Chapter 5

Tug of War\textsuperscript{13}: Single women and The Family

This chapter is based on the women’s narratives gathered through the interviews. Single migrant women working in BPO and media industry were interviewed for the study to gain an understanding whether the apparent changes occurring in their life with greater education and employment in non-traditional industries is indicative of change in the normative gender relations or not. The attempt in this chapter is to present the empirical evidence of the respondents’ articulation of their agency and how they use their agency in varied forms with various domains like family, work, romantic relations, community and city at large. The chapter is descriptive in order to give sufficient details out of which the conclusions have been drawn.

The coding frame for data analysis can be developed based on two approaches: theory driven, constructed from the theoretical framework adopted, or the research questions, or it can be data-driven, emerging from the details of the empirical data Tesch, 1 0 . The analysis of the interviews began with the research questions as the basis of analysis. The study was conducted to understand how single migrant women perceive and enact their agency and the change which is occurring in their relationship with family, at the workplace, within the community and other relationships. An attempt has also been made to understand the influence of economy and culture on women’s agency. The coding frame which was developed was based on the questions which the study sought to answer and also on the data which was generated from the in depth interviews with the single migrant women working in BPO and media industries.

\textsuperscript{13} Tug of war is the fourth solo studio album by Paul McCartney, released in 1982
The interviews were structured to understand their experiences in various domains of family, work, romantic relations, community, Mumbai city and their aspirations. The analysis of the interviews started with the data driven process where the attempt was to understand women’s articulation of agency and use of their agency in everyday life. However, later in the chapter although I have also used the theory driven unit of analysis like segmentalised world, hybrid cultures; rational choices but gendered subjectivity, for which specific codes were defined by the data. The table below summarises the profile of women who were interviewed for the study.

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<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
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### 5.1 Single Women and the City

Mumbai, the financial capital of India, enjoys an established position in the BPO industry (despite gradual shift to Tier II cities), because of good infrastructure, favourable policies and large talent pool.\(^1^\) Also it has the distinction of being hailed as safer for women in comparison to other cities in India by several polls and internet surveys. This is attributed to cities’ resilience and respect for women along with infrastructure supportive of women’s mobility. TOI internet poll, Nov 29, 2005; Business Today, Nov 23, 2003) and has been a hot destination for single women to pursue career of their choice.

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\(^1^\) [www.globalservicesmedia.com/Destinations/India/Mumbai-India/25/18/901/general200910157557](http://www.globalservicesmedia.com/Destinations/India/Mumbai-India/25/18/901/general200910157557)
‘You know what I love the most about Mumbai, it’s the fact that I can travel in the city late at night on my own. This is unthinkable anywhere else.’ (Hetal, Customer Care Supervisor, 25 years)

“My mom is highly reassured, just because I’m in Mumbai.” (Anita, Customer care executive, 22 years)

Women interviewed for the current study perceive a sense of security and see this as an opportunity. The urban-ness of the city along with the perceived security of women seems to give them the anonymity and freedom – from restrictive norms of families and from perceived threat in public spaces, to navigate through the city. Urbanism has been hailed as a process that entails break down of rigid social structures, greater mobility, non-traditional behaviours (Wirth, 1938; Fischer, 1975). Women, who have moved out of their families based in other towns, to earn a livelihood by working in BPO or media industry, perceive that the urban-ness of Mumbai, apparently, has a diluting effect on social structures and normative culture. This, most often, seems to be perceived in reference to the source city, the city where they operated not just within the ‘unsafe’ environment, but were also under the scanner of family and the community. However, they fail to acknowledge that it’s not alone the city’s secured environment, which gives them mobility, but also the lack of ‘intimacy’ which allows them to remain anonymous in their day to day life. However, anonymity is not accompanied by ‘unconsciousness’ or lack of awareness about the individuals in the public space. Schocken (2003)\(^\text{15}\) gives city the credit of being a place that allows human beings to form relations with others at various levels of intimacy while remaining entirely anonymous a person should see people around him but know nothing about them. He uses the term ‘intimate anonymity’ to negotiate between anonymity, a

\(^{15}\)\url{http://www.intbau.org/archive/essay5.htm} downloaded on 7April 2008
resultant of heterogeneous community and the criticism of urbanism for alienation and lack of community.

Form and Stone (1957) suggest that individuals often assess the city and its people by relying on appearance, rather than reputation: status may be temporarily appropriated by the correct display and manipulation of symbols. The single women who navigate through the city landscape often seem to be using the strategy of projection.

The use of space by women is always associated with the utility of her presence in public spaces (Phadke, 2005). It is assumed that the presence of women has to be for a reason or a purpose. The increasing presence of women in public domain is perceived as a threat to the social fabric of the community and the society, thus reinforcing the need to ensure that women use the city for rational purposes at respectable hours of day or night.

Although, women working in BPO in graveyard shifts, may seem like an anomaly in a social environment, which inherently is against the presence of women in nightscapes reiterates that women are allowed in public spaces which have a specific utility. Women’s uninterrupted presence in the city landscape and nightscape is not an end in itself, but rather a means for attaining economic growth. As evident, the onus of woman’s security remains largely on the woman. Cases of violence against women are subjected to either scrutiny of the woman’s appearance (inclusive of clothing and accessories like bag and other things of utility) or are associated to the hour of the day or night. In a scenario, contradictory to popular belief, where violence against women is on the rise in Mumbai (Indian Express, June 14, 2010; BBC News, 2
January, 2008), it is left up to the women to negotiate their presence in the city through acceptable social means or symbols.

The city of Mumbai as earlier discussed is relatively considered a safe haven for women, but the cautious attitude of the city towards single women is evident in the way women are denied access to housing by several societies or buildings. As Phadke (2010) in her study indicates homogenous localities or societies scrutinize women more as compared to anonymous and heterogeneous neighbourhoods. There seems to be a pattern emerging for most single women who have moved to Mumbai for working in BPOs. When they arrive in the city they prefer staying in a paying guest (PG) accommodation, as they find the family (offering PG) and other women crucial to their support system. However, soon they tend to detest the surveillance, and then move out to comparatively independent units of housing within more anonymous neighbourhoods.

‘...initially it was alright, but soon I realized that it will be difficult to continue for too long... they would always be at my back and would want to know everything...’ (Vanessa, Casting Director, 27 years)

‘...the PG lady knew that I come at odd hours and one day I was getting really late, so I called them and told them...but when I reached they didn’t let me in...it was one at night, I kept begging them to let me in...they didn’t respond...I got so scared...finally...I took a cab to Boriavli from Navi Mumbai’ (Monica, Online news producer, 27 years)

In Mumbai, companies’ policy of pick and drop is exclusively for the night shift employees especially women to provide them safe environment. This is inconsistent with the practice of pick and drop which most companies provide to all their employees, at all hours in other cities like Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Gurgaon. The reason for this exception of Mumbai apparently is the deteriorating infrastructure which does not support fast road travel, along with the
assumption of the ‘safe environment’ tag which the city carries. However, several cases of violence against women employees bring to the fore their vulnerability (Bangalore rape case, 2005; Delhi rape case, 2010). The National Commission for Women laid out a guideline for the companies to ensure safety of women working in graveyard shifts. But time and again, it has been highlighted by several incidences of rape and murder, that neither companies, nor state feel obliged to create an environment supportive and encouraging women’s participation in night life. Infact, because of the important economic role of MNC’s, there’s no law or rule, which can thrust upon MNCs to utilize measures for ensuring women’s safety. Women tend to reproduce safety for themselves by appropriating strategies, which justify the rationale for their presence.

‘...while on my way back home I always carry a book to read. If you are busy, no one really bothers you’ (Tiara, Studio Manager, 26 years)

‘We have a pick and drop facility...nothing has happened till date, every time something happens to a BPO employee everyone around me freaks out...that way Mumbai is safer than other cities...’ (Saloni, Medical transcriber, 24 years)

Although there is a perception of being safe among women, none were able to identify why they are safer in Mumbai at night. Except for pick and drop facility, they did not seem to be aware of any other measure which the company takes to ensure their safety. It is not very surprising to note that the state’s response is that of increased surveillance by the company’s and expectation from women to reproduce safety.

Women who were interviewed for the study were single and had migrated from other towns and cities to Mumbai to work in the BPO and media industry. The fact that these women had the opportunity of moving away from parental home and stay in Mumbai on their own, suggest a definite shift in norms around mobility of women. Most studies around migration of women are
focused on women in care and domestic service industry and the focus has been on female labour and love in context of poverty (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). A few studies like that of Tswana women looked at female migrancy threatening ‘patriarchal control over women’ which valued women for their labour and the bridewealth (Cockerton, 2002: 37).

5.2 Constructing Self

At the beginning of the interview, women were asked to talk about themselves. Most respondents talked briefly about their profession, position and their duration of stay in Mumbai. This was obvious as they knew that I wanted to talk to them because they are single women who have migrated to Mumbai for work. Usually the sequence would be similar and any other details would not be shared till probed further. The cross case analysis of the introductory narrative was interesting as most women talked about their journey from their native place to Mumbai. This journey was not always from source town or city to destination, but in several cases was mediated by a transit city where the women either studied or worked.

Giddens (1991) says that in the post-traditional order, self-identity is not inherited or static; rather, it becomes a reflexive project – an endeavour that we continuously work and reflect on. It is not a set of observable characteristics of a moment, but becomes an account of a person's life. "A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor -important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort
them into the ongoing story about the self. Giddens, 1 1: He views individuals being actively involved in constructing their identity in a reflexive process.

Respondents’ narratives emanated out of their position as a single independent woman and set the tone for the rest of the narrative. The respondents’ attempted to ‘keep a particular narrative going’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 54, italics in original; Beck, 1992) as they initially established themselves as single independent women from good middle class families who received good education and parental approval and adoration.

Most respondents indicated that they hail from middle class families which are based in smaller cities or towns. Interestingly, the description of families – type of family, education of head of the family, type of employment, mother’s education, siblings and other aspects like financial status of the family varied, the perception of these women of their families fitted in the category of ‘middle class small town girl’. The ambiguity around the terms - middle class and small town, apparently give women the space to interpret it and use it as they perceive it. Women’s own judgement of being middle class and from small town is relative and also resonate with the popular discourse on small town dreams or middle class aspirations.

The depiction of small town middle class girl in Hindi films and serials seems to capture the imagination, aspirations and experiences of young women who make a shift from smaller towns to glamorous cities. Bipasha Basu played a Ranchi girl who makes it big as a model in Mumbai and finally abroad in Bachna Ae Haseeno, and Priyanka Chopra, a Chandigarh girl in Fashion, makes it to the Paris fashion runway. Popular serials like ‘Karam apna apna’, ‘chhoona hai
“aasaman’, ‘afsar bitiya’ and ‘Bunty aur Babli’ have packaged the theme of small town girls and their aspirations.

In pre-globalisation era the Indian middle class was uncertain of their future with higher reservation for backward caste and classes. After 1991, the new middle class derived power from the private sector which endorsed higher purchasing capacity and focus on the growth of economy and their aspirations (Ray, 2009). As Kocchar (2004: 20) explains ‘globalisation offered the middle class possibility of quota-free education in India and abroad and access to foreign consumer brands has appealed to the IMC the most’. The emphasis on middle class and small town is driven by the consumer markets and also hailed as the drivers of economic growth. Although there is no consensus on the definition of the Indian middle class, the available estimates by National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) vary between annual household disposable income of 200,000 and 1 million rupees (Deutsche Bank Research, 2010). It is evident that the middle class is no homogenous group even though middle class.

The cities or towns which the respondents hail from varied from Tier II cities like Pune, Vishakhapatnam, Ranchi, Jaipur, Dehradun, Patna, Hyderabad, Kolhapur, Nagpur, Cochin, Agra, Ahmedabad, Madurai, Faridabad, Rajkot, Indore to smaller cities or towns like Yamunanagar, Bhagalpur, Rohtak, Thrissur, Srinagar, Chandrapur, Amravati, Warangal, Agartala, Shillong, Alwar, Purulia, Cuttack and Bhatinda. Since these women have moved to Mumbai the native city is referred to with reference to Mumbai. The construction of smaller cities or towns in the language of these women varies and highlights aspects of life in Mumbai vis-à-vis pace of life, culture, work culture rather than size of the city or its population.
In their conception of city, the emphasis is on what the city offers them. It is the choice of lifestyle which is available to them, as against their native city and what they choose to do, which defines them as a middle class small town girl.

‘I am a middle class girl, our values are very different from the girls here...although life is fun here, at heart I will always remain a small town person, but that doesn’t mean that I’m conservative’ (Tishya, call centre executive, 24years).

‘I am from Rohtak...oh you know where it is, how come?... My family is there, it’s a small town, now it’s growing and you can find branded showrooms, but it’s very unlike Bombay... distances are not much, you can’t go out after it’s dark, but it’s nice, quiet and peaceful’ (Poonam, script consultant, 26years).

The narratives emerged in a process of constructing and evaluating lived experience, within the dominant discourse (Petrovic, 2003). It was evident that the respondents took pride in their small- town- middle- class- girl image as they are part of the recurring focus on emergence of small town India and middle class India in popular media. Many of them made it very evident that they have achieved the unthinkable as they have been able to live in a ‘fast paced city’ which is known for its ruthlessness and have survived to live a life on their own.

‘I have been working for almost four years in Mumbai. Since the time I left home I have managed on my own’ (Githa, Customer Care Executive, 24 years)

‘I came six years back and when I had come I didn’t know anyone in the city, I was completely on my own. But in these six years I have lived a life which I won’t have imagined otherwise’ (Sonal, Executive producer, 27 years)

Narratives like the ones given above were often marked with words like ‘on my own’ and an ‘unimaginable life’ or ‘dreams’ which are reflective of accomplishing and exploring a new way of life for themselves. The life which they are proud of achieving in Mumbai is in contrast to their lives in their native cities. Although it is obvious that the independence, which their move from the native city to Mumbai has entailed, was unimaginable in the native cities; it would be a
fallacy to assume that they did not have a reference point to aspire for the lifestyle. The key to these aspirations is also the images that are popular in media and discourse around ‘new-age woman’.

The other aspect of their lives with which the discussion started and was constantly brought into discussion, was that of them being single. The self-identification as a single girl and being independent emerged out of the introduction simultaneously. The ‘singleness’ in most cases was voluntary. Singleness was constructed as a choice which the women could make because they are independent and vice versa. Most respondents discussed their independence and singleness together. The consciousness that they are single and that is why independent did not deny that they are independent and that is why able to make their marital choices and also assert their single status.

‘I came to Mumbai when I was 22 years old, and I am 27 now and still single... I would have been married by the age of 24... but I am independent’ (Data Analyst, 28 years)

The singleness in case of these women was just a phase of life and it did not mean that they were not engaged in a romantic relationship. Singleness in case of these women was that they were not formally engaged or married and also resided in the city without any family member. In most cases the singleness of women was a temporary phase of life and they aspire to definitely move beyond that stage of life. Also in several cases where women were not in any romantic relationship, they aspired to be married within the marriageable age. The singleness of these women did not appear to be a matter of concern in the initial conversation. The social construction of the category of ‘single’ in India should be understood with reference to the changing meaning and the privileges and the sanctions it entails along with the discourse around
singleness (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). The historical reference and change in the discourse around singleness should also be referred to while discussing how the respondents of the current study constructed their singleness socially.

The account of some women of singleness, through the conversation, was that of singleness as a privilege which entails greater freedom and choices. This is in contrast to the sparse repertoire of literature on singleness which is available for reference. The studies in the West have focused on marginalisation of single women and how single women’s lives are shaped by differences. It is important to note that in most of these studies single women are never married women or who have not been engaged in a relationship (Chandler, 1991; Chasteen, 1994; Holden, 199616). The study by Eichenbaum and Orbach (1984) has critiqued the patriarchal normative assumption that women need to forge relationship with men to gain an identity through that relationship. In their study of single women, Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) describe singleness as either personal deficit, or as social exclusion, or as independence and choice and as self-actualization and achievement.

However, in my study almost all women except three who were above 30 years of age described their singleness as a choice which they made, assuming that eventually marriage will happen. The choice of being single entailed - greater freedom from social and familial control, greater mobility and lesser restrictions. This is also unlike single women who stay with family and have familial obligations and responsibilities, as in the case of single working women in Lebanon who

face work family conflict (Sidani & Hakim, 2011). These freedoms became stark and were valued more while reflecting on the contrasts with married women.

‘I’m single and I am not answerable to anyone... I have a life of my own... I see my colleagues who are married, they are so tied up’ (Saloni, Medical transcriber, 24 years)

It’s also important to mention that not all respondents thought that being single is a privilege. The difference in social construction of their singleness emerged while talking to three of the respondents who were above the age of 0 years which in common parlance is ‘crossing the marriageable age’. The experience of these women was almost a combination of Reynolds and Wetherell’s 200 categories of constructing singleness. Although they talked about independence and choice, they also talked about the negative attributes of singleness. All the three women described themselves either as lonely, or articulated a need to be part of family.

‘It’s nice to be single, but after a point you start feeling lonely’ (Gitanjali, Voice and Accent Trainer, 32 years)

‘I have had the most amazing years of my life... I love the way my life is, but at times one feels the need to share your life with someone’ (Fagun, Creative Director, 35 years)

Both these women celebrated their lives as independent and gave positive account of their life as a single woman, but it was apparent that they felt the need to be in a relationship which is socially expected and acceptable. Since the purpose was not to understand how singleness is constructed, the questions around singleness were limited to how it acts as an influence on the agency of women. Here, it’s important to acknowledge that loneliness and fear of being left alone without social support system emerged as substantial reasons for the need to get married.

‘Honestly I never really made an effort... but now suddenly it seems like everyone around me is getting married...obviously people have their own lives; even with friends, things don’t remain the same’ (Priya, HR Manager, 31 years)
The realization of deficiency is in relation to the availability or rather unavailability of social support system and resources for coping in a hetero-normative society. The discourse on singleness in India is multi-layered as the images of single women in circulation ranges from Bipasha Basu – a popular film actor who is again single after a 10 year long relationship; to Maria Susairaj - an aspiring actor who allegedly with her boyfriend murdered the guy whom she was involved with for career gains. Although the popular TV serials start with a focus on single women, marriage is inevitable in which the age at marriage varies from early childhood as in case of ‘Balika Vadhu’ to late 0’s as shown in ‘Bade Achhe Lagte Hain’.

Popular media is strewn with images of women who are independent because they are single and can ‘have fun’ without any surveillance. The popular column on single women in news daily like Times of India – ‘Diary of a Single Girl’, projects a pleasure-seeking lifestyle which is a privilege of single women. The blog is a compilation of diary entries of a single girl who is a model and introduces her as:

‘Sonya is single, 20-something and sexy. Her day job is a model. She lives in Bombay but travels the world for her work -- shows and shoots. She is commitment phobic and cares a tuppence for what the society thinks or talks about her. When it comes to love and sex, this leggy ramp model has the attitude of a man. But she’s every bit a woman when you talk about the shopaholic she is. Shoes and lingerie are right up there on her list of addictions. She knows how to have a good time and, boy, does she know of how to give a good time too! Sonya lives life her way and has moved out of her folks’ place. She can party real hard and can drink a guy under the table. Gets along famously with men. The women, not surprisingly, don’t quite dig her’.

The description is that of a single woman living in Bombay without her family who has a glamorous career and resources to enjoy life. Interestingly, ‘have a good time’ is elaborated on as drinking, ‘getting along with men’ which the detailed blog describes as intimate multiple relationships, and commitment phobia. The emphasis in the descriptive introduction is on
seeking pleasure without being apologetic about it. Referencing and comparing her attitudes and behaviour with men is a reminder of the standards set for a woman who is single, successful and possesses means to seek pleasure in a hetero-normative society. It is not just the blog that is indicative of the normative culture, but the responses which range from being appreciative of Sonya’s honesty and calling her lifestyle liberating for women to questioning the liberal yardsticks and role models it creates.

The social construction of images of single women, the appropriate singleness and the marriageable age is diverse and the discourse around it is fractured across the country depending on class, caste, city, town or village and other factors like age and profession. Therefore, it will be unfair to generalize the emerging themes from the narratives of single women who have migrated to work in BPO and media industry. However, this does not in any way negate that, women who are engaged in industries which are non-traditional and entails them greater mobility helps them gain freer spaces and freedoms along with the opportunity to avoid the social pressure of marriage till the woman is considered marriageable thus increasing the age at marriage.

The construction of an identity for most respondents is a combination of what an individual knows about self and how they think others perceive them within a particular context and situation. Identities are transformed and understood continually within a world view, in an ‘ever changing kind of participation and nonparticipation, contexts for "belonging" and "not belonging" in communities’ Eckert and Ginnet, 11. Identities are also attached to the notions of acceptable norms of right-wrong, acceptable-unacceptable and the related values.
Schopflin 2001 refers to these as ‘a set of moral propositions that regulate values and behaviour, so that identity construction necessarily involves ideas of "right" and "wrong", desirable undesirable, unpolluted polluted etc.’ 1-2). Although these norms are made to look normal and timeless these are neither fixed nor definitive. Similarly, multiple discourses around single women staying without families in a metropolitan city have an ever changing set of norms and defines right-wrong, acceptable-unacceptable differently for each of them. These norms could even be divergent between the source and the destination city which they even acknowledge as in case of age at marriage or the level of mobility of single women. The discourses which surround these women help them have a collective understanding of the articulated values and norms. Therefore, it is not surprising to see all the respondents having a shared articulation of their identity as independent single women who are in Mumbai to pursue a career. The conception of self by the respondents was constituted in the understanding of the discursive field and practices. This is evident by the common and shared understanding and language which all the women exhibited irrespective of their location (Schopflin’s, 2001 Rhodes, 2003)

5.3 Articulating Agency in Everyday Life

While all women introduced themselves as independent and single, both these terms got complicated and contested as the narrative progressed. The introductory impressions about their lives were that of women with no constraints, who are free to pursue their career and also have a lifestyle which they deem appropriate. However, with progression of the interview, the fissures and inconsistencies of the narratives started to appear. The effort to keep a particular narrative going started giving way to multiple narratives, which were hybrid and fluid (Rhodes et.al.
This led to emergence of accounts of having to deal with various domains and actors like family, work, friends, boyfriend, neighbourhood and city on everyday basis.

The narratives of the women emerged in a process of constructing and assessing lived experiences. Most women made an attempt to normalize or standardize lived experiences by subjecting them to common-sense reasoning and self-judging. Lived experience is conceptualized as the practical activities of everyday life—what actually happens, what people do rather than as what they perceive. Dorothy Smith’s standpoint method suggests that it is in the lived experiences, where problems exist, questions are posed and answers provided. The knower who is actually located; she is active; she is at work; she is connected with particular people in various ways. Activities, feelings, experiences, hook her into extended social relations linking her activities to those of other people and in ways beyond her knowing (Smith, 1992:91).

Everyday life of single migrant women working in BPO industry is tied with their experiences as a single woman, migrant woman, working woman in the city which gives them opportunities to exercise their right as an individual to choose their lifestyle. But that gets enmeshed with their relationships vis-à-vis family, boyfriends, colleagues, friends, neighbours and city at large. The women articulated diverse strategies which they employ to deal in varied situations.

The physical distance from their family gives them the space to negotiate and wriggle through the surveillance which the family maintains. The respondents in most cases play up to the families need to know their daughters’ lives and keep them informed with only information that
is meant for their ears. As Anita, while talking about her mother, who wants to be friend with the daughter and wishes to know everything about her life, said

‘I call mummy every night, she basically wants to know once I reach home...but it doesn’t have to be (with a smirk)...it’s easy these days (twinkle in the eyes)’ (Anita, Customer care executive, 22 years)

The women see their move into the city as an opportunity to live the way they wish to - wear what they want to, maintain personal relations or romantic liaison and the freedom of unrestricted mobility. However, they do admit that surveillance by families never ceases to be. Most of them talk to their families at least twice a day and supposedly keep them informed about their whereabouts. This is interesting because although they want to be seen as responsible daughters of a respectable middle class family, they all admit to using mobile phones as a way to wriggle out of the boundaries. Patel (2010) in her work feels that mobile phone does little to challenge the underlying framework as its being used by families for surveillance, but what she seems to be missing out is the mobility which mobile phones accord to the woman, thus in some way gradually subverting the surveillance.

It is evident, in almost all cases, long distance parent child relationships are mediated through peer pressures, pressures of a new culture and also new technology. A shift is being observed in values of a culture where women are constructed as the spiritual, away from the world of ‘materials’ to the woman as an individual who indulges in seeking pleasure in the city culture.

‘I don’t want to hurt my parents, that’s why although I talk to them everyday I don’t really share with them everything...what do I not share with them? (laughs)...well nothing about my boyfriends, parties, drinking, late night clubbing, problems at work...oh my god...I know it sounds like I don’t tell them anything...but that’s not true...I mean what’s the point, when you know that they will get upset if they get to know ... there are times when I have been very blunt with my mom...there was some discussion around marriage and she was saying kids should at least fulfil parent’s dreams and marry by their choice...I told her don’t expect that...she blasted
me and then told dad and he also got upset... since then they keep asking me if I have a boyfriend... I decided there’s no point talking to them about these things... I mean I don’t have a steady boyfriend, I have a few close friends... I will deal with it when I will have to choose the guy for marriage’ (Hetal, Customer Care Supervisor, 25 years)

Like Hetal, most respondents demonstrate an understanding of their strategies to deal with parental and family expectations of a respectable girl and also reasons for their choice of strategy. Most of them articulate dissimulation as a strategy to ensure that families don’t get hurt and feel that only when ‘push comes to shove’ should one confront, otherwise parents start demanding clarity and also might enforce sanctions and women even fear losing family support.

**Illustrative Case I: Priya- Training Manager – 31 years**

Priya agreed to an interview in our first meeting when I walked into her office and by chance bumped into her and explained to her the purpose of the study. After following up for about a fortnight, we met at a posh joint in south Bombay which was suggested by her as she stays in Colaba. She has been in the city for almost 10 years and had come to pursue her masters in business administration (MBA), since then she has been in the city except a stint of 2 years in US. Her family was from business community in a small town in Rajasthan and she was an exception in her extended family where daughters are married off by the age of 20 years and sons get engaged in family business. Both her siblings – sister and brother were older to her and married when she came over to pursue a career. She was able to garner support from her grandfather (who was alive then), her siblings and mother. Even though her father was not keen, he relented and warned her against doing anything which will ruin the family name and told her that after her masters she will be married off by the family’s choice. At that point she ‘had no choice but to agree to all the diktats’.
While in her second year of masters she started dating a local guy from a Tamilian family. Although she knew the repercussions of this, she was confident that she will be able to convince her family. She was selected for placement by one of the leading BPO in Mumbai and she negotiated with her parents to stay on so that she can use her knowledge and skills which she had learnt. Her family came over to Mumbai to settle her down and her mother stayed with her. During her stay her mom figured out that she is up to something and confronted her. When she confessed her mom told her father and the whole family came over to take her back. It was only after intervention from her senior manager who was a woman that the situation slightly pacified.

Her manager promised that soon she will be transferred to Delhi and till then her mother decided to stay with her. In the meanwhile her grandfather expired and while her mom was away, she changed her flat and moved in with a friend to south Bombay. When her family got in touch with her, she challenged them and defied all there diktats. She told them that she will only marry her boyfriend and they can’t force her to come back home. After that her parents didn’t ever get in touch with her.

Later that year her company sent her to US for a year and she took it up to get away from the emotional stress which she was undergoing. Her boyfriend’s parents in the meanwhile started pushing him for marriage within the community and while she was away he got married as per his parent’s choice. This devastated her completely and she decided to stay on with the help of her management for another year. She regrets her decision of going against her family and also tried getting in touch with them. She knew that her parents will never accept her, so she got in touch with her siblings. Her brother ‘surprisingly’ turned out to be more sympathetic than her sister, who told her that she is dead for the family and she should not even try to come back. She
feels that she lost her family in a futile battle which yielded nothing for her. According to her girls should be smart and not be idealistic when it comes to matters like family, love, marriage and she quoted her colleagues example who had three to four boyfriends before she settled down as per her parent’s choice. She felt that now she is left alone and she has no hopes either.

In case of Priya where she demonstrated active resistance to her family expectations and subverted the norms, she lost acceptability within her family. While discussing her emotional state when she realized that her boyfriend got married by his parents’ choice, in retrospect she felt that she didn’t regret the loss of family till she realized that ‘the sacrifice’ she made was in vain. As Priya quipped

‘...I don’t understand why parents teach their kids to be honest, when they are not ready to accept it...’

Most women felt that it is emotionally disturbing if they try and actively subvert their family wishes and therefore choose to use varied forms of agency like negotiation, false compliance, performance based on what they perceive will keep their families happy. Vanessa a 27 year old casting director in her narrative clearly shows the multiplicity of strategies women employ.

**Illustrative Case II: Vanessa – Casting Director - 27years**

I met Vanessa through a common friend. We got talking and she revealed that she is not a Mumbaikar and has been living in the city on her own for almost 6 years. She studied in Pune and hails from interior Maharashtra. After her graduation, she wanted to be part of the film industry and soon realized that to sustain her lifestyle in the city she will have to work. Although her parents were supporting her, she felt guilty in using her parent’s money on partying and
clubbing with her friends which was essential to get started in the industry. She stayed in a paying guest accommodation initially and those were the days when mobile phones were becoming popular, although the call rates were very high. Her parents would call her on the landline number of the PG and also PG had imposed a curfew between 11pm and 5.30am. She found it difficult to stay with these impositions and saw them as a barrier to her aspirations. When Reliance phones were launched with Reliance to Reliance free calls, she strategically bought two sets as an anniversary gift for her parents, who then gave back one set so that they can talk to her more often. This gave her the freedom from observing time schedule around the landline phone and also space to deal with her parents and their instructions. Soon she also moved out of the PG with a friend without letting her parent’s know as they were against her living independently in the city. By the time her parents got to know of it she had already been living in an apartment for more than a year. Initially they threw a fit, but she explained how her current job was demanding and it was very difficult for the PG aunty to bend the rules for her and therefore she suggested that it would be better to shift in an independent flat.

For almost two years now, she is living in with her boyfriend and obviously her parents or the guy’s parents are unaware. Whenever her parents suggest that they want to visit her, she excuses herself by either saying she’s busy with work or saying that she was hoping to spend some time with them and if they will come over she will be busy, so she will come over a weekend. For past 3 years her parents have been talking about her marriage and are also looking for a guy. But since last year they are very seriously concerned about her marriage prospects, and keep asking her if she has anyone in mind. She has been evading the question because the boy whom she is living with is not sure whether his parents will accept this relationship. So every time her parents
suggest that she meets a guy whom they have found suitable, she abides by it but then rejects the guy on some premise or the other. She explained the rationale behind her actions as she doesn’t want to lose her parents support because she is not sure about how her relationship with her boyfriend will shape up. In case it doesn’t work out she can still ask her parents, with dignity, to arrange for a match for her. This also gives her a chance to explore options other than her current boyfriend and she is open to marrying if someone ‘clicks’.

Although Vanessa is in absolute contrast to Priya, it highlights various strategies which women use on a continuum of absolute acceptance and rebel. Most respondents fall somewhere in the middle of this continuum where they accept values and impositions which they rationalize as being beneficial to them or are of greater importance, based on the ‘valued beings and doings’. Women make conscious and rational choices which help them shift the locus of control from their family to them. The strategies might vary as their conception of norms and values also vary with space. The change in space or location also has an effect on conception of what is ‘culturally conceivable’ and the social norms and values of the destination city. The narrative around smoking, drinking, having a boyfriend, live in relationship became conceivable only when these women have moved to a new city. The city has not only offered anonymity but also a new set of norms also termed as ‘western’ by many, which they were exposed through new modes of contact like education, on job training, popular media – print, electronic and social. This exposure along with the tradition, cultural and social customs influences, shapes and constructs a gender identity within a culture which is not homogenous and therefore elicits responses that are varied. As seen in the illustrative cases of Vanessa and Priya, most respondents who have moved to Mumbai from smaller cities and towns across states, find
themselves negotiating between the norms, morals, values and cultures in which they were socialised at their native place and the ones they are acquiring as adults in Mumbai. The values and norms that they had been socialised into when comes in contrast with the normative culture of Mumbai, women try and make choices which enable them to ‘maintain a face’ in front of the family even if they do not live by the families’ expectations.

5.4 Changing Contours of Family – Contesting Patriarchy

In this study the respondents were selected on the basis of their remoteness from their natal families. ‘Singleness’ was not just their marital status but also physical distance from their families, assuming that women staying away from their families would have greater freedom and autonomy to choose their ‘valued beings and doings’. Although the family is not physically present with these women, it is impossible to understand these women and their context without gaining insights in their family context. As discussed earlier most respondents talked about their roots in a middle class family while they talked briefly about themselves as part of the introductory section of the interview. Taking cue from that the interview explored in great depth the family set up which they come from, their relationship with the family members, their role and the expectations within the family, any changes in their relationship with the family after moving out, how do they manage expectations, what are the areas of stress and tension with the family and how do they cope with it.

The respondents came from normative family structure, where few of them had lived initially in a joint family and have seen the system disintegrating into nuclear family units. In such cases to start with the respondents tried establishing that disintegration of household did not lead to any
kind of animosity among the extended family members. However, gradually they shared
instances of detesting the interference of the extended family members and on the contrary had
stronger opinions because of the extended family’s proximity. It’s interesting to see the portrayal
of a ‘big, happy, joint family’ which gives an impression of joint family as the ideal family
system. However, the underlying tensions within the system seem to have disintegrated it.

‘We were a joint family, my father is the eldest one and my grandfather died at an early age, so
my father did everything for his brothers and sisters...now my uncles have taken separate
houses...we live in the same colony, but we are very close...when I was thinking of doing a
course from Delhi, my chachi and bua (aunts) were so mean, they came and instigated my
parents against sending me out...my parents are very cool, but these chacha, chachi, bua they
keep asking them and then my parents start bothering me...relatives should be as far away as
possible...’ (Kiran, Data Analyst, 28 years)

As Thapan (2001: 360) in her study of middle class adolescents observes ‘The characteristics of
modern Indian family life have also changed, from the traditional extended family living together
to the more commonly visible nuclear family. This has resulted in perhaps greater bonding
between members of the nuclear family, due to the absence of a large and overbearing network
of kin relations, but in no way does this suggest a marked transformation in the articulation of the
roles and functions of various members of the nuclear family’. The extended or joint family
members or as the respondents call them relatives are seen as a barrier to any advancement or
growth which the family members experience.

Of the 30 women whom I interviewed 3 were from single mother family, where the male had
either deserted the family or had legally separated or divorced. In case of two of the respondents
the father was abusive and both the women expressed their strong dislike for their father. For
them their mother was the most important person in the family and they wanted to do as much as
possible for their mother, whom they felt struggled to bring them up.
‘...we have absolutely nothing to do with the man (referring to her father) who left us without even thinking once...I and my brother were babies...my mom had a harrowing time, she started teaching in a school and because she was just a graduate she had to study further, she did B.Ed. along with taking care of two of us. She managed everything on her own...I keep telling her now that I am working she just need not bother...I want her to have a comfortable life...’ (Sagarika, Training Manager, 29 years)

It was quite evident that the level of responsibility which a woman assumes to contribute to her family depends on the family structure, sex of siblings and the birth order. In scenarios where either the household was headed by a single mother; or the family had only daughters; or the respondent was the eldest sibling, the respondents took greater responsibility of contributing to the family in matters of decision making and also finance. Although they might not be or might not receive acknowledgment as the main contributor to family’s economy, their contribution in their narrative is crucial.

‘My mom has struggled all her life...I have an elder sister, she is married now...I’ve a boyfriend and we plan to get married soon...but I don’t want to be a burden on my mom or sister...I have asked my mom to move to Bombay with me, then I can take care of her...’ (Tishya, Customer care executive, 24 years)

Another respondent, whose father is an army officer and mother a housewife, felt that since they are two daughters and she is the older one the responsibility of her family lies on her shoulders.

‘We are two sisters only...so for my parents I always feel that I have to come up to their expectations...Papa always says why do you bother beta, you are my son...and actually I’m the one who does everything...I get their tickets done, I am also contributing to the house they plan to buy, I plan their financial investment...and I don’t want them to feel that if they had a son their life would have been easier’ (Anupama, HR Manager, 27 years)

In both the narratives the responsibility the woman has taken over is not because they have been asked to or as they frame it they are expected to, but their responsibility to the family is recognised and to a certain extent acknowledged when families have only daughters and no sons. The absence could be of the patriarch in the family or a male sibling who could take over the
responsibility of the family as the parents grow old. The construction of single mothers’ life as ‘struggle’ or parents’ expectation in the language of ‘you are my son’ also highlights the primacy given to the male members. The assumption here is that in case the male member was not absent from the family structure, the financial responsibility of running and managing the family would have been taken up by him.

It is interesting to see that these respondents or their family who apparently believe in the modern view of the Indian women and greater visibility of women in public spaces, have this view tied within the patriarchal structure of family. Although there seems to be an acceptance of women in new and non-traditional public domains, the view of modern Indian woman is that of the one who takes over the male role within and outside the family in addition to her primary role within the family. The emphasis on achieving the right balance between the household and career responsibilities puts the onus on the women who have images of ‘woman of substance’ or ‘super-moms’ for their reference and feel inadequate if they are not able to achieve it. This is reflected in the way most of my respondents relate to their role vis-à-vis their family.

Family as a haven of nurturance, sustenance and security is a view shared by all those who were interviewed, irrespective of the relationship which they share with their family or members of the family. The primacy of the hetero-normative patriarchal family in the life of these women is echoed in the expression of their role and expectations within their family along with their expectations of the future family life which they foresee. The woman’s role outside family in the work domain is constructed by family as important or crucial for her career and her growth, but the idea that they contribute to the family economy is not really acknowledged, rather it is
framed as accumulation of wealth for their future. Although out of the 30 respondents, 17 said that they contribute to the family income, none of them thought that they were prime earners of the family. This view is relevant even in case of few respondents where they spend more than three fourth of their income as remittance for their family’s welfare and their share to the total income is the largest.

‘I started working only about 2 years back…we had a family business which papa wanted to expand and he invested in a few other businesses but none of that worked out…honestly there’s nothing left anymore…I stay in a PG… so that I can contribute in taking care of my family…out of my salary of 21000, I spend on my rent and keep an additional amount of 3000 for my expenses and send rest of the money home. I know that my family cannot sustain on my earnings, but still it feels good that I’m contributing whatever little I can…papa keeps saying that I need not worry and in fact they plan to invest the money which I send to them…they are doing this for me’ (Pooja, Customer care executive, 23 years)

The quotation above should be read in the context that the respondent is not aware of any other source of income of neither her parents nor younger brother who is in college. She assumed that they are managing with the reserves that they had. This kind of ignorance which the respondent assumes was surprising given that she is primarily working to enable her family to sustain. While narrating her life history she was cautious and in certain instances used harsher words which she then tried camouflaging as her inability to find a right word. During our conversation it was evident that although she feels the responsibility of her family, she also feels the pinch of not being able to live a carefree life.

‘It feels really nice that I am able to contribute to my family…I don’t mind not having the money to go out and spend like my colleagues and friends. I think I am more mature than them…I wanted to do my MBA, and when I say this papa says ‘you should concentrate on your studies’...ya sure but only if I have the time and money. Who will pay for my coaching (preparatory), application fee etc.? I get really annoyed...actually annoyed is not the right word, it’s just that circumstances are such that it’s difficult right now.’ (Pooja, Customer care executive, 23 years)
The underlying tensions are evident in the patriarchal set up where the inter-generational roles along with gender roles are under stress due to the unexpected pressures of the modern economy, lack of social safety nets and also changing conception of women and her work.

5.4.1 Relationship with Father

Women talked about their families as a unit of strength, which supported them in their decisions and helped them to achieve what they wanted to. Further exploration makes it evident that the relationship that they share with the family is bound within the patriarchal norms and values. Although most of them described their father as doting and supportive, but their interactions seem complicated, unlike the mother who is a confidante for them and is expected to be a friend.

‘Dad dotes on me...even as a kid he would never let anyone scold me, he fulfilled almost all my wishes. But you know when you start growing up there are so many things which you can’t share with your father...My mom knows everything about me...ya I told her about my boyfriend...I think things like these I would never dare to tell dad...it’s not that I’m scared but just that feels weird...’ (Nikita, Editor, 28years)

‘I know I might sound funny, but I actually feel my daddy is the strongest17 (laughs)...he is not just physically fit and strong but I don’t think I have ever seen a person as strong as him, he is the foundation of our family. I have never seen him break down in any kind of situation...In fact my mom says she could finish her studies and work only because of his support...Everyone in dad’s side is s*** scared of him, so his word is final...I told my mom about my boyfriend, she said you need to first talk to daddy, because if he says yes then there is no issue...this time when I’ll go home I plan to talk to him...he is very gentle but just that it’s very difficult to change his mind...I’m keeping my fingers crossed’ (Rani, Personnel Manager, 28years)

The father daughter relationship as evident in the above quotes is that of love and respect, but the boundaries are set by the patriarchal structure. The relationship is governed by the conception of respect for the male head of the family. He’s seen as a provider and care taker of the family, who is supposed to also protect his family from all external forces which might threaten the family

17 This is a tagline of an advertisement of cooking oil
unit. Although the girls depict their father as a ‘doting father’, they do not hesitate in sharing that as a grown up woman they find it difficult to share their emotions with him. Father’s affection, his approval, his views are significant in shaping the girl’s conception of other relations. The narratives indicate that fathers also play up to the normative masculine patriarch who is strong, shoulders the responsibility of the family, holds authority within family and is the decision maker. Fathers in most narratives come across as men who are affectionate and caring but find it difficult to get involved with their daughters at an emotive level. Also this relationship seems to be transitioning from a culture that insists on masculine trait of not expressing their emotions and also maintaining a dignified distance from the family members, in wake of the global image of new age ‘metrosexual’ man. Both respondents and fathers seem to have moved away from personifying the traditional patriarch, but still have not been able to break through the conceptions of patriarchal male head of the household. On the other hand, the relationship with the mother is that of a friend and a confidante with whom most respondents claim to share almost everything. The response of these women is in consonance with reproduction of patriarchal norms and values where gender and generation both play an important role in determining roles, expectations and response. For most women fathers are respected and loved but they cannot be a confidant.

On the other hand, most women termed their mothers as vital to their personal and professional growth. Mothers apparently in most cases were a great support for the daughters. It is to be noted that mothers of all the respondents were atleast graduates and some of them were even working. Mothers of these women were the daughters of independence which Liddle and Joshi (1984) referred to in their work. The mothers having had limited opportunity to be part of the public life
aspired for a better bargain for their daughters. The support these women received from their mothers might be either overt or covert depending on the strategy the mother might choose to use. Though the mother is expected to train the daughter to be obedient, respectable, worthy of protection - marriage material, the respondents shared that their mothers empathize with their aspirations and are able to provide support as the daughter’s communication with the mother changes with life cycle. Most older respondents felt a sense of mutual understanding and shared bond with the mother, where they not only confide in the mother but also advise and support her. This was different for women who were younger and in their early twenties. They were critical of their mothers being traditional and restrictive. This is substantiated by Shilpa’s 2010 findings where she found that the mother daughter communication is affected by life cycle and there tends to be role reversal and mutual mothering.

5.4.2 Relationship with siblings

Unlike parents’ relationship with the respondents where patriarchal norms are reproduced, the relationship with the siblings is a window where the same norms are contested. It is not surprising that most respondents come from a two children family where several families have a male and a female child and the rest have both female children. In case of female siblings, it is not surprising that women are very supportive of their sisters and receive similar support from them. They seem to confide in their sisters and also expect support in situations where parents are expected to be unaccepting. This relationship is irrespective of the birth order. In case of married female siblings, the bond of friendship continues but the confidante status of the sibling diminishes.

‘...we are two daughters...my sister is three years older to me and she is in true sense my friend, my guide, my philosopher...she is the only one who knows everything about me...I share
everything with mom, but still you can tell only as much, but my sister...she even used to blackmail me into doing things for her, if I would ever say no (laughs)...(in) My sister got married (three months before the interview)...I call her every day, but now that she’s married I also feel a little weird calling at odd hours...earlier I could even call her late at night...I always used to inform her if I’m out partying and then after reaching home, but now it’s different...I tell her everything even now, but it’s not the same...she also has a life of her own. Although my jiju is very sweet, but still...’ (Zareen, Assistant director, 24 years)

It is interesting to note that women find in a sister a confidant, camaraderie and support, women with a male siblings tend to contest the prevailing gender norms. However, this is not what women express as most of them either believe or want the researcher to believe that the families they belong to, do not practice any sort of gender bias against girls in their families. Rather the picture that is painted is that of a family with modern views about Indian woman who is part of the public domain and has moved into spheres which were considered male bastions. The importance given to girl’s education was highlighted in the narratives of women by using phrases like ‘as much as my brother’. However, the multiple layers within these narratives point towards a complicated relationship that they share with the male sibling and in that context even with their parents.

‘My brother is a year younger to me...we are quite close...he has just joined a software company. He is adorable...he shares all his problems with me...but you know boys are boys...he is so immature, he’s still a kid...he was in the hostel last year, and I was surprised my parents went to settle him down...I told my mom that you never bother to see where I live...they treat him like a baby...they expect me to buy stuff for him...he’s earning now but still my parents send him money and he’s just spending all of that partying...I told dad the other day, that let him manage on his own then only he will understand, but he said let him enjoy he will understand once he will have the responsibility. I mean I was never given these concessions...in fact I remember once I was scolded and told that you should learn how to manage money, you are big enough...(Saloni, Medical transcriber, 24 years)

‘...my brother is married...he is quite cool...he used to stay in Bombay when I was in the hostel, now he’s in US...in fact I came to Bombay first time to meet him and he took me shopping, I was in love with the place since then...he’s chilled out...to him it just doesn’t matter what I wear, what I do...the only thing he said to me when I shifted was be careful and don’t get into anything which will hurt you or mummy papa...he’s quite fatherly when it comes to things like these... he himself is a chain smoker, but I don’t think I can let him know that I smoke or drink...I’m not
Sure how he would react if he gets to know... at times I get upset with the moralistic stand he takes... he doesn’t let his wife drink, says he doesn’t like it... my parents obviously support him on whatever he says... in every damn thing they want me to consult him because according to them he knows this world better than me, as if I’m living all these years with his advice... ’ (Sujata, Production Assistant, 25 years)

The relationship with the brother is also as complicated as with the father. This is evident of how engrained gender and gender relations are in the middle class Indian family. The significance of a male child in the family is established by the excerpts which clearly showcase that birth order in case of two kids is used as a justification to either favour the male child or to establish his dominance in the family. The women are made to feel that they are more favoured as they have been given education and opportunity and freedom to move out on their own, which is a privilege. As one of the respondents while reminiscing how when she first talked about her boyfriend to her parents, they accused her of misusing the freedom which they bestowed her with. They threatened to take her back if she didn’t mend her ways. Many other parents might not react so strongly but most girls talked about ‘being privileged’ to have parents who value their daughter’s right to education, right to decision making and ‘have faith in their daughters that they won’t do anything which would dishonor their family name’. Emotions like these which are imposed on women by their family in the process of socialisation have a strong influence on binding these women to the normative culture of Indian middle class and also in reproducing the patriarchal values. The freedom which is given and the decision making ability which is inculcated is expected to be applied only in consultation with the parents and should be in sync with their valued beings and doings. The family as a unit makes it clear that the space for disagreement around these issues is limited and any attempt to subvert it is met with strong condemnation.
Traditionally a patriarchal family set up functions on a structure which is intergenerational and gendered. The power is yielded by the differences of age, gender and relationship, which are highly pronounced and are reproduced in every aspect of life. The dissolution of the joint family system in urban India marked significant dissolution of intergenerational hierarchy, which is restricted to being reproduced between only one generation of parents and children. In case of children moving away from family this hierarchy is also apparently being undermined and contested. As Arti while talking about her relationship with her family said:

‘...sure I don’t mind doing things for their happiness, after all they are my parents...but they can’t expect me to listen to everything they say...I’ve a mind of my own...actually ultimately I have realized it’s better to listen to them and then do what I want to do...’ (Arti, HR executive, 25 years)

‘My parents can’t decide for me how I spend my money...in fact I help my dad in his investments, travel bookings, even property matters ...if I can take their responsibility then why do they think they need to tell me what I have to do...I just put up with them till they are reasonable...mom keeps nagging, she will keep saying something or the other, unlike dad who’s pretty cool...at times I wonder if dad feels the same, although he might not say it...I get really annoyed and actually end up doing things which they categorically tell me not to indulge in...I still try and avoid conflicts’ (Sonal, Executive producer, 27 years)

The fact that these women are out managing their lives on their own, they find it difficult to live by the standards set by their parents. Also economic freedom gives them the confidence that they can use their money the way they like without being answerable to anyone. This also means a scope to negotiate their freedom from the intergenerational hierarchy. In fact most of them seem to be using their economic power to contest the intergenerational and gender relations at home, without getting into direct conflict situations. The subtle acts of subversion are not necessarily and consciously aimed at questioning the patriarchal structure.
On one hand, the women do not want to fall out of favour with their parents, but on the other they do not wish to tolerate any kind of imposition. There also seems to be a struggle between these women and their families to define their society. In most interviews, women admit that they are often warned by their parents to not indulge in any act or activity which might shame them in their society. Although no one articulated that the society that their parents talk about is not one homogenous mass they are aware that the city of origin and destination exerts different pressures on them. Society in general is heterogeneous, especially if one adds the dimension of space and is subjected to changing norms with time. The society which the parents vouch for is different from the society in which these women live or even aspire to be part of, which is juxtaposed by use of words like ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’. Although there might be social norms and values to differentiate the traditional and modern, this in no way implies that the structure on which these norms and values rest is different for two. The modern also reproduces gendered subjectivities and that in turn determines the strategies, which these women employ to negotiate between the traditional and modern.

‘...I understand that our parents say things which they feel are right for their children...they can never understand what kind of a life we live here, it’s not that they can’t but I guess they don’t want to...easiest is to tell them what they want to hear...the first time I told them that I’m out with friends at a party, they scolded me and told me this is not we have sent you there for, you have gone to work not to party, they scolded me for telling them the truth...the next time they called me I told them I’m out with office colleagues for a training, they started questioning me about the music which they could hear in the background, I said it’s a team building and coordination exercise, I need to rush will call you tomorrow (laughs)...’(Shuchi, Call centre executive, 22 years)

‘We (I and my friends) were planning a trip to Goa...I knew my parents will never allow me...they never used to let me go for school trips...I told them I’m going for a recruitment process to Goa university...it’s better to lie, at least they don’t get worried...I have this cousin whom I’m very close to, she knows all my plans...someone should know in case of a mishap’ (Anupama, HR manager, 27 years)
In case of activities which the parents disapprove of, women find themselves in a bind because they do not wish to miss out on the fun, but on the other hand they don’t want their parents to think that they are irresponsible. The act of being responsible is almost seen as exhibiting the attribute and not necessarily abiding by the families conception of ‘being responsible and respectable’. It is important to accept that words like responsible and respectable do not have a universal understanding. The association of these words with the acts of being responsible and respectable varies between women who have moved out to Mumbai and their families located in small cities and towns. The performance of a responsible and respectable woman is marred with several confusions and complexities, because of this variance.

‘(laughs) if they ever get to know they will be shocked. I don’t understand how travelling with friends or visiting male friends at night is being characterless... it’s not like one can’t do things during the day if one wants to (laughs)...’ (Shuchi, Call centre executive, 22years)

‘...the other day my mom was very upset with me because I told her that I was out with friends...it was like an enquiry, where were you, with whom, what did you do... I was quite pissed...I didn’t really want to hurt her...I usually tell her...so I told her I was with friends at a pub and I had a couple of drinks...she freaked out...then I told her that you are the one who expects me to share everything with you like a friend and when I do you have a problem...you want me to lie’ (Tishya, Call centre executive, 24years)

This sentiment of questioning the accepted social norms was echoed by most of the respondents who felt that although parents and families want to protect them, they are not able to explain why these women should even accept what they think is acceptable in their social context. Also some of them felt angry about what they considered ‘useless botheration’ because they had to deal with the pressures and stresses of living alone in a city and worries of their families added to their woes, since they won’t be able to do that in view of the physical distance.
5.5 Concluding Remarks

Most respondents in the study are conscious of the bind and contradictions they face. The constant swinging between accepting the social norms and denouncing them is almost like a pendulum where because of the gravitational effect of the patriarchal structure, these women move back and forth on the cultural continuum of tradition and modernity. However family seem to be the pivot of this movement and apparently this pivot is not frictionless. It will be a fallacy to assume that the pivot of family is not shifting or changing. The emphasis by the families on safety and chastity in view of the distance is being mediated through technology which also gives women the space to strategize and negotiate with families for greater physical and sexual freedom, as evident in the narratives. Jessop’s alternative to dualism of structure and agency seems to be a useful way of understanding the agency of women and strategies which they use vis-à-vis family members. The dialectical understanding of the ‘strategic relational approach’ helps in conceiving the relationship between structure and agency, where structure conditions agency and define the range of strategies which might be deployed by agents.

Though women are consciously using strategies to utilize their freedom to the optimum, they also constantly indulge their families by either performance or subversion – overt or covert. The practice of strategies, which help them maintain face, show their conscious acceptance of some of the patriarchal norms which they do not see a need to challenge. Also challenging or active resistance is met with strong condemnation and in certain cases sanctions and severing of ties and loss of family support. The women are conscious of the need to prove themselves as chaste and respectable daughters or sisters in order to bargain for greater freedoms like choosing a marriage partner on their own. Though it gives an impression that the normative structures in the
source cities or towns are rigid, the constant bargaining these women engage in, has definitely started loosening the conceivable norms within their families. The women also feel that though the families try and impose strict code of conduct, with time and realization that they practically do not have much control, they are able to accept the choices made by women. Families apparently flaunt their acceptance as benevolence on one hand and modern thought on the other. The positive acceptance of girls by these families could also be because of employment prospects for them (John et.al, 2009). Though the change may not be evident or occur very soon, in this constant tug of war, neither falls but each attempt to shape the norms with their strategies and yet is not able to resist the pull.

*It's a tug of war,*
*Though I know I mustn't grumble,*
*It's a tug of war.*
*But I can't let go,*
*If I do, you'll take a tumble*
*And the whole thing is going to crumble,*
*It's a tug of war.*

*In years to come, they may discover*
*What the air we breathe and the life we lead are all about.*
*But it won't be soon enough, (soon enough)*
*Soon enough for me.*
*No, it won't be soon enough, (it won't be soon enough for me)*
*Soon enough for me.*

- *Paul McCartney*