu sikhe geche.Kintu ektu edik-odik hole amaar bhishon raag hoy(.) aar dekho [laughs] bokar jonnoToh keu chai?
(good?that is it? Actually they cannot live without me and neither can I!to tell youthe truth? For work I really don't have to scold them. They have mostly learned everythingfrom me. But even if there is a little problem I get very angry(.) and look [laughs]even to scold you need someone?)

5.Anindita: thik bujhlam nah? bokar jonno lok chai maane? Eta thik bacchader school-school khelar moton nah?
(did not get you? to scold you need people[I]mean? isn't it like playing a school-School game that youngsters do?)

6.Munmun: hahahaha! Bhalo bolecho! Sottyi majhe majhe tai mone hoy. Kintu sobh somoy emni boki nah?kaaj e khoob phanki dey.?tokhono boki. Ashole ekta adhikar jonme geche.? Ora jaane aami kokhon bokbo, kokhon ki korbo? Ashole Gita, Karuna, Mashi era toh onek dhore ache nah? tai amaake khoob bhalo chene. Karur kono kothai era bishassh korbe nah!
(hahahaha!you said it well!really at times even I think it like that.But I don't scoldthem just like that always?they do not do their work properly.?even then I scold. actually now I have a right on them.?even they know that when I can scold,what I will do? Actually Gita, karuna, Mashi they have been here for a long time no? so by now they know me very well. They will not believe anyone!)

I deliberately attempted a tag-question showing a lack of affirmation in order to solicit information, confirmation or any kind of action (Hultgren and Cameron 2010). My question was focused toward Gita who was Munmun's close ally. In the next turn, Munmun answered in the negative that it is not only Gita that she loves, in fact she loves *all of them*. Questions are purposefully asked to begin a conversation in such a way as to create a slot for the recipient to produce a reactive turn (Ford 2010). In the same turn, Munmun also says that:*but I also scold them a lot... if you ask them you will come to know that how much I scold them.?* (Line 2). By uttering this Munmun displayed implicitly that she has an attachment with the workers whom she can love, care and also scold. Munmun carefully includes everyone, though she does not identify any particular names. Here she also advocates that she does not follow

exclusionary practice. The enacted performance seek to construct and maintain interactional settings that lead to the validation of their identities (Burke and Cast 1997).

In the next turn I was about to tell Munmun that there was basically no need to question Gita and Karuna, but before I could finish my turn, Munmun understood what I was about to say and in the next turn she said: *good?that is it? Actually they cannot live without me and neither can I!* In order to organize the sequential structure and the behaviour of their co-participants, every turns in interaction are also conjointly dependent on each other. Turns reveal two things about utterances: a) a next turn usually occurs only when the speaker of that turn understands that the former turn was complete, b) another aspect is the relationship between turns which reveal that the participants' active role in the ongoing production is to display their involvement (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008).

In this case, it is the second one since Munmun cuts my utterance, to display her reaction on her earlier turn. Munmun very clearly says that both she and the workers are not just dependent, but that they cannot live without each other. While saying she gets excited and hence the exclamation mark used in the transcript. In the next part of the sentence, Munmun accepts that her workers are well-trained by now, and so she doesn't need to scold them for their work, but a noteworthy part is when she says: *But even if there is a little problem I get very angry(.) and look [laughs]even to scold you need someone?* (Line 4). Here she makes a comment that suggests her loneliness and her dependence for every little thing on her workers, as she states that she needs someone to even scold. Affective attachment involves expressing positive emotions, such as cheerfulness, and avoiding the expression of negative emotions, such as contempt, sadness, and being lonely. For Munmun, the workers are providers of work as well as keeping her in a good state of mind.

In line 5, I showed my utter confusion by not being able to understand why she needs to scold her workers. In fact I went to the extent of asking a very sarcastic question by directly stating that it is like an activity that one plays at a kindergarten. But surprisingly Munmun took it very lightly as she laughed and agreed while saying: *you said it well! really at times even I think it like that.* But she was also aware when she made the comment with an uncertainty marker, and hence she immediately changed

her stance in the next utterance by saying that at times the workers don't work well and then she needs to scold them. As Munmun tries to finish the entire sentence, her stance changes from one position to another, first she defends herself and then she goes to the extent of saying that the workers know her temperament. Finally, she says something very different that was not even related to our discussion. Munmun said: *so by now they know me very well. They will not believe anyone!* For Munmun, her workers were not only attached with her, but they were also her support in times of need, they knew Munmun better than anyone in the entire family.

(5) *This video captures Mitali working in the kitchen, even though thakuma³ (Malabika Bose) had said that Mitali has little work to do in the kitchen.*

1. Anindita: tomake toh tahole aajke puro ranna tai korte hoyeche?
(so today you had to do almost the entire cooking?)

2. Mitali: haan. mota-muti sobii? Oi Munni ekta item kore geche?. noyto aami partam naa re.
(yes. almost everything? Munni has done one item?. Otherwise I would not have been able to.)

3. Anindita: ora tomay emni khoob help kore nah?
(they help you a lot isn't it?)

4. Mitali: sottyi bolte ki? ora.?maane mashi, munni, bhoomi era ache boleii aami ekhane thakte
Parchi. Ora amaar jonno ja kore? Tui toh dekhchis? aar sobhii toh janish.?no:tun kore aar ki bolbo bol?
(To tell the truth? they.?I mean mashi, Munni, Bhoomi they all are here that is why I am able to stay here. What they do for me? You have seen? And you know everything.?whatne:w things shall I tell you?)

5. Anindita: aacha? Ekhon tumi thakuma ke khete debe?
(okay so? now you will serve thakuma food?)

6. Mitali: haan? khete debo? Tarpur thakurer ektu iye.?kore aashbo?
(Yes? Will serve her food? Then will do something for the deity? And will come?)

7. Anindita: oi bhog deowa moton.?
(Is it like giving holy food.?)

8. Mitali: haan. haan. tui kokhon khas?
(yes. yes. when do you eat?)

By this time, I became quite close with all the family members hence the employer Mitali changed her pronominal address from 'tumi' to 'tui'. In Bengali, addressing someone as 'tui' can be because of two reasons: first, he/she is intimate and close, and second, because of a hierarchical structure based on class/caste. I initiated my discussion with Mitali regarding cooking, since in an earlier conversation with her mother-in-law the interaction was such that the household always employed a cook,

³Thakuma refers to paternal grandmother in Bengali Language.

and for that purpose Mitali never had to cook. Though, her mother-in-law (Malabika Bose) reminisced that during her times there used to be a standby cook since she asserted that everyone in the family loved to eat Malabika Bose's preparation. This displayed her ways of home management where she devoted her entire time in housewifery and motherhood, whereas denying the work that Mitali does for the family.

As an outsider, I did not divulge any information that *thakuma* or Malabika Bose had shared. I could assume that Mitali somehow understood that her mother in-law would have made such complaints, so she was very indifferent about the discussion on cooking. After my question in the first turn she answered as if it was almost a regular practice that she performed like a ritual. She responded by saying that she almost cooked everything, but she also acknowledged the fact that part of the cooking was done by Munni, a domestic worker. She continued by praising the effort of Munni's humanist approach by saying that: *Otherwise I would not have been able to* (Line 2). This suggested that Mitali was not only signaling a dependence on Munni but also interpreting a sort of equal relationship among all workers, even though Munni was a washer-woman and *Mashi* (Sabitri) a Brahmin cook.

In the next turn, I deliberately asked a tag question. Tag questions (Cameron 2006; Holmes 2013), like other linguistic forms, are characterized by complex multi-functionality and diversity of meaning, so that a certain degree of arbitrariness is to be expected in any functional classification. Besides gender, the patterning of particular linguistic form may be illuminated by a consideration of number of variables. These include the position taken by the participants in interaction and the objectives and goal of an interaction. Hence, the aim of asking a tag question was to determine the claim that Mitali was implicitly making about her workers. The act of questioning is a very complex activity as it involves the context and positioning of the speaker as well as the recipient and how they both act and react about the question (Clayman 2001). But, in this instance, Mitali followed the adjacency pair (question-answer) sequence through a preferred action without deferring the information.

Talk-in-interaction has an inferential order that is, social and the informational resources on which the participants rely on to understand each other (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008). Mitali responded since she understood the context in which the

question was asked and she was an engaged participant. Mitali started with a factual information in the form of a question that was rhetorical as she said *To tell the truth?* (Line 4), as she continued with the *truth* herself. In the same sequence, her next utterance marked an epistemic uncertainty with a question suggesting not the family members rather the domestic workers. As Mitali said: *they? I mean mashi, Munki, Bhoomi they all are here that is why am able to stay here* (Line 4). She made an effort to demonstrate the inter-personal relationship she had with the workers as well as the reliability and dependence on the workers. Mitali chose lexical terms to establish mutual support from the workers who made her domestic life easier. In the same sequence, she introduced me into the scene by clarifying that *You have seen? And you know everything.? what new things shall I tell you?*(Line 4).

In such utterances, Mitali wanted to project me as an engaged hearer as well as a participant rather than just an outside researcher, which was well suggested from her pronominal usage *tui* instead of *tumi*. Goffman questions talk as a dyadic exchange (1981) between just a speaker and a hearer, since there are lot of people present within the same temporal spatial context, and hence stresses the importance of using not isolated utterances, but instead the forms of talk embedded within everyday social encounters to analyze the cultural meaning and de-construct the recipient into a range of participants. In this instance, Goffman's theory is applicable since Mitali's interaction with me is not limited between me and Mitali, but it was also geared for people in and around the space. Hence, my next turn moved from workers to a family member Malabika Bose whom I referred to as *thakuma*. I asked Mitali: *okay so? now you will serve thakuma food?* (Line 5), in a way to collaborate with Mitali that it is not just paid workers but also the duty of the daughter-in-law to follow certain norms and perform certain service to remain within the household. Mitali responded to the question that she will be serving food, but was quite unconcerned about it, displaying less affection toward her domestic service. In fact, Mitali indicated more concern regarding my food timings though I was still an outside researcher in Line 8.

3.4.2 Worker's Perspectives

As discussed, the two notions of domesticity and dependency play out strongly between both the employers and the workers, which is mutually reciprocated and

continuously constructed and re-negotiated. In the earlier sub-section (3.4.1) we saw how the employers perceive the mutual dependence on the workers, for not just work but also as a form of support system within the household. This sub-section will examine the ways in which the workers identify the dependence on the employers, which turns the labour relation into a bi-directional relationship. This bi-directional relationship is seen to happen only among workers and employers who have spent enough time with each other. A certain intimacy has to be formed either through due course of time or through spatial attachment in order to have personal encounters that create a bi-directional relationship. This is the reason why the feeling of attachment is more between the full-time live in workers and the employers.

Existing scholarship (Dickey 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009; Sen and Sengupta 2016) has suggested that part-time workers spend less time with the multiple employers and so there is less scope for them to develop a relationship within that span of time. It might be true in cases where there are both full-time and part-time workers. But in my observation among workers in Kolkata and Delhi, it would be incorrect to generalize and come to such conclusions, since in many households, even part-time workers who have spent a long time with the family have a bi-directional attachment. In Delhi, the full time workers specifically narrate their attachment and care toward the employers and how they are also dependent on them on various matters. The disruption of a relationship is always an ever-present threat, and so the workers try to craft ways to maintain and sustain the relationship in various possible ways. In the excerpts below, I discuss the workers' perception on reciprocal dependency leading to a bi-directional attachment between both. However, the workers' narration might be slightly different than that of the employers because of a differential power equation.

(6) Discussion with the full-time and part time workers in East Kolkata household where Munmun was their employer. I discussed with them separately in a separate space where Munmun was not even present, as she was busy supervising the decoration of the location where the deity would be placed.

1.Sulekha: jaeno? Ama::der ekhane poojoy khoob moja hoy.?
 (do you know? Here during the Pooja[religious ritual] we:: all have lot of fun.?)

2.Anindita: aa:ccha?
 (Is: it?)

3.Gita: ei sobh? Maane? puro baari? Lok bharti hoye jaabe? Khoob anondo hoy.?aar thakur daeka
 (all these here? I mean? the entire house? Will be full with people?[we]have lot of fun

and going out for pandal hopping?.)

4.Anindita: [interrupts] Thakur ki nijerai daekho? Ki kore daekho?
(do you go for pandal hopping on your own? How do you manage?)

5.Gita: //Kaeno? Munmun di'r gaa::ri te jai? Munmun di pottekha baar dashamir din niye jay?
(//why? we go in Munmun di's ca::r? Munmun di takes us every year on the tenth day?)

6.Anindita: she:ta toh bhalo.? Munmun di toh khoob?
(tha:t is then quite good.?then Munmun di is very?)

7.Minoti: Munmun er moton maiya hobe nah! o sobar loge bhabe.? Haan? ei jhe tumi?Tomar?
Khawa-dawar kothao?
(No woman can be like Munmun! She thinks about everyone.? Yes? You? about you also? Your food and all?)

8.Gita: [interrupts] aare sheta noy mashi? Munmun di toh bhabbei.? Shono nah? [to me] Mashi that is not the thing? Obviously Munmun di will only think.? Listen no?[to me]

9.Gita: dashimir din toh? onek boro-boro je sobh Thakur hoy? Segulo bhashan jayna? tai sei
Din? Munmun di aamra sobai mile gaari kore jai.? Aar Munmun di'r moton manush hobe
Nah? amader sobai ke notun kapor deowa?Je ja chaibe? Sobh? Kono? iye nei.
(on the tenth day no? many bigger deities remain? Those do not get immersed on that same Day?that is why on that day? Munmun di and we all go in the car.? And nobody can be likeMunmun di as a person?[she] gives us new clothes to all of us?whoever would ask for thing? Everything? There is no? iye.[difference])

10.Arati: haan. Munmun di'r mon ta khoob boro. Sobaii ke kapor-chopor deowa, poojoy onek
kichuDey. Kono kauke baad dey nah!
(yes. Munmun di has a very big heart. She gives clothes to everyone, during the ritualsShe gives many things. She does not leave anyone out!)

[The workers collaborate with each other and start to discuss about Munmun di and how good she is]

In the above excerpt, the context was about the way the workers enjoy the greatest autumnal festival in Bengal that is, Durga Pooja. The workers did not speak much about their work. Rather they were more inclined to talk about the festive mood. The rhetoric involved more about Munmun's concern for them and her care and attachment towards the workers. In this household, the part time workers came only during religious rituals and also any kind of festivals, whereas the full-time live in workers stayed with the employer in the house for the entire time period. The part-timers and full-time live in workers have both spent a long duration of time in the household with the employer Munmun. Therefore, they both have developed an attachment for Munmun. In the excerpt above, Sulekha, Minoti, and Arati were part time workers, and Gita and Karuna were the full time live-in workers.

Sulekha, a part-time worker initiated the topic about the ritual's festive mood, and she wanted to convey the message to me (researcher) by initially asking a question *do you know?* (Line 1), which covertly suggested that I was asking about Munmun di, but as

an outsider I actually did not know many things which they knew, that is why, in the same sequence she also added that in the Pooja (ritual) they have a collective fun. Sulekha, as part time worker felt more integrated with the other full time live in workers when it came to questions of fun and enjoyment during the ritual. Although Sulekha was informing me about the enjoyment they experience during the ritual, I used a rising intonation and vowel lengthening in the next turn sequence that signaled a non-convincing statement. Gita, the full-time worker understood the sequence construction and provided the same information in a different way since the relationship between turns reveals that the participants themselves actively take part in the analysis of ongoing production to display their own involvement (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008). Gita was directing her answer towards the household and how festive the entire house becomes. In line 4, I interrupted her informative answer to question that how it is possible for them to visit other pooja stalls even after doing so much work. Some questions might linguistically feature as interrogatives, but they might be used to understand the interlocutor's position or stance within the situated context (Tsui 1992). In this instance, the question was asked for that purpose, which Gita understood and overlapped in the next turn sequence.

Earlier studies initially tended to distinguish between interruptions as a violation of "turn-taking" and overlapping as "backfires" within the interactional form (Schegloff, 1987) – thus confirming agreement with the "one speaker only at the same time" rule by a so-called "return-taking repair mechanism." In this case, Gita's overlap can be identified as a recognition onset, since she recognized what the current speaker (researcher) was asking and overlapped to project its completion even before the utterance was complete. Gita did not even follow the adjacency pair where there is usually a question-answer sequence. Rather in her turn, she repeated with another question to the researcher. Her utterance shifted from direct festive enjoyment to the manner in which they enjoy, since Munmun di, the employer, takes them for a ride in her car every year on the tenth day of the ritual. Gita uses questioning patterns, possessive markers, and vowel lengthening to demonstrate the employer's (Munmun) concern for them. In the next turn, when I show my agreement, Minoti interrupts to emphatically say that: *No woman can be like Munmun! She thinks about everyone?* (Line 7). Minoti being a part time worker praises Munmun's concern for everyone. Although she brings me (researcher) into the context of her utterance, but her main

focus was Munmun's equal treatment toward all workers including the part time and full time live in workers. The most critical aspect is the perception of respect that Minoti, as a senior Brahmin worker, gets from Munmun, which she expresses very clearly. But Gita interrupts Minoti in the next turn, to possibly drive the axis only toward Munmun (employer) and not to bring any comparisons or bring me into the context of discussion. Discourse research has studied interruptions as indicators of power and dominance within an ongoing interaction (Coates 2004; Tannen 2000). Here, Gita being a full time live in worker, tries to display her authority over others by seizing the conversational floor and gaining the participant access by making me her main interlocutor. She gives a complete factual detail of how Munmun, as an employer, is a good human being since she gives new clothes and many other things to everyone without any distinction. Arati, a part time worker, also collaborates with Gita and finally they all start discussing about Munmun's care, affection, and attention on each and every item, especially pointing out the equality she maintains in giving material gifts to everyone.

Another household in Kolkata, located in the southern part, where Basanti and Sushila work as part time workers, also had a similar sequence of interactions. Basanti has been working for more than twenty years, and Sushila, her daughter-in-law, has been in the household for more than ten years. Anupriya, the employer has developed a closer bonding with Basanti due to their long standing relation in comparison with Sushila. Even then Sushila has voiced her affection and care for both *mama*⁴ and *mami* since they have done a lot for her. Sushila got married at a very early age, and would often discuss her woes with Anupriya, whom she refers as *mami*. She was aware that the job she does is ill-deserved, not well paid and even unacknowledged, yet she continued to work by saying:

*“We have no option, **didi**, but to work. This is not what we deserve but it is also true that it is a good house and mami (Anupriya) is very affectionate towards me and my daughter Nandini. I will not get such a good house, and mama also gives me money whenever I need it for any purpose. So I too have a responsibility to work for them, this is also my duty to work for this house. Now it does not matter who does what till we are getting what we want[laughs]”*

⁴Mama: Mother's brother; Maami: Mother's brothers' wife.

Even though Sushila did not consider the job to be a very deserving one, she continued to fulfill the needs of the family members in order to sustain a living of her own. She considered it to be a part of her duty and gratitude to re-pay it to the employers' family through her physical labour since Anupriya is not only affectionate as an employer but also provides monetary support during times of need. Hence she agrees that she too feels some responsibility towards the family members. Sushila's concluding remark is interesting since she clearly states a mutual dependence by stating that she is not bothered about the job being ill-deserving or not, till one gets the necessary facilities.

(7) This data was recorded when Sabitri mashi was eating inside the employer's bedroom, a private, intimate space. Mashi was very attached to the family, and especially with the employer Mitali whom she loved like her daughter (as said in a casual conversation). This data reveals the gender relation irrespective of class or any working relation

1.Anindita: mashi kothay?
(where are you mashi?)

2.Anindita: **Mashi?**

3.Mashi: haan? bolo? Ei je aami ekhane?
(yes? Say? I am here?)

4.Mashi: aami khacchi?
(I am eating?)

5.Anindita: ei Mashi? Maane? Kakima toh khoob bhalo.? erokom bhalo hoyna?.sottiyi eto bhalo

Kakima.?
(This Mashi? I mean? Aunty[employer] is so good.?you cannot find such good people?. Really aunty is so good.?)

6.Mashi: bhalo toh. kintu? ei barir loke bhalo bole nah?.
([yes she is] good. But? The people at this house do not think her to be good?.)

7.Anindita: haan?
(yes?)

8.Mashi: barir loker toh?bhalo laage nah!? onar jibone?(.)aamra toh boli? Je onar moton?(.)

manush pete
(the people in this house?do not like her! In her [past]life?(.) we all say?that a Person like her?(.)to get such a good human being)

9.Anindita: //aste? aste(.) kotha bolo?
(// slowly?slowly(.) speak slowly?)

10.Mashi: **pauses but continues by directing her finger...**

11.Mashi: aa:ste aar ki? sotty kothay aste kisher? O ekhon deri asche?
(what is there to be slow? in speaking the truth what is there to talk slowly? and now it will be quite late?)

12.Anindita: ki? deri ache?
(what? Is still late?)

13.Mashi: Mashimaa ghumacche toh? amaader kotha(.)
(Mashimaa[thakumaa] is now sleeping so? our conversation(.)) [smiles]

14.Mashi: amaar ei Mashir moton? Erokome bhalo?. aar ki? paowa jay nah?.
(like my this Mashi[employer]? Such a nice person?. And what? You won't get.?)

Sabitri *mashi* has been a cook in the household where I was conducting my research in Delhi (Chittaranjan Park) for fifteen years. Mitali, the employer was not present, she had gone out to get some grocery, and during that time I got a chance to interact with *Mashi* privately. *Mashi* was having her lunch in the intimate space, inside Mitali's bedroom and so it was extremely difficult for me to find her out. In line 5, when I saw *Mashi* eating inside the room, I started by saying that Mitali was indeed a very good person, though I had framed my utterance in the form of a question. Sequences of questions and answers play a significant role in determining what counts as a question in certain contextual situations (Sidnell 2000). In this case, *Mashi*, responded in a collaborative stance since the question framing was rhetorical in nature. The crucial part of the analysis is the second part of the utterance that revealed her fondness towards the employer Mitali. She openly divulged information that though Mitali is extremely good as a person but her own family members do not like her. I deliberately posed a question in the next sequence in line 7, which was answered quite expressively by *Mashi* as she articulated that the family members do not like her, and she was about to say something about Mitali's past life that would disclose some information about the relation with the family members. However, *Mashi* was careful enough to self-repair herself in not disclosing every minute details. Rather she preferred to stay in one position that marked Mitali as a good person and a human being. *Mashi*, collaborated this with other workers too as she says that *we all say* (Line 9). As I overlapped to ask her not to use such raised intonation, *Mashi* made a gesture by pointing her finger towards Mitali's mother-in-law's room. In her next turn she continued to highlight through her raised intonation that she will articulate the truth, and that there is no harm in doing so. *Mashi*'s stance about Mitali is removed from being just an employer. Rather she evaluates Mitali as a good person and a human being, as she draws her conclusion by saying that it is indeed difficult to get such a nice person like Mitali.

(8)

1.Mashi: ei barite?dekho?choddo bochor theke ponero bochere porlo?hmmm? ei baritar moton
 Khawa-khawi deowa?kono barite hoy na.aar?ja amraa ni(.)?mashi
 o?[referring to
 TheEmployer]Eibaare?aami toh?khabar niyeii ashi?tobuo ja ranna-tanna kori?
 Sheta
 MashiDey amaader khete.? Sobaike dey?. Sobaikeii dey.aar sobh barite sobaii ke dey nah?

(In this house?see?[I will step]from fourteen to fifteen years now?hmmm?this house provides food[and other things]?that cannot be compared to any other houses.whatever We take(.) mashi also?now see? Even though I?bring my own food?even then whatever cooking I do? that mashi gives us to eat.?gives it to everyone?.gives it to everyone.And in other houses they don't give to everyone?)

2.Anindita: Kakima toh amakeo kheyeye jete bolchilo?
(Aunty was even asking me to eat and leave?)

3.Mashi: taholei bojho?koto boro mon khana tar.maane? tumi toh ek-khan kaaaje eshecho?tao?
(so then you understand? She is so broad minded.I mean? you have come here for somework? but even then?)

4.Mashi: sobh barite khawa-dawi oto bhalo nah?kintu? ei barite?ja ranna korbo?mashi bolleo
Aamra nije haath diye niye ni? Aar nah bolleo niye ni.?mitthya kotha bolbo nah?karon?Dekho? Ehhh(.) kheyeye.mitthya kotha bolte nei.?uh? mashi? Amaader sobh
kichui ektu Ektu kore dey. Jaa ranna hoy tar thekei.
(In most houses the food items[giving] are not so good? But?in this house?whatever I Will cook? Even if mashi says we generally take some?and even if she doesn't say
Still we take the food.?I will not lie?since?see?ehh(.)after eating.it is not good
Totell lies.?uh? mashi? Gives us every item in some amounts. From the cooked items.)

5.Anindita: Tumi ki ekhanei khao?
(Do you eat here only?)

6.Mashi: haan. ei ghorei boshe khai.
(yes. [I] eat in this room only.)

7.Anindita: eta toh?kakima'r ghor nah?
(this is?Aunty's room isn't it?)

8.Mashi: hmmmnn. sobh somoy eikhanei khai.? Aamio khai? Mashio khay.?
(Hmmmnn. [i] always eat here only.? I also eat? And mashi also eats.?)

In the above excerpt, *Mashi* discussed about the facility of food given to her in comparison to other households. For some workers, the facility of food is important, in part as a material contribution and also as a sense of respect and dignity of treating them equally, which *Mashi* clearly states in the above excerpt as she says *whatever cooking I do? that mashi [employer] gives us to eat?gives it to everyone?gives it to everyone. And in other houses they don't give to everyone?* (Line 1). *Sabitri mashi* intentionally repeats the phrase that food is not always provided to every domestic worker. However, in this household the employer maintains an equal approach in serving food to each and every worker. I collaborated with *Sabitri mashi* by saying that *Mitali* had offered me to have lunch. In the next utterance, *Mashi* responded with an evaluative comment about *Mitali* being so broad minded since she also offers food to outsiders like me (researcher), which *Mashi* carefully framed as a rhetorical question by saying that: *then you understand? She is so broad minded.I mean? you have come here for some work? but even then?*(Line 3), which would give an obvious

answer, that Mitali is not only close to the workers but she has a commitment towards everyone.

In line 4, Sabitri Mashi not only compares but also evaluates that the quality of food is not so good in other houses in comparison to this household. Mitali also does not create any fuss about food, since they are permitted to cook and eat whatever is being served for the family members. Food is an added enticement of the job, an addition in kind; but more than that it is a part of recognition and respect, a symbolic act of concern. This further reinforces the domestic intimacy and dependence reproduced between the worker and the employer. As quite well observed by *Mashi* in her next turn sequence, she discusses the space where she usually sits to have her lunch and also mentions that Mitali also eats along with them. Hence, the reciprocal intimacy is created through provision of equal treatment as well as eating together and maintaining a relationship that displays a mutual respect for each other, beyond material benefit and other provisions. It places Mitali on a higher pedestal by maintaining the relation of care for every worker, eating together in the most intimate space positions her beyond being just a good employer, but as a good human being.

(9) This data was recorded to see the relation between Munni and the family members, though she seemed to be more attached to Mitali, the current employer, and vice-versa.

1.Anindita: aaccha? Toh kitne saal se kaam kar rahen hain?

(okay? so for how many years have you been working?) [referring to Munni]

2.Munni: ho gayi? kuch pachash saal didi.?

(it has been? Some fifty years now didi.?)

3.Anindita: haan??!!

(yes??!!) [shocking expression]

4.Munni: mein toh shuru se hi yehin hoon? Hain nah bhabi? Bhabi ka shaadi huya? Saab kuch

dekha.

(I am here from the very beginning? Isn't it bhabi? Bhabi got married? Saw everything.)

5.Munni: haan. jaabse aayi hoon tabse yehin hoon?

(yes. The time when I came [from U.P] from then on I am here?)

6.Anindita: toh? aunty ko bhi shuru se hi jaante hain?

(so? you must be knowing aunty from the beginning?)

7.Munni: haan. shu::ru se(.) jaabse aaye tabse aunty ke ghar hi aye. Tab toh aunty ka shaadi

bhi nahin huya? Babuji the tabh(.) [touches Mitali's shoulder] aur kahin nahin gaye

hum.

(yes. Fro::m the very beginning(.)the time when I came, from that time onward I am at aunty's house only. By that time even aunty was not married? Babuji was alive then(.) [touches Mitali's shoulder] I did not go anywhere.)

[Mitali and Munni share glances, Mitali almost in the verge of tears and Munni was still holding her]

8. Munni: yahan mera sabh kuch hain(.) maa hain(.) bhabhi hain(.) behan hain(.) bhai hain(.)? sabh yehin hain.? Itna kisi sa lagaon nahin hain jitna yahan(.) aapna hi ghar samaj ti hoon.
(I have found everything here(.) mother is here(.) sister-in-law is here(.) sister is here(.) brother(.)? everyone is here.? I am not as much attached with anyone as I have it here.) I think this house like my own house only.)

In the above excerpt, Munni, a full time worker, projects her relation with the family through mentioning her long-term duration spent with this one household. Munni claims by saying that: *I am here from the very beginning? Isn't it bhabhi? Bhabhi got married? Saw everything* (Line 4). She refers Mitali in a kinship term as *Bhabhi*, and the above discourse clearly demonstrates the way Munni skillfully crafts a mutual relation with the employer by not just claiming her presence in the family, but also uses tag-question to ask *Bhabhi* (Mitali) that she is a witness to many private incidences. Munni uses emotional attachment, which is a part of a self-conscious strategy aimed to create affection, by disclosing some of the partial emotional facts that binds the worker-employer relation. Munni uses this method when she repeats that she has been in the family for a long period of time, and particularly talks about Mitali's husband's untimely death.

Language is an essential component to understand everyday experiences that are revealed in the form of narratives, but equally important is the manner in which gesture and other body languages are used to understand the scheme of everyday situations. While discussing this incident, Munni touches Mitali and becomes closer to her physically by displaying her empathy towards the entire unknown incident, when Mitali was in the verge of tears. In this instance, Munni's conversation revealed an attachment toward Mitali but more so it was manifested in the manner she embodied her behaviour with Mitali (Jacobs-Huey 2006; Thapan 2009). In the next turn, Munni picks and decides to mention the kinship terms associated with the members of the household to establish that everyone is like her kin, and this is her own house as she says that: *I am not as much attached with anyone as I have it here(.) I think this house like my own house only.* (Line 8). In her utterance, she brings out a comparison by saying that she is most attached to this particular household and she thinks that it is like her own house.

(10) *The data was recorded at the household courtyard where Munni was washing the utensils and Mitali was standing; they both were discussing about another household when I joined in to start a conversation with Munni.*

1.Anindita: toh?aap yahin pe itna din kaam kar rahen ho? Toh ek relation ho gaya hain nah?

maathlabh ek lagao sa ho gaya hain?

(so?you have been working here for so many days?so you must have developed a relation isn't it? Means there is some kind of attachment?)

2.Munni: bilkul didi. haan. haan.aisa ho gaya jaisa ghar jaisa didi.?
(absolutely didi. yes.yes. it has become like home didi.?)

3.Munni: ghar me aur bahar me koyi pharak nahin rahan hain.?
(there is no difference between the private[home] and public[outside].?)

4.Anindita: koyi pharak nahin?
(is there no difference?)

5.Munni: nahin? koyi pharak nahin didi? jaise maa waise bhabi milgai humari.?khana.pina.rehna? kamre ke andar sulana?. Koyi karta hain didi? bahar-wale

insaan ke saath koyi aisa nahin karta?. Hum itne ghar me kaam karte hain par koyi bhi khana ke liya puchta nahin didi? aur is bhabi ke saath? kaamre ke andar sona.?rasoi ke andar khana banakesaath saath khana.?aisa? toh koi nahin kar sakega jaisa bhabi karta hain? Toh? Humbhi ise aapna hi sansar samajhte hain.?

(No? there is no difference didi?like a mother we got a sister[sister-in-law:employer].?eating.drinking.staying?taking rest inside the bedroom?.will anyone do

this didi? withoutsiders no one will do this much?. I work at so many places here but nobody even asksfor food didi? and with this bhabi? We can sleep inside her bedroom.?going inside the kitchen and eating together.?nobody will be able to do what bhabi does for us? So? we also think this to be like our own family.?)

6.Anindita: toh?aap ise aapna sansar samajhte hain?
(so? you think this to be like your own family?)

7.Munni: haan. kyuki?jaab humare liye aap ho toh hum aapke liye do guna hain.?
(yes. Because? When you are with us then we will be there for you two times.?)

While Munni was washing utensils in the courtyard, I initiated the conversation with a question that she was claiming about in the last excerpt. She has been working in the household for about fifty years. She migrated from Uttar Pradesh after her marriage and the birth of a child. Since then she has been working as a domestic worker. But the first house where she started to work was this household where I was conducting my research. So, she repeats the same thing that she has become attached with the family since she believes it to be like her own home, even though there is comparative uncertainty markers: *like*; *only* used in her expressions. In fact, Munni in her next turn converges the notion of private and public, which is interesting for the analysis. My question in the next turn sequence is responded very expressively by Munni as she implicitly states that domestic workers are public bodies who are not treated equally or welcomed inside some of the very intimate spaces like bedroom. Munni's

conversation clearly states that the employer allows her to not only eat and drink but also to take rest inside her own bedroom which is a matter of respect and dignity for the worker. Munni directly asked me by framing it in a form of question: *will anyone do this didi? with outsiders no one will do this much?* (Line 5).

The question was answered by Munni herself that being an outsider, the employer's treatment towards her is much more caring, in comparison to any other employers. Munni's conversation highlights the way domestic workers in general describe how power relations become embodied and personalized when acted out between individuals in the private sphere. Distinctions between employers' and workers' bodies are not simply symptoms of larger inequalities embedded in the society that are symbolically manifested but the everyday distinctions that are created through casual interactions are much hurtful in nature (Gimlin 2007; Kang 2010). In this instance, Munni repeats that she considers the household to be like her own family since she understands the value of a relationship of mutual dependence. However, her final utterance shows a power asymmetry when she says that: *When you are with us then we will be there for you two times?* (Line 7) suggesting a hierarchal inequality in the relationship between the employer and the worker. Workers like Munni, in general, expect unequal degrading behaviour from the employers. But Mitali's behaviour as well as her rhetoric of affection, respect, and love towards them have made Munni obligated to work doubly for a person who cares for her.

The above excerpts discussed the way in which both the employer and the workers have a mutual understanding to meet their needs through a bi-directional relationship. The affection is considered reciprocal and mutual because it is not just the employers who use strategies to get their work done, or have the workers as a support system, but it is also the workers who employ affect to have a greater sense of security in a relationship that will generously help them in flexible timings, negotiations, and material benefits. The conversations quite implicitly suggest that Munmun, Anupriya, and Mitali are as much dependent on the workers as the workers like Sabitri Mashi, Gita, Karuna, Sushila, and Munni are on the employers.

However, I am not undermining the power imbalance between the employers and the workers, since the employers manage to procure a sense of responsibility and care from their workers by giving material gifts, food and monetary benefit, thereby

reproducing a mutual reciprocity that takes this relation out of the domain of capitalist market calculations. Majority of the workers were satisfied with the facilities provided by the employers, but some showed dissatisfaction regarding their wages, which they could not negotiate because of an obligatory duty towards the family. In some instances, the employer herself would increase the salary, but for some they had to manipulate it in another form; either by taking material benefit or by financial help from the employers.

The excerpts noted from the employers and the workers represent a mutual understanding, in a different way, since the identity of both groups are different. The concept of identity is a complex process, with ambivalent experience, since it is located in its various contradictions, gaps and dilemmas that prevail within the situated contexts. These conversations aim to shed light on the relationship between interactionally grounded social meanings and ideologically governed identity categories by investigating the social meaning of reciprocal dependency through a bi-directional mechanism between the employer and worker.

3.4.3 Articulating Family Relations

In this sub-section, the workers and employers collaborate together to discuss their difficulties in life, the vulnerable moments that they have faced as women. I have limited my discussions only to the point till it could be recorded and rest were in field-notes. This discussion is an extension of the bi-directional relationship that is based not just on working relation, but as a supportive relationship within the household. As I had said earlier that the employer-worker relation is not always exploitative, but it has many multiple layers that need to be understood and examined. The untold lives of the employers are often unknown since they always have to maintain a pleasing sight in order to present as a refined woman. But, they do share their lives with the workers whom they can trust, love, and care for. This rhetoric of trust turns into loyalty and a responsible and willing service for the employer. This research was largely inspired from my wide reading of black feminist challenges to white feminists in the 1980's that criticized both theory and practice produced by the western Euro-centric feminists, which while claiming an universal sisterhood, actually excluded and overlooked the understandings of black women. Hence, solidarity as a

conceptual framework cannot exist between women where the notion of the workers by the very nature of their work legitimizes a hierarchical relationship. However, I conceptualize my understanding through collective ally-ship between the employer and worker articulating family and marital relations together. In the following excerpts, I will discuss the manner in which both the worker and employers engage in conversations about their own family problems and articulate them willingly. The interesting area to examine is the manner in which both of them negotiate their identities as women who faced difficult times in the household, especially for the employer who is hierarchically in a much more authoritative position.

(II) The video showed the bitter experience and relation between Munmun and her own family members: Munmun was delegated the authority and responsibility to take charge of the ritual by her late father-in-law. Gita, her full-time live-in worker supports Munmun and tries to appease and calms her down.

1.Munmun:[complaining]o taakar kotha bollo? shunli? Aami bollam.? Tui char toh? uni nei(.)

Opre? Thik koriye neben. nah!nah! uni bora-bori? Aajke noy? Amaar biyer por thekei?Aami bole?(.)
[she] spoke about money?[did you] hear?I said.?leave it no?[he] is not there(.)has past away? Will make it done. No! No![she] was always?not just today? Since the day I got married? It is me so?(.)

2.Tina: //(())tor mone ache?
 ((//(()) do you remember?)

3.Munmun: aami bole shojjho korechi?.onno kono bou hole chole jeto?.
(It is me so I am endured everything?.if it would have been some other girl[bride]shewould have left?.)

4.Gita: bhagobaan janen.tumi chup thako?.
(God knows [everything]. you keep quite.?)

5.Munmun: [whispering] eto? Boyesh hoyeche tao?(.)
([she]has become so old but still?(.))

6.Munmun: aar aami toh?jhogra korboi?ulto-palta kotha bollei amaar matha gorom hoye jay?.
(and I will? For sure quarrel?[if someone] speaks nonsense then I get really hot tempered.?)

7.Gita: Tumi? Ekta kotha bolle naa keno? Ektu shuniye dite?
(you? did not speak at all why? could have told something?)

8.Munmun: Bollam toh?[inaudible](())
([I]said so?(.))

9.Munmun: Jhogra?(.)hmmmm? Kaalke amaar samne dariye Mithu'r saathe kotha bolchilo? Aami
 saamnedariye chilam?(.) pasher barir lok(.)? bhab ekbaar?[to Gita]
(Quarrel?(.)Hmmm? Yesterday[she] spoke with Mithu in front of me? I was standing in front[of her].?(.)next door neighbours(.)? just imagine?[to Gita]

10.Gita: Shono? Ekhane sobai tomake chene? Aamra jaani.
(Listen? Here everyone knows you well? we know that.)

Munmun, the employer, as well as the eldest daughter-in law of the family, was delegated the duty and responsibility to perform all the religious rituals by her late father-in-law. There was a contestation about family property and other such issues on the tenth day of the ritual. The house has not been partitioned yet, though Munmun's mother-in-law stays with the younger son who lives in the same house but on another floor. The context of the above discussion started with some personal fight between Munmun and her mother-in law openly in front of everyone. The above excerpt took place after Munmun's mother-in-law left and Munmun started to articulate the problems in her life with her friends, workers, and other close members.

Munmun initiates her conversation by comparing her late father-in-law and present mother-in-law, who had asked for money. She continues to complain in the same utterance that her mother-in-law had misbehaved with her. Munmun's desperation to voice is reflected as she avoids the overlapped sequence by her sister Tina in line 2 and moves on to talk about her humiliation and the manner in which she had endured, only for the family. Her raised intonation and emphasized utterances displayed the manner of resistance to express her own private life in public. Tina in line 2 had overlapped, but alternative sequencing pair can take place depending on the preference/choice of the participant. Hence, in line 3, Munmun managed the preference organization on her own, and performed it in a straightforward fashion without much delay. The prosodically marked intonation and emphasis of her speech regarding her endurance as a wife in the family reflects her preferred action and implying response from the interlocutors. The next sequence in line 4, Gita supports and pacifies Munmun by bringing in a religious context and expressing that *God knows everything*. Gita, being a worker in the family, happens to be one who is capable of supporting and also appeasing her employer during times of need.

By engaging in a conversation on family relation, Munmun articulates an asymmetrical relation within her own household, and the manner in which she has been treated in her family, which she shares with her workers. The emergent discourses in the next turn sequences reveal that Munmun engages into a dyadic framework with her worker Gita, who provides a collaborative support. It is interesting to analyze the manner in which Gita suggests Munmun to argue with the members who insulted her. Munmun's reaction to Gita's question was responded in

(Line 2). This conceptualization of emotion work captures people's attempts to effectively manage the emotional climate within a relationship. It is therefore consistent with Levenson's use of the term socio-emotional behavior and, more recently, Thoits's (1996) concept of interpersonal emotion-management that is insightful for the analysis of the excerpts.

(13) This video captures the relation between the employer and the workers: both the part-time workers (Basanti and Sushila) Anupriya and Basanti shares a same space in cutting the vegetables while also discussing their lives, and Sushila in the meantime prepares tea for all.

1.Basanti: Durga pooja?(.)aami toh aar kothao jaini(.)ghorei chilam. Ghorei?chilam.
(Durga Pooja?(.) I did not go anywhere(.)[sad expression]was at house only. Was at House only?[past-tense marker])

2.Basanti: amaar ja chele? Baba?
(what a boy I have? My god.?)

3.Basanti: haan. chele jaa korche?baba!
(yes. But what my son is doing? My god!)

4.Anindita: ke? Boro naa choto?
(who? The elder one or the younger one?)

5.Basanti: Choto! Choto!boro ekhon bhalo hoye geche? Boro ekhon nesha chere(.)
(younger one! Younger one! The elder one has become better? Elder one has now left drinking(.))

6.monoshij: // bolo bolo nah! bolo nah! bolo nah! bolle porei?(.)
(// don't say! Don't say! Don't say! If you say then?(.))

7.Anupriya: //bolle porei bhalo tah kharap
(//if you say then the good turns into bad)

8.Basanti: [interrupts] dada? Amaake choto(.)boro-buro etota koshto deyni.
(dada? My younger son(.)but my elder son did not give me so much pain.)

9.Anupriya: nah! nah! nah! boro-buro etota chilo nah!
(No!no!no! your elder son was not like this!)[emphasis]

10.Basanti: Boro buro?(.)
([my]elder son?(.))

11.Anupriya: [interrupts] ek ek din kheto sheta alada baepar? Kintu ro::jh noy?.
([he]used to drink during some days that is different? But not eve::ryday?.)

[Continued discussion on drinking habits]

I had visited the family sometime after the autumnal festival Durga Pooja, which is a joyous time for every Bengalis, either in West Bengal or outside. Hence, I started to casually discuss by asking Basanti what she did during the festival. But Basanti seemed quite sad and replied that she was unable to go anywhere. The pauses in her utterance showed a delayed response, marked with a feeling of dejection as she repeats the phrase *was at house only* (Line 1). In the next sequences, Basanti expressed why she had to be confined within the *house only*, and it was because of her son. Basanti could find a space where she would vent off her anger, as she repeats in both line 2 and 3 that her son is the reason behind all the distress. In both the

utterances, she raises her intonation to emphasize the factor that *what a boy* she has, adding a dramatic pitch by saying *my god!* (Line 2 & 3). Basanti is open and free to discuss her family problems with the employer and her husband, since she feels that they are people who will listen to her problems. Many times it has happened that Anupriya had given suggestions to Basanti and had also helped her in many ways. So for Basanti, it is easier to discuss her problems than with any other employers.

I knew that Basanti had two sons. So I initiated by asking which one of them was it, and Basanti again repeated by saying that: *younger one! Younger one!* (Line 5). Martha Nussbaum (2000: 21) noted that for “Indian women personal well-being is necessarily tied up with the well-being of family members.” In this instance also, Basanti’s own life and well-being is troubled due to her sons. The use of past and present shows the distress that Basanti went through when she says: *The elder one has become better? Elder one has now left drinking* (Line 5), suggesting that both used to drink and create nuisance without any income, but at least the elder one has now stopped drinking. At this juncture, Manoshij overlaps to advise Basanti not to say much about her elder son. He repeated that: *don’t say! don’t say! don’t say!* (Line 6) quite emphatically to index a social meaning that reflects in his immediate utterance framed in a form of a rhetorical question. The next sequence is overlapped by Anupriya as she correctly assumes and completes the utterance. Anupriya’s overlap is a progressional onset, where she repairs the disfluency or an incomplete utterance and suggests a completion in order to move forward the conversation (Hutchby and Woofitt 2008). Both the overlaps (Line 6 & 7) can be functionally treated as supportive one, since in this context the overlap did not represent a violation of the participant’s right to debate, rather it was a more collaborative one.

In the next turn, Basanti interrupts to tell Manoshij, regarding the anguish and pain as she complains while comparing between her two sons. Basanti, in this instance, spontaneously emphasizes and highlights that for her elder son she did not have to bear so much suffering as she has to bear now for her younger son. Noteworthy for this analysis is Anupriya’s collaborative effort to control the conversational floor (Coates 2004). Anupriya, in her next turn, makes an evaluative judgement, based on Basanti’s complaint, by presenting her self to be a very supportive employer who realizes and is also familiar with Basanti’s family problems. However, when Basanti

wants to voice out her issues (line 10), Anupriya interrupts to assess Basanti's elder son who also used to drink but was comparatively better than the younger one. Though Anupriya engages with Basanti regarding her difficulties that is causing disruption in her well-being which Anupriya is supportive of, but the negotiation of the discussion displays a power imbalance. In the above excerpt, Basanti's discussion about her own problems were more often interrupted and overlapped by Anupriya and Manoshij. Goldberg (1990) had arranged interruptions from relationship driven to power driven, and therefore suggested a more well-designed purpose-orientated interpretation frame. So did James and Clarke (1993), who recommended a functional approach to the analysis of interruptions or overlapping sequences that differs between cooperative and dominance-related speech acts. However, I argue that it can happen at the same time as it has occurred in this instance where Basanti and Anupriya's negotiation displayed a power asymmetry but it also reflected a cooperative formula within the context.

(14) The data was taken when both Bhoomi and Mitali were talking with each other as they were having lunch together inside Mitali's bedroom. By that time, I became quite close to both of them and was also invited for lunch. I asked certain questions but rest are my field notes.

1. Anindita: tumi bhoomi ke khoob bhalobaso nah?
(you love Bhoomi a lot isn't it?)

2. Mitali: haan re. Bhoomi amaar aar ekta meyer moton. Sobh sukh-dukher kotha boli?
Oke chara

aami khayii nah?
(yes. She is like my daughter. we share all happy and sad moments? I cannot eat without her?)

3. Mitali: ashole ki janish toh? Bhoomi aar amaar jibon ta onek mile jay. Bhogobaan korun je

or Shaami jaeno or pashe sobh somoy thake.? Jeta aami hariyechi(.)
(do you know what? Bhoomi and my own life are quite similar. God wish that her husband should always be beside her.? Something that I have lost.) [she starts crying].

4. Mitali: aami konodin ei bari theke ektu o bhalobasa pai ni? Amaar shorir kharap holeo keu

Ekbaar o jiggesh kore naa je aami Kemon achi? Tai eder niyei amar songsar. Majhe

Majhe Bhabhi ekhan theke kobe mukti paabo?
(I have never received any love from this household? If I am ill even then nobody would come to ask me that how I am doing? So they are my everything, they are my family. At times I think that when will I get freedom from this house?)

[Starts weeping so I had to stop the video-audio recording]

Field-note:

Bhoomi also shared a similar thought that she never received any love from her family, though she tries her best to please every member of the family. Being the eldest daughter-in-law she tries hard, but even then she gets no recognition from anyone, whereas the other daughter-in-law does nothing but is not even told to do anything. In Bhoomi's case why this should be the opposite, that is why Bhoomi always remains upset

and have decided that the mistake that she made in her life by marrying so early, she will not let her daughter get married until she does something on her own.

Looking at Mitali and Bhoomi's mutual affection, where Mitali would not eat her lunch without Bhoomi, and would constantly call her to have her lunch first before she finishes the work. Mitali was very caring and concerned about Bhoomi. And it was mutual, since Bhoomi would also be very supportive and even do extra work for her if she was unwell. Hence, I initiated the question to Mitali, which was in the form of a tag-question. It was meant to design an agenda for a certain topical conversation and an action required from the participants (Heritage 2010). Mitali replied with a positive note in the next turn, replying that Bhoomi was like her daughter, and that they both share their sad and happy moments together. Mitali categorically says that she does not take her lunch without Bhoomi. She continues by stating that they both have a similar kind of life in terms of marital problems as she expresses her own loss, and hopes that Bhoomi would get full support from her husband. It is through her voice and embodied behaviour that manifested Mitali's grief and sense of loss, as she broke down in tears. Yet, she continued to articulate with great strength showing a sense of resistance by saying that she never received any happiness from the members of the family, though she continued to follow all the duties of an ideal housewife even after the death of her husband. She also makes a bold remark that none of her own family members had even asked for her well-being. So, she feels that her workers are her only support system. Mitali continues to state that the workers are like her family, hence she is more comfortable with them, but for her there is no-where to go, and so her only pursuit is freedom from the house that she is tied into. Mitali and Bhoomi shared similar thoughts even though one is an employer and the other is a domestic worker. In their domestic domain they faced similar hardship, humiliation and no recognition from their own respective family members.

Scholarship has mainly focused on a woman's well-being as depending on factors like her economic deprivation, educational level, marital relation, and other social and cultural factors (Sen and Sengupta 2016; Thapan 2009). I draw on Narayan's (2000) concept of well-being to be multi-dimensional, including material and psychological well-being, social well-being, security, and freedom of choice and action. Hence, well-being of a woman does not only depend on her economic background, just like

Mitali states about not being well and no-where to go which is similar to what Bhoomi also states, though Bhoomi is a domestic worker and Mitali is her employer.

In the above excerpts at three different households, I examined the ways in which both the employer and the workers are articulating household troubles among themselves, and the way they negotiate the problems with each other. In all three cases there is a common strand of mutual intimacy and support, but it also shows how both power and agency operate within the situated contexts, which also reflects an engagement with the exercise of social power in different ways. In the first excerpt, Munmun as an employer articulates her family problems though she was constantly fielded with collaborative support by her full time live-in workers Gita and Karuna. Both Gita and Karuna had overturned the hierarchy by displaying more power over outsiders, since they were close allies of Munmun. In this case, they took pride as workers who knew everything about the private life and their strength to shift the balance of power in their own interest. Whereas in the second excerpt, when Basanti was discussing her family problems, she was given support, but was interrupted and counselled more, rather than being considered an equal partner in the problem. Drinking habits of Basanti's children were easily voiced out since it is quite known to everyone that some male members in the slums suffer from alcoholism and fail to perform the patriarchal duties. But if it had been a similar situation with Anupriya then it would be difficult for her to talk about it since she would fear the loss of respectability in her community. However, in my study I have observed middle-class employers to discuss various private details, which they cannot share with anyone else. In the last excerpt, Mitali clearly stated that she never found happiness in the household where she performs her housewifery duties everyday, but she considers her workers like her family. She showed love, care, and affection for Bhoomi who shared similar troubles like Mitali.

In all the above excerpts, the employers and workers shared their private lives with each other, and discussing the problems were reciprocated mutually. The experiences of marital discord, harsh poverty, lack of dignity and recognition within the family were the issues that they discussed about. The women I spoke to were skilled through which they could show their agency, avoidimpositions, and exercise their dreams and choice to enhance their sense of well-being. Both the employer and the worker also

share their hopes and aspirations, and find ways to adjust in such situation where they can together find a path for being well and have hope for a better life.

3.5 Conclusion

This study has examined a relational approach in labour relations in Bengali households between the employer and the worker who are both women. The chapter examined women collaborating in doing domestic work together. Yet the work is devalued within the households. The issue on gender solidarity is a complex one, and hence I have mentioned about ally-ship in the chapter. Through ally-ship, I have tried to explore how notions of domesticity and dependence construct the experiences of both the employer and the worker that adds to a non-market element in paid/unpaid situation. But this construct of ally-ship also varies and thus becomes very complex as the workers try to build and compete amongst each other to become the closest ally of their employers. The deliberate gestures on the part of employers seen in some households in Kolkata suggest inclusion to help them to claim their dignity and self-respect. These are also bolstered by showing an expression of trust through handing over keys of the house or to look after their kids, and creating a feeling of being part of the same family. This is a case that happens particularly with either the full time live in workers or the full time workers, but not generally noticed among the part-timers (in my field research).

This affective relationship works out as a mutual benefit and works bi-directionally between both the employers and the workers. The workers yearn for recognition and often an equal treatment and chit-chats with the employer often gets work done that might not be done through wages. Thus, building up a rapport is commonly seen as a growing trend with feminization of labour, since both females develop a sense of bonding that somewhat blurs the boundaries of drudgery always involved in the working conditions. The material and emotional support often expressed as care or even duty on the side of the employers has an effect of getting an obligated commitment from the workers.

Several interactions with the workers reveal that despite the intimacy constructed within the domestic space, the workers are aware of their subject position. The huge gap is even more enunciated through the everyday language that characterizes

education, class, and poverty. The workers foreground education of their children as their prime concern so that their children can escape the route of servitude. The next chapter is about their aspirational model.

CHAPTER 4: LANGUAGE OF ASPIRATION: ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG THE DOMESTIC WORKERS

The chapter discusses aspirations for upward social mobility as expressed in the work performed by the workers. Despite a growing body of scholarship that has mostly directed its axis towards multilingualism, code-switching, language shift and language contact (Cowie & Murthy 2010; Gargesh 2004), the growing dominance of English as an aspirational mechanism among the domestic workers have been much overlooked. I focus on workers' perception of learning English language as a route to quit transgenerational servitude and a way for better living. The English language proficiency endures to represent a form of symbolic capital, together with social practices that is associated with middle-class identity (Sen & Sengupta 2016). This chapter argues that the commodification of English language as a way to achieve success not only leads to a failure of aspirations, but it plays a role to endanger local languages and also creates disparity between workers who do not have access to linguistic capital.

The research understands the way in which education is perceived especially among the workers' children. It plays a dual role: first it acts as a marker of social status, and second it is thought to be a tool for breaking away from intergenerational poverty through better marital alliance among girls and some professional work for boys. The chapter attempts to answer two important questions: first, as domestic workers what are the aspirational means through which they seek social mobility for their children; secondly, what does an analysis of the English-language coaching sessions as well as emergent relationships between employers, workers, and workers' daughters reveal about power, agency, and the reproduction of the existing social hierarchy?

I have ethnographically observed a trend of aspiration among young workers, in two cities (Kolkata and Delhi) to make a comparative analysis of how the workers in these two cities approach education as a means to gain social status. The chapter contains the following sections. Section 4.1 discusses the theoretical perspective; and under the same subsection 4.1.1, I discuss the themes of the chapter in detail. Next two sections

4.2 and 4.3, focus on data analysis. Section 4.2 examines ‘Work to aspire’ and section 4.3 investigates ‘Language, Styling and Social mobility’.

4.1 Theoretical Orientation

The power and prestige of English, that foreground such current research strands as the global English paradigm, (Meyerhoff 2012; Birsch 2014; House and Crystal 1997) have a long-standing tradition in the former British colonies, including India (Haidar 2017; Mohanty, Panda, and Pal 2010; Tickoo 1996). A concomitant development of the expansion of British Empire was the spread of English language to different parts of the world. Calcutta, which remained as the capital of British India until 1911, became a site of close interactions between the colonizers and the colonized. The creation of a vast British administrative system created a need for English educated Indians who could help imperial officials with socio-cultural and politico-legal aspects of colonial rule (Banerjee 2004; Chatterjee 1993). Gradually, speaking English became an indicator of a respectable and distinctive identity among India’s elite (Sarkar 2001). Immediately following India’s independence in 1947, the introduction of educational policies that supported a vision of English language proficiency as a key to avoiding isolation and accessing international developments (Begum 2017) preserved the privileged position of English at the policy level. Subsequent decisions, including the provision making English as one of India’s official languages, has cemented the de jure importance placed on English in India.

Sociolinguists have worked on the institutional discourse that produced ‘linguistic stylization’ (Baxi 2006; Cameron 2000; Cowie and Murthy 2010) and commodified woman’s language in the service industries (Cameron 2000; Hall 1995). Existing scholarship has focused mostly on workplace interactions, and has overlooked the everyday interactions in the domestic realm which is the working space for domestic workers. Studies analyzing relationship between the worker and her employer have focused on how certain languages are given more privilege over others (Grin 2001). The state of Bengal stands out in India as the only state to formulate a language policy to remove English-language teaching from the primary school syllabus in the 1980’s. It was later reintroduced in 2000 (Nigam 2004; Scrase 2002). The re-introduction of English has been argued by scholars as a crucial form of cultural capital, which is

essential for future employment success, especially in the emerging new work order (Gooptu 2001; Patel 2010). Such arguments have been incorporated into both official discourses about language policy as well as unofficial discourses that connect English with upward mobility.

English-language instruction remains a central component of today's education system in India; however, quality English-language education is disproportionately available only to Indians who can afford to live in urban centers and pay for elite schools (Annamalai 2001). Hence, the ability to speak English continues to separate the haves from the have nots (Scrase 2002). As in colonial times, English-language proficiency is strongly linked with the identity of India's middle-class (Bhattacharya 2005; Donner 2008). Furthermore, the high symbolic value placed on English by the elite has, conforming to a Bourdieusian conceptualization of the periphery's focus on the centre, greatly influenced attitudes toward English across classes. In light of this issue, while domestic workers interact with employers in their intimate physical space, the interaction and the close presence is in conflict with their respective positions in the social space. The workers enter the space as novices to acquire skills and refined manners as well as to use language in certain appropriate ways in order to become competent members of the respectable family. Such a focus allows for an analysis of language and power through an intersectional lens that incorporates the perspectives of both those who possess symbolic capital and those who seek to acquire it. My chapter examines that learning in such workspaces like a domestic realm broadens their ideas of aspiration and dreams for their children.

4.1.2 Themes

In the following sections, I discuss the two main themes that emerged from the interactions that I have had with the participants. The themes are: Work to Aspire; and, Language, Style and Social mobility. In the first theme, I discuss both the aspiration and the anxieties of the working class as well as the middle class employers. The workers and employers compare government and private schools, and some workers wish their children to be educated in private schools to learn good manners, despite the higher costs of private schools. In the second theme, I study the perception of language among the workers and what role does an English medium

school plays to fulfill the aspiration, and secondly I examine the way employers engage into a bi-directional approach through coaching the workers' daughters in English language inputs, verbal styling, and mannerism in order to avoid inter-generational servitude for their workers' children.

4.2 Work to Aspire

In this section, I analyze the hopes, desires and investment in education among the workers, and the different perspectives of the workers regarding marriage and education. In my interactions, workers expressed a realization of changing times, even though there persists a structural inequality when it comes to educate either a girl or a boy child. This will be discussed in detail in the sub-section on Gender Inequality.

In this section, I discuss education as an aspiration for the domestic workers who spend huge amounts of money only in tutoring their children. These waged working mothers aspire for a generational mobility through the means of education which will provide them a better living. I study the perspective of both the employers and workers based on their perception about education provided in government medium and private schools. The medium of teaching in government schools are in Bangla/Hindi (in case of Kolkata and Delhi) language, whereas the private schools teach the students in English, which attracts the workers. Education, especially for workers' children, is a marker of social status. Most importantly, the question emerges as one of the workers asked that why the social system is to corner the workers' children in the government school? According to the participant, she questioned that why is the schooling system not based on merit? The difference is clearly suggested that a workers' position is already legitimized from the very beginning, there are some workers who accept their position, and there are also workers like Bhoomi who resist and want her children to be educated in a private school.

(1) This data is located in the first household (C.R. Park), in the backyard where Bhoomi, the daughter-in law of Munni, a migrant worker from U.P works in the household. Bhoomi was very shy with the camera since she did not like her work, so she never wanted to face the camera while she was working. She was very conscious of her existential self of being a worker, hence I had to start with a compliment.

10.Bhoomi: ek time pe didi? Mein bhi parna chahti thi, (.)maagar aab bacche ko?

(At one point of time didi? I too wanted to study,(.) but now for my children?)

11.Anindita: Kitne bacche hain tumhare?
(how many children do you have?)

12. Bhoomi: (looks happily into the camera lens and replies) mere,.? Do bacche Hain.? Ek ladka?. Aur ek ladki?.
(I,? have two children.? one son?. And one daughter?.)

13.Anindita: ladki ko parane ka?(.)
(educationthe girl child?(.))

14.Bhoomi: [interrupts] haa:aann? Ladki ko bhi paraungi? Jitna dur woh parna chahte utna dur paraungi mein.? (sobbing)
(ye:eess? I will educate my girl also? I will try to educate her as much as she wants to.?) (sobbing)

[I had to stop video recording][after a while I started recording again]

15.Bhoomi: didi? Hum nahin chahte ki humare saath jo bhi hua woh humara baache pe aaye? Jo bhi baccha kuch banna chahta hain? Hum aapna life woh karke? Bacche ko banayenge.?
(didi?I do not want that what had happened with us that gets repeated with our children?any child who wants to do something? we can do anything with our life?to build the child.?)

Initially we discussed about education and she was very shy to say that she had passed seventh grade, though I told her that she could even study now if she wanted to, but there was a long pause. A pause indicates multiple things especially in a conversation, either one wants to avoid, or remain silent, and silence indexes the social positioning (Ochs 1995). Bhoomi reminisced that *At one point of time*(Line 10) she too wanted to study. By adding a conjunctive marker '*but*' Bhoomi has conjoined her aspiration with her children in the present as she remarks: *but now for my children*.The past was a lived experience that enhanced her aspirational goal to live the present for her children. Bhoomi's face lit up as I asked about her children and she was quick to give me all the minute details about their education (lines erased in the transcript). Bhoomi did not want to dig too deep into the past events, but she referred to her past life which does not seem to be pleasant. Domestic service for Bhoomi was not just disrespectful but demeaning also, but she would not let her children go through such kind of work, and that is the only reason she is working with a hope and a dream of making her children's life better.

In the next utterance Bhoomi stated that she would strive hard while she said that: *Hum aapna life woh karke? bacche ko banayenge.?* (Line 15). Domestic workers do not want their children to become workers, since they are facing the troubled everyday distinction in some form or the other. Although this was initially thought to be an unstructured interview, my questions were in fact answered before I could

complete them, since the interlocutor or the recipient (Bhoomi) was an engaged participant and understood the questions before I finished my turn. My intention was to ask about her daughter's education in line 14, which was an overlapped utterance by Bhoomi to confirm that she would definitely like to educate her girl child as well. In this context, Bhoomi overlapped when she understood what I was going to say, and that was the point of 'recognition onset': when the next speaker feels that they recognize what the current speaker is saying and can project its completion even before the utterance is complete.

Bhoomi was living in a world of aspiration where she wanted her dreams to become real, and she could do anything for that. Each time, I met her she would show me what her children did in the school, and how her daughter was appreciated. It seemed that her children's recognition and appreciation is a part of her own struggle. Many formal and functional features of everyday discourse carry socio-cultural information. Therefore, language use is a major tool for conveying socio-cultural knowledge and it is a powerful medium of socialization.

Like Bhoomi, Sushila too discussed her children's future but since Sushila is the sole bread-winner of her family she struggled financially and, made the difficult choice to send her daughter to a government run school near her slum, whereas her son was sent to a boarding school for better education. When I asked Sushila, she said she had to make the difficult decision, which depicts her own agential role as she forms to play paternal roles in her own household. Sushila has a greater decision making power about what she wants to do regarding her children's future.

4.2.1 Aspirational model: Workers' and Employers' perspective

The primary aim of the domestic workers is to enable their children to escape the trap of intergenerational poverty and subordination that they had to endure. The workers with whom I have interacted had no expectation of achieving social upward mobility for themselves, which identifies a sense of resignation. But they are determined for their children's future and hope that they will escape subordination. The section on 'work to aspire' has been thematically aimed to show how class structure is embedded in our everyday discourses. Hence, I have discussed the aspirational model based on the accounts of the worker, and how the model is perceived by the employers. The

issue of discussion is regarding the schooling of worker's children in private versus government schools. In this section my interaction was limited to the respondents in Delhi. In my study participants in Kolkata accepted their low status, since they could not invest much financially because of their comparatively lower salary, hence the aspiration level was less compared to the workers in Delhi. Thus the situation in Kolkata and Delhi is comparatively different in terms of labour relations. In Kolkata, the workers have financial constraints, some employers take an initiative to tutor the workers' children, but their expectations are not very high as they fear if their dreams get shattered then it will be a major setback for them.

In this section, I discuss education as an aspirational model mostly among the younger generation married women: the hopes, desires and investment in education among some of these low-income group women are beyond belief (Sen and Sengupta 2016). The most significant part of my study is a comparative analysis of Bengali employers and migrant workers from a cross-regional perspective. In Kolkata, the workers cannot spend much on education, but compared to that Delhi marks better in the aspirational model since the class structure of the employers are also different than that in Kolkata. The intensification of the globalization of the Indian economy over the past decade has dramatically influenced Indian social life, both economically and culturally. Various studies have shown the commodification of labour market where certain skills are better paid, and English knowledge is highly valued (Lorente 2010). Hence, the workers want to uplift their children's status marker through education which indexes respectability.

The workers in Delhi receives a much higher wage compared to that in Kolkata, so the aspiration and dreams of living a better lifestyle is reasonably possible among the workers in Delhi. In my conversation with the workers in Kolkata, the women were satisfied with the government schools or government hostels where they expected that their children would be educated sufficiently enough to get a job better than that of a domestic worker. They were struggling hard to formally educate their children, yet they were also conscious of their own subject position and the constant fear of broken dreams. In comparison, Delhi was quite different, as Bhoomi wanted her children to be educated in a private school to learn better manners. The culture of aspiration was higher in Delhi as they at times competed with the employers' children. Bhoomi in a

casual conversation told me “*hum kya un sabh log se kuch kam hain? Didi? Hum bhi toh kamate hain?*” [Do we seem very little in front of those people? Sister? Don’t we also earn money?]

My conversation with both the employers and the workers suggested that education in Delhi has become more commodified. The education industry in Delhi promises upward social mobility to lower-class communities and this is a tempting proposition to these communities. There are two visible distinction in the model of aspiration when I compared both Kolkata and Delhi: first, the workers in Kolkata are satisfied with education in government run schools, as they estimate their own financial constraints and aspire a better future for their children, but in Delhi the workers aspire in comparison with the middle-class employers’ children and the motivation is more towards mannerism, bodily comportment and styling that will display a respectable status; secondly, in Kolkata the gender inequality is very common and quite explicitly discussed, whereas in Delhi it is much more nuanced and interactions in this issue is a difficult task.

(2) Discussion with Bhoomi about her children’s education regarding private/government education

1. Anindita: Tumhare bacche kahan parte hain? private school mein ya phir government school mein?
(Where do your children study? Is it in the private school or in Government school?)
2. Bhoomi: nahin.? Peraibet mein.
(No.? in private school.)
3. Anindita: Private school me tum maintain kaise karte ho? wo toh bahut mehenga hain nah?
(How will you maintain in Private school? Isn’t it very expensive?)
4. Bhoomi: ho jaata hain.?(smiles) jaise bhi ho? Kar leti hoon.?
(we do manage.?(smiles) anyhow, anyway possible? We try to do.?)
5. Anindita: baadh mein kaar paogi?
(will you be able to manage later?)
6. Bhoomi: dekhenge baadh mein kya hoga?(smiles) baadh ka baadh mein hi Sochenge.? Abhi toh? bacche acche par rahe hain.?
(Will see what will happen later? will think of future later.? now? children are studying well.?)

The significance of growing expectation that better education will facilitate upward mobility is noticed as Bhoomi stresses more on ‘private’ education than on ‘government run’ school. The question that I had initiated was an information-seeking question which could be answered by just giving me the information. Instead Bhoomi

started with a negation, followed by the information that her children study in a private school. It sheds light on how identities emerge in relation to other identities within the ongoing process of interaction (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Here in this particular context, Bhoomi wanted to show that her children are in a private school in comparison to children among other workers. My questions posed in lines 3 and 5 did not make Bhoomi very comfortable, so in line 6 she became defensive as she says: *Will see what will happen later? will think of future later.?* Bhoomi wants to live in the present and does not want to think or predict the future in advance, since her aspirations are based on the present. It is indeed interesting to analyze the data that for Bhoomi her present moments reflect the dreams, whereas in real terms one aspires for future development or generational mobility which is the case for Lalita and Sushila. But for Bhoomi, her views of aspiration rests on the present. It is also relevant to understand that aspirations based on private school education are more of a social marker that enhances the status. Bhoomi used her agential role to support the fact that private schools are better equipped to train the children. The priority was given to mannerism, body language and speech styles than actual studies.

On the other hand, Lalita another migrant worker from a rural area in West Bengal, had a different viewpoint. Her younger son was studying in a government run school in Delhi, and she was satisfied with it, since she felt that a government school was best suited according to her income, and she did not want to create a complex situation by enrolling her son in an expensive private school where the higher-income group students would be the peer group.

(3) Located in a second household at C.R.Park, Delhi. Initially we (myself, Ruma [employer] and Lalita[part-time worker]) started discussing about Lalita's work and other small things, but the conversation while talking got shifted to government school versus a private school since Lalita's younger son studies in a government school.

36.Anindita: Governement school bhalo nah private? (to both of them)
(Is government school good or Private?)

37.Ruma: government schooler onek facility ache nah? boi-khata? ei sobh dey nah?ei gulo dite thakle? tahole ektu pora-shuna korano jay? maane? oder bacchara porte pare? aarki?(pointing towards Lalita)oi tution koray bacchader ke? fees kom hole tobei naa? parbe?
(Government schools have many facilities no? books and all? They give all these no?if they give all these? then they can study? I mean? actually their children can study? what else? they give tuitions to their children? since the fess are less that is why they can afford?)

38.Anindita: haaan.? Haaan? Kintu teacher ra poray(.)
(Yes.? yes? But how do the teachers teach.)

39.Lalita:[interrupts]peribaete kichu dey naa?haan?tobaonek taaka ney.
 (laughs)pora-shunar kotha bolte parbo naa? kintu dekho? Jaar
 Jemon khomota? Tar moddhyei toh cholte hobe? naki?aar sobaii
 Toh aar somaan hoy naa?ora o jaane je ekhane goriber bacchara
 Porte ashe?toh?oneker moneo toh? maya doya thake.?tai nah boudi?
 (Private school don't give anything? Yes? but they take a lot of
 Money. (laughs)I do not about their studies?But see?everyone has
 their own capability? We have to live accordingly? Isn't it?and
 not everyone is same?they? too know that here poor peoples'children
 Come to study?so? they have sympathy also.?Isn't it? boudi?[sister-in-law])

My experience with Bhoomi's aspiration about private schooling made me more curious to identify the perception about the government/private schooling through discussing this matter openly with other workers too. Hence, I initiated the question to both the employer as well as the worker, expecting a response from either one of them. In this contextual situation, Ruma responded earlier, even before Lalita could reply, which displayed the asymmetrical power relation within the conversational field (Heritage 2005). In fact, Ruma showed that as if she was asking the questions to Lalita, and as well as answering my question in a subtle way, since Lalita remained silent. Knowing the facts, Ruma asked Lalita whether government schools provide subsidies such as, books, school bags and mid-day meals to the students, which she termed as *facilities*. An epistemic uncertainty marker *I mean* indicated her own stance and positionality followed the question. It is consequently charted out by using an exclusive third person pronoun *they can study* (line 37) expressed distancing (De Fina 2003) and positioned Ruma and Lalita as diverse identities. Ruma's usage of this particular pronoun and then the gesture of pointing towards Lalita served as a marker of dissimilarity and indexed individuals' distinct identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

As I was going to ask about how the teachers teach in a government school, Lalita interrupted by saying that private schools do not provide anything instead they demand a lot of money. While saying so, Lalita made fun of the craze that people have towards private education. Lalita goes on to talk about financial constraints and limitations as she says that: *everyone has their own capability? We have to live accordingly?* (Line 39). Just after saying this Lalita raised a tag-question to me that demanded an answer. Lalita accepted her position in the class hierarchy but she passively resisted by saying that just as resources are not distributed equally, which people are aware of, similarly in government schools too there are some teachers who treats them nicely knowing that only poor kids study in government schools. She deliberately excluded herself from others who are rich and could afford private education. Concluding her conversation, she asked a similar kind of tag question to

the employer: *Isn't it boudi?* (Line 39). Tag questions usually play a multifunctional role. In this context it is a way of contesting the authority claims that Lalita puts forward to the employer to passively challenge her (Holmes 2013).

The last two excerpts described the viewpoints of the domestic workers who both have developed a culture of aspiration. Aspiration of education gave them a sense of hope that it will make their children equipped to survive in the harsh world around; also education is associated with status, and a means out of dependence on unskilled labour (Glenn 1992). However, it is also important to understand how the employers perceive the education among the workers' children. This chapter argues for the analysis of diversity in terms of gender identities, looking for different identity positions as they organize themselves differently.

(4) This data was also recorded with the family members as well as the workers of the first household at C.R. Park in Delhi. The context of this data was based on education and the difference between the private versus the government schools in India, in between this discussion there were also several diversions since mashi entered the scene and displayed an authoritative attitude reflecting also an affective attachment towards the family members.

[In discussion about schooling and education between Sujoy Bose and Thakuma (Malabika Bose).]

5.Anindita: kintu ekhane je Raisina Public school tah? Ache? Ota ki? government school?

(But the Raisina Public School here?[is there] Is that?a government School?)

6.Thakuma: haan toh? ota khoob naam kora school chilo?
(yes? that one was a very renowned school once?)

7.Anindita: ota Raisina Bengali school nah?
(isn't that Raisina Bengali School?)

8.Sujoy: haan.
(yes.)

9.Anindita: haan?
(yes?) [raised intonation]

10.Thakuma: haan? haan? aage toh? khoob naam kora school chilo? Amaar jamai Poreche.?
(yes? yes? Before? It was a very well-known school? My son-in law Studied.?)

11.Anindita: tahole toh ota bhalo school?
(then that must be a good school?)

12.Thakuma: chilo?Se onek aage? Tarpur toh? oi aarki? Ekhaane ekhon sobh oi Jhee chakorer chele meyera pore.? Beshir bhaag.
(it was? Many days before? Then? you know? Now here?only domestic Workers' children study.? Majority of them.)

13.Anindita: Kintu ekhon o toh Raisina school(.)
(But even now Raisina School(.))

14.Thakuma: [interrupts]jacche tai hoye geche.(with disgust)
(It has become just horrible.)

15.Anindita: keno?
(why?)

16.Thakuma: Ki jaani? Oi bhalo school ta teo oi? Jhee-chakorer chele meyera porche? tai ei oboshtha hoyeche? ekta poribesh bole toh baepar ache? naki?
 (who knows? Even in that good school?those domestic workers' children are studying? that is why today this is the condition? [you know]there is something known as an environment? isn't it?)

In the above excerpt, I initiated my conversation regarding government schools where the fees were much less compared to private schools. But Sujoy immediately diverted the issue on the teaching capability. I made a deliberate attempt to ask an open question about a particular renowned school in C.R. Park in line 5 to get the perception of the middle-class employers regarding renowned government schools. Greenwood and Freed (1996) established that questions could be used for different purposes. Some are information seeking questions that are directly not related to the immediate context of the conversation whereas some are about the ongoing conversation itself. However, my question was acting both as a clarification question as well as a confirmation question that would give me a clarified, confirmed answer. Malabika Bose (Thakuma) gave me a confirmed answer that the school is a government school. She used a past tense marker by saying *was a very renowned school once?* (Line 6), which portrayed that at one time it was a good school and that things have changed. So a question still remained open-ended that in recent times certain problems ensued that created a change. But what were those issues? It was now time to get back from the past to the present. So in a couple of next utterances, I probed the same issue regarding the renowned school that had lost its prominence. But Thakuma goes back to her past memory as she says that *yes? Before? It was a very well-known school?* (Line 10), and while using a past tense marker, she also personalizes the speech event with her own son-in-law who studied in the same school.

Language is a warehouse of social and cultural information, a symbol of societal identity, and means of interaction. Thus, the organization of talk, and our ability to classify objects, events and the limitations that govern the way in which we express our relations to others, serve as a resource for the discovery of shared social knowledge (Gumperz 1992). This had led Thakuma to categorize the past from the present, since the past was connected with a personal identity marker. In fact, Thakuma defames the present by labeling it as a school that belongs to the others. The othering is done as she says *Now here? only domestic Workers' children study.?*

Majority of them. (Line 12). Thakuma switches between past to present in line 12 as she compares the past school where students were like her son-in-law versus *now* in the present time the school has restricted itself *only* for the domestic workers' children. She made a claim by referring the workers, who are a majority, essentially acted as an indexical marker through an overt allusion of identity marker and labelling (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Thakuma concludes with disgust that the school which was so renowned had today lost its prominence. She held the increasing number of children of domestic workers in the school as the reason for its decline, as she says: *Even in that good school? those domestic workers' children are studying? that is why today this is the condition?* (Line 16). This was Thakuma's concluding statement where she had already used an indexical marker *those* depicting exclusionary marker for domestic worker, by suggesting that they should receive education in some *other* places but not in a renowned government institution.

It is important to understand the contradictory nature of employers, who on one hand support the workers' children to become educated, whereas on the other hand, the linguistic indexicality provides cues as to their desire to preserve access to quality education for higher social classes (Cowie 2007). The current education system reconstructs this colonial hierarchy. The legacy of this hierarchy is observable through the status of English-language proficiency as a symbolic marker of class in India (Agnihotri and Khanna 1997) that can be considered from a Bourdieusian perspective as a mark of distinction (1991).

(5) The context of the data was on the education of lower working class people in India, as Bhoomi was doing her daily schedule. Her employer Mitali, had told me about Bhoomi's situation regarding her children. She was upset that her children now have to study in a government type school since she could not afford high fee structure in a private school.

5. Anindita: Tumhaare bacche ki parai thik chal rahi hain?
(Are your childrens' education working out fine?)

6. Bhoomi: thik i hain? parai to chal rahi hain. (pitch down) paar who school chut gayi? bahut paisa maang rahe the? didi? toh? (.) humne change kara school?. nahin parayenge itna mehenge school me? itna? itna? paise nahin de saakte? (she did not face the camera, and was very sad)
(it is okay? education is going on. But they are no more in that [private] school? they were asking for lot of money? didi? so? (.) we decided to change the school? don't want to teach at such a costly school? We cannot afford so much money?)

7. Anindita: toh? kon se? school mein diya hain abhi?
(so? now you have enrolled them in which school?)

8. Bhoomi: Phir? dusre ek haalke school me diya? Jahan hum para sake?. Jahan Paisa? (.)
(Next? we have got them into a light weight school? where we can

afford to teach them?.where money?(.)

9.Anindita: Toh? wahan par para paoge? Tum?

(so? will you be able to teach[your children]there?)

10.Bhoomi: haan. wahan paar para lenge?.itna? assi hazaar? nabbaei hazaar?
didi? itna nahin kar sakte?

(yes. there we can afford to teach?. So much? [like] eighty
thousand? ninety thousand? didi? this much amount we cannot give?)

11.Anindita: Bahut zaada maang rahen hain? Toh? government school me kyun
nahin para rahe ho?

(they are asking too much? So? why are you sending them to a
Government school?)

12.Bhoomi: waise mein hi dali hain.?woh government school ki tarah hi hain?
Dono baccho ko nikaal ke aaur usme daal diya hain.?

(have put in such a kind of school only.?that is like a government
School only?[I] have taken out two children and have put them in
that school.?)

13.Anindita: baccho ko parana tumhara shaukh hain nah?

(You aspire that your children will be educated isn't it?)

14.Bhoomi: haan. baccho ko toh main parana chahti hoon.?isme jo bhi laage?

(yes.I want my children to be educated.?whatever it needs I am
ready to do?)

15.Anindita: abhi? Para paogi 10th taak?

(now? will you be able to do it till the 10th grade?)

16.Bhoomi: haan? haan?isiliye toh nikaal diya itna mehenge school se?(as
She sweeps on)isiliye toh para rahin hoon? mehanaath kaar rahin
hoon.? ki woh hum jaise nah bane?didi?

(yes? yes? that is why I have taken them out from such an expensive
school? that is why they are still studying? working hard.? so that
they do not become like us? didi?)

17.Anindita: toh?yeh kaam tumko kharabh laagta hain?iye? jharu pocha ka kaam?

(So?do you feel that this work is bad? this?mopping and cleaning
work?)

18.Bhoomi: kaam toh? didi kaam hota hain.?kharabh laagne wala koyi aisa nahin
hain.

(work is? after all work didi.? There is no bad feeling about it.)

(she kept on sweeping while looking down and had an expressive low falling intonation)

19.Anindita: toh? agaar tumhaare beti kaare toh?isme kharabi toh? nahin hain
nah?

(so?if your daughter works so? there is no bad feeling right?)

20.Bhoomi: Nahin.Meri beti ko mein iye kaam karne nahin doongi.

(No. I will not let my daughter do this work.) [statement]

Last time I met Bhoomi, she was happy that her children were studying in a private school. Bhoomi wanted to give her children the best education that would identify them into a group of a social class. At that time she was living in the present and did not think of the future. But after a month of my research at another household I got a chance to re-visit the first house again where Bhoomi worked. At this time it was present for me as well as for Bhoomi, we were both living in the present habitual, as I initiated the question to Bhoomi about her children's education. Bhoomi had a falling low intonation, with a sad facial gesture as her cascade of complaints about the

private school started to overflow the space. The school was very expensive, and they could not afford to keep their children in that school. So they had to pull them out. Bhoomi, in her complaints about the private school, made use of linguistic structures and systems that were ideologically associated with specific personas and groups that classified only people who could *afford* to study in *those* places. Bhoomi uses the phrase: *haalke school me diya [got them into a light weight school]*(Line 10), which referred to her idea that she had transferred her children to a school that will not provide much social upliftment, since as a domestic worker she could not *afford* to pay and keep her children in a private school. In line 13, I asked about her aspiration to educate her children in a good school, and Bhoomi replied in the positive implying that like all mothers even she too aspires, dreams and hopes for a better future for her children. She wisely says: *whatever it needs I am ready to do?*(Line 14).

Bhoomi wants her children to be educated and escape the route that she was forced into as she repeats it in line 16. But when I asked her that whether she felt bad about this kind of everyday menial drudgery, Bhoomi gave me a very respectful definition of what work is and in fact stated that *there is no bad feeling about it.* (Line 18). The statement was made in a low falling intonation. The workers are aware of their subject position and of the huge social distance between their lives and that of the employers. This positionality got clearer when Bhoomi concluded by saying *I will not let my daughter do this work* (Line 20). Drawing on Bucholtz and Hall's interpretation on identity, it can be said that Bhoomi's temporary role as a mother and as a worker put her in different stance which is voluntarily chosen. In fact, these fleeting positions or roles that individuals temporarily occupy (i.e., positionality) 'contribute to the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in discourse' (2005: 591).

The above excerpts reveal both viewpoints as interacted with the employers and the workers about education of the workers' children. It reflects two important issues: first, the workers aspire for a better living for their children and invest lot of money in their education so that they can overcome the hurdles and escape the subordination of menial labour. Second, the Indian middle classes perceive a distinct social advantage in preserving quality education that continues to represent a form of cultural capital, which, together with social practices and habits, is strongly associated with middle-class identity (Bhattacharya 2005; Donner 2008). In these ways, better education

continues to signify status (Scrase 2002) and, in Bourdieusian terms, distinction in taste and lifestyle (Bourdieu 1991). In conversation with the workers (unrecorded), like Bhoomi, Sushila, Lalita are all ambitious and their major preoccupation is the education of their children but it also serves to deepen their fear and create a dilemma which is difficult for them to express. They fear that their school-going children would be teased by their peer group about their mother's working identity, and they fear that how will they be treated later by their educated children.

4.2.2 Gender Inequality

Gender Inequality is another aspect, like one's caste which is difficult to talk about. Even though, very few workers explicitly stated that the daughters were taken out from the school for managing housework, but many indicated that housework remains to be woman's responsibility which one has to learn before marriage. However, though there are differences, but two visible changes are seen from my participation, discussion and interaction with the workers. First, the young-generation domestic workers are in favour of delaying their daughter's marriage; and second they want their daughters to get some education and refined manners, even if this leads to marriage and not employment, which is not the aspiration in the case of sons. Just like a discussion on caste, gender inequality is difficult to talk about because all mothers want equal education for all but it is the societal norm that often times pushes and compels them to get their daughters married. It is often difficult to understand that the same domestic workers who complained about their own marital problems, and the way in which they were pushed into waged labour, is complacent in finding a good match for her daughter.

In many such conversations, the workers being a mother also imply that a daughter's entry into domestic service is a failure of the dream of their generational mobility. But they still think twice before dribbling away of the investment in their daughter's education or to preserve it in the form of dowry for a suitable match. According to them, seen from such a point domestic service at other people's house is a loss of respectability (Banerjee 2004; Gulati and Bagchi 2005), whereas domestic femininity is associated with responsibility and duty performing at one's own home. The workers cannot discuss with frankness, but are explicit about the issue of respect and dignity

that a woman deserves, and if she gets that in her family by performing household chores then it is better than being a waged worker. Like Bhoomi, Sushila too discussed her children's future but since Sushila is the sole bread-winner of her family she struggled financially and, made the difficult choice to send her daughter to a government run school near her slum, whereas her son was sent to a hostel for better education.

(6) Located in the south Kolkata household where Sushila works as a part-time worker. The context was the discussion on education and why she had kept her son away from her while her daughter Nandini is studying in a government run school.

- 1.Sushila:didi? Nandini(0.4)? Nandini? toh? Aar school e jay nah? Ekhanei ashe? Majhe majhe
 Maami'r kaache pore? Ektu English ta jaanleo toh kichu hobe naa? Noyto amaar Moton loker baari baari khete khete hobe.? Aami chai nah?
 (didi? Nandini(0.4? Nandini? So?[she] doesn't go to school anymore?She comes here?
 [with me]sometimes maami teaches her? If she learns little English even then it will
 be of some use no? otherwise she has to work hard like me working at other people's home.?I don't want it?)
- 2.Anindita: Kintu tui charali keno? Oke school theke? Tao toh ekta porashunar moddhye chilo?
 (But why did you take her out? From the school? Even then she was atleast involved Within an activity of study?)
- 3.Sushila: porashuna nah chai! Tumi jaano nah didi? Oishob bostir school e kicchu porashuna
Hoyna. Ulte? Joto aaje-baaje kotha shikchilo? Maami kei jiggesh koro? Poribesh Bole toh? ekta baepar ache nah ki? Tai toh aami oke ekhaane niye ashi?
 (Education or rubbish! You don't know didi? In all those school in the slum areas Studies do not happen. On the other hand?[she] was learning all bad words? You can Ask maami? There is something called environment? Isn't it? That is the reson why
I bring her here.?)

Last time I met Sushila she was as determined as Bhoomi that she would somehow manage to educate both her children. But when I went back later, I saw tears in her eyes as she felt guilty that she was unable to send Nandini to a better school. She kept on saying that though Nandini was not into a formal education but she has been taking lessons from *maami* (Anupriya), Sushila's employer. Sushila in her conversation said that Nandini was learning English that will help her pursue something better than working at other people's house. She compared her situation in line 4 and ended by saying *I don't want it*, by referring that she doesn't want Nandini to become a domestic worker like Sushila. When I asked her in line 2, Sushila made a distinction between their lives and the *others* by illustrating education as an example is reserved

for high class people. Sushila got agitated and stated *In all those school in the slum areas studies do not happen.* (Line 3) quite emphatically but with a falling intonation to mark it as a statement that cannot be questioned any further (Have 2007; Drew and Heritage 1992). In fact, Sushila continued to say that Nandini was picking up *bad words* from the school, and that was one of the main reason why Sushila had to de-register her name from that school.

In language and Gender studies, women's speech has been seen as being very different from that used by men. Stereotyped as swearing less, using less slang, and aiming for a more cultivated, standard speech style were the main indices for the women to be judged according to their different aspects of lives, such as class and economic situation (Hughes 1992). The use of swearwords by members of the working class is evaluated on the basis of their lack of education that results in their having an inadequate vocabulary, which leads to their everyday common slang usage (Mills 2012).

Sushila's understanding of her daughter learning slang usages was an impact that led to discontinuing Nandini's education, whereas her son was studying in a hostel in a better environment, the same environment that Sushila had questioned. Sushila herself had made a choice that she would keep Nandini in a *bosti* or slum kind of an environment but she would spend money to educate her son by sending him away *from the bosti environment*. With economic stresses placed on working parents in India, there is more pressure to continue to send boys to school. Given the disproportionately higher likelihood of parents' pulling their daughters out of school rather than their sons (Sen and Sengupta 2016), a greater number of women in this setting lack the educational background to pursue careers. The strong influence of gender roles that link women with household duties further diminishes the likelihood of women's social mobility through earned income. For these reasons, the practice of pursuing upward mobility through marriage is quite widespread. In fact, the national context features the very prominent example of the Jat people, a formerly agrarian and officially declared *Other Backward Class*, who have adopted a range of strategies to facilitate their daughters' marriage into rich, urban professional families. They have accumulated considerable political and economic status as a result (Khanna 2009, Jeffery et al. 2011). It is, thus, within this socio-cultural context that the importance of

symbolic capital (English in this case) can be understood: proficiency in English can potentially build symbolic status, a powerful resource for becoming upwardly mobile. This qualifies the reason why Sushila brings Nandini to her employer's house, so that she can learn manners and some English words that would package her as a potential bride.

4.3 Language, Style, and Social Mobility

The discussions above have indicated an aspiration among the workers of this generation. The subject of my study is about struggling lives and not just about labour, it was important to explore the scale between lives and livelihoods. That is the reason why the conversations were a journey as personal narratives that spill over within the workspace from a domain of work into personal lives, where both the workers and employers talk about limiting conditions to articulations of aspiration. This section focusses more on the relationship between the employer and the worker that provides insight into power relations that do not always conform to a clearly definable hierarchical structure and, thus, invite us to take a fresh look at the themes of language, class, and gender as they relate to the domestic workplace. This section focuses on the ways in which the workers employ the paradigm of care to be liberated from the social stigmatization for their children. The most widespread expression of their stride towards dignity and gaining respectability is through their children's education, which they believe will be the next generation's pathway to quit manual work. This section is divided into two sub-sections. First, I focus on migrant workers' perception of English language as a route to quit transgenerational servitude. Second, I examine the domestic space that serves as a training ground in which the Bengali employers, who are privileged in their respective class and education, coach the domestic workers' daughters in English terms, speech styles, and refined manners.

4.3.1 Commodification of Language: Perspective of the workers

India's neo-liberal economy offer these women few prospects for employment (Scrase 2002). Although the domestic workers highlighted in this chapter see little opportunity for their upward mobility, they hope that their children will be able to escape servitude if they learn English terms and refined manners, which is directly linked to class status. The Bengali *bhadralok* (educated middle class) were

distinguished by their access to English-language education and participation in the colonial economy (Banerji 2001). The workers testify that there exists a stratification that persists even today through inequitable structure in the education policy. The workers in this ethnographic research have discussed the reasons why they want their children to learn English. They think that knowing English is synonymous to status and social empowerment.

While conducting ethnographic research in two cities (Kolkata and Delhi), I found that workers in Delhi not only invest a lot of money but they place education of their children as their first priority. There is a growing trend of aspiration among Delhi women workers that better education will facilitate upward mobility. They also pay a lot of attention to speaking skills, especially if their children can speak in English it is a status marker for them. For a worker, the use of English terms is seen to be her aspiration and not always about better education or getting a better job, but giving them a better quality of life. As Bhoomi, a migrant domestic worker, told me one day: *meri ladki toh itni acchi inglis bolne laagi ki aapko bhi sikha degi (My daughter has started to speak such good English that she can even teach you)*. For Bhoomi, knowing English terms was similar to buying packaged products that she could be proud of or had aspired for. These few intermittent conversations about knowing English triggered me to ask Bhoomi in a separate space to know why English speaking was so significant.

(7) The conversation was recorded in my house, as I had invited her and she willingly came and we chatted for hours. However, this is a segment of the data recorded which is specific for my research.

1. Anindita: English medium me kya parai acchi hoti hain?
(In English medium schools do they teach well?)

2. Bhoomi: haan.yeh nahin? Ki? Hindi medium me parai nahin hoti hain.?Hindi medium me bhi

Parai hoti hain.par? wahan ka language? Wahan ka bhasa aacchi nahin hain?teacher

log?Bilkul?baattamezhi se baat karte hain.?bacche se?[she shows] jaise ki?oye? idhar baithJa?(.)hum e aisa nahin chaiye nah? hum e bhi accha baithna-uthna chaiye.?tah ki? humare Bacche bhi accha sikhe.

(Yes.it is not that? in Hindi medium schools they don't teach.?In Hindi medium schoolsalso they teach.but? the language there? There the language spoken is not good? Theteachers?converse in a very foul language.?with children?[she shows]like?hey you?sithere?(.)we do not want this no? we also want[ourchildren]to learn proper manners.?sothat? our children can also learn properly.)

3. Anindita: toh? English medium me kaise bolte hain?
(so? how do they[teachers] speak in English medium schools?)

4. Bhoomi: English medium(.)bilkul tameez se baat karte hain?kya bara ya chota ho?bilkul

aacche sebaat karte hain.?[she shows] bete?baith jao?uth jao? Maatlaabh aacche se
 baat karte hain.
 (In English medium.)[they speak very decently?either you are elder or younger?they speak properly with you.?[she shows]child? Sit down? get up? I mean to say that
 they speak very well.)

5.Anindita: par?English hi kyun?tumhe nahin laagta ki English toh bahar desh ka bhasha hain?

Hindi toh?
 (But?why English? Don't you think that English is a foreign language? But Hindi is?)

6.Bhoomi: [interrupts]kyuki?aajkaal Hindi bhasa ki koi wohi nahin rahin? Jahan dekho?inglis

mebaath kar rahen hain?aap kahin bhi jao.?aieport ya phir railway tation? Sab jaga

loginglis mein hi baat karte hain. Hindi mein bahut kam baat karte hain.
Jisko dekho who English mein hi baat karte hain. Hindi toh? bilkul aam logo ka bhasa ho gayi hain.?Aab zyada se zyada log inglis mein hi baat karte hain

([interrupts] because?nowadays Hindi language does not have that thing anymore?whereverYou see?people are speaking in English? Wherever you go.? airport or railway station?Everywhere they are talking in English only.In Hindi very few people speak. WhoeverYou see they are speaking in English only.So Hindi?has become a language for ordinaryPeople.?now people are speaking more often in English only.)

In the excerpt above, Bhoomi makes a clear distinction between English and Hindi, and expresses her preference to learn English instead of Hindi. But, as Bhoomi discusses about learning English, she focuses more on learning bodily comportment and mannerism that is well taught in English medium schools unlike those in Hindi medium schools. In fact, she also criticizes the teachers comparing both the medium not on the basis of issues pertaining to education, but rather the way the teachers speak with the students. Bhoomi overtly articulates that she wants her children *to learn proper manners* (Line 2), which suggests that manners are more important for her than educating her children, since she perceives good manners with respectable identity. Bhoomi distinguishes herself from the middle class employers by using words like *we, our children*. Bhoomi's perception about English medium schooling is better is based on the way the people speak as she states that *they speak very decently there* (line 4), which shows that for Bhoomi speaking skills or the way one speaks is more important than proper formal education.

Bhoomi's aspiration is shared by many mothers who feel that good manners and speaking in English are signs of upward social mobility, where they could compare their children with children from middle-class families. When I probe deeper to ask her a question regarding English being a foreign language whereas Hindi being the mother tongue, I was interrupted by Bhoomi as she already assumed my question and responded in the next sequence by explicitly giving a detailed testimony of why she

perceives English to be better than Hindi. She makes covert remark that Hindi as a language has no respect or dignity in recent times, which she can feel more since she cannot speak English. She also continues to say that Hindi has become the language of ordinary people, which suggests that Bhoomi desires to move beyond the limits of being just ordinary always. The everyday routine conversation of these domestic workers is taken to be an important ingredient of the setting in order to understand the emergence of new types of social mobility.

Throughout the entire excerpt, Bhoomi's central concern was on learning good manners, to speak decently, and what she perceived to be better, because in recent times everywhere one travels they speak in English and her inability to follow the language also builds an aspiration that her children will learn and teach her. Hindi is perceived to be the language of ordinary people, whereas English became an indicator of a respectable and distinctive identity among India's elite (Sarkar 2001). Studies about the relationship between languages and labour market have tended to focus largely on worker's communication skills based on certain language-use and language variation (Fairclough 1992). Hence, it could be said that globalization has commodified the already privileged English language for all by creating such policies on job opportunities based on communication skills in English. English learning has become an obsession for many of the workers that I spoke with. They believe that if their children can speak some English terms and can pass the twelfth grade in school, then they will be able to cope well with the world and move away from such labouring jobs. At times, the employers, especially in Kolkata, also encourage them where some workers cannot afford to send their daughters to formal schooling. Some progressive employers provide help in kind by informal intermittent tutoring. In the next section, I discuss the ways in which the employers train the workers' daughters and take pride in extending such help for their workers.

4.3.2 Recasting Women¹: Speaking skills, Styling and Bodily comportment

Sociolinguists have worked on the institutional discourse that produced "linguistic stylization" (Baxi 2006; Cameron 2000; Cowie and Murthy 2010) and commodified woman's language in the service industries (Cameron 2000; Hall 1995). These studies

¹Title borrowed from Sangari and vaid's book *Recasting Women* (1989)

have focused mostly on workplace interactions and neglected the domestic realm, which is the working space for domestic workers and their employers. Studies analyzing relationship between the maid and her employer have focused on how certain languages are given more privilege over others (Grin 2001). The current study departs from the considerable body of workplace-situated literature that takes place in public professional settings of organized sectors (Leidner 1993; Macdonald 1996; Cameron 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Baxi 2006; Jacobs-Huey 2006; Friginal 2007; Cowie and Murthy 2010; Patel 2010). Instead the work focuses on worker-employer communication that takes place in the private, highly personalized workplace spaces which have thus far received limited attention in the workplace literature due in large part to the challenges of gaining access.

This sub-section examines the domestic space that serves as a training ground in which the Bengali employers, who are privileged in their respective class and education, coach the domestic workers' daughters in English terms, speech styles, and refined manners. In looking at the interactions in a domestic space, the study emphasizes how the workers' daughters and the employers negotiate their identities in this highly personalized space as opposed to the professional space in organized sectors. My interest lies in studying the domestic space, which serves as a ground for linguistic stylization and training, to analyze the micro details of identity formation in Bengali households. In this sub-section, I analyze two excerpts from the coaching sessions conducted by the employers to teach English words and polite forms to their workers' daughters. The linguistic training that is referred as verbal styling captures the dynamics of certain discourses that points to an asymmetrical relation between the privileged teacher and the marginalized workers' daughters on one hand, and it also studies a context within a personal space where the scripted, standardized styling does not work. Rather, the actors can be called as stylistic agents (Eckert 2003). In both cases, the excerpts begin shortly after the employers, Munna and Anupriya, had started to ask questions, and both Anima and Nandini had failed to answer them. Hence the familiar colloquial Bengali speaking domestic space gets altered to an unfamiliar space, but they find ways to personalize the environment.

(8) This data was recorded during one of the casual days when Munmun was teaching Anima and she was quite reluctant to learn. Munmun took Anima inside her bedroom and started to teach her some English words from English vocabulary books, while Anima was looking around the room with a pleasing, fanciful sight.

- 1.Munmun: aager pora hoyeche?
(have you completed your earlier tasks?)
 - 2.Anima: porechilam(.) kintu abaar bhulegechi.?
([I]studied(.) but now again have forgotten.?)
 - 3.Munmun: bhulegechis? Aar bhulbi? Promise?
(have forgotten? Will again forget? Promise?)
 - 4.Anima: eibaar po:rro:messe:: aar bhulbo naa.?
(this time pro::mise:: I will not forget again.?)
 - 5.Munmun: daekh? Tui? Promise word tao thik kore pronounce korte parish nah?
(look? You? cannot even pronounce the work promise correctly?)
 - 6.Munmun: daekh? Amaar dike daekh?. Maane? aami je bhabe pronounce korchi tui thik shei bhabe
Dekhe dekhe bol? Okay?
(look? Look at me?. I mean? the way I am pronouncing the word you look at me and Utter the word? Okay?)
 - 7.Anima: noticing and trying.
 - 8.Anima: Mashi? Aami Jodi sobh thik-thak bolte pari tahole tumi amay ekta mobile phhone kine
kine debe?
(Mashi? If I can utter it correctly then will you buy a mobile phone for me?)
 - 9.Munmun: kii?Mobile ta tui thik pronounce korte parli nah? aage onno sobdo gulo sekh?ei
jaemonPromise(.)thank you(.)Welcome(.)? aage eigulo sekh?tarpor mobile(.)oofff!!
(what?You could pronounce the word mobile correctly no? first learn the other words?
Like promise(.)thank you(.)welcome(.)?first learn these? Then
mobile(.)oofff!!)
 - 10.Anima: Mashi? Ei e:to:gulo: shikhle kintu phair aan lobeliir kirim tao kintu?
(mashi? If I learn so many words then you have to give me a fair and lovely cream too?)
 - 11.Munmun: mashi eibaar pagol hoye jaabe?. Khoob rege jacchi kintu aami?
(Mashi will now go mad?. But I am getting very angry?)
- [Anima laughs and hugs Munmun; and Munmun too pats her back]

(9) Anupriya teaches Nandini, Sushila's daughter.

- 1.Anupriya: ei picture book ta daekh.?A for apple.B for bat.?ki holo?kothay dekhchis?
(look at this picture book?A for Apple.B for Bat.? What happen? where are you looking?)
- 2.Nandini: naa aami dekhchi.?
(no.?I am seeing.?) [scared]
- 3.Nandini in tears
- 4.Anupriya: kaandbe naa?abaar daekho? Aami purota bolchi.?
(Don't cry?look at it again? I am repeating the entire thing.?)
- 5.Nandini: ae?aapel.?
(ae?[is]aapel.?) [scared]
- 6.Anupriya: iisshh!porashuna bondho kore de.? Ki chai sheta bol?
(iisshh!stop studying.? Tell me what you want?)
- 7.Nandini: dida? Tomar nailpalisher rong-gulo khoob bhalo.?amader egulo nei.
(dida?[granny]Your nailpalish colors are very nice.? we don't have these.)
- 8.Anupriya: niye ne.?porashuna korte hobe naa? shara jibon oi rong makh.?

(take these.? No need to study? The entire life you use these nailpolish and Lipstick.?)

I examine the two excerpts together to understand how both the employers and workers' daughters orient and position each other, since there is an interconnection between the communicative relations in a particular context and the distribution of power and resources in society. In every society, resources are unequally distributed and conversations reveal the reproduction of these inequalities. The relationship between the employer and the workers' daughters in this case is no exception. In the interview and observation data featured above, the asymmetric power relationship between the employers and their workers' daughters is mirrored in their teacher-student relationship as the employers try to lead the daughters in English-language instruction. The power relations suggested by the teacher-student relationship within the frame of the existing employer-worker-workers' daughter hierarchy lends itself to a straight-forward interpretations of top-down power. This structure certainly influences power relations; however, as the following analysis will show, it is more complex than that which might be envisioned when considering the existing hierarchy. Though Anima and Nandini are not paid workers, but the identity of being a workers' daughter erodes the possibility of enjoying certain qualities that are ascribed only to certain groups of people, and the ability to speak English is one such quality. English language acts as a powerful tool to display hierarchy within the situated context.

In the first excerpt, Munmun initiates the conversation with a question, later emphasizing on the word *promise* with a rising intonation, thereby creating an ambiguous situation for the hearer Anima (Clayman 2001). Questions are multifunctional but it always demands a reply that positions one's authority over the topic (Freed and Ehrlich 2010). Anima gets puzzled with the question and attempts to pronounce the word *promise*, which she utterly fails. Her pronunciation, which features epenthesis (the insertion of a vowel between the consonants /p/ and /r/) and a trilled /r/, differs considerably from the epenthesis-free, non-trilled target form. Munmun issues a direct criticism of this pronunciation (line 5) in her response. She summons Anima's attention by instructing her to listen and watch her model the target word as she mouths it in a stylized manner (Cameron 2000). In the second excerpt, Anupriya reprimands Nandini for her apparent lack of focus during the

phonics lesson with the words, *What ishappening? Where are you looking?* (Line 1). In response, Nandini attempts to defend herself by reassuring Anupriya that, in fact, she is not distracted and that *[she is] seeing [payingattention]* (Line 2). Later Anupriya's authoritative stance is temporarily softened by Nandini's crying, which causes Anupriya to shift away from her phonics lesson for a moment to urge Nandini not to cry. However, her negative response disrupts the power relation, and Anupriya in line 3 presupposes that Nandini does not want to learn English.

The excerpts reveal that both Munmun and Anupriya had permitted certain words and pronunciation style that is geared to utter the words in specific ways, suggesting a verbal stylization. In excerpt 21, line 5 where Nandini pronounces the alphabet *a* as *ae* and *apple* as *aapel*, Anupriya animates her contempt by using a Bengali marker *iissh*. The indigenous pronunciation of an English word does not reflect the authentic form cultivated from the colonial past (Annamalai 2001). However, employers maintain a cultural domination since the grammatical rules and language proficiency is reserved for the elite class only. Anima is reminded of her subservient position in line 9, as Munmun says *first learn to utter these words* like *Thank you, welcome*. English as a medium re-enacts the colonial relationship placing the Bengali *bhadramahilas* in a position that re-establishes power inequality. Unfortunately, the linguistically subalternized have not gained an equitable access to linguistic capital even after globalization. Anima had never attended a school, and Nandini occasionally attends a government-run school where the poor infrastructure and lack of teachers, disable the interest among the children of the working-class.

Following Eckert (2003), Anima and Nandinican be called stylistic agents since they both make choices about their linguistic performance, unlike workplace discourse patterns where the workers do not have much role to play. In the call centres or the maid agencies, there are language designers hired from outside to train the workers in a prescribed, standard form (Cameron 2000; Lorente 2010). But the above excerpts portray that the domestic space departs from a professional space since there is no prescribed, scripted formula for learning English words. Hence, the workers' daughters have an agentive role in deciding to utter a foreign word in return for a material gift. Anima could tactfully bargain by emotionally attaching a kinship term *mashi* (line 10), and indicating that she will follow Munmun's task-oriented directives

only if Munmun promises to buy her a *mobile*, and a *Phhair aan lobelii* cream. She knows how to exercise her own choice by deploying an attachment formula with Munmun, and Nandini has also learned to employ emotional attachment as a tool to communicate with her *dida* Anupriya. In Line 3, Nandini's tears soften the employer. Later, in line 6, Anupriya assumes before Nandini could communicate her desires that she wants to wear nail-polish as Anima in her next turn says, *your nailpalish colors are nice, we don't have any*. In line 8, Anupriya indicates that she can never become a *bhadramahila* in a subtle and covert manner, though Nandini seeks happiness in the colors of the different nail paints.

In both the excerpts, the workers are aware that merely learning English terms as a polite formula will not attain job security. But it creates a source of pride among the workers that their children can speak a dominant language. However, talking about the differences between their world and that of their employers, one difference that is readily admitted is in economic position (Sen and Sengupta 2016). Economic condition deprives education commonly seen among girls who start school but have to leave since they help in domestic chores, or seek patriarchal protection and get married early, whereas boys are given priority to attend schools (Chanana 2008).

4.4. Conclusion

The workers focus on education as their primary concern so that their children can escape the route of servitude; many workers like Bhoomi said that her children's schooling was the primary reason for doing the domestic work. Even those in acute financial difficulties like Sushila at least manage to keep her son in a school whereas her daughter is intermittently taught by Anupriya (employer).

The employers and their workers featured in this study are well aware of the constraints – based on gender and class – that act to maintain and compound the domestic workers' and their daughters' subordinate positioning. Such larger socio-political structures have contributed to the asymmetrical employer-worker relationship in which the worker is beholden to the employer for protection; however, based on interview and observation data, the influence of affective attachment and bi-directional engagement appear to mitigate, to some degree, the severity of this asymmetry. The English-language tutorials come out of this relationship. They play

into the workers' aspirations for their daughters' futures; for, the prestigious status of English is both long-standing (it stems from India's colonial past) and persistent (it continues both through the socio-political hierarchy that remains from colonial times as well as the current neoliberal era that favours English.) Analysis of these tutorials as a means of exploring the power structures, both within the settings of the household and local society, represent a primary purpose. It addresses the workers' and their daughters' socio-cultural positioning and their potential for upward mobility through the tutorials.

The employers like Munmun, Anupriya, Mitali who often teach the workers' daughters to help them quit transgenerational servitude act as agents of change is a complex question that needs to be understood. However, the English-language tutorials function primarily as a means for employers to pass on symbolic capital to their workers' daughters; moreover, accumulation of this symbolic capital can potentially allow the daughters to improve their relative power.

The simple exchange of domestic services for monetary compensation becomes less suitable for the relationship; the tutorials emerge as an alternative form of compensation that demonstrate the employers' personal interest in the up-bringing of the employers' daughters. In this way, the tutorials suggest the existence of a bond between the women in which they both acknowledge the limitations that the society places on women with low socio-economic status. The employers' attempts to equip the daughters with some linguistic tools that may potentially allow them to overcome these gender and class-based constraints ultimately serve as gestures that enhance the employers' image as benevolent authority figures; such an image contributes to workers' affective attachment toward their employers. At the same time, it often fosters the workers' enduring loyalty to their employers (Sen and Sengupta 2016), which results in the workers' full acceptance of the existing power asymmetry. While the workers may fully accept their subordinate positioning, they work – in line with Dhawan (2010) – together with their employers with the intention of improving their daughters' positioning.

Though some employers have different viewpoints about teaching, particularly from Anupriya's angle teaching the daughters is a faltering dream since they will get married and again do the same work in the kitchen or the failure of patriarchy will

force them to work as waged workers. The intermittent coaching has helped me to understand the macro-level institutionalized power politics played by the employer as she herself trains the workers' daughters in a domestic space which acts to be an anti-capitalist service relation in comparison to organized sectors that are meant for economic profits. This study broadens the concept of linguistic stylization and looks at the agency of the workers' daughters who do not always follow the directives, as they are not scripted or written in a prescribed format.

CHAPTER 5: LIVING WITHIN BOUNDARIES: CONSTRUCTION, NEGOTIATION AND ARTICULATION ON CLASS AMONG DOMESTIC WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS

The study investigates labour relations between employers who possess a position of authority and are privileged in terms of class and education; whereas, the workers form the marginalized section of the population since they lack both. The chapter examines the discursive expressions and negotiation of class identities among women from different backgrounds within the domestic space. The aim of the chapter is to problematize the paid and unpaid work that show how work is classified into boundaries of class structure. The central question of the chapter is how employers and workers negotiate and articulate their identities in everyday life. This is answered by studying the observed embodied behaviour and conversations recorded through unstructured interviews in seven different households in Kolkata and Delhi.

The analysis shows how both the employers and workers interactively position themselves hierarchically, even though the domestic space is a collective space. The domestic space portrays a great continuity in women's joint collaboration and involvement-across caste, class, and historical contexts (Banerjee 2004). At the same time, it also creates a gap between women in the most explicit manner, especially seen between women employers and women workers (Arnado 2003; Cock 2001; Ray and Qayum 2009; Rollins 1985). I employ the concept of collaborative work in such spaces that are based on class hierarchy¹. This has received little attention when seen through the co-construction of [i]dentities of both individuals. The concept of identity is complex, and, as a result, I draw on Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) socio-cultural linguistic model, which studies identity as emergent in everyday interactions and allows for the investigation of class identity. They argue for "the analytic value of approaching identity as a relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction" (Bucholtz & Hall 2005: 585–586).

¹Not just class but the identities are heterogeneous based on caste, age ethnicity

5.1 The Class Locus

The section studies the way in which women organize everyday domestic life to create a home that fulfills the essential requirements of every member of the family. The focus is to understand middle class homes as crucial sites and meeting grounds for two groups of women: the middle-class *bhadramahila* (employer) and the *kajerlok* (domestic worker). The Bengali term *bhadralok* translates as ‘refined people’ and refers to families with a tradition of family literacy and with sufficient wealth to hire a worker. Respectability of a woman is associated with domestic duties and also involves being protected by staying indoors (Banerjee 2004; Bagchi 2003; Ray and Qayum 2009).

The term domestic worker is directly placed under the authority of the employer, and is bound to follow the employer’s instructions. The workers are accountable for their regular, uninterrupted work in return for wage. It is virtually impossible for domestic workers to achieve respectable status since the very definition is designed to exclude them from attaining that status. The *bhadramahilas* expects the workers to be committed to daily domestic work, which includes dusting, mopping, dish washing, and food preparation (Haskins and Lowrie 2015). Ray and Qayum’s (2009) study is very relevant in the context of the current project since the study is based on a relation between employers and workers. They identify four different types of domestic service: 1) the family retainer, 2) the live-in full time domestic worker, 3) the full-time domestic worker who comes in the morning and leaves by evening, and 4) the part time domestic worker. The scope of this thesis includes all four types of domestic workers in its comparison of middle-class homes in two different cities (Kolkata and Delhi).

Today, we are undergoing not only through a stratified society but equally complex division of labour that exist among domestic workers in urban India (Raghuram 2001). The main distinction is between live-in and part-time workers. Among many scholars (Mattila 2011; Neetha 2003), the confusion between full-time live-in workers and family retainers has remained, though Ray and Qayum (2009) clearly state that family retainers are ones who mostly worked for the rich elite in Kolkata. These family retainers are mostly men who are engaged in domestic service trans-

generationally and generally came from those lands which the employers possessed. But identifying the full-time live-in workers with the family retainers is misleading. Based on my conversations with the employers in Delhi, they either prefer full time workers or part timers. The reasons are two: first, live in workers will disrupt their privacy, and second, fear of keeping live-in workers as this might lead to theft, and many such activities. The trend also seems to be changing in Kolkata, even though there are many full-time live-in workers, mostly abandoned rural migrants who have no place to live, and nowhere to go (Roy 2003; Sen and Sengupta 2016). In Kolkata, women employers still feel safe to keep another women full time live in workers, as they discussed in several conversations.

Recent studies show that part-time work arrangement is becoming more popular among the employers, but have not entirely replaced live-in work order (Dickey 2000; Kundu 2008; Ray and Qayum 2009). My own observations and discussions suggest that since there are no statistics available on the overall numbers of live-in and part-time domestic workers, it is difficult to generalize a trend since the choice is dependent on both the employers and workers. It depends on the workers when they are forced to take up a full time live-in job, and at times when they decide to take only part-time jobs. My interviews with the workers in Kolkata have suggested that they mostly prefer a part-time job since they do not have to be constricted to one house. But in Delhi, most workers prefer a full time arrangement since they can anchor one house where they work as well get extra benefits like food and a place to rest. They are also permitted to work in the neighboring households, which helps them financially. While it is difficult to generalize whether part-time workers are replacing live-in workers, it is certainly true that family retainers have become almost negligible due to the increasing feminization of labour², where the employers prefer female workers due to reasons of cheaper wages than men and easy availability, and better personalized care. The workers hardly describe themselves but they define their work as either *thaka-porar kaaj* (full time live in with shelter and food) or *thika kaaj* (part time work). The part time workers have a spatial mobility to move from one house to another, and they also have a home of their own. The live-in full time workers are more vulnerable as they do not have any place to go to, and are also mostly

²Family retainers were mostly men as the houses were very big and the employers could afford to keep them, as well as they were able to manage the physical labour single-handedly (Ray and Qayum 2009).

constricted within the same household. In my conversations I have found the live-in workers to be more attached and intimate with the employers than the part-time workers.

The work is usually organized on the basis of different tasks that one can perform according to the skill set, and wages also vary based on such tasks. The employer hires the worker, and then decides the task suitable for each worker. This signals an identity of worker based on the work which portrays some skills to be respectable, and others that are menial and demeaning. The division between cooking and cleaning is an extremely important one; the former usually has a higher wage rate and is considered to be respectable in comparison to the latter (Joshi 2004). Cooking jobs are more respectable because of their skill set, and the availability of good cooks are also limited in number, hence the cook has an authority over other workers in the same household. The differentiation and stratification among the workers is created by the employers.

The term *thika* primarily refers to periodic jobs, but in domestic service *thika* primarily refers to a person who works in several homes and visits each house once or twice a day. Initially in Kolkata, such *thika* work were given only for cleaning and washing clothes, because a Brahmin cook was employed for the household cooking (Ray and Qayum 2009). The social construction of *thika* or part-time worker is also related to the notion of skill, which makes the job more demeaning and undesirable (Sen 1999). In this study, I highlight the sacrifices that the full-time and part-time workers make in making the life comfortable for the employers in lieu of monthly wages, even though there is a constant neglect in their own household.

In the following sections, I discuss the three main themes that emerged from my classification of the transcripts of the everyday discussions and the participants' co-construction and performance of class identity. Section 5.2 is on 'Working in others' homes'; section 5.3 is on 'Being a *bhadramahila* in your own home', and section 5.4 discusses 'Work and Housing'. The first theme in section 5.2, the workers discuss about what it means to work at others' homes. They talk about *kaaj* (work) in general, the hardship and struggles associated with it, the demands of a domestic workplace, and issues surrounding the negotiation of identity as workers in a domestic space. The second section 5.3, addresses the class location of the employers, and the questions of

being *bhadra* (polite) and a *bhadramahila* (genteel woman). The section comprises conversations from both employers and workers, who have contradictory views on who can be classified as a *bhadramahila*, and, what signifies respect and respectability. Section 5.4 on the theme based on work and housing, addresses the way the workers try to build their own houses, as they want their children to have a better quality of life than what they have endured.

5.2 Working in others' homes

Households have always been well-known for social organization where domestic relations have been seen to have a great significance (Hendon 1996). While several scholars have worked on the domestic sphere, few have explored women's spatial mobility and social relationships that they form beyond the boundaries of one's comfort zone, especially when they work in other people's houses. Home refers not only to a physical place of dwelling but it is also linked to an ideological and psychological state where one has a sense of belonging (Tienstrakul 2006). Domestic space is itself problematic since the women who work together perceive the space differently: for the employers, the 'domestic' indexes a socio-cultural meaning of belonging to the home to one's own place of residence, whereas for the workers, it can be both a workspace and a place for living (in case of full time live-in). The topics in this study are premised on issues related to the workers' hardships, struggles, and the working norms and conditions that they must adhere. It is significant to understand how the different groups of women performing tasks in the same domestic space interpret *kaaj* (work). In my conversations with the employers and workers, I found a significant difference in the way they referred to work. The employers translated *kaaj* or work as *barir kaaj* (family/house work), whereas the workers prefer a nuanced word by saying *porer barir kaaj* (Other people's housework). This section 5.2 has only documented the voices of the workers.

In the excerpts that follow, the conversations depict the worker's vulnerability, poverty, and struggles that they experience to make a comfortable life for others, while leaving their own homes unattended, particularly in the case of part-timers/full timers who work at multiple houses.

(1) *Sushila, part-time worker, (Location: South Kolkata; her work is to clean, mop and wash utensils. She has been working in the family for more than ten years)*

- 1.Sushila: naa didi? Onno din toh maa er kaaj ta korte hoy na nah?
Daekho naa? amar koto deri hoye gelo.? Erpor onnoder theke
boka khaabo.
**(No didi? Other days I don't have to do mothers' work no?
Look no? I got so late.? Now I will get scolding from
Other people [employers].)**
- 2.Anindita: tah? tui koto bari kaaj korish?
(So? How many places do you work at?)
- 3.Sushila: tah? dhoro ekhon toh? saath baari kori? Naa korle
Peth cholbe ki kore? Chele-meyer lekha pora ache?
**(so? now? I work at seven households? If I don't
work then how will we feed ourselves? son and daughter
both have their education?)**
- 4.Anindita: Toke toh? ekhane nijer meyer moton bhabe tai nah?
(To you? here they think you like their daughter, isn't it?)
5. Sushila: Kajer-meye ki kokhono nijer meye hoy? Didi? Kintu? Haan
enara amake Khoob bhalobashe? Amar meyekeo? Maami toh poray?
**(Can a domestic servant ever be one's daughter? Didi? But? yes
they love me a lot? and my daughter too? In fact maami [employer]
teaches her?.)**

The fast pace at which Sushila has to work in seven homes makes her almost an invisible character. She talks about her working schedule, the amount of time in each house, which is a significant factor that determines her monthly wages. Sushila consciously uses lexical choices to answer that she is paid for her work, while making a clear distinction by using the word *onnoder*, which implies 'others.' When I ask the number of houses she is employed, Sushila responds that she works at seven houses, saying also *If I don't work then how will we feed ourselves?* (Line 3). Though Sushila has responded to the question being asked, she also moves on to narrate her hardship in living on the monthly wages that she earns from each family. Finally, Sushila ended with a rhetorical question: *Can a domestic servant ever be one's daughter? Didi?* (Line 5). Rhetorical questions are not intended to elicit response but rather to gather the persons' opinion or stance (Freed 2010). The careful prosodically marked utterances that show the manner of rising and falling intonation, with emphasized phrases, speaks about certain socio-cultural aspects that reflected her stance.

(2) *Sabitri Mashi, full time worker at Chittaranjan Park, Delhi. She is a cook and a Brahmin woman who has taken Dikhsha (initiation) into Vaishabh Dharma. She has been working in the house for fifteen years. She commutes daily from khadar for work. She is originally from West Bengal*

- 6.Mashi: haan.?loker baari kaaj kore.?kaaj kore din kataischi.?ekhon(.)
**(Yes? I am working at other people's house? worked daily to feed
[myself].? Now(.)**
- 7.Anindita: tomar bhalo laage? Kaaj korte?

(Do you like? to work?)

8.Mashi: ekhon oi jetuku shorire kulay? Maane? Tuk-tak kore? haather(.)
(Now I try to do as much I can? I mean? little bit here and there?
[little pocket money](.))

9.Anindita:[interrupts] kintu tomar kaaj korte bhalo legechilo prothom dike?
(But? did you like to work initially?)

10.Mashi: prothom theke(.)iye?bhalo maane ki? dhoro mojhburi te pore? Ki
bhabe? Baccha palbo? Ki bhabe baccha boro korbo? Sheta.toh? amay
dekhte hobe?.(.)

(From the beginning(.)I mean? I like it means? see? there were no
options? how will I rear my children? how will I bring up my
children? so? that I only have to see?.(.))

11.Anindita: tokhon aar kichu korar nei.?kaaj kora(.)
(Then there is nothing to do.? To work(.))

12.Mashi: korar nei.?tai? maa. Baba o gorib? Shoshurbaari o gorib.? emon noy
Je shoshurbari te poregiye keu khawabe? Keu kichu korbe? She sobh
Kichu nei.? Bujhecho?shei? mojhburi te porei.?(.)

(nothing to do.? that's why?[my] mother. father also are poor? and
also not that my in-laws will keep me and feed me? Or anyone will
do anything for me? Nothing of those sorts.? Understood? That's why
[I had to work] since [I had] no options.?(.))

13.Anindita: Ki korte hoy?
(what do you have to do?)

14.Mashi: boli? iye.korte hoy?koshto laagleo koshto mone kori naah.? Bujhecho?
([will I]say? have to do? Even if I am pained, I don't take it to
heart? Understood?)

I had initiated conversation with *Mashi* (Sabitri) regarding a ritual that is performed by several Hindu women. However, *Mashi* (Sabitri) being a Brahmin cook at a household in Delhi (Chittaranjan Park) stated that she has never performed the ritual since she became widow at an early age. In the above excerpt too, *Mashi* talks about how she had to face difficult times by working at people's houses. *Mashi* overtly uses a distinct marker *other people* to indicate a different class of people as she says that: *I am now working at other people's houses?* (Line 6). In this context, the other people referred are the middle-class employers. Subsequently, in the next few turns, my questions about work takes *Mashi* back to the past events in her life. *Mashi*, while speaking about work and hardship, often switches to a Hindi word *mojburi* (compulsion). She is very clear about her own class location as she states quite explicitly about her conditions of poverty. The word *mojburi* is used here to imply that she was forced to work, which revealed her situation to be different from others. Responding to my question in line 13, *Mashi* replies by adding that *Even if I am pained, I don't take it to heart?* (Line 14). *Mashi* makes it clear for the interlocutor to understand the difference that she makes between *us* versus *them*, a marker of paid and unpaid worker. As she speaks about *koshto* or *pain*, she indirectly refers to her body. Although domestic work constitutes bodily subjectivity in a particular way

(Bahnisch 2000, 59), research generally tends not to place the social meanings of workers' bodies at the centre of the analysis.

(3) Discussion with Sabitri Mashi: Full-time cook at C.R. Park, Delhi

1. Anindita: Tumi (referring to mashi) ki nije thekei ranna koro? naki kakima?
(Mitali) bole dey?
(do you cook on your own? or is it that kakima (mitali) tells you?)
2. Mashi: mashi i bole dey. aami mashi ke cahra ki rannte pari? ki khaibe naa
Khaibe? Tah mashir barite mashi bole debe nah toh ke bolbe?
(Mashi only tells me.? Can I cook without mashi? what [they] will eat
or not eat? At mashi's house, who will say? mashi will only say.?)
3. Anindita: tumi (referring to mashi) amake kobe khawabe?
(when will you cook for me?)
4. Mashi: (0.2) mashi jedin bolbe? Sedin i? ranna kore khawabo?
(0.2) whenever mashi will say? that day only? [i] will
cook for you?)
5. Anindita: keno? tomar? tomar kono iye nei?
(Why? you? you? don't have any [say]?)
6. Mashi: haan? nah!? aami daekho? aami oder bari ekta kajerlok? taile? aami?
ora naa bolle? Ki? tomake khawaite pari? (.) tahole? aamar barite jao.
Kheye ashbe.? giye.
(what? No!? See I am? I am just their house's worker? So? I? If they
don't give me an instruction? Then? can I cook for you? (.) then? [you]
come to my house. you can eat.?)

Mashi does not let her attachment towards the family influence her self-awareness of being a paid worker or a *kajer-lok*. Initiating a question on who is the decision maker for everyday meal, *Mashi* responds quite casually by saying that *Mashi*³ *only tells me?* (Line 2). She goes on to clarify that it is not her own house as she continues to say that *at mashi's house, who will say? mashi will only say?* (Line 2). By saying that it is not her own house, she expresses distancing (De Fina 2003) and situates herself within a particular class hierarchy, and frames her position as a paid worker, whose role is to cook and not to decide.

Though I make an attempt to divert the topic by asking her to cook some nice food for me some day, *Mashi* continues to assert that she is just a paid worker, and that she needs the employer's permission to cook for an outsider (researcher). But I try to tease her by saying *you don't have any...?* (Line 5), the use of heavy stress on the word *any* and the rising intonation in the utterance indirectly questions *Mashi's* stance as a long-term worker to voice in the family since she has been working for fifteen

³Sabitri Mashi addresses the employer as well as me as 'Mashi', a marker of certain class hierarchy. She never addresses Mashi to any other workers in the household. Mashi in literal Bengali means 'mother's sister'

years. In the next utterance, she displays confusion by asking a question *haan?* [‘Yes?’](Line 6), which indicates how speakers use signaling mechanisms or ‘contextualization cues’ (Gumperz 1992), often prosodic or paralinguistic in kind, to show what they mean when they say, and how listeners through subtle contexts can assume, which Gumperz terms as ‘conversational inference’, recognize the contextualization cues through their own culturally shaped background knowledge. In this context *Mashi* expected that I would understand the way she used question to express confusion or an epistemic uncertainty. But finally inferring that I did not understand, she ended up saying that she is *only a domestic worker* (Line 6). The use of the first person possessive case marker *my house* versus the exclusive third person pronoun *they* and *their house* (line 6) served as a marker of dissimilarity, and indexes the individual’s distinct identities based on the very different socio-cultural daily practices that she engages in comparison to her employer (Mitali). Within the situated context of any interaction, pronouns are considered to be micro-level features of talk (Cramer 2010), which function to index particular identities. In this case, *Mashi*’s conversation clearly indicated the socio-cultural features of class hierarchy through identifying her self as one who is a paid worker.

(4) Lalita is a part-time worker in another household at Chittaranjan Park, Delhi. Her duties include cleaning, washing and mopping. Lalita has been working for more than five years, after she got married in Delhi. She is a migrant worker from West Bengal and currently resides as a tenant in Govindpuri area.

13. Anindita: tah? Tumi ki onek gulo baari kaaj koro?naki?
(so? is it? that you work at many houses?)

14. Lalita: nah! nah!aami? shudu charte bari i kori.?
(no!no! I only work at four places.?)

15. Anindita: kaaj korte Kemon laage?
(how do you feel when you work?)

16. Lalita: (looks at Ruma and laughs) bhalo naa lagleo toh mojhburi te
Korte hoy? Tai na go? Boudi?
(Even if you don’t like it still you have no options? Isn’t it? boudi?)

Lalita is a migrant part-time worker in Delhi (Chittaranjan Park). She came to Delhi after her marriage, which initially her family members thought as a better prospect for her. In some of the casual conversations (not mentioned in the above excerpt), Lalita told me that before getting married she was excited to be in a new city, the capital of India. All her dreams of a beautiful city were shattered when she came to Delhi. After

marriage, they had two sons, yet her husband only had temporary jobs and this situation forced her to seek part-time jobs. As I asked her about work, she said that she *only works at four places* (Line 14), which according to her is comparatively much less than what others do. In this excerpt, Lalita also uses the word *mojburi* even though she works ‘only at four places.’ The word *mojburi* intrudes in their discourses when they are asked about their work. Work and compulsion for them is associated together, since they are unable to look after their own family because of such *mojburi* (compulsion), but they have to work to earn a living.

In the above excerpts, all women state that work is essential to maintain their livelihood and that it is their embodied existence. The conversations with Sushila, Sabitri *Mashi*, and Lalita assimilated into one story of how they identified their position within another household, which they often referred as *onnoder* or others. The conversations also had a common strand of hardship, poverty, and deprivation of basic resources. In my questions I have never asked them about their wages or their conditions of living. But the interactions emerged from discussions on why they were forced to migrate for better earning and living conditions, especially in the case of *Mashi* and Lalita. *Mashi* uses the word *mojburi* to mean a kind of compulsion or having no other choice left. Along with herself, she indexes a community or group of people who are forced into the similar kind of practice that *Mashi* refers as *mojburi*. These excerpts clearly depict that, like many low-prestige jobs, domestic work draws on and propagates social constructions of working women’s behavior as unusual and not refined that marks a class distinction (Wolkowitz 2006). Through voice and bodily comportment these women have articulated a real insight into the different kinds of connections, and it is through such actions it will be possible to infer both the social and ways of negotiation rather than the solely economic nature of class (Banerji 2001).

A good example would be the *bhadramahila*, which in itself is not just a class formation, but a social category, used for certain group of women who are refined, respectable and married in *bhadra paribar* [reputable family] (Bannerjee 2004; Bagchi 2005; Deshpande 2003). The word *being bhadra* is used often in the local parlance among the Bengalis in both Kolkata and Delhi.⁴ But this chapter studies the ways in

⁴The word *bhadramahila* is not considered so seriously in Delhi, it is class that over-powers everything.

which the association of being *bhadra* is discussed in certain contexts. *Bhadra*, literally means polite, decent, and well-mannered. However, a construct of class does not come with the meaning. Hence, the next section moves into the ‘Questions of being a *bhadramahila*’ to understand class relations as it is important to know what the workers and employers conceive about the meanings of *bhadra* and *bhadramahila*.

5.3 Being a *bhadramahila* in your own home

Given the interaction of class, caste and gender roles, which is the daily quotidian routine between the employers and workers, how do these women represent their identities in different roles that they play? Studies based on labour relations pose a theoretical challenge in answering the question of who a *bhadramahila* is, and how to define them. The study attempts to understand the concept of both power on one side and subservience on another, and how the process gets socialized through the mundane conversations between people, where not only power relations but also ideas about power are interactionally designed. An example would be, how the women associate respect and respectability as two variant forms, or do they distinguish between *bhadra* (polite) and being a *bhadramahila* (refined woman)?

*(5) This is located in East Kolkata household where Munmun is the employer. The context of discussion was about being a *bhadramahila* versus being *bhadra*, I initiated the question among the workers about *bhadramahila* but the topic moved on different issues from partition to nationality and their relation with this country. I will focus on the segment of the part where they discuss about *bhadramahilas*.*

1. Anindita: tomra bhadramahila bolte ki bojho? Ei je?.kothay boli bhadra nah?
(what do you all understand by bhadramahila? Like? We say Know? Bhadra)
2. Minoti: [interrupts] bhaddarmahila? Hahahah\$\$\$\$\$
(Bhaddarmahaila? Hahahaha\$\$\$\$\$)
3. Sulekha: Aare didi? Bhaddarmahila hocche Munmun di. Ki?re? Gita tai nah?
(Eh didi? Munmun di is a bhadramahila. Isn't it Gita?)
4. Gita: haan. Munmun di.? hobe nah? toh ki? tui hobi? (laughs)
(yes. if it isn't Munmun di? Then do you think? will it be you?)
5. Anindita: Toh? Tomra noy keno? Tomra ki bhadra noy?
(So? why aren't you? Aren't you bhadra?)
6. Sulekha: Aare? Amader ki aar? Oto taa:kaaa? (looks at Gita)
(Eh? Do we have? That much mo:neyyy?)
7. Gita: Tumi boddo kothin kothin poshno koro? Onno kotha boli cholo?
(You ask very tough questions? Let us talk something else?)

8. Minoti: daekho? Amago shikkha-dikkha kom hoite pare.? Obhabe? Nana Karone? Kintu? aamra eikkebaare bhaddarlok.? maane tumi? Jodi sei dig diya daekho?
(See? We might be less educated? Less income? Or many reasons? but? we are completely bhadralok.? I mean? If you see it in that way?)
9. Anindita: Oi dik diye maane? Thik bujhlaam nah?
(In that way? Means? Did not understand?) [to Minoti]
10. Minoti: Oh? tumi bujhbhaa nah.? (laughs)
(Oh? You won't understand?)
11. Mashī: tomra bujhcho nah? desh bhager somoy? Aami chotto? Ischoole Pori?.Sei ischooler mashtar chilo amar baba. Bhadrlok. Bujhle? Aaj aami ekhane kajerlok. Baahmon ghorer meye hole ki hobe?
Kajerlok kokhono bhadralok hoy nah? amaar aar porashunao hoini? Kopaal? Kopaal? Sobii kopaal.
(You all are not understanding? During the time of partition? I was young? studying at a school?. My father was a teacher of that school. Bhadrlok. understood? Today now I am here a kajerlok. I am also a daughter of a Brahmin family? But what? A domestic worker can never become a bhadralok? I could not study? Fate? Fate?
Everything is your fate.

I initiated the question about *bhadramahila* (line 1), but then self-repaired myself to ask what they meant by being *bhadra*. In line 2, Minoti interrupted my question with a rising intonation repeating *bhaddarmahila?*, which was followed by a collaborative laughter from the workers. The epistemic uncertainty in my initial question where I had used terms like *wesay know?* produced a positionality that mediation with another group of people was complicated. Hence, the laughter on *bhadramahila* was found to be an obvious act when it was specifically asked by me. Laughter is pervasive in everyday interaction since it has a strange characteristic that can be used for multiple purposes. In this case it helps to reveal the principle of passive resistance in a reaction to a question. Laughter is an important phenomenon in everyday interactions. It is not simply a reaction to humour, but is used in fascinating ways to divert topics, to avoid a discussion, or as a resistance strategy (Holt 2013). Hence the above expressions reveal laughter as a way of mockery by the workers for asking the question about *bhadramahila*.

In the immediate turn, Sulekha states that Munmun *di* (sister) is one who has the sole ownership to become a *bhadramahila*. In fact, to get a collaborative support she asked a tag question to Gita (line 3). Gita though replied in the positive, but another question was reverted back to Sulekha: *if it isn't Munmun di? then do you think? will it be you?* (Line 4). Sulekha was again questioned because her recipient, Gita, assumed that Sulekha lacked the assurance that only Munmun *di* could be a *bhadramahila*, and

through another question Sulekha could be re-assured. In line 5, I got back to the issue of what they perceived about being *bhadra* or polite. In fact, I wanted to tease out the issue of respect versus respectability. But in the subsequent turn, Sulekha herself gave her own perception of who could be a *bhadramahila* by saying *Do we have? that much mo:neyy?* (Line 6). The production of vowel lengthening of the word money ascribed and indexed certain socio-cultural meaning beyond just a linguistic structural meaning. During this period, Sulekha's eyes were towards Gita, and so she left her sentence unfinished. Gita being a full time-live-in worker had an authority over other part-timers, which I term in my study as 'proxy power'. It means that Munmun's power is made visible through Gita, who monitors other workers and even the researcher, in the absence of the employer. Hence, Gita had the power to suggest me in a casual manner that I ask difficult questions. It had an underlying meaning that signals to stop questioning and, rather to sit and chat with them.

Minoti's next turn produced meanings about *bhadramahila*. She spoke on behalf of all workers by using a plural second person pronoun *aamra* or *we* (line 8). Minoti authenticated the workers to be complete *bhadralok*, even though she confesses that they lack education and are poor. Just like the workers in Delhi who used the Hindi term *mojburi*, Minoti uses the term for poverty as *obhab*. Minoti's use of intentionality *I mean* is to suggest that what she wants to say is *If you see it in that way?* (Line 8). The use of an intensifier *that* establishes a probability supposing that I will know exactly the meaning of *that way*. The subtlety in the whole text is formulated carefully to convey that they were *bhadra* or polite in a different way. However, the information given was partial based on my existing background.

When I questioned the partialness of the turn, Minoti laughingly replied that I would not understand (line 10), which had subtle implications. In the next turn (Line 11), *Mashi* (full time live in worker) brought out national labels featuring issues about partition and memories, which were recollected within the situated context. As she reminisced about the past, she spoke of *here and now* which referred to the temporal spatial structure of one's life which made her a *kajerlok* as she said with emphasis that: *A domestic worker can never become a bhadralok?* (Line 11). The rising intonation did not indicate a question. Rather, it claimed *mashi's* point of view with an emphasis. The workers here perceived money and marital status as pathways to

upward social mobility and they point to Munmun as an ideal *bhadramahila*. Some workers, however, made a nuanced comment on being polite and decent even without lack of education. But their work had excluded them from being a *bhadramahila*.

(6) The data was recorded in the North Kolkata family, where all members got together at the Thakur dalan, and the context of discussion was among the female middle-class members on the perception about bhadramahila.

1.Anindita: Bhadramahila? Bolte bojhay ki?
(what do we understand? by bhadramahila?)

2.jagori: Cultured? Bhadra?

3.Anindita: Cultured? Polite? aar(.) mahila? tahole? Amar saathe? je dhorun barite kaaj korche? Sheo jodi mahila hoy?aar bhadra hoy? tahole? tar aar amar moddhye ki kono tofath ache?
(Cultured? Polite? and(.) woman? So? Say like? One who is working At home? If she is also a woman? And bhadra? Then? is there any Difference between me and her?)

4.paromita: of course ache?

5.Paromita: modern chintadharar saathe Jodi tumi? Tomar chintadhara oder saathe match korate paro taholei? Sobai toh aar sheta pare nah?
(If you think in a modern perspective then? If you can match your ideas with them only then? Not everyone can do so right?)

6.Anindita: Modern chintadhara bolte? Thik bujhlaam nah?
(Modern ideas and thinking means? I didn't understand?)

7.Paromita: maane? ekhonkar dine je jugta cholche.?
(It means? nowadays the current time that is going on.?)

8.Anindita: nah! nah! aami shudu bhadramahila bolchi.?
(No! no! I am only saying about bhadramahila.?)

9.Paromita: sobetei tofaath?
(Everything [is] different? (emphatic note)

10.Jagori: Shikkhay? Jheta main tofaath.? sheta hocche shikkhay?. Aajke se Kajer-mahila hoyeche.? Ei karone? Jehetu she shikkhitoh noy?
(Education? the main difference.? Is in education?. Today she has Become a domestic servant.? Because? She lacks education?)

11.Priyadarshini: Shikkha nei.
(lacks education.)

12.Jagori: hoyto? (.)
(Maybe? (.)

13. Anindita: [interrupts] tarmaane ekjon bhadramahilar main symbolic Indicator hocche? (.)
(which means that a Bhadramahilas' main symbolic indicator is? (.)

14.Jagori: [interrupts] shikkha.
(education)

[all collaborate with her]

15.Tapashi: Civilized nature. Culture. Sobh guloi? dorkaar.?
(Civilized nature. culture. all these? are needed.?)

My question was communicated to get the employers' viewpoint on the definition of a *bhadramahila*. But I moved further by asking whether culture and politeness are the only parameters that determine a person's marker as a *bhadramahila*, or whether there still exists a disparity with a domestic worker even if he/she is equally polite. Jagori responds to my initial question with an already defined perception that only cultured and *bhadra* or polite people can be categorized as *bhadramahila*. Her rising intonation in her utterance claims that the question is indeed rhetorical. Questions are mostly in the form of rising intonation, but in this instance Jagori was not asking a question, rather she was responding to a query. Scholars analyzing interaction have observed that even statements are sometimes made with a rising intonation when the speaker wants to make it a claim (Clayman 2001). Subsequently, Paromita, in her next turn stated that *of course* there is. She again continued to prolong in the next turn to clarify that it is pertinent to have a *modern outlook*. Paromita questioned my hierarchical positioning by asking me sarcastically, *If you can match your Ideas with them only then?*(Line 5). Paromita in her utterance had already created an exclusionary approach by using neutral singular pronoun *them*. Here the most noteworthy point is that Paromita uses a singular pronoun which is normally referred to a plural entity, meaning a group or community of people (in this context). Hence, her discourse is in alignment to her exclusionary practice, as she stated in her next utterance that *not everyone can do so*, where everyone includes only the middle-class employers who possess the authority to decide whom they would embrace or reject.

The next few turns are attuned to this same issue of modernity as a new attribute added on to categorize a *bhadramahila*. Paromita gave an undisputable answer that *everything is different?* (Line 9). The difference is with the workers that is what paromita indicates with her hand gesture, and the rising intonation clearly indicates that she is making a statement quite emphatically, rather than merely asking a question (Sidnell 2010). In the following utterance, Jagori clarified Paromita's point by illustrating the reason of difference. Jagori draws a conclusion by saying that domestic workers did not become a *bhadramahila* because they lacked education. She brings a spatio-temporal marker by using *aajke* (today) suggesting the present. Hence she continues to say that today if someone is a domestic worker then it is only because they lack education. Priyadarshini also expresses and repeats *lacks education*

(Line 11) that forms a cooperative formula, since the other members of the group collaborates together to construct a definition of *bhadramahila*.

The collaborative association of the middle-class employers lies in the habitus that is observed and interpreted by others as the ‘dominant symbolic’ (Skeggs 2004, 87), though we are unconscious of how social structures produce particular behaviors and (bodily) dispositions. In line with the collaboration, Jagori uttered an epistemic uncertainty by uttering *may be?* (Line 12) in a form of question, which was immediately interrupted by the researcher in order to draw a conclusion that the only *symbolic indicator of bhadramahila is* (Line 13), when Jagori interrupted to clarify her incongruity in the last statement. She used an ‘other-initiated self-repair’ to correct it as *education* (Line 14) which was marked by a falling intonation and a statement that was collaborated by all, and the final conclusion was drawn by Tapashi who used several adjective accomplishments like having civilized nature, culture as well as education. In fact, all these categories were itemized within the framework of a *bhadramahila*, and nowhere in these scheme of items placed that a domestic worker could manage to fit into.

(7) This data was also recorded in the same family but among the older generation of women. The context of the topic was same and here I have focused on only the relevant issues and the key points. Especially, this context is important since the women were located in a different spatial arrangement within one room set, and I hardly saw them outside in the Thakur dalan.

9.Anindita: bhadramahila bolte ki bojhay?
(what do we understand by bhadramahila?)

10.Bonolata: aachar.?bichaar.?poshaak-ashaak? Chal cholon? ei? sobh kichur moddhei.?lok dekhei chena jay.? Ke bhadra(.) ke abhadra(.)? kicchuta prachin poitrikh iye royeche tader songhe. Ekkhonkar kicchu milbe naa. Ekhon kar saathe tader ekebaarei milbe naa. shaaj-poshaak bolun? Aachar baebohar bolun? Konotai milbe naah.

11.Anindita: Dutor tofaath tah tahole ki?
(So? what is the difference between the two?)

12.Bonolata: Sommanarthe taake bhadra bhabe bola hoy(.)bhadrlok o bola hoy? Bhadramahila o bola hoy.? eta kono bisheshhoshto noy. Manush ke Somman diye bola? aar kichui noy?
(with due respect we address the term(.)even bhadrlok is addressed? also bhadramahila is also said.? This is not any special attribute.it is just to respect a person? Nothing else.?)

In the above excerpt, I initiated a similar question of the same family to the members of an older generation, hence the response was slightly different. After the question

was initiated, Bonolata Debi's response about *bhadramahila* indicates the group (bhadramahila) into a homogenous universal category whose dressing style, mannerism, and bodily comportment can make her look like an appropriate *bhadramahila* within a respectable family. The distinctive choice of dress, a certain appearance, and gesticulation communicate bodies' locus in hierarchies of class, gender, and occupation. Embodied habitus is 'a statement of social entitlement' (Skeggs 2004, 22) that creates class inequalities in, on, and through bodies that itself becomes a source of conflict in interactions between people of different classes. Bonolata Debi goes to the extent of saying that *lok dekhlei chena jay* [can recognize by looking at a person] (Line 10), where she suggests that the mark of a particular taste and distinction is sculpted on the body. Though she also brings in a configuration of tradition related to a normative class structure indicating *prachin poitrik iye royeche* [traditional, paternal, that is there] (Line 10). Bonolata Debi, being one of the oldest members of the family constructs the identity of *bhadramahila* through traditional customary beliefs and patriarchal norms. She stages an open conflict with the modern generation by claiming that *the current generation is in no comparison with them at all. You talk about dressing style? mannerism? nothing will match.* (Line 10). Here Bonolata Debi not only draws a comparison but she excludes the modern generation women from the category completely by referring as *us* versus *them*.

The significant part of this excerpt is the distinction Bonolata Debi makes between respect and respectability. She says that *Sommanarthe taake bhadra bhabe bola hoy* [With due respect a person is addressed] (Line 12), which emphasizes that anyone can be called a *bhadralok* or a *bhadramahila*, but that is only with due respect, but there is no attribute added to make that person a *bhadralok/mahila*. She specifically labels it as *manush*, implying that any human being should be given respect but that does not make him/her a *bhadralok/mahila*, which suggests respectability.

(8) *This data was recorded in an East Kolkata household. I was interacting with both Mahua and Suparna on everyday life style since I went on a day when Suparna was preparing some breakfast items and supervising Brojo to cook some meal for lunch. I initiated discussion with Mahua on the issue of the meaning of bhadramahila and how she interpreted it.*

- 11.Anindita: jaara dhoro?loker baari kaaj kore? tader aachar-aacharon o toh?
 bhalo holeo toh? tahole? tara ki bhadramahila?
 (like people? Who work at other people's house? their behaviour
 also? if it is good even then? can they be bhadramahila?)
- 12.Mahua: [interrupts]haan? nishcoi.? tarao shei category tei porbe?
 (yes?definitely.? they will also fall into that same category?)
- 13.Anindita: Kintu?(.)
 (But?(.))
- 14.Mahua: [interrupts]Jodi taader sobhabh bhalo hoy? tader baebohar tah bhalo
 hoy?tahole?tarao bhadramahila.?
 (If they have good manners?their behaviour is good? then?they are
also bhadramahila.?) [emphatically said]
- 15.Anindita: haan. kintu? Normally kintu? aamra?(.)
 (Yes.But?normally but? we?(.))
- 16.Mahua: [interrupts]ekta kaajer-loker kaaj tah diye toh?tumi? ekta manush
 Ke? bichar korte paro nah.?
 (so? by the work of a domestic worker? You? cannot judge a person?)
- 17.Anindita: haan.
 (yes.)
- 18.Mahua: Kono kaaj choto noy.
 (all Work is equal[is not small].) [emphatic shatement]
- 19.Mahua: kaaj diye toh? tumi ?kauke bichar korte paro naa? naah?bhadralok
 baa? abhadralok?toh?gaye lekha thake nah?
 (so? by a person work you? cannot judge that person no? bhadralok
 Or abhadralok? is not written on anybody's body no?)
- 20.Anindita: kintu ekta class factor ki kaaj kore?(.)
 (but? don't you think a class factor?(.))
- 21.Mahua: But that myth has to be broken? Nah? karur gaaye lekha thake nah
 Bhadra? Ki abhadra? onek shikkhitoh mahila? Onek abhadra baebohar
Kore. [statement] jekhane. onek. Kajer barir mahilara onek beshi
 bhadra hoy.
 (But that myth has to be broken? No? It isn't written on one's body
 that he/she is bhadra?or abhadra? Many educated women? behave in
 such a abhadra manner. Whereas. Many. domestic workers are much
 more bhadra.)
- 22.Mahua:[interrupts] nah! maane? aami ucchho shikkhitoh?aa:ami? uucchho
ss:hikk::iitoh? thik ache?kintu?aami.? very rude.aar baebohar
bhishon rough.? How can I be a bhadramahila? [emphatic]
(No! means? I am highly educated? I? am hi::gh::ly e::duca::ted?
okay? but? I am very rude.and my behaviour is very rough.? How
can I be a bhadramahila?) [statement]
- 23.Anindita: haan
 (yes.)
- 24.Mahua: I cannot be.

In a similar way, in the above excerpt, I initiated the question on whether domestic workers could also be a *bhadramahila* or not. Interestingly, Mahua's approach to the question was very different as she was analyzing *bhadramahila* by its literal Bengali meaning. She in fact interrupted before my turn was complete to say that workers can definitely be included within the category if they are well behaved. In the next few utterances, Mahua further described the meaning of *kaaj* or work, and repeated quite a

few times as she stated with rising intonation that *by the work of a domestic worker? you? cannot judge a person?* (Line 16). I deliberately replied in minimal responses in my conversation with her to show less involvement, since I wanted Mahua's response without any collaboration. But certain interruptions in my utterances facilitated the conversation where Mahua assertively said that *all work is equal [is not small]*.

Mahua's lengthy conversations on work and the workers not only added value to the work, but also empowered the women who are in this occupation to feel that *work is equal for all*. In the subsequent turn, Mahua brings up the topic of working bodies based on the fact that a *bhadramahila* is not sculpted on the body. Rather we judge them through certain behavioral norms. The perspective of 'body as symbol' often focuses empirically on gendered appearance, and research has shown how workplaces value certain forms of gender performance (Freeman 2000; Salzinger 2003).

Iteration is a way of explaining something to one's self and the other participants about the topic discussed. Mahua was enacting a similar activity as she repeated similar viewpoints in different ways in several utterances. Mahua perceived the embodied manifestations of both a working body (domestic worker) as well as a domestic body (employers) and that either one could be a *bhadramahila*. She made a bold assertion that being a *bhadramahila* is not constructed by the work one does, but rather by the way one behaves in the society. When asked about the class factor, she replied with a rhetorical question that *the myth has to be broken? No?* (Line 21). She further elaborated that neither education nor economic structure can actually determine class, but it is only one's behaviour that conveys the meanings of *bhadra* and *abhadra* (polite and impolite). Mahua posed a challenge to the existing categorization by illustrating an example: *I am highly educated? I? am hi::gh::ly e::duca::ted? I am very rude.and my behaviour is very rough.? How can I be a bhadramahila?* (Line 22). In this context, Mahua is seen to reject the idea of education as conferring *bhadramahila* status. In her utterance, she had a rising intonation and the vowel lengthening suggested a claim as well a challenge to her interlocutors. Finally, Mahua ended with a rhetorical question that she answered herself *I cannot be*. (Line 24) in a low falling intonation. Mahua, as a middle-class employer not only made several bold comments but also suggested that *the old perception needs to be changed* (erased from the excerpt). For Bucholtz & Hall, the

tactics of intersubjectivity ‘not only call attention to the intersubjective basis of identity, but they also provide a sense of the diverse ways that relationality works through discourse’ (2005, 605).

(9) East Kolkata household, inside the kitchen where the Brahmin part time workers Minoti and Arati were making food for the deity, and we were discussing about maintaining the traditions. However, the topic got diverted to the effort that certain classes of people put in whereas others do not.

1.Anindita: Ekhon ki egulo uthe jacche aste aste? Tomra je eto? Bhalo paro?
(Are these practices slowly eroding? You are so good? at it?)

2.Arati: Ekhono sobaii parbe.
(Now also everyone can do.)

3.Minoti: [interrupts] Paar::be? Eikhon dokaan jheye koibe? Sobh naru dao
aamra lokkhi poojho korbo.? Koijhone? aar randhe?
(Yes they will do? Now they will go to the shops and ask? Give us
All the naru we will do lokkhi poojo.? How many? now cook?)

4.Arati: [collaborates]dinkaal jaeno aalshe hoye geche?
(day by day people are becoming more lazy?)

5.Anindita: Kaeno?
(why?)

6.Arati: oi? Porishrom?
(again? Hard work?)

7.Minoti: Porishhrom asche.? Aar shobai ke jhaante hoibe nah? shobaar ekta
Jhaanar oh toh? baepar asche? nah?
(Hard work is there.? and everyone must also know right? Everyone must
Know how to make? Isn't it?)

8.Anindita: Kintu jaane naa kaeno?
(But why they do not know?)

9.Minoti: Jhane nah? karon tader maayera tader eisobh shekhai ni? Shekhai
nah? taara ekhon lekha pori kore? aaro karon taader eidike jhokta
nei? Ei? sobh somoshto dike taara dhukey? naa? (says with contempt
as seen in her facial gesture)
(Don't know? Because their mothers do not teach them these things?
They don't teach? Now they all study? And moreover they don't
have any interest in this area? They do not enter into these
spaces?)

10.Anindita: Kaeno? ei? somosto dikta ki kharap?
(why? Are these spaces bad?)

11.Minoti: Kharap nah? ei je? tumi eita niye korscho? tah tumi ki eite korte
Parbe? Parbaa nah.
(Isn't it bad? Like you? are doing something on this? So will you b
be able to do it? No (you cannot) do.)

In the final excerpt of this section, the Brahmins were working together to make sweet dishes, part of holy offering required for the Durga Puja, a religious ritual among Bengalis. As I was observing them, I asked them whether such tradition and customary practices would survive or not. Arati was quite supportive while Minoti was against Arati's position. Minoti distinguishes between them and others on the

basis of capability in making the sweet dish, suggesting the skill-set of the people. Minoti, further commented on the commodification of religious products in the market as she continues to say that: *Now they will go to the shops and ask? Give us all the naru we will do lokkhi poojo.? How many? now cook?* (Line 3). Minoti indicated that middle-class women usually go to the markets to get the semi-cooked products rather than make them in their homes. She implicitly meant that in recent times every middle-class woman has a cook, or that they go to the newly formed malls to buy semi-cooked products. When I asked her why they do not want to work, Arati responded by saying that it is because of *hard work, nobody wants to do any hard work* (Line 6). Minoti interrupted immediately in the next utterance to say that hard work is not that important, rather it is the skill-set that is essential. In fact, she moved on to socialization and added that in recent times mothers do not socialize their daughters to learn to cook. She noted that the daughters are busy in education and do not even enter the kitchen. As Minoti says: *Because their mothers do not teach them these things? They don't teach? Now they all study? And moreover they don't have any interest in this area? They do not enter into these spaces?* (Line 9).

Minoti through her discourses had depicted an experience of an exclusionary practice, where she herself had made a distinction between workers and employers. As I could understand Minoti's implicit indications, I asked her *are the kitchen spaces bad?* In reply, Minoti questioned me in return: *aren't these spaces bad? Like you? are doing something on this? So will you be able to do it? No (you cannot) do.* (Line 11). Minoti's agentive role did not stop her from pointing out that domestic workers are meant for cooking and making things for the employers whereas the employers and their daughters would gain upward social mobility through education and getting good job opportunities.

In the above excerpts, the workers have a common viewpoint about *bhadramahila* as a class construct with a huge economic disparity. Workers like Arati, Minoti, Sulekha, Gita, and Mashhi have been deprived of the identity of being a *bhadramahila*. But in my interaction with them they were all very polite and well behaved. In this context, I see that the working women's engagement with the employer creates an image that is reflected through the embodied experiences and practices in their quotidian life. As Thapan (2009) noted, class is central in everyday interactions since the upper/middle

class women with access to education, linguistic skills, and the western media articulate the exclusionary habits very clearly. The middle-class employers of North Kolkata were very expressive about their views regarding who can be classified as a *bhadramahila* where education played a key role in signifying the status. On the other hand, the older generation of women, who probably lacked education, relied on customary practices, belief systems and embodied behaviour as signifiers of *bhadramahila* status. For Bourdieu, habitus “causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be . . . “sensible” and “reasonable” to members of the same society” (1977, 79). The notion of ‘being cultured or *bhadra*’ is a process of constructing an ideology and the interaction on the context of who is a *bhadramahila* and who is not contributes to the (re)construction of it.

Ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religion, ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling and law (Gal 1998:323).

The utterances of both workers and employers revealed their positionality regarding what they perceived about each other. There were also exceptions like Mahua who articulated that a *bhadramahila* is one who is polite and well-behaved, and it could also include a domestic worker. She challenged the social construct of a *bhadramahila* by stating that education and work cannot be the parameters to classify or demarcate people. Mahua’s utterances had reflected a more liberatory flow that stepped out of the constraining nature of habitus into an unfettered expression of her own self.

The workers still had a strong notion that poverty and lack of education has pushed them into an exclusive space of being a *kajer-lok* (domestic worker), whereas the *bhadralok/mahila* today is dominated by the values of possessing the cultural and symbolic capital. Respectability is primarily one of the crucial element that is associated with every *bhadramahila*, as she is protected, culturally refined and responsible for upholding the values of the household. These few excerpts discussed leads beyond the micro level analysis to a broader understanding of how ‘behaving polite’ is an ideology which describes and prescribes a way of acting and categorizing

like and unlike people (McElhinny 2007). It follows from an ideological to a social construct that creates an image of who is polite or *bhadra*, and reproduces hierarchy (Bourdieu 1977; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Goodwin. M 2006).

5.4 Work and Housing

The perception among the workers is the economic deprivation, which is a major rift that creates class hierarchy (Sen and Sengupta 2016). Though, something that is far more difficult to identify are the differences in cultural and social values that have a more nuanced quality which reproduces the class structure. However, the conversations in my study reveal ‘poverty’ in a manner different than how it is usually depicted by other scholars who have worked on paid domestic work (Ray and Qayum 2009; Romero 2002; Palriwala and Neetha 2009).

The term *kaaj* or work is universally deployed among both groups of women to describe the domestic work they perform. Yet, they describe and perceive work in ways that establishes different socio-cultural meanings to it. Several interactions with the workers revealed that despite the intimacy constructed within the domestic space, the workers are aware of their subject position and of the huge social distance between their lives and those of their employers. This huge chasm is prompted through the everyday language that characterizes education, class, and poverty. But according to the workers, every social space is identified with a specific group whose values, preferences, and aspirations are reflected in that space, and in which every woman feels empowered as a person through the means of work. This section discusses aspirations for upward social mobility as expressed in the work performed by the workers.

This section focuses on the anxieties of the working class as well as the middle class employers. This part discusses the manner in which the employers perceive the housing arrangements done by the workers in Delhi (C.R. Park). In this section my interaction was limited to the respondents in Delhi, since my participants in Kolkata accepted their low status and did not have as much aspiration as the workers in Delhi. In Kolkata, the aspirational model is structured in a different way than it is in Delhi. The reason is also due to the nature of the class structure and also because of the more

intimate labour relations that keeps the workers away from a strategic market calculations.

5.4.1 *Anxieties of a Middle Class*

The rhetoric of ‘*becoming like us*’ is an anxiety that is common in both middle-class households in Kolkata and Delhi. In my study, there are employers who worry that they are being threatened by a potential upward mobility of the workers and that this would lead to a ‘servant problem’ or a rise in their wage-structure as conceptualized by Ray and Qayum (2009). I introduce the section with an argument between an employer and a worker over a house, and their points of view regarding home ownership.

(10) The data was located in the first household, and the context was in the living room where Mashi, the cook was extremely tired. Mitali was talking on the phone with her brother regarding her health and other personal issues, and her brother-in law Sujoy was also busy doing something else. Whereas Mashi was sitting on the sofa and was waiting for someone to eat so that she could go for a nap, a discussion arose on Mashi’s house and Sujoy’s sarcastic comment on it.

5.Mashi: Koshto kore ki hobe?ja kopale ache taii toh hobe??
(what is the use of hard work?whatever is destined only that will happen??)

6.Anindita: loke toh bole? Je koshto korle? Keshto pay.?
(so people say? that you get? the fruits of hard labour.?)

7.Mashi: hmmmnn(.)tah? Ki keshto pelam?[shows a hand gesture]
(Hmmmnn(.) so? what fruits of labour did I get?)

8.Sujoy: nah?! Mashi? Teen tole baari banieche? [smiles]
(No?! Mashi has built a three storey house?)

9.Anindita: keno? Teen tola baari banieche bolche?(to mashi)
(Why?[he is saying] that you have built a three storey house?)

10.Mashi: tahole? Khatni korechi?ka:korechi?
(so what? I have worked very hard?hav: worked?)

11.Anindita: tahole?koshto kore keshto toh pele?
(so? now you have gained the fruits of your hard work?)

12.Mashi: Toh? keshto ki?aamar?aamar koshter dara toh eta hocche?
(so?what is the fruit?my? through my hard work I have done it?)

13.Anindita: Toh? keshto o toh peyecho?
(so? you have also got some fruits of your labour?)empahtic

14.Mashi: ha::aan?? (sarcastic)
(ye::ss??)

15.Sujoy: nah?! nah!teen tola baari? Baariteh? Puro tiles lagano?(laughs)
(No?!No! three storey house? the house?covered with tiles?) (laughs)

16.Anindita: tai naki?
(is it?)

- 17.Sujoy: haan?abaar ki? (laughs)
(yes? what else?)
- 18.Mashi: barir moton bari hole hoy? Oi rokom sobai korte pare.?
(If it is like a proper house then its okay? that kind[of a house] everyone can do.?)
- 19.Anindita: ki pare? Orokom?
(why? who can do? What kind of?)
- 20.Mashi: ei sobh ghor-tor er moton amader jayga nai?(shows the flooring of the employers' house)
(this kind of house is in no comparison to our space?)
- 21.Sujoy: (())jai hok? Aajker tarike? Oi baritar daam hocche ponero lakh taka.?
(()) whatever? In today's date the value of that house is fifteen lakhs.?)
- 22.Mashi: hmnnnn? (looks up & little annoyed)
(Hmnnnn?)
- 23.Mashi: aapni toh? shudu takar hishabh korlen? Aar amar sara jiboner daam?
(You have only seen the value of the house? and what about the price that I have paid throughout my entire life?)
- 24.mashi: aapnader moton amader jayga nei?ori moddhye?Hago?moto?khao?
(our space is not like yours? In that small space?[we have] shit?piss? and eat?)Empahtically remarked upon.
- 25.Sujoy: aare mashi? Chotcho keno? Tumi peye gecho?etai onek? Etar jonno Dekcho toh koto lok maramari korche?
(oh!mashi? why are you getting angry?You have gotone?That's enough? For this you can see how many people are fighting to get one?)

Mashi started by questioning the benefits of hard work, and argues that whatever is destined will happen. In the next turn sequence, I deliberately used a famous Bengali proverb *Koshto korle keshto pay* (getting the fruits of your labour) tactically by using a reported speech that *people say*. In Goffman's theory on frame analysis and footing, I remained in a position of an animator but not the principal (Goffman 1981). In the next sequence, *Mashi* demanded an answer as she questioned about the famous Bengali proverb. This correlation between questioning and the ideological expectations of specific socio-cultural meaning associated with the proverb coincides with what Bucholtz & Hall (2005) refer to as 'authentication' within their definition of intersubjectivity. While *Mashi* was upset about the questions being raised about her hard work, *Sujoy* in the next turn sarcastically commented on *Mashi's* house, which was a three storey building that indicated improved living standards. This appeared important for the working class women to be seen as a very high status marker, whereas for the employers it was a sign of class anxiety. In the next few turns, *Mashi* argues that she has built the house through her hard earned money. Her contestation led me to analyze the way the domestic workers generate an aspiration for their children to escape transgenerational servitude by securing their life not only through

education but also by building a house for them. But Sujoy's sarcasm irritated Mashi, since in line 15, Sujoy laughed and said with rising intonation that reflected cynicism: *three storey house? the house? covered with tiles?*. There was actually no need to give so much information about the house, but Sujoy wanted to echo the point repeatedly that in recent times *even* the domestic workers aspired for material improvements. The class anxiety was very transparent in his utterance as he told me casually one day that several working families have high consumption capacity and an aspiration to purchase items that have high symbolic value.

Mashi also demonstrated her authority and agentive role by claiming that there is still a hierarchical difference, while she made a comparison between Sujoy's house and her house. *Mashi* made an implicit comment by covertly sending a message to Sujoy that there is no reason to be so anxious about his middle-class identity, since: *this kind of house is in no comparison to our space?* (Line 20). *Mashi* clearly draws a boundary of distinction by addressing it as *this kind of house* versus *our space*. While distancing herself, she clearly stated the difference by using lexical choices like 'house' and 'space.' Sujoy follows his next turn by calculating the value of the house to let *Mashi* know that it is not just *a space* but has a value of *fifteen lakhs*. This annoyed *Mashi* as she raised her intonation to say: *our space is not like yours? In that small space?[we have]to shit? Piss? and eat?* (Line 24). The emphatic remark as well as her rising intonation along with the language she used, shocked Sujoy for a minute. Everybody in the household, knowing her class difference respected *Mashi*, and she too maintained an authority as well as some kind of distance with most members of the family. By doing so, *Mashi* draws on various linguistic features, including prosodically marked utterances, pronominal use, and overt mentions of her hardship in life, which index the cultural identity and at the same time exemplifies the performance of class identity.

Mashi's argument helped me to draw on Ahearn's theory on agency in which a person within a context has a role to play through what he/she enacts within that very context (2001). Expanding on Bourdieu, Wolkowitz (2006) elaborated the idea of *occupational habitus* related to people's work identities. Domestic work is one setting for the construction of occupational habitus. It is not just *Mashi*, but every domestic worker

that I have interacted with had either a passive or an active agency in the way they performed their everyday work.

5.5 Concluding remark

In this study I have examined how disparate identities between employers and workers are co-constructed by studying the casual conversation and unstructured interviews that I had with them. It was based on how the emergent discourses marked a class identity between women who acted as employers and some who were their domestic workers. In accounting for how 'living within boundaries' is seen among the two different groups, it has become clear that certain socio-cultural benefits such as better education, living style, dress, and bodily comportment are ideologically associated with a particular cultural group, in this case the division of class between the employer and the workers. However, as seen among workers like Bhoomi, Sushila and Lalita, they might not all be actively showing their agential role, understanding the hierarchical position, but the decisions they make are completely their own.

In accounting for the linguistic structures that are used to co-construct the negotiated class identities, I have employed Bucholtz & Hall's (2005) socio-cultural linguistic model, which views identity as emergent and as a product of social interaction. Because their paradigm explains for such identity construction at various methodical levels, this has allowed me to illustrate how identity works and, in particular, how class among both groups of women is co-constructed, negotiated, and performed where the positioning of self and other continuously shifts at the micro-level of conversation. This is especially true while analyzing who the *bhadramahilas* were? Each group of women had a different perspective, and Mahua particularly concluded with a policy-making solution that the *old perception needs to be changed*. Analyzing the indexical process of labeling, pronominal use, or prosodically marked utterances that they employ to position themselves and others in discourse, exemplifies the various systematic layers at which identities emerge. And while it is impossible to account for identity 'as one whole,' I have shown how both individuals working in a domestic relationship come to terms within the hierarchical structure of class identities by discursively co-constructing this notion and, simultaneously, performing

and challenging class structures by drawing on everyday conversations. It is indeed difficult for the domestic workers, but it is also difficult for the middle-class women to break their boundaries and alter the structural positioning.

Moving beyond the micro analytical level is a broader picture that depicts the class hierarchy in the way described by the domestic workers as to how class relations become embodied and personalized when acted out between individuals in the private sphere. Taking *Mashi* as an example, the information about her house and other details were sarcastically leaked to the researcher who is an outsider for *Mashi* as well as other members. If *Mashi* would have articulated the unheard stories of that household, would she be forgiven? Thus, distinctions between employers and workers are not simply symptoms of larger inequalities within the structure, but at times such distinctions are hurtful in everyday negotiations.

CHAPTER 6: CASTE HIERARCHY IN DOMESTIC SERVICES: KOLKATA AND DELHI

The chapter examines the relationship between caste and gender; it understands the way through which it invades the differing lives of women. The purpose is to study the role of labour relation between women from disparate caste, class and ethnic backgrounds. In the previous chapter I have shown how class hierarchies are reproduced through domestic work. By examining the interaction between caste and class, no congruence between caste and class can be assumed, such that the employer is always upper caste and the worker lower caste. Caste and class status do not always draw a parallel, hence the domestic workers can be of a higher caste than an employer, since caste is not necessarily a sign of a person's economic status, though the two might overlap. In order to fully understand the complexities of caste hierarchy in domestic relations it is extremely important to understand the perspectives of both employers and workers. This approach unveils an entirely different aspect of work relations in both caste and class hierarchies that unsettles the always presupposed popular narrative of lower-class and lower-caste workers employed by middle-class and upper-caste employers.

In general, caste gets never discussed openly either by the employers or the workers as a topic of interaction, but it is discursively produced through social practices and everyday spontaneous conversations. The exercise requires to situate women (both employer and worker) as conscious acting subjects of social relationships and “processes that constitute, reproduce and modify the social system characterized by the institution of caste” (Dube 2008, 466). Hence it is important to understand that why gender and caste is significant to examine. The aim of this chapter is: to identify the ways in which Brahmin workers play identity politics during religious settings in order to transform the domestic space into a dominant “ritual” space, and also practice untouchability during quotidian daily life, and to examine the ways in which both the Brahmin workers and employers negotiate their lives with the ‘other’ non-Brahmin workers and employers. The central question is how these women from diverse backgrounds negotiate their lives within a hierarchical system. While, I examine the objectives, it is equally significant to consider the ways in which women become

instruments to the structures and processes implicated in the reproduction of caste (Chakravarty 2006).

In section 6.1, I discuss the theoretical approach based on the three inter-related themes, then in section 6.1.2, I focus on the context of this study which provides information about the space and local setting. Section 6.1.3 discusses the thematic structure of the data in detail, followed by the analysis of the data divided into themes in different sections. Section 6.2 focuses on ‘embodying identity’, section 6.3 studies the contestation between caste and class, and section 6.4 examines the ‘performing caste relations’.

6.1 Scholarship on Caste

Scholarship on caste spans in interdisciplinary fields of anthropology, history and sociology, particularly Judith Rollins’ (1985) work on Black American domestic workers, Romero’s (1992) on the Chicana domestic workers in the United States, and Cock’s (2002) study of domestic service in South Africa during the Apartheid has put forth that that ‘race’ was one of the most significant category of analysis when looking at domestic service. The understanding of racial constructions in such existing literature has helped me to examine the caste relations that is deeply rooted in both private and public spaces in Indian society. Hence, I examine how caste is outlined in domestic work relations which are complex and intersect with other forms of social distinction, like religion. It is significant to build on the theory of agency and power (Bourdieu 1977; Ahearn 2001) to understand the negotiations between both the workers and employers from diverse backgrounds.

The discourse on caste occurs in two different ways related to paid domestic work in India: first, domestic workers’ and employers’ caste, as an identity, becomes important to understand the organization of work. For example, studies highlight caste identities as the focal point regarding the assignment of tasks delegated to the workers and discriminatory practices based on such tasks which are exercised by employers (Froystad 2003; Matilla 2011). This is particularly seen during religious contexts in my study. Second, studies also look at practices reflecting the structure of caste in everyday relations (Ray and Qayum 2009). The ways in which caste operates in such a subtle manner that at times it becomes difficult to structure such relations, as there is

very often no direct reference to caste at all. I find it very insightful in my ethnographic research where the conversations show that the practices of caste are often camouflaged by the lexicon of hygiene, cleanliness and privacy. The everyday practices of cleaning the house is itself a way through which women indicate notions of hygiene and cleanliness (Chakrabarty 1992). Scholarship has extensively discussed exclusionary practices by middle class employers in their household space in the name of privacy, hygiene, and pollution that did shed light on some of the ways in which boundaries of 'home' and 'outside' have been maintained according to patriarchal norms (Dickey 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009; Warren 2010).

The study is based on the responses from the conversations between two distant social classes: between the middle class employer and the domestic worker. Bourdieu (1989, 16) has drawn my attention to the social logic of spatial segregation and underscores the interactions of social and physical spaces as follows:

"It is true that one can observe almost everywhere a tendency toward spatial segregation, people who are close together in social space tending to find themselves, by choice or by necessity, close to one another in geographic space, nevertheless. People who are very distant from each other in social space can encounter one another and interact, if only briefly and intermittently, in physical space"

The home has remained a physical space in which very often people from the same 'social space' are welcomed. While domestic workers interact with employers in their intimate physical space, the interaction and the close presence is in conflict with their own subject positions in the social space. According to Dickey (2000) the lowly work of the domestic workers characterizes them to be 'dirty and dangerous'. It is in this context that the exclusionary practices takes place, where the starting point is from separating utensils to a complete denial in using the toilets also. Existing ethnographic studies have primarily examined how hierarchies of caste led to an overemphasis of employers' voices, highlighting the power employers have over workers in their household space, both in ritual and everyday quotidian contexts (Banerjee 2004; Bagchi 2005; Dickey 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009; Sundar Rajan 2005; Walsh 2004) But, it has overlooked the accounts of the Brahmin domestic workers who form a portion of working class identity taking labour relationship into a different dimension. This study turns its focus around to question the workers and the employers about religious practices discussing at length about the notions of purity and pollution, reflecting on their own identity positions that is based on caste relations. In the study

on caste position, the responses of both the workers and employers have been taken into consideration.

6.1.2 Situating the context

I chose different locations to address caste issue among Bengali families in both Kolkata and Delhi. Particularly, I looked at how everyday negotiations formulated caste as produced in two different contextual situations: one during the religious ritual spaces and the other during the quotidian everyday life. The two different contextual setting is crucial to understand that ritual itself serves to produce and reproduce women as gendered subjects. Ritual spaces have been explored especially to understand the diverse relation among the workers and employers. Rituals also act as an economic support for those who look at it as a potential market to benefit financially through means of contractual paid work based on their caste identity. The two contexts are pertinent particularly to study on caste since it often happens that the boundaries are questioned and transgressed in different contextual situations. Hence, at times, the households become sites of conflict and confrontation among the workers as some Brahmin workers cannot come to terms with the notion of servitude. However, such domestic spaces are also arenas of collaboration as the workers work together to perform household domestic chores. Hence, context is crucial to understand how workers themselves enact the practice of segregation, not only in ritual setting but also during everyday mundane routine tasks based on the caste positions.

In what follows, I examine three main themes. Section 6.2 is based on 'Embodying Identity: an analysis of caste and power relations' that unsettles the homogeneity among workers who belongs to diverse caste groups. In this section, I discuss the perspective of both the employers and the workers. Section 6.3 is based on the confrontation between class and caste issue which depicts the hierarchical ordering of society based on economic power. This section documents the conversations from the workers situated in two different contexts: religious as well as mundane everyday routine life. What emerges within the discourses is that even though paid domestic work is not regulated by the state, it is well structured through hierarchies and social dimensions of caste, class, gender, language, ethnicity, and religion, in the same way

as other informal sectors of work in India (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000). The intersection of these different dimensions create collaboration as well as confrontation is what the section explores. Section 6.4, shows that employers who practice the rhetoric of ‘othering’, familiar from other studies on domestic work (Cheng 2006), are less involved in my study, in fact the workers themselves practice untouchability among each other in the same social space. I discuss how from both the workers’ and employers’ perspective all hierarchies ultimately merge into the dichotomy of clean and dirty.

6.2 Embodying identity: Caste and Power relations

Religious rituals are religiously practiced in both Kolkata as well as Delhi, and women play a very crucial role in such rituals. However, rituals are fertile grounds of contestation in relation to one’s caste identity. Bernstein (1996) noted that power relations create, legitimize, and generate margins of exclusion and inclusion between different categories based on gender, class, race, and other discourses. The issue of exclusionary versus inclusionary practices have always been a prevalent thought by scholars working on the pollution/purity issue based on caste relations between the employer/worker conversational dyad (Dickey 2000). The aim in this section is to analyze how caste hierarchies are reworked in domestic and ritual spaces through interpersonal narratives and casual conversations among the workers. The second part explores the voices of the employers’ perspective on caste system, and why caste forms an important grid during religious rituals. I, also discuss with both Brahmin and non-Brahmin employers to understand how they perceive caste among their own class and social position.

6.2.1 First among Equals: Perspective of the workers

In this section workers’ narratives taken in the field-notes and the interviews reflect caste-based practices of purity/pollution. Such practices on specialization/segregation of tasks under the arrangement of either part-time or full time work in different contextual settings is examined. For the purpose of certain rituals there are many part-time workers who are being employed, and among them some are Brahmins whose main work is to prepare the holy food offered to the deity. These workers are not novices either as cooks or as new-comers since they have a long-term relationship

with the household members. The workers also maintain a working relationship with the full-time live-in workers in the household. However, the following excerpts show the way in which the part-time Brahmin workers establish their caste identity in a religious setting and the manner in which they negotiate their worker identity with the other full time live in non-Brahmin workers. The conversation was initiated in the form of a question by the researcher that triggered the entire interaction.

(1) This data was recorded from a first family in East Kolkata, and here the researcher tried to initiate conversation among the part-time as well as full-time live-in workers of diverse categories from different caste variable and similar economic structure. The context was Durga Pooja where the employer gave full responsibility to the Brahmin workers for cooking and preparing the holy food, whereas other workers were delegated other kinds of tasks.

1. Anindita: kara kara bhog kore?
(who all prepare the holy food?)
2. Sulekha: looks at Minoti
3. Minoti: aami, mashi aar oi didi kore?.
(Myself, mashi and that didi does?.)
4. Anindita: didi?maane? Munmun di ki kore naki?
(Didi?I mean? Is it Munmun di who does?)
5. Minoti: nah! nah! oi jhe teel bhajtache nah? o tumi?ranna ghore dhukla
jhe?[coughing](.)
(No!no! that[woman] who is frying sesame seeds no? eh you? entered the
kitchen now? [coughing](.))
6. Minoti: aare? Munmun toh? Berahhmoner maiyyai noy? Toh?
(hey? So Munmun? Is not even a Brahmin's daughter? so?)
7. Sulekha: [interrupts]aar mashimaa koren.?
(and mashimaa does.?)
8. Minoti: (smile)aar schube naa toh?[pointing towards Sulekha]
(and [others] won't touch so?)
9. Sulekha: [interrupts] aamra bahhmonn noi? Nah?
(we are not Brahmins? Isn't it?)
10. Minoti: [collaborates by nodding her head]
11. Minoti: aamra onno bhog schui.? haan?(.)
(we touch and make the holy food made of rice.?okay?(.))
12. Anindita: ooohhh(0.04)
13. Sulekha: mashimaa ra bahhmonn tai?.
(Mashimaa [and others] are Brahmins so?.)
14. Minoti: egulo sukhno bole? Ektu kuraye dey?(smile) aar noytoh kischu tei hath
laagaita parbe nah.?)
(these are dry things so?[they]shred it a little bit?(smile) and otherwise they
are not allowed to touch anything no?)

Domestic spaces have exemplified an important aspect of the role of religion and caste in the structure of contemporary urban life. My intention was to start a casual conversation about religious activities and its performance, however my initial

question on who can prepare the holy food (line 1) directed the axis towards an exclusionary versus inclusionary practice. Questions always have an agenda and a goal set which is presupposed, but it is also true that questions are dependent on the recipient design, that is, how the interlocutors will interpret the question (Goodwin 1984). In this instance, my intention was to get a factual information but the participants received as a whether or not question, where some are included and others being excluded. That is the reason why in the next utterance Sulekha, a part-time non Brahmin worker's gesture as she looked towards Minoti, the Brahmin part time worker reflected the power imbalance among the collective workers. In the next utterance, Minoti named the people who were given the authority to cook the holy food by saying that *Myself, mashi and that didi does?* (Line 3), excluding the others who were working along with her. In her utterance, Minoti addressed everyone in kinship terms which created ambiguity since they could not be directly identified. The employer Munmun, is also addressed by everyone as *Munmun di* or just *didi*, meaning elder sister.

At this juncture, I took the opportunity to tease out how the power relation worked with the non-Brahmin employer Munmun versus the Brahmin workers, when Munmun was visibly not present in the context. I deliberately asked Minoti a tag question *Is it Munmun di who does?* (Line 4). Tag questions can be coercive, in relation to the context (Heritage 2007), and can challenge the authority claims of the interlocutor. In the subsequent turn, Minoti made it clear by stating with an emphatic negative *No! No!* (Line 5), and her rising intonation suggested that it is the other Brahmin woman who is allowed to cook, and she has been doing so inside the kitchen. She replied my question to communicate a fact that *Munmun? is not even a Brahmin's daughter?* (Line 6), that further prompted a rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions are not intended to elicit response but rather to gather the persons' opinion or stance (Freed 2010). The turn sequences displayed Minoti's execution in making decisions regarding the eligibility criterion for who can or cannot cook the holy food, and the careful prosodically marked utterances that include emphasized phrases with rising intonation indexed the employers' incapability to cook during the religious ritual performed in her own house is due to her low-caste status. Hence, caste plays a vital role in Hindu religious rituals, which acts as a powerful tool for Brahmin workers like Minoti who can make use of their agential role during this period of

time. In this study, I see that in households the non-Brahmin employer Munmun too adheres strictly to purity rules, since she notably delegates the Brahmin domestic workers to prepare the holy food for the deity. Minoti's caste identity gave her the power to solicit a positive response from the non-Brahmin co-worker who collaborated with Minoti. The above excerpt clearly portrayed that Sulekha was aware of her caste position, which is evident in lines 9 and 13, yet she expressed solidarity as they all are domestic workers.

In the subsequent expressions, Minoti moved on to discuss about pollution and purity, which is extensively looked at by scholars. She quite explicitly expressed that *they are not allowed to touch anything* (Line 14), as she deliberately distinguished *they* versus *us* by creating an exclusionary space for Brahmin workers, and also carefully used lexical terms like *touch* that supports the concept of purity/pollution practiced among workers. Initially the caste-based anxieties might have originated from the employer's notions of purity/pollution, and are enhanced by their privilege of class (Dube 2008), but the above excerpt demonstrates that the Brahmin domestic workers also willingly participate in maintaining and reinforcing these practices.

(2)

1. Anindita: aapnar oi golay? oita? ki? royeche?
(around your neck? that thing around? what? is that?)

2. Gita: hmmm...??

3. Shibcaran: poite? Poite?
(sacred thread? sacred thread.?) [smiles as he says]

4. Gita: (interrupts) Bahhmonn.
(Brahmin.)

5. Anindita: etar mane aapni? Brahmon?
(This [thing] means that you? [are] Brahmin?)

6. Minoti: [interrupts] oi nichtolay jhaaba? Sobh Berahhmonn peye jhaba.?
(If you go down there? [you will] find all Brahmins.?)

7. Shibcaran: bolte jacchilaam? (smiling intonation)
(was just going to say?)

8. Another worker: opore ranna hocche? Sobh ranna korche?
(upstairs food is being made? Everybody is cooking there?)

9. Anindita: tarao ki sobh? (.)
(are they too? (.)

10. Minoti: [interrupts] nah! Nah!
(No! No!)

11. Worker: okhane sobai ache.
(at the place everyone is there) [Minoti and this worker share glances]

The above excerpt is a conversation that takes place between the priest, Brahmin worker and non-Brahmin workers. It is crucial to understand the way how they negotiate with each coming from different sections of the community. My initial question regarding a material object that signified the caste identity generated conversation among all participants. Questions are multifunctional and can be interpreted in different ways by the recipients (Holmes 2013). My question was responded to by another question from Gita, a non-Brahmin worker, as if she was unaware of what the object was or what the question was about. This ambiguous response from Gita prompted the priest to reply with a smiling gesture by repeating the word *sacred thread* (Line 3), followed by Gita's sarcastic interruption by categorizing *them* as Brahmins. By making such categories, Gita too creates a differential space for workers based on different caste identity.

In the following sentence, when I tried to clarify and relate the material object with the caste identity, Minoti interrupted by saying that *If you go down there? [you will] find all Brahmins.?* (Line 6), which was collaborated by the priest Shibcaran. Both the priest and the Brahmin domestic worker shared an embodied gesture of being a Brahmin. At this point of time the caste based hierarchy mattered more than the work or the task that each person were assigned to. In the subsequent turns, the other workers openly resisted as they claimed that diverse group of workers have been employed for the several tasks needed during the ritual, hence Brahmins are not the only ones who have been recruited for the ritual. The 'other' worker remarked that *everyone is there* (Line 11), which included all castes and all kinds of work that is needed for the ritual. However, Minoti's glance indicated that the holy food offered to the deity is particularly important, and that is cooked by the Brahmins. Gaze, facial expressions, gesture, and spatial distancing as well as the way in which participants and the respective material objects are arranged in specific sites are important semiotic codes in conversation and influence how we organize and make sense of our activities (Ten Have 2007). Minoti had the sole authority to take certain crucial decisions since the power was delegated by the employer herself.

(3) The kitchen was turned into a ritual space with only the Brahmins to be allowed inside, and if they needed any help they would ask. A full time-live in worker came in to hand over some utensils that they needed. I was recording without entering the kitchen space, to observe the amount of hard work that they had to put in to prepare the holy food. Munmun was mostly seen near the Pandal to supervise other public affairs but was never visible near the kitchen.

In this segment, I encouraged Minoti's hard work with a question, as she was grumbling and dissatisfied with the sweet she was preparing.

1. Anindita: ki?madam minoti Chatterjee?
(what? Madam minoti Chatterjee?)
2. Minoti: haan?
(yes?)
3. Minoti: eijhe hoscche nah?
(this one's not happening.?)
4. Anindita: hocche nah?
(It is not happening?)
5. Minoti: oi jhe norom narkel nah?
(That coconut was soft no?)
6. Arati: paak dite hobe aar ektu?
([we] have to twist it a little more?)
7. Minoti: aar ektu tight dite hoibe?
(have to tighten it more?)
8. Gita: laughs in the behind as 'tight' is a pun used.
9. Anindita: tumi Munmun di'r theke jene nao? (to Minoti)
(You ask from Munmun di?)
10. Minoti: haan??
(yes??)
11. Anindita: Munmun di'r theke jene nao?
(ask from Munmun di?)
12. Minoti: Ki? Jhanum?
(what? Will I know?)
13. Anindita: Ki kore korte hoy?
(how to do[this]?)
14. Minoti: Munmun di? Eshe? Jhigaiben jhe ki korlen? (emulates the way Munmun speaks)
(Munmun di? [will]come? And ask that how you have done?)
15. Minoti: hah! Munmun di ke jhigaibo?
(hah! Will ask munmun di?)
16. Arati: hahahaha (while cooking)
17. Gita: Oh! Tomra nah? (says something that is inaudible)
(oh! You are no?)

I was curious about the way they were making the sweet dish as a holy offering, but Minoti who is generally seen to be quite assertive displayed her dissatisfaction regarding the quality of coconut which might fail her as an expert cook. As she kept on grumbling about the quality of the coconut, Minoti also played with her words. Conversations rest on the idea of 'acts' that is the Austin's speech act theory which discusses about what we do with words. Interaction, conversation or any kind of talk can act as a social force, a movement acting us to do something, or pronouncing to do something. In the following turn, Minoti used a double intended meaning as she said *aar ektu tight dite hoibe* (have to tighten it up a bit more) (Line 7), suggesting an ambivalence in the phrase which could be meant in two different ways. In this case,

she used the word *tight* as of physical activity to use her skill in order to give shape to the sweet, but the phrase also reflects on displaying the usage of power. This ambivalent usage of her phrase is understood by the other workers since they collaborate in laughter. It is important to understand that conversational field is a field of power relations. It also depends on the authority of the person who will obviously get an access to the floor (Coates 2003).

Knowing that Minoti was a powerful speaker, I took the opportunity to ask her the skill of making that particular sweet item from the employer, Munmun who was not present in the context. Instead of replying to my question, Minoti asked me another question, which demonstrated an interactional asymmetry by violating the adjacency pair, and by taking the differential speaking rights. This turn taking system has been termed by Drew and Atkinson (1979) as turn type pre-allocation where the participants determine the turn that they would prefer to take. In the following turns, Minoti makes an implicit evaluative judgement on Munmun's skill set, especially in cooking. As both Minoti and Arati makes fun about it, while Munmun was absent from the scene, Gita the full time live-in worker attempts to stop their conversation. The last section of the extract reminded about gossip which is defined as an informal communication about real or fictional people who are currently not present during the ongoing discussions (Besnier 1989; Eder and Enke 1991). In the above excerpt, the gossip on Munmun di's cooking skills was enacted through prosodically voiced achievements that was also collaborated by the participants (Besnier 1989).

The above excerpts are significant to understand that Minoti is definitely a powerful player in the conversational floor, as she was the prominent narrator or teller of the events happening. Minoti's identity entitled her the assertion of power, but the other non-Brahmin workers also displayed their agency in certain passive ways, and some quite active. Brahmin identity permitted Minoti and others to invert the hierarchical authority, and resist the space of servitude, by slowly building what I have termed it as a *dominant ritual space* through dialogic conversation. The everyday domestic space was transformed into a ritual space where the non-Brahmins were barred from entering. The excerpts highlight the importance of producing the inequalities among other workers. However, it is also noticeable that Minoti equates her non-Brahmin employer Munmun with the other non-Brahmin workers which undermines the class

hierarchy. Minoti, along with other Brahmin workers hold a belief that *a Brahmin woman who cooks holy food is not a servant anymore*. This resistance to servitude is collaborated with by the societal mechanics of caste which places Brahmin workers at a higher pedestal than other non-Brahmin workers and employers.

The workers in the excerpts above, refuse to equate such task like preparing holy food during religious ritual with the other tasks performed by workers on a daily basis. Workers' practices reveal that while caste plays a crucial role in structuring the relations, it is not the only identity at work. It is only during the spatial-temporal setting of religious contexts that these characters create an imaginary space for themselves. Minoti gets a collaborative support from her co-workers who are aware of their subject positions, and also agree with the superior caste system. Cameron (2003) argues that as we enter 'communities of practices', we constantly *produce* our identities by *performing* what are taken to be appropriate acts in the communities where we belong- or else challenge prevailing norms by refusing to *perform* (emphasis mine). This forms a crucial analysis between the workers who perform the domestic chores together in solidarity, yet are refused to perform the similar task when it is a religious performance. But, this patriarchal convention is legitimized by the societal mores and are organized by the employers of the households even today.

6.2.2 First among Equals: Perspectives of the Employers

In this section, the shift turns around the employers who are much more open about discussing the issues related to caste, though there is a popular rhetoric that '*we don't follow caste anymore*', and is particularly observed in Kolkata. I study how the employers discuss about caste in their ongoing conversations and a very significant part of the analysis is the negotiation of employers who are also diverse: Brahmins and non-Brahmins. The common expression of 'practising casteism' is rooted in our everyday life. It embodies the ideology of caste not only as a discursive matter but as a practice among both workers and employers. The excerpts reflect the issue of caste being discussed by the employers as if it is a traditional belief system; one of the manifestations of the prejudgment of caste in domestic work relations is the discrimination at the time of recruitment.

(4) *This data was recorded in North Kolkata gentry family, among the older generation of women. I tried to initiate a question based on the fact that since they were much older in age so they would have much more knowledge about the religious ritual. But as ‘casteism’ was not directly questioned, hence it was difficult to make discussion on caste directly, though slowly it emerged in their own conversations.*

1. Bonolata: Prothom kothai hocche? Ekhane mahilai bolun? aar purushii bolun? Tader nijeder korar kicchu nei.?ja korben.?purohith moshai korben.aami Thakur chobou naa?. thakurer kono kaaj o korbo naah?
(the first thing is that? Here if you say female? Or male members? They have nothing to do on their own.?Everything will be done by the priest. I will not even touch the deity?.I will not even do any work for the Goddess.?)
2. Anindita: oh! Maane?.mahilara o maane?. ekhane thakurer(.)
(oh! I mean?. The women too I mean? Here[don't engage]in God's(.))
3. Bonolata: konodini noy. Kono keu chhobei naa?Brahmon chara ekhaane thakur keu chhobei naa?.
(Never it was allowed.Nobody will even touch? Without a Brahmin nobody will even touch the deity here?.)
4. Anindita: maane?Brahmon chaara ranna korte parbe nah?
(means?without a Brahmin no one can cook?)
5. Bonolata: ranna? Paka bhog?kicchu korte parbe nah?
(cooking? Paka bhog[that is the holy food]?cannot do anything?)
6. Anindita: aacha? Eita aapnader Kemon laage?
(okay? So how do you feel about these things?)
7. Bonolata: [interrupts] phol? Mishti(.)
(fruit?sweets(.))
8. Anindita: maane? Ekhonkaar juge toh? caste niye eto kichu bola hocche je?
(I mean? In this era so?[people] are discussing so much about caste that?)
9. Bonolata: kintu? caste niye holeo? Shetar baepare kono iye nei(.) kono krishthan?kono Musolmaan? Kono?(.) egulo hobe nah?
(But?even it is about caste? About that[Pooja]there is no(.)any Christian?any Muslim? Any?(.) all these will not happen?)
10. Anindita: kintu? shegulo toh?caste noy? Sheta toh? religion?
(But?all those? Are not caste? That is? Religion?)

I initiated the conversation with Bonolata Debi by asking her regarding any change in traditional practices related to religious ideologies, but as we know that questions are multi-dimensional and can be received in different ways (Clayman 2001), similarly Bonolata Debi also perceived it differently. She thought that I was questioning about the way the ritual is conducted in the household, hence she told me that *there has been no change in the way the deity is taken care of*. However, the following turns reflected the way she intermingled gender and caste together. Turns are sequentially ordered, and it is shown how Bonolata debi expresses the perspective that only Brahmin priests can touch the deity of their own household, whereas women and men of the family have no function at all. The prosodically marked utterances, and the lexical choice she makes distances herself from the deity that she believes in. In the following turn, my question was negated by an embodied gesture. By saying that

Without a Brahmin nobody will even touch the deity here? (Line 7) prioritizes the Brahmin priest than her own family member. Caste concerns did not appear as relevant for female domestic workers since the employers would still regard them as inferior and stigmatized whether they were Brahmins or of lower-castes. The hierarchy between caste and gender is articulated by Bonolata Debi when she negotiates the purity rules, since only Brahmin priests are allowed to *touch* the deity.

My repeated questions on why a woman cannot work in the ritual space, or whether it is only a Brahmin who is allowed is answered by Bonolata Debi in a calm falling note that only Brahmin male priests are permitted to do all the task. In line 8, I raise the issue of caste system and its awareness among people in the form of a question. However, Bonolata Debi strategically says that: *But? Even it is about caste? About that[ritual]there is nothing like(pause)any Christian? Any Muslim? Any?(pause) all these will not happen?* (Line 13). She carefully plays with words to use tradition and customary practices as a means to avoid the direct question asked on caste, and that is why she pauses more number of times in this utterance than she usually did before. In fact, most interestingly she conflates caste and religion together in one set, but through such practices she is also indirectly equating her stance with the ‘others’ whom she refers with disgust and contempt. As Chakravarti notes that “women are regarded as upholding the traditions by conforming to them; men on the other hand uphold traditions by enforcing them-not upon themselves but upon women” (2006: 144). Hence, Bonolata Debi’s compliance to the notion of customary practice is nothing but a way of sustaining family values and culture.

(5)I asked members of Bonolata Debi’s family about the restriction on how one can serve one’s own household deity. I specifically asked the question to a male member of the younger generation by addressing him as ‘adhunik chele’ meaning modern.

1. Bonolata: nah! amraa Thakur ke Thakur bolel maani?
(**No! we consider God as God only?**)

2. Anindita: Brahmon rai poojo korbe? othocho aar keu korbe nah?
(**Brahmins will only do the Pooja? Whereas others will not do it?**)

3. Male member: prothomoto(.) aami jeta bolbo? Sheta hocche je(.) who is a Brahmin?
(**First of all(.) what I am going to say? Is that(.) who is a Brahmin?**)

4. Anindita: tomar ki mone hoy je? Who is a Brahmin?
(**what do you think? that? Who is a Brahmin?**)

5. male member: **It’s a question on my part to you?**

6. Anindita: nah? tomar ki mone hoy?
(**no? what do you think?**)

7. Male: nah? aami tomay?(.)

(No? I am asking you?(.))

8.Anindita: oh! Amar? Who? is a?. Brahmin?.
(oh! Myself? Who? is a?. Brahmin?.)

9.Male: yes(.)who is a Brahmin? Jaake ei brahmon bah(.)
(Yes(.)who is a Brahmin? Whom this Brahmin or(.))

10.Anindita: [Interrupts]It has been decided by the society much long(.) ago?

11. Male: nah!?! Gita te boleche je? Chatush varna maya srishtha(.) toh? okhane shri Krishnoi

Boleche je? Chatur varna je caste system ta sheta divided into brahmon(.) kshtriya(.)Vaishya(.) aar shudra(.)? charte je bhaag? Sheta kintu bhogobaner i shrishto(.) maane? Jonme obhdhi sheta well defined.

(No! In Gita it is said that? Four varna system is my creation(.)so? There shri Krishna Himself had said that? Four varna the caste system has been divided into Brahmin(.)Kshtriya(.)Vaishya(.) and shudra(.)?so the four divisions? That is only created by God(.)I mean? from birth that is well defined.)

In the above excerpt, Bonolata Debi attempts to divert the conversation from the issue related to caste into her own religious belief system by stating that: *We consider God as God only* (Line 1). By emphasizing on the word *only* she tries to index the purity rules that needs to be followed in order to maintain the family values and morals. By averting the question on caste, Bonolata Debi implicitly dampens the position of the researcher in front of the other family members, especially the male member. In the next subsequent turns, I ask informative question on Brahmins, and the question gets re-interpreted as a challenge to the authority claims being made. In fact Bonolata Debi's gendered opinion on caste gives the male member to make use of his positional hierarchy. More than the nature of caste being raised, it is the gendered manifestation that is to be questioned. As a female researcher, my question on who is a Brahmin is further questioned or rather challenged by the male member in the subsequent utterances. Interestingly, he inserts a lot of English words in his own utterances, whereas my conversation initially started in Bengali. Though, he uses English, but makes sure to analyze the definition of Brahmin by using the Holy Book Gita as an example. He also uses Lord Krishna as the author and he being the animator according to Goffman's frame analysis (1983). For him, caste is well defined and created by God as he says that: *from birth it is well defined* (Line 11).

In the next excerpt that follows it is indeed interesting to observe how caste relations are reproduced and generated among employers, as they criticize the customary practices of other non-Brahmin employers and their households.

(6) This data was recorded in the second household in South Kolkata during the time of Kojagori Lokkhi Pooja/ritual. Here, I saw Anupriya, the employer who was a Brahmin and Sushila who was a non-Brahmin domestic worker were cutting vegetables together sitting on the floor. In the segment of the data recorded, I asked Anupriya about the norms of the particular ritual, with caste issues in mind.

1. Anupriya: Lokkhi poojo.maane? kojagori Lokkhi poojo.?
(Lokkhi Pooja.I mean? Kojagori Lokkhi Pooja.?)
2. Anindita: aaccha?. Tah? Ekhane ki? Brahmon Thakuri ranna kore?
(okay?. So? Here? Only Brahmin Thakur cooks?)
3. Anupriya: bhog korche Brahmon.?aar(.)aar(.)sobji kete dicche aar jogar dicche?(.)
(bhog[holy food]is being prepared by Brahmin.? And(.)and(.)arranging and cutting Vegetables?(.)
4. Anindita: Toh? khichudir bodole onek jaygay maane? Luch-tuchi o toh hoy?
(so? Instead of khichudi[hotchpot]in many places? I mean? Like luchi-tuchi[poori] also happens?)
5. Anupriya: haan.?Luchi o hoy?aar khichudi o hoy.durokom.amaader onno-bhog dite hoy? jehetu
amraa Brahmon(.)luchhi bhog jara kayastha baa Brahmon chara? Tara dite pare(.)
onno bhog tara dite pare naa.
(yes.?Luchi also happens? and khichudi[hotchpot] also happens. two types.We have to serve onno bhog[made of rice]?since we are Brahmin(.)luchi bhog is served by
kayasthas or non brahmins?they can give(.)They cannot serve onno bhog.)
6. Anupriya: Brahmon chara onno bhog dite pare naa.?hmmm?tarpor payesh?caler payesh kori
amraa?Amraa jekono onno kono payesh kori naa(.)onno bhog di?(.)Lokkhi Thakur ke.aar sobiiToh shunle? Tachara? Luchi o hoy.?narkoler naru o hoy? Oi sobh rokomi hoy(.)
(Without a Brahmin onno bhog cannot be served.?hmmm? then payesh? We make payesh outOf rice? We do not make any kind of payesh(.)we give onno bhog[of rice]?(.) to
Goddess lokkhi. And you have heard everything so? We also make Luchi.?also naru
madeOf coconut?almost everything is made(.))
7. Anupriya: bhogta brahmon ke diyai korate hoy(.)brahmon ghorei ei onno bhog ta hoy(.)onno bhog.
(The bhog has to be prepared by a Brahmin only(.)among Brahmin families only this onno bhog happens(.)onno bhog.)

The initial conversation started about the ritual and the employer was quite specific in answering that the Brahmins only cook. Though the arrangement of the ritual is collaboratively done by both the employer who is Brahmin as well as her non-Brahmin part-time workers. The arrangement includes cutting vegetables, fruits and other necessary items. In a casual conversation, Anupriya, mentions that she does not have confidence on the Brahmin cook, whom she refers as *bahmon thakur* which is quite distinctively different from the Brahmin priests in terms of hierarchical positioning among Brahmins.

Everyday life (which also includes ritual activities) acts as a process of learning the social, cultural and interactional settings in which language and other kinds of

knowledge are learned, both formally and informally to become competent members of a particular social community (Ochs and Scheffelin 1984; Duff 2008). This explains the way in which Anupriya evaluates the non-Brahmin practices of the other households in front of Sushila, a non-Brahmin domestic worker, but irrespective of gender, class and ethnicity, Anupriya equates all non-Brahmins in a similar way. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet states (1992:3)

“To think practically and look locally is to abandon several assumptions common in gender and language studies: that gender works independently of other aspects of social identity and relations, that it "means" the same across communities, and that the linguistic manifestations of that meaning are also the same across communities.”

Anupriya, overtly excludes the category of the ‘*other*’ Bengali non-Brahmin households through differential customary practices. Noteworthy in this analysis is the manner in which she creates a distancing of *us* versus *them*, within the same Bengali community not due to class structure but different caste identity. The Brahmin status, and her class position allows her to clearly state that it is essential to serve *onno bhog* or a *preparation based on rice*, but the non-Brahmin families cannot serve *onno bhog*. In lines 5, 6, and 7 Anupriya emphatically stresses on the fact that only Brahmin household can serve the *onno bhog*. She categorically stated that *luchi bhogis served by kayasthas or non-Brahmins? since They cannot serve onno bhog* (Line 5). Anupriya explicitly draws a boundary between who can serve what to the Goddess, and she repeats the caste hierarchy consecutively phrasing it differently in her last three sentences. She crafts a way to exclude Bengali non-Brahmin families through her lexical choices, and prosodically definite rising intonation. Anupriya enacts the entire conversation in front of Sushila, a non-Brahmin worker with whom she collaborates the arrangement of the ritual. Hence, the most interesting part reveals that whether one is a worker, or an employer, the caste identity only dictates the norms during the religious practices. Her articulation on other employers based on caste identity have illustrated a new insight in the scholarly work produced so far based on a linear narrative between employer and worker (Cock 2001; Banerjee 2004; Baviskar & Ray 2011; Ray & Qayum 2009).

The above excerpts taken from three employers depicts the patriarchal caste hegemony in their articulation in different ways. All employers that I have interacted

with were very open about discussing caste issues, though in my study too I met with several employers who were in the view of opposing old practices with comments such as: “*I don’t like to practice caste*”, but in emerging discourses and in certain contextual situations it is evident that they themselves created an exclusionary space among themselves. Anupriya’s attitude highlight the caste identities and discriminatory practices by employers based on socio-religious practices among other non-Brahmin families, that has been much overlooked by scholars (Dickey 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009; Mattila 2011). In comparing both Bonolata Debi and Anupriya’s expressions on caste, I found Tenhunen’s study (1986) in an urban neighbourhood in Kolkata, to be quite insightful, since he found that while people did not give much emphasis to caste differences, but on the other side class differences appeared to be caste-like. Those who considered themselves as of higher class maintained a distance from the lower class in the same way as upper castes traditionally maintained a distance from the lower castes. I agree with Sara Dickey’s argument (2000) that it is not always caste, but rather class that characterizes such distinctions. In these instances too, the domestic workers remained to be workers and for them caste was not a significant factor, since they were anyway excluded, but the employers like Bonolata Debi who celebrated the caste system was not excluded from the space of the ritual because of her class position. Hence, caste is an important issue that needs to be studied in more detail.

6.3 Contestation over Class/Caste

The hierarchies between employers and workers are associated within such embedded networks that characterize social differentiation in society (Tolen 2000). However, it is also true, that such diverse relations are temporarily unified through shared engagement in daily mundane practices. The outlines of caste are complex and intersect with other forms of social differences, like religion, as discussed in the above excerpts. These intersecting identities often create puzzling and stratified differences during different contextual settings: mundane daily routine versus the religious rituals. This section reveals the social structures which looks at lower class order which is just one part of domestic workers’ subjective position in general, in relation to their middle class employers. The first two excerpts discuss about the manner in which the paid worker reacts in front of a researcher who is an outsider to the worker. The two

excerpts look at both religious as well as everyday quotidian spaces in order to compare different setting and location situated in Kolkata and Delhi. In both cases the workers from a different caste identity avert the questions of their work or occupational status. I have deliberately collated the two excerpts together in my analysis to get a comparative viewpoint since the contextual settings are different: the first one is based on the ritual setting and the second one on the everyday quotidian lifestyle.

In the first case, the location was in Kolkata and the the context was a religious ritual, where the Brahmin workers turned the kitchen parlour into a ritual space. I was also not allowed to step inside so had to zoom the camera lens from the threshold. The holy food was being cooked, and Arati, a part time Brahmin worker, was working incessantly to finish the items. As I was recording, Arati was preparing and frying food items in separate utensils kept specifically for the use of holy food later to be served to the deity.

(7)

- 1.Anindita: Kisher jonno korcho eta?
(What for are you doing all these things?)
- 2.Arati: Maa er jonno.?Durga poojo r bhoge(.)
(For mother.?for Durga poojo's holy food(.))
- 3.Anindita: Tumi ki? ekhane? Kaaj koro? naki? Bhajhar jonno
Escecho?
(Do you? work? here? or? is it? that you have come to fry
things?)
- 4.Arati: Bhajhar jonnoi?.(.02)aami kichu kori naa? ei?maa'r bhog(.)
(For frying only?.(.02)I don't do anything? this maa's bhog(.))
- 5.Otherworker: Tumi ranna korte esecho toh? Kaaj korte? Sheta bolbe nah?
(You have come to cook here so? To work? Won't you say
that?)
- 6:Arati: haan.bhoger ranna (looks down)
Yes.cooking for holy food.
- 7.Anindita: accha:aa.
(oka:aay) .

The following excerpt is based on quotidian everyday life in a household at Delhi (Chittaranjan Park) where I was with the employer as well as Malabika Bose, the senior most member in the family. As soon as Munni (full time worker) entered the scene, I explained her about my research, and the employer also explained about the research. Munni and Bhoomi, the workers migrated from Uttar Pradesh. Bhoomi is

Munni's daughter in law. They both perform the task of cleaning utensils, mopping, washing, dusting and other running errands.

(8)

1. Munni: Samajh gaye(.)samajh gaye.?
(**[I]understood(.)understood.?**)
2. Anindita: haan? samajh gaye nah? toh? yehi main kuch din ke liye dekhungi.
(**yes? Understood no? so? now I will observe it for few days.**)
3. Munni: haan.? mere pure pariwar se(.) meri aisi soch nahin hain.?
(**yes.? With my entire family(.)I don't have such thinking.?**)
4. Mitali: nahi nahi? Tu bol? Tu humare ghar mein kaam karti hain nah?
(**No. No? You say? You work at our house no?**)
5. Munni: [interrupts] by a hand gesture suggesting **No? no?**
6. Mitali: humare? Ghar mein kaam karti hain nah?
(**You? work at our place no?**)
7. Munni: haan. haan.? samaajh aa gaya?
(**yes. yes.? I have understood?**)
8. Munni: par main dhobi hoon.? Press karti hoon.
(**But I am a washer-woman.? I press clothes**)
9. Anindita: aaccha.
(**okay.**)
10. Anindita: aur kuch? Kaam nahin kartein?
(**[do you] work some other? things?**)
11. Munni: nahi?.aur toh? ghar ka kaam hain didi? Khana banana? Yehi sabh.?
(**no?. otherwise? I have work at home? Like making food?like these.?**)

In the first excerpt, I initially asked information seeking questions to know facts, but Arati's responses were minimal. Though she judiciously managed to repeat *bhoger ranna* or *Holy food* three times (lines 2, 4, and 6) in order to avoid questions on being a paid worker or not. Asking question always puts oneself in an asymmetrical position, since it demands a response (Eades 2008). There has been a lot of study on questions and answers in communication as well as language/gender literature (Freed 2010; Sidnell 2007; Holmes 2013). In this study, I show that just like questions can be a very powerful operational tool, even answers or rather avoiding the answers and disruption of the question is an agential role taken by the recipient in both the excerpts.

In the first contextual situation which was a religious setting other than the usual quotidian domestic days, Arati avoids the question that I had asked her (Line 3). Alternative sequencing pair can take place depending on the preference/choice of the participant, since the next turn was produced systematically in a different manner, maintaining the 'preference organization' (Schegloff, Sacks and Jefferson 1973).

Arati took a pause to think, and gave her response in a low falling intonation to again repeat that she was *cooking for holy food* (Line 4). Arati, managed to avoid the question by using the religious context and also by maintaining her calm and poise. Usually, the dis-preferred actions are delayed and there are possible markers used as a social action which suggests the response of the participant. But, the above context got even more complicated with the presence of the third party who was another paid but lower caste worker who confronted Arati regarding her work. However, Arati still did not say that she came to work in lieu of wage, rather she insisted that it was for cooking holy food. Hence the caste/class hierarchical paradigm played a role in creating stratification in the way the workers negotiated with each other, based on the organization of their work.

The second excerpt reinforces that it is also important to investigate every aspect of what we 'do' with conversation. The concept of interactional sequence is premised on the recognition that each 'current' conversational action embodies a 'here and now' definition of the situation to which subsequent talk is oriented. However the given context as well as the situated knowledge as described by Goodwin (2000) plays an important role in every interaction. In the given context, the employer had to ask Munni (line 4) whether she works at her house or not? Even though, Mitali knows that Munni works, yet she was forced to ask due to Munni's earlier turn sequence where Munni diverts the issue on work and says *I don't have such thinking?* (Line 3) which puts Mitali in an awkward position. Even then in line 5, Munni communicated through her hand gesture suggesting in the negative, and avoiding the entire issue. It is not our goal to know that why Munni avoided the issue of work, but it is to see how she sidelined the topic. Mitali again repeated the question in a different format which was in fact more direct: *You? work at our place no?* (Line 6), but Munni in her next turn sequence denied her identity by averting the question through prosodic utterance and affective feeling that displayed a smiling gesture as she said: *yes.yes.? I have understood?*(Line 7).

I draw on Erving Goffman's interactionist approach on face theory, where he discussed the strategies based on avoidance principles. Goffman observed that face had to do with the positive social value that we all like to maintain in social interactions, hence we do not want to lose our positive face in social contexts. Asking

questions to Arati did put me in a higher class hierarchy, and a privileged position since I was a researcher who had more in common with the employer, but answering the question was completely Arati's choice. This observation is in line with the study's larger findings that these power relations in the current context are not as straightforward as they may seem and that the forces that may reproduce this hierarchy are incomplete. Particularly observed in a class and caste intersection, and that is why Arati was repeating the religious context to depart from the situation of being called just a part-time domestic worker. The single encounter formed a dyad between three people who all wanted to have a positive social face, especially between the workers who belonged to a similar class but different caste.

In the second excerpt, the turn sequence in line 8 is noteworthy to mention about emergent discourses on identity since a coordinating conjunction 'But' was formulated in a manner that acknowledged Munni's stance as she said that: *But I am a washer-woman.? I press clothes* (Line 8). This utterance was also a way to avoid the original question as Munni did not want to present an image in front of an outsider as a paid worker. According to Mitali's description, Munni is a dhobi or a washer woman by caste and paid domestic work is not preferable among their community, but she does it for financial needs. In the above excerpt, Munni avoided the issue on paid domestic work to project a positive face in front of an outsider (researcher) but she used the identity markers of a washer-woman as a tactical way to divert the topic. Arati, too wanted to maintain a positive social face while she was just getting introduced to me. In the beginning of an introduction she did not want to be addressed as another paid domestic worker, since that would disrupt her social image which might result in a loss of the internal emotional support (Goffman 1959).

In following excerpt, I discuss the spatial mobility of the Brahmin cooks who were within the kitchen to complete the holy offering. The kitchen space was transformed into a ritual space, hence the other full time live-in workers on purpose did not enter the kitchen space because of their caste identity, and rather they went out of the house. This in effect caused problems for the Brahmin cooks who were almost constricted within their created ritual space.

(9) This data was recorded in (East Kolkata) and the context was located within the kitchen which the part-time Brahmin workers have transformed into a ritual space, hence no one was allowed inside. But

this restriction had also created problem for them since they were paid workers and they would be accountable. This is where caste and class plays an intersectional role.

1.Arati: Balti tay aami konodin kichu korte chai ni?
(I never wanted to work in this tumbler?)

2.Minoti: jhanen? Mashi tokhon koilo ki? shomaan shomaan asche?
(Do you know?)At that time Mashi[they] said? That everything is there equally divided?)

3.Arati: ei tuku hatha diye nara jay? Eto? boro? kodaite? aar? kichu hole toh dosh porbe amader?
(Can anyone cook with such a tiny ladle? And? that too in such big pan? And? if anything goes wrong then the fault will be ours? Right?)

4. Minoti: she toh botei? Dosh lagaite toh aamra ekkeibaare ready hoiya aschi? tai nah? kintu kar dosh tah maa i jhanen?.hmmm.
(That is true? To put blame on us? We are there always ready for them? Isn't it? But it is whose fault only maa knows?.hmmm.)

I take domestic workers' accounts of issues concerning their caste identity on one hand and the class position on the other. A significant question that rises at this juncture is how does this employment arrangement based on caste identity relate to broader ideas about differently classed workers during religious rituals? I followed an approach to understand the workers' accounts as they discussed, complained and grumbled about the lack of arrangement and utensils to finish the holy food. While they were complaining about the lack of utensils, they were also aware of their class position as a paid worker, and the onus of completing the task was entirely upon them. The last two utterances made by Arati and Minoti gave a different perspective based on the schema of working as paid workers. Though the intonation was high, but the lexical choice that Arati made about '*fault will be ours*', and Minoti still in an authoritative voice stated that '*to put blame on us we are always ready*', made two very important points: firstly, they still distance themselves with others as they consciously made a choice to use the pronoun '*our*' and '*us*' while detaching from the '*others*'; secondly, they are also mindful about their class position as a paid worker and so they carefully used words like '*fault*' and '*blame*'.

The above excerpts establish the fact that the paid domestic workers belong to a marginalized community, irrespective of their caste identity. Domestic work draws on and propagates social constructions of poor people's work which is low, unskilled and insignificant (Cock 2001). Hence, even though we see Minoti inverting her power dynamics through caste identity during religious ritual, she is still left behind constricted spatially in the space that she has created for herself. Class operates at a

much higher level, where workers like Minoti, Arati and Munni are paid to work. The responses from the excerpts clearly indicate that sometimes workers do not only know what they should or should not do, but also, in their schema of task-segregation, it is already decided that who should do what. Ideas of pollution as “avoidance” (Froystad 2003) apply not only to employers, but workers also “avoid” certain activities as well as certain places within the household. Based on identities, some workers have preferences to work in certain parts of a house, like both Arati and Minoti preferred to cook in the kitchen, yet they got “trapped” in the similar space and had limited access within employers’ home. The identity-based access (or lack of it) within the home has consequences for workers’ everyday experience of workplace.

In everyday quotidian routine too, class matters. This is why Munni kept on averting the questions of being a worker, and also tried to skip the similar question from her employer which we both understood. Though, Munni was not a Brahmin like Minoti, but even in her caste working as a domestic worker was not very desirable (according to her employer Mitali). Thus, moving beyond the micro analysis to a broader picture, it is critical to understand the class structure and relations that are intrinsically linked to the analysis of domestic labour relations in India (Dickey 2000; Romero 2002; Skeggs 1997).

6.4 Performing caste relations: Analysis in both Religious and Quotidian Contexts

In this study, I viewed the way in which the workers perceive the caste system in the society, in the way each particular work assignments are organized, and that each task determines the caste of the worker. Caste is not as important an issue if the family employs a worker for jobs pertaining to cleaning and washing dishes, but it is significantly important when they are employing a cook. Ethnographic observations show that it is not just employers who classify workers based on caste positions but at times it is also the workers who often exercise exclusionary practices towards employers and other workers present within the same domestic space. This section is based on those social practices in both religious as well as everyday routine life-style, and I see this through the emerging discourses on the popular rhetoric of eating habits, purity rules and what kind of work one does. Hence these are broadly divided into

subsections based firstly on Eating habits; secondly on purity rules and next on working relations.

6.4.1 Eating Habits

Home is a fertile ground in creating a social culture with respect to food and eating (DeVault 1994) because usually daily routine in a household organization is to make food (Dickey 2000). Valentine urges scholars to examine “how patterns of eating are negotiated and contested within households” (1999: 491). In this section, I focus on how eating habits portray caste relations within religious as well as quotidian daily life among the workers of different caste identity, much overlooked by the recent scholarship.

The following two excerpts discuss eating habits of a Brahmin Priest in a religious setting and a Brahmin domestic worker in an everyday routine work. The first excerpt becomes interesting because of an intersecting pool of participants: from Brahmin workers to non-Brahmin workers and employers who participate in the discussion as the priest talks at length about his eating habits with pride; in the second excerpt the domestic worker interacts regarding her personal food habits and other places where she works for. Both the excerpts have a central theme based on caste identity that is related to eating habits and food preferences, and interestingly both of them either the priest or the domestic worker fall under the rubric of paid workers. Priests are accorded a higher rank but undoubtedly they are paid servicemen, as they rely on the financial help and support from the non-Brahmin/Brahmin employers.

(10) This data was recorded in East Kolkata. In this segment, the participants discussed their eating habits on the basis of caste, religion and Hindu Tradition.

1.Priest: aaj porjonto aami mukhe diya dekhi nai(.)
(Till now I have not yet tasted.)

2.Arati: [interrupts] aamio mach. Mangsho khai nah? peyaz. Rosun khai.
(I too do not eat fish. Do not eat meat? onion. Garlic[I] eat.)

3.Anindita: aaccha aapni keno khan nah? kintu? Mahadeb toh khan?
(okay so why don't you eat? But? Mahadeb eats?)

4.Mesho: tobe? Tobe? Mahadeb holen kothay?
(so?so? how will you become like Mahadeb?)

5.Priest: aami? Mahadeb ke khawai?. Maa keo khawai?. Kintu nije khai naa. etai Brahmoner dhormo.
(I? offer food to Mahadeb?. Also offer food to the mother?.but I do not eat myself.
This is a Brahmin's morale.)

- 6.Anima: tobe Mahadeb toh aar holen nah?
(so you could not be Mahadeb no?)
- 7.Priest: e toh maha Jbālā?
(this is now a big problem?)
- 8.Priest: aami boli ni toh Mahadeber moton hobo?
(I did not say that I will be like Mahadeb?)
- 9.Mesho: Shudu Mahadeber moton jbala? Tai na?
(Only the stomach[belly] is like mahadeb? Isn't it?)

The discussion in the above excerpt on eating habits was initiated by the priest himself since he acted as a story-teller and then finally moved on to talk about his personal eating habits. The next turn was a deliberate interruption by Arati, another Brahmin part-time domestic worker who collaborated with the priest, even before his turn ended, in order to personalize the interaction by saying that she too does not eat fish or meat. Turns are said to be sequentially ordered, which means that turns are linked to each other into definite sequences. Hence, Arati's collaborative stance to display her Brahmin identity through eating habits, and also presenting an embodied disgust toward people who eat fish and meat was obvious. The next subsequent turns are interesting. Finally, I intervened to ask a question in religious terms that Lord Shiva [Mahadev] eats meat and fish both, then as a Brahmin priest too it is his duty to eat the same items that is being offered to God. Collaborating with my question *Mesho*, who is a Brahmin himself (and Minoti's husband) questions the identity claim of the priest. In temporal order, talk is produced in time, in a series of 'turn constructional units'-it acts as an instrument of action (Clayman 2001; Drew and Heritage 1992). In the next sequence, the priest carefully defends his positionality by wisely formulating a phrase structure where he could prove the morale of a Brahmin. But, Anima interrupts and takes an agential stance by framing her utterance in a form of question that was marked by a prosodically marked sarcasm which was a deliberate attempt for the other interlocutors present. Anima's question demanded an answer and so the priest tried to dodge it by saying that "*this is now a big problem*" (Line 6). The word *jbala* in Bengali language has dual meaning, in one way it can be meant to be irritated and the other which is more colloquially used for fun would mean having a huge belly. Taking advantage of the dual meaning, *Mesho* intentionally used the same word *jbala* with a different meaning, and asked a tag-question to get a collaborative support from the recipients. The collaborative laughter was the answer to the priest's discussion on eating habits. As Gumperz (1974: 788) said:

“Activity or relationship in turns carries culturally determined connotations. Therefore, the meaning of any one word derives from several sources. A word has a literal definition which relates to the perceptual cue or behavioral fact it encodes. Furthermore, the word has additional symbolic associations determined by the cultural activities and beliefs with which it is associated and by the lexical structure of which it forms a part.”

(11)

1. Munmun: [interrupts] nah! nah! protha jeta chole asche nah? aager diner brahmon ora?(.)pandit ra?(.)hmmm(.)pandit bolbo nah?(.01)
(no!no! the tradition that is being passed along no?in the earlier days the Brahminsthey?(.)I mean pandits?(.) hmmm(.)I won't call them pandits?(.01))
2. Priest: [interrupts] bhagobaan Shree krishno(.)
(God Shree Krishna(.))
3. Munmun: [interrupts] aare.? Biru da? Brahmon rai toh niyom gore? Abaar niyom bhangе.?
 JaemonKhushi. Eije dekhun naa? amaader bangali Brahmon ra ki mach? Mangsho khay nah? SobhToh dibbi khacche?(.)
(Hey.?Biru da? Brahmins only make rules? And break rules.? According to[their]wishes.Have a look no? at our Bengali brahmins who are eating fish? Meat isn't it? Everything they are simply eating?(.))

Munmun, the employer who is a non-Brahmin initially termed the Brahmins as *Pandits* and immediately in the next sentence she does a self-initiated-repair, where she says that: “*I won't callthem pandits*(Line 1). Turns also reveal the relationship between the participants themselves who actively take part in the analysis of the ongoing production to display their own participation (Hutchby and Woofitt 2008). Munmun took a long pause, which gave the priest an opportunity to interrupt. Though it may seem that interruptions are extremely disorderly but in Jefferson's work it has been shown that both the onset and termination of interrupted utterances are extremely ordered. Understanding the turn sequence, as soon as the priest made an attempt to interrupt by recalling Shri Krishna's name in a reported speech (line 12), Munmun again interrupted in line 13, by stating that Brahmins are ‘norm makers and norm breakers’. Munmun projected its completion even before the priest could complete his utterance. Hence, from the above excerpt we can derive that how emerging discourses between Brahmin, non-Brahmin, employers, workers and priest can create a space of collaboration and competition among each other to seize the conversational floor. The private discussions about food and eating habits and discussed in the public space. Hence, the diverse participants converge private and public as much as there is an overlap between caste, gender and class equation through such interactions.

The next excerpt is between myself as an ethnographer, and a Brahmin domestic worker at a household in Delhi (Chittaranjan Park), where she discusses at length about her eating habits. She talks more in detail about her own preferences focusing further on her agential role as a subject position.

(12) This data was recorded as a form of discussion with Mashi (Sabitri) who has been cooking in the house for 15 years now. She is a Brahmin lady but recently had adapted into Vaishnabh sect, which has its religious differences with Brahminical ideologies.

1. Anindita: onno barite? onno barite dey naa? (.)
(at other houses? Other houses they don't give? (.))
2. Mashi: **[interrupts]** onno barite amii khayii nah?
(at other houses I do not eat?)
3. Mashi: daekho? mash gele pore maiine dicche tai kaaj korchhi.? mojburi te korte hoy.? kintu?
Khawa te toh kono jor khate nah? nah? amar jekhane iccha aami khabo?
(See? every month they are paying me so I am working.? no options I have to do.? but? regarding food no one can force me no? no? I will eat wherever I want to?)
4. Anindita: aar? aar onno? onno barite ki koro?
(and? and other? other houses what [do you] do?)
5. Mashi: onno barite ranna kore diye chole ashi? **[plain tone with much expression or pauses]**
Okhane? Maane? (.01)
(In other houses I cook and come back? There? I mean? (.01))
6. Anindita: **[interrupts]** maane? okaane? keu (.) khao nah?
(I mean? there? you all (.) don't eat?)
7. Mashi: onnoder kotha bolte parbo nah? karon oder jaa debe ora tai kheyeb nebe?
Kintu?
Aami Khai nah! nah! nah! [emphasis] niramish keu kichu khay nah? oi sobh mach (.) mangsho (.) Khay? aar eki koraito sobh kichu hoy? kono baad-bichar nei? tah? ei barite toh dui koraito hoy? aar sobh kichu amaar moner moton porishkaar kore kori.? tai ekhaanei Khai.
(I cannot say about others? Because whatever you give them they will eat? but? I don't eat no! no! no! Nobody eats vegetarian food no? everyone eats those fish (.) meat (.)? and they cook everything in the same utensil? no sense of appropriate beliefs? so? in this house the items are cooked in separate utensils? And I do everything neatly on my own way.? so I eat here.)
8. Anindita: aar? onno barite? to make khete boleo ki?
(and? [at] other houses? do they even ask you to eat?)
9. Mashi: haan bole? bole? kono-kono jaygay (.) haan bole? tah? aami boli? Je tomader tah teh
aami Khaite pari nah! piyaz (.) rosun (.) khao nah? tah? Ek koraito sobh kichu? Tai
jonnoaar khai nah.
(yes they say?. They say? At some places (.) yes they say? But? I say? that I will not be able to eat yours'!. onion (.) garlic (.) [you] all eat no? everything in the same utensil? That is why I don't eat.)

I initiated the conversation with an information seeking question whether *Mashi* receives food at other or *onno* households or not, since she prefers to eat at the household where I was conducting my research. *Mashi* emphatically stated in her next turn that she does not eat at any other places. She tactfully mentioned in the

subsequent turns that due to her poor economic condition she was forced to migrate, and had no choice but to become a domestic worker. *Mashi* often times had termed it as '*mojburi*' or compulsion. Even though she is a domestic worker, yet her statements revealed not just her own caste identity but it also displayed the manner in which she assertively showed her agency by stating that she can be poor but no one can take advantage of her poverty and force her to eat. In this utterance, *Mashi* suggests an intersection between class and caste and so she implicates that food habits are one's own preference. However, *Mashi* refuses to eat at other or *onno* houses as she said in plain, expressionless utterance that she works as a cook in return for a monthly wage and so she completes her duty and returns to Mitali's house. :*In other houses I cook and come back?* (Line 5), but she also added: *I mean*, which had enough contextualization cues within the speech event to suggest that *Mashi* resisted to eat at any 'other' employer's house, and preferred to eat only at Mitali's place due to her personal food habits which she described at length in the following turns. In particular, Line 7, is interesting for the analysis because *Mashi* distances herself from others as she very explicitly draws a boundary between her eating habits and the 'others.' The othering is produced by *Mashi*, not only with the workers but also with the other employers for whom she works. She disregarded them as having *no sense of appropriate beliefs?* (Line 7), while using the lexical word *porishkar* or neatness. The rising intonation indicates sarcasm and cynical attitude depending on the context and the extra linguistic factors (Ten-Have 2007). *Mashi* not only projects her agential role to decide where would she eat, but also observes a food habit that reproduces an exclusionary practice with the others who do not follow a similar habit.

6.4.2 Purity rules and Work relations

This section of the chapter focuses on the notion in which the context of purity/pollution is created through rhetoric of 'dirt' or *nongra* (in Bengali) and *ganda* (in Hindi) in both religious and everyday practices. In my ethnographic experience, I have observed the purity rules being followed in all religious contexts in almost all Bengali households, as we have seen how *Minoti* and *Arati* as Brahmin domestic workers created an exclusionary space for them; the way *Sonali* non-Brahmin domestic worker, was excluded from attending the religious festival was also camouflaged under purity rules. The issue about purity norms with the idea of 'dirt'

being constructed within a discourse of caste can be identified in the ways in which it shapes the identities of the social actors present within domestic spaces (Froystad 2003). However, in this section I would like to explore the ways in which the domestic workers from diverse backgrounds experience and are also responsible in practicing untouchability among themselves through the discourse of ‘dirt’, ‘hygiene’ etcetera.

(13) The data was recorded at C.R.Park in the first household where the employer was Mitali. Though the discussion started between mashi and Bhoomi but Mitali had to enter the scene. The discussion turned into a contestation as Bhoomi was asked to make coffee since Mashi was busy, and Mashi would not let her enter the kitchen.

1.Mitali: ki holo ki? mashi?eto chitkaar kisher?
(what has happened?Mashi? Why is there so much noise?)

2.mashi: mashi?dekhen naa?aami bolchi je ranna hoye gele.?ekhaane dukhte?kintu amaar kothar
Kono daam dey naa? pot kore dhuke porlo?
(mashi?see no?I was telling that once I finish my cooking.?then[you]enter? But[she] didn't pay any heed to what I had said?quickly she entered?)

3.Bhoomi: bhabi ne hi to kaha coffii banana ke liye.?(.)
(Bhabi[mitali] had only asked me to make coffee.?(.))

4.Mashi: ekdom mitthya bolbe nah?bha::bi ne kaha?keno mashi nai? Bha::bi?uni batthoom porishkaarKorben? tarpor shei hathe ranna ghore dhukben.? sheta hobe naa kintu?
mashi?
(Don't say lies completely?bh::bi told me?why mashi is not there?bha::bi?[musical Intonation]She will clean the bathroom? Then with that hand she will enter the kitchen.But that is not going to happen? mashi?)

5.Mashi: keno?mashi amay bolte parole naa?aaaj aami ponero bocchor kaaj korchi?tumi jaeno je
Nongra kaaj kora amar apochondo.?haan?aami ei barir kajer lok? Kintu bhoomi HothathKore oi nongra kaajta keno korche? Naa mashi tumii bolo je batthoom poriskaar koreKeu rannaghore ashe?
(why? Mashi couldn't you tell me?till today I am working for fifteen years?you know that I dislike dirty work.?yes? I am only a domestic worker? But why Bhoomi has suddenly taken up that dirty work? No mashi you only tell me that after cleaning thebathroom do anyone enters the kitchen?[mashi asks the question to me])

6.Mitali: //shono mashi? Aami bhoomi ke bathroom porishkar korar kaaj dii ni? O nije thekei
niyeche.?or kichu extra taakar dorkar?tai o oi kaajta korche? Noyto toh?amii kori?
tahole toh?tumi amakeo dhukte debe naa?
(// listen mashi?I have not given the bathroom cleaning job to Bhoomi?she has taken it on herself.?she needs some extra money?so she is doing this work?otherwise then?Ionly do? Then?you will not even let me enter?) [emphasis]

7.mashi: aami she kotha boli ni?aami ei barir kajer lok.?kintu? batthoom e jaowa ek jinish?
aar porishkar kora aar ek jinish.?mashi? aami tomay dekchi?tumi konodin e kaaj korbe nah? Tumi Gopaler poojo koro toh?
(I did not say that? I am just a domestic worker in this house.?but? going to the bathroom is one thing?and cleaning is another.?Mashi?I have seen you?you will never dothis work?you workshipGopal so?)

8.Mitali: mashi?ekhane poojo-toojo baepar noy? Poojo sobai kore.poojo bhoomi o kore.
 Kintu o
 aajke khoob koshto peyeche?(.)
 (mashi? Here Pooja and all is not a big factor? Everyone does Pooja.Bhoomi
 also
 doespooja. But today she was very hurt?())

In the initial turn, Mitali (employer) questions *Mashi* directly for creating so much noise and contestation inside the private space. *Mashi* replied in an authoritative stance that she had asked Bhoomi,¹ to leave the kitchen until the food gets prepared. *Mashi* uses rising intonation to establish her authority, and complained that Bhoomi did not listen to her, implicitly suggesting that Bhoomi had no right to enter without *Mashi*'s permission. As Bhoomi attempted to say that it was Mitali who had asked her to make coffee, in a soft rising intonation taking a pause, gave *Mashi* an opportunity to interrupt to make an evaluative comment by terming her as a liar.

Mashi was overtly explicit in communicating and also conveying it to the employer that she would not allow Bhoomi inside the kitchen after she cleans the bathroom. In the next utterance, *Mashi* generates an emotional attachment through the choice of her words by saying that she has been working for a long period of time in the household, which implied an attachment with the domestic space where she belonged. She also carefully defends her position by putting the blame on Bhoomi as well as Mitali by questioning the employer and playing a defensive role by assuring her that she dislikes *nongra* or 'dirty work'. *Mashi*'s admittance to her practices positions her stance as a pure Brahmin worker. However, *Mashi* is also judicious enough to self-repair her demanding question by immediately acknowledging that she is only a paid domestic worker in the house and hence has no say. She, then directs the question to me, whom otherwise she thinks to be an outsider. *Mashi*'s skillful enactment in line 5 clearly depicts the manner in which she would manipulate exclusionary practice through the rhetoric of being *nongra* or 'dirty'. The next few turns gain attention with Mitali's overlapping sequence in line 6. Mitali's overlap was during a progressional onset, when there she found some disfluency in the utterance, and she intervened in between to move forward the conversation. Mitali's anger towards *Mashi*'s attitude was very explicit by the manner in which she overlapped in between and also her

¹ A migrant worker from Uttar-Pradesh, her language is Hindi so everyone accommodates to speak in Hindi with her.

emphatic utterances made *Mashi* reciprocate her stance as a domestic worker in line 7 with a careful usage of religious connotation added in the sentence. Though, Mitali showed her empathy towards Bhoomi, but *Mashi* was adamant and her answer re-established the concept of ‘dirt’ or *nongra* in Bengali and *ganda* in Hindi. This usage has reference to an ideology of caste directly or indirectly. The usage is intended to indicate both ‘unhygienic’ and ritually impure states of certain objects as well as behaviours which *Mashi* strategically used in terms of religious context within everyday performance. The insertion of religion in everyday task was noteworthy in the analysis.

(14)

1. *mashi*: dikkha naa nile? amaar haathe keu jol khabe nah?
(If I don't take dikkha? [then] nobody will drink water from me?)
2. *Anindita*: ki?
(what?)
3. *Mashi*: dikkha? naa nile keu? Jol khabe nah?
(dikksha? [if I] don't take? Then no one will drink water?)
4. *Anindita*: tomar haathe jol(.)jol khabe nah?
(won't drink water from you(.)won't drink water?)
5. *mashi*: nah. (falling intonation)
(no.)
6. *Anindita*: ke? boleche eta?
(who? [has] said all these?)
7. *Mashi*: maane? ke:: (h) [aspirated] je bole (h)? eta toh aar bolte pari nah.? [laughs]
(I mean? who:: (h) [aspirated] says? This I cannot say anything about.?) [laughs]
8. *Mashi*: amaader niyom(.)? amaader baishnabh ra jol khay nah? dikkha-sikkha nile? tobe? jol
Khabe. dikkhitoh na hoile khabei nah!?
(our norms(.)? our vaishnabhs will not drink water? if you take dikksha-sikksha? then? [they will] drink. If you have not taken dikksha then will never have!?)

I had initiated the question that why *Mashi* suddenly took *diksha* (initiation) into a Vaishabh sect when she was already a Brahmin, but it seemed that she had no answer for that question or she did not know why she did it. However, *Mashi* stated quite firmly that if she had not taken the *diksha* or initiation then nobody would even drink water from *Mashi*. As I repeated the question, *Mashi* in her next sequence emphatically replied that: *Then no one will drink water?* (Line 3). Interesting to note is the fact that when I questioned her in line 6 that who told her all these details, she was again unable to answer. In fact she was not sure that who had actually said these things since she used an epistemic uncertainty marker *I mean* in the beginning of her

turn sequence. In the same sequence, she also used aspirated voice with a sarcastic tone by saying that: *who::(h)says? This I cannot say anything about?*(Line 7) and then laughs it over to either avert the topic or to question the societal norm that remains unanswered. But in her final statement she clears her point by stating that norms have been produced in such a way that unless you take *dikhsha* (initiation) and *sikhsha* (education) both only then people will drink water otherwise not.

The varied expressions of the usage of the term *nongra*, *ganda* which meant dirt, and *ucchishtoh* meaning contaminated/pollution reflected the caste ideologies. While caste-based anxieties might originate from the employer's notions of purity/pollution, and are enhanced by their privilege of class, but my interactions show that domestic workers also willingly participate in maintaining and reinforcing these practices. The workers describe both other workers and certain employers as not having proper belief system or are not neat (*Porishkar*) but with different lexicons and explanations for labelling them. In the above excerpts, it was evident how Bhoomi, a migrant worker from Uttar Pradesh working in a Bengali household in Delhi performed the work of sweeper since she needed some extra money, but this led into stratification and an exclusionary practice by the Brahmin cook who would not let her enter the kitchen space. Hence, she was forced to quit the job. According to her employer, she was a *dhoban* or *Dhopi* (washer-woman) by caste, and it was not proper to work as a sweeper according to her own caste norms, however due to some extra money she had initially agreed upon. Gradually, she realized that all work were not equal, and washing the rooms and a bathroom was a specific different task that generated an embodied inequality within the space she worked. Bhoomi was treated disrespectfully by other domestic workers so she had to quit the task, and made aware of her caste identity.

Scholars have extensively worked on the private/public divide on the basis of how the employers treat their servants who basically come from outside or *bahir*, hence justifying the workers as unhygienic and dirty. As Chakrabarty (1992) points out that the symbolic practices, of segregating 'dirt' from the clean, on the basis of 'hygiene' are key to the social construction of space. However, *Mashi* inverts the concept of segregation on the basis of outside and inside, rather she decides which place is clean, and where to eat. She does not only bring up a caste identity but also depicts a

religious layer to it by saying that she is pious (*dikkhito*) and so she excludes ‘other’ employers from that status. This particular experience highlighted how workers can be in subordinate positions in the space of the home not only in relation to employers but also in relation to other workers.

6.5 Conclusion

The voices of both the workers and employers reveal the way they both exercise exclusionary practices within the domestic space that gets translated and legitimized in the social space. Upper or relatively privileged castes have mostly practiced exclusionary politics to maintain their status and power in relation to other relatively less powerful groups. However, specific contexts in my data show that workers who belong to a similar economic structure invert their hierarchical position when they get a chance to identify their superior caste position. Similarly, domestic work also expose us to the specific reconfigurations of the social status and power. Actually, the unstructured interviews and interactions give us more insight into the contextual forms of power and vulnerabilities which exist as a continuum in the societal structure rather than as two polar opposites. In these contextual power relations—which are deeply embedded in the contextual relations—the employers and workers become actors who occupy different locations in the spectrum of power and vulnerabilities.

According to Pei Chia-Lan (2003), it is through the very mundane practices in domestic lives that such margins of distinctive habits are drawn and re-drawn to maintain hierarchies in work relations. However, practices of untouchability, in the form of separate utensils for domestic workers, was observed during my ethnographic research which described the workers’ sense of humiliation that they feel with such an arrangement, especially in the households in Kolkata. But such an arrangement is less discussed about in the households in Delhi among the Bengali families. However, the Brahmin cooks maintain separate utensils for them to maintain a distance among other workers who are of a lower caste, and the employers agree to their practices. Workers are very differently positioned (in relation to each other and employers) in these relations due to the differences of caste and religion, and thus respond to the exclusionary/inclusionary practices in employers’ home space in varied ways, accounting their experiences which are very different from each other.

Raghuram (2001) noted that caste will be subject to changes due to current processes such as urbanization, particularly in paid domestic work. However, in my ethnographic fieldwork I did not find any such re-negotiation of caste hierarchy, even with the result of migration and urbanization moving at its fastest peak. My study looked at two different settings and locations. I identify that caste is embedded within the society and is very difficult to re-structure or negotiate caste hierarchies, since it is deeply rooted and ingrained within the social life of people camouflaged in the name of 'norms' and 'conventions'.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

My dissertation “Everyday Talk and Gendered Labour: An Ethnography of Action in Interaction between Domestic Servants and Middle class Bengali Women in Kolkata and Delhi,” examined labour relations between Bengali employers and workers from both Bengali and Hindi speaking regions. In particular, my research revisited the domestic space focusing on the employer-worker relationship, and the complex gender, class and caste equations that characterized this relation, as women interacted in a collective space. In my study, I not only chose different locations but also focused on varied contextual settings, such as ritual and quotidian routines, in order to get a comparative analysis of both (location and context) in relation to caste, class and gender. Of the different workers toiling in Indian middle class homes, I focused on three different worker-employer relationships: between employers and part-time female workers, between employers and live-in workers, and finally between employers and full time workers (the last forms to be most prevalent in Delhi).

My research involved the use of language to examine identities formed at the complex intersection of gender, caste, and class. It had engaged with two distinct developments: the feminization of domestic labour within Bengali households in Delhi and Kolkata, and the rapid urbanization arising from India’s adoption of neoliberal economic reforms. With this in mind, my first main research question was how labour relationships are generated bi-directionally between domestic workers and employers? The focus was to study the mutual dependency paradigm between both groups of women; instead of generalizing it only as a form of an exploitative relation based on power and hierarchy.

The significance of domesticity in constructions of femininity had major implications in the ambivalence located within the meaning of “work” or *kaaj*. The ethnographic observation for almost two years in Kolkata and Delhi and the process of writing the dissertation has been an unbelievable journey for me, as I could personalize some of the problems and crisis faced by the workers. It took me through the differing lives and livelihood of employers and workers. Most importantly, this journey took me into seven different households in various locations and contexts, which gave me an opportunity to understand the private space, unlike that of the more accessible public

and professional settings. These different private spaces have allowed me to study the meanings of domesticity in varying degrees. Some taught me to know what social distance is, whereas others helped me to understand the relation between the experiences of subservience and dependence, and some taught me the meanings of personal intimate relations. Though all houses had different things that I could learn from but the general attitude towards paid and unpaid work remained to be same everywhere.

Most important lesson for me was to carry my fieldwork inside the private spaces. This was one of the biggest challenge of this research that I had to overcome. It was not an easy task since in Delhi many houses had rejected my idea of entering their private spaces which seemed like an invasion into their lives, hence I had to try and re-try. In Kolkata it was less difficult since I am born and brought up in Kolkata so people could relate with me more than Bengali families in Chittaranjan Park for whom I was an outsider. Hence, the difference is not only in diasporic areas, but also within trans-regional places where a Bengali might be treated like an outsider. Finally, after stepping into the threshold of these private spaces enabled me to study the issues of the worker-employer relation based on each other's dependence, need, aspiration, frustrations, and fear. I have examined how disparate identities between employers and workers are co-constructed by analyzing the emergent discourses that were discussed either in unstructured interviews or the topics that came about spontaneously.

Revealing affective attachments examined the issue of gender solidarity, which is itself a complex phenomenon, and hence I termed it as ally-ship in the thesis. Through ally-ship, I have tried to explore how notions of domesticity and dependence construct the experiences of both the employer and the worker that adds to a non-market dimension in a wage-relationship. The discussions have indicated a mutual dependency which I have termed it as 'reciprocal dependency' that builds into a bi-directional affective attachment between the employer and the worker. However, it is also true that employer and worker have a power imbalance. They might be close allies in the private spaces, but in public they both remain to be invisible, unrecognized characters. Although in my study I have seen the workers find ways for visibility during the vulnerable moments faced by the employers, but they are also

aware of their fleeting, temporary roles. The stigma attached with domestic service are deepened by the general cultural attitude considering all forms of such work as demeaning (Dickey 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009). But, I conclude by establishing affect as an emancipatory tool and strategy as an agential role that facilitate the creation of a bonding among women from diverse backgrounds.

In my research, I have demonstrated how affective ties and dependence are brought out to explain long tenure of employment in a particular household. Issues of security, good treatment, dignity, and respect configure their explanations as to why they remain in those particular households for long-term duration, despite the prospect of an improved wage elsewhere. In fact one worker went to the extent of saying that her employer has been with her for a long term duration and so they have developed a special bonding. This special bonding was indeed an interesting reversal of the usual hierarchy where the employment of the worker is usually described by the employer but in this instance it is the worker who says that she has been with the employer. It is true that working within the intimate spaces, the workers and employers create a different environment for them, where they even gossip about “others,” where the employers transgresses the boundary of social distance. In such a space, there evolves a language in which mutuality and reciprocation constitute a legitimating idiom.

In my research, I have never questioned a worker about their wages. Very few complained about the low wages, but mostly they were satisfied with the entire package. By entire package, the workers meant wages as well as extra benefits like financial support, material goods as well as education for their children. The last is the young workers’ greatest aspiration to look forward in life. Hence in my research, I did not look at the relationship as exploitative, or making use of the power relation, since both the worker-employer relation were mutually dependent on each other. The employers were equally dependent on the workers for their everyday needs, and they had full faith and trust on the workers who served for a long period of time. In fact, in many cases, the handing over the house keys and other important documents were considered to be an equal treatment by the workers. Despite the intimate relations in the workspace, I do not undermine the huge social distance between the lives of the workers and the employers. But at the same time it would be unjust to state the relation as exploitative.

The workers' dreams for upward mobility were often fulfilled by these employers who provided financial support for the workers' children's education, housing, and other facilities. In Kolkata, the workers get much less wage compared to that in Delhi. Hence there are some employers who tutor the workers' daughters. It comes from the workers' aspirations for their daughters' futures; for learning English which serves as a prestige marker as it stems from India's colonial past, and continues to persist both through the socio-political hierarchy that remains from colonial times as well as the current neoliberal era that favours English. The workers foreground education of their children as their prime concern so that their children can escape the route of servitude. For instance, Bhoomi said that her children's schooling was the primary reason for doing the domestic work. Even those in acute financial difficulties, like Sushila, sought to keep her son in a school whereas her daughter is intermittently taught by Anupriya (Sushila's employer).

The employers like Munmun, Anupriya, and Mitali, who often teach the workers' daughters, act as agents of change is a complex question that needs to be studied further. However, the English-language tutorials function primarily as a means for employers to pass on symbolic capital to their workers' daughters; moreover, accumulation of this symbolic capital can potentially allow the daughters to improve their relative power. Grillo's (1989) notion of *legitimated domination* is quite relevant in this context: the workers are aware of their subordinate positioning and accept their employers' authority over them to the extent that they extend the purview of this authority to relationships with their daughter.

The simple exchange of domestic services for monetary compensation becomes less suitable for the relationship; the tutorials emerge as an alternative form of compensation that demonstrate the employers' personal interest in the up-bringing of the employers' daughters. In this way, the tutorials suggest the existence of a bond between the women of disparate identities to come to terms regarding the limitations that the society places on women with low socio-economic status. The employers' attempts to equip the daughters with some linguistic tools that may potentially allow them to overcome the hurdles in life, signals the employers' image as generous maternal figures; such an image actually enhances the workers' affective attachment toward their employers. At the same time, it often fosters the workers' enduring

loyalty to their employers (Sen and Sengupta 2016), which results in the workers' full acceptance of the existing power asymmetry. While the workers may fully accept their subordinate positioning, they work – in line with Dhawan (2010) – together with their employers with the intention of improving their daughters' positioning.

Some employers have different viewpoints about teaching and view it as a fictional dream, since the workers' daughters will get married and again do the same work in the kitchen or the failure of patriarchy will force them to work as waged workers. In this way, the employers' insistence on the prestige variety further underlines the gender inequality where the girl child needs to acquire the variety that adheres to local standards of feminine refinement, that is linked to the language of respectability. These findings suggest that, while it is possible that the popular discourses that champion the power of an unspecified variety of English to lift people out of poverty might hold true for some men, these discourses are less relevant to women, whose gender roles severely limit their potential for upward mobility. The focus was therefore on gender inequality that is seen through women's own conversations and narrations.

Hence, the workers' huge investments in schooling and the intermittent coaching by some employers has helped me to understand the macro-level institutionalized power politics played by the employer as she herself trains the workers' daughters in a domestic space which acts to be an anti-capitalist service relation in comparison to organized sectors that are meant for economic profits. This study has broadened the concept of linguistic stylization and has looked at the agency of the workers' daughters who did not always follow the directives, as they were neither scripted nor written in a prescribed format.

One strand of feminist literature studied the emergence of paid domestic work that focused on the interplay of gender and class as important variables; and the other strand of scholarship has focused on both paid and unpaid work performed by women as characteristic of feminine skill. The construction of the middle-class *bhadamahila* as a refined woman, and her respectable status allowed her to stay at home to become an ideal housewife, however unequal, it requires to draw a parallel with the domestic workers who lose their respectable status as they go out to work as waged labourers and perform all the household tasks at other people's house in order to feed her own

family. The presence of workers in middle class homes not only caters to their articulated domestic requirements but, as a clear status marker, also contributes to reproducing the class distinction between the poor and the middle class, and, perhaps even more importantly, between upper and lower middle classes.

In this study, I found that “work” or *kaaj* legitimized the women’s status in the society. The labor associated with working at own’s home and other’ home is itself problematic. The creation of a genteel middle-class, the *bhadralok* and the analogous *bhadramahila* abjuring daily labour as a marker of status and dignity, required the presence of domestic workers to take on the everyday housework. The work that a worker did was waged labour, and the work that a middle-class housewife performed was to maintain the values of her family. Hence the work that was performed at one’s own home was respectable whereas working at other’s home as waged labour was labelled as demeaning. In accounting for how “living within boundaries” is seen among the two different groups, it has become clear that certain socio-cultural facilities such as better education, living style, dress, and bodily comportment are ideologically associated with a particular cultural group, in this case the division of class between the employer and the workers.

In unsettling the homogeneity among the employers and the workers, my dissertation has contributed to cross-cultural research that takes gender, class, and labor as its central concern and theorized language as an important mechanism to understand societies and construction of identities. My research demonstrated how employers and workers of diverse relations interactively position themselves hierarchically through the co-construction of [i]dentities. This study has also contributed to a comparative study of labour relations between two regions in India. At the same time, I have also addressed issues of transnational migrant women since some workers are from Bangladesh. Thus, my research has incorporated trans-regional and transnational aspects of identity formation among women domestic workers. Finally, my study has demonstrated that agency plays an important role between both the employer and the worker, which reinforces them to create an attachment based not only on emotional needs but a paradigm of building trust and dependency at work. The personalized nature of the service qualifies them to construct an acute insight into the reciprocal dependencies.

The chapters in my dissertation have significantly pointed to something crucial to understand how the domestic workers negotiate their identities as *workers* in so-called collective spaces? The study of both sides of the relationship allowed me to explore the dialectic of employer and workers' gender ideologies, to examine how gender solidarity is built within the situated context of domestic spaces through notions of work or how solidarity is contested by excluding workers through one's social position. The two different locations were crucial to understand the impact of migration.

My next question was about the workers' choice of this particular profession. In interacting with majority of the workers, as discussed in the dissertation, they said that they were compelled to be a domestic worker. But they also informed that being a domestic worker in a private space was considered much more secure than any other odd jobs in the informal sector. The goal of my study was not about the history of partition, but many of the women who are my research subjects have been subjected to experience their lives during the partition of India in 1947. Following the partition, the city (Calcutta) experienced an influx of migrants and refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). These migrant families struggled financially and, in an effort to supplement their family income, made the difficult choice to send their wives, aunts, and daughters into the workforce. Although the career path diminished their social status (including for some who were from higher castes), many of these women sought employment as domestic workers. This trend has continued into this century with the feminization of domestic service. My ethnographic fieldwork showed that women were mostly engaged in domestic work, and some migrated to Delhi after their marriage, but chose domestic service as their occupation. In my study, I found that marriage migration, often perceived as social mobility, led into domestic service for young women since that is the most available permanent job. These younger women who migrated to Delhi (mostly from West Bengal, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh) showed interest for generational mobility for their children through education and better lifestyle that would benefit their children to quit the degraded occupation of domestic service in which they have been forced into.

The challenges that remain in this kind of research between employers and domestic workers are still huge and I will discuss some of the challenges in the next section.

7.1 Invisible voices, untold lives: Agency and representation of domestic workers

This section reminds me of Baby Haldar's book that speaks about agency, own representation and the challenges ahead. The challenges continue as we examine the way in which the domestic workers can articulate their voices in a form that would reach out to the common people. Despite lot of scholarly work on domestic workers, the question about the workers' own voices in the form of self-representation has been much overlooked. This task focuses on the agential role and self-representation among several domestic women workers who are silenced. But have we ever thought that do they really want to remain silent or are we, the scholars partly responsible for making them silenced. It was indeed very challenging while continuing the project, and that is why I never asked any straight-forward questions. I always wanted them to speak what they wanted to, so at times it got diverted to other areas leading to my own frustrations. This question of self-representation and issues of policy making was brought out by one of my research participant by directly questioning that what would be their benefit. It was not about any material benefit, but she meant a change in their lives. Will such research, even if they speak out will bring a societal change, will they get other kinds of jobs? These were some questions which I could not answer, and remained silent.

The book written by Baby Haldar allows people to think about one's individual agency, one who can be passive victims but do have power of self-representation. Haldar's book tells us about the need of workers' own self-representation. Despite feminist scholarship to recover the voices of these women through their writings, the engagement has always been problematic. It is essential that the scholars should collectively engage with women who speak from their social position of being in domestic service to voice the worker's own feelings, frustrations, and facing insecurity in being into such service. One aspect of the wide chasm in South Asia is the lack of education. Consequently, there is little record of the "voices" of the working poor, hence the researcher has to depend on the accounts of the employers (Banerjee 2004; Dickey 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009; Sen and Sengupta 2016). The analytic aim of this kind of research should be: to re-imagine feminist scholarship in a way that unlettered voices can also find its way into the collective feminism. In this concluding chapter, I therefore question feminist scholarship, and would like to bring

the notion of collective feminism where unlettered also has a space for self-representation. I also propose to unsettle hierarchy among the scholars so that it becomes easier to engage with the workers in a less scholarly way.

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