#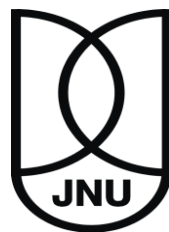 The Changing Dynamics of Work, Lifestyle and Social Relations: A Study of White Collar Corporate Professionals in the National Capital Region

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled 'The Changing Dynamics of Work, Lifestyle and Social Relations: A Study of White Collar Corporate Professionals in the National Capital Region' submitted by me to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my original work and has not been previously submitted in part or full to any other university or institution for any other degree or diploma.

SAYANTIKA PALIT

CERTIFICATE

We recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiner for evaluation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1.1 CHANGING ECONOMY AND WORK

The idea of work[1] has been changing with time and sociologists have been interested in mapping these changes. The life of a white collar professional in the private corporate sector is hectic and fast paced. They usually have professional degrees and get recruited in national or multinational companies (MNCs). Today, many of these companies are into services as part of the larger service economy or 'knowledge economy' (Drucker 1969). This economy is characterised by creation of services in addition to the manufacture of goods. In India, the services sector contribute more to the GDP[2] compared to manufacturing and there is greater FDI[3] in the service sector. 'Knowledge economy' (Drucker 1969) is key to the service sector which rests on information revolution. Companies survive by being ahead of its competitors and this is done by research and development, knowing what customers/ businesses want and then equip themselves to deliver.

According to planning commission annual survey data (2016-17), there has been a significant growth in the service sector businesses. In India, the share of the services sector in Gross Value Added is 53.2%, while its share of total employment is much less, at 28.6%[4]. This scenario is unique to India because in most other developed and developing countries, the share of service sector in GVA is usually more or less equal to the percentage of population employed by the sector. As a result, very few people are able to benefit from employment in this sector and if we separate the private and the public companies, the percentage of people employed in the private corporate sector would be even smaller. Despite being small in numbers, they are an important group because of their purchasing power and consumption habits. Their values, ideas and lifestyle is considered aspirational for groups below them in the social hierarchy.

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[1] The concept of work: Paid work is the current dominant form of production under modernity and its theoretical roots go back to classical sociologists such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim. The idea of work itself is dynamic owing to the changes that have come about in the global economy, thereby significantly impacting the world-view of the people involved in any kind of work, either directly or indirectly. Work is a source of identity and self-fulfilment and it is often used as a lens to look at self and others.

[2] Gross Domestic Product

[3] Foreign Direct Investment

[4] https://www.livemint.com/Money/swHsB7PlwWQ2Pnd9yrM1mO/Indias-jobless-growth-in-services.html

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.It is argued that the idea of a job-for-life has been replaced with the idea of a "portfolio worker" (Grigg 1997) – one who has a number of skills which he can use to offer his services to a number of organisations across space. There is less importance given to job-loyalty. The young workforce employed in the corporate sector are characterised by frequent job switches, each one better than the previous one in terms of pay-package, designation or both. In most sectors in private corporations, there is also a shift from regular, long-term employment to work that is intermittent or insecure. Another trend is of companies hiring freelancers or consultants who work on project basis and are hired only when there is a need to outsource work or a part of it. Such professionals do not receive the benefits that full-time employees do. In some instances, the full-time employees do not get the kind of treatment and even pay that consultants do. It is often in the interest of the companies to not hire full-time employees as they would have to be given more benefits which means a higher CTC[5] per employee.

However, Webb (2004) argues that the importance given to the concept of portfolio worker and idea of short-termism has been given more importance than it deserves. His arguments were drawn from study of organisations in the U.K where employees were not changing jobs frequently nor was there a dominant trend of working on project basis. This kind of work in providing services directly to consumers or to business clients involves an interplay between physical, mental and emotional labour. Not only is it important to be knowledgeable, industrious and technically skilled, but one has to know the art of the right presentation of self be it in terms of clothes, body language, expressions, spoken language, leisure and consumption habits. All this has a bearing on the way they think, make choices and behave when it comes to their personal and social lives. Another important aspect about paid work in the formal sector is the increasing entry of women in it who are making a career out of it. As a result of all these, there are bound to be changes in the traditional family structure, interpersonal relations and gender norms.

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[5] Cost to company

1.2 WORK AND SOCIAL RELATIONS[6]

Feminists have argued that the changing global economy and the accompanied changes in the corporate professions have a bearing on the relations between men and women. For instance, inflation has been a constant reality over the last few decades, more so after the global financial meltdown of 2008. This has made survival of families on the basis of single earner difficult. As discussed in the previous section, the notion of work and the culture of the workplace has changed, especially after the 1990s liberalisation policy. This has affected wider society and 'social relations', i.e. relationships and interactions between people and groups, both within and outside the family. It includes relationship between parents and children, between spouses, between friends and colleagues. It also includes gender relations. These white collar professionals are seen as global citizens. In terms of lifestyle, those in managerial and above managerial positions are exposed to international travel, they are aware of global brands, services and entertainment/ leisure activities in international settings, most of them are comfortable with latest technology enabled gadgets. However, they are still part of traditional Indian cultural and social milieus and have inherited the traditional cultural values. There is an interplay between tradition and modernity. For example, with both husband and wife leading busy lives and trying to balancing work and familial responsibilities, grandparents have assumed an important role as caregivers for children. While young professionals may have become 'frequent high fliers' now used to world travel and independent handling of finances, when it comes to marriage, they may still opt for arranged marriage brought about by their kin.

Sociologists are interested to understand ways in which communitarian ties, identity around family, caste, ethnicity which were seen as intact, defining a person's life trajectory have tilted towards individualism, where a person has to construct his own identity outside of the communitarian ties. This individualism is both in the context of personal relations and work where values like being goal-oriented, autonomous and self-directed are upheld. For instance, a woman's identity would be defined by her father's or husband's identity and home was seen to be her natural sphere. Today, this

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[6] **Social Relations:** In Weberian Interpretive sociology, social relations refers to any social interaction or any relationship between two or more individuals within social collectivities. These social relations make up the social structure when seen in the context of agency of an individual.

is not true for a small but dominant section of our population. Household and child-care expenditure have increased as a result of which the earlier idea of a nuclear family with husband as provider and wife as care-giver has given way to increasing trend of dual career couples. There is uncertainty in jobs in a constantly changing global economy. Dual employment is a strategy for dealing with increasing financial expenditure. In addition, work is seen as an important source of identity and self-fulfilment. As there was legal provision made available for women in India to participate in work and get equal treatment and remuneration, more and more women participated in paid employment.

All the changes that has been described above in the context of work and family impact children and relations between parents and children. A working mother might feel or is made to feel a sense of guilt when she has to leave her child at home or a crèche as the child is devoid of time that she/ he should spend with parents. A parent could feel torn between her responsibilities at work and those with regard to her children. A parent might yearn to spend time with his/her child but is unable to do so owing to long working hours, frequent travel, strict deadlines and high stress levels due to spilling over of work after office hours. There is an increasing number of crèches and day-care centres in metropolitan cities. There is certain degree of flexibility that some sectors provide their employees such as options of consulting, freelancing, work-from-home where there is a possibility of an employee having a say in the length of time they devote to work and some control over the kind of projects that are chosen. But one of my female respondents said that despite working from home she has to put her child at a day-care centre so that she is free to concentrate on her work and deliver the results expected from her. She feels a sense of guilt in keeping her child away from her even when she is at home. Many of the women employed in the corporate service sector are single and living away from their families in a different city on their own in order to make a career and have financial independence. It would be interesting to understand their views of marriage considering the fact that they devote a lot of their time and effort to build their career, something which was common among men but not as much common among women even a few years back. These are important and interesting in the lives of individuals which this research aims to look at.

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1.3 LIFESTYLE[7] AND CONSUMPTION

There has been research done on the consumption habits of the middle class in India's current liberalised economy, on the rise of shopping malls and its social character in the context of urbanisation (Srivastava, 2015). Online shopping portals spend lakhs of rupees every quarter of a year to conduct research to understand people's online shopping habits. Most often, their main target audience is corporates who spend a significant part of their time at their workplace. Consumption requires little time and is often not just restricted to leisure but is integrated with one's overall lifestyle. These portals come up with special offers and discounts on various products during fixed hours in the afternoon targeting employees' lunchtime as that is the window available to those at work. They ensure efficient and fast delivery of goods within the office hours. Most of my respondents own more than one credit card. Some of them earn over 20 lakh rupees per annum, but towards the end of the month when they fall short on cash, they depend on credit. They own cards which give them a few months' time to clear their due payments. These cards also give discounts and deals on specific brands/ services. For instance, corporate offices provide employees with shopping cards and vouchers for eating at fast-food joints. There are pubs and bars which gives special offers to corporate professionals. These outlets are strategically located as they are often very close to offices such as those in Gurgaon cyber hub.

Stress and anxiety are common in the lives of such people. There are problems of tight deadlines, constant evaluation, competition and perennial fear of being laid off. On 9th Feb, 2015, Indian Express published an editorial which said that statistically, the suicide rates among young corporate professionals residing in Bangalore have increased and cases of depression are on the rise. Mental health counsellors and psychiatrists argue that young professionals are sinking into emotional distress and are unable to come out of their stress-filled jobs. One of the causes of stress mentioned in it was the limited time they can devote to their loved ones. One of the

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[7]'LIFESTYLE': It is used as concept to reflect on one's attitudes, ways of life, world-view and values. Following Max Weber, (1946) lifestyles are distinctive elements of status groups connected with recognition of prestige and is the visible symbol of social differentiation. For Veblen (1998), it stands for desire for distinction from social strata considered as inferior to one's own in the form of 'conspicuous consumption' and desire to reproduce those whose lifestyle is considered superior, exemplified in the form of emulation, as used by him. Using the concept from Bourdieu (1984), lifestyle refers to social practices that are tied to individual tastes, representing the basic point of intersection between the structure of the 'field' and processes connected with the 'habitus'.

major causes of anxiety that I found in my respondents' lives was the pressure of maintaining a certain lifestyle, to repay loans through EMIs and the shrinking savings. There is high pressure from increasing EMIs which has become a very common aspect of their lives. It is easy to find young professionals in their mid-twenties paying EMIs against car and home loans which require adjustments of different kinds. Such anxieties cannot be seen as an individual psychological problem, but more a result of social forces outside the control of individuals. A few of my respondents have a home loan against which they currently pay an interest of about 15%. When they had taken the loan a few years back, the interest rate was around 7.5 %. This increase in the rate has forced them to cut down expenditure. Their resentment was directed towards the government. They feel it is the failure of the government to regulate the market to prevent hike in interest rates. To recapitulate the sections so far, the purpose of this research is to understand the ways in which work, lifestyle and social relations have a bearing on one another in the lives of white-collar corporate professionals in urban India. So far I have set a broad canvas and provided a preliminary idea of their changing lives. Let us look at some of the important literature related to these areas which have been used to formulate the objectives of this research.

1.4 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the following sections, I have briefly reviewed some of the important scholarly contributions in the different areas/ themes that are a part of this research, namely, the rise of the service economy; on work; rise of the 'new' middle class and consumption; parenting; singlehood and gender identity. My chapters are divided on the basis of the topics/ themes I have explored and the literature referred to has been presented theme-wise as well. However, the use of this literature would be visible in the chapters that are devoted to these different themes wherein the interplay between literature and data would be presented in a more detailed manner.

1.4.1 THE CHANGING ECONOMY AND SERVICE SECTOR

In India, the service economy is concentrated in financial services, hospitality, health (such as nursing), information technology, retail, insurance, real estate and tourism. There is increased participation of women in the service sector. The cost of staying at home and the rewards for paid work have both increased, forcing women to

participate in paid work (Wharton 2009). Globalisation[8] has thrown the Indian market open to the world which has led to increase in the number of multi-national organisations. According to Castells (1996), the globalisation of services constitutes the latest phase in the development of global capitalism.

According to Upadhyay and Vasavi (2006), the rise of the MNCs and the spread of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been linked with process of globalisation and the transition to a post-industrial economy in India. These MNCs have been restructured, from vertically integrated bureaucratic organisations into 'network enterprises' made of semiautonomous entities that contract out work to one another. The development of these flexible forms of organisation has been accompanied by the "flexibilisation of labour" as well as increased mobility of capital. (Ibid.)

The orientation to work be it in manufacture or services can be seen as part of the larger process of individualisation that is occurring in the workplaces in the new economy. As pointed earlier, several social theorists such as Giddens, Beck, Bauman and several others have identified individualisation as a major outcome of the post-industrial economy as well as a significant social force in the "information societies" (Castells 1996), both at work and elsewhere. Individualisation is defined as an orientation in which people centre their planning and actions around themselves based on an ideology of self-interest, rather than around collectivities of various kinds (Upadhyay and Vasavi 2006).

The "new-age managerial thinking" (Murphy 2011) has permeated private national and multi-national companies involves a problem-solution oriented approach, branding and presentation of self in a specific way to be accepted as part of networks. It also involves a kind of hierarchy which is different from the kind that is visible in the public sector. There is less bureaucratic procedures involved, more openness and flexibility. The productivity of the employees is maximised by emphasizing on team-work. Using Max Weber's (1946) theory of rationality, it means the development of forms of social organization devoted to the achievement of precise goals by efficient

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[8] When I say Globalisation, I mean spread of communication production and connection technologies throughout the world. In words of Giddens (2002), globalization can be defined as the intensification of social relations throughout the world, linking distant localities in such a way that local happenings are formed as a result of events that occur many miles away and vice versa.

means. It is this type of rationalization that we see in the development of modern corporations. There is emphasis on training programmes in which employees are initiated into the global corporate culture. However, it is not enough to say that public sector is bureaucratic and private is not. Moreover, there is increasing corporatisation of different sectors even in public undertakings. The corporate culture is deemed to be efficient, rational, profit-driven and merit-based. Hence this kind of culture is looked up to and it is believed that this is the way all sectors should be in order to contribute to the nation's growth.

According to Giddens (2002), in economic terms, there is important role of transnational corporations whose operations stretch across national borders that impacts global production and international division of labour. There is increased world trade, global capital flows and integration of global financial markets. Transnational corporations are an integral part of globalisation where companies produce goods or market services in more than one country. Today, these corporations employ people situated in different countries and the world's biggest transnational corporations are often economically bigger than national economies of a few third world nations. However, globalisation is created not just by economic forces but by coming together of political, social, cultural factors (Ibid.). It is argued that globalisation is responsible for the formation and spread of a global culture which is mostly west European and North American in origin.

On the hind side, Webb (2004) argues that top 200 corporations control about one-third of the world's economic activity but employ less than a third of one percent's of the world's population. Growth of transnational corporations may thus pose challenges to social cohesion and perpetuate inequality. Another important argument is that the vertical hierarchy and the division of labour has given way to a more horizontal coordination through changing project teams and emphasis on risk-taking (Sennett 1999). However, it does not mean that private corporations are characterised by less hierarchical structure. Since 2008 recession, it has been seen that companies tend to delayer, i.e. reduce the complexity of management layers by reducing their number. However, there are hierarchies still intact. On the one hand, there is an overt emphasis on hierarchy-free structures, team building and increasing sense of ownership to be given to employees. But covertly, there are subtle and complex hierarchies which are often not discussed about but experienced by employees.

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A more prominent division within middle management appears to be emerging between newcomers chosen for their expected skill in restructuring and redirecting the business, but with little specific knowledge of the organization, and the majority carrying out more routine tasks. The former are expected to move on quickly, to take risks, and to show little loyalty to a particular organization. The majority probably have less clear-cut career routes than in the past, with the expectation of more horizontal than vertical moves becoming the norm (Webb 2004:721).

A person sitting in India can create a product or design a service for a company in the U.S through fast evolving information technology (Upadhyay and Vasavi 2006). This has consequences such as changes in the idea of work-time as one has to make oneself available as per the clock of the country he/she works for. It also leads to home-based work which is possible due to advanced technology. The idea of power-structure and hierarchy has changed due to which it is often not possible to demand accountability. It has become more dispersed and difficult to pin point. For a professional working at an executive or even at a managerial level in a corporate office, it is often difficult to determine who one should approach in case there are problems or grievances. This is even more visible in case of a multinational corporation in which the head office is outside the country. The highest authorities could be a board of directors working in the United States or Western Europe and an individual employee may never come in direct contact with them. There is less transparency during both recruitment and promotion stage within many organisations. Some of my respondents said that they have no idea how Vice President and CEO posts get filled up in their offices. It is not considered their business to know or enquire about such matters.

Indian private corporate companies usually have long working-hours and few days of paid leave when compared to the public sector. It upholds the values of aggression and competition in the workplace. There is frequent travel[9] and constant performance evaluation. At this point I would like to mention that the concept of "proletarianisation" (Marx 1975) is being used to understand the changing corporate sector, more so, in the third world. It means that there is a shift from people working as full-time employees to selling their labour/ specific skill set in return for wages and it is either part time or consultancy/ contract basis. It is a set of processes which increases the number of people who lack control over the means of production and

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[9] Often the people in managerial or above managerial ranks are referred to as Frequent High Fliers.

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who survive by selling their labour power. Sections of the middle class employed in the corporate organisations could be said to have been proletarianised if their work becomes routinized and de-skilled and if their decision making abilities and their sense of ownership over the organisation comes into question. Though there is a vast difference between the working conditions of the working class in industries and today's employees in corporate organisations, the commonality is the fact that neither of them have any control over the means of production and they survive by selling their labour power or skill-set in the market.

A trend that I observed while doing my fieldwork was that people were either discussing, considering or actually shifting from being an employee to becoming an entrepreneur. This is visible in several sectors, more so in software and IT services. I met a group of young entrepreneurs who were in full time well-paying jobs. A few like-minded people got together and invested their savings to form capital which they invested in the new venture. They also took loan from banks which was not difficult owing to their past records and credentials. For the initial few years, their income was less when compared to their jobs. In their jobs, they ended up working over 60 hours per week, hardly had time for their families or for pursuing their hobbies. As a result they led very stressful lives. The situation in terms of time did not change after becoming an entrepreneur. It is because they are hardly able to switch off from work, owing to advanced technology and greater connectivity through smart phones. However, they feel positive about working for themselves and not being subservient to anybody.

1.4.2 THE RISE OF INDIA'S 'NEW' MIDDLE CLASS - CHANGING LIFESTYLE AND CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Social sciences literature on the middle class ranging from theories of Karl Marx to that of Bourdieu shows that it is an important segment of modern society and has emerged as a result of modernisation-industrialisation process all over the world. In the Indian context, the middle class is linked with processes of industrial development and urbanisation. It has come to be identified with colonisation which resulted in rise of certain occupations. In contemporary economy, growth in the size of the middle class was a result of LPG reforms (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) and opening of the domestic market in 1990s to international players for business expansion. It has been growing in size ever since and the size is estimated to be of a

wide range from 5 percent to 30 percent of the population (Jodhka 2016). This width exists because middle class is a nebulous category and different disciplines and approaches define it differently. Middle class is seen as an income group, as a group with certain specific relation to means of production (Marx 1967), as a group with specific values and aspirations or a group with specific life-chances and market situation (Weber 1946). It is also viewed as a group with distinctive lifestyle and consumption patterns. Marx (Ibid.) had argued that with rise in industrial capitalism the middle classes would increase. But unlike his theory which looked at middle class as that which either would get sub-served in the Bourgeoisie or the Proletariat, it emerged and grew as a class in itself. Gouldner (1979) has looked at the middle class as bearers of cultural capital. Wright (1978) has looked at the middle class in a "contradictory class location" as they are the beneficiaries of the capitalist mode of production but they are also part of the proletariat for selling intellectual labour for a wage.

Deshpande (2003) has looked at the centrality of the Indian middle class as a product of the developmental regime. However with the gradual eclipse of the idea of state-led development, the Indian middle classes had since then gradually distanced themselves from the idea of nation-state and its development. The processes of globalisation and localisation have seen the emergence of subnational loyalties as well as attraction of transnational identities among the new middle classes seeking adjustment. He had argued that having consolidated its social, economic and political standing, this new class, especially its upper segment, would corner the benefits of globalisation. He posited that the processes of globalisation which produces "a sort of identity anxiety" should be accompanied by the growth of "particularistic cultural identities of all kinds.

The salaried white collar corporate professionals would fall under the rubric "new middle Class". Leela Fernandes (2006) argues that this new middle class includes, among other groups, professionals working in new economy in MNCs in white collar jobs, mostly professional degree holders and they often serve as an aspirational group for the others in the middle classes. It is based on her research that the middle class is internally differentiated and each of them employ different means and different kinds of capital to gain access to the new middle class status and they create their hegemony

by making certain kinds of assets (such as English education) and consumption modes aspirational.

1.4.2.1 WHAT IS CONSUMPTION? HOW HAVE SOCIAL THEORISTS LOOKED AT IT?

As the nature of work changed, so did the social theories to understand and make sense of it. There began an overall shift in sociology of work from industrial production to consumption and its effect on social relations. In the kind of service economy that shapes the economic functioning of the most of the nations of the world today, production and consumption needs to be seen in tandem as these two processes occur simultaneously. Services are created and consumed at the same time, creating further need for such services. Thus, consumption of goods and services is an important concept which has to be employed in order to understand how work-life of such professionals impacts their lifestyle and social relations.

According to Baudrillard (1998), modern western culture is a 'consumer culture'. He defined consumption as an activity that acts as a basis for social groupings and as a means to acquire membership in them. Post the Great Depression and the Second World War, consumption has become not just personal indulgence but civic responsibility designed to improve standard of living for all. It is not just consumption of products and services, but consumption of signs and symbols that designate a certain kind of lifestyle. He argued that a person who consumes is actively engaged in creating and/or maintaining a sense of self identity through display of products and services meaning signs and symbols. He revised the Marxian concept of Exchange Value into "Sign Value" and Commodity Fetishism into "Sign Fetishism". In modern western society, consumption is about satisfaction of 'desires', not just 'needs' and desires are always limitless.

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1984), consumption is a social and cultural practise for establishing difference at an individual and group level, where demarcations are maintained through tastes and choice of lifestyle. It is taste and consumption of a certain kind that determines social status and reproduces social class. The individual taste stems from what he calls "habitus" which is inscribed on the body and is influenced by social and cultural conditions. Habitus constitutes both the conscious and the unconscious. The same theory can be applied to understand the lives of

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corporate professionals in the contemporary Indian context which is seen as "consuming class" (Deshpande 2003). Their membership in the international work-culture requires them to project a certain kind of lifestyle to their clients, colleagues, seniors and to their social circle. Regardless of whether individuals conform to the new consumer lifestyle that has been promoted by the media and the market, the middle class must confront these ideological forces. Given their earning power, one would expect corporate professionals to conform to the new consumerist lifestyle that has come to define the Indian urban middle classes in the post-liberalisation era.

Ritzer (1993) has argued that consumption is not just about acquiring basics, but the goods and service obtained are valued in their own right and these act as cultural symbols used for communication in social interactions. There are elements of allurement that makes consumption ritualistic as we have moved from purchasing for necessity, to worshipping that availability to purchase. There are objects, subjects and sites of consumption in modern world. He has looked at the rise of consumerism in relation to globalisation, which he explains by his concept of "McDonaldization". This can be summarized as the way in which "the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world". In the current period, most countries have adapted to this concept because of globalization.

Veblen (1998) posited that an alienating consumerism is required to solve problems created by slumped demand produced by technologically induced unemployment. The people who are under the pressure of conspicuous consumption try to maximise their incomes by working longer hours to meet these artificially created needs. Instead of working for fewer hours due to improvement in technology, the professional today works for longer duration. Largely, people find themselves with less time for creative activities even in the midst of time-saving technologies. He argued that capitalist economic rationality has no room for free time which neither produces nor consumes commercial wealth. David Harvey (2014) has offered a strong critique of capitalism in the current global economic system following Marxian theory. He argued that alienation is one of the biggest negative influences of capitalism in which a worker is estranged from work, product of his labour, fellow workers and from his own true nature. People are made to trust that capitalism is the best system to generate wealth and well-being for all. There is mistrust and anger that one has at one's own alienation

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and often blames oneself for it. Harvey gave an example that she could be angry at her boss for too much work given to her or could be angry at her partner for wanting dinner and sex and not sympathising with her exhausted state. Harvey has also paid importance to the role of technology in the contemporary lives of people. Work is technicized and managers are working on highly complex technological systems. "Technicized work which aims to save time by reducing work cannot, at the same time glorify work as the essential source of personal identity and fulfilment" (Ibid: 272). He points out several crises of work-based society such as unemployment, lack of job security and feeling of nothingness associated with work which often forces individuals to look outside work for sources of identity and social belonging. Harvey argues that for the current economic system to continue, desire for expensive products with inferior use-value have to be created and wishes need to be given the urgency of needs. Unless there is a new demand and new set of consumers, system cannot run. More than satisfaction of consumers, importance needs to be given to need creation.

High disposable income and exposure to international brands and products shape the aspirations, lifestyle and consumption habits of corporate professionals today. It may happen that lack of time and attention to spouse and children translates further into consumption. As work they do is hectic and stressful, there is hardly any energy or time left to follow other pursuits leading to a void which is often filled by consumption. According to Jacobsen and Poder (2008), Zygmunt Bauman's (2013) work on consumerism offers deep insights into what it means to live a market-mediated life. According to him, consumerism should not be seen merely as a particular set of activities contained in a certain sphere of social life as it is mostly done. Rather, it is more to the point to understand consumerism as referring to a whole way of life, which is why Bauman speaks of "consuming life". Consumerism for Bauman is less an ideological conspiracy in which we all collude as a competition between sellers and buyers who try to get the best value for their money (Jacobsen and Poder 2008).

According to Carol Upadhyay and Vasavi (2006), the feelings of the new middle class members about their sudden improvement in economic status is not homogeneous. Rather than simply absorbing the ideology of consumption as a symbol of India's progress, their appreciation of their more comfortable lifestyle is in most cases accompanied by a sense of loss and nostalgia for an earlier family and community-

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based life that they believe has been destroyed by the demands of their work and the complexities of modern life. While the majority of informants in their study who work in the IT industry in Bangalore reported that their standard of living has improved, many do not believe that they lead better lives than their parents.

> They say that their parents had the time and space to lead more fulfilling lives, keeping up relations with family and friends. Because these kinds of professionals work long hours, they are often unable to fulfil family commitments, nurture significant social relationships, or pursue artistic or spiritual interests. Many of their narratives express this opposition between the material gain and the social loss that result from their profession and lifestyle (Ibid: 117).

Ganguly Scrase & Scrase (2009) analyses the economic and cultural sides to globalisation in India by focussing on a range of issues such as costs of living, household expenditure, employment restructuring, global media and television and importance of English in education. They argue that globalisation is a complex process and the idea that it has uniformly benefitted the Indian middle class is not true. For instance, their study reveals that while the lower middle classes are supportive of the 1991 economic reforms, they remain doubtful of the benefits of the country's new economic policy of liberalisation. Brosius (2010) looks at the complexities of lifestyle of the upwardly mobile middle class in India. Through ethnographic observation and analysis of research material and illustrations, she looks at new social formations and aspirations, modes of consumption and ways of being in contemporary urban India. She uses real estate advertising to map the changing nature of Delhi from being the colonial and national capital to a global city. She also looks at the new middle class who are characterised as "global nomads" and risks associated with this kind of highly flexible, mobile work. These would be discussed in the chapters that follow in relation with the data that emerged from my fieldwork.

According to Nita Mathur (2010: 226)

> The shift in ideology of the younger generation of the middle class away from idealism, stronger allegiance to general welfare over individual concerns and national pride to personal gains, sometimes results in flamboyant consumerism, which has at least three main implications in society. First, status gets attached to a pretentious show of new fashions and styles and ownership of luxury commodities, even as the long held codes of status groups are challenged. Second, an ostentatious way of life and possession of

enviable goods emerge as a contemporary basis of understanding distinctions in society and as signifiers of personal identity that sets an individual apart from others. Third, there is a distinct change in emphasis from virtues of humility, self-restraint and nurturance to conspicuous indulgence in consumption. The new middle class seems to be more cosmopolitan in outlook and lifestyle, global in aspirations, time-investing and risk-taking in jobs, demanding in leisure-time services (such as tourism and hospitality in hotels) and at the same time watchful of values and lifestyle laid down by age-old tradition emphasizing austerity and frugality.

Srivastava (2015) traces the emergence of a new middle class in India as the inevitable result of economic reform. In India the new middle class is seen as a departure from the old middle class of the pre-globalized India. The newness is characterised by the production of a new cultural image that rests on consumption and new aspirations around education, employment and leisure. He argues that along with the commodity consumption this class is the main recipient of material benefits of jobs under globalization and it is expanding in size. It is because there is a continuous entry of people as a result of reservations and subsidies in education. He argued that this class is differentiated because of their background and habitus, which they carry with them wherever they go, despite the overall similarity in terms of the economic rise.

1.4.3 PARENTING IN THE LIVES OF NEW MIDDLE CLASS URBAN PROFESSIONALS

The book *Second Shift* (Hochschild 1983) looks at the American middle class dual career families and notes that the woman bear the brunt of childcare and domestic responsibilities and her salary in most cases pays for the care, which is often pushed 'down' to lower skilled immigrant workers in the United States. Cunningham (1995) argues that since the second half of this century, parental authority has declined and children have demanded and received an earlier access to the adult world and that the media plays an important role in forging a sense of identity of these children and young people. The role of the media is even more important today as the people I am looking at are more affluent and tend to have a media-rich home. In this context, Margaret Mead's (2017) concept of "reverse heritage" is useful as children today teach their parents, more so because children are more aware of ICT[10] innovations,

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[10] Information Communication Technology

thereby reversing traditional status hierarchies. Carol Vincent (2004) has studied British mothers who are professionals in paid employment and has explained that they experience a shift in their self-identity by balancing full time hectic work schedules, childcare and a household. Her focus is more on the care-market and pre-school day-care systems and how parents negotiate with these.

Families that have been the focus of my research can typically afford to spend money on their children's education in private international schools and extra-curricular activities such as after-school cultural activities, organized sports, personality development. They spend time reading to their children and they impart their knowledge about diverse subjects in the course of everyday interactions. Lareau (2003) called this parenting style "Concerted Cultivation". By concentrating resources on their children, middle class parents cultivate their children's competencies and expand their skills and talents. Drawing from all of the above, my chapter on parenting looks at the private world of the working professionals and parent-child interactions. With more double income families, exposure to global cultures through travel, use of technology and rising aspirations, I considered it important to understand how these changes have effected families and their approach to parenting.

1.4.4 THE IDEA OF SINGLEHOOD

Jesook Song (2014) has done an ethnography of young, single women in South Korea who seek to live independently. Through extensive interviews, she has highlighted the difficulties that they face in getting residential autonomy and how this is linked to the legalities around property and the social pressures that such women face in the conservative culture of Korea. It has talked about different ways women are able to resist the patriarchal structures which assumes them to be dependent on their fathers and their husbands after marriage.

Coles and Fechter (2008) argues that there is a new generation of growing single female professionals, the more transnational class of employees around the service economies and has looked at their positions in the male dominated workplace. According to Cross & Scholz (2004), there is a small group of women who have successfully entered positions of economic, political and social power with paid work in the formal sector and the authors have looked at the personal, social costs and the opportunities facing these women. They conducted their study in 3 different countries,

including India and found that professionally successful women face societal prejudices around the world. Urban, professionally qualified, middle and upper middle class (upper caste) women in India can, for a period of time, think of possibilities of a life which is outside the conventional heteronormative marriage as a result of the independence obtained from paid employment.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One framework which has shaped my research is Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical approach that takes into account the importance of culture and is relevant if one has to understand ways of life, consumption patterns, social consciousness and changing dynamics of social interaction. He defines culture as set of meaningful practices constituting a way of life, adding that culture is one that is defined by the dominant classes. "Habitus" is one of the key concepts used by him in order to understand the relationship between structure and agency or between individual and society. It provides us with the means to analyse the workings of social world through empirical research. It is central to Bourdieu's distinctive sociological approach and "field" theory.

> Habitus is a property of social agents (whether individuals, groups or institutions) that comprises a structured and structuring structure. It is structured by one's past and present circumstances such as family upbringing and educational experience and it is structuring because it helps to shape one's present and future practices' (Bourdieu 1977: 170).

> The habitus is constantly being formed in the daily practices of individual subjects (which for Bourdieu are often families) and while it is a structured system of meanings it does not follow any mechanistic formal or algebraic logic. People do not simply reproduce their meaning systems, they also produce and use them. One must see classes and their members not just as actors in a prefabricated play but also as creative subjects. As such their actions and thoughts should not be interpreted in terms of a 'logic' but rather in terms of a 'sense'. This sense is generated by the objective living conditions, but since it is itself able to generate new 'sense' it is by no means reducible to a function of them (Ibid: 109).

For Bourdieu the concept of habitus is intricately linked with the social structures within a specific field and is essential to sociological analysis of society. Reality according to Bourdieu is a social concept. He argued that to exist is a social process

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and in relation to those around us. According to Bourdieu, an individual's habitus has the potential to influence her actions, construct her social world and is influenced by the external. Another concept which he uses is that of the social space or field. In order to understand interactions between people, or to explain any event or social phenomenon it is not enough to just look at what happened or what was said but to also understand the social space (or "field" in his language) in which interactions and events occur (Bourdieu 1977). The social field whether it's scientific, religious, academic, political or economic has its own structure of internal power relations which are defined and maintained by habitus which is both individual and collective in nature. In the context of my research, the field is the corporate organisation where different professionals with their habitus come together with the organisation having its own rules and power relations.

In addition, my research is influenced by the approaches adopted by late modernity theorists like Bauman, Giddens, Harvey and Sennett who have looked at ways in which work in "flexible capitalism" (Harvey 1989) calls for and leads to a certain kind of identity and selfhood for its sustenance. What all of them have in common is that they have looked at relationship between structures of late modernity-capitalism and individual lives, interactions and identity. For instance, Harvey argued that work in contemporary economy does not follow a Fordist principle of mass production but is now regulated on the basis of flexibility in production and labour organisation wherein outsourcing, sub-contracting, part-time work are measures adopted to maximise capital turn-over. Sennett has argued that work in flexible capitalism which by nature is insecure has resulted in lack of stability in individual selves and a corrosion of character. Giddens (1991) has argued that in late modernity, self has become a reflexive project where individuals do not operate based on given normative, traditional structures but have to constantly cultivate a sense of self from a complex diversity of choices which is based on a premise of freedom and choice but it is equally a burden. Ulrich Beck (1992) argue that in the framework of modernity, if one has to understand family, relationships and intimacies, one has to look at broader factors such as work and money. They are all inherently tied to one another.

Kelly (2013) termed such theories "epochal" and pointed out the need to look for more micro, nuanced perspective notwithstanding their significant contribution to systematic understanding of contemporary world. The relation between the three

concepts used in my research are not causal or deterministic. One of the ways of understanding the changes brought about in lives of such professionals is gender where one can see the interplay of work, lifestyle and family. Gender is a recurrent theme in all my chapters. Though epochal theorists look at larger patterns and draw some kinds of generalisations from a certain kind of abstraction, I am aware of the importance of their contribution to understand the relationship between macro-micro and public-personal. However, as Giddens would argue, the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences only. This directly informs my assumption that private lives of my respondents have a relationship with more external, structural aspects such as work but I refrain from a causal analysis and do not offer a statistical validation nor do I offer an "epochal" theory. In each of the chapters that follow, I have invoked these different frames and tried to see my data through these lens but my focus has been on the micro, on the individual stories and narratives and the ways in which they view their own lives.

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the nature and dynamics of work in corporate service sector as viewed by the corporate professionals,

2. To understand the ways in which work interacts with other aspects of life such as lifestyle and consumption practices,

3. To understand the ways in which work and interpersonal relationships influence one another. In terms of interpersonal relations focus is narrowed to the following:

     a. Ideas around marriage, singlehood and gender

     b. Changes in the ideas and behaviour around parenting in case of dual career couples

1.7 KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1a. What are the tools, technology and site of production in corporate service work?

1b. What is the nature of work and expectations from employees?

1c. What are the different kinds of work environment?

1d. What is the experiential domain of work like?

2a. What are the different connotations of consumption in the lives of white-collar corporates?

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2b. What are their challenges and anxieties in everyday lives?

3a(i) What are the ideas around marriage when it comes to single men and women?

3a(ii) What are some of their challenges and coping strategies in everyday lives?

3b(i) How do dual career couples with children balance work and parenting roles? What are the balancing strategies adopted?

3b(ii) What are the challenges of parenting today and what are resulting anxieties that parents face? What mechanisms do they employ in coping with them?

The focus would be on those individuals who are first-generation migrants to Delhi-NCR and have been working in this sector for five years and more.

1.8 RATIONALE FOR FIELDWORK SITE

Delhi and the national capital region was chosen as my field of study because it has the second highest per capita income[11] in the country and is an important destination for the new economy businesses and multi-national corporations. Though Bangalore and Hyderabad are the main destinations for IT and software companies, Delhi being the capital houses main or branch offices for many MNCs especially non-IT service companies ranging from FMCG to finance, marketing consultancies, real estate and hospitality industry, among others. Delhi is home to hundreds of thousands of students pursuing professional, technical or non-technical courses from reputed public and private universities. Some of these campuses host companies for recruitment drives from time to time. A lot of educated migrants who come as students from small towns or other cities across the country end up staying on in the city to seek employment opportunities and lot of them settle down here post marriage. This makes it an interesting site of study due to influx of aspirational lifestyle and an effort on part of some of my respondents to distinguish their lifestyle from those of the business community which they consider to be too loud for their taste. Land values shot up across Delhi NCR post economic reforms and today the regions wealthiest own property in NCR owing to influx of corporations and resultant increase in real estate prices. Rentals have shot up considerably in last two decades which has a bearing on the lifestyle of the salaried professionals.

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[11]   https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/economic-survey-2017-18-at-rs-3-3-lakh-delhis-per-capita-income-second-highest-in-the-country-5103843/

(As Corporate offices began to come up in NCR especially Gurgaon in the 1990s, beginning with the Global Business Park, the real estate prices shot up manifold and that was followed by continuous growth in construction of housing societies in these areas. Today, Gurgaon is one of the most expensive cities in the country in terms of both commercial and housing properties).

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1.9 THESIS CHAPTERISATION

Chapter one deals with issues around methodology where I have fleshed out the rationale for qualitative research to understand the experiences of work and social lives of white collar corporate professionals. It calls for subjective interpretation of experiences, events and meaning-making processes in everyday lives. I have pointed out the use of observation, in-depth interviews and narratives to make sense of their world in their own words. I have narrated my own experiences during the fieldwork and the various challenges that I encountered in the process. I have made an attempt to reflect on the concept of reflexivity in the way it has emerged from my experiences in the field. It is this journey which makes every research interesting, challenging, satisfying and lends uniqueness to the process.

Chapter two is titled 'Understanding Work among the Corporate Professionals in the Service Sector'. It delves into the nature of work in a multi-national corporation, the tools and technology of production, the dynamics of the workplace in which I look at the organisational structure, hierarchy, formal and informal relations in the workplace. This chapter also deals with the experiential domain of work wherein I discuss the notion of time and its management, performance, presentation of self and the anxieties surrounding work that emanates largely from the insecure and instable nature of work.

Chapter three is titled 'The Dynamics of New Middle Class Lifestyle: On Privileges and Anxieties'. This chapter has employed the concept of lifestyle and consumption to look at the lives of the professionals. In literature review section of this introduction, I have already presented the theoretical meaning of these concepts such as the way consumption has been defined by social theorists. The chapter dives into the relation between consumption and work, the meaning and connotation of consumption as seen by the respondents in their life-context. It deals with the ways in which identity is linked with the act of consumption. It also looks at the anxieties that are related to the act of consumption and ways in which people address them. Privileges and anxieties go hand in hand and attempt has been made to capture this through the narratives presented in the chapter.

In chapter four on 'Work and Life Choices: Tales of Single Professional Women and Men', I have mapped the lives of women who are going for late marriage or

postponing marriage as a conscious decision or matter of choice. In cases of these single women, I have looked at their decision of living independently away from home in a new city and the ways in which they benefitted from it. Several of these women I met are aware of their privileged position as those who can exercise some freedom. This has also resulted in changing or challenging the stereotyped gender roles. I have included the narratives of men regarding their views on singlehood and marriage and the dilemmas that they face in negotiating their choices with their families. This chapter has made an attempt to understand the relationship between paid work and marriage/ singlehood by focussing on ways in which work helps people refashion their identity outside conventional institutions.

Chapter five is called 'On Domesticity and Relationships: Parenting among Dual Career Couples' in which I have looked at parenting ideas, practices and tried to identify some common patterns. It addresses the expectations of parents from their children. As time is a constraint while money is more than there ever was, attitudes towards parenting is bound to change. Some parents believe that a child has to be geared to a lot of activities to sustain modern life and its possible future uncertainties, more so in the absence of joint family. This chapter has looked at the ways in which dual career couples manage their career and parenting roles and the challenges they face on a quotidian basis. It looks at the role of outsourcing child-rearing activities to nannies and the importance of grandparents in an urban nuclear family context. The thesis ends with a conclusion that summarises the main findings of each of the chapters, an overall analysis based on the themes that emerged, limitations and possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGY: THE PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE OF DOING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Epistemology is about how we know things. It is a branch of philosophy that addresses the question of the nature, sources and limits of knowledge. Knowledge here is propositional knowledge – distinct from 'belief' in that it requires that we give reasons for saying that something is so and can potentially convince others. Again, the question arises also in the natural sciences; but they have shared standards of evidence, argument and logic. This is not so in the social sciences, with some social scientists calling for objective evidence akin to that of the natural sciences, while others insist that other forms of knowledge are possible. For example, a common device in positive social science is to contrast 'myth', as widely shared belief, with 'reality', revealed by empirical research; the task of the social scientist is to expose this falsehood and discard what is not empirically verifiable or falsifiable. Many anthropologists, however, would reject this way of proceeding, on the grounds that myths and beliefs are data as valid as any other and that we have no business telling other people (especially in other cultures) that their construction of the world is wrong, as opposed to merely different (Porta and Keating 2008: 22).

As social scientists, we are aware of the different standpoints from which social sciences research is undertaken. Positivists believe that reality is out there and is knowable. The subject and object are different from each other. A researcher can study a phenomenon objectively without getting affected by it or affecting it. The emphasis has been on arriving at probabilistic causal natural laws and these principles have derived from scientific methods as that of the natural sciences. As Durkheim had argued, sociologists should aim at understanding social facts which are external, general and constraining on the individual and this is done in the same way as natural scientists study physical world. The other methodological approach to research is termed as "Interpretivist" in which the subject and object are linked with one another. It espouses that there is nothing like objective reality out there but reality can be known from the human subject and her interpretation of the world around her. Though they believe that reality can be known, but it is not separate from human subject. The form of knowledge here as argued by Porta and Keating (2008) is contextual

knowledge. The third kind of approach is called the "Humanist" approach which is almost on the other end of the spectrum from the positivist one. In this reality is not knowable and the focus is on human subjectivity. It propounds that no objective knowledge is possible and "the form of knowledge that is acquired is empathetic in nature" (Ibid: 24).

In terms of methodology, I draw from the "Interpretivist" position which is part of the wider school of thought called "social constructionism" within social sciences influenced by Weberian sociology. Weber's (1946) idea of *verstehen* or interpretative method was one in which he argued against the objective and value neutral methods of positivists such as Marx and Durkheim. He instead argued that all social phenomena can be studied by reducing them to their individual constituents because it is only individuals who think and act. To him, individual interpretation was an important aspect of knowledge.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), this methodology focusses more on understanding (*verstehen)* the meanings that motivate the social actors to act or behave in a way they do and not rely on universal laws external to the actors. According to Porta and Keating (2008), it is subjective knowledge which forms the core of this knowledge. Any social phenomenon can be understood only by looking at individuals' perceptions of the world they inhabit. As Clifford Geertz (1973: 4) argued:

"Social science is not an experimental science in search for laws but an interpretative science in search of meanings".

In this approach to research, the focus is not on the discovering laws about causal relationships between variables but to understand the nature of human behaviour and its diversity. One gets informed by different theories but it is not important to establish it prior to research. Arriving at a prediction of human behaviour, laws that are general and universal is not seen as possible because human beings change in time and space. As Bourdieu has argued, "practice has a logic which is not that of logic" (Bourdieu 1977: 109).

2.1 METHODS IN INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS

In case of my own research, my objective has not been to establish a causal relation between work, lifestyle and social relations but specific explanation of cases in which

these three concepts could be interrelated. For instance, I have looked at the ways in which work in the contemporary corporate (service) sector as seen by single professional women enables them to have financial autonomy which becomes the springboard on which they negotiate pressures of marriage coming from families who they live away from in the city. Their lifestyle, their relationship with their families, their own social location in terms of class, caste and gender and their professional work all have a bearing on one another.

> The assumption of mutual influence among the many factors at work in any case discourages an attempt to reason about causes and effect or to generalise. Understanding reality implies immersing ourselves in the information about the actors in question and using both empathy and imagination to construct credible accounts of their sense of identity' (Smith 2004: 43 as cited in Porta and Keating 2008: 30).

In most cases, there is no rule of using exclusive methods for positivist research and others for the interpretive research. However, the latter mostly resorts to methods of data collection such as unstructured interviews, narratives, life histories, ethnographic observation. The presentation of data is usually in the form of thick narratives with excerpts from text as illustrations. This is what I have drawn from for the present research. The questions I needed to address called for an understanding subjective experiences of people, their perceptions, negotiations, aspirations and habits. I have used a combination of ethnographic observations, semi structured interviews and narrative interviews as tools which place importance to the individual and his/her interpretation of reality. Use of a combination of these techniques helped in balancing depth and width of qualitative information on the subjective experiences of the people concerned. It was necessary for me to meet the respondents more than once for at least 3-4 hours each. I met them in their homes, offices, during lunch-break or post worktime, on weekdays and weekends. Some non-participant observation was done in office spaces while mostly it was conducted at homes and outside of work and home such as recreation and leisure spaces. I interviewed not just the working professionals, but their family members in order to get their perspectives and stories. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed later.

2.1.1 ETHNOGRAPHY

It is a school of thought and a specific method of data collection. My research called for an ethnographic understanding of the ways in which people are involved in

construction and maintenance of meanings which guide their actions. I have tried to obtain an understanding of the ways in which my respondents view their own social world, their culture and ways in which it informs their actions. When I say culture I mean different social settings such as workplace, home, social/leisure spaces and so on.

Ethnography is about the emic or insider's perspective. It is also an approach that allowed for multiple levels of interpretations of reality throughout a study. According to Fettermen (1998), ethnographic research is based on phenomenologically oriented paradigm. People are believed to act on their individual perceptions. The subjective reality that people see is as real as an objectively defined and measured reality. These kind of studies are inductive in nature and approach is based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967). My own research also draws from the same school of thought. It is because I have looked at the ways in which people make sense of their own lives − work, their lifestyle and relationships. Their own interpretation of their reality is what I have gathered through use of different modes of data collection such as in-depth interviews, narratives and observation as happens in an ethnographic research. It is inductive in nature because I did not have a hypothesis which I wanted to test. However, it is not a long drawn ethnography as in the traditional ethnographic approach. As Fettermen (1998) had argued, often it is not possible to conduct that kind of an ethnography in studying one's own culture. It is also not possible to do that in contemporary urban world where time is a constraint, more so when it comes to a research that deals with urban, working professionals.

2.1.1.1 GAINING ENTRY AND ACCESS TO THE FIELD

Ethnographers have pointed out the challenges that lie in gaining access to the field. In case of studying institutions, it has been argued that access is challenging and it is restricted even if it is obtained. Robert Burgess (1991:43) suggests that access is *"negotiated and renegotiated throughout the research process"*. He further states that 'access is based on sets of relationships between the researcher and the researched, established throughout a project". Ethnographers have also pointed out that the study of elites posits different kinds of challenges. According to Hertz and Imber (1993), the study of elites begins with the first challenge of access as they are in a position to refuse to be part of research.

Though I am not studying elites exclusively, but I am looking at people who are in a social location which puts them in a position of power with respect to me. I have seen in the course of my fieldwork that upper middle class professionals who had agreed to meet me had done so on two accounts. First, I had started out with contacts that were suggested by four of my friends who were already working in the corporate sector for the last 5 years or more. Second, some of them were curious about the idea of a doctoral student from JNU wanting to speak to them about their lives. Most of them imagined it to be a few minutes' interaction like a survey would take. They were surprised on getting to know that I intended to meet them for a few hours, to say the least, possibly over multiple meetings. The real surprise came in when I explained to them that I would like to spend time with them in their workplace, wherever possible and in their homes and even in their moments of leisure/ relaxation/ outing. While some of them expressed some discomfort with this kind of a request (intrusion, in other words), some did not deny access but were unable to work it out owing to real time constraints. A few of them did express interest in allowing me in and also made efforts to work things around my requirements.

The idea of a "fuzzy field" (Marcus 1995) in terms of sociological ethnography is valid here. In an urban set up, there is no consistent field. The use of methods are not neat. Not all of my respondents who were interviewed could be observed. I used my own sense and judgement to choose some of the interviewees for observation based on their availability in terms of time, interest and my own requirements. All those who were observed in one or more setting were interviewed but not all those who were interviewed were observed. Sometimes it was not practically possible to have a consistent and continuous period of interaction with respondents owing to their work and personal commitments. I made myself totally available at all days in any given week and at all times. Some interviews were called off and some confirmed in the last minute so I had to rush from one place to another accordingly. Delhi metro and Uber/ Ola cabs were my constant companion that helped me navigate through Delhi and NCR. There were some interesting observations I made while commuting. This window of time is valuable for my respondents in multiple ways – they respond to work emails; read/ prepare for a meeting or presentation; coordinate work on the phone; make personal calls to family/ friends; give instructions to maid/ cook/ nanny in case of women; this window of time acts as a leisure moment in which they may

watch online content/ listen to music/ use social media and so on. While it was not possible to strike up a conversation in many instances owing to my fellow passengers being caught up with their phones, in the cases I did I learnt that the commute-time often becomes hectic but on occasions it is not, it is an opportune 'me-time' when they are by themselves and away from their pressing responsibilities in a physical sense. It is akin to the 'flight-mode' which is an interim period when one is just away from both home and work, though one's mind may be fully preoccupied.

The flexibility that ethnography has acquired over the years as a result of its varied use across different cultures, settings, disciplines and the different ends to which it has been put to use enabled me to be flexible and avail of the different opportunities it now gives researchers. In my study, I have conducted observation, a mix of participant and non-participant immersion across different physical spaces such as the home, leisure spaces (parties/ gatherings, eating out, drinking out, shopping), workplace and also while respondents were on the move. The specific questions relevant to the field and the social actors are often subject to alterations with more interaction with the field. It is not ethnography as in traditional anthropology as I have mentioned at the beginning of this section.

> Unlike traditional cultural anthropology sociological ethnography in and of complex societies rarely ever deals with a clearly bounded group in a single place. Its research objects are derived from theoretical knowledge and questions. Therefore the field of sociological ethnography cannot be found somewhere out there, but is constructed by the researcher. Moreover, a field for sociological ethnography is most likely not restricted to one observational site. Its contours emerge only during the research process as the ethnographer traces informants across multiple sites that turn out to become relevant in the light of the research question. Sociological ethnography has to deal with what we call "fuzzy fields," that is fields without clear boundaries with regard to many dimensions. From a symbolic interactionist vantage point we conceive of ethnographic fields as "social worlds" and these are formed by "sets of common or joint activities or concerns bound together by a network of communications (Marcus 1995: 36).

2.2 REFLEXIVITY: THE RESEARCHER AND THE RESEARCHED AS PART OF THE SAME SOCIAL WORLD

Reflexivity in the social sciences and particularly in ethnographic research is like having a constant conversation with oneself through the entire process of research. It

is about taking cognisance of the fact that researcher and the researched are part of the same social world and the entire process from selecting a topic to modes of inquiry to analysis is not neat and it requires examination and reflections. These reflections are part of data as much as the information or insights that were collected in the field. As Hertz (1997) argues, a reflexive researcher does not just report the findings as 'facts' but as interpretations of experiences that one has in the field and also questions the ways in which such interpretations arise. Broadly, from a methodological point of view, this was a move away from the façade of 'value-neutrality' in research which was espoused by positivistic method in which the researcher would study the world around them as external investigators, neither taking a stand nor imposing their own thoughts.

> Maintaining the facade of neutrality prevents a researcher from ever examining his or her own cultural assumptions or personal experiences. Subjective disclosures by researchers allows the reader to better understand why a research area has been selected, how it was studied, and by whom (Berg 2001:140).

Subjective motivational factors of why a particular topic was selected and how it was studied and the inconsistencies in the process and other such "true confessions" (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979) are what makes a research reflexive in nature.

2.2.1 WHY WAS THIS TOPIC SELECTED?

I have witnessed a lot of conversations within friends' circle and family about the ways in which concept of work has changed in India and the consequences of it for life in general. More and more women have joined the workforce; remuneration is way higher than what our parents' generation saw; work timing is no more 9 to 5 but extends to evening, weekends and in fact it is 24/7 due to technology such as smart phones; people have higher disposable incomes due to which they can buy homes at a younger age, indulge in leisure activities, and travel abroad more than Indians ever did before. The work environment in MNCs is similar to corporations in the west which tend to focus on professionalism be it in terms of formal rules, formal attire and specialised division of labour. More and more educated, middle class young men and women are migrating to the city and living away from families, either alone or with friends/ colleagues. From time to time, I would hear my friends and their family

members discuss that youngsters are getting married late and even questioning marriage and parenthood, questions like - Is it necessary? Is it meant for everybody? Can there be an idea of love and partnership beyond the institution of marriage and so on.

On the other hand, one also hears people lament on the declining strength of binding norms that traditional India had be it in terms of religion, marriage and family. It is common to hear that divorce is on the rise in India possibly due to more and more women entering the workforce, not being able to devote enough attention to the family, having financial autonomy so more control over her own life so no more compromising for the sake of family and so on. The list is endless. All these quotidian conversations, opinions and assumptions made me eager to have a better understanding of our times and lives – the contemporary, the urban, the middle class lives and issues that they grapple with. I was interested to understand a world which is not that of the 'Other'. I have more similarities than differences with respect to the universe I wanted to study – I belong to an upper caste, middle class background and had the privilege of going to a private school and an elite college in Delhi University followed by JNU. I had friends working in the corporate sector. I worked in a private research firm after my graduation, though it was not a large MNC or an American firm as most of my respondents work in. But I was aware of the work environment, the fact that the ways to enter the job market is not formal established examination system but works either through campus recruitment in top colleges/ institutes or through social networking. Due to part familiarity and part curiosity I narrowed my focus to corporate service sector work and try to understand the ways in which people's overall lives are shaped by this kind of work and also shape it in return.

I had certain biases which were coming from my own assumptions about them and from my reading on modernity, largely from critical theory, sociological theories of social class, lifestyle and consumerism. To begin with, I thought they would be reckless consumers with a myopic vision in life where acquiring financial wealth, social and cultural capital, going up the ladder in terms of career and social mobility was central to their lives. I assumed that most of them would be politically conservative, strident opposers to ideas of socialist state and financial planning. Some of my assumptions came to be true, such as most of them believe in the idea of 'merit' but this idea of merit is not linked to privileges of caste, wealth and social capital.

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They are concerned about the effects of global warming but not cognisant of the role that their organizations and they play in increasing carbon footprints. They are not in agreement to any opposition to development projects such as dams, malls but not many engage with the idea of livelihood and displacement.

Reflexivity in social sciences and its importance makes me recognise my assumptions, values and biases. I was aware of these thoughts, was aware that they are 'biases' right at the outset. But I was also aware of the need to be as open minded as possible knowing well that these biases would colour whatever data or information I would gather in the field. In that case, it could be possible that I would end up seeing only what I wanted to see and that was not something I could afford to do in my journey as a research scholar. Since I took the methodological position of interpretive, hermeneutic understanding of subjective experiences of people I was in full agreement with the idea of research being a reflexive and creative endeavour. I did not have to hide anything, there was no need to pretend to be a 'value-neutral' scientific researcher who collects heaps of data and analyses it by being affectively neutral. The first thing I did was to acknowledge my biases, write them down and share it with my fellow researchers and my supervisor. My training as a sociologist enabled me to approach my respondents, talk to them, observe them, listen more and speak less. At no point did I impose my views on them or question/ problematize their core beliefs. However, when asked about my views on a subject, I would not refrain from a conversation. I would encourage them to finish narrating their stories, their views and their feelings, then proceed to share my own only when asked. Some respondents were more than willing to engage in a healthy debate. I did engage with them, not in the middle of the interview but towards the end of it. There were times when we decided to go to a café or a restaurant to speak more freely, outside of the formal interview setting, with the recorder off. A lot of interesting and rich information happened to emerge from these informal interactions. I had sought their permission to use that information in my thesis, if need be, assuring them of complete confidentiality. Most of them seemed to have no problems with that idea. I was not merely interested in proving or disproving critical theory or other theories which offer a critical understanding of formation of social class, the elites, the new middle class and issues around consumption and consumerism. I had no hypothesis. While some of the assumptions that I had about my respondents were not untrue, it was realised in

the process of fieldwork. I wanted the voice of the respondent to be heard, over and above the voice of the social critic. That has been my methodological position as is required from one who engages with narrative inquiry and the 'interactive voice' (discussed in the narrative section) and in general keeping with the inductive interpretivist tradition. Simply put, I was interested in my respondents' views and perceptions of their own world.

The flexibility and my ability to listen to my respondents enabled me to get an insider's perspective which also challenged my own understanding of my research topic, respondents, their lives and my perception of the world. Research not only offered me a glimpse into the lives of my respondents but also enabled me to question my own assumptions and perceptions of their lives and my own. A researcher is supposed to immerse herself in the field. As I have argued before, some approaches place emphasis on detaching oneself emotionally from the field so as to do full justice to the 'object' one is studying. It is akin to a scientist who studies her object in an objective manner or a doctor who performs an operation successfully precisely because she is not related or emotionally attached to the patient. So her hands don't shiver when she is operating on someone as emotions are nowhere in the radar. Other schools of thought espouse that a researcher is also human and in context of social sciences, what she is studying is also human. So one's thoughts, emotions and biases will creep in and the best way to deal with them is to accept and own them up. Once one is aware of one's bias or one's position with respect to the issue or object, she will know how to work around it. Feeling empathy or relating to one's respondents help one understand their situation better. I feel one goes through or does both. There are days when one is detached and focusses on getting the data. There are days and occasions I can understand what I hear when I actually feel (or empathise with) what my respondents are saying.

One of the things that I remember discussing was issues around payment of monthly EMIs. Most of my respondents had loans – home, car, personal or two of them or all three of them. Majority of my respondents are migrants. They have, what they call, 'started from scratch' in a new city far away from what they had known to be home. Initially, they did not have the luxury of a car or a house in Delhi. Some of the married ones have made arrangements to bring their parents over to their current location. The singles are managing on their own in the city, either sharing their

apartment with friends or colleagues or a sibling/ cousin. Most of them are not comfortable seeking financial help from family. Some of them need to send money home. Those in their late 20s have just started to experience managing life and daily expenditure around paying EMIs. Those in their late 30s were more used to managing. They had also reached a position/ designation and salary at their work where they were able to pay EMIs and have a decent life which included the expenses of running the household, the expenses of the child and maintenance of all members of the family in terms of fulfilling their basic needs and leisure. But there was nobody who said that the EMI didn't pinch them or sometimes made them feel desperate about not earning enough.

Each time they heard of downsizing and other cost-cutting measures they are enveloped with fear and insecurity, though they may not openly express it or even share it with their family members. These observations made me reflect on my own assumptions about their lives being easy owing to their privileges. While one cannot deny the privileges, their anxieties and challenges throw light on the nature of contemporary life in general and work in particular. I distinctly remember a respondent's father (retired engineer who served in a public sector undertaking) expressing concern over his son's insecure job, saying that two of his son's seniors were laid off at work. He said alcohol and tobacco companies are reaping profits owing to unstable nature of work in private sector and rising inflation. His discomfort was visible with the fact that while the younger generation earn more at entry level today than he could only dream of a few years before retirement, their jobs are insecure and not even a senior manager or a vice president of a company knows if his job would stay tomorrow. These are significant changes in society and he was surprised that not much public debates have ever occurred on this issue. When I spoke to the son, he did not express his anxieties in the first interaction but did so in the subsequent one. One of the ways in which he deals with it (other than drinking and smoking) is to contemplate on possible ideas around an independent venture or a start-up[12]. While the initial few years would be a struggle in a financial sense, future

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[12] As per a report by *Grant Thornton* in association with *ASSOCHAM* a start-up is a new business venture which is launched by an individual or group of individuals based on innovation and technology. The objective is to develop, produce or distribute a new product, process or a service for people to consume. Its functioning depends fully on the kind of funding it receives and it is usually considered a start-up if it has revenue limited to a certain amount (Rs 50 crore as per Infosys co-founder) and is in the initial stage of business within the first three years of its operation.

would be more secure than what it currently is if the venture were to successfully take off.

2.2.2 STUDYING UP

The concept of "studying-up" in social anthropology and sociology emerged with the recognition within the discipline that ethnographers need to study not just people who are disempowered or have less power and privileges than the researcher, but also those above them in the social hierarchy. Ethnography had emerged with colonial rulers employing anthropologists to study the 'savages' in order to administer them. Till date, most of the anthropological and sociological accounts tend to "study-down", understanding the lives of the marginalized such as the rural and urban poor, marginalized castes, religious and ethnic minorities, victim of different kinds of structural injustice and violence. Scholars like Nader (1972) argued that studying up would highlight different sets of challenges of ethnography and ways to overcome them. It would also give a more varied and balanced perspective to the tool and the overall methodology.

Through my own research on understanding different aspects of the lives of corporate professionals in the Indian capital city, I encountered the possibilities and limitations of studying up. Getting access to the offices and time of my respondents was one of the biggest hurdles and I realized that they were well within their means to avoid or turn down my requests. At every step, I felt that my respondents were actually doing me a favour by giving me their time and inputs (thereby the need for all researchers to be mindful of it no matter who they are researching on). The significance of several material, visible factors came to the fore that shape the nature of interactions such as social class, social and cultural capital, power dynamics and other specific details that the above boils down to such as the way one dresses, body language, spoken language. These act as means that I worked with as a researcher in order to feel at ease in an intimidating environment, to be able to convince my respondents of the need for such research and also to be, in some ways, accepted by them in order for them to open up to me. Reflexivity is an integral part of sociological research as I acknowledge my own position of privilege compared to many others who would, perhaps, have more constraints in gaining access to the lives of people who wield more power than them. The fact that I come from an upper caste, middle class, English educated background who had the privilege of studying in a private school

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and college enabled me have a few friends in the corporate sector who I could approach. My social location enabled me to be aware of the ways in which I should dress, talk and behave in a setting which should not recast me easily as an 'outsider'. My respondents let me in into their lives because I was coming from a known source, in many ways I could dress and speak like them and had the means to order coffee or food at an upmarket restaurant, if need be (though that was mostly difficult owing to our paltry scholarship money).

I ask myself if the concept of studying up can be further problematized by highlighting not just privileges, power or lack of it but also of hierarchy of disciplines and professions. Social sciences (especially in public universities) in India have had their struggles of finding acceptance and legitimacy by the state, the market, thereby people in general who often fail to understand the purpose and utility of such disciplines. This is true in a global capitalist economy when people and objects, borrowing from Marxian theory, are reduced to their "exchange value" or market value. In the backdrop of the anti-national debacle that occurred at Jawaharlal Nehru University in February 2016, where the running media narrative was to question the contribution of the university and its students in lieu of their education based on tax-payer's money, doing research with the corporate professionals both enabled and disabled possibilities of exchange of ideas in varied ways. It made me rethink of the scope, value, 'utility' of the discipline, research in general and possibilities of sociological research beyond academics and policy research (questions like "Will you get a corporate job after completion of PhD?" meaning why else would a researcher do a PhD on corporate work and life?). Studying up in this case involved studying people who were in a higher social class position than me. Even professionally, they were 'up' because they were in professions which happen to be more 'useful', merit-driven, contributing directly to the nation's 'growth' in economic terms, thereby more respectable and better remunerated. These were the realities within which I placed myself and my research and tried to find ways to negotiate the world I intended to explore.

2.3 MY JOURNEY AS A QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER: EXPERIENCE OF USING MIXED METHODS

Other than acknowledging one's biases, another established way to deal with biases in research is the method of Triangulation in which different methods are used to look at the same phenomenon to capture as many aspects of it as possible, something which I have already discussed in my section on multiple methods, namely, observation, semi-structured and narrative interviews. The inconsistencies or gaps in one method or tool could be offset by another one. I followed the funnelling approach, having a certain width of data and gradually narrowing it to specificity. I started out with semi-structured interviews which were in some instances accompanied by or followed by a combination of participant and non-participant observation. In the last leg of my fieldwork I had a few, very specific questions in mind which I explored by the method of the narrative interviews.

> The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. 0bjective reality can never be captured. We know a thing only through its representations. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Flick 2002: 227).

> The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 5)

Time has been a constraint. Since they are full time working professionals with long work-hours, work from home after work-hours and travel, I had anticipated that time would be a problem in this research. The fact that they were hard pressed for time themselves, the fact that they planned their lives in a way to be able to meet this challenge, which different people did in different ways such as multi-tasking, outsourcing work; seeking help from parents, friends, using institutional arrangements (such as crèche, day boarding in case of working parents) itself goes to show the importance of time and the consequences of lack of it. Hence my own flexibility to work around their availability and convenience had a bearing on how I was managing my own time. For instance, although I was in fieldwork mode for months, it often

happened that I was doing actual observation or interviews two to three days in a week depending on their free time, which in most cases were weekends.

Not only was time a constraint here but access to people especially in their work-settings. I had to make special requests and wait, sometimes for weeks, to be able to find someone who was ready to let me interview her in her office or let me observe her workplace. In most cases, my request for observing the work-stations were turned down. Early on in my research I understood that the corporate sector is closed to outsiders. There is surveillance not just of outsiders but also of the employees. There were people I approached who could not meet me because their company policy prohibits them from talking to outsiders about their work. Telling them that I was interested to know their lives in general did not help either. Companies generate data for their business growth and it is commonplace for their data to get stolen by their competitors. Data privacy is a central requirement due to which the employees have to be cautious about their social interactions outside of work. Whenever I could take help from friends and acquaintances to enter an organisation I did. In those cases, I had access to the reception area, canteen, in some cases the conference rooms but not beyond that. It was only in two offices where I could spend a few hours observing employees at their work stations.

My study was not a closed-site ethnography of a corporate office but more about getting to understand and deep dive into certain aspects of the lives of people who worked in such spaces, thereby trying to arrive at a relation between work and home. An ethnography based on long observations, immersing oneself completely in the field by living in a close-knit space was not possible. I had to find different ways to get glimpses into the different spaces they were part of. To give an example, the bright side of the fact that I could in some cases, meet my respondents only on the weekends gave me a glimpse into their routine on their non-working days, thereby giving me a chance to make observations and also know from them their ideas around leisure. It gave me a fuller picture of their lives.

Observation entailed spaces such as office, office-canteens/ cafes, respondents' homes, leisure activities and moments such as shopping, eating out, hanging out with friends/ family, drinking out or at home during get-togethers parties and so on. The semi-structured interviews was the tool I started the fieldwork with. I had a few topics which I wanted to explore though the use of such interviews. It included different

aspects of their life such as their background, their education; the world of their work - their entry into the corporate world, their routine, the challenges at work, the highs and lows of their profession; their leisure and interests/ hobbies; their dreams and aspirations; their fears and insecurities; the relationships in their life with their spouses/ partner, children, parents, friends and colleagues in terms of the time they have for them, the things they do with them, their expectations from these relations, etc. Overall, this leg of the fieldwork was exploratory and interviews were long and open ended. Most of them happened in the course of multiple meetings.

After the first few months of depth-interviews and some observation, certain interesting themes came up which called for more detailed exploration. I used the narrative interviewing method in this leg to explore a few very specific aspects of their lives. Like the technique demands, it was done, in most cases, over multiple meetings which were dispersed across time and physical setting. It was possible to deep dive and collect stories of events and experiences after they had become comfortable with me and initial rapport was built. In a few cases, I approached the same respondents I had interviewed earlier to deep dive on specific events or experiences in their lives. The initial exploration about varied aspects of their lives using the method of semi-structured interviews opened the gates for narrative exploration as I already had an idea of who they were, where they were coming from and what they wanted from their lives. This context made it easier for me to place the narratives that were coming from them. So the width of data that I collected in the semi-structured interviews were useful and it set the context in which I understood the specific narratives. So one method of data collection fed into the other. This happened in an organic manner as it made sense and enabled me to get the kind of information I was looking for.

In most other instances of narrative interviewing, I interviewed new respondents and the focus was on specific questions that I had in mind. Probe questions were asked to aid the narration and the detailing of it. For instance, in addition to exploring different aspects of the role of my respondents as parents in a dual income household in the course of a semi-structured interview, I conducted narrative interviews with a few couples specifically to understand the ways in which they managed parenting responsibilities. This particular style of questioning required me to elicit anecdotes and enabled me to understand the way they think, behave and feel through instances

from their own lives. It was not just their opinion that was important to know but detailed stories that would bring out the nuances I was looking for. To obtain further details and for a deep dive into the ways in which people actually were in their natural settings, I insisted on spending time with them in their homes to observe the way they go about interacting with their children. To do this, I made myself present during evenings at home when their children would be back from their play-school/ school and the parents would also be back from work. I also spent time with them during weekends when they would have more time together.

Let me provide an example of the way in which I got a more complete picture of the ways in which my respondents behaved as parents by combining different tools of data collection such as interview (in which they said what they do) and observation (what they actually do). Vinay and Anindita have a 3 year old son who goes to a crèche on workdays and soon would start going to pre-school. Both of them are engineers and work for MNCs in Noida. When I asked them their views on the differences between them and their own parents with respect to parenting, one of the things that they said is that their parents would not buy them things they would get obstinate about. Gifts were given only on certain occasions and each demand made by the child was not necessarily met. They feel working parents today who are hard pressed for time compensate for it by fulfilling very wish or demand of the child, be it big or small. This is something that they like to consciously stay away from. They feel their son would know the value of things only when he is not pampered to the extent of being spoilt. On two different occasions, I went out with them on weekends to a nearby shopping mall. On both these occasions, their son got cranky at some point and began asking for a toy at Hamley's store (which they were passing by) on one occasion and chocolates on another. They had a long list of items to buy from different stores in the mall and then also make it to a friend's housewarming party later in the day. The little boy's pestering increased and on refusal from his mother to buy him his desired item, his crankiness went up manifold. The mother looked visibly embarrassed of his behaviour in front of other people and gave in to his demand. Later when we were having a conversation, she told me:

"Children are so clever these days…you know at home he (her son) is quieter and does not demand much. He is well behaved at the crèche also…the moment we go to the mall he starts misbehaving. He understands that parents will not say no there!"

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The point that I want to make is not that the couple was not saying the whole truth or that there was an inconsistency in what she believed she does and what she actually does. I made a similar observation in my interaction with another couple and their child. The sense that I got was that some parents were conscious of the ways in which material abundance was a hindrance in the way of their children imbibing a sense of value for things, for money, of them developing an understanding of the effort that goes in making money and to use it wisely. In today's age when children are surrounded by material goods and are brought up in families that can afford more than their parents could, it is all the more important to take small steps in helping their children realise this so that they can be responsible in the future. However, in this same glitzy world of fancy material objects parents talk about children being well-mannered, to not come across as spoilt. For instance, cranky behaviour in public places, talking loudly, not taking permission before touching things especially in the presence of others are not at all seen favourably and parents feel they are responsible if the child misbehaves. It was a combination of observation followed by further conversations/ discussions around lines of inquiry that observation threw up which enabled me to know more. In a social environment where certain kinds of manners and etiquettes are unsaid rules that children need to follow, parents in a situation as stated above, end up giving in to the demands of their children and it may happen unconsciously. This need for the children to be well mannered, and not come across as completely spoilt is something which a lot of people I met spoke about and they believe it is dependent on the way a child is brought up. They feel the failure to raise children in a desirable way is a reflection of unsuccessful parenting. Often in such cases, the point of comparison were westerners and their well-mannered children.

In some interviews, there was an interplay between semi-structured questions and narrative style questions and responses within the same unit of interview with the same person. This depended on the kind of topic that was being discussed. I was flexible and did not intervene when someone started narrating a certain event that had happened in her life at some point in the middle of exploring a specific topic within the semi-structured format. It was interesting in the way it threw light on a few things. For instance, in a particular interview I asked a single woman who works in a finance company about her last promotion and she told me how she had worked for it and was ecstatic about it when she heard it from her boss. That led her to discuss the impact

that it had on her personal life and it was in the form of an uninterrupted narration. Certain sections of the interview could be seen exactly as a narrative interview with a beginning, middle and end; with focus on a particular event or experience and questions only to elaborate it further such as "how did you feel" or "what happened next" and so on. These sections were very detailed and long and it generated insights which would go missing had I been solely focussed on completing my check-list of questions. This I consciously allowed to happen, more in cases when the option of multiple meetings looked bleak at the outset.

Some of the observation moments were designed and planned while some happened to be more spontaneous and natural. For instance, after spending a few hours with a respondent at his home, talking to him and getting to know his life, I was invited to meet him the following week at a coffee shop with his wife and friends and then they headed for shopping which I accompanied them to. The weekend leisure moment could be observed and understood in addition to the information which they had verbally mentioned to me in the course of the interview. While he had mentioned that shopping for him was just about getting things he needed from the mall since it was convenient and fast as different brands were available at one place, I observed that he went through several stores, looked at offer items and fresh arrivals of apparel from different brands and purchased the things he actually needed to buy only in the end. Being an online shopper, he mostly shops from home, but when he goes out, he does not mind spending time in an unplanned manner. Later he said that some of the best buys he has done has been a result of such unplanned outings. Buying things for himself and the house is seen by him as one of the best ways to unwind from hectic weekday schedule.

> Where can one possibly go in a city like Delhi in the summer heat? You either go to a movie theatre or to a restaurant or to a mall for shopping. Even if there is nothing to shop for there is window shopping. The entire week I am working and it gets very hectic. I don't feel like staying at home on all the weekends. Sometimes you can't come up with any creative idea or an activity to do, your friends may be traveling or busy with work. Then what do you do? Sometimes I feel it is a forced expenditure. Even when we friends meet, after a point we have to order drinks or something as we run out of topics to discuss. Best is to watch a movie together or a game.

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2.4 NARRATIVE INQUIRY

"Narrative is present in every age, in everyplace and in every society" (Barthes 1975: 79)

"Narrative offers biographical particulars as narrated by those who live them. Narrative is not just a form of text but a mode of thought" (Chase 2005: 656).

In qualitative research, narrative mode of thought, method of inquiry and data collection is important because it involves shaping of past experiences. It is a way of understanding social reality by focusing on one's own and others' actions. Chase (2005) argues that narratives help us understand not just what happened but also one's emotions, thoughts and interpretations. It also helps us point out uniqueness of action and not just the commonalities. In the case of many of the narrative research, the researchers view themselves as also the narrators as they develop interpretations and find ways to present ideas about the narratives (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

Narrative interview is considered a form of unstructured, in-depth interview with specific features. It is a form of interviewing that involves the generation of detailed stories of experience, not just generalized descriptions. Narrative Interview is classified as a qualitative research method (Bauer 2000). The importance of narratives in the social sciences draws from its movement away from positivist enquiry and meta-theories like Marxism or structuralism. Narratives come in many forms, ranging from tightly bounded ones that recount specific past events (with clear beginnings, middles and ends), to narratives that traverse temporal and geographical space – biographical accounts that cover entire lives or careers (Riessman 2006). My research required the use of narratives so as to capture specific events and experiences in the life-trajectories of the working professionals. Conceptually, the idea of narrative interviewing is motivated by a critique of the question-response schema of most interviews. This method would enable me to get detailed life stories, experiences and perspectives. Drawing from C. Wright Mills (1959), narrative analysis can forge connections between personal biography and social structure – the individual and the social.

Narrative interviewing has more in common with contemporary ethnography than with mainstream social science interviewing practice that relies on discrete open-ended and/or fixed-response questions. "It is useful if we want to learn about

experience in all its complexity, details count: specific incidents, not general evaluations of experience. Narrative accounts require longer turns at talk than are typical in 'natural' conversation, certainly in mainstream research practice" *(Somekh and Lewin 2005: 157).*

2.4.1 DOING NARRATIVE INTERVIEWING

One of the conceptual shifts in qualitative research which has been discussed in the academia is the shift from looking at narrative research solely as the voice of the researcher, her interpretive authority and representation, there was a need felt and scope of looking at the interviewee as a narrator with their own stories to tell. However the role of the researcher is important as any research requires interpretation and in the light of my own work the voices of the interviewees is juxtaposed with my interpretation by using academic literature on similar areas in Indian context and also the world over. One cannot deny the fact that the researcher's questions and interruptions shape the narratives that eventually emerge. I take the position of an interview being a collaborative process of understanding social phenomena, experiences, thoughts, views and feelings from the narration offered by the primary narrator, i.e. the interviewee and then shaping of the narrative in terms of asking certain questions and interpreting the narratives against the backdrop of sociological literature by the secondary narrator that is the interviewer. It is about the ways in which my respondents create meaning out of different events in their life which needs to be presented in their voice. However, their stories need to be placed in a larger sociological context. Drawing from the typology offered by Chase (2005), my take would in some ways coincide with "interactive voice", a term which she uses that refers to a complex interaction of intersubjectivity between the researcher's and narrator's voices. In this researcher examines her voice, her own subjective position, social location and her personal experience as much as that of the respondent's. This is in some ways, different from an "authoritarian" voice of the researcher in which the two voices are kept separate through the process of interpretation. In a sociological approach which belongs to this type, the researcher may speak differently but not disrespectfully of the narrator's voice.

> If we take seriously the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration, then in depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories. By life stories, I mean

narratives about some life experience that is of deep and abiding interest to the interviewee. Furthermore, taking narrative seriously has consequences for how we use those life stories to pursue our sociological interests. As many have argued, narration is a complex social process, a form of social action that embodies the relation between narrator and culture. Taking narrative seriously means directing our attention to that process of embodiment, to what narrators accomplish as they tell their stories, and how that accomplishment is culturally shaped. A major contribution of narrative analysis is the study of general social phenomena through a focus on their embodiment in specific life stories (Ibid: 274).

Chase (2005) argues that interviews should elicit stories and not reports. In stories, the narrator has an important role to play while in reports, the interviewer has an upper hand on the way he constructs it. It is important to invite the interviewees to tell their stories and this is part of the interview process. In case of my own research, while conducting open ended in-depth interviews, I realised that some respondents were willing to share their life experiences through their stories and others were doing so on encouraging them. My in-depth interviews were eliciting responses about a variety of themes in the form of stories because I intended and worked towards letting my respondents narrate their experiences, thoughts, feelings and events in their lives. These points of examination call for stories in a qualitative exploratory kind of research. One of the ways I could do so was using everyday language and not sociological language. Several times in the course of different interviews, respondents would answer in general, more abstract sense in terms of what people generally think and do. There were times when I struggled to make them talk about their own specific, personal anecdotes. I would elicit responses by asking them "Tell me what you think about it' or 'please give me an instance from your own life" and so on. Once they would understand that I was interested in knowing their journeys, they would narrate them. It also depended on the rapport that was built with them which became stronger the more I met. The relationship that we establish with our respondents has a bearing on the quality of their responses to our questions.

Chase (Ibid.) quoted examples of a research done by Sacks (1992) in which she tries to establish a relation between women's place in their families, what they were socialised to believe in and their modes of resistance to oppression at work. Sacks was able to do so by treating participants as equals, as people who are able to analyse the

social factors that influenced and shaped their own lives. She was asking sociological questions and she was getting sociological answers. But it did not provide her with much depth because while she was able to get how social impacted the personal, she was not able to get how people actually led their lives. So she shifted her focus to personal stories and encouraged her respondents to do so. When she did that, she would ask them about their childhood experiences, about how their parents would treat them at home, about the different responsibilities at home which gave an insight into the sense of empowerment and independence that their families taught them. When these women were ill-treated at work, they were able to resist it by voicing their opposition. It is the personal stories about their childhood, about their parents and later narratives about work which gave her an insight into the relationship between what women learnt at home and their behaviour at work.

I had realised that the interview questions should not shift the focus away from the people and their experiences. It should encourage them to talk about it. For instance, if my larger research question is to understand the ways in which professional work has a bearing on single women's sense of identity, which is a sociological question, the questions posed to these women should not be sociological. I was interested in understanding their lives, their family background, their dreams, their entry into the corporate world and their lives in the city as single women. All these areas of exploration called for narration of anecdotes, of events, experiences, thoughts and feelings. For instance, instead of asking:

"Do you think your views on marriage have something to do with your career commitments"*?*

I asked questions like:

"The last time we met you spoke about your close friend who is about to get married and you two would often discuss your individual opinion on it…what do you feel are the good things and not-so-good things about marriage? I am interested to know your views on it".

In my first two weeks of interviewing I had asked the first question and while I was getting answers, but I could sense that they were not bringing out the respondent's personal experiences and her associated feelings and it was also not easy for her to answer in an anecdotal style. It was expressed in more general, abstract manner.

Listening to the audio recording after the first week enabled me to re-examine my style of questioning. In the next set of interviews with the same person and subsequently with other respondents, I changed my questions and also phrased them in a more personal language which not only brought out richer narratives, but also made my narrators more interested in the interaction. There were instances when they said they wanted to meet me and tell me more about a few topics which we had discussed earlier as they later remembered more instances which they wanted to narrate. In some cases, they would want to talk more at length but were unavailable owing to work-related travel. In some such cases, they were more than willing to talk on the phone or through WhatsApp, which we did. Since time has been an unswerving constraint in this research owing to the nature of the work they do, I intended to make the most of every kind of interaction that was practically possible.

2.4.2 NARRATIVES ARE SOCIOLOGICAL IN NATURE

Narratives are a rich source of information about the relationship between the particular and the general. Factors like social class, caste, gender, age and others are usually embedded in narratives. When a particular personal narrative is being narrated, it is a rich source of information about the ways in which the social, structural, institutional or cultural is embedded in the personal. One of my respondents Shweta, 31 year old sales and marketing professional working in an MNC in Gurgaon narrated her experiences of being a minority in her workplace. Her anecdotes contained several references to the ways in which she faced lot of curious questions for being a professional in a male-dominated sector of work. She would have to be careful each time she went for work-trips with her colleagues. During hotel stays, she would have early dinner and retire to her room before her male colleagues could invite her to drinks. One of them teased her by saying that she does not like to hang out with them because she thinks they are boring. Such reactions would make her feel uncomfortable. When I asked her what some of her apprehensions were, she said:

> I want to be safe. One can't be careful enough as a woman, especially in India. In the West, some women I know hang out freely with their male colleagues and bosses, go for drinks and discuss work in different leisure spaces. They do not miss out on important information that is often exchanged outside of workplace.
>
> M: How does that impact your work?

R: I have made a choice to not indulge in all this. When men are high, you can never be sure if you can trust them. My mother has told me not to worry about all this, she said never mind if you don't get promoted or a raise. You should be safe first! So you know what I do…I reach office on time, work sincerely, leave office on time and come straight home, don't know why I don't feel like spending time with my colleagues after office hours. Even if it means missing out on some opportunities. I have come to terms with it.

M: So am I right when I say that this is more so because there are very few women in your team?

R: Yes I am the only one in my team! It is a profession which is male dominated. People in general ask me what I do, they assume I would be in HR, they become a little surprised when they learn that I am in sales and marketing. If I had women in my team, I would probably be more social.

Shweta's work narrative is a reflection of her behaviour at work, orientation to career growth and overall sense of work-relationships which is embedded in institutional relationship between gender and work. The excerpt above indicates that her position as an employee in this particular field of work is impacted in a significant way by her gender. I did not have to ask her any question about gender discrimination at work. The relation between her personal story and the larger structural issues came to the fore in the process of her narration. Asking her about her perceptions of gender based discrimination at work would produce in what Chase would term as a report but asking her about her work in general gave a more nuanced picture of her experiences.

2.5 RESPONDENT PROFILE

My respondents comprises of:

- Dual career couples with school going children;

- Single men and women in their late twenties till late thirties living away from family

- Age – Broadly 25 to 45 years

- Profile: Working in white collar professions in executive/ managerial/ above managerial positions in corporate sector.

- A mix of first generation migrants to Delhi-NCR and those who were born and brought up in Delhi, though the focus would be more on migrants who came here for purpose of education and later sought employment here. I intend to capture their journey and struggle and the resultant anxieties in their lives since they have made it on their own and have faced challenges of a different nature and magnitude compared to those who have had their residence here.

- The profile would include service sector work with functions such as sales, marketing, human resources and finance specialisations; sectors are retail, FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods), Information Technology, Banking, Insurance, Architecture, Real estate, Research, Corporate Law, Corporate Media and Public Relations. I did not focus on one specific sector as my aim was understanding the relation between work and non-work aspects of life and not do a corporate ethnography. This would give some kind of a variation which would make the analysis more nuanced and layered unlike focussing on only one particular sector.

2.6 SAMPLING

I used Non-probability purposive sampling using snowball technique. Non-probability connotes the fact that samples are gathered by using a process in which all individuals in a population do not have the chance to be selected. The sample is drawn from specific profile based on the requirements of the research, the objectives, the subjective judgement of the researcher and not random selection which are probabilistic methods.

It is purposive because as a researcher I have been in a position to decide who could be the potential respondents that I would include in the sample depending on criteria such as profile required, willingness to participate and availability. In purposive sampling, the sample is supposed to be representative of the population that the research deals with. It also connotes the fact that the researcher uses her own judgement to select members from the population to participate in the research and it is based on the nature and requirements of the study.

Snowball technique enabled me to identify one respondent based on the research criteria and then ask him/her to help me identify other potential respondents till sufficient sample size was reached. I started with the simple procedure of getting in

touch with 4 people I knew who had the kind of job profile I was looking at. I asked each of them to give me at least 2 contacts each and then requested them to introduce me to others they knew. I made sure that they were from diverse fields of work but within the ambit of corporate sector. I tried to ensure a fair mix of men and women. Alongside interviewing 30 of them, I conducted observation with them at their homes and leisure spaces. In common spaces such as offices, canteens, in-house parties and informal gatherings I came across other people who I interacted with based on their availability and willingness to participate. These were short or long conversations or in some cases, informal group discussions. I conducted around 10 months of ethnographic observation and interviewing. In the last leg of my fieldwork, I met a few additional respondents and some from the previous sample who were single men and women working in this sector for at least 5 years or more. I also purposively selected dual career couples with children. These last set of interviews were the narrative style interviews to understand specific aspects of their lives in a more or less uninterrupted manner with only probe questions. Most of them happened over multiple sessions, some at their homes and some in public spaces.

2.6.1 DETAILS OF UNITS OF FIELDWORK

Semi structured interviews (of 3.5 to 4 hours over 2 or more sessions): 14 (8 men and 6 women)

Semi structured interviews (of 2-3 hours each): 16 (8 men and 8 women)

Narrative interviews (across 2-3 sessions of at least 2 hours each) with single professional men and women: 10 (6 women and 4 men)

Narrative interviews (across 2-3 sessions of at least 2 hours each) with dual career couples: 10

Observation occurred in most of those cases where the interviews were in-home, a few happened in offices, the canteens/ cafes inside office premises and during accompanied outings such as shopping, eating and drinking out and in-home parties.

A lot of informal, brief interactions/ conversations happened which were interesting and unplanned. The nature of the topic, the 'fuzzy field' as I have discussed before made the ethnography dispersed over time and space. The boundaries between data collection and participation or immersion in the lives of the people I met blurred as did the boundaries between the different methods of data collection. Research is never

a neat simplistic process and the field usually throws us off guard. It in many ways compels us to be flexible and make changes to our set ideas and schedules. One has to keep one's eyes and ears open at all times.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING WORK IN THE LIVES OF CORPORATE PROFESSIONALS IN THE SERVICE SECTOR

The service sector is the tertiary sector of the India economy, the other two being the primary (extraction of raw materials) and secondary (agriculture and manufacture of industrial goods). The services sector is not only the dominant sector in India's GDP, but has also attracted significant foreign investment flows, contributed significantly to exports as well as provided large-scale employment. The service sector does not create a product as in the manufacturing, but it creates services for businesses, organizations and consumers to use and benefit from. As per reports based on planning commission annual survey data, in India there has been a significant growth in the service sector businesses which made up almost 60% of India's GDP in the last fiscal year. Some of the activities in this sector includes retail, banks, hotels, education, health, social work, media, computer services and so on. As per a recent government economic survey published in *The Hindu* (Article dated August 2016):

> India has the second fastest growing services sector with its compound annual growth rate at nine per cent, just below China's 10.9 per cent, during the last 11-year period from 2001 to 2012, the Economic Survey for 2013-14 said. Russia at 5.4 per cent is a distant third. The survey highlighted that some services like software and telecom were big ticket items that gave India a brand image in services. While further focus on these services is needed to retain and further our lead, the time has come to focus on some other high potential big ticket items (such as Tourism and hospitality sector, Ports services and Railways) that have high manufacturing-sector and employment linkages[13].

This sector focusses today on what is being called the "knowledge economy" (Drucker 1969)[14]. Companies survive competition in the open market by being ahead

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[13]http://www.thehindu.com/business/budget/india-has-second-fastest-growing-services-sector/article6193500.ece

[14]Knowledge economy is defined as a shift to information age. Human capital (education and knowledge) are productive assets and used in business. This can be sold, bought and exported and can yield profits to the person, the organization, the industry and the overall economy. Examples of knowledge economy includes research, technical support and consulting. In such an economy, information is seen as the greatest source of profit and the success of it depends on development in Information Communication Technology (ICT).

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of its competitors and this it does by research and understanding of what customers want and then equip themselves to deliver all that to consumers in a quick and cost effective manner[15] so that profit is ensured. In most cases, developing counties like India have both manufacturing and services based activities in order to contribute more to the GDP. However, in India the services sector contribute more to the GDP compared to manufacturing and there is greater FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) in the service sector today than other sectors, than ever before. The Indian corporate sector has two main components, namely, the government owned and privately owned companies. The size of both the components, in terms of both numbers and capital, has grown fast, particularly since beginning of the seventies. According to Goyal (1988), government companies are mainly in the basic, heavy and capital intensive industries whereas the private sector is predominantly in industries which cater to the consumer markets directly. It is due to such a basic difference that while the government sector accounts for nearly two-thirds of the productive industrial capital, its share in the net value added is less than one-third. And the opposite is true of the private sector. Private corporate sector, unlike the government sector which comprises of about a little more than one thousand companies, consists of more than two lakh units (Goyal 1988).

> Being government owned enterprises, the choice of investment, location, pricing, employment and all other important policies are centrally decided. These have to be in conformity with the macro and socio-economic objectives -- which are multiple and sometimes even self-contradictory. The constituents of the private sector do not have multiple objectives to pursue; the purpose of a private business organization is clear i.e. to operate as a business enterprise -- and business means, profit and economic

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[15] A lot is being written about in the media and discussed in scientific/ intellectual circles about if and how limitations on business profit can be placed. In the context of certain fields like software and ICT, being cost effective in order to kill competition and sustain profit is so important that employees could be laid off with just a month's notice, sometimes in the name of 'cost-cutting' in an uncertain financial market. Sometimes an improved technology or software can perform a technical function which was performed by professionals till then, at a far lesser cost, thereby replacing human labour and this is happening the world over on a regular basis. However, no organization/ economy/ nation has taken any strong position in favour of people and human employment and there are little or no strong ethical questions asked because these are 'businesses' with the sole motive of making 'profit'. Software giants like Google, Apple, Microsoft and the more scientific-technological giants in the US and Western Europe have predicted the near and distant future to be dominated by robotics and artificial intelligence. While the richer, smaller countries could possibly profit from technology replacing humans in mundane functions, the more populous developing countries could see dark days ahead. Issues surrounding this are interesting and need further sociological research, but they are outside the scope of the present work.

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advantage and not social service. The primary test of performance of a private enterprise is in terms of the profits it can make (Ibid: 2).

India's services sector covers a wide variety of activities such as trade, hotel and restaurants, transport, storage and communication, financing, insurance, real estate, business services, community, social and personal services, and services associated with construction. The services sector is projected to be key driver of India's economic growth. The sector contributed around 66.1 per cent of its Gross Value Added growth in 2015-16, thereby becoming an important net foreign exchange earner and the most attractive sector for FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) inflows. As per the first advance estimates of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the services sector is expected to grow at 8.8 per cent in 2016-17[16].

3.1 TOOLS, TECHNOLOGY AND SITES OF PRODUCTION

In a knowledge economy (Drucker 1969), production of services, their advertising and marketing, their overall demand and supply are intrinsically linked to the production and use of information which is in turn linked with education and technological infrastructure. Creating new websites, new apps such as e-commerce to promote easier ways of consumption, or payment services or any other kind of services from paying bills to ordering food are all part of this economy in which the tools of production are software programming/ coding, engineering, management, administration, marketing, finance, advertising and research. Most of these are seen as creative, skilled or technical work which are highly time consuming, competitive and well-paid. While this is certainly the nature of work today in the developed economies of the world, these have found entry into the developing economies such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa with varying degrees of success and failure. For instance, this kind of work is dependent on availability of human capital, technological prowess and infrastructure which is not available in the developing economies as much as the developed ones. Moreover, there are other smaller tasks within this kind of work (such as transcription, coding, updating databases) which require less skills and are less paid which often get outsourced to the developing countries, resulting again in an imbalance in power.

It has been argued that the knowledge economy and the requirements of competitive business be it in manufacturing of goods or in the creation of services rest on

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[16] https://www.ibef.org/industry/services.aspx

knowledge or information and its dissemination through advanced technology and communication. In today's world of work, it is knowledge which is the main means or tool of production. Knowledge workers are those who use their skills and expertise in new, creative ways and any organization can run smoothly with the help of their ideas, thereby creating a need for an environment which is conducive to creative work. These highly skilled workers form the "creative class of workers" (Florida 2002), or knowledge workers who use their creative energies and intelligence to propel economic productivity. This class of workers are highly skilled, educated, well paid whose efforts make the profit and enable economic growth. Some economists and industry experts believe that countries which value them such as the United States, UK and Germany, Japan are able to excel in the economic race. Florida (2002) argues that such workers are part of different sectors such as technology, finance, entertainment, journalism and others. They do not consciously think of themselves as a class' but they can be characterized by a common worth ethic that values creativity, individuality and merit. Several post-industrial theorists such as Daniel Bell (1976) has mentioned this shift from industrial to post-industrial economy in which production rests on innovation and change which is related to knowledge. Contemporary ideas of management takes into cognizance the importance of knowledge as a tool of production and the knowledge workers as asset to any organization, thereby, enabling them to command not just high remuneration but also an open, creative, non-bureaucratic, non-hierarchical work environment all of which needs to be provided and ensured by the managers. However, this specific segment is only a small chunk of the workforce and they are not easily replaceable, unlike other professionals in same industries or segments who are skilled, educated, experienced but may be more replaceable than them. They can be considered to be the most mobile of all, changing companies and looking for better prospects, commanding more, each time. For instance, an engineer in a software consultancy such as a Wipro or TCS could be more easily replaceable than a chief engineer or an innovator at Amazon or Paytm.

However, they are all part of an economic system which is made up of highly competitive business and their presence in the market is guaranteed only as long as they make profit and can kill competition. One of the chief ways in which they do so is marketing and advertising which is again the task of a team of professionals who

are creative and are in touch with the needs of consumers. Companies end up spending most of the profits they annually make in advertising and marketing in order to woo new consumers and retain the attention of the old ones. Thus, creation of services, the technology and knowledge to market and sell it and the creativity of the knowledge workers to innovate and come up with new ways of marketing is what keeps this knowledge economy running.

Site of production of services is the market itself such as services of retail, hospitality, finances, corporate law and so on. Businesses or people approach these sites in order to buy the services offered. Another site of production in the case of services is the virtual space which may end up at the consumer's doorstep, such as online goods and services. These days, owing to massive improvement in ICT, it is the web or the virtual world which is the site of production of services. Large number of online apps and websites sell products of different global brands by procuring them in bulk either directly from brand manufacturing units or from merchandisers. They employ labour employed to do the packaging, delivery and oversee other logistics. They may or may not have a full-fledged office for the initial few years till they have made a good margin.

A start-up may create services online for people to consume, it could be an app to shop for clothes or a restaurant search app which needs to be downloaded on the phone or it could be an app from which one can buy groceries. It could also be a software consultancy which uses advanced software to design webs or a software program to create or improve a database web application which, as a service (of expertise) is offered to a business. Often the conceptualization of any business begins as an idea. It is taken forward through brain storming sessions, where the initial conceptualization is given a more realistic shape, keeping in mind several factors like demand and supply, capital/ investment, availability of expertise to launch the project, potential profitability and infrastructure to sustain it. It is sometimes possible that the people who generate new business ideas are professionals who may have no economic capital. However with the help of social capital i.e. the contacts/ networking (Bourdieu 1984), and impressive credentials, it is possible that an investor or financer invests and funds the project if he thinks it has the potential to make profit once

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launched[17]. It also happens that a new idea is liked by a bigger, already existing company and they acquire the new venture at a mutually agreed upon value. This is especially the case in the technology, IT and finance sector[18].

3.2 HOW DOES WORK AND THE CHANGES IN IT HAVE A BEARING ON THE LIVES OF PROFESSIONALS?

Harvey (2014) has an interesting take on the relationship of technology with work and consumption in contemporary global capitalism and he draws from Marxist thought. He argues that in this system of contemporary capitalism, technology is an important means of production which could lead to machines replacing human labour, thereby saving time which people will be able to put to some other creative use for self-realization, since a basic minimum wage would be guaranteed to all. However, despite all kinds of advancement in technology meant to reduce the working hours for people, they are working even more now. This is certainly true for my own research where spending over ten hours in office is fairly common. He looks into this question and points to the inherent contradiction in capitalism which uses technology to produce more, produce faster and with less cost than human labour so as to survive the immense competition in the market. However, it does not provide more time to people because the social system in place cannot afford or let people use free time for their own creative pursuits, as that would provide them the opportunity or scope to ask more questions, be critical or demand an alternative. *"Instead, the attention of the people are diverted to a new world of gizmos, video games, social media and search engines which, on the one hand could lead to more awareness and a platform for voicing resistance, but could also lead just to more banter, more idle gossip"* (Harvey 2014: 279).

He argues that technology has an impact on the way work is looked at by people. Any idea such as the fact that technology's primary aim is to save work, cannot at the same time, glorify work as an important source of identity in social life. If technology replaces work and the requirement of human labour, by mechanizing of every aspect

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[17] They often study the entire market and all potential new ideas from different start-ups to and come to a decision on the best possible business idea to invest in. In most cases the investors are either from the US, UK or from China.

[18] Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) which indicate buying and selling of companies and business operations. Merger is when two different companies join in their operations while acquisition is when one company is taken over by another keeping in mind the profitability and financial prospects.

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of work, then how are people to take any pride in their work, in their abilities and their potential? Needless to say, it brings in alienation (Marx 1967) at work among them. People accept it because only work provides the possibilities of consumption which is an adequate compensation for the alienation at work that people face. People feel this way because they have become a "socialized consumer" (Gorz 1999) brought about by market economy and commercial advertising.

Turkle (2011) has looked at the impact of technology on the lives of humans and in their interpersonal relations. Networking, presence in the virtual space, using technology as a means of production at work but also production of certain services and emotions at the personal level need to be looked at, which his research intended to do.

> These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time. This can happen when one is finding one's way through a blizzard of text messages; it can happen when interacting with a robot. I feel witness for a third time to a turning point in our expectations of technology and ourselves. We bend to the inanimate with new solicitude. We fear the risks and disappointments of relationships with our fellow humans. We expect more from technology and less from each other' (Turkle 2011: x).

www.shutterstock.com · 361935023

(This cartoon captures the essence of several work and time related conversations I had with my respondents. There are jokes and memes commonly circulated on social media which highlight the plight of employees in the beginning of a work week owing to high work pressure, strict deadlines and constant evaluation followed by the excitement on the approaching weekend. Picture source: Shutterstock)

In second section of this chapter, I discussed the changes in contemporary ideas of work as a result of changes in the economy and technology over time. One of the changes that often has a bearing on the people is a merger or acquisition. If a company is bought over or two different companies are joined, there are changes in the internal organizational structure, there are changes in the company policies, administration patterns and overall functioning. Sometimes, there are changes in the hiring policy. Whenever there are changes, new rules may be put in place. The approach to work is often dependent on the management who are the main stakeholders in the business. When they change, a professional needs to adapt to a new structure and new ways of functioning. The manner in which they are able to cope with it is dependent on the nature and extent of change and a professional's own style of work. One of my respondents Shivani, single, 29 years old who worked in online shopping portal's corporate office had faced a similar situation and was made to change her team and her style of working. She was expected to work weekends post the change and she found it difficult to take leave. She was working closely with several consultants who were working part time and she realized that their monthly payments were not being made on time due to internal reorganization and the new,

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more complex network through which a small financial payment was to be released. As a result, she could not expect full cooperation of consultants due to which the quality of the team projects suffered. She could see it, she took it up with her seniors who made a note of it but nothing could be done. After a point, she did not know whom to approach to discuss problems she faced and would just have to put up with everything. She began to lose interest in her work which was what her life was centred around. By the time I met her for the third time, she visibly seemed disoriented and had started looking for another job. However she believed that nothing would be different in any organization and she would face similar challenges everywhere just to a varying degree. A casual conversation with her that evening revealed to me that she was spending less time with her friends and family. Her family lived in Greater Noida and she lived in south Delhi, worked in Gurgaon. She would visit home almost every weekend but she had stopped doing that since she started having problems at work. When I asked her the reason, she said that she wanted to avoid any discussion of marriage at home. The only other topic which she could freely discuss with her father was her job, which at that particular time she wanted to avoid as well. So she was left with nothing that she could possibly talk about at home so decided against going home. She ended up spending the whole weekend in her apartment (rented) and watched movies and videos. She said she felt low, sometimes lonely but could not discuss this with anybody knowing that it would not solve any of her problems. She smoked a lot and drank alcohol. She said she does not want to be stressed or depressed like a lot of people she knows do. They are not able to handle stress and end up going for therapy. She did not give herself these options for these were signs of failure for her. She believed she would be able to overcome this phase and kept waiting for a new job offer. Even as a complete outsider I could sense that she was under immense pressure was taking too much upon herself. Her only release was consuming media, cigarettes and alcohol.

3.3 FROM INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION TO CONSUMPTION BASED SERVICE CREATION: HOW CAN THEORY HELP US LOOK AT WORK?

Marxist theory, critical theory and some strands within sociology of work have looked at alienation in capitalist economy whereby a worker is distanced from his work process, product of his work, from himself and from fellow workers because he has no control over his own labour power. He is almost forced to sell it in the market

which enables him to provide for his own subsistence but has no control over what he produces, which is appropriated by the capitalist who is the owner of means of production, who only consumes but does not produce himself.

In pre-feudal, pre-capitalist societies, people owned their own tools of production and produced for subsistence for the whole community. In capitalist system specifically, the tools of production are owned by others who appropriates the goods that are produced. A wage is paid to the worker who uses it to purchase goods in order to fulfil his subsistence needs. In his theory on alienation, Marx looked at different kinds of relations and used them to see the nature of alienation in the industrial society in England of his time. One is the relation that a worker has with the object he creates. Marx argues that in capitalism, worker is alienated from the object due to which his own labour becomes an object outside of him. The other is the relation between the labour and the act of production, which also does not belong to the worker. The third element is the relation between species (humans) with the life-activity itself. Here Marx argued that humans separate themselves from their life activity which are activities needed to meet their own needs. It is the capitalist who owns these, it is the capitalist who does not produce himself but only consumes. The other relation consists of that between worker and non-worker (capitalist) and between the non-worker and the object. It is private property that defines these relations. Marx's theory posited that capital itself is accumulated labour which rightfully belongs to the labourer (along with the objects produced and the labour power) and not to the capitalist. When people are alienated, they look at social institutions as beyond their control and oppressive.

Marx argued that work is what defines the essence of being human. He felt that the division of labour is without essence. Capacity of labour is unique, a distinctive human characteristic. It separates humans from the rest of the living creatures who are just objects but not subjects who create a life for themselves. Economic alienation is when man is alienated from the daily work activities that provides him a living. Alienation includes alienation from objects of labour, process of production, alienation from himself and his fellow human beings. Capitalist societies does not lead man to self-determination and freedom because it alienates people from everything related to work and work relations. There is a differential access to forces of production and thus differential access to power. Economic surplus is taken away

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by those who have dominance over forces of production. Division of labour creates differentiated classes and class based inequality. Work is core of one's existence but only if it is creative, voluntary and not under external coercion. Human beings cannot be reduced to what they can offer in the market system in the form of labour power but they can be their true selves only in creative work which gives them the control (Chomsky 1987). This would tie up with what Harvey (2014) has discussed on ways in which individual identity, work and worth is all dictated by the market demands.

If we apply Marxist theory of alienation then will it be the same as industrial work or should it be modified in case of work today? If we take the example of start-ups, arguing that professionals have no control over the means of production and the profit generated would not be entirely true. The ideas and the execution come from the technicians, the professionals. It is a creative process which involves an amalgamation of abstract ideas and converting them to material reality. The initial capital required is also possible when resources are pooled in by the people who come together. Often, loans are raised and banks look into the financial background of those involved. In some cases, once the business takes off and does well, the profit is distributed among the stakeholders. In others, the business is brought to fruition only when it is successfully sold or acquired by bigger companies or investors. While owners of capital are still a minority whose profit is multiplied each time they invest capital, the professionals have a higher degree of control over what they produce than industrial wage labourers.

Once the investors come into the picture and give them the means and the freedom to develop their idea and launch it in the market, they feel their long wait and hard work has paid off. The start-up professionals I met have had good experience when they got the desired funding and could launch their product or they sold it successfully to a bigger company and made enough money to invest in another business-idea or take care of personal goals such as buying a car, a house or world travel. However, they did mention that not everybody has success and in fact most start-ups in the world have failed, very few find the deserved launch. It rests heavily on their networking skills and contacts which might enable them to find an investor, in addition to an excellent idea and execution. Needless to say, in Indian context, people from a certain social background have access to the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) which is required to start any business venture. However, there are a few media and

business reports which show that young men and women from satellite towns are also finding opportunities to develop their business ideas when they migrate to the city for regular employment.

> Not everybody can think of a start up in the software field. I feel only the very talented can think of a new idea and even fewer who can take the risk of leaving a well-paying job and work for something whose result could be complete failure. Every product company that you see today was a start-up actually. I remember that only a few of my seniors who were very good at studies, highly intelligent and creative are part of such companies, that is why they command a lot more remuneration and companies treat them like kings. One of my friends who is a highly valuable resource at Amazon just took a 6 months straight leave to travel to Europe and his bosses had to say yes! It is always more challenging and rewarding to work for a new venture than for a big software consultancy like a TCS or Wipro where work is monotonous and predictable. Even career progression is predictable like from an executive to manager to senior manager to vice president to CEO and this is just for a handful. Most move only till a certain point. Also people stick around because they get the opportunity to go for on-site projects to the United States- Deb, 31, Software engineer (He successfully sold his start up; now doing masters in computer science from a university in Germany, used the money earned from selling the business idea to fund his education abroad. His future aim is to work for another start up).

3.4 THE NATURE OF WORK IN CORPORATE SERVICE SECTOR

It would be interesting to look at the kind of impact service work has on individuals, the process of meaning-making by employees and requirements from work and thereby understand the ways in which it influences non-work aspects of their lives[19]. For instance, the work which is centered on production of services for people to consume operates in a world in which a consumer's needs, wants and desires have to be instantly fulfilled. Let us take the example of a business idea which wants to build a mobile app for online garments shopping. If the end consumer who is using the app to browse and shop for product faces any kind of difficulty or a delay or any other kind of dissatisfaction, the consumer will move to the next best option that suits him and there is never a dearth of service providers of any kind. Whether it is a small start-up or an established service organization, consumer satisfaction is the biggest goal.

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[19] Though I want to point out here that my analysis is not causal and refrains from any claim of mathematical or statistical certainty.

Ideas and businesses have started and ended within days and this happens day in and day out, more so in the world of start-ups. Even if organizations don't die, the profits fall and rise and the fluctuations could be so steep that the company could be forced to downsize, resulting in both unemployment and underemployment. As a result, one has to be constantly available to cater to work, to fulfil unexpected needs and solve untimely problems. In such a kind of work requirement, there is often no clear distinction between work and home. As Kelly (2013) argues, in contemporary capitalist economies, there is a blurring of boundaries between work and home. Some of my respondents feel that there are now adept at multi-tasking because they are doing both work (on a laptop) and home related chores (online shopping for groceries) along with browsing their phones (leisure; making a plan to meet friends on the weekend). Sometimes it happens that when they are not multitasking they are bored. There are times when they remain glued to their phones and laptops while family members complain that they are becoming asocial.

The other thing that such demanding work does is create a permanent paucity of time. The new work ethic points to a need to be perpetually flexible and available 24/7 for different kinds of requirements. This kind of a demand leaves very little time for other activities in life. When I look at the narratives of my respondents, across different sectors, profiles, designations, gender and age, there seems to be an underlying reality of them leading time crunched lives. Their tone is not of lament or complaint in their interactions with me, at least not in our first interactions where they were trying to figure me out as much as I was trying to figure them out. Subsequently, they opened up and acknowledged that their work lives eat into all other aspects of their lives. However, they were not really complaining or being critical. Perhaps they have reached a stage in their career where they cannot imagine their life to be any other way. They have only begun to enjoy the fruits of their labour, they have started getting high pay packages; they have bought their own furniture, gadgets, may be a car and even a house. They have seen a surge in their salaries when compared to their parents and today own, in their thirties, what their parents had only after 45 or 50 years of age and consistent hard work and savings. On the other hand, they have explored different ways of having fun and experiencing leisure. Most of them feel that their lives are significantly better off than that of their frugal parents. Money brings with it freedom for which they are ready to make compromises with their time.

According to Sennett (1999), the culture of the new capitalist order of work in the western world is what needs to be looked at to better understand its effect on people's daily lives. In his work, Sennett focused on the difference the new political economy has made on people's ethical values, sense of one another as social creatures, and people's understanding of themselves. The new capitalism is impoverishing the value of work, he argues. Becoming more flexible and short-term, work is ceasing to serve as a point of reference for defining durable personal purposes and a sense of self-worth; sociologically, work serves ever less as a forum for stable social relations.

So how true is this in the Indian context? First, in certain sectors like software industry, there is always a fear of being outdated. For instance, 29 year old Shyamal had to forgo his job (though willingly he said, he "never enjoyed working as an employee in a corporate office for someone else's profit") and his plans to work on a start-up idea and had to move to U.S for higher education as he could foresee that his technical skills would be redundant in the coming years. He had been a bright student; he took keen interest in physics and computer science. He went for engineering and then started working on his start up idea with some friends. He was clear that he did not want to work in a consultancy firm as he looked at that work as monotonous and predictable. He had seen his friends and seniors work in such companies and feel demotivated at work. They would find it repetitive, promotions would be slow, getting leave would be difficult and the work failed to challenge them. He wanted to do a start-up or join any product company, namely new ventures (such as e-commerce), smaller in size, where new ideas are used for working. His first start up was successfully sold to an American investor and he made good money which he used to buy a house and car for his family. Then he joined an e-commerce company for a few months but left it when he got bored. He then decided to work on a second start up idea. However that is when he realized that his skills today will not be enough to sustain his career for the coming years. He told me that the rest of the world has moved to robotics and artificial intelligence and it would eventually come to India. At that point, companies would need technically skilled people who could understand this kind of language. He has the necessary knowledge and vision to protect himself from future uncertainties.

According to Harvey (2014), an important contradiction at play here is that one has to be engaged and fully committed in a job which is not secured. The skills that are

required from the professionals do not go with the overall work structure in the contemporary capitalist economies because the requirement is commitment and deep engagement but the nature of the work is precarious and unstable. When one does not know if the job they have will last as long as they want, it becomes difficult to be interested, motivated, proactive and responsible, all of which need to be exhibited as one wears one's professional hat. Team work is necessary for which people need to connect with one another but they all seem to be aware deep down that it is superficial and short-lived.

Coming back to my argument about work being short-term, flexibility is said to be the key to survival in current world of work and it translates into job hopping. This aspect of work in the new economy[20] being short term and unstable has been brought to our attention by several scholars who, in the western context, described it back in the 60s and 70s. That was the time the US and other developed countries were slowly making a transition from industrial to post-industrial phase. Bauman (2000) has argued that the uncertainty at work that was the reality then is an individualizing force; it divides rather than unites people. In a situation of temporary employment, unions are inadequate, hence almost non-existent today in a post-industrial phase. Employment is short term or temporary, so there is not much chance for long term connections and loyalties. Bauman calls this precarious situation at work akin to a shift from marriage to a live-together which could end anytime. In the case of my research such concerns were indeed voiced, though in their minds the situation is not yet so grim. However, professionals today in a populous country like India know that they are disposable, so they do not see much point in developing long term loyalties and deep associations with their colleagues. This is also the reason why lot of arbitrary rules and expectations from employees do not meet with resistance.

For instance, work on weekends, late evening or in the night, being even compelled to take on more work than their designated responsibilities due to employees leaving or team size cut down may not be liked but there is hardly a scope or a platform where these concerns could be voiced. This instantly reminds me of an interview with Shriram, a mid-managerial level employee in marketing field of an MNC that

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[20] "New economy" is a term that suggests the shift from manufacturing to service sector, mostly in the context of the developed economies and became commonly used with the 'dot com bubble' of the 1990s. In the new economy, production, distribution, selling of goods and services are heavily dependent on the improvement in internet and communication services.

provides financial services. Their head office is in Dubai and India branch office is in Gurgaon. He mentioned that there have been a few episodes of high tension when he and a few of his teammates feared being evicted probably with no explanation offered. The internal organizational structure was undergoing a change; some of the senior management members gave in their papers. Apparently, the top bosses sitting in Dubai had hired a very influential person with political connections on their board of directors, as a result of which the authority structure and work culture was undergoing a change. The employees who were working hard, taking important decisions up until then were not in a position to do so anymore as the new boss wanted his own team in which he wanted to hire employees of his choice. A kind of cold war was brewing in the organization. Some of the employees could see this and had started making efforts to please the new boss. Those who could not or did not do so, bore the brunt and they felt this was the reason why they could be evicted anytime. Interestingly, Shriram, a practicing Hindu, took a vow that if his job would be safe, he would stop eating non-vegetarian food. Eventually he could save his job and he kept his vow. When I met him subsequently and went out for a meal with him, I noticed that he ordered only vegetarian food. The reason I put down this anecdote is to make the point that getting a job, keeping it and doing well are few of the most stressful aspects of life today for these people and this is irrespective of their qualification, experience and ability.

> In the world of structural unemployment no one can feel truly secure. Secure jobs in secure companies seem to be the yarn of grandfathers' nostalgia; nor are there many skills and experiences which, once acquired would guarantee that the job will be offered, and once offered, will prove lasting. No one may reasonably assume to be insured against the next round of downsizing, streamlining, or rationalizing, against erratic shifts of market demand and whimsical, indomitable pressures of competitiveness, productivity and effectiveness. No one can feel truly irreplaceable – neither those already outcast nor those relishing the job of casting others out. Even the most privileged position may prove to be only temporary and 'until further notice (Bauman 2000:161-162).

Just as I make these points, the media is flooded with news around lay-offs in the technology and IT sector in big companies like Infosys, Tech Mahindra and others. Quoting from *India Today* (May 14 2017):

As digitization and automation become the new normal, IT biggies like Infosys, Cognizant and Tech Mahindra are seeing a spate of layoffs and this trend may continue for the next 1-2 years, say experts. The pink slips are being handed out to thousands of employees as part of their performance appraisal process, but it is believed that these are directed more towards cost control amid pressure on bottom line due to a rising tide of protectionism in most target markets. Indian software exporters in particular are facing headwinds in the business environment and stricter work permit regime in countries like the US, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. Moreover, with newer technologies in artificial intelligence (AI), robotic process automation and cloud computing, which help complete the job with less manpower, software companies are now having to reconsider their strategies. It is a situation wherein the available talent haven't kept up with the pace at which the industry was evolving and hence, many of them find themselves redundant - Rituparna Chakraborty, Team-Lease Services Executive Vice-President and co-founder."[21]

It is not just that employees are laid off. Professionals are taught at the beginning of their careers to be 'flexible' as the needs of the market, the demands of work and the nature of expectations of clients are not steady but bound to be in flux. Being too rigid with one's way of work, having a streamlined formula for success does not work. So it is very common for professionals to be flexible for their own career progression. It is a multi-layered relationship between the organizations not providing security to employees and then employees not being loyal to any one organization. The moment one sees a better opportunity in another organization in terms of portfolio, designation, salary and other benefits, there is no holding back. One makes the necessary shift. All my respondents have changed jobs more than once in their career already, even at the age of 26 or 27. This is the norm and not the exception. That is seen to be one of the best ways to move ahead. If a person is seen to be attached to one organization for more than 5 years, people around him tend to think that he is less capable and has found a comfort zone and he cannot afford to move out of it. The attrition rates are very high in the private corporate world. Companies spend a lot of time and money on understanding and improving it. Providing pick and drop facilities in cab or shuttle, weekends off, paid maternity leave, allowing marriage between two employees from within the organization (not same team), yearly bonus, providing

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[21] http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indian-it-sector-it-sector-layoffs-it-experts-infosys-cognizant-and-tech-mahindra/1/953707.html

facilities like cafeteria, gym, yoga room, space to relax are some of the common measures the bigger MNCs adopt in order to tackle the rising attrition rates. However, despite this, job hopping is a very common feature of work-life today.

> R: Now nobody thinks of job safety since it is always dicey. People are ready to hop from one job to another because their career graph and salaries will grow.

> M: People working at different levels do it?

> R: Oh yes! In my HR department, I have seen people taking offer from one company, come in for new joining formalities, then leave after that….just disappear! They got X salary package from A company, they can show it to B company, this is the package I have, so you give your new offer now. And they then get what they want. This happens most in IT Company. For certain skill sets and sometimes for most mundane jobs like coding, there is enough demand that they are given whatever they want. But it is also true that people are replaceable and they know it. It all depends on the market situation and how lucky you are. Today you might get whatever you want and you keep switching, if you happen to get unlucky, for example, if it is recession time, there could be a time when you are turned down everywhere. So it is happening from both sides (Anita, 43 years, works in a Japanese investment firm; had worked with Lehmann Brothers till US economy crashed and she had to move back to India).

In the Indian context, not all jobs in the service sector have similar nature. Overall there is a fear of losing a job or not being promoted despite fulfilling all requirements. Economic recession, downsizing, losing work from clients as a result of global recession, more specialized division of labour which require very specific skill sets and constant upgradation are factors that put people on the edge. Despite all this, for most of my respondents, work is a solid source of identity. It brings in in the hope for a better future. For people who belong to a society which has moved out of feudalism, gained political independence from the British followed by the austerity of the (infamous, for most people I met) license raj, what life offers them today is better than the past. The youngsters think of the contemporary age as the best phase that India has seen when they see themselves in relationship with their country's economic history and compare their lives with their parents.

The throwing open of the Indian market to the world economy, the steady inroads that technology, media and social media has made into the lifestyle of the educated middle and upper classes has provided a substantive ground on which people stand today, not

just make a living but etch an identity and make sense of the world around them. A sense of meaninglessness, work not offering a source of self-worth, though not totally untrue in theory, is not realized or expressed by people in their narratives. The west is infused with these problems today, they have gone through decades of industrialization, a post-industrial phase and they have reached a high level of material growth and fairly equitable distribution of wealth when compared to the third world economy like India, where this journey has just begun.

(An employee-boss relationship is central to a professional's career growth. It is believed that a professional never leaves an organisation, but leaves a boss. Start-ups are considered the next big thing in the world of corporate work. They are known to attract young professionals because of innovative projects, relaxed work environment and a greater sense of ownership. Picture source: RapidBi.com and Dillbert.com)

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The brief period of industrialization in India was a by-product of colonialism and later continued within the framework of Nehruvian socialism. While work and careers were stable, Indian economy did not grow as much as it could have. The crisis deepened which supposedly led to decisions to open up the domestic market. The children of government salaried job holders then are mostly the corporate salaried professionals of the contemporary global economy and they see a significant difference in disposable income and lifestyle between their parents and themselves. They have just begun to taste the fruits of the liberalisation-globalisation and they feel this is what is going to change their country for the better. That is one of the reasons why their narratives had hints of fatigue and stress associated with work but no expression of despair and meaninglessness.

3.5 DYNAMICS OF THE WORKPLACE: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE, HIERARCHY AND WORK-RELATIONS

The purpose of my research was not to focus on work in a particular sector only. As a result, there is a lot of variation in the organizational structure, nature of work-relations and hierarchy in each of the instances I came across. However, I will first discuss the generalities and then highlight some differences. To begin with, there are broadly two types of structures in place in the private corporate sector, namely the typical MNC-corporate type and the non MNC-corporate type commonly referred to as *lala*[22]' (a term used commonly by all I met though it can't be called a technical term or concept) companies. In the following section, I will highlight some of the major differences between the two.

There is a clear dichotomy between work-culture in typical corporate organizations vis-à-vis non-corporate work culture, more commonly referred to as *lala* companies. This is a common point of reference for people in this kind of work and it was picked up by me in several interactions with most of my respondents. To begin with, a typical corporate (I will use the letter 'C' to connote this kind of organization) work environment, mostly, American or a multinational, is more desirable for a professional due to a number of reasons. The organizational structure and processes are clear, well-defined and a set of rules are established to make the systems work.

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[22] *Lala* in Hindi *is* a traditional money-lender who mostly belong to merchant caste such as Baniyas and Agarwals. The term connotes a traditional approach to business modelled on traditional joint family hierarchy in the internal organisation. It is seen to be less innovative, less adaptive to changes and does not work on the basis of codified rules.

There are separate department with clearly defined division of labour such as finances, HR, marketing, R&D, operations, administration, etc. The senior management will be involved in important and big decisions but the first decisions would be taken by the concerned department heads.

On the other hand, in a *lala* company (I will use the letter 'L' to connote this kind of organization), in most cases the head of the firm is all-in-all. He decides everything from who would be recruited to decisions around finances. Here, processes are not set or laid down which could be followed during the course of operations. Processes are created as per the need of the hour. Whether an employee will get a raise or not depends on the head (sometimes on his whims and fancies), unlike in C where there is a ladder/ hierarchy in place on which people would be evaluated and placed during the annual evaluation process. For instance, if there is an opening, the HR department would conduct first round interviews to judge applicants on soft skills (general awareness, communication skills, presentability). The shortlisted candidates would then be interviewed by the department concerned where there is an opening and the heads of those departments would decide on the applicants. The top leadership or chairman may or may not be consulted for all such evaluations. But in L, almost everything is decided by the owner or the chairman. Some companies which are C have a special grievance addressal body and a sexual harassment cell which caters to such problems which are practically non-existent in L.

Thought personal contacts and networks are a prerequisite for entering the private corporate world as a whole, in some cases there are differences between C and L. An opening in any large scale organization are put up on the company website. C would recruit a large number of candidates from professional or technical colleges and institutes. Diversity in recruitment is recognized as a need to compete successfully in the global market. However in L, hiring is more closed and non-transparent. Most often, relatives, friends and acquaintances are given important portfolios and it is not anybody's business to question that. As a result of these differences, most of my respondents clearly expressed that their dream is to work for C. If currently they are working for L, they would make efforts to change their job in immediate or distant future.

There are strategic ways in which service sector employees assert their status, from western consumption-oriented lifestyles, to identification with a global industry

whose norms and mores they consider more professional than Indian domestic industry (Murphy 2011). There are differences in the work-culture of these two. Based on my interviews, it came up that C promotes transparency, gives fair opportunities to all, is better with promoting work-life balance, takes gender disparity seriously and gives due respect to qualification and expertise. They are more global, communication is in English, work relations are formal, there is emphasis on professionalism and team work, women are free to wear any kind of attire (such as work dresses or skirts), there is a more democratic culture of debate and reasoning. C has a system of recruitment and induction (initiation and training at work post recruitment) which are systematic, goal oriented and time bound in nature. My respondents mentioned that in case of C, it is more likely that weekends would be off. Though work-from-home had become a regular feature of work in contemporary times, which makes work spill over work to weekends, some of the companies with C had the option of compensatory-off whereby an employee could claim an off after working weekends. In L, these are either rare or non-existent. Overall, there is a clear preference for C and this came from my respondents.

Hierarchy is an inherent feature of any society. It is part of all social institutions be it work, family or religion. Here I have drawn from Max Weber's (1946) concept of rational-bureaucratic structure of organizations and his argument that bureaucracy is a central feature of modern society be it in economy, law or polity. Offices are ranked in a hierarchical order and their operations are characterized by impersonal rules. Incumbents are governed by methodical allocation of areas of jurisdiction and delimited spheres of duty. Appointments are made according to specialized qualifications rather than ascriptive criteria. This bureaucratic coordination of the actions of large numbers of people has become the dominant structural feature of modern forms of organization (Ibid).

In some ways, the defining characteristics and features of 'C' are, in some ways, akin to Weber's features of bureaucratic organizations, albeit with changes as a result of time and space[23]. There is system of job specialization, meaning, jobs are divided into routine and fixed category based on competence and functional specialization. There

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[23] Weber wrote in the early 1900s in the context of bureaucratic organizations in Western Europe and Germany. Despite the change in time and context, one can draw several points from his theory which one would still find to be applicable in organizations today.

is system of authority-hierarchy in which the employees within the organization are organized in a formal hierarchy in which higher officer controls lower position holders i.e. superior controls subordinates. There is a process of formal selection whereby potential employees are to be selected on the basis of technical qualifications and competence demonstrated by training, education or formal examination. However in the context of the private corporate sector in India, there is no formal examination system which is open but a process of screening takes place in a closed manner, when compared to public examination system for government jobs. People who check particular company websites to apply, register with recruitment agencies, or students who get through campus placement have to go through the process of a written examination and/or personal interview. There are a set of formal rules and regulations, especially in case of C. This is to ensure uniformity and to regulate actions of employees. Thus, rules of law lead to impersonality in interpersonal relations. The rules and controls are applied uniformly, avoiding involvement with personalities and preferences of employees. Nepotism and favouritism are not preferred in ideal type of a rational-bureaucratic organization. This is a definition as per a model. Even in the organizations which fall under C in case of my research, they may not be completely devoid of favouritism in practice, though in theory they have rules in place to promote impersonality and avoid nepotism.

3.6 SOCIAL RELATIONS AT WORK

On the surface, relations seem formal, hierarchical; people seem busy and distant from one another. There is sense of competition that prevails that does not enable people to develop close ties. Several people I spoke to said that most professionals are opportunistic where interactions happen in order to network, in order to expand their circles and improve their own career prospects or further their organisation's business opportunities. There is cut throat competition for a single position, a project, a deal, an account and so on. It often prevents people from coming together for team work as everybody has their end evaluation in mind which would invariably take place annually in which people are gauged in comparison with others' performances. While this emerged from my interviews and observations, one needs to refrain from generalizations which are only depicting one side of the story. The other side of the story is that people often establish close relationships which last a lifetime. Often one finds a mentor who can help one grow in the organization and one can learn from

him/ her based on their experience. Some employees mention that the relationship between the employee and his/ her boss is of fundamental importance because that determines one's fate in the company

This is an architecture firm located in Gurgaon. This is the typical size and style of office cubicles. This picture was taken by researcher when my respondent was called away for a meeting.

. The kind of projects that one would get, the learning, the exposure, the push, the encouragement are determined by one's relationship with one's immediate boss. If the relationship is of an unpleasant nature, it could be the single biggest roadblock in one's career.

> One does not really leave a job, one leaves one's boss. Your work life could be totally
> in the dumps if your boss is angry with you or does not like you. Sometimes even if
> you do a good job, your position could be jeopardized if the boss is not on your side.
> He will not teach you the right thing, he will not let you accompany him for the
> important meetings, if you want leave and if he does not approve of it, what can you
> do? So you see this is the most important thing which every single person you talk to
> will be concerned with (Avik, Software consultancy, Gurgaon, 30 years)

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There are all kinds of bosses, there is no pattern. I have worked in different companies and I have had different kinds of experiences with different kind of people. Overall if a person is well qualified, well experienced and well-travelled and has made it big on his own, then there are higher chances that the person will be reasonable and a professional. So he might make a good boss. Some of them are very supportive, encouraging and they know how to develop their juniors' talent, they will not do personal attack. Then there are the insecure types who will always be threatened by good performers and will expect everybody to butter him. He will have a set of followers who will be mediocre and will just say yes to everything the boss says. Some are outright mean and ill tempered, they might be talented but they do not treat people under him very well. The important thing here is that the kind of relation is not just about something outside of work or personal but it is very much linked with your work and your growth (Chetna, 29 years, working with an international research organisation)

An excerpt from a conversation with Kedaar, 33 years old corporate lawyer:

M: Can you please tell me a little about the kind of relationships that you share with your colleagues and bosses. You can tell me some specific anecdotes if you remember around any relationship developed at the workplace.

R: I was working in a team with 4 others. We had supervising partner and then the 'malik' or boss of the firm. Out of us 5, one of them was a girl. Our equation with immediate partner was very relaxed. We would call him by the first name just to pull his leg. We would even share our personal problems with one another. It was so open, we even knew the money (salary) each was drawing. With another partner it was very formal. He suffered from a major colonial hangover. He was weird. In UK, it was different. We were consulted even when the office premises changed and the new place had to be painted and redecorated. All the employees were consulted and meetings arranged with the architect. If you are spending so many hours at a place, it is almost home and you need to be feel good about sitting in that place. When my parents paint the house or buy something new, they always talk to me even though I don't live there and may visit them for 10 days or less in a year. Within my team I had good camaraderie. We all should be made to feel part of this, even if we are not stakeholders literally, but we can still be made to feel like that. Even now I am in touch with some people from my previous company, have WhatsApp group, I meet them outside work still. So small teams are connected well with each other. That boss did not want a lot of intermingling when I was working there. He preferred not to have his employees

getting close. He was a one man show and he would control it. He did not want you to plan or be happy or do things. He would be surprised that I was wearing the same branded shirt that he was and he would even ask how you got that brand! When I came from London, I had most of the formal clothes from there, so you see he judged me, and he would glance at the shoes or the clothes and all. If your boss is a difficult person, then you could be in real bad situation and you might have to even think of leaving your job. The opposite is also true. When he is by your side, he will make you grow and even protect you if need be.

It is not uncommon for people to form close bonds with their colleagues or boss who they can share their work-related problems with and may even establish a good personal rapport with. It is also fairly common for people to approach their boss or colleagues especially from previous organisation where they served to help them hunt for a new job. People often get together on weekends to socialise and may introduce their families with one another. However, there was a sense of maintaining some kind of a distance from people at work and to be careful to not divulge too many details of professional and personal life. It takes time for people to establish a sense of trust. The nature of relations formed depend to a large extent on the team structure, work environment which in turn rests on the mindset and personality of the boss. It is up to him/ her to encourage or discourage inter-personal bonding between teammates. However, my interactions with my respondents made me feel that a sense of professionalism needs to be developed for work to go on in a smooth fashion. This professionalism calls for a fair balance between having healthy, civil relationship and a certain degree of distancing and informality between colleagues.

3.7 THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF CORPORATE PROFESSIONALS

The social composition the new middle class has changed in quantitative terms in India in the last few years. Fernandes (2006), Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) and Upadhay (2007) look at new-middle class as beneficiaries of liberalization engaged in high-paying new service activities. According to Krishnan and Hatekar (2017), this is only the upper middle class of the population whose share in the new middle class segment within the population was 5% in 2011-2012. The rest of the new middle class is employed in traditional middle class occupation, construction and real estate and other newer forms of service related businesses. In 2011-2012, 50.3% of India was

middle class. Within that, 63.7% were upper castes. STs were most poorly represented when compared to SCs, OBCs and minorities whose participation in the new workforce has increased, even if not significantly over the last decade. However, upper caste Hindus have a clear majority and dominance (Ibid.). Deshpande (2003) has pointed to us that in the post independent Indian context, caste was associated more with the lower castes who were forced to intensify their caste-based identities in the hope for political, economic and social inclusion in Indian polity and society while the privileged upper castes thought of themselves as "casteless". The upper castes garnered the benefits of English education during colonialism, retained their domination in education and government jobs under the Nehruvian socialist development phase and have been the main beneficiaries of globalisation and growth of new occupations owing to their language skills, educational qualifications and network.

Bourdieu (1977) argues that there is a clear relationship between language and social power and this nexus is of importance in the developing postcolonial countries like India. English language is a pre-requisite in accessing any job in the service industry. In the Indian context, we know that quality education in English medium is more likely to take place in private schools, entry into which is dependent on a family's 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984). So the overall structure is such that it excludes majority of Indians to find an entry into this world of work. As Murphy (2011) argues in his research on call centre workers in India, the English language requirement highlights a complex relationship between the old[24] and the new middle classes in India. Most of the new middle class individuals come from families which belong to old middle class where parents were in white collar government jobs and had made their children receive education in private English medium schools. Their families were in a position to convert old form of capital such as monetary resources and elite education (cultural capital) and mostly upper caste status (social capital) into new forms of capital to survive and sustain their position in the new economic

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[24] Old middle class refers to educated salaried professionals and medium scale businessmen in the pre-liberalisation India before the 1990s, mostly government job holders, doctors, lawyers, army personnel, among others. New middle class is associated post-liberalisation post market-reforms India in which several new occupations came to the fore which increased their disposable income, aspirations and consumption habits. While the old middle class is known for their austere lifestyles, the new middle class on the contrary is referred to as the "consuming-class" (Deshpande 2003) marked by their consumerist tendencies promoted by the market and supported by the government (Fernandes 2006).

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environment. This has resulted in a perpetuation of class status in the context of the private service industry work. This is also drawn from Bourdieu's (1977) concept of "plasticity of power" which is an integral part of his social theory.

Carol Upadhya's (2007) work on the social composition of the IT professionals clearly point to the fact that there is an industry requirement for workers with a certain kind of cultural capital who are capable of being moulded into global professionals. This stands true in my own research. Almost all the professionals I met were recruited into the corporate sector by campus placements or through some contact by means of the social network they are part of be it friends in college or previous job or sometimes through contact in the family circle. This is one of the reasons why the social composition of the corporate world is fairly homogeneous in terms of caste, class and religion. The respondents who were part of my study had mostly studied in elite technical institutes, most of them had a master's degree in courses like MBA after engineering/ law/ BBA/ journalism/ mass communication while a few were from general streams like commerce/ science/ humanities. Out of the ones whose bachelors were in general field like commerce and humanities, their master's degree was in technical or professional field from elite colleges defined by their high fee and high ranking in annual polls by leading media houses. There was a difference in the trajectory, at least for the first few years of their career between those who had passed out from elite colleges and those who were educated in medium level ones. For instance, there was a difference between the graduates of IIT (Indian institute of technology) and NIT (National institute of technology) in terms of their entry package, designation or rate of growth in the corporate ladder. Similarly, there was a difference between the postgraduate students who were high ranking CAT percentile scorers to others.

For those who belong to what I had earlier mentioned as the creative class of corporate professionals, the possibility of inclusion and exclusion happens at a more subtle level. There is often a common written test followed by a group discussion or an interview. In case of recruitment happening through a walk-in interview or through a personal recommendation, there is usually a written test followed by interview (sometimes a series of interviews). These are the spaces in which the HR team or the senior management gets face to face with the applicant. While the technical aspects are judged at the written test, the "soft skills" are judged at this stage which includes

factors like English proficiency, body language, demeanour, physical appearance, general awareness (which is a wide gamut of areas such as events of national and international importance at the level of politics, art, popular culture such as media, cinema and fashion. Depending on the sector in question, varying degrees of importance are attached to these 'soft skills'). As Upadhya (2007) had argued, these requirements leave a very small pool of professionals which the organization could choose from, thereby reinforcing class and caste inequalities. It is because in India, opportunities and access to resources required to develop one's full potential and realize one's merit is determined by one's social location which is riddled on the lines of caste, class, gender and religion. As studies of Fuller (2006) and Upadhay (2007) show, the professionals in the organizations they studied who made it to managerial and above managerial position were from Brahmin, upper caste non Brahmin, landed OBC communities whose parents had means to send their kids for education in private schools and colleges along with series of tuitions and coaching centers. Fernandes (2006) argues that in India the class formation is shaped by the reworking of inequalities of caste, religion, gender which means that class as a category is constituted by these structures.

In my own sample, out of the 50 people I conducted in-depth interviews with, only two were SCs, one OBC and one ST. The rest were from general category and all had one thing in common: their parents were educated, had stable government jobs or small business, they were from tier 1 and tier 2 cities and they had been to English medium private schools or the best of the government school in their region. Those who belong to marginalised communities had educated parents who were beneficiaries of the government quota system. The point to be noted here is that while the private sector claims to offer a level playing field due to their focus on merit, it is closed and exclusionary in practice as the data on caste composition clearly shows us. So the voices of people in this research are voices of upper caste, middle-upper middle class, English educated Indians coming from a mix of cities and small towns. However, I would like to end this section by presenting a short narrative of an IT professional who is a Dalit from Telengana.

Atul is a 30 year old software consultant who has a start-up operational in Delhi and Hyderabad. His family comprises of his mother and elder sister. His father separated from his family when Atul was 12. Coming from a marginalized caste group, it was a

constant challenge for him to make a mark in his career. He went to government school and then went on to a government college in the outskirts of Hyderabad. His mother did odd jobs to support the family in the absence of a steady source of income. Atul had always been interested in mathematics and computers and he topped his college and opted for the open category which was a matter of pride for him. It was a moment which made him feel vindicated that merit is not the prerogative of the privileged groups. Atul helped in running the household and funded his education by working in call centers and home tuitions. Unlike what others expected of him, he did not join any organization though he had offers with attractive remuneration. He had bigger goals. He wanted to start his own software consulting firm which would cater to clients in India and abroad. He was confident that the skills he had was something which not many others had in the market. From time to time he would keep updating himself by reading, doing small online courses affiliated to international institutes or universities. He took help from two of his friends from similar education background and started working on his ideas. Within first three years he was able to establish clients based in Bangalore, Pune, San Francisco and Berlin. Since then there has been no looking back for him. After working from home, cafes or people' homes, he took his own office space on rent. Today he travels all over the world to work with clients. He also delivers lectures all over the world to explain his product and software ideas and the ways it could help clients to improve their businesses.

Today when he reflects back on his journey, he realizes that he has come a long way and has achieved a lot at a young age. He believes that because of good quality public education available back in his home town, he could achieve whatever he did. His family never had the means to send him to a private school and engineering college. He believes that the software industry is one that provides opportunities to anybody who is talented. As I have stated before, this industry rests on technical skills and expertise and less importance is given to soft skills when compared to other service industries. At executive level when companies require coders, the positions are filled by recruiting young graduates from all over the country as a result of which the social composition of the IT industry is more diverse than other service industries. However, the posts in managerial and senior management level is still occupied mostly by upper castes, especially Brahmins as pointed out by Narasimhan and Fuller's research (2006). Atul said:

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It is ideas and execution that matters to investors, not the caste background. If there is a good student from an IIT who is SC or ST and has very good skills he will get a job but there is a chance that he will face some discrimination at the interview stage. But if you have your own ideas for start-up then you are in a best position as you will have more opportunities. If you are dealing with foreign investors and clients then they are only interested in your ideas and performance and nothing else.

3.8 THE EXPERIENTIAL DOMAIN OF WORK

3.8.1 (OVER) WORK AND PRODUCTIVITY

How does one know if whatever one is doing in the name of work is not overwork or even exploitation? While in industrial work, there was a clear concept of 'overtime' which clearly signalled to people that it is over and above normal quantity of work and in most cases one would get paid for it, such a thing is not possible in the kind of work that my research is concerned with. The central characteristic of contemporary work in the corporate sector is that there is blurring of lines between work and leisure in terms of not just time but also values and ideals. While 40-50 hours a week is a world-wide standard and accepted as the norm, there are rarely any instances of abiding by this norm in the cases that I researched on. Despite variations and differences in my field owing to the fact that I met people from different professions and occupations under the rubric service sector work, most of my respondents worked for over 60 hours a week. They worked weekends too. Post office work, they worked at home. They took calls after reaching home and next day morning before reaching office. Most of them are unable to completely disconnect from work even when they are on a long leave or a holiday in a different city/ country. They cannot be not available at any point and the common reason stated was that client-servicing is a job that is never ending and does not follow boundaries of time. The clients outsource work to the organization or agency, these clients could be Indian or international. No matter who they are, the person or team providing services to them have to be available to resolve problems, answer queries or arrange logistics and this could be anytime in the day or even late evening. Any employee at that point of time represents his company so his conduct would be the basis to judge the credentials of the company. The professionals are mindful of it and they do not complain.

My dressing sense, the way I talk, convince, cater to the needs of the clients are all very important and my bosses know everything because they somehow get an update on

everything. So this one time I was waiting to be free from work in the evening as I had planned to watch a movie with my sister, the tickets were booked. This particular person I was working with on that project was a senior kind of person. She was intelligent but had no sense of time at all. She would keep asking me stuff even after I was done with the day's work. Later there was a problem in the workshop that we had arranged for them and she called me up and she was rude to me. I told her that I have done my bit and I would not be equipped to handle problems at all stages and she should contact so and so person from my office. She did not see any reason and hung up saying that it was really unprofessional of our company to deal with it this way. I felt really angry, had to even cancel my movie plan because I immediately had to go to the venue despite it not being my territory of work. My initial anger was then replaced by a worry as to what would my boss say the next day. You know, there are 50 other people waiting to take up my job the moment I leave. So I brought some sense in my head and focused on my work. That is routine life when you work in this (public relations) field. – Manasi, 28 years, works in Gurgaon with an international PR firm.

Madeleine Bunting (2011) has done research on the "overwork culture" that is governing lives of professionals in the context of UK by analysing the entries made in her 'Working Lives' column on the Guardian website. She argued that there is a high volume of work that people do every day and work has an invasive effect on people's lives such as health, relationships and other aspects. Contemporary work culture in the UK is such that it is work which is the centre-stage of life and it takes away almost all of a person's time and energy than ever before, though it also fulfils more needs of people than ever before. She argues that while people looked at the negative side of work and wrote about it in her columns, they never fail to recognize the positives of work which they also mention to her in the interviews. For many of them, work is not drudgery, it is exciting and rewarding.

How can we understand work without looking at the concept of productivity? I wish to stretch it a little further and ask the question, Can life today be led or understood without the concept of productivity? Perhaps the answer to this is no. Productivity, in simple words, in terms of professionals employed in any organization (also called workforce productivity) is an assessment of the efficiency of a worker or group of workers. Productivity may be measured in terms of the output of an employee in a specific period of time. Employers and employees are aware that the success of any organization relies upon the productivity of its workforce. Productivity is linked to

maximizing the impact from both capital and labour. Today, we have a third big component which can increase productivity in almost all kinds of work that is internet and overall technology improvement. For instance, most of the interactions that happen between different regional branches of an organization or even overseas interactions with clients happen though use of advanced ICT and facilities like video conferencing which immediately reduces inputs and maximizes output. Productivity is also closely linked with employee skills and expertise, which if improved, promises increased productivity and an edge over one's competitors.

Organizations spend a lot of time and resources in increasing productivity in the form of frequent training programs, using advanced technology with constant upgradation, employing highly skilled labour, cutting avoidable costs (the irony the world over today is that costs are cut by laying off workers and this is happening to people at all levels). Though technology is mostly an enabling factor at work, a common problem that have gripped management of all kinds of companies, big or small is how to regulate employees in terms of the amount and nature of time they spend in social networking or other personal activities on the internet? There is a term for this called 'cyber slacking'. This reduces productivity of employees and organization. As a result, some organizations place a limit on the number of sites one can visit on the corporate network so that their time can be regulated. Interestingly, there are studies conducted which show that employees get diverted every 3-4 minutes while using the internet and it takes long to regain the focus. There is a branch of research in science called 'interruption science' which measures the impact of disruptions on employee productivity. There are 'skills' which are taught in order to counter this such as ways to manage your emails faster or 'how to search relevant information on the web without being distracted'' and so on. No matter what one does, productivity is never enough. The narratives and interviews revealed to me that despite putting all efforts, spending over ten hours at work, employees have been told that the company did not make enough profit in a given quarter so either they would get no raise or no bonus or in worst situations, they would lay off people to further cut costs.

Cost-benefit analysis is one of the key ways to gauge productivity. This is a standard that is followed in all businesses the world over in which benefits are gauged vis-à-vis cost or inputs provided. The suitability of an investment made rests on the returns made or the output. The interesting thing that this research helped me see is the varied

ways in which this approach to work permeates all other aspects of one's life including education, relationships, marriage, choice of partner and ways of parenting. *Yeh karke kya fayeda hoga* (What is the benefit of doing this?) is a standard mode of thought[25]. While choosing a subject to study, the first line of thought is - "How much am I paying for this and what are the options once I complete the course?" My respondents, once they became comfortable in my presence after initial ice-breaking, candidly explained to me the way they think, contemplate and plan when it comes to choosing a life partner in case of arranged marriages. For a working professional living away from family in a city, with a pressure to maintain a certain social status and lifestyle of comforts and sometimes indulgences, what makes the most sense is to find a partner who is from similar socio-economic class, preferably caste, religious and ethnic background[26]. But the most important factor is for the partner to be working, drawing a good salary package. This makes life easier, more hassle free. There offer better chances of having the desired lifestyle.

3.8.2 TIME-MANAGEMENT AS A LIFE SKILL

Productivity is linked with time. It is because the more work done in less time garners profit. One's career, relationships, leisure and one's overall worth is gauged in a relationship with time. It is time which is used to determine one's possibilities and limitations of achieving success at work. The ways in which time is scheduled determine one's planning capacities. Time is well slotted and activities planned by the clock in advance; planned and judicious use of time is seen as the marker of success and efficiency. There is constant negotiation with time, it is exchanged, bought, even stolen in trying to balance work and life; putting time to correct use is an oft-repeated phrase in the lives of all working professionals, even the children. Time is supposed to be treated as a precious commodity which must be put to use in 'productive' manner.

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[25] As a researcher, the most repeated question that I had to answer was "What will you get by doing a PhD in sociology? Will you become an HR professional or will you join CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility?)"

[26] The more similar the social background, the less need to convince or fight it out with immediate and extended family, as one of my single male respondents said, "Who has the time to be the rebel and go for inter-caste marriage? Who has the time for such tensions and efforts to sort things out? It is not just in arranged marriage but in love marriage too. Meet my friends and you will see it. School and college romance could be different. People are not blind when they seriously consider marriage. The thing is we all are busy, have to earn money, trying to do everything. The last thing we would want is trouble in family life"

All the people I met were asked a common question at their interviews, "How good are you at time-management and multitasking?"

Every day begins with preparing a to-do list which includes minute breakup of all large projects in terms of small achievable tasks and deadline set against it. By the end of day, one's to-do list should be done with. Though this is the norm and the desire, it is often not achieved as much. It is not achieved owing to various reasons – concentration deficit which leads to more time spent on a task than allotted, being distracted by other events happening at work such as unexpected meetings with supervisors or clients. A large chuck of the time goes in phone calls which is work that is not accounted for. It is because a lot of discussion, planning and coordination which are all part of project management needs to be in place for the rest of the work to happen and meet deliverables in the "stipulated time". However, this aspect of the work cannot be used as an excuse for delay in meeting deadlines. Calls are never ending. It happens early morning before reaching office, during meals, after work-hours in the evening and even at night, more so for those who are directly in touch with overseas clients.

Work-life balance (WLB) is the most discussed concept in workplaces and in policy decisions regarding workplaces around the world. In sociological literature, it also finds as much mention and exploration as it deserves. To define it:

> WLB involves a contest between competing interests and relationships: a contest that is governed by the mutability of time/ space that is a fundamental characteristic of flexible capitalism. Twenty first century capitalism has the capacity to flexibilise time and space, to time shift, to transform industrial age notions of time and space (work time and work space) to enable particular groups of workers to work from home, to work on the move, to stay connected, to be on-line, to be available 24/7.' (Kelly 2013:163)

> Work-Life Balance (WLB) has been an issue of concern for the last few decades. The current context of globalization and the changing nature of work have provided the impetus for this topic. The current work scenario is marked by the fast pace of change, intense pressure, constant deadlines, changing demographics, increased use of technology and the co-existing virtual workplace. Juxtaposed with this, the increase in average income and rise in living standards have individuals striving for better work atmosphere, improved family and personal life. Today is the time when employees want it all. It is not restricted to one domain of work or life but rather a rich synthesis of

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the two. WLB metaphor is a social construct located within a particular period of time and originating in the western context. Research in this domain emerged at a time when the number of women entering the labour market grew and resulted in a focus on working mothers and dual earner families (Shankar and Bhatnagar 2010: 74).

There is a relationship between time as understood in the world of work and the concept of WLB. Research has shown that with increasing technology, digitalization, work has been chained from a particular time and space. It has made us unable to understand where work ends and personal life begins. Hence the question above could be misplaced in an era of 24/7 flexible capitalism as argued by Kelly (2013). Time needs to be understood in the context of managing it in different ways such as quality time, being time poor or rich, finding time and losing time.

Interestingly enough, despite all the planning and the efforts, it is this very time which is always in crunch. It is never enough not only at work but also in one's personal lives. There is a perpetual time shortage, all kinds of devices and efforts to save time does not save it. While one of the reasons attributed by my respondents for this is the unending nature of work which flows from dawn to dusk, from Monday to Sunday, from office space to the home inhabiting the laptop and the smartphone, the other is the invasion of technology in the form of a smartphone into the lives of people today. One is constantly checking one's emails, chat messages on WhatsApp and checking social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. Sometimes the distinction between work and leisure is blurred when it uses these platforms for communication as one is chatting with friends and is also constantly in touch with one's colleague, boss or client.

The messages one sends out on social media are used to gauge one's orientation to life, to work, to people which is used these days by a lot of organizations to screen candidates. While some kinds of work requires one to be opinionated where people with specific and strong take on issues and sharp communication of those ideas are a positive filter, there are other kinds of work where thinking minds could be a potential threat so strongly opinionated people are filtered out. The importance attributed to social media profiles can be gauged by the fact that LinkedIn, a public media platform for professional networking has one's social media page enlisted in it which makes it easy for recruitment agencies or HR department in companies to study and screen

candidates. So the contradiction at play here is that while most organizations stress on work-life balance, work takes up most of one's time and mindspace.

3.8.2.1 A Day in the Life of a Corporate Lawyer: Looking At Time through the Eyes of a Professional

Planning by the cock and executing small task as per deadlines were a regular part of the work-life of all my respondents. It was at its peak at work but it also was part of non-work hours of their life starting from the morning till late evening so as to enable smooth execution of the entire day's to-do-lists. For instance, if one did not leave home on time, there would be more traffic. Delay in starting the workday would end up extending the work time by an hour or two in the evening. That would interfere with one's commitments with family or friends. However, in certain cases, a specific approach to time and timekeeping is an essential part of their work and this is achieved at the level of formal training and subsequently, on the job. Corporate law, among several others, is one profession where any legal work done for any corporate client by the lawyers are billed to them in terms of hours and minutes. This billing goes into the overall project-cost and the company makes a certain profit on each of these cases. The profit that the company makes on an annual basis is calculated keeping into account all these billings made to the clients and payments received. If this is not done, not only is the individual held responsible for the overall company profit, but it also effects what the employees draw from the company in the form of their salaries.

I observed 34 year old corporate lawyer Rishabh at his desk at work for a few hours one morning. As an outsider, I was not given permission to sit in the cubicles in close proximity to the employees but sat at a distance. He works in a three side enclosed 6X6 cubicle with high walls which do not allow eye-contact or free flowing communication with fellow employees. His iPhone was adjacent to his laptop and was constantly ringing. Most of the times I saw him talk on his phone while looking at his computer screen which had spreadsheets, charts and other kinds of software. The rest of the time he was typing, punching in numbers, reading files, making notes on a word document. He used the office extension to get in touch with his colleague or his boss who has a room to himself a few feet away. He sipped green tea, coffee, had a fruit while constantly looking at either the computer or his phone screen. He took one

smoke break in the course of the first half of the day. Later at home we had a long discussion which threw light on the things which I had observed him do.

R: Every single day I have to punch in my time that I put in every smallest work; like in first 45 minutes I was drafting a letter, then I was drafting an opinion in separate cases, like a case C I had telecom for 2 hours and all. So you know how much time you have given on an entire day to your work and you also have a breakup because you have individual cases and their timings through a billing software which most firms have nowadays. So this window on my computer is always open and you have to type in the details of work and time spent. If you don't do it daily, you will not remember later. So after that the partner goes through and approves everything. There might be some plusses and minuses.

M: Can the client ever not accept your billing?

R: Yes sometimes if he requests for a discount or feels the bill is on the higher side. I have not been part of the billing and finance team in India, in UK I have. Before all this, the engagement letter is typed and sent with all the details from work done to courier and international calls and all that. In London, we had a software where we would keep a tab on the number of pages they had to photocopy on a particular document of a particular project as that was also billed to the client..A law firm works on the principle that the client is paying you only for the time and nothing else, so anything else is also to be billed.

M: So how does all this affect you in general?

R: I consider myself to be very punctual as a person even outside my work. So I have an uncle in Pashchim vihar and if I have to meet him, even if I get a little late, I start feeling embarrassed and I keep thinking about it till I reach. I feel bad when I keep someone waiting or if someone is keeping me behind the clock.

M: Why is that, you think?

R: I was always punctual. And it also increased when I went to London and more so when I joined law firms where we are bound to measure and keep track of every minute of our work-time. I feel I am more refined that most people when it comes to time keeping. So for me 10 minutes is not lose or casual, it means 10 and not 12 minutes. I respect my time and others time and I feel if I have put in an effort for someone then I should be paid for my time. Although I have never run a business, but always been part of one, I have seen the heads of businesses to inflate the bills, sometimes I find it annoying. When I see it from the larger perspective, I realize it is business and that

these things will happen in the accounts. I find it alright, it happens when we haggle in Janpat market. The shopkeeper agrees and we feel we won but he actually always keeps a margin. So these things happen in business.

At this point his wife came back from work, he asked her to join the discussion. She looked tired and excused herself for a while. We continued the discussion and she joined later. She asked me if I wanted to eat or drink something and did not take no for an answer. She went to the kitchen to get some refreshments. She sat for a while with us but was clearly not very interested in our discussion. I mentally decided to speak to her on some other occasion when she would be more relaxed and would have time to narrate about her life. It seemed she wanted to be left on her own and just relax. They sensed my hesitation to continue the discussion late in the evening. However, Rishabh insisted on continuing the discussion with me as he was unsure if he would be able to give me time for a third round of interview. I realized that time was indeed in shortage considering his work hours. So I continued.

R: Abroad they are even more particular about time. Like we are expected to minimize the window we are working on when we get a phone call, click on the clock which is there in the software, and stop it when the call ends. So like 6 minutes is one unit. If I talk to someone on a project for 7 mins, I will charge 2 units to the client.

M: Okay. So tell me something, how does such nuanced time keeping happen? Also, is it even possible to take a break in the middle of something?

M: (laughs) Yes it is possible but not desirable. Things take time to be learned. When the software came in, we were given training as we were doing it manually up until then. So that we would be told on how to do it. I am a bit slow with things like this. I did not fill my time sheets for 1 month. So at the end of the month, I was in some trouble as I had not filled in details for which I was hauled up by the seniors. I said that I don't understand how it works. So again training was organized and my junior helped me with time. Law firm has both billable and non-billable hours. We are expected to put in some non-billable hours also, although in India it does not happen that much.

So time is an important factor in the lives of these people. It is never enough. It is a prized possession, it is a high-value commodity whose worth can be calculated at work.

3.8.3 MODES OF PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY WORK

Presentation of self (Goffman 1959) in certain ways that provide means to certain ends defined by the workplace, the organizational goals, the overall demands from one's profession and the economic structure is a necessary part of survival in the contemporary service sector. One of the central ideas is to 'package' oneself as a 'brand'. I use the word brand because a brand stands for a thing, a value, a unique selling point, specific characteristic feature that makes it viable to be purchased by consumers in the market. Any organization looking to recruit or recruitment agency in job market acts like a consumer. It has a plethora of brands to choose from and it selects one based on its requirements, value and affordability. Potential employees are in abundance in the market today. The employer looks at a professional who has packaged himself in the most innovative way that would attract employers to him/her. This packaging involves educational qualification, work-experience and family background. This is in tandem with 'soft-skills' like communication skills, English fluency and vocabulary, body language, interests and appearance. The interesting thing here is that based on my interactions with professionals from diverse sector and designations, the 'soft-skills' are as important as the other requirements.

Here I would like to elaborate on the arguments made by Kelly (2013). Basically, he tries to underline what it means to imagine the 'self as enterprise' i.e. the different forms of personhood that are required in the globalized, precarious labour markets. He wanted to understand the way work is imagined today in the over-developed western economies of the world, the ways in which it is imagined, regulated and performed and its role in peoples' lives today. The cultivation of self as an enterprise, is, as the author argues a life-long activity that should give meaning, direction and purpose to life. Kelly follows the approach of Max Weber who in his work "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" looked at work and the virtues attached to work and in the ways in which certain Protestant sects influenced those virtues. He draws from Foucault in terms of both theory and methodology.

In order to better understand the nature of the society (western world) in which people live and work, Kelly looked at the works of Beck (1992), Bauman (2000), Sennett (1999) and others and the common theme that emerged was that "processes of globalization done by electronically enabled microprocessor based technologies have transformed the material reality of paid work" (Kelly 2013: 7). As I have argued

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earlier, globalization has induced feelings of uncertainties and anxieties and the responsibilities for any failure or success are fully attributed to the individual. In the new world of work as seen by Beck and others, existence is marked by perpetual anxiety. Literature referred in this research and the fieldwork highlighted that selling oneself in the marketplace is almost a given and a necessity. While there could be ways such skills are taught in one's professional course or at the workplace in the process of training and workshops, it is passed off as being presentable or highly skilled/ talented. It is an all pervading thought which questions utility of educational qualification if one does not know how to use it effectively, in a way that it is seen as productive by the market. Selling oneself in the work market is as important as doing something well or learning something new. Some of my respondents who initially had problems coping with this reality told me how people around them would constantly advise them to work not hard but smart, to not just work but to develop contacts and network with the right people. During any interview, one must be confident and would need to hide their flaws. There are experts who coach people to appear for interviews; there are agencies (these days both online and offline) who teach people to write CVs in a way that would attract organizations and recruitment agencies.

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) looks at the nature of the time-phase and worldview in post-industrial societies in the context of western world, calling it "liquid-lifeworld" as opposed to the more solid foundations of life, work and values in industrial modernity. The solid phase had its own challenges, but it was more certain and limitations were known. In the liquid phase, life is marked by fast change, choices, opportunity and apparent open-mindedness but at the same time it has fears, anxieties and uncertainties. It is a dynamic phase where change is fast and constant nobody knows what tomorrow would bring. The important thing that Kelly draws from these scholars is that there are ways of being which work ethic of a certain kind demand from the people and this also flows into one's non-work aspects of life such as health, relationships and work-life balance. All aspects of a professional's life is performance related and this is something that I would build on further.

Carol Upadhay (2007) in her study on social composition of IT professionals argues on similar lines. There are three different stages that are involved in the selection of professionals for a job in the IT sector. First, the top companies go for campus placement to the top 40 to 50 elite institutions and engineering colleges in the country.

Second, the cut off marks which are required for the students to have in the course of their four year program is above 65 to 70% which excludes a lot of candidates, more so the SC/ST/OBC candidates whose passing marks is lower than those of the general category students throughout their in college. Third filter, which is a very important one and can solely determine a candidate's future despite clearing the requirements in the first two levels is testing one's soft skills which are part of the HR interviewing process.

> The third level of filtering occurs during the interview process, which follows a written test (usually of logical, analytical, and problem-solving skills, as well as English and Maths). First there is a group discussion to evaluate communication skills, personality and spontaneous thinking abilities. The candidates who are short-listed in this round are then individually interviewed. There are two types of interview - technical and human resource (HR). The HR interview is designed to assess non-technical attributes of candidates, such as attitudes and values, personality, career aspirations, and "soft skills", and to determine whether s/he will "fit" into the company's culture. The most important "soft skill" that is assessed during the HR interview is communication skill. Since many software jobs, especially in services companies, are "client-facing", good communication skills are considered to be essential, and a candidate who is otherwise well qualified may be rejected purely on this basis (Ibid:186).

So it is clear here that a certain kind of presentation and performance of self is crucial. In this section I put down the different modes of self-presentation that one requires to engage with, based on my observations and interactions with my respondents.

3.8.3.1 A Successful Professional is a Busy One

Spending longer hours at work is seen as a sign of commitment. A lot of professionals I met told me that not leaving office on time is often seen in a positive light. This is not something they personally believe in, but have to professionally subscribe to it because the workplace culture dictates it. It is not something which is a standard, it varies with the sector one is with, the kind of management that runs the organization, the work-ethic or temperament of one's immediate senior. Very few of my respondents leave office at the end of the 8 hour shift. However, they say that this is a very Indian thing to do. In the west, work-life balance is encouraged.

It is not even considered good ethic to ask when I may leave. Again I would say that on a regular day, it would not leave before 9.30 pm on a regular day. 10-12 hours is average. If you are busy, it could go up to even 2.30-3.0 pm. Even if you don't have work, you have to pretend that you have work and you are busy. One should not go home at 7.30 pm. So people look at you and give you cold stares if you leave early, as in how can you do something like that, especially if your seniors are still working? (Karan, 33, insights team of an FMCG company).

Forty year old Dheeraj has worked in different sectors and in different countries like Australia, South Africa and India. One of the things we discussed during my first interaction with him was the difference between working in India and the western countries. They have a better understanding of work-life balance, employees do not hesitate leaving office on time after work-hours. He is now used to calling his colleague at any time of the day when there is a requirement, but people do not do that in the west. He pointed out that even if it is an MNC or an American company operating in India with an Indian as a head, the work environment could become unlike that in the offices in the west. The moment an Indian handles an important position here, the first thing he does is expect people to stay back longer, work weekends, make getting leave an unwelcome experience so that people would think twice before taking it. He has had the experience of working in an MNC which was systematic, things were planned and there was a culture of mutual understanding and encouragement. Relations were formal but more professional and one could rely on one's colleague. All this was when they had an American boss who would oversee everything. However, there were changes and an Indian was hired in a top position to overlook overall functions and operations in this country. That almost changed the work-environment overnight. It started functioning like a typical *lala* company where people had to work for 12-14 hours in office and beg for leave, one would have to keep pleasing the boss. Eventually Dheeraj put in his papers and got a job in another organisation. He looks back at that decision and considers it correct and that which preserved his sanity.

3.8.3.2 24/7 Concurrent Availability – In the Real and the Virtual World

In certain kinds of jobs, especially the ones into client servicing, one must come across as tactful and adept as a multitasker. One who knows when one has to be available online and the moment that one needs to be off it. Ideally, one should be available 24X7 without compromising on the actual work one is doing in the real space as opposed to the virtual. There must be a seamless transfer of self from the 'real' mode to the 'virtual' mode. It is the work itself which requires one to freely oscillate between the real and the virtual space.

Working in the service sector in contemporary time comes with an unsaid condition that one must be reachable at all times whether it is in full time or part time work. So when cannot be physically available for work (late evenings, nights or weekends), then there needs to be availability for virtual communication. It is because clients expect 24.7 services in terms of responding to their queries or following any other instructions they might have for an ongoing project. For part time employees, consultants and freelancers, there is an expectation to be available and take on any work that comes but with no guarantee of when the work will come. The point that I am trying to make is that this is linked to our previous section on time management. While one is always managing and negotiating time, using different kinds of technology to save time, it is still in crunch and one of the reasons the crunch is perpetual is because of the 24.7 availability in both the real and the virtual world.

> I sometimes think where is my time going? It is not that I am working in office for 15 hours and then outside working in something else. I am not doing all the work at home because I have a cook and a maid too. I had gone to meet my parents a few months back. I was complaining to them that I don't get time for any hobbies and that makes me frustrated. My father had sarcastically said that get off that phone and you will have plenty of time to live. For a minute, I was hurt by it because I was not Instagraming or Facebooking all the time but I was reading, responding to mails and messaging all the time. All of this together was actually taking up a lot of my time. But did I have a choice? It is not merely for show off but you need to be a certain way here otherwise they will call you dated. Come to think of it, not only will people make fun but they will get offended because I won't be online 24.7 (Arun, 31 years, advertising)

3.8.3.3. One Has To "Be a Certain Way": Embracing a Personhood and Worldview

One's survival in the service sector is not dependent merely on one's knowledge and skills. There are several other requirements. For instance, being aware of latest products and brands across categories, knowledge of the movies, music and fashion sense. It includes a certain kind of communication in English, a certain demeanour and body language. A lot of organizations across different sectors have trainings of two kinds – one of developing specific skill sets or technical skills which are required for the job to be handled. The other is developing soft-skills such as personality development courses which are conducted by the organization as part of the initial training, more so in jobs that include client-servicing. This kind of training includes imparting skills in convincing people, ways to develop self-confidence while meeting new clients, the kinds of attire that are suitable. Even brands of clothes, shoes, accessories are recommended. People are instructed to wear perfume and use deodorants and carry them in their bags. The acceptable ways in which one can present oneself are handed down through not just initial trainings but subtle ways of socialization over the whole course of their career in an organization. This "workplace-socialization" as I call it, happens as much in the conference or training rooms as in the work-cubicles and in the cafeteria or other informal spaces. It is constantly imparted not just by HR trainers but by senior management and by colleagues.

The spatial location of a person whether it is urban/ rural/semi urban is of significance when it comes to matter of recruitment/ selection. In minority of the cases where candidates are from small towns and found their way into the corporate sector, their experiential domain is usually riddled with inconsistencies, negotiations and finding ways to sustain themselves in an environment which is different from what they had ever imagined or hitherto been exposed to. Snigdha Biswas is a 28 year old professional working with an international corporate research organization in Gurgaon. She hails from a small district in West Bengal named Purulia which can be classified as tier 3 semi-urban area. She completed her education from a private school in Purulia and then went to Shantiniketan for her master's degree. She hails from a middle class household and they belong to SC category. The father holds a government job while her mother is a teacher in government primary school. She had

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come across an opening in this particular organization on one of the online job portals and had applied for it. She feels her good writing skills made her a good contender for the job. She was called for a written test and an interview to Delhi and she fared well in both. She landed herself a job when she was 26. Her parents were supportive of her decision to move to a city but it was a decision that was taken after a lot of deliberation. Initially she was both excited and scared. It was a rare chance she had got. She was mindful of the fact that not many people land themselves a corporate job in a city coming from a small town with no previous job experience. She started out at an entry level but she was happy that she was independent. She was desperate to make some money so as not to be financially dependent on her family. Also, staying back at home would end up in marriage within a year or two which she did not want.

> It is a big deal for a young girl to come alone to a city from a small town with humble upbringing. I was not poor but I was behind some of my peers at the workplace in terms of a lot of things. I was unaware of latest brands of products. I was not well versed with English movies. I had restrictions in my home on what I could watch. My parents were strict but serious about my education and career. But I didn't have all the freedom. I realized that what people discuss in informal groups outside of the office, be it in parties or lunch or smoke breaks were very important in one's acceptability in the organization. There is always a group which is the coolest and closest to the big bosses. I was not incapable and it was not that people put me down deliberately but I did feel left out at times. I could not give examples from brands or music or movies that others could relate to. They would be surprised that I had not watched certain Hollywood movies or that I didn't know Pink Floyd's music. I would feel embarrassed.. I resigned to the fact that there are things I didn't know and I would always be behind some. Initially I was upset and lost my confidence but with time I realized I had to prepare myself and there was no other job waiting for me. So I worked hard. I feel I have improved over the years.

The attributes which she realized she lacked and later tried to acquire would what be qualified as 'cultural capital' by Bourdieu which is also argued by Upadhay (2007).

Kunal is a 37 year old chartered accountant who is working with an American real estate company. He is unmarried, lives with his parents in Noida. He is from Baniya caste of Rajasthan whose predecessors had migrated to this city decades back. He began his career when he was 24 and today he is a senior manager with this firm. He draws a package of over 30 lakhs per annum. He spends over 60 hours at work per

week, often works from home and is on the phone taking work related calls over 4 hours a day both on weekdays and weekends. He is fond of traveling, trekking, biking and other adventure sports and struggles to find time to do these things. He often contemplates leaving his job and settling down in some village or small town where he would do a simple teaching job and have a garden of his own where he would do farming. I met him a few times and his anguish over the conflicting tendencies of continuing his job, earning well and giving up all this, in the search for a more meaningful, soulful life was visible each time I met him. His narrative of entry into the corporate world and what it took to keep it going is interesting because it shows that the demands made by work and the workplace have to be met by professionals across sector, age or designation. While one's family background, primary socialization, schooling, choice of leisure or hobbies, exposure prepare one to be better suited to perform certain kind of roles, for those who feel they come from conservative families or from an environment which is radically different from the global, cosmopolitan world of the corporate sector, they have to go through a period where they grope in the dark trying to find their feet.

Kunal has to meet big investors, rich businessmen, builders, contractors on a daily basis. The employees who join this organization are given a training at the outset where it is clearly stated that one needs to be mindful of the way one presents or conducts oneself. The organization that a professional represents at any client meeting is judged on the basis of the car he drives, the phone he carries, the wristwatch, the brand of clothes and so forth. Kunal had a blackberry and he used to be happy with it. However, each time an iPhone would be launched, his colleagues and boss would urge him to upgrade. He did not want to buy a car because he would not want the hassle of driving it in traffic. He was comfortable with the metro and sometimes would take a cab to work. He kept it that way for a few years. However, he would always feel the pressure to buy a car. His immediate boss would often say in jest, "You are good at your work but the client won't give us business because you don't even have a car! We are into real estate. Everything is about show off here".

Kunal clarified to me, "You need to prove that the employees are well fed by the company. If the company does not have enough money to maintain it employees, how is it credible that it can spend crores of money on developing projects or funding others? So we are urged to buy fancy cars, phones, clothes. Sometimes I feel

frustrated and tell them why you don't buy these things for us if you want to use us to showcase these to the clients. But of course you can't ask this".

The above discussions are in tune with similar research done in the service sector in other countries and similar arguments are made in terms of linking work with aesthetic labour and consumption using theoretical framework of Bourdieu.

> Bourdieu referred to the particular importance of consumption for the symbolic struggle for advancement of the middle classes. Studies of social class and consumption in developed countries demonstrate close correlations between member ship of economic class hierarchies and participation in high-brow social activities including costly and conspicuous consumption such as visiting top restaurants. Beyond the extracurricular manifestation of class identity, consumption orientation is increasingly woven into service sector job duties in the form of 'aesthetic labour' where the worker's presentation is part of the product; looking good, sounding right (Warhurst and Nickson 2009).

> While research has mainly focused on the hospitality and fashion industries, aesthetic labour is part of most interactive services, a rapidly growing part of the economy. Affective aesthetic labour often depends on the naturalized performance of appropriate consumption by the employees themselves (Murphy 2011: 23).

In developing countries, global consumption process often act as the most important means to middle class identity both in material and symbolic terms, as a means to live a modern life in their homes and also to project a higher status in society. It is consumption behaviour which is the cultural context for the middle classes and it reflects the extent of appeal of the global modernity project to the middle classes in general. The important thing here is the idea of consumption is not just in the personal sphere but is an intrinsic part of one's work-life as seen through the concept of aesthetic labour which is not just restricted to looking good and sounding right in the retail and hospitality industries, but most other service industry work be it advertising, research, branding, marketing and other forms of consulting. As my respondents Kunal, Kedaar and Snigdha had expressed, there is a certain sense of responsibility that is put on professionals when they are expected to be the 'face-of the-company' in front of clients who give them work. When they represent their company, they have to conduct themselves in a certain way and that includes exuding a certain aura which can be filtered down to class, consumption of certain products, brands, values, body

language, reflecting a sharp mind and go-getter attitude; immaculately dressed; to be articulate in English and to be mindful of hierarchy in the organizational structure. One of the sectors which is required comparatively less to focus on this is the software industry. It is because most of their work is around communication through use of technology where face to face interaction is not part of everyday work.

3.9 CONCLUSION

Arlie Hochschild's work *The Time Bind* shows that it is often work that becomes home and home that becomes work. Some people find work to be more predictable, more under their control and exciting when compared to managing different chores at home and dealing with relationship problems and their emotional hassles. Hochschild argues that many people find haven in their workplaces, away from the intensity of personal relations that in any case are fragile. Though work itself is insecure and precarious, there is always hope of a better next day or a better job in the future.

Despite having multiple complaints from work life, there is a strong sense of identity that one draws from one's occupation. There is a sense of purpose to life that work brings, one's achievements and success are defined by performance at work and the whole family takes pride in one's achievements. Work is seen to be the most important part of one's life, everything else in life can be planned around it and unless on is able to give one's best to work, nothing else would be in place.

> Assuming the necessary authoritative position with clients requires fluent English, but also the capacity to engage confidently with western clients, depending on a broad identification with the cultural identities and 'thought styles' of those clients. Achieving this identification is much more than accent training and adopting western names. Managing a relationship and achieving a successful outcome - whether the sale of a financial product, collecting an unpaid credit card bill or satisfying a customer service complaint – depends on an internalized capacity to engage across space and cultural distance. It involves reducing cultural distance and the sharing of elements of a common habitus with clients in the western world, worldview, values and social norms. This process should be seen neither as corporate coercion, nor of genuinely free will. As Bourdieu argues, those who enter a field enter a social space, at the same time coercive and also the environment within which the individual interests can be pursued (Murphy 2011: 429).

Keeping with these arguments of Bourdieu, my research suggests that while this particular kind of work, namely, the global service industry under the neoliberal 'flexible capitalism' (Kelly 2013) is taxing, yet it is also beneficial and provides different opportunities. It could be taxing or sometimes constraining, in terms of time, balancing work and home, keeping up with constant change in the face of upgradation demands in business practices and technological innovations. It is challenging to satisfy different clients on different kinds of projects, successfully projecting the right image as per the demands of the situation, always being available and ready to take on work and even putting up with a not-so-transparent promotion process within the internal hierarchical structure. But a lot of these negatives are either off-set by or deliberately ignored (for lack of alternatives) by people in lieu of their hard earned remuneration, the bonus, the positive image and social status, the possibilities of participating in a global environment defined by materialistic attainments, consumption and upward mobility. For instance, time is a huge constraint and one is often either leading a highly regimented life or unable to make sense of the pace of their own life resulting in a sense of detachment from real world and a sense of meaninglessness associated with life. However, the sense of independence from the monetary/ financial security, the feeling of accomplishment of making it in an industry which seemingly work on principle of merit, the access to material wealth in the form of goods, international brands/ services and possibilities of leading the desired kind of modern lifestyle in the present and the future are benefits they think would compensate for all that they lose out on. On the whole, people seldom complained. When they had bouts of frustration or despair, they would tell themselves that this is just a part of life and too many of these episodes mean they are losing a grip over their life which is their own doing.

The transnational new-middle class habitus (Murphy 2011) is built upon the social and cultural capital which is transferred generationally in a seamless way, perpetuating the status quo, through contemporary urban life, work and creation of new networks which are an essential part of the process. The Indian corporate service professionals are part of the global middle class, whose values and lifestyles share many elements of common habitus with the middle classes of developed countries. Globalization, access to different forms of global media through the simplest and most personal devices such as cell phone and different social media platforms have

enabled this kind of exchange of ideas and information. While the privileged from the license raj generation especially travelled abroad or got gifts in order to have access to international products and brands, this generation is able to order anything they want online, whether or not the products are available in the domestic market.

Drawing from Daniel Bell's (1976) study of post-industrial society, the west has moved from industrial to post-industrial phase in which the role of the expert is seminal in governing the state, economy and science and the superiority of their professional knowledge is widely acknowledged and power is centred around that knowledge. This expertise in managing different aspects of work and life and the rationality that is associated with it is the cornerstone of governing life in post-industrial society. Managerial thinking and rationality is the basis of work, business, leisure, family, relationships and emotions.

> Who exactly would lead in this symphony of knowledge and expertise? Thirty years after this seminal book we can solve this puzzle: it is obvious that the regime of management (not of managers) has become the leading semantics of and for the social. Managerial rationality invades virtually all the spheres of life from professional careers to private relationships up to social problems of all kinds. Managerialism can be seen as the dominant form of governmentality that is a conglomerate of techniques and rationalities for ruling others and the self (Foucault 2000; Dean 1995; Rose 1996 as cited in Kelly 2013).

> Managerial thinking culminates in the character of the entrepreneurial self who rationalizes his or her whole life according to market imperatives and knows how to seize opportunities. In the labor market adaptability, flexibility, disposability, mobility and polyvalence are prerequisites for employability (Sennett 1999; Kanter 1995 as cited in Kelly 2013). The individual is called upon to submit to the imperative of relentless self-improvement and to be prepared to incur risks. In order to do so s/he must get used to seeing him or herself with the eyes of others as a product to be sold in the marketplace. Handling the self as an enterprise is a necessity pertaining also to the "market place of life" beyond the labor market. The entrepreneurial self has become a "comprehensive model of neoliberal subjectivity" not just in the economic system but as a general mode of self- regulation (Kelly 2013: 78).

My interactions with professionals revealed certain aspects of their lives at work which echo the above, especially the need to package and sell oneself in the marketplace to be visible to those who want the services of this "self as enterprise"

(Kelly 2013). This kind of an ethos not just dominates one's professional career but also enters different domains of life. The important result of this way of life is that the onus of all successes and failures are attributed to the individual. When things do not go as per one's plans, there is a sense of fear of losing control, a fear of losing. One begins to think that whatever is happening is one's own doing and as a result a sense of gloom is not unlikely. There is a tendency to take a lot of pressure onto oneself.

Interactions with my respondents made me see and feel that they display grit and determination in order to fight the inconsistencies and ambiguities in life. There is a belief that a sense of control, success, material wealth are the ways in which life could be lived well and there is no scope for weakness, being emotionally vulnerable, or any place for negative thoughts. If any such thing occurs, there is a sense of discomfort with it and all efforts are made to put a lid on it. In times of growing uncertainty of work, wealth, health and risks of urbanization, one feels or is often made to feel that an individual is capable of overcoming obstacles and one has to take charge and control of one's life and be in a position to take care of his family. More often than not, one's deepest concerns or fears are not discussed with any family member. It is rare that people would open their heart out to their friends. It is seen, either as unacceptable, weak on their part to accept and share their vulnerabilities or seen as futile as everybody has problems and they need to tackle it on their own. While western societies work on individualistic values and Indian society have been characterized as collectivist in nature, this dichotomy cannot be applied to understand reality as there are grey areas. Despite being close to immediate and even extended family, members coming together on most social occasions, there is a growing distancing from one's family at an emotional level. Though it cannot be reduced to breakdown of family as an institution in India since there is a degree of jointness in structure and function, it is a dynamic relation and there are signs of both growing distancing from family, more so at an emotional level, along with increased efforts to maintain the ties, especially during social occasions like marriage, childbirth and festivals. In case of some of the respondents, there is a much higher degree of comfort and fondness for friends and not as much for family. But overall, there is a sense of being detached from others and depending more on oneself to overcome obstacles and move ahead in life.

Needless to say, the work-ethic that dominates the global economy service industry is "do-it-yourself" which harps on different values such as individual performance, constant need to update oneself, package oneself well as per the demands of the market based on a consistent "condition of performativity" (Lyotard 1984), ability of individual to fight all odds, success which is defined by to-do-it-all, 'you get what you deserve'. These are different but interrelated values which impact all these people in some common ways. One, it induces hope and optimism that one can achieve anything one wants to if one has the courage to dream big. Every chance or opportunity needs to be grabbed before it goes on to someone else. Every day is an opportunity to work hard and get closer to one's dream life. The time has come for India and Indians to make their presence felt in the world and individual efforts can become a collective to realize this potential. Indians have finally arrived. There is no scope of critical thinking as it has never been encouraged at any level be it school, college, work or family. Critical thinking is of no good and only stands in the way of success. There should be no more dependence on the government, socialist goals, economic plans and state protection of institutions. These are seen as factors that has left India in the category of third-world nations.

Two, it looks at failure very seriously and it gets defined as lack of able management of self and others. As discussed earlier, it pins failure onto the individual and makes it look like a private rather than a structural or public problem. As a result, individuals are encouraged to find private answers to all kinds of questions or problems, which does not easily let collective action happen at any level. It could be anything ranging from unemployment, growing economic disparities to failing work-life balance owing to increasing work pressures, constant fear of being laid off and replaced, no raise or promotion despite shouldering increasing responsibilities and so on.

Third, it makes one look at the concept of merit as a given, as natural because contemporary work in the private globalized corporate sector is blind to one's ascriptive status and only considers one's achieved status and believes that it offers a level playing field. Anybody who has the ability and the dreams can make it big in this world. It disables people from linking merit with privileges. Often people look at problems like poverty and inequality as lack of merit and political will. They are unable to see that the world is not inclusive and is highly unequal and hierarchical. The fact that one is able to push oneself and fulfil the needs of the organization is

often because one is standing at the top of an inherently hierarchical social structure. The push can be possible due to services of people who are below them in the social hierarchy such as maids, cooks, nannies and increasingly, even the grandparents. There is an increasing trend of 'outsourcing' which follows the same logic that economic outsourcing does – services are made available at a reasonable price for them to use owing to the overall system which perpetuates structural inequalities and does not allow questioning the status-quo. In addition, there is an increasing tendency of looking for 'professional services' that are considered superior to those obtained from informal sources. For instance, a trained, English speaking nanny or an institute which has trained professionals are sought after rather than finding someone from one's native village. The internet and social media plays a crucial role in setting this trend. Due to these trends, there is more pressure to earn a certain amount and maintain a certain kind of lifestyle. The next chapter of my thesis would elaborate upon the lifestyle, aspirations and consumption practices of my respondents.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DYNAMICS OF NEW MIDDLE CLASS LIFESTYLE: ON PRIVILEGES AND ANXIETIES

This chapter looks at the ideas and behaviour around desired lifestyle of the urban corporate professionals and ways in which they negotiate challenges on the road to their aspired identity. It looks at the ways in which their work and their leisure are related. It points to the fact that while there are privileges of caste (majority of my respondents belong to upper and middle caste groups), class, social and cultural capital, there is a downside to it. For every aspect of their class identity that gives them prosperity and other forms of privileges, there is a negative consequence that points to the instability and insecurity of the urban middle class life. All these various aspects of their quotidian lives are highlighted using excerpts and narratives from my interviews and overall impressions that I formed about them from by observations. In the introduction to the thesis, I have already laid down the theoretical meaning of the concepts I have employed such as lifestyle and consumption. Keeping those in mind, let us look at the lives of my respondents by employing these terms.

4.1 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IS SHAPED BY A CONSUMERIST DISCOURSE

Consumption is a social and cultural practise that people engage in to differentiate themselves from other individuals and groups and it shapes one's social location and identity. Consumerism is an ideology that frames our worldview, identity, values and relationships. Consumerism is that ideology which binds people to the capitalist system of mass production and sales which drive the economy and it is the act of consumption which determines an individual's location in social order.

Bauman (2007: 34) defines consumerism as:

> We may say that consumerism is a type of social arrangement that results from recycling mundane, permanent and so to speak 'regime-neutral' human wants, desires and longings into the principal propelling force of society, a force that coordinates systemic reproduction, social integration, social stratification and the formation of human individuals, as well as playing a major role in the processes of individual and group self-policies.

Chaudhuri (2017) has argued that based on television ads, the new Indian is a typical corporate sector executive who is an upwardly mobile professional. He/ she travels extensively and is a globe-trotting Indian. They work hard and they like to unwind during weekends and holidays and as seen in my own research, consumption of branded goods and services is one of the ways to do so. She argued that with the coming of the corporate transnational organizations in the Indian market post liberalization, young men and women who were English educated got opportunities to work and earn salaries which their parents did not get even at retirement.

My own research shows that the ways of life, household consumption patterns and dreams around lifestyle are linked to the new work ethos which entered India through coming of the MNCs. As she has argued, the middle class in contemporary India is different from those before 90s in the sense that values of safety, security were exchanged for success, risk taking and upward mobility (ibid.). Chaudhuri (1998) has argued that thrift is no longer a virtue and shopping is a legitimate pleasure. Advertisements profile consumers and looks at the new generation as 'hedonists' who do not mind spending on goods because they seek experimentation. This new Indian is body conscious, is free and wants to live without making compromises.

Corrigan (1997) provides an account of a variety of practices that link the consumption of goods to questions of lifestyle and the social communication of meaning. In his work he argued that the goods that we consume become bridges to a desired lifestyle. The reason that we can never consume enough is that these lifestyles are necessarily idealized and are more lived in fantasy than in reality. The turning of objects into desirable commodities is a key feature of tourism, advertising and the department store. In this he looks at the gendered aspects of consumptive experience. He points out how women's magazines, advertising and shopping have become pleasurable social practices in that they have commodified different aspects of femininity.

To take the example of women as a target audience for brands, one look at the jewellery, accessories, apparel and cosmetic brand advertisements reveal that the idea of a successful, modern working woman is tied to her performance at work, home and in the way she presents herself in everyday life. This presentation is dependent on the kinds of products and brands she adorns herself with. For instance, a modern working woman wants to look graceful so she deserves subtle, light intricate jewellery,

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something that is convenient to carry yet classy. She works from morning to evening and then goes for social outings so she needs a lipstick or a foundation that lasts an entire day. She makes so much effort so she deserves the best in terms of quality and only brands can offer that. Such images are attractive and influential. My research corroborates this. My respondents were either talking about brands or about not being able to afford some of the expensive ones or about limiting their desires to not upset their budget. No matter what their take on brands were, they were talking about it and their lives were influenced by it.

> As Chaudhuri (2017) argues, the new Indian is not desi but ethnic. There is a playful mixing of styles and codes which are called as hybridization' (p 94).

> What comes across through ads in print media is heralding of a new epoch, a celebration of new Indian man and woman who shape their own destinies and are unabashed about their pursuit of good life (p 102).

While discussing their sources of information about products and brands be it the restaurants they eat out at, clothes, gadgets they prefer or home décor items that are considered stylish, it was expressed that it is through their peers that they get most of their ideas from. Other important sources are advertisements, internet, social media, blogs and lifestyle/ fashion magazines. However, work culture is seen to be one of the aspects that drive their lifestyle decisions.

So when I say "consumerist discourse" it stands for the ways in which consumption is related to wider aspects of economy, work, rights and duties of the consumer who has a plethora of choices to pick from and an assurance that he is contributing to the country's economic growth through the various acts of consumption. The whole idea has shifted from production to consumption and related images are disseminated by the state (Fernandes 2006), the market, all forms of media be it print, online or social; economic policy, education system and so on. The importance of consumption for the country, for the society and for individuals is highlighted by these multiple medium at all times and it is so all pervading and entrenched that it begins to shape individual thought and behaviour. When this happens, ideas of a good life, success, desires and identity are tied to questions of aspirational lifestyle and acts of consumption that may bring it about.

4.2 HOW ARE CONSUMPTION AND WORK RELATED?

Giddens (1991) argues that there is a relationship between work and lifestyle because work has a direct relationship with life-chances that determine lifestyle codes. Simple living and high thinking is a philosophy of a bygone era. Today, there is no guilt in announcing to the world that one have arrived. Some may not identify with it in their personal life but it is almost a self-marketing strategy if one has to succeed at work. One needs to maintain a certain kind of lifestyle and be a certain way to be part of this social group. In the language of work, one has to be part of the right network, or else one may be out of the game. This is true, considering the fact that there are no open public exams which recruit people to work in the private sector. In such a structure, it is either lineage or networking which can open the doors to this exclusive world.

My respondents frequently mentioned that it is important for them to be a certain way, to embrace a personhood which when decoded showed that the image they need to project to their clients for cracking a project or winning a tender or making the right impression for business generation often boils down to material details such as the clothes they wear, the accessories they use or carry, the car they drive and the phone they use, alongside the soft skills such as command over English, body language, confidence level, ability to multi-task and so on. I have already discussed this in chapter two about how this is linked to Bourdieu's concept of social and cultural capital. Here I would like to focus on how all this is linked to things they own, buy, consume and project, i.e. to the acts of consumption. I also focus on the ways in which they have to withstand pressures and anxieties in their daily lives to be able to do it successfully and fulfil their lifestyle needs and requirements.

Consistent with Bourdieu's discussions on habitus, the professionals' perspectives and lifestyles tend to support the strengthening of their economic and social situation. They are mainly economically neoliberal in outlook and oppose affirmative action, while supporting globalization and liberal social values. As Murphy (2011) had argued about call centre workers in India, the professionals in the case of my research are strongly committed to their jobs which they view not just as a career but as a source of identity, as a cushion against all inconsistencies and irregularities in life. But often, the work itself is a source of irregularities and angsts. Their consumption

practices both assert a 'modern' identity vis-a-vis mainstream India, and demonstrate adherence to a global set of values constructed in part through identification with international brands.

> Even if only a small minority will actually move overseas, the consumerist representation of transnational middle class identity - the jeans, the mall, the internet, the car - reflect a fundamental shift away from the imagined community of the Indian developmental state, towards an imagined neoliberal middle class globality. Appadurai's (1996) observation of the strategic and political nature of developing country new middle class is validated here. Consumption marks out the social claims of its members. For example, their outrage at attacks on women attending bars dressed in jeans is both a demand for human rights, and a defence of the social space that permits a globalizing new middle class to function within India (Murphy 2011: 421).

Here I would like to point out that working in multi-national companies are a means to a lifestyle that is seen as modern, cosmopolitan and with greater potential for the future. It is a source of social status, which till before the 90s was occupied by public sector employment among the old middle class. My respondents shared with me that it had been their dream to go for a professional course from a reputed institute followed by entry into the corporate sector. Its perception was of a space that instills and promotes values of efficiency, merit, discipline and professionalism Working in the private sector, especially in the MNCs is an attractive proposition because it is the potential means to attain one's desired lifestyle which begins with attractive salary packages, opportunities to travel and exposure to the world outside India. Consumption is an integral part of their lives. However, it is certain kinds of consumption, products and services, certain behaviour around it which is facilitated by working in the industry/ sector they do and then this ultimately becomes the means through which they move up the ladder in the social hierarchy.

Literature on lifestyle and consumption has shown us that a larger discourse around consumption penetrate minds of consumers through different mediating sources such as tourism and advertising. This is linked to structural forms such as economy and institutions such as work. My research has been influenced by some of these works which my data further corroborates. My idea is that different consumers derive different meaning from lifestyle codes and consumption practices which rest on a number of factors such as their social background, values passed down in the family,

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nature of work, income and other social variables like caste and region. Though each one is influenced by it but the interesting thing that I observed was the manner in which they are flexible and adaptable depending on their own situation and requirements. They resist it when they have to and embrace it when they want to. While work and other social factors (such as class, caste, gender) that impinge on their lifestyle behaviour cannot be separated, I have seen that work brings very socially diverse people together and the commonalities often surface when seen in this light.

4.3 CONNOTATION OF CONSUMPTION IN THEIR LIVES

4.3.1 Desire to have a perfect home: The home is a reflection of one's social standing

The home must announce their class, their status, their standing and their taste. According to Nita Kumar (2011), it is the home followed by the workplace and school which are sites for production of middle-classness. Dickey (2002) argues that one typical middle class home is like other middle class homes and this similarity is seen as both a triumph and a failure. Most of my respondents had fancier homes than those described in Dickey's (Ibid.) research, but there are certain similarities. The homes are mostly located in a closed spatial gated community which has an entry and exit gate with a guard stationed at both. There is a system of maintaining a register which has details of any visitor. The occupants have a sticker on their car which makes their entry smooth. When visitors come in, the vehicle number is noted, address they are going to enquired after or for the more affluent gated communities, the owner is called using a central intercom system and the details of the visitor announced.

The higher one's salary, the more fancier the gated community one can afford. The minimum price of a two bedroom apartment as per my own enquiry would be currently priced between 30 and 80 lakh rupees in NCR. Since most of my respondents are migrants, they are the first generation residents of Delhi-NCR so the house would be bought by them or together bought by the working couple. Almost every couple/family I met have a home loan to repay. Only a few did not have it because either their parents had bought it for them or they had got it as dowry during marriage. Some of them had pooled in money together with own parents or in-laws.

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Some of the commonalities that I found in the homes of my respondents were that the interior of the homes were well done up, meaning considerable thought and money had gone behind it. They looked impeccably clean, orderly and decorated with expensive wooden furniture or leather couches; modular kitchens, latest tiles on the floor and in the washroom. They had items on display such as framed photographs of the family, different collectibles from different states and countries reflecting their travels over the years. All the homes were "media rich" (Livingstone 2002), meaning a variety of technological modern gadgets such as LCD/ LED, desktop, laptops, tablet, smart phones, music system and the like were stationed. There was either a Wi-Fi connection or a landline internet connection in every single home. Most of the families I met had individual media devices for each member except for children below 5 years. Several of my respondents were interested in home-décor and made effort to refurbish the home from time to time either in terms of soft furnishings, wall paint or changing some tile or flooring every few years. During festivals such as Diwali, some of them would paint the walls, replace the curtains with new ones or get new soft furnishings.

Some of the homes I went to had a small bar to themselves. For those who drink, they said that they have in house parties with their friends and they drink in the presence of the children. They believe that the more children are used to these things, their curiosity to try out such things alone would not get incited. Their homes, both in terms of location and aesthetics are matters of high significance in their lives. This was evident from the interviews I had with professionals who are about to purchase their home in the near future. They are currently living on rent and a lot of online research discussions friends and colleagues take place before making any decision. Depending on their income, their savings, their parents' financial situation, the budget of the apartment is decided.

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(A lot of time, attention and money is spent on the decoration and upkeep of the house among the high income professionals. My respondent Priya has a maid and a cook who help her with managing the house. She likes to purchase home-décor items when she travels in India and abroad. She likes to serve high price-good quality alcohol to her guests and is particularly mindful of what she serves her and her husband's colleagues and boss. Picture of the living room taken by researcher).

4.3.2 A desire for sociality

Eckhardt and Mahi (2012) argue that consumption in the contemporary context means a certain desire for sociality, for acceptance, for being part of a certain group one desires membership of. The desire for consumption to enhance relationships is quite prominent in their data) and also seen as one of the primary motivations for consumer desire. Thus, when giving into consumer desire means enhancing relationships with others, we see little resistance to desire. Given the stratification of Indian society along caste and economic standing, status plays a very important role in how Indian society is structured, and thus social pressure exhibits a significant influence on the development of consumer culture as the country globalizes (Ibid: 288).

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Travel seemed to be an important part of their leisure and they would do so at least one in a year if not twice. It would be planned months in advance and among families with children, they would be included in the decision making. A few families said that they have recently done international trips on insistence of their children who get influenced by their peers in school. Comparisons are common between them and the families richer than them. It is not uncommon for the kids to discuss material possessions that they lack in their lives when compared to their richer friends in school. When their friends discuss international travel, they feel they are entitled to these and come back home to pester their parents. Those who feel they can afford after a few months of planning go ahead with it while those who feel they cannot, try to help their children understand their limitations. However it is usually expressed using optimistic language such as "We will do it in a few years" or "We can do it when dad gets his next raise". Sometimes the kids are lured into some activity or working harder to get better grades by promising an international trip on successful completion of the task. Sapna and her husband Rohit live in Greater Noida. Sapna in human resources and Rohit is in marketing field and they have a 7 year old daughter. They were of the following opinion:

M: What are the demands or requirements of your children these days?

R: Whatever their peers have. Also what they see something on TV. Whatever the others have, she should have. It could be anything small or big. Once my daughter asked when will my house be beautiful like Muskaan's (a neighbor's daughter)? She liked their house, it is bigger and fancier. So then I scolded her and told it would never be like theirs. Since then she has not talked about it. Like our daughter demanded tablet and we gave it. We thought it would be useful. Actually we give them enough that they don't need much else. My husband is a little particular about shirts and brands (both laugh). He buys a lot during sale. Children learn a lot from parent's actions and thoughts. We don't have a sense of competition as such. But a lot of people are very competitive in terms of lifestyle and things. There is always a lot of show-off. People flaunt foreign vacations. Once my daughter asked me when will we go? I told her we are not going there for next few years. We have not made this into a dream or an agenda. But we told her that when we can and when we have time, we will.

Ritupriya, a 28 year old single professional said:

Lifestyle changes happen depending on what everyone else have. But people spend depending also on their capacities but sometimes the pressure to feel like others in

terms of lifestyle is so strong that people push themselves. Lifestyle gets more opulent. People pay in parties, on booze, food, also branded clothes. Sometimes people also splurge just to impress others. In certain companies, if you don't go and don't spend, you are left out. Sometimes if a group of colleagues decide to go to some high end place for drinks and dinner and the boss also joins usually, then how can I not go? I know that if I don't, I will lose out on some information! This is how it is. One of my colleagues wanted to quit smoking but realized the smoke breaks are the best time to network so he could not quit.

4.3.3 A desire to constantly scale-up

Swati and her husband are into event management and often have colleagues and clients over at home to discuss possible future projects or ongoing ones. They live in Gurgaon which makes it a convenient location for a post work-hours unwinding session with colleagues/ friends or for work in case something urgent comes up. Since it is linked to work and it is imperative to enhance relationship for the work to progress, they had to invest in the house in some specific ways. Swati said that she is particular about home décor as "people always judge and form opinion" whenever her or her husband's colleagues are home. She has started buying home décor items from upscale brands like Fab India and Anokhi. Whenever she is invited to her colleague's homes, she is careful to note how their homes have been done up which gives her ideas to improve her own. She needs to keep expensive liquor in the house. She said that one cannot serve mediocre brands of alcohol and simple food. She is not fond of cooking so has to order in a spread from a reasonably good place and the order is no less than 3000 rupees each time, she added. She finds online portals for clothes, accessories and home décor items a big temptation to resist. Each time she browses through her Facebook page, there are advertisements which catch her attention from a range of products such as premium bed-side lamps to book shelves to potted plants for the outdoor and she gets diverted to them.

My interaction with her revealed that the need for sociality stands true in my research. Consumption is not just about buying, owning, deriving pleasure and means for social mobility. In addition to all this, it is about belonging, about establishing and maintaining relationships, it is about a certain kind of communication, exchange and unsaid acceptance in a certain social circle, a shared worldview, as Baudrillard had looked at consumption as "a structure of meanings". Here I would like to bring in the

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narrative of another respondent Kedaar with whom the discussion about lifestyle and his future dreams was interesting and in line with the larger argument being made here. It is reflective of the fact that the consumerist discourse is shaped by different forms of media and is linked with the changing ideas around work and the requirements that work has from employees. He is a 34 year old corporate lawyer who recently married his girlfriend, a tax lawyer. Together their monthly household income would be around 4 lakh rupees.

M: Tell me something about your dreams and ambitions.

R: I think I am a very ambitious person. I don't like to be easily satisfied with whatever I have got. Ambitious to the extent that the house that you are calling nice is something that I am not satisfied with. I want to move to a more lavish place in a more lavish locality. Like I don't like this sofa now. This is just one year old. So my wife was telling me the other day about buying this place and speaking to the landlord. But we then dismissed this idea the next moment.

M: Why?

R: First, there is no elevator here. Second I was thinking that in next 4-5 years I might become a partner in a law firm. I wouldn't want to live in a flat where the approach is in a narrow alley. I guess I have been bitten by the Delhi snob worm (laughing), but my aspirations are a bit high. There are some relatives who have horses, they are active in derby. Sometime back I heard they bought a house in Worli. I want that. I may not be working towards it, but I still want that.

So in my spare time, one of the things I do is to search how much is Shahrukh Khan worth, or Roger Federer, Vijay Mallya worth.. Price of their house bought in Dubai or elsewhere. So some people say antella[27] is ugly and on-your-face lavish, there is no need to be so insensitive. Why is there a helipad and all? I find all that bullshit. If you earn 1.5 lakhs a month and you desire a phone which is worth 60k then why can't the richest man in the country have that kind of a house. What is so obnoxious about it? Why can't you be less materialistic yourself?

I am a capitalist but then that doesn't mean I don't feel for the poor. See, not everything that I do at work is what I believe in. I think I pay all my taxes. I am not very charitable, but there are traffic signals where I stop and buy these things from the poor kids who sell. In my car there would be a lot of those things which I have never used,

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[27] Business tycoon, owner of Reliance Indsutry Mukhesh Ambani's sea-facing house in Mumbai.

but I just buy. I don't like haggling with vegetable vendor and the *rickshawallah*. I have wanted the big money since day one. That's the reason I did not get into law practice. These guys now make so much money. They earn lakhs and lakhs by the day, these big lawyers. I might be earning 3-4 crores a year in the next few years. So people get into litigation and the sense of achievement is high plus all the money that you can earn later. This won't happen in a law firm.

M: How much rent do you pay now for this house?

R: We pay 45K for this. I look down upon people who don't do anything and just waste their time. I have such people in my family. I am fine as long as one is working.

M: Hmm…where would you like to buy a house in Delhi?

R: May be Defence Colony or Sunder Nagar. This apartment of this size in Defence colony would be 10 crore. The by lanes there look posh. It is not dirty or narrow.

4.4 LIFESTYLE, CONSUMPTION AND IDENTITY

Consumption takes place not only in the realm of objects (products, brands and services) but it is about experiences. It is not about mere freedom and choice, but what people do with it which reflects identity and it is what people use in order to differentiate themselves from others. Bauman (2000) have argued that identity is in the plural in second modernity which centers around consumption, unlike the first modernity which hinged on production. It is the capacity of members of society as consumers that is used to engage them in a social manner, he argued. It is important for the consumption activity to be consistent because economic growth is now tied more centrally to consumption. Consumption is not new to second modernity. It has existed since the dawn of civilization.

However, what makes contemporary consumption different from erstwhile consumption is that it must never stop and consumers must not rest. No needs must be fully satisfied and desires need to keep shifting. No fixity of any kind is good for the functioning of the economy. Be it a highly priced phone or a plasma screen television, there is no end to upgradation.

(Living room of one of my respondents named Rita – this was a duplex apartment in Gurgaon. The house was recently refurbished, floor tiles changed, walls painted, some of the soft furnishings were changed. She wanted a modern-chic look of the house. In the past, the room had heavier, more traditional furniture and a darker hue of the interiors. She follows architecture and interior designing blogs online to get ideas from time to time. Her husband often invites his colleagues for weekend get-togethers at home. Picture taken by researcher).

In pre-modern society, identity was given – one was either a landlord or a soldier, craftsman or a farm tenant. Modernity changed that to an individual being assigned the responsibility of self-construction or building one's self-identity (Ibid). Work was a major means to cope with this new responsibility. The building of an identity was related to work and career journey; the fixity of a steady career and a wholesome identity construction were related. He argues that a durable work identity is hardly a possibility in contemporary modernity. The buzzword now is "flexibility" and this is something that I have already pointed out in chapter 1 in the context of work. Bauman makes a link between work and consumption by arguing that:

All cultural products are calculated for maximal impact and instant obsolescence, a lifelong construction of an a priori designed identity would indeed spell trouble.

Identities, just like consumer goods are to be appropriated and possessed, but only in order to be consumed, and so to disappear again. As in the case of marketed consumer goods, consumption of an identity should not extinguish the desire for other, new and improved identities, nor preclude the ability to absorb them (Bauman 2013: 318).

So the point here is that identity keeps shifting with this kind of flexibility. There are multiple templates that one can chose from. There is no one fixed identity. One must constantly seek new experiences, buy new products and upgrade to better brands be it in terms of attire, white goods or one's choice of vacation. Consumption of certain kinds of activities, experiences is reflective of changing tastes and maintaining a sense of distinction. Any kind of stagnation is looked down upon. The goalposts of aspirational lifestyle keeps changing and one must change oneself to adapt to it. Consumption today is a continually evolving process in order to sustain one's desired lifestyle. There is a constant barrage of different images around it coming from different quarters such as television, movies, social media, lifestyle blogs, magazines and others. Each of those images stands for certain meanings, values and are in a relationship with other such images and the sheer variety, endless options to choose from can be unnerving. For instance, parents find it difficult making choices regarding their children's school – there is always one better than the other. What are the different activities that their child must learn? What kind of diet is good for their health? How much of media exposure should they allow their child to have? Every source of information they turn to, the confusion to choose one from so many is difficult. There is no fixed idea of 'good parenting'. While this could be thrilling in some instances owing to innumerable choices people have today, it could also be exasperating or confusing in others.

4.5 CONSUMPTION IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

A review of literature on consumption shows that the middle classes can be seen either as consumerist predators (Gupta 2000) or responsible consumers driving the economy. My aim is not to prove or disprove this duality but to reflect on the quotidian aspects of consumption in the lives of my respondents and the associated struggles that it brings with it. I do not intend to establish my respondents either as "victims of consumerism" (Ganguly-scrase 2011) or as conscious, smart consumers

who drive the engine of India's economic growth (not denying that both stand true). My data points to the fact that consumption is about meaning-making on a broad canvas. The argument that I put forth here is that consumption is a double-edged sword – it enables individuals to do things in their life as much as it produces pressures and anxieties which they need to grapple with.

4.5.1 HOW DOES CONSUMPTION ENABLE?

Megha is 34. Most of her friends and cousins are now married. Each time she goes back to her family in Lucknow, she has mixed emotions. While she longs to spend time with her family, meet her childhood friends, she is averse to the idea of answering questions around her marriage. There are times when she has heated arguments with her mother and her elder sister, who is married and settled abroad. It seemed to me that she sometimes entertains the idea of marrying and settling down, but there are times she refuses to do so. She has been in relationships before and she narrated her experiences of ways in which men tried to control her or invaded into her space. We had discussions about her dreams, aspirations and her current lifestyle. It was through these discussions that I could make sense of the meaning making that happens in the process of consumption. According to Holt (1997):

> In the poststructuralist approach, consumption patterns are expressed through regularities in consumption practices rather than in consumer objects. Beginning with Weber's initial outline of cultural sociology-and forcefully reasserted by Bourdieu, Clifford Geertz, and Michel Foucault, among others-social theorists have argued that human actions are always meaning laden-embedded with understandings and intentions. The term practice is often used to emphasize that human actions are not merely physical behaviours disconnected from thoughts (as the term consumer behaviour is often used) but, rather, have meanings embodied in them.

Her current lifestyle is a result of years of hard work that she had put in to build her career. She is fond of shopping for her house. Whenever she travels on work, she often gets home-décor items. She goes on vacations with her friends at least twice a year. Since past two years, she has been going abroad for her vacations. At least once a month, she hosts a party at her rented home in south Delhi. She invites her friends, colleagues and usually plans them in advance. She is particular about the restaurant from which she would order in the food and purchases expensive alcohol.

R: When I began my career, I did not imagine I would be financially independent and single for so long. I enjoy my independence. The kind of life I now lead was my dream. I always wanted to have a comfortable home, enjoy buying things with my own money. No other girl in my family has done this. They all got married by 24 or 25.

M: You had told me your family members insist you get married soon

R: Yes whenever I go home or go for any wedding, I am always the subject of discussion, people think I am sad that I am not getting married. My parents feel that I can have a much better life if I get married. I will have my own house and other luxuries. I tell them that I have enough luxuries and I can afford them myself.

M: How does that make you feel? What does your parents say to this?

R: Actually I think I have a say in my own marriage because I have been able to show to my family and relatives that I have a good lifestyle. I am successful at my work, I travel abroad these days. Through social media, everybody can see that I have a decent lifestyle.

M: How?

R: We check-in (On Facebook) each time we go somewhere. Last month I went to Taj for breakfast and checked in. One of my cousins asked me if it was paid from office or with friends. Some people cannot believe that an unmarried woman can also afford such things. I feel good about it, it boosts my confidence. It is not that I don't want to get married. But the person needs to understand my dreams and respect me. If it is not the case, what should I give up all this for?

M: How do these things change the situation with your family?

R: My family now sees that I have a good life. They will not force me to get married to anybody. Money always gives you respect. Lately I have seen that my mother, sister and cousins who would question me and sometimes pity me for not being married, do not interfere so much. They still look for marriage proposals, but they are more careful about the proposals and ask me before speaking to anybody.

As per Megha's narrative, her current lifestyle choices, her decisions around consumption of products and brands, her expenditure points to the fact that she uses her lifestyle as means to silence her critics. She can counteract the people who question her life choices and her freedom. By announcing to the world that she has a good life in material terms, what she does is continue to live life on her own terms and stand up for herself. She gets to decide when she would marry and whom she would

marry. She gets to communicate to her family that only if a man meets her expectations, does it make sense for her to give up on the life that she has created for herself, which by no means is lacking if compared to her married cousins and friends. Gender is an important variable in this context. While both men and women I met had similarities in terms of their approach to consumption, one of the differences was that women such as Megha used their lifestyle as a trope to be assertive of their identity, their claim to freedom when it came to major decisions like marriage and so on. Both enhancement of social status and claims of gender equality (in terms of freedom to choose or say a yes/ no) are factors that have consumption and projection of lifestyle as means on which these are contingent upon.

Contemporary urban life is characterised as uncertain unanimously by all respondents. It is for this reason that I ventured into exploring what it means to different people. It took me back to Ulrich Beck's (1992) text *Risk Society*. He had argued that risks and uncertainty characterise second modernity and the management of risk is a prime feature of global order. The important feature of the risk of second modernity or contemporary society is that its nature has changed when compared to the previous order - risk is not limited to natural disasters or wars but created by our own social development and that of science and technology. He talked of "manufactured risks", namely, global terrorism, environmental pollution which are beyond national borders. The fact that there is an uncertain backdrop found expression in the narratives of my respondents. These ranged from uncertainties that are financial, health-related, due to lack of security at work and those which are part of inter-personal relationships.

Madhav is a 37 year old investment banker who resides in Gurgaon with his parents who are now retired. He is the vice president of his organisation. His annual salary would be not less than 40 lakh per annum excluding the hefty bonus which he gets during Diwali. He travels every week on work. He leaves for work at 8.30 in the morning and is hardly back home before 10 pm. He works most of the weekends. He recently invested in a 3 BHK apartment in Gurgaon which was priced at 2 crores. I met him a few times in the course of my fieldwork from 2015 to 2017. The first impression I got was he was more than willing to share his experiences at work. He candidly acknowledged that there is hardly an occasion when he gets to express himself and be critical of his workplace without any fear of consequences. I had assured him that while his views would find an entry into my thesis, the particulars

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such as personal details would be changed. Each time I met him, I obtained a wealth of information about his work, lifestyle and his everyday struggles.

R: I wanted to study economics. But my parents were very insistent that I did some hard-core finance professional course. I now see why they did that – I would not be making half the money that I now do. I would not be able to buy this house in a swanky neighbourhood, I should be able to repay my loan sooner that most people do because I save a lot.

M: What are the main advantages, as you see, of your situation in life?

R: I recently bought an SUV and have kept a driver. I don't want the headache of driving in this mad traffic, parking and all… I have the means to go on holidays, I can go abroad too. I went to Europe last year and want to see all countries there. I am fond of trekking and try to go for such activities at least once a year.

M: How do these things make you feel?

R: See my job is extremely high pressure, my bosses depend on me. These are the activities that keep me sane and gears me up for my manic workdays. I have to meet countless people and impress them – you had asked me how I impress them. Other than the work, I have to buy the most premium phone, specs, shirts and shoes. If you don't go all decked up, nobody will look at you these days (laughs)...it is all about impression management!

M: Yes I heard very similar views from another person I recently interacted with.

R: Sometimes I feel what am I doing all this for? What is the meaning of all this? The thing I really enjoy is travel and mountaineering and I hardly have time for that. But then one doesn't have the time to think so much. I have done a lot of questioning and soul searching in the past. Now I have come to terms with my life and its requirements. I am very lucky that I have so much and I can give a good life to my parents who had struggled a lot to give me good education. Life is too short, I have to make the most of what I have.

M: What are some of the things that your current lifestyle gives you that makes you feel lucky?

R: I will give an example. Very often we hear about diseases such as cancer, heart attack… so many things happen to even young people. Both my parents have high BP, one of them is diabetic. It is so sad to see people queue up in government hospitals for days for basic treatment because they cannot afford otherwise. I consider myself lucky

because at least I have the money to take my family to a private clinic or hospital. I have invested a lot in health insurance. All this gives me some peace of mind.

From this interaction I could understand that the means and the ability to consume act as shields and help individuals fight inconsistencies and anxieties in life. Madhav, like many others has realised that the nature of life is uncertain. He constantly seeks security and one of the concrete, material ways of doing it is to opt for high-value high-cover medical insurances.

4.5.2 HOW DOES CONSUMPTION DISABLE?

4.5.2.1 Consumption and anxiety

Consumption provide means to desired leisure activities but there are varied pressures of status maintenance that one has to counter. The urban Indian new economy professionals are known to be highly image conscious. This image is a cumulative effect of their sense of self, their ideas about success, the place where they would like to see themselves in the future in terms of career and material wealth, social status, their ideas of what others perceive them to be, the world of their work and the ideas of self that derives from mediating sources between the self and the world, i.e. media. There are also certain structural parameters which are laid down by society through various social forces such as work, family, peer groups, entertainment and fashion industries which get instilled in the minds of people. This shapes self-perception which then gets distilled though the process and nature of consumption because this idea of that image can be sustained or fed only by certain concrete material goods and associated actions.

The ease of technology (through digital banking and online shopping) has given a different colour to the process of consumption. Their buying practices, the way they do up their homes, the clothes they wear, the nature of the holidays and the choices of brands and products makes them different from their own family members of the previous generation. Such differences are looked at with both pride, distinction and sometimes a sense of nostalgia and loss, pointing to the ways in which lives were simpler in their parents' generation (Upadhyay 2014). There is a specific gradation of each of these and they all have a fair idea of where they are and where they want to reach. With every step taken, they have a sense of moving up the ladder. However, there is always a tendency of being dissociated with the idea of "hyper-consumerism"

or "conspicuous consumption", something which is loud, vulgar and unsophisticated which is often attributed to the business community in Delhi.

Different reports based on *NASSCOM*, market business trend, newspaper reports and academic work have pointed to the fact that the new middle class is 'new' because of its increasing salaries, ability to spend, its intrinsic relationship with consumption and upward social mobility which is made possible because of their ability to consume. There is a movement from consuming necessities to more discretionary spending post the Indian economic reforms of 1991. With time, we have seen that while the earning has become steady, consumption has increased manifold and savings have been low, despite higher salaries of the contemporary professionals as compared to their parents' generation. This has led to a lot of financial pressures that are being borne by them. In the event of lack of raise or promotion for more than a year, along with increasing expenditure to meet needs of self and family members, or children who are required to be sent to private schools, tuitions, multiple extra-curricular activities, the pressure has been felt on shrinking savings. This is particularly true for those who have education loan, home loan, car loan or any other personal loan. Because of financial pressures and aspirations of materially superior lifestyle, an urban married couple needs to both have their independent careers. Any marriage proposal for the single, for instance, is screened using different filters, the most important being salary package.

According to Appadurai (1996:5)

> There are several ways to approach the contested space within which public modernity is visible in contemporary India. In the observations that follow, we privilege consumption as an activity and a modality of social life. In part, this is because we assume that in trying to understand the political imaginary of modernity, it is important to engage with the subjective experience of modern life, which is closely tied up with particular sorts of pleasure, desire, and agency. Consumption, conceived as "the work of the imagination" is an activity that simultaneously captures the distinctive disciplines of modernity and draws attention to new forms of expenditure and social identity.

There are differences to the approach to consumption based on individual preferences, salary, social background of that of their families, financial responsibility towards ageing parents, peer group pressures and several other factors. Those who have a family and home in Delhi do not have to pay rent or EMIs against home loans so they

can indulge more in leisure trips, eating out and other personal indulgences. Those who are migrants, first generation residents of Delhi-NCR, come from middle class families with retired parents have a lot more financial liabilities. For instance, there is a difference between people who have dependent parents with those that do not.

For instance my respondents Manasi and Harpreet are not originally from Delhi, but come from families which are fairly well-to-do. For them, savings are for their future. For some whose parents have retired from government service or have small business, saving is very carefully done keeping their parents' future financial needs in mind. They may not compromise on their present consumption, but will find ways of maintaining a balance. For instance, they would not go for international holidays every year or would spend less in eating/ drinking out at premium restaurants but rather have home parties. Often, they are the one who invest in home at an earlier age so that they have a shelter in the city. For the others, buying a house is not a top priority as they already have one in the city. Those with more than one EMI such as a home loan, car loan, education loan or any other personal loan face a lot more pressures and anxieties in the face of societal expectations of a certain standard of living and status maintenance. As I have argued in chapter 1, no kind of work is seen as secure and permanent in the private sector today. This adds to the anxieties of such people, though sometimes on the surface, all looks well. Notwithstanding that there are privileges such as higher education, money, network and a base at work, they go hand in hand with anxieties.

4.5.3 ANXIETIES AND COPING MECHANISMS AROUND FINANCES

4.5.3.1 Knowing Where to Draw the Line

"Working in the corporate sector brings in the brand fixation", quipped Lavanya. She worked in Delhi for a few years, got married to a colleague and then they went on to have a daughter. She hails from Kerela. She worked in Bangalore for a few years in between when she switched jobs for pay hike. They live in Gurgaon now but plan to move back to Bangalore. On asking her the reason for this decision, she said that Delhi is not the right place for her and not a good place to raise a child. It is more materialistic and flashy than other cities and people are less warm and considerate in general, she feels. For her, changes in her lifestyle was a result of entry into the corporate sector where she felt that she had to groom herself, wear certain kinds of clothes, for instance. However, she feels she has not let it take over her life

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completely. She still shops from a Lajpat Nagar or GK local market, something that her colleagues do not even consider.

R: There was a charm in the past of going to local markets, now everybody wants to go to malls. People spend a lot of money on branded clothes, even for children. There is almost a pressure felt of buying certain things. With the coming of the corporate work culture, overall lifestyle changed – people started focussing a lot on grooming, spoken English, rentals went up and prices are going up for everything with increasing demand. For those who can afford it is fine, for others it is difficult.

M: How do you deal with these changes?

R: We have decided to move to Bangalore so that my daughter does not learn all these things. I am looking for a good school with not very high fees and want it to be more with middle class sensibilities. Here in Delhi and Gurgaon, children who come from business families go for international holidays every year, they have expensive cars etc. Before she starts demanding these things, I want to leave. I have seen people are less concerned about show off in other cities. There is some level of casualness there. Also keeping up with the lifestyle burns a deep hole in your pocket. All of us have EMIs to pay against our home and car loans. Like we share it between me and my husband. We have this joke in our office wherein in the beginning of the month when we have our salaries in our bank accounts we say that our payment-gateway has opened. Till mid-month it looks okay post which the gate closes again (laughs). If we have to make any additional purchases in a month it usually impacts our savings or we need to plan it and start saving in advance. There is no end to buying and lifestyle improvements. We have to draw a line somewhere.

I met a Smriti and Shantanu who have a 5 year old son who goes to primary school. They are first generation migrants to Delhi who came here after completing their MBA and got their first job here. They both hail from Orissa with families there. They lived on rent for a few years after marriage and then saved money for buying a house in Faridabad. They had saved individually which they combined to make their first down payment. I asked them about the efforts that go in running the household and the financial contribution that they individually make.

R: There are so many loans – car, home, gadgets, education and personal loans. People fall into this trap. Our thinking is that at least 30 pc of our income should go into savings. In case situation changes, as in in private there is no job security. Sometimes one person has to leave job or may lose job, so there has to be a safety net. We should

have enough savings. From one person's salary, living expenses can be met and another can pay the EMIs. After all that also, a minimum of 30 pc savings should be there. Otherwise it can be a real burden. We never know what happens tomorrow. What if we are not in a position to pay off so much loan? Now it is fine, we are spending well as we are earning well and have reached a good position on our jobs. If we have two home loans, and say if I leave job after sometime, then one person will never be in a position to pay off EMI for two home loans. So our point is why to get into that kind of a situation in the first place?

M: Okay. How do you split the expenses when both are working? If you could elaborate for me.

R (Husband): Practically, it is simple. First thing is expectations management. Moment people get married, they spend on a lot of things. They immediately buy a house, buy car and all. When we got married, first few years we used second hand car. He felt that we should focus on home first. At that time we had only 2 lakhs for the down-payment. Within three months, we had booked this house here. We somehow managed to make the down payment. We were very clear that we would take no assistance from our parents. Why should be bother them in their old age? So we made certain decisions and also made certain compromises. I wished for a new car. But I kept quiet. According to our salary, we got loans. It was in 2010. So after 2012, we were lucky to find the finished project to move in. A lot of things depend on one lifestyle, how one has lived in the past and what one's expectations are. We were brought up with values which taught us to place some limit in our desires. If one wants everything, even 10 lakhs per month is not going to suffice, forget about 2 lakhs. Then if I buy santro, I will want Swift, if I buy swift I will want Honda city and the list goes on like this. There is no end to spending. It depends on one's thought process. Do we need money to lead our life or is it the other way around? If it is the other way around, it is very difficult.

R (Wife): The influence of colleagues/ peers cannot be discounted. Both partners are working, were working before marriage and have had their individual freedom. Now in so many cases, what happens is we try and match our colleagues and compete with them in our lifestyles. That is a risky terrain. Again there is no end to it. We need to understand our boundary. If one of our parents would have been settled in Delhi, then it is easier. If we want to eat out three times a month, or shop every week, then it is impossible. We have realised these things over time. Some people pick up clothes without even looking at the tag. Others don't.

4.5.3.2 Gender-Equitable Sharing of Expenses

Vikram is a 33 year old chartered accountant working for a real estate firm. He hails from Jaipur and his family is settled there. He came to Delhi when he got his first job and has lived here since last 13 years. He lives in a rented accommodation in south Delhi. He makes around 1 lakh a month and sends money home every month. His father is retired from government service. He has a younger brother who is pursuing engineering from a college in Jaipur. His family is of middle class background and they belong to Pandit/ Brahmin caste. He likes his job and is fond of his colleagues and seniors. He came across as an easy going person who is ambitious when it comes to his career. He does not mind taking on extra work and describes himself as a workaholic who is fully driven by his work commitments. He has been in relationships with women but is currently single. On weekends, he meets friends, goes for movies or to the mall for shopping or eating out. They drink together on most weekends. In the past, they would go out to pubs or lounges to drink on the weekends but he now enjoys in-home parties because they are cost effective and more relaxing. He said he has friends who belong to richer families whose parents are into business or those who have their own homes in Delhi. They usually have less responsibilities to save money or send money home and can thereby indulge in drinking and eating out in expensive hotels. For a person like him, he has to maintain a balance between being mindful about saving a substantial amount every month and leading a life with all comforts and occasional indulgences. The discussion moved to the understanding that is required for working couples to distribute the expenditure and combine the savings. He said:

> After marriage, couple has to have mutual understanding. They are not roommates who would divide all expenses into 50-50. If one forgets something, the other has to shell out from her/ his pocket. Mostly in Indian houses, husband has to be the main spender despite all changes. To give you example, some wives always target the husband's credit cards. I see that in my married colleagues. They say my wife went shopping but took my credit card. Why couldn't she take her own credit card? Then there is misunderstanding between them. Marriage is common, kid is common (laughs), the finances also should be common. This is a major cause of stress. Why can't the husband also ask for the wife's credit card?

> M: What do you expect from your future partner?

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R: A lot depends on the girl, he continued. If she is looking at the common goal, she will take care of things. If she is thinking he should be the one spending, then it will lead to conflict. This is fairly common among young couples. I know a boy who is looking for a bride. He has found a girl who he is about to get married to. So he was telling me that she called him one day and asked for something very expensive, may be diamond or something which she wanted him to gift her. Now the boy went mad. He was saying that now I am not even married and she has such demands! He was very stressed out. If you get into competition thinking that my money should not be spent and only his should be spent, then it is going to be difficult. Some people hand out everything to the wife. They probably do that if they know that the wife is not a spendthrift. Things have changed mainly because women are working. Now they have a good steady income and they can take care of their own needs. But because they are now independent, husbands also have certain expectations that their wives would share the burden. Mutual understanding is the key here which is what I also expect.

Vikram's parents are anxious about getting him married and have been looking at marriage proposals. He wants a working wife because he feels that surviving in the city with double income is easier. When I asked him about domestic chores he said that currently he has a maid who does cooking and cleaning for him and after he gets married, he would continue to have help so that his future wife does not have too much burden. We discussed different scenarios and situations that his friends are in about domestic work and childcare responsibilities. From our conversations, I gathered that if expenses are to be shared, responsibilities must be shared and he sees that things are changing among the younger generation. Men need to be more involved with chores and women need to be more independent with finances after marriage. He believes that is the only way marriages can work today.

4.5.3.3 Bringing in reality checks

Avantika works with the brand insights team of an FMCG company in Gurgaon. She is 42, divorced and has a 12 year old daughter. Her parents live in Bangalore. She has a commerce background and went to a reputed business school for her MBA. She is in a senior managerial position in her company and describes herself as an ambitious person who has always taken her own decisions in life. She had a love marriage with one of her MBA batchmates. In my third interaction with her, she said that they both fell out of love with each other after 7 years of marriage. By that time, she sensed that her husband was seeing another woman from his office. She did not demand any

explanation or answers from him and was the first one to suggest separation. She also believes that since both of them were traveling extensively for work, they could not give enough time to each other. She said that her husband would insist that she spent as much as he did as part of the household expenses. Sometimes, it would irk her as she saw that her friends had easier lives with their husbands who would indulge them from time to time. It is not that the wives did not but husbands did more and it was looked at as normal. I allowed her to open up to me to the extent that she was comfortable and did not probe further on a subject that was intimate and personal. Her parents drop in from time to time to meet her and their grand-daughter. She has a full time help who takes care of household chores and also looks after her daughter when she is back from school.

In terms of finances, she said that she has had to make some compromises in her lifestyle since she is a single mother now. Though her husband provides for the child, she was not comfortable with the idea of him paying entirely for their daughter's upkeep so they have made an arrangement of paying equally for it. She believes that a child must not be indulged often as it risks her getting spoilt. When her daughter demanded for something, her husband would give it to her immediately. She demanded a phone for her personal use and he gave it to her when she was only 10. This led to a lot of bickering between the couple. She would insist on bringing her up in a way that she would not get easily influenced by her peers' lifestyle, should be patient and less dependent on immediate material gratification. She wanted her to know the value of objects, of money and should know that one can get what one wants only by working hard for it. However, her husband's constant indulgences through gifting made it difficult for her to do so.

> One of the things which gave me some relief was that after getting my child's custody, I could decide on the way I wanted to deal with her. I have told my ex-husband to consult me before buying anything expensive for her. Despite all this, she is so demanding, she is asking for brands all the time. She only wants Nike in Sports shoes, she said she will only wear clothes from Forever 21, Benetton and all. It is not that I cannot afford these things but after a point it gets too much. I need to save up for her and my own future. I want her to be less dependent on these things. At this age it is so easy to get carried away. She tells me she wants an iPhone next year. I have told her she will not be given such an expensive phone. Children are so difficult, some of them do not understand how much hard work is required to live this kind of life. I try my

best but her friends are all using these things so you see the pressure is high. I have tried to explain to her the difference between business and salaried families. I have told her that I have worked hard to reach where I am today and my parents never bought me so many things. Sometimes she understands I feel but influence of her friends and what she sees around her is high.

So while media images depict the positive aspects of the lifestyle of India's new rich, the fact that they have arrived, that they travel by air, plan their vacations well, spend on themselves, think of the future without compromising on their present, want to constantly upgrade their lifestyle and are fixated on brands, my experience in the field showed me that what goes on backstage is a different story which neither the TV ads nor the social media profiles of the high-flier corporate professional has shown us. As Fernandes (2006) has argued, the new middle class in general and the corporate professionals in particular are not a homogenous group. There are differences by education, designation, salary, kind of sector/ industry, caste, gender and region. Even within my own sample if a person's caste, sector, designation and region were comparable, their approach to work and lifestyle is different. One of the differences is caused by their own social background - education and income of their parents and the values they have been brought up with.

4.5.4 THE PRESSURES OF MAINTAINING STATUS AND THE MEANS TO REMAIN AFLOAT

According to Béteille (2003), the new middle class places more emphasis on occupation, education and salaried income through employment than on property ownership. The new middle class is chiefly constituted of educated people from all kinds of castes, working in offices, occupying managerial and so-called white collar positions. They share the experience of upward social mobility (Saavala 2010) and there are many indications from India and elsewhere that such people are getting increasingly stressed in all aspects of life.

I had a picture in my mind of this class of people which got formed as a result of general reading and my interactions with people. A lot of them stood true in the course of my fieldwork. Let me begin this section by first putting these down. The class of urban, corporate, white collar professionals are privileged, have access to good schools, colleges and other material resources. They mostly belong to upper and middle castes and their families are either middle or upper middle class. Their social

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and cultural capital enables them to make an entry into the world of private corporate job which is a closed social space with restricted entry of people in the white collar positions. They are ambitious, upwardly mobile, image-conscious, articulate and materialistic.

They live in their own cocoon, which is shielded and guarded from the India they do not wish to be a part of or are ashamed of. However, they are very much rooted in their traditions and it finds expression in varied ways, such as celebrating festivals with family, marriage (adhering to caste and class endogamy), gender arrangements (division of labour at home is still gendered despite both husband and wife working and earning well), religion (some of them wish to see India as secular but inter-religious marriage is rare or non-existent).

Their financial security rests on their salaries and promotions and they are subject to fluctuations as per the vagaries of the global market. They are heavily into financial investments and having their own property or a house is one of their biggest aims in life. They have a myopic vision in life – their dreams and hopes are within a limited frame. They often talk about merit and believe that India's politics rests on claims for backwardness to garner reservations. They cannot identify with this and their scope of escaping this reality is to find shelter in their private sector offices and private haven of the closed gated community.

However, not all is well with this world either. Their jobs are far from secured, their personal lives are no havens, their jobs are blood sucking and a lot of them find their work meaningless. They have pressure to maintain their lifestyles and not falling from their current position. Inflation and rising consumption habits make them vulnerable to unreasonable demands made by their organization and how they handle such situations determine their social relations at work which in turn determine their growth within the internal organizational structure. Things may fall apart due to the following – loss of due to internal restructuring of the team or general laying off due and changes in company policies; inability to cope with burden of work in a small team leading to longer hours at work and loss of weekends, no compensatory off; difficulty in getting leave and so on. They make things work by neglecting their own health, the family and domestic responsibilities.

There are different mechanisms that couples have to adopt in order to remain afloat in the event of loss of job. One professional I met had lost his job and had started applying to different organizations, even for profiles that would pay him less. This desperation lasted for a few months. In the meantime the monthly household expenditure at first was met by his previous savings. After a few months, he urged his wife to look for a job who had left her job a few years back to focus on their child. She managed to find a job in a different city. She moved, alone, to avoid complete resettlement in a different city. She did not take the child with her as they were not in a positon to hire a full time maid while she would be at work. The husband took care of the child while his parents were called in for help. During this time, she would be on skype almost the whole day with her family so that she could see all that was going on in the house and would give instructions to her husband as to what to do. She was torn between her responsibilities at work, to provide a substantial income for the family and was always missing her child. They moved back together when her husband found another job. He had to settle for lesser pay and had to adapt himself to the needs of the new role he had obtained for which he was not fully equipped. She came back and could no longer afford to discontinue her job. Today, they have a full time maid who tends to the needs of the child while they are both at work. While the husband's parents knew of their tribulations, the wife's parents were not fully informed of the situation as they were already living with their son and his family where they take care of their two grandchildren while the couple goes out to work. There are other ways of making additional income (doing independent projects, starting small business online, working with a start-up venture on weekends) to safeguard their families during crisis moments. Leisure outings on many occasions end up being meetings for networking, to develop further contacts and floating their CVs around for alternative job opportunities.

4.6 A NARRATIVE OF AN EMI COUPLE

The millennials are the people born between 1980 and 2000 and constitute the young workforce of the country. Those among millennials who had access to quality English education constitute a significant proportion of the workforce which is employed in private sector in urban India. Among other things, this generation is the main consumer base of the economy and a significant part of their income goes into shopping and other forms of leisure. Compared to their previous generations, they are

less into savings. They are heavily dependent on credit cards. They are also known as the most indebted generation the world has seen so far and this is seen across nations, including India. While loans were looked down upon in the past, today it is no longer so. It is considered a matter of prestige to have loans sanctioned by the bank to them. It is reflective of their financial credentials – only those with high salaries, high value credit card purchases and bank statements with no record of lowest value outstanding amount are eligible for a loan. One's income and one's bank loan amount are directly proportional to one another. Not everybody gets a loan. While their frequent consumption habits, higher disposable income, a general societal stamp on exhibition of status through specific lifestyle modes and consumption habits are reasons for their dependence on credit cards and loans, it is true that taking a loan is not a matter of choice but in certain context, it is inevitable. This is true for buying a home in India in the absence of government housing schemes with escalating real estate prices which are unregulated in the absence of a strict centralized law and its successful implementation.

When I say "The EMI couple" I mean to connote an urban working couple who have loans on them to repay – education loan, home loan, car loan or any other personal loan.

Some have other smaller EMIs such as buying an expensive laptop or a phone on EMI. Not even a single respondent I met are loan-free. They have pressure to repay these loans. Availability of loans and EMI schemes for all kinds of products today be it a house, a car or a mobile, laptop has made consumption easily achievable. A major chunk of one's salary goes in the home EMI followed by the car. Those currently living on rent have dual burden of rent and home EMI if they have booked a home but have been unable to move there owing to some reason. A few respondents I met in Noida and Greater Noida had booked homes under various private real estate building projects years ago and have not yet got possession because the projects were stalled post-recession. Their money is already locked in and they have little hope of getting the possession. My sample mostly consists of migrants who had moved to the city in search of education or work or both. In their cases, investing in a home has been one of the biggest decisions in their life and they have planned their work and even marriage around this. Rising inflation and the pressures of repaying loans urged several of my respondents to choose marriage partners who earn at par with them or

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more (in case of female respondents). It impacts their decision around family planning, style of parenting (which is discussed in detail on the chapter 4 on parenting). Migrants who come from humble background face lots of challenges in maintaining a certain standard of their life with respect to their colleagues at work.

Credit cards and their consumers are segmented by the banks. Silver, gold, diamond and platinum are the different segments derived from the value of these precious metals in the market. One begins one's journey with a silver credit card which has lowest permissible monthly credit amount and a platinum card holder is the highest. High net worth individuals are approached by banks and given a free credit card with a number of benefits which range from golf club membership to free entry in premium lounge at airports to complimentary passes to concerts in the city. Different credit card companies have tie-ups with different travel companies, clubs, restaurants and other brands for a range of products and services. If an individual makes a few lakhs a month, it is assumed that he would be a frequent traveler and benefits offered to him are often related to travel. It is also assumed that he would be busy and often a credit card salesman would be sent from the bank to privately meet him/ her. Owning a high value platinum credit card by international bank is a matter of prestige. It is a marker of status, a marker of one's success as a professional.

> Once we had gone for lunch to a five star hotel and I was supposed to meet my client. We usually go to good restaurants and ordering drinks is considered a good gesture in the business circles. When the bill arrived I took out my credit card and the waiter said it was being declined. It was really embarrassing in front of my client. The same day I applied for a credit card to another bank. I understood why my bosses always carried more than one credit card. These things are important and it creates an impression in front of potential business partners and you are remembered that way for a long time. Also, when you travel by air and have to wait for a flight or if there is a change-over or something, those with high value credit cards with a lot of benefits get access to premier lounges at the airport – you can take bath, children can play games, you get to relax in comfortable couches. Even if it is long change-over duration, you will remain fresh. If you are traveling with another family which have these benefit while your credit card does not give you any, you feel a little embarrassed – Suresh Gupta, 40 years, associate vice president of an insurance company in Gurgaon.

(DLF cyber city in Gurgaon and malls in Delhi and NCR are common leisure spaces as mentioned by my respondents. Shopping on weekends is usually accompanied by eating out and movies. Malls offers a space to do all this under a single roof. Lounges and pubs in cyber city are known to offer discounts on food and drinks on weekdays to attract customers working in nearby corporate offices. (Picture Source: www.dlf.in)

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To fall below the position one has acquired over years of hard work is not an option. The middle class does not give itself the option of sliding down the social hierarchy, though it can certainly dream of climbing into the class above it. These leads to incessant desire to earn, earn more, get promoted every year or in a few years. If this means working 7 days a week, it is not resisted. However, mostly coming from humble families and being first generation migrants to the capital city, it is also considered important to pass on values that are considered to be core and non-negotiable, such as knowing the value of money, despite the changing times of material plenty in which the children live today when compared to the previous generations.

Geeta is an IT professional who has a 10 year old daughter. After her marriage, she had lived in Hyderabad for three years with her husband. When they moved to Noida, they were initially living on rent but eventually decided to buy an apartment there. They had to make a down payment of 3 lakh. All she had as savings were one and half lakh rupees and so did her husband. So they made the purchase. Today, they both are working, earning well so the home loan for which they pay an EMI of over 60,000 rupees per month does not make the finances too crunched, although her husband does mention from time to time that the home loan is the biggest pain and he wished he didn't have this kind of liability. Both of them are migrants, one from Rajasthan and the other from Gujarat and had started out in the city with a job and no savings. They could not make savings for a very long time. After having a child, expenses only went up. But promotions and raise over the years have enabled them to have a fairly comfortable life. Sometime back, their daughter came up to them and demanded they go for a vacation abroad. She said most of her friends in school go abroad for an international holiday. Her father lovingly, but very categorically said that it would not be possible for them to do that for many years to come and she should not get affected by it.

> We have brought her up in a very comfortable environment but she understands the value of things. Once I explained to her where we stand, she understood and never brought up that question again. We came from a more humble background but we did the same when our parents explained to us their limitations. It all depends on how you raise your child. But there are colleagues of mine who go out of their way to fulfil the child's dreams, sometimes end up borrowing money or taking a loan. If your primary

aim in life is to show off your upmarket lifestyle, then that is the only choice you will have.

4.7 CONCLUSION

Culture is packaged as a commodity and can be bought and sold in the market. The massive "culture industry", as argued by critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer is all pervading and it enters peoples' private lives. Through agents such as mass media, there is a bombardment of stereotypes around aspirations and lifestyle. Marcuse in his work O*ne Dimensional Man* argued that there is a new kind of totalitarianism in which those who rule may not necessarily look like tyrannical masters. On the surface, there is freedom, there are choices. This freedom and its messages are disseminated to the masses through media, democratically elected political parties, the periodic elections, availability of a range of commodities which offer choice and discourses around the free consumer. However, within this apparent freedom, there is a hidden un-freedom which is anchored in manipulation of needs. Marcuse makes a distinction between true needs such as food, fresh air, a home, family, love and care and false needs which are constructed and manipulated through this very culture industry. Certain commodities, services, codes of behaviour and kinds of lifestyle are projected as aspirational and people are so seduced by them that they feel life cannot be about anything else other than achieving them. The unfreedom is masked within an apparent choice of consumption which is a new form of totalitarianism and control. In this world, any kind of doubt or contradiction is not acceptable. For instance, a peek into the lives of my own respondents revealed that creating and projecting a certain kind of lifestyle often ends up being an end in itself and successfully acquiring certain codes of life is a mark of success. It is more like, the more one has or owns, the more one is. For instance, a car isn't just about mobility anymore, it is about social status, about social mobility. Planning a holiday isn't just about relaxation, discovery or bonding, it is also a parameter based on which people would gauge social status.

It is not just this culture floating around that creates a worldview wherein having and being are so intrinsically related, but such messages are obtained from a variety of sources. Let us take the example of work in the service sector. Consumption of various goods and services are not for leisure per se but for projection of certain lifestyle codes which are seen as favourable for the work and growth in it. Each of

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those codes exhibit certain meanings which are shared by those who are part of the same world. Such codes are seen as logical because they are consistent not just with the overall worldview but also makes sense in a practical way. For instance, if an employee's work centers around business development on which rests the profitability of the company, then it so happens that the way one looks, behaves, speaks and the things one owns assume significance. Why? Because as per the worldview in question, one's self-worth derives from what one has and acquires.

A plethora of lifestyle products and services are available in the market today. A white collar service professional is expected to be abreast with such things. As a result, the boundary between work and leisure is blurred in new ways. For instance, while it is a matter of discussion in a lounge or a club as to where different individuals are planning their annual vacations, such information about people are seen to be reflective of their social status and their exposure levels. This kind of segmentation of people have a bearing on the way they are viewed and treated at their workplace. At one level, it could be restricted to mere social judgement which may not be seen favourably by some employees themselves. At another level, this kind of profiling is seen as legitimate because an employee's overall experiences, exposure and practical knowledge can be used as inputs into the kind of work that we are discussing here. For instance, an architectural firm which is trying to attract investors in order to fund a luxury residential project would be judged not just on their technical capacities and credentials but also on the way their own office looks in terms of aesthetics, the overall décor and the information they have on latest trends in this business. This could be acquired through a professional degree, general awareness about the business. But what adds value is the kind of exposure the architects themselves have and the way they exhibit them. This exposure is a cumulative result of his degree, work experience, travel, interactions with elite social circles and upscale or premium tastes. So when I say consumption is important means to maintain the integrity of lifestyle, it connotes a variety of things such as self-worth, life-goals and sense of self. It is now an all-encompassing factor that takes into cognisance both work and leisure. However, the struggle to keep up with the chosen lifestyle and the fact that it is in a state of constant flux is real and induces insecurities because nature of work has changed from being a stable force to being an unstable one in the backdrop of ever-fragile economy.

CHAPTER FOUR

WORK AND LIFE CHOICES: TALES OF SINGLE PROFESSIONAL WOMEN AND MEN

In India, it is only in the last few years that the number of single[28] men and women, living independently, away from family in a city in order to make a career would have increased. Among them, the percentage of those who remain unmarried by the time they turn thirty is less in proportion, but this would have possibly increased over last few years. Corporate white collar professionals are a tiny section within this small sub group. In the west, sociologists tend to look at this group as a global sub-class in itself who have means to a better life. They call it global since the effects of globalisation, the western work culture has been transported to the rest of the world, resulting in rise in the number of single professional men and women around the world. Education and work opportunities have increased in the world of white collar professions and these opportunities call for more investment in terms of time in completing education and building a career, which easily gobbles up ones twenties. My focus in this chapter is on the ways in which men and women working in the private corporate service sector view and operate their careers, their orientation to their single status and views on marriage. I focus on these specific themes because they emerged repeatedly in my conversations with my respondents during the pilot research. More and more individuals were talking about it and I see it as an important shift in the way young people think and behave.

The global corporate work culture is common now but it is largely a recent development, more so in the last two decades. Their employees have higher incomes than people in most other sectors of work and they start earning well at a young age. They are exposed to a lot of travel which in cases of a few people I met, has changed their orientation towards life. They are also believed to lead fast, busy and stressful lives. A lot of women are increasingly becoming a part of the workforce and they have autonomy, access and control over resources. How does one understand the relation between work, lifestyle and social relations in the lives of corporate professionals today? The interplay between these three areas is what would enable us to understand some of the macro and micro changes happening in urban India today.

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[28] I use the term 'single' to include men and women who are unmarried at present and have never been married.

A small part of this urban upper middle and middle class segment is constituted by working corporate professionals. Some of the insights generated by the study would be general to the urban middle class population. However, what makes them different is the kind of world they are exposed to as a result of their work and even within private corporate work, my focus has been on the service-economy centred work which requires people to approach life and work in a certain way as described in chapter 1. Almost all of them are first generation corporate employees. They have had parents who were mostly in government jobs or in small and medium scale businesses. In cases of single women, one of the things I have explored is their effort to create an independent life for themselves away from their families. I was on the lookout for instances of late marriage or postponing marriage as a conscious decision. They believe that Indian women did not have such choices even a few years back. This has also resulted in changing or challenging the stereotyped gender roles. Through a few narratives of these women, I intend to reflect on the situations in which marriage and family are approached in a way which is different compared to the vast majority of women and the society in which they live.

5.1 THINKING AND OPERATING OUTSIDE NORMATIVE INSTITUTIONS - MARRIAGE

Marriage is seen as an option, a choice. In the 21st century, flexible capitalism stands for choices and opportunities, just as it also stands for insecurities and uncertainties. The same extends to people's personal spaces. Any failure at work is attributed to the individual, so any failure at personal life is also attributed to the individual. On the surface, one has the choice of not opting for a certain job and can chose from the free open market as to what suits him. The same value system is extended at the level of relationships and marriage. One may choose to opt out of it, or do it when certain specific needs they have are met. It became visible to me that if certain standards in terms of one's expectations from potential marriage partner are not met, there is a tendency to either postpone or move on to exploring the next possible option. This is possible in different scenarios, whether one is entering relationship at the level of dating, being in a steady relationship, looking for potential marriage partners and so on. The reasons for avoiding or postponing marriage as stated by them are follows: The fear that marriage would mean end to their freedom and autonomy; no success in

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finding a partner with similar 'wavelength'[29]; marriage no longer being the fall back option or an alternative to career; no compromises to be made in marriage; marriage often seen as invading into one's individual space and lifestyle. I would take up these different aspects in more detail in the subsequent sections.

In the past, opportunities in terms of paid employment were restricted for women and there were stricter social norms that they had to follow. With the opening up of the economy in the 1990s, the opportunities for paid employment increased and more women could be part of the workforce. This coincided with increase in number of professional education courses and institutes. All the women I met in the course of my fieldwork had either completed their bachelors or their masters. They were mostly enrolled in some professional course and most of them aimed at full time employment before marriage. There were instances where some of these women were the first in their family to leave home and migrate to a new city for education or job or both. In some cases, their own elder sisters were not allowed to do so. By the time they had passed out of school, "times had changed in India".

With increased education and work opportunities, women in urban India, more so in the metropolitan cities started taking more time to build their careers and the time required is such that it easily guzzles up one's early 20s. It automatically increases ones age of marriage. The professional urban women I met have more access to resources, take their own decisions, their financial dependence on their family is low or non-existent. They seem to be conscious of their rights, their freedom, they do not take their rights for granted knowing well that their mothers did not enjoy them as much. They are able to leave home, find a job, live alone in a city, fulfil all the responsibilities that comes with living alone, they have control over their income. Hence they are in a position to postpone or rethink marriage. Some of them see marriage as an option and not a compulsion. Those who come from liberal families are able to choose their own marriage partners. Due to higher education, income, exposure to western (mostly American) media and cultures through their work based interaction with foreign clientele, overseas travel and social media, there is a certain

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[29] This can be broken down into number of sociological variables like class, caste, social status, occupation, income and interests/ tastes. This can be understood using Bourdieu's theory of habitus to understand factors like taste and distinction. There are gender differences in the approach to singlehood and marriage. For instance, marriage and providing for a spouse (especially in case of men) is an expensive affair – "I can't afford a wife", as some men say.

level of expectation they have from their lives. This also gets reflected in their expectations from marriage, from their potential husbands, which if not fulfilled, they are not forcing themselves to settle down. A common theme that emerged is that they do not want to compromise on their lifestyle and expectations from a life-partner. Women from educated upper middle, mostly urban areas are beginning to see marriage as optional and reversible; in cases of some of my own narratives from the field, it was expressed that staying single is better than being let down.

R: My mother used to say that back when she was young, parents would find the desirable partner and in some families the bride and the groom were not even asked for opinion. This was even in educated families, you know. My family, even my grandparents were educated and well-to-do. But this was the norm expected to be followed by 'respectable' families. I think things changed a lot with time when women started getting more education and began doing jobs, especially in cities. Now if you take my own family, my parents ask my opinion for every little thing. I have a matrimonial account online. My parents wanted it since I did not have a boyfriend. If I would, they would not hesitate to meet him, I guess. When they see the profiles online, they have so many criteria, even I do. Their expectations are very high. I do not want to get married just for the sake of it.

M: What are the expectations you and your family have from your potential life partner?

R: He should be from a well-to-do family, should have a good business or a in a high paying private job. His family should be educated, liberal. My mother even wants me to stay away from in-laws, actually even I would prefer that. So the man should be living away from family. Then there are other criteria like religion and caste which should also match. My parents are basically liberal but they do not want a drastically different family with different values and culture as that would only make my future more difficult.

M: What are your expectations?

R: I have another set of expectations like the person should be articulate, smart, who likes to read, travel. I want an open minded, independent person who does not have to depend on some female member to do his own work, chores, cooking. I want an equal partner who treats me so, not as a typical wife who will cook and clean for him. You know, these online matrimonial profiles write that they need a homely girl who should

earn and look after family and home. My parents read this and say it's a good thing that they would let you work after marriage. But me, I hate reading such things.

M: Why do you say so?

R: Who are they to allow me to work? I don't need anybody's permission to do what I want. Why expect the women to 'balance' while the man completely focusses on his career? I am not taking all this onto myself. I need a progressive minded person who thinks like me and supports me. Only then can I respect and support him. My *mausi* (maternal aunt) says that this is too much to ask for. I would never find such a perfect man in India. One has to adjust, etc., etc. (smiling). But I think times have changed and these kinds of expectations from marriage is common to most educated families. Perhaps it is not true for masses in this country but people in my circle think like this. Even men have a lot of expectations from their future wives. The young people in India today are not willing to make big compromises. They would marry late or not marry but not go for anything less – Roma Basu, 28 years, PR professional, lives in South Delhi, shares her rented flat with another working woman.

Roma is an upper caste (Kayastha) Bengali women whose father, an engineer, was in government service in a managerial position. Her mother, a graduate from Calcutta University used to teach in a secondary school but left her job when Roma was growing up. Her parents live in Kolkata and her brother is now studying engineering from NIT, Durgapur. She has had a comfortable childhood and the family has seen some tough times in terms of finances, but never had to compromise on basic amenities. They had saved enough to build their own house in Bengal and spend on both their children's higher education. Roma completed her studies from Delhi from a private institution but she has been a bright student who got placed within months after she passed out. She is currently at a managerial level in a multinational PR firm and enjoys her work. She is drawing a salary of over eighty thousand a month. Her father receives a pension so they do not have any financial constraints. Her brother is expected to get a job in an IT firm within a few months.

Roma's social circle mostly comprises of people from similar class background, mostly middle to upper middle class with educated, liberal parents who did not hesitate in sending their daughter to a different city for education and job. From their names, it was also clear that most of them are Bengali, either Brahmin, Kayastha or

Baidya caste of Bengal[30]. She made other friends in Delhi, most of them are also from similar social backgrounds. So when she said that her parents want a groom for her from the same community, she meant he should preferably be Bengali, Hindu and upper caste. In one of my subsequent meetings with her, I learnt that her parents and her friends' parents are liberal to an extent as to be comfortable with their children going for love marriage. But the match has to be from same caste, religion, class and preferably, linguistic group. Roma feels her parents would not refuse a boy who is not Bengali but he has to be Hindu, upper caste and from an upper middle or upper class. There is a clear instruction of "no marrying a Muslim".

Her education background, exposure to the cosmopolitan world of work, educated and liberal[31] parents has given her the freedom and the confidence to live alone, build a career, be financially and emotionally independent. Having seen no gender discrimination at home between her brother and herself, she was equipped to be strong, assertive, hardworking and ambitious, things which only women from certain privileged sections can hope to be. As a result, she could question the expectations that potential grooms and their families have from women. She has read about western feminism and she feels that India has a long way to go before it can become as progressive as the west and it would only start at the level of the home and family when sons and daughters are not brought up differently.

For some of my respondents, marriage could result in an end to their new found freedom and personal space and the constant need to compromise which does not appeal to them. Based on their expectations, they are finding it difficult to find someone. As stated by Gerson (2010) in the context of American working women, economic stability before marriage is essential for women these days. In case that does not happen, there is a commonly prevailing fear that marriage might hold them

[30] All these are upper castes with Brahmins being in the top of the hierarchy. They all belong to the general category. In Bengal, there are no Kshatriya equivalents, after the Brahmins comes the Kayasthas and the Baidyas who are all the high caste Hindus who were among the first to take to western education under the colonial rule, thereby gaining access to English language, modern scientific education and professional careers, in addition to the higher ritual status they already enjoyed in the caste hierarchy.

[31] These were her own terms to describe her family, since they were open enough to send her away from home for education and job; who are not uncomfortable with love marriage and who give her freedom and space, unlike the vast majority of women from lower classes who, she feels, do not have these privileges.

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back or pull them down. The same seemed to be true in lives of the women I met in Delhi-NCR. This is linked to the fact that women want to take some time to develop their individual selves as that is seen as an effective way to build a healthy marital relationship in the future. So if one is unwilling to settle down for immediate gain then it could help in order to form a meaningful bond in the long run. One should not look at marrying in order to fill a void in life. One of my respondents, Sharmila, 29 years old, hails from Bhopal and lives in Delhi with her younger sister in a rented accommodation.

Back home, I didn't have to worry about a lot of things. I was always coming back home and had no worries there. In Delhi, I had to build my life, do everything on my own. So it's a home away from home. It's up to you how you want to live. Either you live in a squalor or you live at home and I preferred home. I came here when I was 24. It was very late I feel. But its okay, better late than never! You have to be able to take care, to learn how to cook, you can't order in food everyday; washing clothes; realise that on a bed there should not be food; folding clothes and all that. Personally I didn't know how much of food to cook, how much grocery to buy. You have to figure all that out by trial and error. You can't just run out of toothpaste or some basic food item. So some planning and some hard work and consistency required. I need such and such things for this month. This helps a person a lot. Unless you can fend for yourself, you can't grow up. This is extremely important today to be totally independent and it helps you in life in the future too. Everybody should go through this. At the end of the day, you are coming back home and you have to take charge of things. Living alone it makes a difference as it gives you a practise.

M: So what do you think of living with a spouse or partner? How would it be different, you think? May be for that I need to ask you your views on marriage?

R: See, you are used to a certain way, especially for single woman who have been living alone and have already established a life and a routine and a certain kind of order and peace in their lives. Say your husband you love and want to be with, but not necessarily the mentality will match or you would want to be on the same page with him. I think women think of these things these days before they get married. Men also think of it. Parents may not understand as they are so much into the worldview of sacrifices and compromises. To them marriage means this more than other things. For us it may disrupt what good we have in our life. I think that's why among my friends, many of them are marrying late. They are not bowing down to social pressures. If you have a family that backs you, that is best, especially if you are living in India. If you

don't want to do something and someone forces you to, it could create havoc in the relationship. If you are living alone in US, UK or Australia it is a different kind of freedom because you live so far away. My parents live in Bhopal which is just two hour flight away. So any rift with your partner or husband could lead to a disillusionment – Sharmila, 29 years, works with an international media house.

In some situations and for some of my respondents and their families, marriage is seen as a suitable option for social life and economic considerations. Sometimes marriage ends up being the only option for a financially secured life. As Berg-Cross et al. (2004) argue, it is economy that often shapes psychology and decisions around marriage. Out of the narratives that I gathered, more than half of my respondents did concede that the financial standing is of highest importance when it comes to a long term relationship or marriage. It reflects one's social status and possibilities of having a desired lifestyle that could be met only if there is parity in terms of finances. For single female professionals it seemed to be important that their husband earns more than them. For single male professionals, most of them prefer a working woman, preferably salary at par or less than their own.

Despite the fact that delaying marriage is not always a conscious decision but happens as a result of what I argued earlier as women needing time to prepare themselves before entering a lifelong commitment, the consequence of such a delay is also something these women and their families have to deal with. Late marriage could mean compromise. Parents point out the importance of marrying 'on time'. If that is not achieved, it is seen that one gets to choose from lesser options as most Indian men still get married by their mid or late twenties. The pool of eligible men and women shrink, which is described as "marriage squeeze". With the rise in the population of single professional women the world over, there is an increasing pressure for women to marry men with a higher economic and social position, thereby reducing the pool of partners available to them. This is also related to the concept of parity expectations wherein there is an ever increasing desire of young successful women to have relations or marry men on parity with them or even above them in terms of class, status and occupational hierarchy. The concept of parity expectations "stresses on the role of expectations about class and economics in reducing the pool of partners

available to SPW[32]. This term also encompasses the desire and planning of young elite women to have developmental parity with men, including a long period in which to continue their education and focus on their own development before committing to marriage or a permanent relationship" (Cross, et al. 2004: 35). As a result of these expectations and the fact that the pool of eligible partners shrink in size as age of an unmarried woman increase, it becomes even more challenging for these women to find successful unmarried men in their thirties in the case of my respondents.

Thirty five year old Nandita Khanna works with an international bank has been recently promoted as head of her team. Her annual package has now increased to twenty lakhs per annum and her promotion happened in the course of my interactions with her. The second time we met, she looked happier and wanted to share the news with me. She wanted to take me out for dinner. We went to an upscale Chinese restaurant in cyber hub, Gurgaon which also serves alcohol. Their alcohol and cocktails was one of main attractions of that place, she had told me. We ordered food and red wine. Initially I felt a bit uncomfortable at the idea of her paying for such an expensive meal. But I felt happy for her success and could see that she wanted me to be part of her celebrations. In the course of our conversation that evening, I asked after her family and their reaction. Her father is in senior management of an advertising firm and her parents had separated when she was in college. She keeps in touch with both of them and they are aware of her life events. Her parents had never put pressure on her to get married, more so because they had an unpleasant experience and could not discuss the advantages of marriage. Nandita was not keen on getting married before she had completed her higher education and established herself in her career, which easily took up a decade after she had graduated. Though she is not unhappy, but she does feel the lack of a special person in her life and has been trying to find a suitable person. Her parents, her friends and even her colleagues are on the lookout for someone right for her. When I asked her about her expectations she said:

> I need a man who is serious about his career, is ambitious and knowledgeable. I have male friends but they are either married by now or some who have not are mostly younger, less mature. I cannot imagine marrying someone who I cannot look up to. Of course, family background, money and status are important because I have already reached a certain level in my career and need someone who will not feel threatened by

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[32] SPW – Single professional women

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that. My friends say that I am a good catch for any man (laughs). But I really feel that only some men can handle successful career oriented women. So my choices are very less. When I check these apps on my phone (dating and matrimonial apps), most of the interests I get are from men who are above 45 years, mostly divorced, with children and all. I feel disheartened. May be it is too late for me to marry. My parents have the same concern for me. I do not like the thought of living alone for the rest of my life. You know, sometimes people can be so mean. One of my relatives told another aunt of mine, who is close to my mother, *Nandita ki shaadi kaise hogi..itni umar ho gayi hai uski..isilye ladkiyon ko zyada padhana aur naukri karwana nahi chahiye* (How will Nandita get married now. She is past her marriageable age. That is why girls should not be encouraged to go for higher education and job)

From the voices of the single women, it was evident that their ideas around marriage are not similar to what they believe their mothers would have had. Social context, time and economic realities have changed. Women have more education and employment opportunities now than ever before. They have choices which their predecessors did not have. As a result, their orientation to marriage has changed. They are ready to focus on their education and career even if it takes up a significant chunk of time. They have started questioning the idea of marriage as the ultimate source of stability and identity for women. They are comfortable with their single status and are not ready to compromise on their dreams and desires just in order to get married. They have started viewing life differently and they feel that being financially independent is an important step in their lives which would make enable them to have a more fulfilling life whether or not they decide to marry later.

5.2 GENDER, PAID WORK AND IDENTITY

Complete control over one's own finances seemed to be a big boon of singlehood. For those living away from family in a different region or city, money is key to survival. One of the chief reasons they could imagine moving out was finding a job and getting a monthly salary. The biggest expenditure is the rent. For those who had to initially move away for education or even a low paying first job and were dependent on their families for rent, they did not feel free despite being away from family and its constraints. They feel their families exercised control on their lives and monitored their activities. They felt they were not in a position to resist it because they were not fully financially independent. With time, they were able to earn a substantial amount and it increased their confidence. A common observation in the field was that things

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began to change the moment financial situation of these women improved. Their parents still play a crucial role in their lives, but they do not feel the pressure they used to feel earlier.

> No matter what we say, money is the most important thing in this world. At least life has taught me that lesson. Today I send money home and I feel proud of myself. My parents are happy. Family is still important and they take decisions for me, but now it is not forced upon me. They consult me. They know that I have a good, respectable job where people take orders from me. So they have started respecting my space and my decisions more than before. If I would be dependent on them, they would have no choice but to marry me off to some random person. But now they do not say that openly. They try to make me understand in a nice way, the express their concern. They can't force me to do anything anymore, I always respect them but will do what I think is good for me – Prema, 32 years, architect.

Work is central to their identity and sense of self. They are pulled towards devising different strategies of self-reliance such as - establishing a strong foundation at work becomes a starting point for their journey. Work is refuge from the chaos surrounding family life. Work makes them feel indispensable, wanted, independent and provides a sense of belonging (Hochschild 1983). These single professional women are "pushed and pulled towards self-reliance" (Gerson 2010:128) in order to avoid the "perils of domesticity" (p 129). From their narratives, a common concern emerged about whether they would manage to find husbands who would be equitable partners, who would not just contribute financially but they would also help with household chores. When they see people around themselves, they see more examples of dual career couples where the wife takes on most of the household and childcare work, even if both partners are financially contributing to the household. They say that women are more adjusting, they have low expectations from their own marriages and they have always been brought up in a way that men's incapacities or indifference in sharing household work were accepted by them.

> Most Indian women are brought up by their mothers who tell them that no matter what the women does outside of the home, in her career, even if she becomes the prime minister of the country, she will always be expected to take on household work, much more than the men! If your child cries, or if there is no food in the kitchen, if things are not in place, if the house looks dirty and unmaintained, would anybody blame the man of the house? No! It is always the women who would be harshly judged by her own

family first, then it would be the guests or outsiders. I am ready to wait till I find some man who is totally comfortable doing all kinds of work and who believes in marriage as an equal relationship. Till then, I am leading a free, quality life and doing things I always wanted to do. I have had a relationship in the past, but I was not fully in love with the person, it was more like an infatuation – Anjali Chowdhury, 31 years, mid management in a multinational apparel brand.

As Gerson (2010) argued, having a strong foothold in a career is not just an insurance against perils of future domesticity but is also against current uncertainties of modern relationships. Almost all my respondents who are now single have been in at least one relationship in the past, some in multiple ones, over the last few years. Some of them have membership in dating or matrimonial sites where they meet new men from time to time, either fixed by their families or by themselves. They believe that more choices and freedom also bring in more uncertainties in relationships. One of the common themes that emerged from their narratives is the low level of tolerance their partners and they seem to have for differences and incompatibilities at an inter-personal level. They unable to adjust or make compromises. When I asked for specific instances from their past, they ranged from not sharing common interests or hobbies to not sharing same liking for parties, drinking and smoking. In some instances, one of the partners wanted marriage while the other was not ready. In one specific instance, the woman had to go through a breakup because she belonged to a different community and the family members of her partner had opposed the match. However, the most oft cited reason for ending a relationship was breach of trust. As a result of such experiences, these women were clear that work based identity, financial autonomy and developing close network of friends was crucial to their well-being.

Work also served as an important outlet for their creative energies. At work, they had more time at their disposal as compared to their married counterparts who had familial commitments, duties towards their children and so on. As a result, some of them willingly take on work in addition to their normal requirements. It gives them something to do and better spend the available time. Some of the unmarried men and women I met told me that they would actually prolong ours at work to avoid going home, as that would mean sometimes mean boredom. For some, it opened new doors when they could give additional time to an ongoing project resulting in appreciation from their seniors at work. It enables them to participate in post-work discussions,

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share ideas with more people thereby network more with other professionals. As I had discussed in chapter 1, these are important steps to career growth in most corporate offices. However, it is the men who would end up doing these more than the women. This is mostly because of safety concerns that women have. Even if they want to, they cannot party till late-night as often as their male counterparts do. In addition, there are notions of appropriate behaviour and conduct that women are subjected to more than men. Despite organisations emphasizing on equality and greater participation of women in the workforce, there is an expectation of some distancing that women would observe from their colleagues and seniors. It is not uncommon for male (and some female) professionals to view frank and outgoing women as careless, trying too hard, too ambitious or aggressive.

5.3 ALTERNATE WAYS OF EXPRESSING SELF

There are various interests and avenues that are used by people to express themselves thereby making marriage not the only choice that they have. It could be hobbies ranging from photography, travel to arts and pottery. There are online portals that cater to single female travellers or a trekking group that gets formed with otherwise strangers. A lot of these possibilities of coming together is made possible due to internet. A set of different activities/ hobbies are an important part of the lives of these people – ranging from yoga, Buddhist chanting, art, travel groups, adventure sports, blogging, writing, cooking, dance, music and several other art forms. When family is no more the core space of socializing these are often the sources of active engagement and they invoke a sense of belonging.

There are different communities on social media that one can chose from and acquire membership in. There are communities that are formed on the digital medium and it ranges from activities like biking, camping, book reading clubs, learning gardening, pottery and other artistic activities. There are groups or communities which one can join and receive notifications on different events happening in Delhi. Some virtual groups are dedicated to making single people meet. They aim at 'connecting like-minded singles' in a particular city and even countrywide. There are communities which get together to screen movies at homes of people or other commercial venues. There are online music groups that operate like a secret clubs. They accept members on request by a lucky draw system. These selected people are invited on special musical evenings featuring new Indian artists mostly in fusion or western music. I

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happened to be part of one such gathering with a female respondent. There were lots of young people there and there was socializing that took place among young people who met each other for the first time. The event took place at an upmarket café in a mall in south Delhi and the people gathered there were well dressed. All three performances that evening were by Indians performing slow-rock or jazz music. One of them was a half Indian Yale student who usually performs in such exclusive events. Her mother is active in theatre and movies. One of the bands that performed consisted of a mix of artists from north and south India. They all have exposure to western culture and music either through their stint abroad for work, studies or specifically for music. In such kinds of gatherings, single women and men connect with others and they are enthusiastic about such special gigs in the city as these provide avenues to meet 'like-minded' people. My interaction with a few members of the audience revealed that such events are common in western counties and now they are becoming successful in India among the young, urban professionals who want to socialise beyond visiting malls or lounges/ clubs that play loud Hindi film music.

There are more avenues to meet the members of the opposite sex due to improved technology and social media, from dating apps to matrimonial ones. There seems to be less judgement by society on indulging in sexual relations. The idea of strangers itself has changed. One of my respondents told me that she had met her current date for the first time when she saw his profile on Facebook through a common friend. So a certain sense of familiarity stems from an otherwise virtual relation. She said that getting friends hooked-up (when the two otherwise belonged to separate social circle and did not know each other up until then) is common. So for a long time of their lives, people are busy with their work, happy with their friends and occasional dating or relationships, so marriage may not feature as a top priority in their lives, at least not for the first few years of their job and beginning of financial independence. This is true for both women and men. Subsequently, the family pressure to marry begins to creep in.

5.4 THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN THE CAREER OF SINGLE PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

The social support from family or the lack of it varies in individual cases. However, certain sociological factors govern this such as parents' education, occupation, caste and social class. All the single women I met who are living away from home, taking

independent financial decisions and building their career happen to belong to middle or upper middle class. These families belong to metropolitan cities or other tier 1 or 2 cities with only three of them from small towns. Out of a total of 15, 11 single professional women I met belong to general category, upper castes (Brahmins, Rajputs, Hindu Punjabi upper castes, Kayastha, Bhumiar, Baniya, Agrawal, Pandits). Two of them are OBCs (From UP and Rajasthan), one from ST (Manipur) and one from SC category (Maharashtra)[33].

According to the women I interviewed, social support from family comes in the form of facilitating preparation for exams all through school, private tuitions, emphasis on higher education, mostly in the field of technical or professional fields and encouragement to make a career. For those whose mothers were working, they were their first role models who taught them the value of work and financial independence. Women feel that working mothers are better mentors and can practically guide their daughters to make career choices. Most of these women felt blessed to have parents who encouraged them to study and make a career. For them, education and career were linked right from an early age. The fact that they should be individuals with a purpose other than just marriage was ingrained in their minds. This was true for families where the parents were in jobs themselves, as salaried professionals either in

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[33] The focus of this research is not to understand social composition of SPW (Single Professional women) per se, as that requires a separate research in itself. But caste is something that needs to be taken into cognisance in any sociological research. It is because variables like caste, class (Income, occupation of parents in this case) and education play a role in almost all aspects of social interactions in India. For instance, in this case, most of the SPW I happened to meet belong to the socially 'privileged' sections of society and this is not surprising. As I have argued in my first chapter, the world of the private corporate sector, especially the service sector is, by and large, a socially closed space. People from the margins of our society (Dalits, Tribals, Muslims, economically disadvantaged), on account of having less access to professional education are rarely able to enter this world. Moreover, even for the people from upper castes and middle to upper classes, this is not an easy space to enter if they are lacking social and cultural capital, social networks; education from elite professional institutes or high ranking universities with campus placement and high proficiency in English. Already established contacts that people have in this field of work, like a friend, a relative or an old colleague is one of the most influential ways of making inroads in this world. One of the big exceptions that do not necessarily follow this is the IT sector where people from different castes, classes, rural background are seen to get an opportunity to enter through campus placements done by software companies in different institutes. However, as I have already elaborated in chapter 1, even in this sector, there are limitations. Research done by Fuller (2006) and Upadhay (2007) show that the professionals in the organizations they studied who made it to managerial and above managerial positions in the software industry were from Brahmin, upper caste non Brahmin and landed OBC communities whose parents had a minimum of graduation degree and wealth to send their kids for education in private schools and colleges along with series of tuitions and coaching centers. Fernandes (2006) argues that in India the class formation is shaped by the reworking of inequalities of caste, religion, gender which means that class as a category is constituted by these structures.

government/ public sector or private sector, teaching, army and others. I present here, an excerpt from my conversation with 28 year old Ritupriya Balakrishnan, from Chennai .who completed her MBA from an institute in Delhi and then got a job in Delhi in a multinational HR consultancy firm with headquarters in the UK:

R: When we were young, most people would consider 25 as age beyond which you should not be unmarried, it was a big taboo. I think in my family, let me give you a context. You had already asked me what my family would expect from me. We are two sisters, no brother. So for us there has been a different environment. See my family is very academically oriented and we were always pushed to do well. There was a lot of expectations from us. The value that a good education can provide you was always felt by us as my family made us realize it. So we were always pushed to perform well in our studies and later in our career. They always wanted us to excel and to gain next step in life. If they had struggled a little in their lives, they wanted us to be better, have our own independence and income and not just rely on a husband's income. So in my house we never heard this thing that sit at home or we will get you married and all that. Which is very common for girls to hear in the middle class even upper class families like some of my friends. To make us understand the importance of retail margins, our marketing professor in MBA once asked, how many of you have heard this in their homes that if you don't study, we will open a shop for you to run. So you will sit at home and get a margin, you will at least earn something. So a lot of people raised their hands and I think I was the only girl in the class who raised her hand too! Later I thought about it and I presumed that such things are not discussed in most families when it came to their girls. They are often told that if you don't study well, we will get you married. I was not used to this at home. They always pushed us to do well. Marriage was a secondary thing mentioned once in a while. Of course my parents wanted us to get into good marriages but it was never expected of us to live on our husband's income. My mother has always been working. Whenever any major decision making had to happen at home, all of us were asked and our opinion was given a lot of importance. Like if a car had to be bought, we were asked what colour we liked and all. When we bought a new house, we were taken along.

The relationship dynamics between the SPW and their parents alters or becomes more complex on account of their attitudes towards marriage. Some of the women I interviewed felt that their parents have a set notion of right age for marriage, which typically ranges from 24 to 29 years. For those who want to leave their family and city to migrate for a job or for job advancement, not all of them have a smooth ride,

more so for those who do not show an interest in marriage. A lot of convincing, negotiations, promises have to be made to enable this step. There is major concern about safety/ security, discomfort with the fact that their unmarried daughters would live alone. For some parents who happen to be more conservative, as described by my respondents themselves, there were episodes of altercations between them. In some cases, one parent was supportive while the other was not.

After crossing a certain age, the pressure to marry begins to set in more. There are frequent conversations around this topic, much to their chagrin. There are discussions around matrimonial prospective profiles obtained either through online sources or through extended family/ friends/ matchmakers. Attending family weddings are a nightmare where relatives and family friends openly question their intentions around marriage. Sunidhi Sharma is 33 year old business analyst working with an American corporate company. Her family used to live in Meerut but have recently moved to Ghaziabad after buying a house there. Currently, she has to meet them at least two to three times in a month. Her mother demands she calls her every day to give her details of her whereabouts. When she was in college, she would not mind doing it. As time went by, she became financially independent and busy with her professional commitments, she finds it demanding to give her mother all those details on a daily basis. She said,

> R: Don't get me wrong. I love my family and they mean a lot to me. I still need their opinion on any big decision that I have to make be it change of rented accommodation, applying to other companies and so on. What is the point if you have to do everything alone and nobody is there to hear you out? But sometimes I feel very stuck. If I want to go for a trip or even for a night out, I still think about what they would think, despite living alone for so many years and having my own money. Though they have stopped interfering too much once I was less dependent on them financially. No matter what, money does matter. It gives you an identity, it gives you wings to fly. What would I have done if I didn't have a job and my own money? Perhaps I would be the mother of two kids by now (laughs). There is still a lot of pressure for me to get married. But I have made it very clear that I have to like the person very much even to think about marriage. They are very worried that I would never get married, what would happen when I am old?

> M: So what do you think about it?

R: I do feel a little anxious about being alone forever. Now I have my parents, my friends. But a few years later they may not be around. But I am clear that I won't get married for the wrong reason, not for any fear or under any kind of pressure. Nowadays I try to avoid attending family weddings. That is when relatives actually ask you all sorts of questions, sometimes they are personal. People don't even think twice before asking personal questions or scrutinising you. They think there might be some real problems with me for I am not getting married at 33. In our culture, there is no place for individuality, no respect for personal space. It is really bad. Why can't we learn the good things from the west? Sometimes I feel I would have been much happier had I been in some foreign country. Whatever little doubt I have about myself would not have been there. May be I would never marry there!

5.5 CHANGING STATUS: SINGLE BY CHOICE AND THEN BY CIRCUMSTANCES

Living alone away from home is seen as a milestone by the women I met. It was a well nurtured dream, which they brought to fruition. This is not something which they take for granted. As I have stated before, some of them were supported by their families in their decision to move out of home for education or work. They did not have any confrontation. Some of them did. They are frequently reminded of marriage or asked to move in with relatives in the city. A few mentioned that they prefer to move in with either friends or colleagues but not with relatives. The point here that I want to make is that this journey often starts with choice and ends up with not marrying due to unavailability of choice. Sometimes it so happens that the freedom phase gets translated into preparation phase for the inevitable next step in life that is marriage – learning to cook, manage household work and expenses, make savings and so on. However, this is restricted to a certain kind of family. For instance, in my own sample there are several women who want to get married. They are willing to take the next step, but they are not being able to find the perfect match[34].

5.5.1 Marriage merely on hold, but very much there on the cards

Broadly, there are two kinds of situations when it comes to their status as single women – either they are single out of choice or single out of circumstance. In most cases, it was seen that they were single out of choice till they were 31 or 32 years of age and post that if they were single, they voiced it as single out of circumstances.

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[34] This can be seen as a combination of social variables like family's financial background, profession and qualification of the groom, social circle, religion, ethnicity and caste which are non-negotiable.

Some of them mentioned that marriage is something they will have to do as their families will leave them with no choice, or out of fear of being lonely for the rest of their lives. Some of them said that they need someone to strengthen their financial security and assets. It is difficult to lead a decent lifestyle living alone as a significant chunk of the salary goes on rent and bills.

> I think after sometime, a little companionship is fine, I think most people want it. So then when you have it, you relish and enjoy it. Then after that you also want some asset. Like right now, I don't have any asset, like a house or car. I just live on rent and company provides me cab. If I want to have those, I will not be able to do all of it alone. I had option of buying a car, I thought of parking and maintenance and backed out. So I didn't want to do it right now. So I look forward to having my own things and stuff. Even now I am not really living alone and also adjust with my flat mates. But now I don't have anything that I can call my own. Personally I don't think I would prefer living completely alone. I would want somebody. - Ritupriya

With a husband in the picture, expenses would be shared. Responsibilities would be divided. Currently it is a lot on their plate if they are living on their own - buying groceries, paying bills, getting things repaired, cooking, washing, cleaning and so on. When the discussion would steer to this, all of them equivocally said that this sharing is something they want and desire, but when they look around, there are not many instances of equal sharing. Most of the household work is still handled by the woman in the family. They are expecting a 'partner', more like a flatmate, who, like their current flatmates would help them in running the house and would be much more receptive and concerned about their lives, their work and their growth as much as a flatmate cannot be.

One of the important themes around which a lot of discussion took place was the fear of loneliness and the positives of having a companion. She said,

> I accept the fact now that I want a companion, I want marriage. I want someone to talk to, to crib to, to travel with, to share the load with, and to share my life with. However, I am also clear that I am not going to give into any kinds of pressures. For instance, there is this friend of mine who is 30 and is single and quite successful at her work. She is now seeing someone who I feel is not good enough. I have seen that she takes a lot of shit from him. I have seen this in other cases too. After a certain age women just compromise, knowing that they may not find any suitable companion once they cross 30. I now feel from within that I would want a companion, not be lonely anymore, but I

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don't want to ever enter the mind-set of oh I am not getting married, what will become of me?

The women who realise that they should eventually get married often think of the things that can go wrong once they do. They are on lookout for a companion (they use words like partner, friend, lover), not a husband. A husband has connotations of someone who would want to control them, interfere, exercise control over their time and space. A partner, on the other hand, is someone who one can share things with, who would help them in their personal growth, who would share joys and sorrows of life with them, who would take interest in their professional growth and would treat them as an equal. The idea of a non-hierarchical relationship based on the ideals of respect, equality and mutual support found expression in the narratives of all these women. This comes close to the Giddens' (1992) idea of a "pure relationship":

"It [a pure relationship] refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens 1992:58).

The idea of being alone and being lonely are often synonymous in their thoughts and vocabulary. The fear of feeling left out, of not having someone who care about their life, their well-being and whereabouts are often thought of and discussed with friends in similar life-stage. They gave instances of women in their late 30s and 40s who are unmarried and most of them are not very happy with how their life has turned out to be, despite professional success and financial security. There are instances when others look up to them, but there are also instances where they are pitied or looked at with disdain. Remarks are made about their drinking habits, about their ill-temperament and their obsession with work and they mention instances in which they expect their juniors to work odd hours as they do not understand that others have a family to look after. This is not very different from women generally discussing how their male bosses are not very sensitive to their need to leave office at a certain time. They say that their male colleagues and bosses never bother about household work or their children and can leave office anytime.

However, there are layers here and the situation is more complex. There are girls who may belong to similar families in terms of economic standing. However, the parents

may be less concerned with their marriage or they themselves are not of the same point of view as the one described in the last section. They do not look at this phase of theirs as a gateway to the next inevitable stage of marriage. They may not be averse to it, but will give marriage a thought only if they find the right kind of compatibility. The reason behind the difference in mentality is due to the way they were brought up, the liberal values in the family and the cosmopolitan attitude work enables them to acquire by being able to mix with different kinds of people. They feel that western work-culture, professionalism and working with different kinds of people opens up one's mind and widens one's horizon. So some of the women I met were more comfortable with their singlehood than others.

A research on the social and economic policies in the UK in the context of working men and women show that only through paid work can one feel personal fulfilment. This new work ethic of the western world also points to a need to be flexible and available 24.7 for the requirements of the work, which often cause negligence of all the other areas of life outside of work. I could see both a sense of pride and fulfilment coming from work and also a kind of overwhelming feeling of work enveloping their lives as a result of the dominance of it, so much so that everything was planned around it. However, the more I got close to the lives of people, I saw that there are different layers and nuances to it. Some of the respondents in the particular research done in UK highlighted that the respondents themselves felt a sense of negligence on their part on the demands that their families or friends made, leading to a candid acceptance of disappointment which they felt as a result of the overwhelming presence of work which found direct expression in their interviews.

 Most of SPW I met would not directly say that they were feeling totally subsumed by work or were feeling disappointed or stressed. They would, justify to themselves and others that that is how contemporary work is like. If one has to survive in the corporate world in the current unpredictable economy, one has to just accept it and move on. They would rather focus on the good things that work had brought into their lives – the money, independence and freedom that comes with financial security; a sense of purpose; constant reminder that they are needed and their contribution is valued by their organization. They save, invest, buy property and jewellery, but not at the cost of their present fulfilment and indulgences. Indian middle classes are witnessing this surging possibilities of consumption. There is an elevation of status,

there is an upward class mobility in comparison to the frugal lives of the older middle classes, i.e. own parents. For the single women, money brings with it unprecedented freedom from financial dependence and they can, at least temporarily, evade the pressure to get married.

> Crazy workdays are better than interfering relatives coming home and asking about marriage. I sometimes don't go home on the weekends just anticipating this. I don't go to weddings. Like I have this friend who is American. She is 34 and still single. When she goes home, her parents decide on the next vacation with her or the new places they can go out for dinner or drinks. It is so much fun. She is so happy and confident. She was saying that when she gets bored of her work, she will get back to studies, learn a new language or do another masters in a new subject just for some fun and exposure. I would want to think like that but cant. It will take a very long time for us to realise that life of a man or a woman is not incomplete without marriage, kids – Rupa, 29, senior Public Relations, Branch manager.

5.6 IS SINGLEHOOD A STAGE OF LIBERATION OR CRISIS?

The phase of singlehood is mired with dilemma. It is sometimes linked to better performance at work and no compromise with career. Liberation is in a financial sense resulting from independence and control over money and better decision making capacities. A sense of crisis is experienced, when expenditure goes up and the pinch of not being able to share it with someone is felt. Crises is also in the emotional realm, in all those low moments when they feel lonely, unwanted, unhappy and uncared for. There is an underlying sense of insecurity about not getting married. When it came to the discussion around their own concerns about marriage, the major one was around health and loneliness. There were concerns on who would take care if they were to get hospitalised or if they faced any security issues. Some of them had financial concerns. Having a partner for lifetime, means, among other things, having someone to share expenses with. It means having a partner to go on vacations with. As I have argued earlier, it so happens that the initial decision of postponing marriage or waiting for the right person to come by, gradually get replaced with a sense of anxiety or insecurity of the possibility of remaining alone. A few of my respondents mentioned that once their friends get married, have kids, the feeling of loneliness creeps in and they begin to question their decision. Excerpts from an interview with 30 year old Renu Malhotra:

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M: Do you feel that post this whole living alone phase, are things difficult in terms of adjustments? You were mentioning about your friends so what do you see them do?

R: You are right it's a big change. I agree with you. People do try to avoid this, they wish they could live alone at least for some time. It's considered normal these days, though people will not come out and say it. They wish it. People say that with age you become rigid, so in India people tend to get married young, but I feel people should get time to live alone, develop their own viewpoint and a personality before they get into something like marriage. Just a personal view. I think it does not bring rigidity, but it does bring emotional maturity which is a must before one marries. To some extent, your individuality will go away, your space will not be just yours, and hence it is all the more important to live this life before getting into that phase! I still feel that marriage is not that bad when it comes to freedom! My married friends are happy. They are not living with in-laws, they are working, they have a maid who comes and cooks and they don't have to cook every day. If they don't feel like making anything, they won't! They will eat out or order in. they have good marriages, not troubled. I think after sometime, a little companionship is fine, I think most people want it. Personally, I don't think I would prefer living completely alone. I would want somebody in there. None of my friends live completely alone. One of them had to for some time but didn't like it. Actually I don't think it is a great to be alone. We were all staying in a hostel so we are even more used to group fun and socializing.

Another respondent named Prema Srivastava, an architect, lives alone in a rented apartment in Dwarka, is in a mid-managerial level and draws a package of over one lakh rupees a month. She mentioned that the fear of loneliness bothers her sometimes. She feels it more when she is alone, when she falls sick, sometimes when she wants to go out but does not have company. There is external pressure from family and relatives. She feels some people look at her with pity, often telling her, "you are beautiful and successful too, such a nice girl, how come you didn't find someone?" Unlike Chetna, Prema does not make it obvious through her body language or her expressions that she is offended or annoyed. Sometimes she does not offer any justification. She just says that she has not been lucky in love. There are times when she says that her weight is a hurdle, she thinks she is overweight.

She meets guys through matrimonial websites or through common friends who want to hook her up, but she narrates that she has only been unlucky. Sometimes men talk to her for days, weeks, even months and then suddenly they cut themselves off

without offering any explanation. There have been times when she liked a person but he did not show an interest. In those cases, she often blames herself for not being slim enough or pretty enough. There is a lot of thinking, self-blame, even self-pity that comes in. In one particular instance of a failed relationship, she was in depression for several months. When she would look back at the event, she would blame herself for giving a person so much importance and neglecting her work.

> I want to go abroad for higher studies, I want to write a book, I want to travel, I want to get out of this job and do something I really love – read and write, may be even teach. I had made a New Year resolution that I would take concrete steps towards it. Then I met this guy who was all into me initially. I had such a good time. He is not from my community, not even my caste (She is Brahmin and the guy is a Dalit). But I looked at him and saw that he is a self-made man and doing well in interior designing, he is happy with his work and with himself and is caring. He convinced me that we can have a future together if we work towards it and slowly I started believing in the possibility. Once I gave in and started trusting him, I saw that he was slowly backing off. It went to avoiding me, not taking calls, to removing me from his Facebook and WhatsApp. He gave me no explanation, we did not have any conversation though I demanded it. I felt so angry at my situation. Why does it always happen with me? Why do I always attract the wrong kind of men? I could have prepared and applied to colleges abroad and my career could be something else. I wasted so many of those precious months. I got completely detached from my own future plans.

Prema said she has always been an independent person and would not take orders from anyone even when she was a child. Her sister got married when she was only 23 and is now settled in Australia. Her own family is in Guwahati. Like her sister, she was supposed to do well in studies, get good grades but marriage would be the ultimate agenda. However, she subverted these familial conventions by coming to Delhi for higher studies and then started working here. She looked for a rented accommodation and was lucky enough to find one without much hassle. Her landlord lives one floor below hers and are accommodating enough to allow her to bring in her male friends and colleagues and not judge her for who she is. Even if they do, they are not open about their thoughts.

She has a tastefully done up place with a terrace-garden. She has invested a lot of money in the furniture and home décor. This keeps her happy and helps her unwind. She has a maid who comes in the morning to do the cooking and cleaning. She also

has a gardener who takes care of her plants. She often contemplates keeping a dog but decides against it since she has a travel job. After work, she has her gym, dance classes and swimming in the summers. She likes to turn to new things from time to time and also makes sure she does enough physical activity to shed the extra weight. She is acutely conscious of her weight and feels it is a big handicap in her life. There are times she feels she has more lavish lifestyle than she should and perhaps her parents do not approve of it though they do not say it openly. But the next minute, she tells herself that she is works very hard and she has the right to a decent lifestyle and to spend on herself. She has to also maintain a certain minimum standard of living so as not to be embarrassed when her colleagues want to come over to her place.

Prema seemed to be comfortable with the idea of a non-conventional arrangement such as co-habitation without marriage, but yearns for a meaningful and serious partnership. She is 33 and in the last 2 years she has become more comfortable with the idea of marriage, even arranged marriage as long as she gets time to know the other person beforehand. In one of my meetings with her, I saw her making plans for the approaching weekend with her friend.

M: So tell me what are the best things about being single?

R: I have my own space which I don't have to share with anybody. My life does not depend on anybody else's. Like I told you I want to study abroad, change my profession and experiment with my life. I am not even sure if I want to be with one single person for the rest of my life. Perhaps I will even get bored. So all this cannot go with marriage. And the kind of guys and their parents who I talk to and meet, my God they are weird! Once this guy's mother met me for the first time and all she did was look at me from head to toe and turned her eyes towards her son as if asking him is she okay to look? I could see it so clearly. I felt so angry. But I just behaved well with them because my upbringing has not been like theirs. So being single means to be free from all these useless drama. I can be the person I want to be, eat what I want to, and go where I want to, anytime. I don't have anybody here who will dirty my house (laughs). These are the perks of being single. The negative side of all this is the loneliness that grips you sometimes. I want to travel but cancel seeing that I am alone and my friends aren't free. See, the biggest fear is what would happen in the old age? That is the worst fear of anybody who is single. I was thinking about it sometime back and I think that what one can do is earn well, save well, invest it in schemes and all, by the time you are 50 you should have enough money to put yourself into those fancy old age community

homes. They are not like the badly cared for places. These are fancy, they are almost like 4 star hotels with all services and amenities and the best thing is they are full of people in similar life stage who are well off and don't want to live with their children. Rather than living alone, it is like living in a community like we did in our colleges. I think by the next few years such concepts would be more common here and more choices would also be available to people like us. It is just a thought for now but I can consider it.

5.7 THE CHALLENGES IN THE LIVES OF SINGLE WOMEN AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES

While certain challenges are similar for single women because of their common status of being single such as pressure from family and a sense of insecurity and concern over their future, there are other anxieties which are different for different people. For instance, the anxieties of single women from middle or lower middle class background who currently have decent salaries, dreams of an upwardly mobile, modern lifestyle but have precarious jobs are different and this is important to be understood. Those with retired parents often have to help out family back home but they find it difficult to compromise with their acquired lifestyle and values. There are two different worlds that these women need to straddle. When Chetna goes home on the weekends, she has to stay at home and give her mother company. Other than cooking and eligible bachelors in the community, there is not much else that they can discuss or bond over. Prema goes to her hometown in Guwahati once or twice in a year and she is sometimes tensed about how she would pass those days with her parents with them expressing concern over her marriage. Her father is retired and her mother is a housewife. In one of my meetings with her, she told me she finds it difficult to manage her parents' expectations. Her mother is fond of traveling and expects she would make plans and book tickets for them to travel. Though she does it at least once a year, it often happens that she cannot afford to go on multiple trips or would like to save up some money to travel with her own friends. She sometimes feels stuck that she cannot enjoy her holidays the way she would have liked to. She does not have a brother and is proud that she is able to take care of her parents and provide for them. However, sometimes when there are financial pressures, she finds it difficult to manage two households. Though she lives alone, her monthly expenditure is higher than that of her parents in Guwahati. One day she overheard her parents talking about her and that they wished they had a son. They would feel less hesitant to

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be financially dependent on him than their daughter. She felt they also meant that a son would be able to earn more than she does. This episode upset her and she took time to become normal with her parents once again.

Song's (2014) ethnographic work on single Korean women has insightful ideas around the ways in which heteronormative sexual and moral control of unmarried women is systematically embedded in housing, finance and employment institutions. She looked at women living alone in a city, away from their families and the different ways they are trying to resist the patriarchal structures which tends to look at women as dependent on their fathers and then their husbands. The resistance happens in different ways from subtle expressions to leaving home and arguing with family members. It talks about how money capital is the most important tool they can use to subvert patriarchy. The book also addresses related issues such as sexual freedom, problems of sexual safety, housing experiences and importance of work. This is an important ethnographic work focussing on the women's experiences and there are certain interesting similarities between Song's respondents and those part of my research. One of the similarities is the underlying patriarchy in social norms, values and institutions.

My interactions in the field revealed that there are notions that people commonly associate with single professional women, more so for those above a certain age. There is a perpetual curiosity of neighbours, relatives, married friends and colleagues about their relationship status. Like in the Korean context, there is a commonly associated idea around single Indian women being too liberal or that they have too much of frivolous fun. These women expressed that there is a perception that married women have more responsibilities and they are more concerned about others, hence cannot afford to be self-centered. Media depictions of single women reinforce these ideas of them being carefree, having no responsibilities, having multiple relationships. It is often depicted that they are affluent and property owners which is not a common social reality. They feel that they work as hard as married men, women and single men. Men who are single and live away from family are seen as responsible, independent, ambitious and hence eligible for marriage. However, women in similar situations are not likely to be as respected or found as desirable for marriage. A single woman, living alone, away from family and working in the city is first seen as an exception, sometimes an anomaly, often seen as 'too ambitious' or even self-centred.

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These women particularly said that they are judged harshly by their relatives, sometimes by their own family members, neighbours and colleagues.

> I feel judged all the time, in big ways and small. It is seen in people' expressions. Things are changing for the better, a woman living alone without a husband, earning money and enjoying her freedom was not a possibility a few decades back. So I agree some things have changed. But you know, I feel some things will never change. I don't think society will be able to look at women and men in a similar way in terms of respect. Yes single elite women have an easier life as compared to others, but I am not an elite and so don't hope to ever belong there. As I had told you I feel being beautiful or fair skinned is important in India… I have faced several rejections from different people…all prospective groom's family…people just look you up and down…and now I am all done with that non-sense. I would rather be alone than live in so much pressure
> – Neha Garodi, 30 years, chartered accountant in an American fund company.

Manasi, a 29 year old finance consultant from a middle class family in Indore, lives and works in Faridabad. She is currently living alone and is looking for another female flatmate. She does not feel very safe in her neighbourhood in Faridabad and her neighbours pry into her life. One of the women living adjacent to her house, a middle aged housewife often comes unannounced. Manasi feels she comes to check if she has male visitors in her apartment. Initially she would hesitate but now she finds ways to exchange pleasantries at the door without letting her in.

> R: I was often tagged as this hot babe in college and people would often just see how I look and not that I was good in so many things. I did a lot of debating. I had done nothing to get this tag and I was tired of this. I never even flirted with anyone. I was always point to point. Often I did not understand when people were hitting on me. I wanted to change my image and become a normal girl. So for instance I carefully dress in this organization as people are very backward in terms of mind-set.
>
> M: As in, how?
>
> R: Like I would not wear a skirt or a formal dress like you would have seen in big corporate offices. Mine is a typical *lala* company where men just stare at you, they have no basic etiquettes. I wear full pants with kurta or salwar kurta. I wear shorts and

skirts when I go out with my friends. I sometimes pose to be a *behenji* [35]so that I am spared from the weird looks (laughs)

M: Can you give me instances of difficult experiences and how you dealt with it?

R: I feel I am more progressive than the people around me. I have been to a good school and we were encouraged to develop our personalities. Like I wanted take science and prepare for the IITs but my principal told me to take humanities and build my personality and do something more dynamic than that. My MBA institute was a good built up for me to understand that corporate world would be difficult. I had gone to a small town in Maharashtra and had done some project there. Even there I faced similar problems and again I had to complain to authorities. You know, when people see single, good looking, successful women, they don't like it and want to tag them as either flirtatious or too fast or totally uptight. This particular guy said that he had seen me in some private space with a man who was working in the office and the word spread! Can you imagine? Thankfully, I had narrated everything to my boss on time and he had faith in me.

M: How do you think the corporate world treats single women? What has been your own experience?

R: Corporate world is not very simple for girls. But one should not play a victim and say that I don't get opportunities. That way we will never get opportunities. Of course the sector does not treat men and women equally. My managing director has told me that he does not see people as men and women. In this particular organization I have seen that women have problems when it comes to their image and all that but since the MD is not an Indian and he is a man of integrity, I haven't really seen the phenomenon of glass ceiling myself. But generally it is very much a reality. However, when it comes to single women, I feel sometimes that they are an easier target for some men in this sector who want to take advantage of their vulnerability for their own fun. I am not saying that married women don't face problems but their problems are of a totally different nature. Both are serious problems. In this organization, since they are an American MNC, they actually want to have more women in the sector, they actually want to increase the number. It is part of their policy. There are women in important positions. I don't know if it's the same in every office. Some women I know mix with men more freely, go out for drinks with them. They know how to be around men and

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[35] The Hindi word *behenji* literally means sister-like and it has a connotation of a person who is traditional in mindset and attire. It is sometimes used in a slightly derogatory sense to mean a person who is not modern or cosmopolitan, one who does not know to carry off western attire.

be safe and also have fun. There are some who don't. But what I am saying is despite knowing it you could still be put in a tight spot.

I met Gauri on a Sunday afternoon. She is 28, working in a multinational consultancy firm. She was home, working on an office project and also had to attend her Buddhism classes in the morning, complete her household work that she piles up for the weekend. In between all if this, she managed to squeeze out a couple of hours to speak to me. She invited me to her living room, served me water and made me feel comfortable. She spoke very fast, smoked a couple of cigarettes in the course of the conversation. Her eyes were both on me and her phone, she was expecting a call from one of her clients. She eyes looked tired but her body was active.

Gauri lives with two other single working girls. They have a common maid and cook who look after all the chores. Gauri does not have either the time or the interest in any household work. She just gets them done. She has been living in this flat since last 4 years and she does not want to leave this place. Her previous office shifted from south Delhi to Gurgaon, she did not move then to any other flat. Her current office is also in Gurgaon and it is far. Yet she chooses not to move closer to office, but drives to work on all weekdays. That causes her a lot of inconvenience because of traffic. She cannot use that time to work or respond to mails as she is driving. Sometimes, she takes a cab because she can use the one hour of commute to start working by taking calls or responding to emails even before reaching office.

> Working is all day long, I have to keep working through and through. It starts from the moment I wake up till the time I fall asleep at night. I don't have the ideal luxury of the weekends. On most of the weekends I am working. People keep asking me why you work so much, when you will be free, etc. I just get irked by these questions. Nobody asks a man these questions. I work because that is the core of my identity, I want to be known for the work I do; it is the main source of my income, my independence, the lifestyle that I lead. I don't have a husband or in-laws who will take away half my time, so what else can I do? Sometimes I feel I end up working so much because I don't have any other responsibilities

One of the reasons she does not shift is because her current landlady is friendly and non-judgemental as compared to her experiences in the past. When I asked her to explain the context, she said that her landlady is a liberal person who does not ask her or her roommates any uncomfortable questions on why they are single, why men

come into their apartment or why she has to work at odd hours. She and some of her friends in similar life stage have had to experience this from neighbours and landlords who are always curious about them.

> One is always under the scanner of the neighbours and relatives as a single woman. Like here, once we had left the tank tap on my mistake and one of the neighbours literally harassed us. Others do it too but they have not been so bothered. Once I literally told one of them on her face that you harass us because we are alone, you would not do that had my family been around or a husband been around. They have a problem with us partying or even give these looks when male friends come over. I can see the judgemental attitude right in their eyes. I am sure they also talk behind our back, but you know what? I just don't have any time for all this! I hardly have time for any leisure so I seriously have no worries about what others think. I have reached a stage when I do what I have to do and don't care about anybody else. Not everybody is so lucky with landlords. Some of them literally harass single girls, but they will still keep them for the money. Most of them have rules such as men cannot enter and all that. Even in a rented flat! Imagine what must be happening in PGs and hostels. This is a very Delhi thing, single women are not much of a shocker in Mumbai. I had a very chilled out time there. I am so weary of Delhi men, it is a cultural bias I have. But I really believe that they are more narrow minded and patriarchal.

There are different ways of subverting conventions or coping with existing challenges. One of the ways Gauri evades the questions around her marriage is by not going for extended family gatherings. When she has to, she told me that she makes a bitch-face and is upfront and sometimes rude in her response to the incessant queries she is subjected to. She feels that being nice and coy adds to the problem. Some of her relatives have understood her disapproval of such questions and they do not approach her anymore. She feels irritated most of the times when there is any family gathering. However, there are times she has fun troubling them with her boldness. They are surprised that she is working all the time, not bothered much about her single status, lives and travels alone and hangs out with men.

5.8 THE PRIVILEGES OF SINGLEHOOD

So far, being single has been a choice that my respondent Anamika Agarwal has made. She wanted to invest fully in her career, make a name for herself in her industry and reach a certain level. She wanted to achieve financial security. She is drawing a salary of more than a lakh a month, wants to go higher up in the ladder. She was

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previously into journalism, later moved to corporate research out of interest and for better financial returns. One of her single friends has recently invested in real estate and Anamika sees this as a significant step towards future investment and insecurity. Anamika would also like to do the same for herself. She is independent because she does not know to be any other way. She drives, she manages her home with the help of a maid and she takes care of her finances. She often travels alone. Having a successful career for her was always a pre-requisite to having a meaningful life.

Her parents live in Jaipur. She sometimes goes on weekends to meet them. There are times when they come over to meet her. With time, the frequency of going home has gone down owing to immense work pressure. Sometimes she is so stressed out and tired that she does not feel like meeting anybody. Her mother often complaints that she is not spending time with her family enough and drifting away. She tries to adjust but beyond a point she does not care. This is because the mother often reminds her of marriage, asks her how she would continue living like this in the future and so on. She frets over these things when she meets her colleagues and friends who explain to her that parents are only concerned, they are not judgemental.

> My mother and all the female relatives keep asking me when I would get married. Sorry to say but women really need to change their mind-set. I see that they are so curious about what I am doing, why I am working so hard, work is not everything and all that. I kind of hate these remarks. What I am doing or what I have achieved has no importance for them. The salary package is all that matters. Sometimes I see that my father takes more interest in what I am doing, who my clients are, what are the problems at work. He even gives me suggestions.

There are several advantages of being a single woman in the city. First, one is able to give herself completely to one's career. One can stretch oneself like the way the married working women cannot. Working on weekends, staying back in office till late night, frequent travel are all the pre-requisites of working in the corporate sector which are often not mentioned in one's contract. While signing on official documents at the time of recruitment, one of the clauses is that one has to fulfil all responsibilities that come with whatever projects one is handling at a given time. This is a blanket statement which is mentioned in one's joining letter and it implicitly includes all the extra work that goes with work. Nobody complains because it is seen almost as an intrinsic part of work and of possible growth in the workplace. Often, those who are

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strict about reaching and leaving office at fixed timing are looked at with some disapproval, not only by the management but even by the colleagues.

Most often such employees happen to be married women with children. They have two ways to negotiate their career and home – one is by marrying late in which case they already have reached a certain level in the organisation in which they can work on their own terms and conditions. They have put in conditions that they cannot work after a certain time in the day and are particular about not working on weekends. The other way is to compromise on one's growth and not accept all promotions offered. With a promotion comes several added responsibilities in which case it would not be possible to follow strict timings or other conditions such as not working during weekends or not to travel extensively. These are some of the challenges which a single woman does not face. Another way of holding back or what some women like Anamika would consider as a compromise is that one works part time or as a consultant. The freedom that comes with being single is significantly valued by these women. They feel and remind themselves that they have a lot in life which they should be grateful for. This freedom means different things for different women, but it manifests itself in a few ways which are more or less common to all such professionals I interviewed. One is that one exercises control over one's time and space.

> I don't have to seek permission to go out late in the night. Nobody keeps a check on my time. Previously I used to inform my parents but now I don't bother. I can come in anytime I want to. I don't have to cook, I don't have to manage my time around someone else's. It is a huge kind of freedom when you don't have anybody telling you what to do. Sometimes when I am very busy or after being busy for several weeks, when I get tired I can easily disconnect from everybody and everything. Can you imagine doing that with a husband or a family around all the time? Sometimes when I go home on the weekends, I just don't talk to anybody and chill. I like to be on my own watching mindless TV or listening to music. My mother keeps complaining so I tell her to let me be and not disturb me. Is it too much to ask for? – Sunidhi

Sunidhi works with an international media house. Her family resides in Bhopal. She has a younger sister who is currently in college. She left home when she was 24 and came to Delhi. Since then she has been living in a rented accommodation at Lajpat Nagar. She has made several friends, usually is busy with her work and travels

extensively on work. She feels she is lucky to have a landlord who is educated, liberal and non-interfering. She said that he does not have any set rules for the house and does not bother about who is coming and going out of his rented house. To her, this is the best that she could have asked for. She has seen other single women go through a lot of difficulty in finding a place where they could live alone and without any interference. Once they did, most of them go through some amount of interference or even surveillance from the landlord and his family. Sunidhi hails from an educated middle class family who do not put pressure on her to get married. They value her work and her personal freedom and has always done so even when she was living with them. But she is conscious of the fact that this kind of environment is an exception. People's liberal views are limited, though today it accommodates their daughters' education and job. Their job is seen as an asset that could be useful for her to get a groom. In most cases, their job is limited to their salaries and has a supplementary scope in terms of contribution to household expenses. She has always been taught that an individual's identity stems from her education and occupation. She needs to be financially independent. She was given the freedom to make friends on her own will, go out with them and had no curfew-time at home.

I present here an excerpt from an interview with another respondent named Shipra. She is 28 years old. I met her on a weekday evening post her work hours:

 In my MBA college, I would feel insecure that I didn't come from a big business family so I knew that I would have to make it on my own. A lot of us from middle class backgrounds knew that we had to survive it here, excel and also sustain it all on our own and that was the only way for people like us to live. It's quite competitive, everybody wants to land with a job offer. So when in my MBA College, a big services consultancy came and I was recruited I didn't see anything else and just went on with it. That's how I came here.

M: What do you think are the challenges of living alone in a city for a woman?

M: I had started living on my own even during my college and then during MBA. I'll say advantage of living alone is that you become independent. This only happens when you are alone and not with your parents. No matter how liberal they are, you always know you can fall back on them. When you are alone, you have to do everything on your own which is sometimes a burden but that is what helps you live independently. You learn to make decisions, be aware of consequences, you leant to be alert, take more responsibilities and you have to bear the consequences of whatever you do. My

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bag was snatched once, since then on I became very alert. I was in an auto and my bag was picked up by a biker. So one has to be more careful.

If you are working you learn to manage money and also you learn to handle a lot of people. It is a very basic training and it really helps. I really feel everybody must live alone at least once in their life. During education you are in a protected environment, but work is a different environment and teaches you more. You gradually realize that people are there to take advantage of you and you gradually learn how to protect yourself and move on and achieve your dreams. You don't feel helpless. If someone is coming out for first time, you do feel helpless, initially. With time it becomes more manageable. Most importantly, you learn to judge people. So I also feel before one marries, this phase of life really prepares you well for life to come. You become more adjusting.

M: How old are you now?

R: I have completed 28 now. So now the perception is breaking, the average marriage age has shifted beyond 25. But I think this is a very metro thing you know, I don't see it happen as much in the smaller cities and towns. Marrying late is definitely happening. But I still feel there is a lot of pressure when it comes to the society and the family. My generation may not care about the society but we do care about family. Then there is something like peer pressure. Like when I open fb I see a lot of couples exchange anniversary messages on Facebook. So all you see is honeymoon pics and that they are having kids. People feel the pressure. It is a fact. I think in India it is difficult for a woman to remain single and do what she wants to. If someone genuinely does not want to get married and is okay with this lifestyle and wants to pursue his or her own interest, I think we still are unable to do that despite all the financial freedom. Someone may not be wanting to get burdened with one long term marriage. I think the decision is tough. India has social taboo about women who do not marry or marry late. Society sees them with pity. Oh so like you couldn't find someone, you couldn't do it, how sad! It is okay, you may still get lucky, etc. etc. they don't realize that the women may have not married out of her own choice and free will. Same do not want to have kids. There is so much pressure after you are married with the burden of kids. There is certain social fabric here, people are brought up in a certain way. Even in arranged, people are asked for choice, girls are not really forced these days. Basically middle and upper middle educated families in urban areas at least want some companionship for their children. But yes, after a point, you become sore in the eyes of society if you are single.

It's still very difficult in India. I am financially independent. I don't take any money from my parents and I take care of my savings. I haven't taken any money from them in the last 4 years. I have no restrictions nor my sister. Nobody asks me how much money I have or spend or save. However, that independence doesn't grant you enough will to defy social norms and make such decisions, even if someone wants to because you are still have deep attachment to family and community also peer pressure. A lot of them weighs into our own social decisions. It's easier to decide when there is acceptability around. Our social environment dictates a lot. There are people who are single, if the number and prevalence increase, it might help. May be in our next generation it will happen more and it will be easier.

5.9 THE SINGLE PROFESSIONAL MEN

A few of the men echoed similar concerns that women have about finding the right partner. While some decided to remain single, others had turned to their families for finding a suitable wife for them. One of the major differences between single men and women was that men seemed to be more open to marriage arranged by their families. Women came across as more enthusiastic about love marriage while men, though liked the idea in theory, seemed to be less uncomfortable with arranged marriage.

One of the reasons for this difference is possibly that women have to change their residence and sometimes, their lifestyle after marriage. In most parts of India, patrilocal or virilocal residence is still the cultural norm. In addition, most women I interacted with feel that they would have less control over their lives and less freedom after marriage. The transition would be bigger and the change more stark if they would have to live with their in-laws after marriage. Arranged marriage also instils a concern in them that not knowing their husbands well before marriage could jeopardise their situation if their husbands would turn out to be conventional and less flexible with contributing to household work. However, times are changing, there are socio-economic changes which we have discussed before. All these changes are impacting single women in urban India today. It is not surprising that it would not affect men as well. In some ways, it is similar to the ways working women's lives are changing. In some other ways, the nature and extent of change is different in the case of men.

Avik is a 30 year old middle manager working in a software consultancy in Gurgaon. Both his parents are doctors and they live in Rohtak. He had completed his

management from IMT Ghaziabad and started his job with an automobile brand in sales. He has worked in varied sectors from electronics to tobacco industry to an e-commerce brand. None of the jobs he did lasted for more than 2 years. The major reason for the switch was better work opportunities and higher salary package. He recently joined an e-commerce company that buys products from different brands and sell them on one of the online shopping portals. This one is a start-up. He sees a lot of potential in e-commerce in the near future so he decided to give it a shot.

Avik is not in a relationship. He is a little sceptical of marriage at the moment. He does not say with confidence that he wants to remain single or he is very happy with his life now. But he does give a hint that he is unsure of marriage. His parents have started looking out for him from amongst friend's circle and consult relatives from time to time. He is not against the idea of an arranged marriage. However, he is very clear that he wants to know the girl well before tying the knot. When I asked him what his ideas about marriage were, he said:

> There are so many problems around when I see my married friends. One of them is lack of time. People are so busy that there is hardly any time to talk to your partner, or for that matter your parents, children. People are working all the time, or traveling or commuting. If the woman is not in the corporate sector, she will never understand the pressure. Where is the time to even think about, children, for instance? Like I hardly get time to go meet my parents though they live in the neighbouring state. I have seen that most married couples merge their individual friend circles into one big common group and hang out together to avoid any hassles of meeting different friends on different weekends.

> M: How do you think your life would be affected if you were to get married?

> R: I have so many unfulfilled dreams. I want to become a popular academic in my field; I want to buy an SUV car. I want to go for backpack trips to Europe. I don't know how all this will happen in addition to marriage. After all, marriage is also an expensive affair!

Another respondent Akhilesh who is 31 years old has worked in both India and Dubai echoed similar concerns. He hails from Kanpur, belongs to a middle class family whose parents are settled there. He said he has never been very attached to his parents and does not want to live with them. He admitted that he feels lonely at times as he

does not have many close friends living in the same city. He ends up playing video games almost all weekends.

He said that his primary aim in life at the moment is to earn a lot of money, save and invest in property. He wants to buy at least one house and only then think of marrying. When asked why he thinks so and how he plans his life in the near future, he said:

R: Why would any girl from educated, middle class family want to marry me? I don't even have a house. I don't have expensive furniture. If I want a girl of similar education and work background, I need to have a much higher bank balance! These things matter more than love.

M: Why do you say so?

R: I see that around. Girls want big diamond ring. My ex-girlfriend expected me to give her a wedding ring of around 1.5 lakhs! I can't expect my own parents to do that for me. I don't come from filthy rich background. You see, girls have more options these days and they can be much more demanding. The explanation lies in a simple fact of skewed sex ratio. There are so many more eligible bachelors for a girl today than the other way around. Also, I want to be with someone who is independent. Like she needs to have her own savings, contributes to the household and all. She should not be dependent on my money or my credit card. Some girls do that despite having their own money. Two working people can lead a decent life in Delhi. I can't afford a wife otherwise! (laughs)

So while finances are very important for both men and women when it comes to living a decent life in a city, the meanings money hold and ways it is approached today may vary as explained above. Single professional women want to marry men who earn more than them, single professional men want women who earn (may be less or equal, preferably not more), is financially independent, but then they realise that it would be difficult to meet the expectations that such women and their families have from marriage. Three of the single women I met said that they would prefer marrying a man who has lived away from family. This enables a person to think independently and be equipped to handle all household chores. One is also aware of the feeling of loneliness and can look at marriage in a different way than men who have been taken care of by their families. Being single, feeling lonely makes one miss company and on getting married, such a person would understand the value of a

partner and would make effort to share chores, contribute equally to not just finances but also chores at home. Men face less pressure to get married when compared to women. However, after the age of 30 their parents start giving hints regarding the need to settle down. Women face it more than men. The women feel they may be seen as 'incomplete' till they are single but such may not be the case with men. The phase of singlehood is seen in either in a neutral or a positive light for men. It is seen as something that is inevitable because they have to focus on their career and for that it is in the common way for them to stay away from families. While some families of my female respondents have similar dreams about their daughters, there exists a difference. The singlehood phase of women are seen in a slightly negative light, more so once when they cross 30. Their extended family members start expressing concern regarding their status or they pass judgements. The financial pressures are higher on the men and this effects their perceptions and decisions around marriage.

5.10 CONCLUSION

The important point that I would like to draw your attention to is the ways in which work has a bearing on the way individuals make decisions and ways in which inter-personal relations are formed and maintained. Most of the women this chapter focusses on are from tier 1 and tier 2 cities, have had access to good quality education in private schools, elite colleges and have had access to the social and cultural capital owing to their social background, which they used in order to negotiate the challenges of finding employment and for financial independence. The 'choice' that they exercise of delaying their marriage or not marrying is a choice available to a select few, in a country where patriarchy, caste and class based inequalities are deeply entrenched. Though, they are clearly from a privileged background, they do face several challenges. When they come to an urban setting which is defined by its vastness, cosmopolitanism, anonymity, they expect a smooth ride. But they face a different kind of reality here. They make efforts to subvert traditions and social norms which are applied to a majority of other women. As a result, they have to face raised eyebrows and uncomfortable questions. Different women and men have different battles to fight. However, certain battles that are to be fought are common as I have outlined in this chapter.

5.10.1 How is the Global Sub-Class of SPW Impacting the Lives of Both Men and Women?

There is "feminization" of workplace and workforce, wherein the participation of women in the service sector is much higher now than in the last decades. Almost all the young, single men I met are independent in terms of running and managing a household, traditionally thought to be as the women's domain. The single men argued that if they get married, given the fact that most women in their social circle are working, they would have to contribute not just financially, but also in terms of 'sharing the load'. The single women believe that since expenditure of running a household is shared between a couple and if more male professionals expect their future wives to be working, they would have to share the burden of domestic work. Both partners should contribute equally to both aspects. It is unjust to expect working women to take the entire burden of the household chores. The men voiced that women are more educated today and they also have greater expectations from marriage. But if they are financially stable, then they must not be dependent on their husbands, citing several instances of working women who make decent money but still use their husband's income for personal expenditure.

5.10.2 Changes and Continuities

The scholarship on the Indian middle classes emphasizes aspiration as a mediating force that binds the lower strata of the middle classes to the elite, high-caste urban professionals benefiting most from economic liberalization and the transnational knowledge economy (Fernandes 2006; Fernandes and Heller 2006).

Aspiration refers to a longing not only for social mobility or a level of educational or occupational attainment, but also for a "global Indian" class identity that anchors these desires and is specific to India's new urban transnational elites (Radhakrishnan 2009, 2011). Yet, with the empirical literature on the Indian middle classes still limited (Ray and Baviskar 2011), there is a need for more sustained examination of aspirations and their role in everyday life, particularly among non-elite young women. Young women's aspirations center on an ethic of flexibility and openness to whatever the future may bring, claiming both the autonomy and worldliness of modern women and the family embeddedness of rural middle-class domesticity (Vijayakumar 2013: 778).

Though the above instance is of a service industry, but the service is offered though cables and codes which is a complex virtual setting and is not done on a

face-to-face level in most cases. But most of the other sectors in the service economy such as marketing, sales, financial services, brand development, strategy, hospitality, real estate, architecture, media, public relations and all kinds of professional consulting services rest on direct social interactions as a result of which corporate companies, whether big or small, hire professionals who are not just good at the technical side of work but also good in soft skills, something which I have discussed in detail in chapter 1. These industries happen to employ more people with social and cultural capital without which excelling in the soft skills is challenging. Due to these differences, my respondents, most of whom are not from IT think and behave a little differently from those in rural-semi urban settings. My respondents have aspirations of a highly upwardly mobile lifestyle. They aspire for global exposure through their work and travel, they want to have more control over their own marriage, they want to have their own savings and investment and they identify with the India that that is modern, cosmopolitan and forward-looking. Most of them did not seem to be interested in retaining the Indian middle-class domesticity values that some of their mothers did. They do not identify themselves as elite, they called themselves as middle class, but this middle class is different from Vijayakumar's middle class not just in terms of spatial location but also in terms of values. They expect equitable relationships with men; preferably they would like to marry for love. They do not feel that a healthy relationship or family can be built only when the woman compromises on her career or other dreams. They do express concern over their financial security and see marriage as a convenient way of stabilising their finances, but they also believe that they would be able to live alone and be financially independent if their future demands so from them. They are comfortable with establishing sexual relationships with men and spoke freely about having had multiple partners in the past. But they deeply value commitment, at the same time also believe that only by developing intimate relationships with men can they be sure about taking it to the level of marriage. A commonly expressed idea was – "I would not get married just for the sake of it, for money or under parents' pressure or societal expectations, but only when I meet someone I can love".

According to Cross, et al. (2004), ideas of American brand of individualism, identity from paid work, economic empowerment, ideas around partner selection based on love has spread across the world. Through global travel, social media, exposure to global media in the form of movies, television and other forms of online content readily available in their workplace and home, there is a lot of similarities that I could see between professional single women in countries like United States, Poland, and Germany and my own respondents in the Indian capital city. We could consider using the term Indian brand of individualism, different from the American, though there are several similarities in terms of their aspirations and values. The possible differences are: marriage is given more importance by the single women I met compared to the women in these countries as per the above mentioned research. The role of the family, though mired in complexities and different layers of distance and intimacy is more central in the lives of my respondents. They are deeply connected to their families which is reflected not just in their participation in festivals but also in their day-to-day functioning. There is an anticipation of marriage as a result of love but there is also a certain sense of resignation that in case they are unable to find a suitable companion, their parents would take over in arranging for a suitable match. This is truer for the single men. The women seem to be keener on marrying for love and there is a conviction that their parents would not put any pressures but give their suggestions based on their worldly wisdom.

As Cross, et.al. (2004) argues, perhaps single professional women in India can be single without being lonely because of the strong Indian family network. Many single professional women, particularly those in their 40's or older, prefer to live with their families. The strong family presence partially takes care of the problem of loneliness. Companionship, though celebrated in ancient Indian texts, is rare even between married couples. The basic difference, lies in non-sexualized relationships being as important as sexualized relationships in traditional Indian settings. This is an interesting research that can be explored further that would include narratives and life-histories of single professional women who have remained single through their forties and fifties across different social location and milieu.

However, certain realities have not changed but either continued in the same form or a different variation of the same core idea. For instance, need for the married man to be superior in designation and income than the woman he marries is subscribed to by

both men and women. Women expressed that they aspire to marry a man they can respect, meaning a man with superior social status. They also express that men marrying 'superior' women are rarer and that they often find it difficult to accept women in a more powerful position than them. Men expressed that women superior to them would have more expectations than they think they can live up to. As I have argued in the second section of this chapter, because of such preferences which are termed parity expectations there is a marriage squeeze or shrinking of the pool of available eligible bachelors for single professional women. It shows that despite changes that have come about in the lives of both genders as a result of increasing participation of women in the workforce and their financial autonomy, certain things have remained unchanged and have not contributed to the cause of gender equality in the true sense of the term.

Certain changes in gender roles and relations are a direct consequence of economic shifts such as increasing unemployment and inflation. Salaried single income households are becoming less common in metropolitan cities due to financial constraints in the face of price-rise and rising consumption habits. Educated middle class families take up loans for their children's education thereby making it common for both boys and girls to take up employment as soon as they are through with their education. Girls are encouraged to be financially independent as a means to fight inconsistencies of contemporary life such as increasing instances of failed marriages, increasing health problems and expensive healthcare. In such families, an educated daughter is expected to build a career just as a son is. Today, young men want financially independent wives. These changing realities are visible around us but there are new challenges that emerge. They city offers anonymity and a relatively more liberal environment compared to a village or a town but there are greater financial challenges, problems of housing, safety and security of women.

According to Jacques (1993), modernity and the crisis of identity goes hand in hand. He looks at individualism as both a modern virtue and malady and traces the link between modernity and identity. Simmel (1972) has looked at the problem of individualism as a central concern of sociology. In modern life, an individual is in search of himself as if he did not yet possess himself with no certain foothold anywhere outside of himself. Simmel argued that relationship between individual and society is dynamic in nature. It becomes a relationship of tension or anxiety since 19th

century modernity because the subjective sensibilities of modern man prevented him from belonging to traditional structures or submitting to constraints which paid no respect to his own aspirations and sensibilities (Ibid.). He argued that it is the modern man who could distance his personal, intimate life from the grip of society. Individuals in modern society were asserting their freedom from social structures and rigid norms, from familial discipline and gradually demanded their own space. This is true when my respondents value their new found freedom and the liberal values that they have acquired in cosmopolitan city and workplace. They are able to subvert conventional norms by virtue of their financial autonomy and a strong sense of identity that stems from professional work. However, despite family being an important institution in our cultural context, problems of distancing from family, loneliness, increasing burden on individual's shoulders in the absence of family/ kin ties are coexistent. There are social changes - urbanization, changes in the conditions of education and work, women have stepped out of their traditionally bound spaces, changes in economic structure, inflation, improvement in media and communication technology all of which are contributing, in different ways to the changing conditions of life for young men and women in India. The understanding that I got from my fieldwork is that there are simultaneous things happening: both changes and continuities, personal struggles and social support; there is role of individual agency and constrains imposed by external structures. Reality is messy, layered and thus interesting for a researcher. It is important to keep in mind that any transition is time taking and fraught with challenges, conflict of interests and resulting anxieties, more so in a traditionally patriarchal and community-bound society like India in which there has been a complex interplay of tradition and modernity.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON DOMESTICITY AND RELATIONSHIPS: PARENTING AMONG DUAL CAREER COUPLES

This chapter focusses on families where the husband and wife are working in the corporate sector, referred to as "dual-career couple" in my work. The way children are brought up, the values they are taught, the expectations of parents from their children would throw light on the way parenting seems to have changed when compared to the previous generation. As time is a constraint while money is more than there ever was, attitudes towards parenting is bound to change. Some parents believe that a child has to be geared to a lot of activities to sustain modern life in a city. They must not miss out on anything that contemporary globalised lifestyle has to be offer (it could be anything from specialised coaching for soccer or tennis to western classical or contemporary music). A few others believe that schools put a lot of pressure on children and engage them from morning till late afternoon, hence the time at home should be relaxed and the child's routine should not be overburdened. Balancing parenting and work role, especially in today's world of work where everyday performance is a crucial factor in one's career is a difficult task but people strive to realise this goal and both fathers and mothers (more so, mothers) view this is a desirable end. These efforts lead to a re-arrangement in traditional gender roles which has consequences for the individuals and interpersonal relations. This chapter focusses on the ideas and practices around parenting through the voices of parents and looks at gender roles and relationships in this context.

There is a plethora of information on the web and in self-help books on how to be the perfect parent today. Just one look at the online material, the different websites and personal blogs dedicated to this can be mind boggling. One look at any book store self-help section would highlight the number of books and magazines which cater to issues around parenting. However, all of this is directed to a certain section of the society, a certain class, the privileged, the urban, educated, English speaking, ambitious parent of 21st century India. A part of this audience that these books and blogs cater to is also the audience in my research. The increasing debates around parenting, more in in contemporary age of internet and social media could be overwhelming for the parents. It causes not just a sense of anxiety among the parents

about whether they are going the right way but a sense of competition with respect to their peers. There is a certain kind of performance pressure on parents and a need for reassurance that they are going the right way with regard to their children and in accordance with the need of the time. A lot of care, caution and planning goes in maintaining a certain kind of routine which they think is beneficial for effective parenting.

Most new middle class parents have their own sensibilities when it comes to parenting and values they feel they need to inculcate in their children. This depends on a variety of social factors such as their own relationship with their parents, their social class, education background, region, religion and caste. It also depends on the influences from their peers such as their friends and colleagues at work. In my research I saw that the nature of work they are engaged with have a bearing on their ideas and behaviour around parenting. However this is not a one way causal relationship in which work influences their parenting habits in specific ways that can be measured but it is layered relationship where the reverse also happens and all this is always in conjunction with the other social variables. The aim of this chapter is not to offer a causal analysis but explore the different facets of this aspect of the lives of my respondents through the use of information and insights garnered from the in-depth interviews, narratives and observation.

6.1 PARENTING OR HYPER-PARENTING?

Coming to children, I think the Facebook generation is way too sensitive. Parents today are always afraid of scolding children as they might actually harm themselves. Internet parenting thing is such *bakwaas* (rubbish). A lot of these parents I see are more concerned about what others think of their parenting. I know somebody who is careful of what she gives her child in what quantity. There is this RDA thing for a child which is about measuring the amount of protein, carbohydrates that one needs to feed the child. So you see even parenting has changed. Earlier people felt that a child will grow and we all grew up to be okay. Our parents didn't obsess over every second thing in our lives. We are not criminals. Now it's like reading books trying to be perfect. So there is this one mom, she sends her child to class after class on weekends. It's a baby. She says everybody does this. They have a car with a nanny who runs around everywhere with the child. At the end of the day, it is mixed – both good and bad – Lavanya, 40 years, technology consultant with an MNC, lives in Gurgaon with her husband and 7 year old daughter.

Parents today have less time compared to our parents but may have more quality time. I think we overthink as parents these days. Like if I have to scold my child, I think twice whether this will have an impact on him or not. My mother would not think so much. We read about parenting more. We use the internet. Parents were disciplined but they did not take so much interest in certain things. Parents today are more involved. There is better utilisation of time since it is less today. Parents would not explain certain things, just say that father will come and say so and so and we would get scared. But now we talk freely and try to be their friends. It should be less authoritarian now – Vinay and Nalini, working parents to five year old son; live in nuclear set-up in Noida.

There are a variety of terms that are used these days to connote parenting which involves parents paying close attention to the needs and performance of the child and are said to be too involved, which often leads to anxieties not just among them but among their children. I came across terms like intensive parenting, vigilante parenting, hyper-parents, tiger-parents, helicopter parents and so on. Most of these terms are in the context of the western world where parents are obsessed over the needs of the child to prepare them for the future, to revel in their achievements and to be involved in their school and extracurricular activities. It is seen that such tendencies are more and more visible among the upper middle and elites of society who have all the means at their disposal to prepare their children for the competitive world, which they believe would become more so in the future due to expanding population and shrinking resources.

There are several instances of involvement of the grandparents who are brought into the city which makes the lives of the parents relatively easy when they go out to work. They oversee the day-to-day activities of the child. For those families who live close to their extended family members and are emotionally connected with them, it often happens that parents do not feel left out of the family and community and consult them for advice from time to time. However, in cases where there was a higher degree of nuclearisation of the family in terms of structure and functioning, there seemed to be greater tendencies of obsessing over the child's needs. On talking to such families, I realised that in the past, when parenting was more collaborative with important roles played by extended family members, there was less fussing over the children. In a city, away from all family members parents are often worried if they are doing the right thing for the children, if they are doing enough. Since work is highly demanding and they end up spending less time with their children, there is perpetual guilt which

they end up compensating for by making the most of the little time they have. Often this results in buying things for the children, engaging them in different activities hoping they will not be lonely, saying a yes to whatever the child demands, taking lot of interest in all that they do, making sure that the child faces no inconvenience. The moment they see some other parent doing X, Y or Z for the children, they start comparing themselves and question if they are doing enough. Invariably, this results in a sense of competition among parents.

Needless to say, the market with its plethora of objects and brands capitalise on the need gaps in the lives of people. They range from financial and insurance companies that offer policies for child's future, elite schools which communicate to parents that their child deserves the best in terms of experience; to academies or centres that offer extra-scholastic activities such as personality development, vedic maths, tennis, jazz; brands of milk food drink which promise brain development to excellence in sports; international brands of clothes that have children's fashion apparel; professional services offering arrangements of birthday parties to educational trips for children, the list is endless and the choices for parents are many. Like the two cases I began this section with, Lavanya and Vinay-Nandini, a few of them are able to step out of their situation and look at it in a critical manner, wondering if all this madness is of value in the long term. But most of the people I met are not able to view the situation from a distance. They invest in their children in every possible way and yet feel inadequate or doubtful. They are constantly worried. They have seen the hardships of sustaining a comfortable life in a city, the pressure and insecurities that their work lives are riddled with and thereby they want to protect their children from all kinds of discomfort. Often the efforts backfire when their children are unable to face any out-of-the-ordinary situation.

> I have a colleague in Delhi who has children…there was car-pooling for the kids to go to school. So his kid and other friends of his were to take turns and travel...so he had a Maruti Omni van…the children were to come in car pool. They are all used to travel in AC car. So when it was his turn, he took his Maruti and one of the kids refused to travel in his car because there was no AC. It was so embarrassing that his own kid asked him not to come as he was ashamed in front of his friends. You know, in my own daughter's school I saw that one day a few parents were arguing with the school teachers and principal that there was a problem with one of the passages which had a

broken ceiling so it was getting hot in the summer and their children were complaining.
It is an all AC school – Ritu, mother of 8 year old.

6.2 BALANCING PARENTING AND WORK AMONG DUAL CARRER COUPLES

Research has shown that women make most of the adjustments to family stresses by curtailing number of hours in the work-place or going in and out of jobs. If she is not in a position to do that, there is double burden on her – of managing work along with pressures of domestic responsibilities and care of children. On the other hand, it is also true that as the percentage of working mothers goes up, there are changes in the role of fathers as compared to previous generations. Dual career couples are faced with challenges pertaining to allocating and dividing family and work responsibilities. A large body of research has examined how couples create a sense of balance in the middle of enormous family and work-related responsibilities and stress. Work-life conflict occurs when time and energy demands imposed by the different roles cannot be met, as participation in one role is made increasingly difficult by participation in another (Chauhan 2010). Work-Family conflict is a type of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell 1985). WFC is reciprocal in nature due to the influences between work and family, that is, work can interfere with family and family can interfere with work (Ibid.)

> Work-life imbalance has over a period of time attracted concern because of increasing problems related to employee health, monotony at work place, declining levels of productivity and efficiency at the employee level. The imbalance also has a negative impact in the personal life of working people some of which have may be changed to social hazards such as increase in the number of divorces, infertility due to high stress levels, breakdown of joint families and weakening of kinship ties. As a result corporate professionals today seem to be more interested in jobs that give them increased flexibility at work to enable them to meet the different needs at different stages of their working life. By doing so they strive for striking balance in their working hours and their personal commitments (Chauhan 2010:185).

Men today are believed to be more involved in housework and child care as compared to their fathers and grandfathers. However, it would not be incorrect to say that women's career development is still more subject to the family needs than men's. In a

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professionally employed middle/upper middle class dual-income family, gender relations cannot be understood by simply assuming that men dominate women. Patriarchy and traditional sex-role stereotypes are being challenged through everyday social interaction, though this is not to suggest that institutions such as work, family are not gendered. I am interested in understanding processes of both continuity and change.

The book *The Time Bind* by Arlie Hochschild studied lives of men and women employed in large corporations in the United States. She points out that due to higher financial rewards available to people employed in white collar professions and higher demands of work from them, families face a time deficit. She argues that it is workplace which gives people the time to feel in control, takes things slow and feel accomplished by achieving the target at hands. While at home, there is more time crunch, hence greater time consciousness and efficiency which also translates into stress.

> As the first shift (workplace) takes more time, the second shift (home) becomes more hurried and rationalised. These gives rise to a 'third shift' – noticing, understanding and coping with emotional consequences of the compressed second shift (Hochschild 2003: 215).

Here, it is important to point out that the experiences of men and women differ. Though both face the time bind, women experience it more because till date, in most societies, the primary responsibilities of the home and children rest with the women. She argues that an ideal family man is one who provides for the family. So the idea of cutting back on work hours and taking out more time for the family was not very attractive to men as it would affect their image at work of a 'good or a serious worker' and call into question their masculinity. A woman's career progress is more dependent on her family needs than a man's is (Maume 2006). This is research done in the United States, but it would perhaps not be untrue in the context of India. Since men's contributions to household labour have not fully compensated for the increased time women spend away from home (Hochschild 1983), many working women express their commitment to family life by opting for part-time work or as consultants. Dual income households with children engaged in professional work seem to experience this kind of reality on a day-to-day basis (Jacobs 2001).

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My focus has been on dual-career couples with children from 4 to 15 years. I wanted to look at the ways in which such couples balance their roles at work and at home in a situation when they are usually hard pressed for time. In such circumstances there are different means they adopt to balance their responsibilities in different spheres of life. The solution to balance work and home is primarily in developing solid coping strategies, lot of planning and careful execution. Research has shown that women either withdraw from the job market or enter into part-time work when the responsibilities of childcare begin. Those who resume full time work in a few months after childbirth are able to do so either when their own parents or in-laws help with childcare or they can afford a full time nanny or a day-care arrangement. Different strategies are adopted to take care of responsibilities which depending on the family's financial status, husband's income, gender roles and woman's ability or willingness to move in and out of the job market.

As I have discussed in chapter two, time is a crucial factor in the lives of these professionals and there are different arrangements they enter into in order to manage time. They need to acquire the skills to manage it as part of their work and there is an association of efficiency and success when one is able to manage it. This aspect of their lives find entry into their personal non-work spaces too, including parenting. Stephen's (1999) study of female hospital doctors used the notion of the "politics of time" (Benn 1998) in which he argues that it is mostly women who take up the primary responsibility of either earning, buying or stealing their own time in order to effectively manage work and childcare. Nature of time is "gendered because it is the mothers who take the primary responsibility of managing childcare" (Vincent 2004:18) be it through outsourcing or managing it themselves by opting for changes in their career and work arrangements. As she argues: "Despite the social and economic advantages of the middle class families, the adults are not presenting a serious challenge to a traditional understanding of family relationships" (p 3).

In my research, I saw that if a mother is working part time or using flexi-time arrangement in case provided by her workplace, it was almost a given that she would take on most responsibilities around childcare. For those working full time, it was more common for childcare to be outsourced to a nanny or a full time maid. Some of their concerns would be met if grandparent(s) would be part of the arrangement. In several cases, there would be the presence of a grandparent along paid help in case

where the woman was working full time. Working part time did not mean that the mother did not use services of help for childcare, but it depended more on the family's financial situation. Overall, they was an understanding, sometimes said, sometimes unsaid, that if one parent is the primary breadwinner, then the other has to fulfil all other responsibilities such as domestic work and childcare in order for things to be in place. Even when both partners are working and earning at par, the primary domestic and childcare responsibilities rest on the mothers, though fathers are more involved today when compared to the previous generation.

6.3 STRATEGIES OF BALANCING WORK AND PARENTING ROLE

6.3.1 The Woman Retraces from Her Career

Anisha is a software engineer and is mother of two. She was in a full time job till she gave birth to her elder daughter who is now 7 years old. Her husband, Ajay is the head of marketing in a finance company. Post the birth of their daughter, they moved to the US for work and stayed there till she was expecting her second child. They came back to Delhi and are now settled in Gurgaon. Both their parents live nearby. Anisha's parents live a few blocks away from them. Since she became a mother, Anisha has opted for part-time work with a tech firm which gives her flexibility of working 4-5 hours per day at office and in case she has work left, she has the option of working from home. The conversation below shows the adjustments the couple had to make post childbirth in terms of work, money, household chores and childrearing tasks. Here the husband is the primary breadwinner and the wife is working part time to be able to devote more time to her children. She said that since she is earning less, she has taken on every other work related to home and children. When they were both earning well and working full time, she had little or no time so she was fully dependent on her help. Her husband's contribution has not changed with his wife working full time or part time.

> Anisha: One of the challenges I am facing today is having two kids instead of one. Most of the other women I know who are in same life stage have one kid. So the time they are able to devote to their child is much more but my time has to get divided. If you have one hour it is actually a lot that you can give in that time to one kid if it is not interrupted. But since I have two, I am not able to do so in an uninterrupted manner. So my elder one wants to study or draw and all the younger one wants to play around, he will disturb her, or will scribble

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something on her notebook and all, so while managing him the elder one cannot be attended to with complete attention. That's where the time goes away.

I think responsibility wise he (Ajay) is equally involved, just that *ghar ka kaam* (house-work) comes on me. The reason is, I am working part time and he is earning five times my salary, so just being logical I will have to balance it out by working more at home. Or I should be going out and earning all the money and then I would expect him to do most of the housework.

Ajay: But this is not how one should approach it, right?

Anisha: Money wise if you think, then no. Logically it should be shared right? As in in the US he was doing the dishes, the garbage bag and all that. If I earn more, I would expect you to work more at home!

Ajay: The thing is I will still not be able to do all the housework and cooking and all, as in I don't know cooking. Washing clothes and utensils I can still do, but still someone has to tell me. It will never come from within.

Anisha: The interesting thing was he would still do his bit, but it was my mother and mother-in-law who would constantly tell us he should not do it, he is a man! My mother would be horrified to know that he was doing the dishes and other chores. When they were there with me in the US after my daughter was born, she was constantly hassled because of this. Families staying in US don't think like this. So he himself would fight back and say I will do it.

The complexity of the situation is evident but a lot of the resistance on part of husbands to contribute to domestic work is ignored or goes unquestioned in day-to-day life because middle and upper middle class households have affordable services from maids, nannies, cooks and drivers who reduce the burden on working women in cities. This is a situation which is drastically different from the western world where such services are very expensive. Role of affordable help and other services is central to avoiding conflict situations that arise out of balancing act.

6.3.2 Women Continues With Her Career While the Man Readjusts His Career

Rita is a 40 year old woman who is in a senior management position with an American retail chain. She is, as she herself puts it, in a male dominated branch, namely production and operations. She is the only woman in her department in a senior managerial role. She has a diverse set of roles owing to her interest and has met with success in moving up the ladder. She not only looks at production, but is also involved in strategic decisions that the company takes. She plays the role of an

industry expert. She is fond of writing and often publishes articles related to her field in organisation and industry journals. She is a busy professional and a high flier. She has to travel both within the country and overseas as much as four to five times in a month. She has travelled to a large number of countries in South Asia, South East Asia, Europe and North America. There are ten people who report to her every day.

Despite her hectic schedule, she managed to give me a few hours of her time in the afternoon of a weekend. She lives in a duplex in a posh gated community in Gurgaon with her in-laws, husband and son. We had a long chat about her work, family and her routine. She narrated different aspects of her life such as challenges of being a full time working mother, handling a team at work in a male dominated sector and the various challenges that she faces as a parent today. She told me candidly that it was always clear to them that the child would be the top priority. She had her son Niraj when she was 36. Both she and her husband, Nitin were done with building their careers and enjoying life. In their own words, they were done with their *"life full of partying, drinking and going out"*. She felt that was completely prepared to have a life-altering experience in the form of motherhood.

> One has to move on. We both went into this only after wanting it enough and deciding in advance that from now on our lives would revolve around our child. We don't even socialise with our own circle anymore. Now my circle comprises of my son's friends parents. Initially, our friends would miss our company and invite us. We accepted their invitation less and less and after a point, they also stopped inviting knowing that we would not be able to make it.

She said that her career is important to her, but she has now reached a position where she can work her way around things and can afford to centre her work around her family. However, she travels very often and spends several hours talking on the phone to coordinate projects every day. For her, quitting her job was never an option. She always wanted to do well in her career and move up the ladder. Second, her husband did not have a steady job for a few years so there was no option for her to give up on a full time well-paying job. She said she could only think of changing her job but never leaving it.

Rita feels that Nitin has always been very supportive of her career and never shied away from being the main care-giver as a parent. He had started a restaurant a few years back and it was doing fairly well. However, after a point it became very difficult

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for them to devote time to their son because she was heading an entire branch while he was looking after his restaurant. They were both uncomfortable with leaving their son to the care of a maid or in a day-care. She was earning more than her husband and had a more stable job, so she continued while he gave up on his restaurant. He looked for consulting or freelancing which would offer more flexibility with time so he started working on voice-accent training with BPOs. He travels frequently but they manage their time in a way that at least one of them is always home with their son.

Rita feels that most husbands are different from Nitin, she says that when she compares him with her friends' husbands. Most of them do not support their wives as much. When I asked her what could be the reason for this difference, she thought for a while and said that it is possible because he is Anglo-Indian and has been brought up in a typical British culture where his mother was working and was a strong, opinionated individual. He has always been secure as a man, not been intimidated by successful women and that reflects in his behaviour today.

6.3.3 Narrative of a Family Close To "Shared-Parenting"

Another strategy of blurring two diverse roles is what I call 'Shared-Parenting'. This is more or less equal division of childcare related chores in cases where both partners are in full-time jobs. In such instances of shared-parenting in the field, fathers were more involved than other fathers out of the couples that I met. So what actually happens when both husband and wife are working and live in a nuclear set up? There are all kinds of scenarios that I saw in the field – full time maid being supervised mainly by the mother; grandparents being in charge of care-giving in the absence of the couple; grandparents or grandparent being in charge in addition to a full time help who does the work; child put in day-care in the absence of either parent and so on. Overall, it was the mother who would put in more time or attention or supervision or all of these despite being in a full time job. In those cases where grandparents were part of the set-up, she feels more at ease, but feels guilty that someone else was doing her job as a parent. A select few women told me that the father's role was given more importance or more of it was demanded by them in case they felt not enough help was coming from that side.

I was particularly interested in delving in a case where an attempt was being made to go close to the ideal of shared parenting. I wanted to see how such an attempt was

made from both sides, what the changes that had come about were and what the continuities were. While a lot has been written about ways in which motherhood has been changing in a context where women are making successful inroads into paid employment, I was interested in looking at the ways in which fatherhood is changing and more importantly wanted to see the ways in which respondents viewed and articulated this.

I met 35 year old Priya at her office and then later at home where I got to not just talk to her, but also observe her go about her usual life. She said that her husband is a good father, a "hands on dad". She admitted that he has more patience than she does with their five year old daughter. He travels extensively, but when he is in town, he usually comes back home by 6-6.30 pm so he gets an extra hour before she is back from her office. She said with a hint of humour in her tone that on weekends he does not have to go to the parlour but she has to. She told me that she does these typically feminine things only because she enjoys them. She prefers doing the grocery shopping, taking care of the house. She tends to go out of the house on weekends while her husband stays at home looking after their daughter. He does a lot of activities with her. He takes her to her tennis and cycling classes, plays number games with her, teachers her to solve different puzzles and finds out creative ways to engage with her. He found an app like splash math which is creative problem solving so he downloaded it and used it with her. As a result of his efforts, their daughter has developed an interest and aptitude in these games. Priya told me that when they go to the mall, she goes to the buying section while he remains near the play area.

> Even as a baby, he was very much involved. It's not that he was not staying up at night to tend to the baby, we would take turns. Actually when the child is small, that is when the sharing dynamic play out. So when I was on maternity leave, it was usually me. When I was working, we both took turns. We didn't want the nanny to have access to our bedroom in the night. Though the nannies usually take care of all this, we weren't comfortable with it, these are important days of natural bonding – diaper, food, comforting the baby. The classes and activities I chose, like taking her to birthday parties, planning and leaving office early it's all me.

In her own words, she and her husband were conscious of being equally involved in parenting from the outset. They had detailed discussions around this before she even conceived. She had made it clear to him that she would not give up on her career and

social life just because she is a woman. One of the reasons she liked her husband was because of his open-mindedness and his constant support of her career. He was always fond of children and wanted to be an involved father. He did not do it solely on her insistence. Priya said that his involvement with his daughter at a deep level made him stand out from his peers and she still feels proud of it. Priya mentioned that her husband had lived abroad for a few years where one has to do everything on one's own irrespective of the money one makes. She feels it is possible that sense of independence subsequently made him less dependent on female family members. When he goes back to his native place in Chandigarh where his parents live, she has observed that he does not depend on his mother or the maid for any chores.

6.4 "CORPORATIZATION" OF PARENTING

This is a term that I am suggesting to indicate the instilling of values that one acquires at work into one's parenting styles, not in a conscious manner in most cases. Some of its visible and verbal cues that I picked up are as follows:

Time management - planned and systematic delegating of domestic and childcare work among adult family members;

Outsourcing of tasks – role of nannies, maids and day-care;

Planning a routine and its execution;

Systematic research to find help/ crèche/ day-care and evaluation techniques;

Scheduling child's routine and family routine around it;

'Multitasking';

The idea of 'quality-time' to be spent with family;

'Networking' with like-minded parents;

All the above terms are words used by the respondents themselves at different times in their narrations. These were oft repeated words as part of their casual conversations, part of their daily parlance which I made a note of. These bear a striking resemblance with their approach to work in their offices. Time is approached in similar way both at work and at home. These denote the ways in which certain traits are drawn from one's work life to better manage the family. They feel they need to lead a planned and regimented life in order to combat the pressures coming from

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domestic chores, children and work. Planned life is systematic and productive but not spontaneous. While some are aware of it, there is currently no other way to manage their lives.

6.4.1 Time Management in a Working Mother's Life

Time is never enough. It is a prized possession, it is a high-value commodity whose worth can be calculated in terms of money. Time is money. This worth is a cumulative value of one's education, designation and work experience on an overt level. However, at a covert level, what goes into deciding a professional's time-cost are dependent on factors such as their net worth (in terms of money/ wealth/ status), social and cultural capital. For instance, a company may value person A over B simply because A comes from a well-connected family in terms of business though B may be equally or more qualified/ experienced. In the service industry which is driven by 'client-servicing', a major part of the work is business development, i.e. getting clients and more business for the company. So the more connected a person is, the more valued he is by the organisation.

My interviewees did express that they lead time crunched lives. Sometimes the only time they get to pause and think or reflect on something is when they commute to work. I spent a few hours on a weekday and a weekend with Riya, who is heading the marketing branch of an FMCG brand. She has a seven year old daughter. Her husband is working in a senior position in finance consulting company in Delhi. She wakes up when the alarm snoozes three times between 6 and 6.30 am. Straight out of bed, she has to get her daughter ready with the help of a nanny who lives with them. Sometimes she drops her to the bus stop or sometimes the nanny goes to drop her. In either situation she reaches office by 9 am. On the way, sometimes she grabs a cup of coffee, sometimes a sandwich and has it on her way to work. She did the same on the day I accompanied her to her office. She mostly talked on the phone that time, which is what she feels is a good way of utilising time. That is the time she gets to connect with her parents, in-laws and cousins. The commute takes about 30 minutes. On a day with more traffic, it is more than 45 mins.

The day at work begins with checking and responding to emails, supervision, meeting clients, meetings with her team members, overall planning of upcoming projects. During afternoons, she usually does not get time to take a break. Lunch on most days

is not a relaxed lunch but more like a working lunch. It is done to get out of office earlier to avoid traffic and to catch up with her daughter before she sleeps. She typically doesn't come back to office in case she has to leave in the afternoon for a meeting. So most days she is back home by 7.30 pm. That is the time when her daughter is having her dinner. She then tucks her into bed by 7.45. So that is the time she actually gets to be with her and talk to her. Her daughter is fast asleep by 8.10 pm on most days.

> I navigate time, I manage it and I think I do a very good job of it and I wouldn't do it differently. But I am stressed most of the time. But, for instance, if I had more time, pressure of socializing is there. Like the non-working mothers look forward to the birthday parties. For us, it is an effort. Like I think is it in the housing complex or outside of it. If it is in the building great as the nanny can go. If out, I have to go, shit! Means have to leave office early, means I will be the most shabbily dressed as I am going after a hard day's work while others are all coming well dressed for the occasion. They have perfect set hair and bright lipstick. So you feel a little weird (smiles).

> So, then in terms of involvement in the child's activities which give her more confidence and makes a better process of well shaping her personality. I worry about that as I told you earlier. What I feel sad about is perennially running my life around post-its and to-do-lists be it work or home related stuff. In personal life also everything is regimented. There is no scope for going with the flow. There is no time scope to just let things be and live spontaneously. I know I go back home every Friday and before going out for beer or something, I need to look at that list stuck up on the fridge where my maid has written down things that I need to buy. So first I have to open big basket (online shopping app for buying groceries) and order all that stuff, you are constantly negotiating life and time.

As I have argued in chapter two, time is approached in a way that is different today when compared to the industrial past especially seen in the context of contemporary "24/7 flexible capitalism" (Kelly 2013). Borrowing from Hochschild (2003), time is experienced and mobilised in a specific way when seen using the term quality time. It is rationalised by application of Taylorist view of time, in a quasi-industrial way into one's domestic sphere. Whether it is chores or relationships with spouse or children, time is subjected to a view of productivity in which less has to be more. So scheduling intense periods of togetherness can compensate for an overall loss of time in which relationship must not suffer any loss of quality. So an effort towards spending quality

time with one's children transforms the cult of efficiency from the office to home. This effort requires one to use discipline, focus and energy to use time in parenting just as one would at work[36].

> Often the management of time, as Foucault would argue, is a disciplinary practise. To make quality time requires a particular set of skills, capacities and behaviours. The manufacturing of quality time is an ongoing project and it requires one to be entrepreneurial, to locate it within a larger enterprise in which the practices of world of paid work benchmark how it should be done, when it should unfold and what it should achieve. These brief respites of relaxed time can look more and more like little segments of job time, with parents punching in and out as of on a time clock (Kelly 2013: 166).

This is in tune with my own observations regarding parenting practices among the dual career couples with children. Let us examine this quote below:

> On most days I am back home from work by 7-7.30 pm. That is the time when my daughter is having her dinner. I tuck her into bed by 7.45. So that is the time I get to be with her. She is knocked out by 8.10 pm. So that time in between we chit chat, or we read together or she reads since she has just started reading so I make her read the simpler words. Typically I do tend to talk to her, even for 5 minutes about some values that I want to inculcate or want her to know, good touch bad touch, privacy, friends, honesty depending on the mood. Different values are picked up on different days. So these could be knowledge, awareness or values or something for her own safety. So this is what I practice as a last thing to discuss with her before I say goodnight. This I read online to be the best practice before the child sleeps. So it's a 5-7 minutes conversation. That's the time the child is most receptive. They internalize the things taught at the time just before sleep so I don't compromise on it – Riya, Full time working mother to a seven year old daughter.

So every minute needs to be accounted for. Work has taught them that. Before that it was their professional degree such as management (MBA) which kept them occupied with projects and presentations. In retrospect they feel it prepared them for the tough work life ahead. Today, they seem comfortable with tight schedules and they feel a sense of satisfaction at the end of the day if their to-do list is ticked off and they have

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[36] This is in consonance with Giddens' (1991) understanding of time in the context of modernity. Time is seen as something which is utilised, commodified and there is a separation between time and space. The concept of a mechanical clock was important in the development of a uniform and empty dimension of time.

not wasted time. Closer observation and discussion revealed that what they think they have lost out on as a result of intense time-keeping is spontaneity. They do not know the joys of sudden trips, unplanned meetings with friends, fulfilling their own sudden desires. When their children's leisure is planned, it also does not have much room for spontaneity. A play-date is a scheduled appointment made for children to get together and play, mostly planned by parents among themselves, sometimes on insistence of the children. A number of parents mentioned that they often keep aside weekends for play dates so that their children are engaged while the parents can devote their time to finishing weekend household chores, shopping, meeting their own friends or completing office work. It gives them the satisfaction that their kids would return home happy and that they are well aware of who and where they are hanging out with. If the couple lives in a gated community, they try to arrange play dates with children who live in the same area or in the neighborhood. Often the parents of the children know each other well and they feel assured of their children's safety.

In Europe and United States the fertility of women have decreased in the last few years. Women who are in jobs which are highly fulfilling and remunerative and have to take care of household chores and childcare roles often postpone motherhood or do not become mothers due to too much pressure trying to reconcile all the roles. Those who don't get any support from their partners are more likely to do so (Binachi 2011). Here I would like to argue that such is not entirely the case with India. First, women in jobs which are highly remunerative and fulfilling are very few in number. Second, the role of the extended family, especially grandparents are central to running families, especially childcare, even in nuclear families in cities, where grandparents are made to come and live with the married couple after childbirth and they often move in with them and assume the role of a caregiver, often in addition to affordable services by a maid or nanny. Research in the context of the US and western Europe show that mothers who can afford to often end up in part time employment after childbirth or to leave the labour market most often do so. They choose a job with as much overlap with school schedules as possible[37]. These trends stand true in my research among high remuneration job holders.

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[37] However, there is a penalty that they often face at work after this called motherhood wage penalty as they are assumed to be less committed workers. After a gap, they may have to join at lesser pay compared to the time they made the exit. It is often assumed that she would be less flexible from now on and may demand more leave for childcare.

6.4.2 Parenting as a Job That Necessitates "Outsourcing"

6.4.2.1 Paid Services

The higher the woman goes in the corporate ladder, the involvement with the child in terms of time might be less but the non-work hours are fully dedicated to the planning required around smoothly carrying out child's routine and activities. A lot of dependence is on the external paid help, especially if the role of the grandparents in the family is not central. Anita, for instance, has outsourced all her cooking, cleaning, washing and related chores to three people she has hired over the last few years. She is fully aware of the chores that needs completion and does supervision of all routine activities. Over the years, the dependence on her help has increased and she has become more relaxed about what they do. A sense of trust and ease has come in. She said:

> It would not be untrue to say that most marriages around me are dependent on the maid (laughs) without them we cannot go to work, our husbands will come back to an unclean home and get mad, the kids would have to be left at the crèche forever. Perhaps I would have left my job had it not been for my help Roshni. We don't treat her like a maid, she is like family. She goes to her village twice a year and we give her gifts and things like that. I can't imagine what I would do without her. She is very sincere and hardworking.

If a family can afford a full time maid or a nanny, she is often made to accompany the child if they have to go out to play, or on a play-date or accompany the child to her activity classes in the absence of either parent. Most of these activities are after school. So the children come back, eat, relax for some time. Then the nanny or the maid helps them get ready, gives them milk, fruits or some snack and then accompanies them to their activity scheduled for the day. They also have the responsibility to keep the child engaged in some activity or the other and not to leave them unsupervised. Each of the working couples I met mentioned that finding the right person for the child has been a difficult task and they are relieved when they find one. They prefer a literate person with some knowledge of technology, use of gadgets like computers and phones. Otherwise, it is not of much help to them. It is because she would need to play games on the computer, keep an eye on the content that the

kids are watching. Sometimes the children may have queries while using a gadget or while reading and it is important that the nanny is able to provide some guidance.

Zoyas (forthcoming) has researched on Latin American affluent households in which parenting practices points towards intensive style and it is shared between partners. Her focus was on the affective mediations of race and class on parenting practices and not so much on psychology of parenting. She points out that there is a demand for people who are educated, well trained and presentable. The practices of parenting are centered upon the services of maids and nannies who are mostly the black Brazilians who serve the whites[38].

When I asked them to explain to me the process of search for help or a nanny, they said that they would first spread the word among their friends and acquaintances. It is considered agreeable if she is recommended by friends or colleagues. The other option is that of a professional agency but not all of them have good experiences with agencies. They are often unable to understand and provide for the exact requirements the parents have. Excerpts from Priya's interview conducted at her home:

M: How was the experience of finding a nanny?

R: There are two things here. Our daughter arrived late and it was a long wait. It meant that we were both already carrying several years of work experience so we had reached a position where we had both become very busy. We were clear that we don't want to compromise on health even if it means paying double of what is available in the market and getting the best possible person who can take care of the house and childcare. We didn't want to be someone who would say that today my maid has not come or my child is not well so I will not come to work because we were carrying responsibilities. No organization will take it after a point. As a professional am not okay with this and it does not find room in my ecosystem. There are *Japa* women from Bengal who are experts in taking care of the new mother and the child. So we got one of them to come down to our place. We got her to extend her stay beyond the first 45 days after birthing. I got to know of them through my family. They are trained *aaya* (nanny). They come from Bengal and Assam. They are like professionals and they are very good, typically

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[38] White upper middle class and elite parents in parts of Brazil she researched on are anxious about their child's academic and other activities and there is also pressure from schools for more parental involvement. She argues that parenting can be seen as a social phenomenon on which broader changes and structures of power can be studied. She coins the term 'sovereign parenting' which includes racialized and class based parenting practices related to surveillance of the power and a certain kind of self-fashioning and moral legitimacy is produced (Zoyas, forthcoming publication)

they charge around rupees 45,000 plus airfare for a 45 day duration. They teach the mother what is to be done, they take care of post-delivery pain, flabbiness and all of that, they also use herbs for different massages. She stayed with us for the first 6 months from Kolkata. Till 2 years of my daughter's life, there was either my mother or my mother-in-law at home along with a nanny. When the *Japa* woman left and till we found this nanny, it was a harrowing three month period, where we interviewed 40 people, employed and dismissed within a week, some 3-4 people. Then we found her by pure luck. The previous ones we had hired through agencies, so we gave money, lost money and all. So someone known to us said that they know someone who is good and they could vouch for her, she was with them but then she left as she had to go to her village but then she was back. So when she came in she was very professional and efficient. Today, she is like a family member, like a little sister to us. Her name is Basanti and she is from Ranchi. Other than that we have another maid, a cook, a driver. The maid does cleaning and all, Basanti takes care of my daughter and helps with the dusting.

In line with Zoyas's work on Brazilian parents, the new middle class professionals are ambitious and dedicated to their career growth, they strive towards balancing work and parenting. The services offered by people who belong to lower classes, lower or middle castes coming from villages and small towns often go unnoticed in the literature on sociology of work. The working women (and men) from the organized sector are able to operate successfully because of the support structure available in the form of working women from the unorganized sector who have no unions or laws to protect them. They often work at low, non-negotiable rates. I saw a few respondents express a sense of satisfaction that they are able to employ poor women who need work and that they treat them well, assuming that this is what these women want and deserve but probably do not get it in their own families. One of my respondents told me that her maid recently spent 4000 rupees for celebrating her daughter's birthday and insisted on getting extra money. She explained to her maid that she could have purchased some books for her daughter instead of indulging her on her birthday. A concern was expressed by my respondent that the consumption bug has not just bitten the middle class but also the lower classes and that there should be an end to people's desires. It is because of these tendencies that our society is becoming more affluent but there is no real relationship between people. I could not help but ponder over the fact that upward social mobility is often expected to occur among already privileged

classes and not those below them. While she questioned the indulging behaviour of her maid and her rising materialistic desires, she did not question her own position and her choices.

6.4.2.2 The Experts

When I say experts, I mean an entire gamut of specialised actors who are part of an institution that caters to the new middle classes to offer them a wide range of services. There are specialised art academy, day-care centres, online experts such as psychiatrists, psychologists, career counsellors, the internet and other online portals that offer guidance or counselling to parents and their children about learning different activities and skills. In today's times when both parents are working and face time-crunch, often some roles and responsibilities around parenting or childrearing tasks get outsourced. There are available services which teach a child how to ride a bicycle or perform skating, things which are always known to have been picked up by children on their own just with a little bit of practise. The day-care centres reaches out to parents assuring them that their children would be safe, would learn more than other children in a social environment and would be independent at an early age. Career counsellors for children who have just completed their class 6 or 7 are available and availed by a lot of people. They stress on the importance of grades and encourage parents to start taking subjects like maths and science seriously. I recently came across a news article [39]which said that it is slowly becoming a trend for parents to send their 2 and 3 year olds for coaching classes to crack school interviews. Since the number of private schools which offer quality education are less than the number of children who need it in our country, it is considered worthwhile by parents to invest 2 to 3 lakh rupees into this so that their children can get admission in good schools. There is a concept of early childhood education which is catching up in Indian cities and has started in elite schools like Amity and GD Goenka. It is meant to develop social and self-dependent children. Children are taught social skills. There were two couples in Gurgaon I met who were aware of this and wanted it for their children. One of the mothers said:

> It is a lot of work for a mother to raise a child. So if there is specialised training for it which the child benefits from and it teaches him to live independently and well, then

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[39]http://www.huffingtonpost.in/rhea-lobo/2-year-olds-are-attending-coaching-classes-to-crack-school-inter/?utm_hp_ref=in-homepage

why not opt for it? It is not just about working parents, but about anybody who looks at education in a different way. In India, it is not very accepted yet because of mothers who are working, it is not possible for them to engage so deeply. Here it has always been the case that women feel oh I am a mother so I have to take care of my child and I should teach him everything. They take so much pressure on themselves. I know so many of my friends and colleagues who take undue pressure. There seems to be parenting competition everywhere. Why to be a superwoman? I saw my mother working all her life, she retired as a school principal. So in my life working mother has a different kind of value and my daughter understands that too. I also wanted to be like her. I didn't want to be just a mother. I am born to do other things with my life.

6.4.2.3 The Grandparents

The grandparents have a routine which is centred on the routine and requirements of the other members of the family. Some, by nature are more authoritarian than the others. They may not participate in different chores in the household other than taking care of their grandchildren. In most cases, they would oversee the work that was being done by the nanny. A few others I met were more involved in the parenting activities. They would also take care of other responsibilities in the kitchen and overall household maintenance. The working couple plans their life and work in a way that they live in close proximity to at least one set of their own parents. These are carefully thought out decisions discussed as part of the family planning process.

Joint families are still a reality in India and the role of grandparents is central to many families. They are figures of authority and have control over property. In many families, it is they who regulate the resources within the family and decide on the expenditure or any big decision such as purchase of property or white goods. For instance, in case of most of my respondents, they had migrated to Delhi for education or work or both, leaving their parents behind. Some of the children now are first generation upper middle class residing in the city. Though they mostly belong to middle class families, they experienced freedom and forged their own identity on coming to the city. Some of them chose their own marriage partners, while others went in for marriage arranged by their families. Those whose parents were in salaried government or private jobs are now retired and live under pension. All of them have their own house in a small town or a different city. When grandparents are asked to relocate to the city with their children and grandchildren, they are not in position of real authority in terms of finances or decision making with regard to family anymore.

They do so in order to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children and grandchildren. The situation is different for those who are inhabitants of Delhi and have their own home in this city. They do not give up on their own home, but urge their children to live close by so that they can be in proximity and help each other out.

In case of Geeta, an IT professional, he dependence on her mother-in-law is high and she is able to carry on with her job and weekend socialising because her mother-in-law (MIL) lives with them and oversees the domestic chores. Geeta currently works in a relatively flexible job with flexi-hours and an option to work from home. Her office is not very far from her place. Her husband feels that if the previous generation understands and accepts that they are different from them and that they are more ambitious and have more material needs and ambitions, then there is relatively less friction. Even in situations in which they don't accept the changes and there are differences and ego problems, their parents don't have much of a choice because they know the sons and daughter-in-law would not relent and lead lives the way they do.

Their close friends Rohit and Sapna live in the same housing society in Noida also have a similar family structure. They have two daughters and Rohit's mother lives with them. They hang out together on most weekends, at one of their homes or go out for movies or shopping together. They go together for outstation trips. Their children are friends and play together in the housing society playground. They go for extra-curricular activities together. When they want to go for movies without the children, they leave them with their mothers. They realise the importance of their parents in their lives today. They are seen to be the best people to pass down the right values to their children.

> I never took sabbatical. We had a nanny, a full time person. Plus there is lot of support from the grandparents. They might not do the physical work but their presence is very important. We have hired help to take care of the child but our own mothers have always been there for the supervision, to make sure things are fine. They give all their time and so much of love and support. We can't imagine anything happening smoothly at home while at work without our own mothers. If both are working, then it is advisable to have at least one grandparent if not both. Their presence to oversee all activities is a must. It is important for culture and home environment. Values are passed. If nobody is at home, then it is difficult (Geeta, 33 years, working mother, Software consulting).

Now they have become more open. They don't ask why I should be doing things which you should have been doing. They are open and have accepted things. They do not demand a daughter-in-law who should sit at home and serve everybody else. They are quite accommodating that way (Mohan, Geeta's husband, marketing manager of an electronics brand).

Diksha's narrative shows that she had to keep several things in mind before even planning a child:

M: So when you are not home, who takes care of things?

R: My biggest investment is this girl who now is here with us for the entire day. I had similar option after I had my son Tarun because I realised it was becoming physically straining for me to take care of both child and work and I had a huge amount of guilt. Then I got another girl. So now this one stays from 6 am to 8 pm. I am not comfortable with her staying over because we don't have any extra room or space. We are 4 adults so we can manage the rest of the time. She makes dinner and then leaves. She does everything but the utensils. I just kept another one as depending entirely on one becomes problem sometimes if she does not turn up. So if one doesn't come, then at least the other one does so it kind of works out. If they don't turn up, nothing happens.

My parents-in-law stay here with us. We were extremely uncomfortable with leaving the child in day-care. We had realised we would not go for it. The choice is leaving child at day-care when it is 3 months old or get people or some arrangement at home. So we consciously made a decision to invest in the second option. So we got my husband's parents here and also invested in the girl. I was very clear till Tarun learns to talk completely, I will not leave him with strangers. Though there are good ones in Gurgaon. My in-laws have our own house in Chandigarh. So it's been two years since they came here to live with us and now they cannot imagine any other life. Their life revolves around their grandchild. He keeps them busy the entire day. There it was more of a slow life and retired type. So now they kind of enjoy it here. I did not want to burden them taking care of every little thing so we kept a maid. They should be able to enjoy it that is more important. I can be in peace knowing that our own family is here.

Two out of 15 dual career parents I met in my research had a different take on the role of grandparents. They were critical of people who did not think twice before expecting their parents to take on their responsibilities while they were busy making money. They looked at it as undue pressure on ageing parents. They narrated instances when the grandparents were made to change their location, such as going

from one region to another or moving to the city because families either did not have the means or did not want to spend on paid services. The others do not see it as unfair because they have hired a maid or a nanny so that the pressure on their own parents is not high. They should be able to enjoy grand-parenting and not be burdened by it.

> It was a conscious decision on our part that we will not exploit our own parents. We took this decision in the US as there we saw a lot of these things happen. Like so many grandparents would just come there to work for the family, take care of the kids. They were left with the small kids. A couple was there, both working and they had travel involved in their work. So this couple would get their parents, one at a time as VISA was a problem. So one *dadi*[40] or *nani*[41] would come in for 6 months and then go back and then the nana or the dada would come. So they once told my parents at the park that they had not met their spouses in a long time. They made this arrangement, left their 5 months old baby at the home with their parent and travelled for work. They did not even have a TV at home. Just because they are old, doesn't mean they don't have a life or they don't have feelings. There are elderly people we see here who drop and pick up kids every day and they can't even walk properly. Seeing all this we decided to not do the same – Nivedita, 33 years, mother of a 4 year old son.

6.5 THE FINANCIAL PRESSURES OF PARENTING

Bianchi (2011) argues that raising children today requires substantial financial investment, because the lengthening transition to adulthood often requires parents to backstop children unable to secure a foothold in the job market. The financial concern came up in almost all my narratives from those in managerial positions to those in senior management and higher positions as well. Despite coming from families where both husband and wife are working earning substantially well, having financial assets, the concerns were common.

> I want to give her the best in terms of education. While I am not very concerned about how she performs academically, but I do believe good institutions give you a certain level of foundation and exposure which is required. This is unparalleled. So in the future, where she will study, how much money we would have to invest in that, how will we be ready with so much money is a concern for us. It could be good for her to study in rishi valley and later in some college in the Ivy League. So this a concern, we often think of all that we can do in terms of savings and investments.

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[40] Paternal grandmother

[41] Maternal grandmother

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In the course of my fieldwork, it became clear to me that their anxieties are contextual which is linked to one's social location, the nature of expectation one has from life and self. Those who have access to good schools and colleges are exposed to a worldview which is global. Their aspirations are also built on their own foundation which is different from other social classes. As argued by Fernandes (2006), the new middle class is internally differentiated and each of the groups are differentiated based on various factors like income, occupation, property ownership, status and worldview. For a lot of those who are first generation upper middle class, having their own house and car was almost like a rite of passage. Some of their parents could not afford a four wheeler. To have achieved material success at a young age is a matter of pride. But is also meant that they took loans in order to lead their desired lifestyle. As argued in chapter 3, they have to pay high monthly EMIs which makes dual income necessary. If they have children who go to private international schools, it is a huge financial expenditure. All parents I met had enrolled their children into one or more extra scholastic activity outside of the school which was also an added expense. Having children also meant more outings, more eating out, movies and compulsory annual holidays. Children as young as six and seven year olds now demand international holidays. All of this makes parenting financially taxing.

One of the areas of concern for parents was to find the right school for their child. In case of Anita, researching on schools was an arduous and long process. She had her husband shortlisted a few schools and then visited those shortlisted schools such as Sun city, Lotus valley school in Noida. They did not want a high-profile school because their daughter is shy and reserved in nature. They were mindful that the child should not feel overwhelmed. They didn't want one which put pressure to excel in academics nor the kind of school where kids came in Mercedes Benz. She wanted her daughter to be away from peer pressure of that kind. When I asked her to elaborate, she said that she wanted her child to remain grounded. She wanted to avoid a situation where her daughter would feel guilty or embarrassed about her own life. Anita was clear that certain things were beyond their reach. She would never want to give into coaxing by the child in order to get an expensive mobile phone or a tablet. They didn't want an expensive school as that would mean higher financial pressure. They were already spending a big chunk of their salary on repaying the home loan. On one occasion, Anita went to the bathroom of Lotus valley school and realized that she

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could never have that kind of a bathroom in her own house. She came to know of schools like Heritage and Shiv Nadar which charge around 55,000 rupees for a quarter. She began asking herself if making this kind of expenditure would be worth it. As per Times ranking, Shree Ram school is the best in the country and it is based on academic results, extra-curricular, international exposure so she was attracted to it but soon realized that they could not afford it. They finally chose a CBSE board Alliance world school which is a private school with reasonable fees. Despite their own family combined monthly income being around 2.5 lakhs, she felt it was not sufficient.

> See nowadays it is difficult and one cannot sustain more than one child as it is so expensive. Schools everywhere, especially in Delhi and Bangalore and now in all cities are such that one cannot afford it for two kids. If you put your child once in such school, then the child is also in a pressure to have a certain lifestyle, have all kinds of gadgets. It is impossible to sustain that lifestyle for so many years. I know a friends daughter who is in 8th class and has 3 devices – an iphone, ipad and a laptop. Her daughter goes to Europe in a group for her holidays. Imagine international holiday for an 8th class child! So I ask her why should she do all this? She says, *sab karte* hai (everybody does it). But I am like why? She asks me, what are you doing for Prarthana (her daughter)? I said nothing… she is just going to the park, what else? (Laughs) – Lavanya, 40 years, technology consultant with an MNC, lives in Gurgaon with her husband and 7 year old daughter.

Since parenting involves not just emotional but a lot of financial investment today, in cases of several middle class families, it requires planning, saving and often result in strains. In some cases, it becomes a need for both partners to work and earn as contribution of both would enable them to have a better lifestyle to fulfil their aspirations for themselves and their children. When both men and women work and earn well, there are changes in the gender relations, roles and expectations. This is what I will discuss in the following section.

6.6 THE CORPORATE CHILDREN

With industrialisation, globalisation and increasing growth of the service industry, there are changes that have taken place in Indian family structure. Before the industrial phase, the extended family served as a unit of work such as agricultural work where labour was divided between different family members. Even the child

had a role to play in it. With industrialisation, there was a separation between home and work in terms of space. The women took care of the home while the men went out to fend for the family. Since, then the children ceased to become assets or provide working hands. In India, with industrialisation and urbanisation, there was migration from villages to the cities. While families engaged in agriculture still have children help out with farm-work, the cities have a different reality.

Children today are no longer assets but responsibilities of parents, speaking from a middle class and elite urban Indian perspective. Till one becomes an adult, completes education and becomes financially independent, Indian parents look after their needs as opposed to the western world in which things change the moment a child turns 18. As a result, there is a different sense of independence they feel when they are on their own and the degree of interference from the parents in their day-to-day lives and decisions lessen to a greater degree than their Indian counterparts.

Let me present a glimpse into the life of Meenakshi, a 34 Year Old Full Time Working Mother and her son Nikhil on a weekday morning. Giving time to the child is the topmost priority and for that one often cuts down on one's 'me-time' and social life. Everything in the family seems to be planned around the routine of the children, their schooling, their organised activity schedule and other activities they are enrolled into outside of school. Meenakshi wakes up at 5 in the morning, goes for a run. She comes back before 6 am. Her 12 year old son Nikhil wakes up by then. "I always make sure that I am around him when he wakes up, even if it means reducing the only me-time I have".

Her son is very active with swimming. Thrice a week she and her husband take him to school by 6 in the morning. For the first one hour the swimming club active members are coached by a full time swimming instructor. In that one hour, both parents are present there. They love watching him learn. Sometimes, they go for a run or walk in the school premises while waiting for their son to get done. Nikhil continues to remain in school for the assembly and the rest of the day. On those days he is given an extra tiffin.

On other days, either she or her husband drops their son to school in the morning by 7.30 am. By then she is ready for office and has got her full time help to pack her tiffin. After dropping him off, she straightaway drives to work. It is a distance of over

30 kilometres one way. She does not like to depend on a driver. At the time of my fieldwork, the odd-even rule in Delhi-NCR had also justified her decision of driving herself as women were exempted from the rule. She starts work at 8.30 am on most days and wraps up at 4-4.30 pm. She does not take a break, not even a lunch break.

"I eat lunch at my table so that I don't spend extra time here and there. This makes me feel less guilty about having to leave office by 4.30 pm. Since I start early and work all through, I am usually done with my to-do list. My son returns home from school by 4 pm, has his snack and lazes around. By the time he is done with it, I like to be back home. I want him to know that I am always there when he is free from his own busy schedule".

The children of the working professionals I happened to meet in the course of my research are prepared to adjust to a hectic, fast paced lifestyle. There is a major focus on overall personality development which includes not just studies but a whole host of other extra-curricular activities. From my field work, I could sense that there is almost an obsession with enabling the child to master multiple activities owing to a plethora of reasons, which I will take up later.

6.7 THE INDIAN "CONCERTED CULTIVATION"

According to Bianchi (2011), middle-class children participate in extracurricular activities which require active parental involvement. Parents may increasingly believe that involving their children in a wide range of activities ensures their ultimate educational success. Annette Lareau (2003), in her book *Unequal Childhoods*, calls such parenting 'concerted cultivation' and her research with children cultivated that way suggests they perform well in young adult-hood, especially compared with their peers from families with less education and less involved parenting. One of the aspects that distinguishes the parenting styles of the middle and upper middle from the working class is that they engage their children in a range of activities which they believe better equip their children for sustaining themselves in a competitive and unpredictable future.

This tendency of parents is called "concerted cultivation" because in their organisation of daily lives, children's interests and activities are treated as matters of prime consequence. Lareau (2003) added value to her research by bringing in a class perspective where she argues that in the context of American white, black, middle

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class, working class and poor families, there is a differential importance given to children's activities outside school which she calls as organised activities. Middle class parents, in particular, comply with the current professional standards which are derived from views of doctors, teachers, counsellor and other institutional structures. They engage in concerted cultivation to stimulate their children's development and foster their cognitive and social skills. On the other hand, for working class and poor families, sustaining children's natural growth is seen as an accomplishment as they have more economic challenges making their childrearing a challenging task. Her research showed that one's economic position in society defined in terms of social class, among other factors, is tied to differences in the cultural logic of childrearing.

The middle class parents are committed to child-rearing strategies that favor the individual development of each child, sometimes at the expense of family time and group needs. By encouraging involvement in activities outside the home, middle-class parents position their children to receive more than an education on how to play soccer, baseball, or piano. These young sports enthusiasts and budding musicians acquire skills and dispositions that help them navigate the institutional world. They learn to think of themselves as special and as entitled to receive certain kinds of services from adults. They also acquire a valuable set of white-collar work skills, including how to set priorities, manage an itinerary, shake hands with strangers, and work on a team (Ibid, 2003).

The hectic pace of life in American middle class families is not very different from the pace of life of my respondents. Events and activities of the children are scheduled, family members work around a common family calendar which is prepared by the adults after consulting their children. There is a good amount of adult supervision in the lives of the children and children's activities create a substantial pressure and stress among the parents (Ibid. 2003)[42]. There is labour that goes into maintaining the routine and schedule which accommodates their long school hours, home work time, play time and a whole host of extracurricular activities that children are enrolled in. Let us turn to some of the reasons, as stated by my respondents, for this kind of child-rearing which is similar to Lareau's concerted cultivation.

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[42] There is a gendered labour involved in this even in case when both partners are in full time jobs, which I will discuss separately in a section of the chapter.

First, it is done to enable the child to excel in a harsh competitive world. There is a lot of focus, almost an obsession with preparing a child for an increasingly cut-throat world. Among the people I met, a majority believe that a child needs to be exposed to as much of a wide range of activities/ hobbies as possible and let the child later choose for herself a few things which she would want to pursue further. It is seen as an investment which would ensure a more secured future; it can be looked at as an ongoing CV-development process which starts right in the childhood; it would be like a long term 'investment' with expected returns. The extra-curricular activities of children is their new work. It is changing at a fast pace because what is deemed useful for children keeps changing. So the more the exposure, the better. In a harsh competitive world, the child needs something in addition to what other children have. Academic achievement is a basic requirement which most middle class parents demand from their children today. However, putting a child to a range of extracurricular activities is not something everybody can even afford. So excelling in certain activities automatically puts their children in a different league which is almost unattainable by the lower and even the salaried middle classes in a blue-collar occupation.

Second, these activities are a marker of social status in a world in which often a competitive spirit prevails among parents. My respondents expressed a sense of pride in the fact that their children learn different activities and are capable of withstanding the pressure of performance in today's world. While they themselves were taught certain specific activities such as music, dance, arts, today's children have a wider range of choices which has increased the gamut of activities to world music, western classical, theatre, sports like tennis, soccer, horse-riding, cricket; dance forms like ballet, jazz, hip-hop and contemporary. There are classes available in vocabulary, public speaking, vedic maths, creative writing and foreign languages for children below 13 years. There are classes that are available in personality development for children.

This kind of intensification of options meted out for consumption by parents and their children and the overall increase in demand for such kind of learning is made possible by a host of factors. First, there is an increasing trend of 'academy' in Indian cities which are private institutes that offer to teach or offer coaching in varied of activities. Such academies are found all over the city. Second, there is professionalization of

such services that are made available. I mean there are professionals who have specialised in running institutes like this. I met an event management personnel at her office in Noida. Among other things, she pointed out that there were some people in her last organisation who quit their jobs and started an institute in their own homes. They hire professional musicians, dancers, artists who are paid on an hourly basis. Most of the parents who come to enquire about the schedule are professionals in private jobs. I managed to do a telephonic conversation with one of them who said that most parents come to his academy to get their children enrolled in multiple activities, each day with a different activity, five days in a week. When both parents are working and living in a nuclear set-up, kids and teenagers need to be engaged in different activities so that their time is well utilised and they are not left alone at home. They like to keep their children busy. This seemed to be a common scenario in case of most families I visited in the course of my fieldwork. The advantage of having a single academy with different creative activities for children is that they save on time as parents find it difficult to drive their children around multiple places.

One of my respondent named Himani has a seven year old daughter named Shreya. Both Himani and her husband are working in senior managerial level in corporate law firms. Shreya's routine goes like this. She wakes up at 7. 15 am. She goes to school by 8 am and usually comes back by 2.45 pm. She has a light lunch, usually her nanny feeds her. It takes about 40 minutes. Usually she is watching something on the iPad or television when she is having her lunch. That's the only way she eats well. She freshens up post lunch. In her mother's words, "she is an active child, doesn't like to laze around, nap or snooze".

She has regular extracurricular classes from 4.30 to 6 pm. The activities that she is currently enrolled in are art, craft, piano, skating and tennis. Once a week she goes for two classes, namely, tennis and story (the children are made to listen to stories and discuss them, pick new words and learn meanings). For Shreya, all of this is in the gated community where they live. Usually, the community clubhouse or a building or somebody's home is used. Most of her teachers are stay-at-home moms. Shreya is accompanied by her nanny everywhere. She picks and drops her if it is an indoor class. For tennis she is there so she can watch the child practise (from a safety perspective, because there are senior boys and male teachers). To save time, Shreya goes straight to play after her classes are over. Her nanny carries milk or fruit for her.

She eats in transit between her class and her playtime. Post that, Shreya hangs out with her neighbourhood friends. They all play, cycle and have scooty race. She is back home all tired. She then has dinner at 7.15 pm and goes to bed. Her mother comes back home just in time to spend half an hour with her after she is tucked into bed.

In most of the housing societies I went to, there were people who have started coaching centres or classes based on hobbies which they are interested in and want to teach children. This has made available extra-curricular activity learning options within gated communities. One of my Gurgaon respondents has started sending her daughter for tennis coaching and creative writing, both within the complex she lives in. She seemed excited about it and was full of praise for the teacher who, she said, is an IIM[43] pass out, was working with an MNC and had left her job post childbirth. Since then she decided to start coaching for creative writing for children. Children today are as busy as their working parents. Their days are well-planned in advance. When something comes up suddenly, it changes their set schedule. The child's routine comprises of academics and a set of different activities and hobbies that keeps his/ her plate completely full.

Rakhi has a son in class 8 who is also involved in many activities He is busy with these things on the weekends. He told me that he learns things that he enjoys and he is otherwise a home bird. He does not mind not having time to go out of home to play in the neighbourhood or visit friends. He is active with playing drums, swimming, reading, playing games online and writing short stories or poems. Often his parents plan their time in a way that they are present when their child is going for a class or learning something new. The child continues with his school after his early morning swimming classes while his parents come back home and then rush to work. This kind of routine has been worked out because Rakhi has a full-time cook and a maid at home who are given detailed instructions on all that needs to be done in their absence. A lot of the people I met have travelled the world, are privy to what is happening in the western world. They believe that people with such exposure often come back to India and they start offering such options to others or work towards it. Global media, the internet, social media has made all kinds of information only a click away. Wider

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[43] Indian Institute of Management

contacts with the outside world have enabled the incorporation of several forms of activities and content for children.

Sometimes such efforts are looked at as means to creatively sustain the child for the future in a context where one child is becoming common and role of the extended family is limited. This is seen as means to equip a child with creative self-expression and self-reliance, imagining the future in which different modes of entertainment will not necessarily have to depend on a collective. For a child, growing up in a nuclear family with limited bonding with extended family members and lack of bonding with friends owing to time constraints could be lonely. Parents feel that the only way the child can handle this is to be busy and engaged in different hobbies. Some of them envisage a lonelier future where individuals and families would be further distanced from one another owing to busier work lives. There is a visible lack of trust among people with respect to fellow beings be it their neighbours or family members. They feel that a child needs to be prepared for such times and they would be equipped to handle growing social distancing in the future.

There are efforts made to cultivate specific hobbies because certain activities such as watching television, playing video games are seen as unfavourable. Often, parents who make their kids sit in front of the TV are seen as lazy and non-creative. While there is certainly a class factor here where members of lower classes are seen as irresponsible who are not equipped or inclined to engage with their children in more creative ways, it is also beyond class. There is a sense of competition among the parents on the degree of engagement one has with their children in terms of spending time and doing things together. For dual career couples, this is always a bigger challenge than single earner households, but this engagement is used as a yardstick to measure one's parenting abilities. I present below an excerpt from a narrative of a dual career couple who are parents to 11 year old son:

M: How did you decide on the activities that your son is into?

R: Both me and my husband swim, we are good swimmers. His dad took him to the pool when he was 11 months. In Mumbai, we were living in a complex which had a beautiful swimming pool. So we would go swimming every evening. So he learnt there. He loves frolicking and we would spent hours. So he had the facility and he loved the water too. When he was in Bangalore, he was only 5 in the swimming team in his school. In music, we put him up in the piano classes in Bangalore. We realised he had

an aptitude for music. He learnt the notes very fast. But he is lazy and piano requires lot of practise. In Delhi we were not be able to find a piano teacher. Then Raghav himself said that he wants to learn the drums. So he started at school with his friends. This drum set actually belongs to my cousin. She was playing but then she had to leave so she decided to give it to us. He enjoys it. Euphonium is something he picked up in the school. So we did at some point tried to push him into basketball because his father is fond of basketball. He did try, he was good at it. In Delhi he didn't have a good teacher so he left it. I tried to get him into running but I realised he does not like it. I was just very clear that I did not want a couch potato who spends 4-5 hours in front of television or playing video games.

M: How did you manage it?

R: The easiest way to occupy a child is to put him in front of a TV. It requires a lot of effort to involve or engage a child in other activities and most effort is required by the parents. So when he was little, we would play other things. We would play cards, chess, board games, we would go out and play in the evening. We only came back before dinner. It takes a lot of effort. Frankly, I have no me-time. The only me time I have is when I go for my 30 or 40 minute run. That I choose to do in the morning at 5 am when he is asleep so that I am back and free for him by the time he wakes up.

M: Hmm

R: It is a lot of hard work every single day, it is very exhausting. So by 9.30 pm I am dead meat. I chose to prioritise Raghav over everything else. I was very clear I was not having it any other way. So I or rather we chose not to put him in front of the TV and let him take care of himself for 4 or 5 hours! We have chosen the harder path. I didn't want to give in to that ease. So a friend of his once asked me aunty how much TV time does Raghav get? So I said he gets one hour every day in the week and then he gets a little more time in the weekends. He said, 'really?' so I asked him how much time do you get? He said he gets around 3-4 hours every day. So I was thinking in my mind, this is just not acceptable to me, you know. Raghav has archery set, he plays badminton, we play board games instead of computer, we have two cycles so two people can go out cycling…we avoid junk food, we don't eat oily food, we eat continental at night, we have light food, not Indian food at night. Neither of us are ready to compromise on our time with our child. That way we lose our friends.

Thus, it is clear that children's leisure today is no longer separated from their education and future employment prospects (Livingstone 2002). Academic performance is not the only pursuit of parents in the 'media-rich' lives and homes of

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the new middle class professionals. What gives them the edge over children of classes lower than theirs and even within the middle class itself? It is the extra-scholastic activities and achievements that sets them apart. Even in that there is a certain kind of exclusivity attached to certain specific forms of activities such as tennis, piano, violin, jazz, western classical music and world theatre. Ganguly-Scrase's (2009) research among lower middle class in Kolkata and Kumar's (2011) research among middle class children in north and eastern part of India focusses on parental devotion to children and a keen interest in their scholastic and extra-scholastic achievements. They have looked at the grooming of middle class children in the hope of upward social mobility through use of social and cultural capital, the latter is possible to be acquired through their extracurricular growth. My argument is that those in the upper rungs of the middle class needs to further differentiate themselves from the rest. They do so by carefully choosing activities which are expensive and exclusive. They also do so by consciously staying away from the discourse of the self-sacrificing parent or ones who invest in the child thinking of their old age security. They want their children to do well, chose any career, they should "listen to their heart", they should chose a career that they are passionate about and feel free to think for themselves without being caught up in undue emotional familial pressures that are typical of the Indian middle class.

6.8 Child-Rearing or Child-Crafting?

All this leaves me with a few questions: Should one look at such patterns in the behaviour of parents as parenting to raise a child or does it become child-crafting? Parents spend their time, energy, resources in preparing their child to be a certain way which is sync with the demands of contemporary neoliberal capitalist ethos that value on efficiency, productivity, multi-tasking, time management? Is the child growing up to be what she wants to be or is it just a systematic crafting of personhood (with a mere appearance of choice, freedom and realising of one's potential)? Where is the time for the child to be free and just relax? Or for her to have more control over her own leisure time and space? To what extent, can the child decide on the things that she really wants to do? What if the child just wants to be free from all such pressures of performance in different spheres of her life? I doubt if not doing anything is even a possibility for them. Can a child grow up to form a worldview different from her parents?

I would refrain from arguing that control is just about exercising power as a parent and crushing the child's innate nature. It is not always a cold calculation where parents consciously exploit their child to satisfy their own sense of "success" as parents (which is drawn from the larger neoliberal, market oriented worldview they have bought into). It is something that is not necessarily forced on to the child by the parents but often the child willingly engages in this lifestyle under the influence of their own peers. Both parents and children become part of a world which expects them to value certain things and devalue others and look at self-worth in a specific way. This world gets shaped by the logic of 21st century capitalism guided by neoliberal market oriented sense of being, relating to others and subjectivity and one of the visible modes of socialisation and reinforcement of this worldview is their sphere of professional work.

It is the work-ethic that instils the values of productivity, efficiency, does a cost-benefit analysis for every action, promotes the idea of meeting targets and often reduces a person to his cost-to-company. It is work which makes them believe that competition is a natural way of life and there is nothing problematic about striving forward by leaving everybody else behind. After all, there is no other way one could possibly survive in the world of cut-throat competition. Work emphasizes on team-work but this team work is short-lived, for a specific project and for a specific end only. It benefits the organisation more than individual employee. It is because once the project that called for team work is over, professionals would go their own way and carve their individual paths to success. One is constantly reminded of the fact that one needs to prove her worth every single day and not take her previous contributions or awards seriously. They believe that it is only merit which can take people ahead in life. The world of work makes one believe that everybody is equal and gets a level playing field to operate in and one's achievements or lack of it are a result of one's merit. One gets what one works for and deserves. From time to time, one is made to feel good about one's contribution. Some of my respondents argued that doing well at work is rewarding. There could be appreciation, a promotion, a raise or a positive recommendation. However, when one does well in personal life, in their role as a spouse or a parent, there is no instant recognition or appreciation for one's efforts. No matter what one does, there is always a feeling of lack or deficiency. This is most often true in one's role as a parent. For instance, one is unsure if being a friend to

one's child is better than having a formal relationship. There are more grey areas in relationships compared to work. At work, one is clearer about rights and wrongs and dos and don'ts. Perhaps that could be a reason why one instills values acquired at work into one's relationships and roles, hoping that it would bring better results, greater order and stability.

Lareau (2003) argues that like the organisational aspects of children's activities, the home based practices among middle class households such as learning to prioritize one activity over another, traveling for participating in different organised tournaments or camps, speaking with confidence, value of team work, notion of responsibility towards others, reasoning skills contribute to development of skills that have a seamless fit with behaviours and expectations of occupations, work and other social institutions. She argues that middle class children not just acquire necessary life skills but they get opportunities to practise the skills as well. In other words, middle class approach to child-rearing "meshes seamlessly with the practices and values of society's dominant institutions" (Ibid: 63).

The above view is in sync with my idea of "corporatisation" of parenting where I have argued that certain skills which are cultivated at work often find an entry into the home in the ways in which one parents, the ways in which one manages the household and domestic work and other related responsibilities. However it may happen that things may not be consciously done. They do so to better manage their children and their homes. They feel that the planning, the efficiency and the obtainable result when it comes to work related goals could be brought about in other aspects of their lives. If I borrow Laureau's argument, it would not be unsafe to say that such a behaviour would possibly result in the values of society's social institutions (such as work in this case) meshing seamlessly with childrearing practices. One of the results is that these children have a better chance to succeed at professional work in the future.

 However, it is not just occupation that determines the mode of parenting. There are other factors here such as family structure, income, neighbourhood and others. For instance, Rakhi and Geeta are working in the corporate sector and they both have dual income households with children going to private international schools. However Rakhi is in senior management with a much higher salary than Geeta. Rakhi has had more exposure to western culture owing to her frequent international work trips and has been in a leadership role when compared to Geeta. Rakhi was born and brought

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up in Hyderabad and was raised by a working mother who was ambitious in terms of her career growth. Geeta hails from a small town in north India and her mother was a homemaker. While Rakhi is extremely particular about enrolling her son in a specific sets of activities outside school, Geeta wants her daughter to be good at extracurricular but is not very insistent on her daughter doing a specific number of activities. She seemed to be more relaxed with her approach to parenting. She said that as long as her daughter has some time and freedom to play, to have time for her thoughts to run freely, for her to develop her mental faculties in her own pace, she is happy. She asks her daughter from time to time if she wants to enrol in a dance or a drawing class. She was not worried when her daughter attended dance classes for a few weeks and then took to skating. Rakhi's son, who is almost the same age, has never done that. He likes to go for all his classes on a daily basis and feels disappointed when he misses any. Rakhi is mindful of his routine and plans her work around his activities so that she can drop and pick him from all the classes. When she is not available, her husband makes sure to do that. An individual's social location, namely caste, class, religion, ethnicity, family educational background shapes one's ideas and practices around parenting. Lareau's (2003) study has pointed out to us that black, low income families were more relaxed about their children's academic and extra-scholastic achievements compared to white, middle class families. However, the scope of my research and the nature of the data collected is not equipped to identify patterns and make generalisations on parenting based on these factors.

6.9 MEDIA, LEISURE AND LEARNING

Children are the new teachers. They are good with technology and it is a matter of great pride for the parents. As a parent, if one cannot buy them gadgets, it is unacceptable and unpardonable. The child needs to know how to use a computer or a smartphone because everybody else's child knows how to. However, a certain degree of caution is exercised in the amount of time a child spends with the gadgets. Some parents get irked when their children demand an IPhone or an expensive gadget. For some, it is financially a burden, for others it is too much of materialism that has influenced the child and they want a balance. No matter what they say, my observation in the homes enabled me to see that there is an intrinsic relation between media, education and leisure and parents do not know where to draw a line. They fear their kids would miss out on things so it is better to just let them engage with different

forms of media. However, there are two common concerns regarding technology as expressed by the parents. One is of children being exposed to inappropriate content. Some parents resort to child lock and other such services. The other is health problems such as weakening eyesight, physically unfit bodies and not being social enough as a result of excessive use of gadgets. Different parents adopt different means to address these problems. My observation is that higher the financial means or the economic standing of the family, the more concern expressed by parents regarding technology and more pro-activeness in engaging their children in other physical activities to maintain a balance. Having said that, different gadgets and media devices are part of every single household I went to and it is a given that the children would have them. Increasing use of such items by schools on a day-to-day basis in classroom learning is responsible for such a high degree of integration. In other words, these are both necessities and markers of status for the middle and upper middle classes in India today.

> Media choices reflect value judgements regarding time management. Leisure activities, media use and the experience of time are linked through construction of leisure lifestyles, a process which is itself framed by broader historical trends towards individualisation. Through the construction of individualised lifestyles, young people combine media and non-media choices in particular ways, making use of the time they have to pursue interests which are constitutive of their identities (Livingstone 2002: 78).

Role of technology is central to the lives of middle and upper classes. While it is key to learning and acquiring skills, it often fills a void when there is lack of any social interaction between children and parents because of their prolonged absence owing to work commitments. Children as young as four and five years are comfortable handling gadgets and experiment with the internet. Most often, their leisure, learning and use of media and technology get enmeshed into one another. Parents who hand over gadgets to the kids to fill the void produced by their prolonged absence are looked down upon by those who make an effort to make their children do and learn things using different modes. Diksha said she has not bought any gadget for her 4 year old son and is trying her best to get him to play outside home with his friends. She wants him to play in the mud. Resorting to gadgets, making kids sit in front of the TV

are often ascribed to parents who are not involved enough, or ascribed to parents from the lower class and education background.

The larger logic that my respondents seem to operate within and the framework which informs the choices they make is embedded in a tendency of marketization of everyday life and time within the larger logic of neoliberal capitalism which values productivity, efficiency and weighs actions through a model similar to the cost/ benefit analysis[44]. It is almost like the time of childhood is like a time for preparation for adult life. As a result, a child's time is specialised, commercialised and regulated (Ennew 1994). There is a set notion of time well utilised and time wasted. D Sullivan (1991) argues that individualised lifestyles are part of children's lives from the beginning and childhood is an important period of construction of self. In the western world, traditional structures which confer identity are undermined and replaced by the market. There seems to be an integration between individualisation and consumerism and this is a globally structured process. This kind of a consumerist worldview is now very much a part of Indian culture. However, when it comes to family ties, certain aspects could differ in the Indian context owing to high involvement of grandparents in the lives of children where nuclear families rope in grandparents for upbringing of the children with cultural values passed down from one generation to the next. In the absence of parents from domestic everydayness for a significant length of time in a day, grandparents have a role to fulfil. However, not all families with grandparents had a strong bond between them. More often than not, the "time-poor" and "activities-rich" (Livingstone 2002) children hardly get time to bond with people. The previous extended family role has been taken up the core nuclear family. For those who do not have grandparents, the parents themselves felt and expressed that they are too attached to their children.

6.10 CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES IN TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

"When you are working woman, you are expected to work like there is no family. When you reach home, you are expected to be like you have no work outside. So on both ends you have to give your 100 pc. So when I enter office I am Diksha, an

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[44] As per Investopedia, cost-benefit analysis is a process by which business decisions are analysed. The benefits of a given situation or business-related action are summed, and then the costs associated with taking that action are subtracted.

insights team lead and when I am home, I have to shed that off completely. Men don't have to do it to such a drastic level".

In this section I will use the idea of rigidity and flexibility to understand the nature of changes that work in market based economy has brought about in gender relations by presenting the details of continuities and changes in the lives of my respondents. This points to us towards the changing notion of motherhood and fatherhood today. Mothers have the primary role but fathers are much more involved than the previous generation as mentioned by most of my respondents. There are certain pushes towards flexibility in gender roles and certain pulls towards traditional gender roles where the father is a provider and mother is a care-giver.

Financial or domestic difficulties can be overcome by transgressing gender boundaries and developing more flexible strategies for childcare (Gerson 2010). What is the "unfinished revolution" that Gerson elaborates on in her research among families in the US? Today's changing world of work and family has led to creation of certain opportunities and conflicts for dual career couples with children. Demanding work and childcare, inflation, nuclearisation of families leave working parents stressed and all these social shifts lead to new conflicts between breadwinning and care-giving roles and new opportunities for gender flexibility. The unfinished gender revolution has created a conflict between new values and resistant institutions. The new values are a result of factors such as changing nature of work, work-from-home option and new ways of exercising control (Ibid. 2011).

Continuing with Gerson's arguments, by blurring boundaries between caretaking and earning, mothers could seek an economic base at work while fathers could become more involved in parenting. She puts forth two observations in the context of American middle and upper middle class families. One, there is rising individualism and decline in the idea of a community. Two, there is also a return to the concept of stay-at-home mothers, especially the ones who were reared in time deprived homes. Some women were choosing to opt out than do-it-all. In my fieldwork among working mothers, I saw that both of these are true. However, my respondents had not altogether stopped working, though there were quite a few instances of women scaling back their career, such as opting for part-time work, working as freelancer or consultant, rejecting promotions to avoid responsibility overload or extensive travel. Some of them feel that they have less time than their own mothers to spend with their

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children but are more involved in what they do. They mention quality-time as being more important than the length of time. The tendency to delay marriage in order to solidify their base at work also stands true. Some of them who did so by marrying late are satisfied with their choice and feel a pressing need to be devoted wives and mothers today. The single women I met also reiterated this. They said they would marry late as a choice, build a good base at work and strengthen it but are hopeful that if and when they marry, it would be an informed choice.

6.11 MOTHERHOOD TODAY

Gerson (2011) argues that women are re-designing motherhood in today's world where work is an important source of one's identity. They not only desire work based identity but also need it. Work is a source of money, confidence and a refuge against all inconsistencies of life and relationships. My respondents said that they want to balance work and home and involve their husbands more in parenting. An interesting pattern that emerged in the working mothers' narrative is in tune with Gerson's idea of "Breadwinners are good mothers". A few of these women I met believe that children should grow up around independent mothers and must understand that work and financial independence not only adds to a woman's experience but also to her happiness and confidence. Their children should appreciate and respect their mothers not just as mothers but as individuals in their own right. They believe that one of the ways in which gender inequality can be reduced is for the next generation to see more examples of working mothers who are doing a good job of both parenting and career. They would be more effective is questioning conventional gender roles and stereotypes and that would be possible only when their socialisation is different from their parents.

Below are excerpts from my respondent Chhaya's narrative. She is a 39 year old professional who is heading the HR[45] team of an American FMCG company in Gurgaon. She lives with her nine year old daughter, husband and has employed a full time maid and a nanny.

> M: What are some of the differences that you see between your mother and yourself as a mother that you have felt?

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[45] Human Resources

R: There is guilt and lot of anxiety around the time we are able to spend with the kid. I think at least for me and my peers, the guilt is there but it is not like it is killing me every day. Second, I am equally conscious that I need to have a positive and happy mood and life, only if I am happy will my home environment be happy and positive and to be so, I have to do certain things in life. The children are extremely perceptive even before we express ourselves. So the emotional aspect is useful to develop a mind reservoir for the future. That's my own belief. So I go out with my girlfriends' evening outings, I will travel for a day to three days outstation with my best friend from school. I will miss my daughter, but I do enjoy myself as well. So I feel bad, guilty but I am not succumbing to it. For us, beyond a point, I don't want continued support from the family. I would much rather hire people who will be able to provide me services and not put all responsibilities on the grandparents.

I feel that women now at certain level, have been working in the industry for a long time have made a choice and they have been living with it. So they are not necessarily obsessing about how do I make it up, pamper the child and be drowned in guilt. In case they have supportive spouse, which a lot of women today have, they don't feel any huge pressure that oh my god, I do all the worlds work, I have all the possible pressure and all that. The whole story of women playing many roles and all on their heads is all on its ebb and for a certain section of women, is a thing of the past. Like for me or for my peers and cousins, this is not true anymore, so this is over. My best friend from school, she went abroad for office work for 9 months, left her 4 year old child with her husband over here, so it was like the child has to stay with the dad, I have got a good opportunity in Switzerland and it will take me to the next level in career and it is good exposure and I can't miss it. So she is a high potential person in the company. However in smaller towns it is very tough today as well.

M: Okay

R: See, we live in a condominium where there are all kinds of people. On weekends some women I meet at the playground where the kids play. We have *Diwali* and *dusshera mela*[46]. So sometimes you see the most modern looking women well dressed and all with the most regressive thoughts. You can sense some of these. So they say things like *hum apne baccho ka sara kaam apne haath se karte hai* (We do everything for our kids with our own hands). Oh you are going for a five day trip to Bangalore,

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[46] *Diwali* and *Dusshera* are Hindu calendar festivals celebrated across the country and *mela* is fair in Hindi

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what about your family? So they look down upon you and often judge you. But the working women like me have made their choice and found their balance.

I asked her own approach to parenting, the ways in which she spends limited time she has and her concerns when it comes to her daughter. To this she said:

R: There is a shortage of time for me and there are so many things that I want to teach her. Most people fuss about that including me. I feel that I don't have time for all these things. Either you are taxing or stretching yourself or letting it pass on certain occasions or sometimes turning a blind eye towards a few things. So net net it's a void. However, I am confident that in the long run it won't be a problem and the child will emerge the winner. By virtue of the affluence, it will fetch her the exposure and opportunities. Since I have the money, I could go for Olympics in Atlanta or in Rio. I could go for a birthday party for my daughter to a museum as opposed to a frozen theme party, not because it is snob value but for the experience and what she will learn in it along with fun. Eventually, time and life will equalize and exposure wise I am confident that working moms' kids will possibly be ahead in the longer run, in immediate term it is a concern for many. Though this may not be true in terms of character or moral values.

Also working moms remain relevant to a child's life for a longer time. If I take the example of my mother and compare that to my *bua* (paternal aunt), who is working, I can see it. My mother gave up working after having the second child, my younger brother. I think my aunt is more involved with me in the sense that I can converse more with her and less with my mother simply because of her own horizon. Like I don't have to tell her about smaller details as she understands them like to tell her the experience of flying business class in Emirates while going to Dubai, I didn't have to explain as she has done that already. So she has been working and has travelled. But for my mother it is different, so there is this intangible gap. Like in the beginning the housewives give more time and exposure to their children because of the initial time you spent. I have seen that later when they grow up, they can relate to you better if you have some experiences of work, travel, other exposure. When both parents earn, you have more savings which you can use to buy more experiences and hence exposure, especially after your children have grown up and you have cleared off all your loans. So the more exposure you gather, the more discussion points you have with the children which leads to greater bonding over a longer time period. Moral character is not what I am talking about. Working women's kids due to greater exposures and for more bonding as a result, could possibly be a step ahead, though the moral aspect we

don't know much about as it depends on more time, care, more parental control, etc but we still don't know such things for certainty.

She feels that work and associated identity that she derives from it is an asset to her and women like her, especially in her role as a parent. Work offers her wider experiences which she can tap into to impart wisdom to her child and this kind of an exchange is something that the child would value when she grows up. For a long time, Indian traditions and norms did not enable women to go out in the world and experience it in their own ways. As a result, they could not acquire worldly wisdom, ideas about the ways of the world which was easily known to a man. The gender roles in parenting were conventional and there was a clear division between men and women, men being the provider and one who imparted worldly wisdom while women providing care, love and being the emotional core. Now it is a changed scenario wherein both parents can perform both aspects of child-rearing. In this narrative, Chhaya has not moved away from her traditional role as a mother, as one who provides care and warmth, but she is also in a position to guide her child in other respect, just as she expects her husband to offer both. This kind of an interchangeability of roles is something that she finds fair, just and hallmark of modern life.

6.12 FATHERHOOD TODAY

Why are some fathers more involved than others? Could it be because of factors like social class, education, being raised by working mothers? While identifying factors would require a full-fledged research which is beyond the scope of this work, but there were some certain factors that came to the fore which I will discuss in this section. Haywood and Ghaill (2006) argue that gender can be used to understand wider social transformations and gender shifts can be identified within issue such as work-life balance. There is a new gender settlement within the context of late modernity in contemporary capitalist societies. Men's lives have changed owing to entry of women in the workforce, especially in the service sector where there are debates around feminization of work, thereby causing a change in power structures. There are academic debates around collapse of stable masculinities in the context of service sector which has witnessed division and mobility of labour which needs to be mapped within changing meanings of paid work. This is a reality shaped by globalisation, among other factors, wherein there are new forms of global

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communication systems and diverse family forms. "Gendering of parenting" is employed as a concept by the above authors where the role of the mothers are seen to be central to parenting while the fathers' role is side-lined assuming that they have always been less involved.

For a long time, institution of family is seen in two ways in the west. One, it is a safe haven from the inconsistencies of world of work and other in which family itself is in crisis as men and women are trading places and doing away with stable male-breadwinner and female – caregiver roles. If I try to see its utility in the Indian context, I would argue that both these tendencies are visible in the lives of my respondents. Family is viewed as refuge from the chaos of the outside world. On the other hand, because of women's entry into the world of work, traditional gender roles are being questioned. However, it may not be as much a real change as it is a modification or in some ways, continuity wrapped in new a logic and rationale.

In the media and popular culture, one can find images of the sensitive father, the one who is more involved and active in parenting. According to VanEvery (1995), there are men who are involved in childrearing and seem to challenge traditional patriarchal roles. However, the responsibility of childcare and housework does not go together for men, unlike women. Marsiglio (1995) argues that structure of workplaces, career demands, aspirations affect men's experience of fatherhood. Both in academics and in larger society, childcare, flexi-hours and parental leave seem to be women's issues but they are actually parents' issues. In India, social class and caste are factors that affect 'good/ present/ involved' father and bad/ absent/ uninvolved' father imagery. Men's perception of their roles as fathers depend on the condition that if his primary responsibility in family is seen as a financial provider, then his role as father would be different than cases where the husbands have adjusted to the realities of their wives' careers. Marsiglio (1995) also argues that fathers' commitment to parenting (other than the role as provider) may not be realised or expressed due to workplace norms which may overtly or covertly place more value or give more importance to career. There are specific messages regarding the gender roles, norms and expectations from a workplace. There are workplaces which encourage fathers to be more active in caregiving while there are organisations where the subtle message is that fathers have the primary role as financial provider and the more they work hard and earn, the better fathers they will become. Today in India, one sees media images of caring, emotional

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and involved fathers who have no difficulty in pushing the pram or feeding the child. A latest ad of Raymond shows a glamorous, young, working mother feeling torn by having to go for work leaving an infant behind and then emerges the father who is chose to stay back at home to attend to the child. Needless to say, caste and class are important variables which impinge on these social realities. Often class and gender are superimposed on each other. For instance, upper class families may have fathers who are sensitive, liberal, who take to care-giver roles more easily than the working class fathers whose masculinity is intrinsically tied to their role as a provider, to their role as hard manual workers. It is possible emotions such as care, warmth and love are seen to weaken the image of ideal masculinity.

The fathers I spoke to felt that they are more involved in the lives of their children than their own fathers. They did not shy away from changing diapers, feeding the kids, reading them stories or making them do activities while their wives were out on work. They feel that times have changed and so have fathers. Some of them believe the kids are closer to them than their mothers. In most cases I encountered, the fathers were more relaxed and less authoritarian or less of a disciplinarian than the mothers. However, as Haywood and Ghaill (2006) argue, increasing role of fathers in non-provider roles are not accompanied with share in domestic work which is a given for mothers. Becoming flexible with gender roles and offering a helping hand comes as a result of these realities. Some of the single men I met told me that they cannot afford to marry a non-working woman. One, they do not find such women interesting and confident. Second, they would be financially dependent on them and they do not have the means to provide for them forever. They come from humble middle class families. While their mothers were not all working, those times were different. When I probed further, they said that their fathers had more stable jobs than what they can dream of having today so they did not have to worry about dependent wives. Also, working women were few and far between due to several constraints surrounding women in general. While all of them hope to become involved fathers in their future, they were not sure of domestic chores. Also, they expect their future wives to take the lead be it domestic responsibilities or parenting and they would provide supporting roles.

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6.13 CHANGES OR CONTINUITIES?

Smitha Radhakrisnan (2009) uses the idea of "respectable femininity" in the context of IT industry she researched on in Bangalore. This kind of femininity is not in conflict with traditional values around gender roles. For instance, women have to constantly negotiate the dual expectation of being successful in career, bringing in the money for running the household alongside being family oriented, taking care of elders and children without compromising either. So one has to be professional, competitive, hard working in the world of paid professional work without all these values interfering with roles within the family. Several respondents I interviewed said that ideal femininity demands much more today than it did a few decades back. However, it is more nuanced. This act of balancing the two worlds is seen with pride. The interesting thing here is they feel they have slightly tilted things in their favour which are as follows:

First, they make efforts to involve their husbands in the household work and childcare activities. While some husbands volunteer to help out, others have to be told or instructed on what to do, meaning that the initial thought and planning is done primarily by the women. They know the nature and extent of help they want and can expect from their spouses. When they get it, they often feel obliged or grateful for it. Second, they outsource domestic and childcare work. In this, the role of the grandparents, domestic help, nannies, day-care are central to the act of balancing parenting and work roles. Some of them feel guilty about the outsourcing of responsibilities which the think is primarily theirs, others have trained themselves to not feel so and get on with it. Third, they make efforts to take out more time for themselves. This includes activities like meeting their own friends, going out for lunch or dinner with colleagues and friends, organising in-home parties and so on. All this requires an understanding between the spouses, often it takes years to come to this understanding of the need for individual space and importance of leading their individual lives. Fourth, they participate in activities other than those related to work and home – develop or revisit hobbies, join a gym, dance or fitness class, learn some art form, try out a new sport with friends or with their own children, travel with friends or in a women-only travel group.

While the above instances point to new ways of rearranging and readjusting traditional roles to fit new roles and some possibilities of breaking free of stereotyped

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gender roles, there is a limit to reworking of conventional gender-roles. In the words of my own respondents, women feel blessed or lucky to have an understanding and helpful husband, a caring father for their children. All the planning, coordination, adjustments to be made are spearheaded by women and only followed by the men. The onus is on the women, even though the change is that they can expect, sometimes demand their spouse's help. So motherhood among the new middle class professionals is almost like trying to achieve some kind of perfection: be perfect as a mother; in addition to having a perfect job, be a perfect wife and have a perfect house. This translates into pressures and anxieties around performance.

> Qualitative studies suggest why time allocated by mothers to childcare may remain the same or even increase despite their greater paid work effort. Sharon Hays describes what he calls the cultural contradiction of modern motherhood: Mothers assume the co-provider role but still feel compelled to be "all giving" and "ever available" to their children. Mary Blair- Loy analyses a schema of "devotion to family" that competes with" devotion to work even among high-income professional mothers who are most heavily invested in their jobs. Being a good mother, devoted to one's children, is a core identity that does not change when women take on more hours of paid work. As adults, especially highly educated adults, postpone parenthood and have smaller families, they may be planning their childbearing for a point in life when they want to devote time to parenting (Bianchi 2011:20).

There are continuities in a new form or with a new rationale in place. Carol Vincent (2004) in her work *Metropolitan Mothers: Mothers, Mothering and Paid Work* writes:

> It is possible to identify a variety of responses amongst our respondents as they sought to resolve what Hays (1996) calls the "cultural contradictions of motherhood" arising from two opposing logics, that of the private family sphere and that of the public marketplace. Some of the women had chosen to give up paid work, others shortened their hours and slowed the pace of their careers. The vast majority had adapted their careers in some way (p 10).

This is true in my own research. Most of the mothers at some point in their career either left their job or had taken up part time work or worked as a freelancer or a consultant which had flexi-hour arrangement. The decision was taken based on their family income. In most cases, the husbands were earning more than the wives so they continued to work while the wife stayed back and took care of the home and child. In

some cases where it was not clear who earned more, the women said that they identified that the mothers' role is central to child-rearing so it is beyond any doubt that they would step back and take on the primary role of caregiver. The 'choice' in this case and the gendered nature of the division of labor or parenting responsibilities are interlinked. Choice is made and exercised but it stems from a belief that is a result of gender socialization which implants the views that women and men have differentiated roles and responsibilities and that they are necessary and natural. Certain things have not changed. While my own respondents did not offer a direct critique of their husband's absence from domestic and childcare related work, they did talk about such instances using the language of third person:

> In my friend's case, it is different from mine. Her son is extremely naughty. The husband is actually almost absent. As in even we haven't seen him in the last two years so he has no contribution. He comes back late in the night. She is a woman who has done her MBA, she is dying to join back work, but she is unable to do anything because he is not a support at all. She is very open about it. Like she says that she is his mother and the child only has a mother. Father is practically absent and I don't think he even wants to be there. He never helps her out. My husband is way more involved. He never skips the PTMs (Parent-teacher meetings), even if he has to take a leave for it. He is even interested in how we should make my daughter's hair and all (smiling).

6.14 CONCLUSION

6.14.1 The Inconsistencies, Ambiguities and the Coping Strategies in Contemporary Parenting

There is a significant difference between India and western world when it comes to parenting due to different and distinct ecosystems that prevail in the two cultures. Western culture, norms, practices, beliefs and institutions are geared towards individualism and the value is put to practise when their children are expected to leave home when they turn 18. In Indian context, it has been argued that the middle class subject by nature is Indian but is obsessed with the global (Kumar 2011). The whole idea of strictness may not mean domineering or restrictive in the Indian cultural context. However, there is a significant control over children's lives by the parents. But, certain things have changed. For instance, children of the new middle class urban professionals are uncomfortable with overt authoritarianism. Parents mentioned how sensitive their children are to tone of voice. They do not like to be compared with

their peers, they do not like when their parents raise their voice or express anger. They are vocal about what displeases them. This, they say is different from their own childhood when they were less vocal and they shared a more formal, hierarchical relationship with their parents.

One of the biggest inconsistencies that have emerged from my research is that parents find it difficult to balance between dependence and independence when it comes to their relationship with their children. Varenne (1996) looks at changing families in terms of roles, structure and emotions in the context of UK and argues that there is democratisation of the family which has changed the authority structures in it. Families today are caught between discourse of dependency and needs and that of individualisation and rights. My respondents look up to western standards in parenting where the kids are treated as individuals who have choices, freedom and are able to develop their talents in the ways they want to. They want their children to be opinionated, to reason, to debate, eventually become responsible for their own actions. They want them to be exposed to a variety of hobbies and activities so that they develop different talents and skills. Focussing just on academics is passé. That is what the typical middle class Indians do, which is what their parents had done. They need to be different because the changing times, the global and cosmopolitan urban life demands it. However, they are aware of the pitfalls of western culture such as excessive individualism, social distancing from family and friends, breakdown of families, children being exposed to divorce in their childhood and so on. These fears make them look for Indian cultural values that would keep their children grounded and simple. They want the best of both worlds, they want to balance tradition and modernity, which is challenging. For instance, they want their own parents to be involved in childrearing process, they want them to pass down Indian values to their grandchildren. But when the grandparents question certain actions of their grandchildren, parents find it interfering or sometimes old-school. So they don't know where to draw the line.

It seems there is no given template that these new middle class parents today can follow. There are so many sources of information, lots of opinion floating around; the internet and social media is flooded with blogs and articles on what modern day parenting should be like. All of this results in some amount of confusion. Parenting is laden with anxieties of different kinds. There is a performance pressure of sorts, the

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fear of being judged, the fear of their children losing out on things, the fear of their children not performing well in school and extra-scholastic activities which could jeopardise their future. Parents are always judged, they can never be fully right and this is reinforced by the media and the experts. The attention given by parents to their children is either too much or too little. Media images are replete with the messages that emphasize on the need for parents to be modern and for them to have a life of their own. But one does not know the right amount of indulgence – too much is seen as spoiling and too little is seen as not enough pampering. I observed that one of the ways in which the confusion is met is meticulous planning, strict time-management and rigorous execution of set routine both for themselves and the children.

Nita Kumar (2011) has argued that there is a certain kind of 'production of middle-classness' among and by children and that the home, the family, the school and the workplace all contribute to it. One of the keys to mobility from the lower class to the middle class is the attention given to children. The discourse of self-sacrificing mother and the dutiful progeny is a typical middle class phenomenon. The entire family's schedule is planned around the child's academic and other requirements. She argues that time and support to the child is crucial. Whatever is seen as useful for the child changes with time and context but the reality remains that the devotion to the child is unquestioned. Here I would like to add that while most of it is true, among the new middle class professionals, the discourse of self-sacrificing mother and dutiful progeny is not relatable anymore. They say that they were brought up with these values and their own mothers lost themselves in their children and family's interests. However, while today's parents do everything for the child and are particularly attached to the growth and learning of the child, they do not want to see themselves as sacrificing parents. Their discourse of parenting is what one may call enjoyable parenting and parenting-as-choice. They believe that their success as parents is tied to their success in their career and in pursuing their own hobbies and interests. They want to give their children the best without compromising on their own dreams. They look up to people who are good at their own work, have made a mark for themselves in their professions, have travelled the world, fulfilled their desires and are able to use their experiences in becoming good parents. They want their children to look up to them for what they have achieved outside of the domestic life.

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At a general level, there is an expression of lament over the loss of innocence, simplicity and togetherness within families today when compared to their parents' time. People do hint at parenting being collaborative in the past and not as individualistic as it is today. All the responsibilities be it at work or at home lies on the individual. So on the one hand parents want to spend more time with their children, want to be closer to their friends, but their current reality forces them to live apart from each other. They want to better balance their career and home but perpetual work pressure and deadlines leave them with little time for their families or themselves. They imagine their children to be free from any pressure, to fly high but their current lives are totally organised and regulated.

CONCLUSION

The objective of my research was to understand the nature and dynamics of work in contemporary corporate service sector and the ways in which it influences and is influenced by lifestyle and interpersonal relationships. The idea was to offer a qualitative, micro perspective based on subjective experiences of my respondents for which the focus was further narrowed to include two kinds of profiles – single (never married) professional men and women and dual career couples with children. Like in an inductive approach, I did not set out with a hypothesis to be tested but arrived at the areas that I deep dived into only after spending some time in the field. Unmarried professionals were talking about marriage and their apprehensions around it; married ones spoke about the challenges they faced in balancing work and parenting roles. This emerged in the course of our initial round of interactions about work and life in general. As I listened to the audio tapes and planned my subsequent rounds of fieldwork, I realised that certain specific areas of their lives were coming up in the discussions more than others and I began to feel that they deserved more attention. Accordingly, the narrative interviews began with focus on very specific events and experiences after initial few months of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews provided a width of information owing to the variety of context-setting questions that needed to be asked such as questions around their childhood, family background, education, work-life, interpersonal relations within and outside family.

As Bourdieu (1984) had argued, the middle class calls for practices of consumption that marks one's social identity as distinct from lower social groups. There is planned expenditure in expensive gadgets such as phones, on branded apparel and white-goods, buying a car and simultaneous efforts made to not come across as too flashy. As I have argued earlier, my focus is on a specific sub-class within the new middle class. They own or hope to own fancy homes with "cosmopolitan aesthetics" and move in social circles in which brand consciousness is high but there is an effort to downplay it (Srivastava 2015). They have means to hire maids, nannies, drivers, cooks, gardeners to help them manage their lives and homes and as Qayum and Roy (2015) has argued, the cultural changes in the middle class gets clearly reflected in changes in the servant management techniques. They are active with the use of latest

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technology gadgets, internet and are mostly active on social media. As a student of sociology I read up on the literature on middle classes in India and wanted to explore the idea of working on a fine-grained qualitative offering in order to make some sense of the experiences of being middle class. As Baviskar and Ray (2016) have argued, the new middle class subjectivities are produced in certain sites such as economy and educational institutions and this research has looked at the workplace and the home.

Baudrillard (1998) argues that modern reality is in flux, our own identities, sense of self and our subjectivities are being transformed. Social life is influenced not only by economic forces but also by what he calls, signs and symbols, for instance media images which people respond to. Beck (1992) presented to us the idea of risk and uncertainty in modern life. Castells (2000) gave us with the concept of information society and network economy that influences different aspects of personal identities and everyday life. He argued that individuals in contemporary societies do not take identities from the past but they make them actively in their social interactions. I agree with the above theorists in their conceptualisation of contemporary societies. However, Indian context is different from the west. Though identity is in flux in urban cosmopolitan India and may be broken and reshaped in the process of social interaction, to say that past identities do not hold significance would not be applicable owing to importance of social factors like caste and religion.

I have already highlighted the social composition of the corporate sector which has shown that caste and class interact in complex ways to perpetuate social inequalities. Social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is the means that professionals use to negotiate the entry and growth in the corporate sector and these forms of capital are unequally distributed along caste lines. A Dalit or a Muslim candidate has a far lesser chance of making it to the corporate sector and growing in it as compared to the privileged castes (Jodhka, 2016). The social composition of the private sector is one in which minorities and marginalised communities form a miniscule percentage owing to the fact that there are no reservations in this sector and the requirements that organisations have for selection are such that it is not yet structurally feasible for underprivileged sections to accrue such qualification and skills.

SOME INSIGHTS AND QUESTIONS GENERATED BY THIS RESEARCH

Life Entails Risks and Their Constant Management

Risk calculation and management are an integral part of contemporary urban life in India. This kind of risk is similar to what Beck (1992) would term as risk in his work on modernity. These risks are brought in not by natural world but by changes in our societies. Marriage, for instance is like a risk calculation today in an uncertain social backdrop when seen from the perspective of white-collar corporate professionals. A person's job, irrespective of designation, entails risk of losing it. Life of a single professional woman living in a city away from home is a constant negotiation with challenges and risks that urban life poses for her. For parents, their child losing out on certain experiences is seen as a risk incurred which they want to evade. There is fear of their child missing out. To evade this, they devise different strategies. Financial risks are always in the backdrop more so in contemporary economic context of inflation, downsizing and technology replacing human labour making certain skills and roles redundant. The constant effort to perfect this management of life is fraught with tensions and anxieties. Parents often feel they are not good enough as parents. This attitude underlines the need to constantly balance and be perfect. People believe health is a risk owing to sedentary lifestyle, processed food, high toxicity levels in the air, water, food and increasing stress levels. Financial security is key to evading health problems. While there is no control that one has over the environment, one of the effective ways of addressing such problems is purchasing high-value health insurance policies.

Their Lives Offer Choices and Ability to Exercise Freedom

The other side of this seemingly bleak story is that people are not soulless, mechanistic nor are they trapped in a world they have no control over. This kind of an analysis of their situation would not do justice to their story. It is because they do not view their lives like that. There is always room for freedom. There are choices at every juncture that are available to them and there are different ways to offer resistance to things that may overpower them. For instance, single women living away from their families in the city use the means and the autonomy that paid work provides them to counter the challenges that traditional gender roles pose to them. For

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parents, their educational qualification and financial means enable them to change cities to opt for a school with quality education yet middle-class values if they find that their child's school is extravagant. Some parents opt out of multiple, pressure inducing, plethora of activities that other parents around them put their children through. They feel they will have enough savings to support their children even if they do not get top grades or high paying jobs in the future. In the sphere of work itself, freelancing, consulting, start-ups offer people means of subverting the domination of big corporations which provides them money but leaves them with no time, ill-health and neglected relationships.

Owing to improvement and constant upgradation in information and communication technologies, two different things are happening. On the one hand people are losing jobs, especially in software and IT industry or their skills are becoming redundant because technology is fast changing and skills required to work with it needs to be updated which is not happening as quickly. On the other hand, individual professionals can provide competition to big organisations because in a client-servicing business, an employee of an organisation and a freelancer with same qualifications and experience can provide similar expertise and skills to the clients. A freelancer would charge way less compared to an organisation for similar scope and nature of services. In a profit-driven cut-throat market, clients are more likely to opt for solutions that make business sense to them. While the uncertain nature of part-time work under flexible capitalism has been pointed out by theorists as having a negative consequence for people's sense of self, some of my respondents look at it as freedom from exasperating 12 hour work-shifts.

Their Lives Reflect a Constant Interplay of Privileges and Anxieties

Consumption is an important activity through which new middle class members move up to achieve their aspirational status. Failure to do so may result in being ousted from one's aspirational social location, something which these people cannot afford to do. As my chapter on lifestyle has depicted, having to keep up with monthly EMIs alongside maintaining a certain lifestyle that includes managing servants, going on international vacations, owning cars, expensive gadgets, schooling of children in the city's best private/ international schools induce insecurities in the face of unstable nature of work. While these are the challenges, the same work and lifestyle enable them in a country in which unemployment is rampant and inequality between rich and

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poor is alarmingly high. It includes the ability that paid work and high disposable income provides to individuals to explore life on their own terms, meet new people, marry when they are comfortable and help old parents with financial assistance. Working couples with children feel that the exposure to different activities and experiences that their current lifestyle gives their children would make them better geared to face an uncertain and possibly a lonelier future. They envisage the future to be more competitive, cut-throat, one in which social distancing between people could increase. Though they are attached to their families, they feel that growing nuclearisation in Indian cities and distancing of children from their extended families could make it more difficult for the next generations.

New economy jobs require different forms of cultural capital such as educational qualification, lifestyle codes, cultural knowledge, interest in certain hobbies such as travel and art, fluency in spoken English and so on. This reworks caste inequalities through some of these nuanced social codes. For those who don't yet have it, there is feeling and experience of exclusion which results in additional challenges in being part of the world they aspire to belong to. Some of my narratives show process of acquiring these codes as a result of exposure to the new economy jobs. This process of acquiring or imbibing is not one which is ever a smooth sail. It is fraught with inconsistencies which has been an underlying theme in all my chapters.

Work Entails Learning the Art of Impression Management

This research has been about both changes and continuities. It is largely about general processes and tensions of change. The aspirations of corporate professionals reflect a desire or a longing for being part of global Indian middle class in which there is an adjustment with traditions and imbibing of modernity. The transnational new middle class habitus comprises of "managerial thinking" (Murphy, 2011) and the notion of "self as enterprise" (Kelly, 2013). My research demonstrates that there is a need to constantly subscribe to it through performance of the self in specific ways. This managerial thinking and rationality is an intrinsic part of this habitus which calls for a certain kind of mindset and behaviour. It includes art of branding and presentation of self, akin to what Kelly (2013) calls as the cultivation of the self as an enterprise which is a lifelong activity that gives meaning, purpose and direction to life. This presentation entails certain actions such as branding of self, selling one's skills, time and mind to secure one's job. Among other things, it also includes seizing

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opportunities, minimising risks and constantly seeking more. These values acquired at work are exhibited both at and outside work.

Work provides a capacity to engage across space and cultural gap and a habitus is formed to perform the role of a service provider in the global market which influences other aspects of life. This goes beyond technical skills, dressing style and manner of speaking English as I have highlighted in my chapters. Ideas of performance, success, achievement, perfection and participation in a global aspirational lifestyle has penetrated culture and psyche through various means like workplace, images of global media and advertising industry. The entire ecosystem that surrounds the people involved in this kind of work-ethic is geared towards this worldview where selfhood is often equated to having/ owning and performing (it is important to not just have the means but to exhibit it in a manner that would help people network, be noticed and create a positive impression without which it is not possible to excel in this world).

There is Blurring of Boundaries between Work and Leisure

This thesis has presented the aspirations of corporate professionals around desired lifestyle and the challenges that they face in the process of achieving them. We know that there is a bombardment of stereotyped images about aspirations and lifestyle and the central notion of free-consumer in popular culture and media. This is done through manipulation of needs. One's image that is created at the workplace is sustained by activities that define one's lifestyle through practices of consumption. Work often reinforces a worldview which is shaped by the capitalist commodification of culture and hegemony of ideas around free consumer, choices and lifestyle. This worldview places importance to material goods, certain kinds of lifestyle experiences and values such as success and perfection. There is a blurring of boundaries between work and leisure. The way people behave outside work is linked to their performance and evaluation at work. I have provided examples from certain professions where this was evident.

Some Changes, Some Continuities

There seemed to be a conflict of interest among single men and women due to changing expectations around marriage. Financial considerations play a significant role in the lives of both but in different ways. Men coming from a particular social location find expectations of working women unreasonable when it comes to their

financial status while the single women are apprehensive of men's lack of contribution to domestic responsibilities. Both genders have apprehensions around marriage and question the institution in the face of other possibilities. They are concerned about losing their freedom. They are currently readily available to take on additional work, work on weekends, travel on a short notice. However, they are unsure if they would be able to offer themselves as much to their work after marriage. This is particularly true for the women. However, being single might offer freedom but it also provides challenges especially to women living away from family.

We have looked at the narratives of parenting among dual career couples. There seems to be an inconsistency between western and Indian norms when it comes to parenting, for instance the constant struggle to balance independence and dependence as values that children grow up with. Parenting is an individual effort and not as collaborative as it used to be in the past in the presence of extended kin and neighbours. Parents want the best of both worlds in terms of values they want their children to imbibe – the individual freedom of the western culture and the family embeddedness of the Indian culture. There is no given template to follow because people have drifted away from traditional values and not yet fully imbibed the western norms of individualism. There is production of new middle classness which is a hybrid of tradition and modernity, of control and freedom and of dependence and independence. Parenting is like a mega corporate project that needs to be well managed, perfectly executed just like work based responsibilities. There are lots of choices on values, experiences, ideas around modern-day parenting that they can chose from which leads to confusion. To some extent, this confusion is evaded with meticulous planning of routine of the child and their own, regimentation and constant effort to mitigate risks. It is considered very important for the children to succeed in the new economy. Attention devoted to children's education and extra scholastic activities is a marker of social class. However, the idea of a self-sacrificing parent no longer has as much acceptance as it did in the past.

Every research has certain limitations as it is not possible to address all aspects of a subject matter in one research. A piece of research throws up ideas for future work. Getting an entry into corporate office space was a challenge. I could not conduct as much observation of the workplace as I was eager to despite repeated efforts owing to privacy/ confidentiality related company policies. They are framed to preserve data

companies have or generate owing to intense market competition and lack of trust as an inherent feature of modern life. There can be interesting research on the corporate sector from the vantage point of the workplace as one would do in a close-site ethnography.

This thesis has a small section on children of dual career couples in chapter 5. This is an interesting area that calls for detailed exploration and I intend to develop it in the future. I believe this could be a full-fledged research that calls for singular attention in which one can aim to understand the lives of children raised in dual career, time deprived households with material abundance and rising aspirations.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that there is a domination of upper castes in different sectors within the private corporate world[47]. However, there does exist a slowly growing, albeit very small segment from the marginalised communities who have managed to make an entry here. It is probable that this is facilitated further by the possibilities of formation of start-ups, of freelancing or consulting with companies without having to go through the formal recruitment procedures which could be discriminatory in practise when it comes to recruitment. I have argued earlier that most big MNCs go to elite colleges for campus placements thereby closing doors for majority of the marginalised caste groups even if they are college educated. With instances of skilled young people aspiring to start their own businesses in the form of start-ups slowly growing, it may be possible that these possibilities can accommodate people from diverse social backgrounds though these possibilities are also dependent on one's social and cultural capital. The situation on the ground needs to be understood. There is potential for research on the qualitative changes that have come about in the lives of people belonging to marginalised castes and minority religions with their entry into this sector. It would be interesting to understand their past, their family backgrounds and their current life experiences of both inclusion and exclusion into the corporate world.

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[47] Fuller and Narasimhan (2006), Fernandes (2006), Upadhay (2007), Jodhka (2016) have elaborated this fact in their research among the new middle class in general and private sector employees in particular.

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