Chapter 7
Hybrid World, Segmentalised Lives

This study attempted to understand the use of agency by women who continuously negotiate their entry into globalised industries in the city of Mumbai and the steady shifts that their presence seems to bring to the socio-cultural context. The effort was to gain insights of women’s understanding and articulation of agency in everyday life, the influence of their work in industries like BPO and media and the impact it has on their lives. The findings of the study have mapped out how women articulate agency in various domains of everyday life, the different types and levels of agency they showcase in different domains. This chapter now critically examines the significance of these findings for our understanding of agency being exhibited by single women who have migrated to work in BPO and media industry of Mumbai.

The study started with chronological tracing of literature on education and employment of women. The purpose was to understand the intersection of education and employment with gender over four periods – pre independence, post-independence till early 1 70’s, mid 1 70’s to early 1 0’s and post-liberalisation. Although there were varied ideological orientations, education and employment were hailed as an instrument to changing women’s subordinated status. In the pre independence era the conception of women’s role and role of education in their lives was set within the patriarchal structure. Education was a tool to make women more efficient in their role as wives and mothers. Although women’s involvement in nationalist movement was encouraged, thus giving them visibility in public life, no one questioned the structural inequalities. The early women’s movement demanded for education and legal rights for women,
but remained elitist in nature and continued to endorse the social reformist view of demarcated public and private roles of men and women (Desai, 1977; Chakravarty, 1980; Patel, 1988; Gandhi & Shah, 1991).

The second phase post-independence till early 1970’s witnessed the contestation of the assumptions made by functional school vis-à-vis education. While Schultz (1961) reinforced the understanding of education as investment in social capital which helps in removing social inequalities, Coleman (1966) cast doubts in his study on schools ability to eradicate racial and class inequalities. In the same period second wave of feminism in the west helped women to see their personal lives as politicized and reflective of the sexist structure of power. The popular images of women in the prevalent culture were challenged. The legal changes also paved way for women’s involvement in public life. At the same time in India, the constitutional commitment to equality for all encompassed gender aspects thus challenging differential curricula. However, primacy of women’s role within the households as mothers and wives continued. The main concerns in this period were role conflict, its impact on the family and changing family structures. Segregation of women’s role within family and in public domain was seen as contradictory and the onus of change and adjustment both seemed to be on the women as studies in that period emphasised the need for working women to adjust to multiple roles. Most of these studies did not take into account the structural inequalities and did not see the need for family and society to change their attitude towards the working women. Although towards mid 1 70’s women’s presence in public domain started getting acknowledged and recognised.
Since mid-70’s till early 0’s the shift from welfare to development brought women in focus. The assumptions around female domesticity were challenged. The Committee on the Status of Women in India report ‘Towards Equality’ in 1974 highlighted that the educational system reinforced the traditional roles of women within the patriarchal structures and failed to develop employment oriented capabilities thus hampering the economic growth. It was underlined that women must be urgently equipped with the capabilities required for them to participate actively in country’s economy. These revelations and recommendations gave birth to the concept of women as "partners" in development in the following Plan period documents, which took the issue of women’s education to a new threshold. The new visibility of women’s poor positions around the world was connected to under development but not to subordination thus prioritising basic needs of the family rather than the unequal access to resources and opportunities. During this phase the existing concepts of work and methods of accounting for women’s work were challenged and women’s contribution and their double burden started being recognised. However, the focus remained on poor, underprivileged women who were also seen as instruments to achieve the developmental goals of lower fertility, better child and maternal health and other human development goals.

The period since early 1 0’s witnessed a major economic shift in the Indian economy and also emergence of women’s movement as an important political force which strengthened the articulation of the women’s demand for their rights, rights of the girl child, women’s education, equality in decision making, balance in gender representation, sexual and reproductive rights, action against violence and institutional measures to ensure the implementation of policies to advance the development of women. This phase saw the continuation of women in development
with focus on empowerment of women which focused on control and autonomy, process orientation and the question of measurement. The understanding around empowerment of women or groups became more nuanced, thus acknowledging that it takes place in different spheres of society: social, economic and political and psychological and has material, human and intellectual dimensions and the onus been shifted to men’s participation to change social attitudes and community practices.

Over the years the trajectory of understanding women’s subordination and role of education and work in empowering women has seen a paradigm shift. Although the need for structural changes is acknowledged for equitable gender relations, the debate around women’s roles, sexuality, safety and modesty still seem to be bound within the patriarchal structure. In the era of globalisation, women are more visible in public spaces and have relatively greater avenues of work to choose from. Although the focus is on empowerment of women, there is no consensus on the definition of empowerment or its measures (Malhotra, 2002; Lingam, 2008).

Women’s access to financial and economic resources and it’s consequence for women’s empowerment is an important assumption for most development programmes. However, defining and measuring empowerment has been through multiple iterations (Malhotra et.al. 2002). Kabeer’s definition of empowerment acknowledged three important aspects – resources which is a precondition, agency which is the process and achievements i.e. outcomes. However, agency as a process is central to the definition as without women’s individual or collective ability to recognise and utilize resources in their own interests, resources cannot bring about empowerment. (Kabeer, 1999 and Malhotra et.al. 2002).
7.1 Revisiting Conceptual Framework – Rules, Resources and Agency

The framework conceptualized at the beginning of the study, understood agency to be influenced by resources, opportunities and achievements, which in turn would impact on social norms and social roles. The lines of influence run both ways. This essentially meant that an individual’s access to resources, opportunities and achievements would facilitate the exercise of agency which in turn would lead to change in social norms, social roles and structures. While, one is aware that the existing social structures determine access to resources and opportunities, it is unclear how this access at an individual level sets the possibility for strengthening or weakening or changing the existing social norms and practices. Further, in what ways a city like Mumbai creates the context for re-negotiating social norms and practices. The attempt in the study was to understand the various ways in which women exercise and articulate their agency in various domains of public and private spaces and the interactions of the context with the individual woman’s social position.

Individual action, according to Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory, reproduces the social system. He emphasized the duality of structure, where structure consists of rules and resources. Individuals reproduce structure through their knowledge of the rules and meaningful action which are appropriate to institutions, thus ensuring appropriate practices for reproducing systems and institutions. As the structure is both enabling and constraining and actors are reflexive, the strategies they use are based on their knowledge of the structures. He also acknowledged the individual’s freedom to act otherwise, which Anthony King (1999: 63) insists ‘contradicts the rest of structuration theory, which explicitly limits the randomness of individual action through
This is seen as giving primacy to the autonomous individual. Giddens argued that human beings are knowledgeable agents whose practices constitute social systems. There can be no question of structures operating independently of human beings; these structures are constituted by practice and have no existential significance apart from practice (Giddens 1981). Action and structure cannot be analysed separately, as structures are created, maintained and changed through actions, while actions are given meaningful form only through the background of the structure: the line of causality runs in both directions making it impossible to determine what is changing what. He claimed that any effort to explain this phenomenon solely in terms of micro or macro level causes will result in a logical fallacy.

Though Giddens acknowledged both actor and structure influencing each other, we did not have an understanding of how agency gets articulated in day to day interaction. As evident from data analysis single women working in BPO and media industry belong to the social group that has access to financial resources along with cultural capital thus giving them more choices. Irrespective of their financial capital, these women belong to middle class families; have access to resources like education and employment thus having access to higher cultural capital. The sociocultural position and access to resources for each of the respondent is differential, but the differential outcomes are not alone a resultant of resources and opportunities. The differential outcomes are also influenced by differential understanding and interpretation of the context by the women (Mcauliffe, 1998).

---

18 https://eric.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10036/71393/King%20Legitimating.pdf?sequence=2

19 Cultural capital is a concept first articulated by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu identifies three variants of cultural capital: first, in the embodied state incorporated in mind and body; second, in the institutionalized state, that is, in institutionalized forms such as educational qualifications; and third, in the objectified state, simply existing as cultural goods such as books, artifacts, dictionaries, and paintings (Bourdieu, 1986). (http://educatedgirl.hubpages.com/hub/What-is-Cultural-Capital)
The response to instances or any specific event in everyday life is thus determined by actor’s understanding and perception of their sociocultural position, the accessibility and availability of resources and also the constraints of rules. The rules and resources, however, as presented in chapter 5 emerge as being non-static and are defined by the space and time. The spatiality and temporality of rules and resources is evident in case of women who have shifted to Mumbai for work. The single women who were interviewed for this study had shifted from a smaller city or town to a metropolitan city. This shift, as the women articulated, also entailed change in social norms, rules and resources available to them. Most women observed that their shift to Mumbai meant change in culture, which they expressed as shift in social norms that are relaxed about women being out in public space, women’s presence at night, mixing of the sexes and closer proximity of men and women, acceptance of romantic relations. These norms were seen as relaxed by all the respondents, as the norms of Mumbai were being assessed with reference to the norms of their city or town of origin while consciously acknowledging anonymity.

Greater freedoms - greater mobility, greater autonomy in decision making and even greater choices seem to be linked to not just physical remoteness of these women from their families but also their current life situation. Women currently find themselves in a phase of life that entails them greater opportunities and freedoms though they accept that marriage would mean lesser autonomy within marriage as they would prefer to take ‘joint decisions’. The rules or norms thus are defined by an individual’s location, the space which they operate in, prevalent discourse and also the stage of life cycle. For the respondents of this study it translates into women working in BPOs and media houses, living in middle class Mumbai which has access to luxury consumer
goods and aspire for global lifestyle where the discourse is fragmented and contradictory and their single status gives them the space and freedom to negotiate.

As mentioned earlier the shift to Mumbai creates an inconsistency between the rules these women have been socialized with and the rules they are exposed to while working in global jobs. The contradictions that emerge are generated out of the conflicting rules and resources within the structures and institutions. As one of the respondents said

‘It’s a funny situation, parents want you to be safe and so you should not go out with men at night, but they also want you to do well at work, get married to a nice boy of our choice whom they should approve, but we should stay away from men, because they can’t be trusted...what? Should I work in all-girls office... good for me I use these arguments the way I like...’ (Rani, 28, Personnel Manager)

Women are not necessarily unhappy with these contradictions as indicated by Rani, because the fissures that these inconsistencies give rise to help them use their agency creatively. This also gives them a richer repertoire of rules and resources to choose from. Women are conscious of the variety and contradictory rules and use them as resources to make their choices.

7.1.1 Agency in Globalised Era

As discussed in Chapter 5, the relationship between these women and their remotely located families is a hotbed for creative, generative and purposeful use of agency. Most respondents exhibited active use of agency and variety of ways in which it gets articulated while dealing with their families. Performance, false compliance and dissimulation are a few which most respondents seem to be demonstrating in their narratives. As evident, families appreciate their daughters when they perform the role of a respectable, chaste, caring daughter who is conscious of upholding the family honour. Women are expected to demonstrate by their performance that
they are worthy of family’s support. Respondents like Anupama, Arti, Hetal, Sonal, Vanessa actively use performance as a way of managing the impressions which distant families have and claim their support. However, performance should not be read as submission or obedience as Billaud 200 cautions. While Priya’s case was a reminder of all that active resistance entails, several others like Hetal and Tishya recognize that and avoid that route as they do not want their ‘parents to get upset’. It is clear that women are conscious of the choices which they have and as expected are influenced by all four categories of influencers spelt out by Ryan & Deci (2000).

The articulation of agency in multiple forms is a reminder of reflexive actor, who reflects on the situation, rules, resources and valued beings and doings. Women often use false compliance or dissimulation as ways of managing family expectations without giving rise to conflict. Most women expressed that they prefer withholding facts or would disguise their intentions under a feigned appearance, than divulge the details and be at the receiving end. In dictionary dissimulation is the word for withholding facts or disguising the intention. Dissimulation as a strategy is preferred as it conceals all the facts and unacceptable behaviour that would be disapproved by their families. Most often dissimulation is also combined with false compliance to exhibit obedient behavior. Vanessa exhibited both dissimulation and false compliance when she agreed to meet the guy her parents suggested, while she was in a live in relationship with her boyfriend, which her parents were not aware of. Combination of dissimulation and false compliance via mobile technology help women to demonstrate responsibility and respectability.

20 The extrinsic motivations have been identified by Ryan and Deci’s 2000 as:
- External Regulation
- Introjected Regulation
- Identified Regulation
- Integrated Regulation

as expected by the family and also escape their wrath. It essentially helps them breakthrough the patriarchal structure which expects them to be obedient and bound by tradition, even while they are physically away and being monitored through mobile phones. In the city of anonymity both women and their families play the quintessential cat and mouse, while one tries to use mobile phone for surveillance, the other uses it for concealing and disguising their intentions and activities.

Though women consciously do not wish to actively resist families’ expectations and hierarchical structures, their narrative is evident of constant bargaining which they engage in. Women respondents accept that the new found financial freedom helps them bargain for greater freedom and choices and also at times subverting the patriarchal structures. Saloni, Nikita and Pooja in their narrative demonstrate conscious questioning of their family’s pressure on them to either get married; sanctions on certain activities or the evident unfair advantage given to male child. The questioning of the inherent power of patriarchy is conceivable as these women perceive themselves to be not a ‘financial burden’ on their family and hence the freedom to negotiate their terms. The conscious negotiation which they attempt accepts that being a female child of the family they are a financial burden and now that they are working they should not be considered so.

While the respondents attempt to bargain with their family, conceal their intentions, perform being honourable, chaste women they also engage in active subversion of the structures in their destination city which gives them anonymity, multiple discourse, resources and freedom to exercise their choice. The respondents who claimed to be living in with their boyfriends without
marriage also had funny tales to relate. In order to hire apartments in a society which still frowns on and disapproves pre-marital cohabitation, they use pictures clicked together as bride and bridegroom or the guy would hire an apartment saying that he will get married next month, which creates an impression that the girl who has come to live with him is his wife. This is seen as rejection of socially acceptable forms of cohabitation, but unfortunately they are disguised in the same form which they attempt to subvert. Moreover, women engaged in romantic relationships and live in relationships most often tend to reproduce gender roles and expectations as they routinely take up household chores as their primary responsibility. However, the use of agency by these women who have had the opportunity of being independent is often evident in situations of conflict. Shabana, Kiran, Rani are women who had moved out of difficult or unpleasant relationships without worries of being labeled a ‘bad woman’. Women do not ever discuss these relationships with family or even friends and colleagues who might know about it. The silence which these relationships are shrouded in due to fear of ostracisation helps them maintain the ‘good girl’ label. Also the garb of marriage in which these relationships are often camouflaged in, in case of live in relationship, for the benefit of renting an apartment help these women to walk out of the relationship without the fear of putting their or their family honour at risk. Above all the anonymity of the city proves to be supportive for these women. Though they admit that moving out of a romantic relation is often traumatic, but the fact is these women are able to move out showing an active use of positive agency.

The use of illusion of submissiveness which the generation of mothers of these women showed at workplace and family in Liddle Joshi’s study is not evident among the respondents of this study. As discussed earlier women dissimulate and disguise their intentions, but also do
not tend to create an image of submission either at work or with their families. Infact at workplace they make sure that they come across as the ‘new-age-woman’ who is constructed as free spirited and independent and is not apologetic about being so. The discourse around the new age woman often advocates and supports the images of independent working woman.

Though most respondents demonstrate active and creative use of agency vis-à-vis family and love relations, it seems to be either dormant or absent while they discussed their workplace. None of the women as mentioned in Chapter 6 consciously discussed or acknowledged any form of gender bias or discrimination or harassment. However they also apparently are aware of ‘difficult situations’ their female colleagues or friends have had to face. An acceptance of these incidences as either one-of-its-kind or an aberration or not something serious is evident in the narratives of respondents like Ashwini and Hetal. The reason cited for disregarding this issue at workplace is ‘no one knows what happened’ where often the intent is to appear unbiased and non-opinionated and also in some way point out the onus on woman who complains of sexual harassment. It was evident from the narratives that though the company policy has safeguards and procedures against sexual harassment, most often these policies are not implemented. The hierarchical relationship between the executives and managers and concentration of power with men as the numbers of women dwindle in managerial positions, leaves them powerless. This is especially true for women who are engaged in jobs which are at the lowest level of the pyramid, do not have growth prospects and do not provide possibilities for sharing in decision making.

[^22]: A leading English daily on International Women’s Day carried out a story about ‘The Confident New Age Woman’ where the leading paragraph describes them as ‘They sport modern clothes, guzzle mugs of beer at the most happening watering holes in the city, sit in air-conditioned office cabins and know their minds perfectly well. Here comes the independent, free-spirited new-age woman. She is no longer the shy, bat-your-eyelids type. But rather, a woman who knows her mind only too well and has the confidence to face the challenges in life.’
The powerlessness which women experience pushes them to search for resources beyond their workplace and strategize to deal with the situation. Hetal talked about her friend who could pull a few strings when harassed by her team leader. Most women fall back on male colleagues or boyfriends, thus reiterating men as ‘saviours’. This also echoes that women in public spaces are at a risk of harassment and violence without any institutional safeguards and the onus lies on them to deal with these risks.

Though market liberalisation has led to increasing employment opportunities for women from middle class families, who had access to English education, it does not necessarily translate into change in structures. The underlying assumption in a market driven economy is that mutual cooperation and concern for social justice are taken into account, but this assumption is more theoretical than practical leading to unequal power (Pathania, 1999). Currently in Indian economy although tall claims are made by multinationals of hiring more women and women forming a huge workforce (TOI, 21st May 2012), one cannot ignore the type of jobs women are absorbed into. Even media reports suggest that women find it difficult to continue in their jobs once they decide to have a family because of lack of support from either the multinationals or the government (TOI, 9th May 2012). Although none of the women respondents acknowledged gender discrimination on job, they highlighted that men climbing up the ladder faster than women. This finding is in consonance with a recent report in a National English daily (TOI, 8th May 2012) which says:

‘Only one in every 10 senior management positions is occupied by a woman in the Indian IT sector, perceived to be a preferred destination for female employees. In the last three years, IT firms have largely placed women at the entry level positions while the count of mid- to senior level women executives has remained the same.’
The absence of women in decision making positions in these multinationals and the government’s dissolution of regulatory framework and exemption from central laws like trade unions act results in absence of any collective of workers or women, leaving them without any resources which they can evoke to exercise their agency. The rules of these institutions thus do not allow women access to resources which they could use to demonstrate agency.

7.1.2 Rules, Resources, Opportunities and Discourse – Reworking the Conceptual Framework

Rules and social norms influence availability of resources and opportunities to the individual, agency of an individual may be enhanced or limited by the same resources and opportunities thus affecting the rules and social norms in turn. This is at the level of the structure where agency of the individual comes into play with the social structures. The conception of ‘valued beings and doings’ or achievements, at the individual level, are influenced by social norms, resources and opportunities and individual’s ability to exercise agency within the public discourse. Since the discourses or public representations are multiple - often fragmented and contradictory, it leads to multiple beliefs about the norms of the society. In most cases women living alone and working in Mumbai admitted to having a vibrant night life – pubbing, clubbing, dancing, drinking and smoking; romantic relations – at times just friends with no strings attached, but almost all of them perform and believe in the ideal of chaste Indian woman who must adjust within marriage and also protect the honour of their family.

The findings of the study clearly spell out the significance of considering resources and opportunities available to the individual within the prevalent social norms that are mediated by
multiple discourses or what is termed as public representations in Aoki’s game theoretic conception of institutions Pillath’s, 2011. Aoki as discussed in Pillath 2011 proposed the concept of substantive institutions which relate outcomes of strategic interaction with public representations of equilibrium states of games. Public representation is assigned to the cognitive dimension of the model. However, Pillath (2011: 8) claims that public representations are not alone cognitive dimension of an individual, but ‘rely essentially on external means of representation’. As Pillath’s 2011 naturalized conception of Akoï’s model demonstrates, that individual actions emerge out of the feedback between individual and population level. He says

‘An action is performative, if it involves a conceptual blend across different domains, such that the resulting action is linked with particular somatic markers which reflect a sustainable disposition to this action, and such that the action correlates with the regular occurrence of external facts, which operate as signs triggering the somatic markers. As a result, following an institution does not involve an intention to follow, in the sense of a mental fact, but results from a closed causal feedback loop between signs, inner neuronal states, and actions that are signs in turn. As the signs are shared in a population of agents, these patterns reflect collective intentionality supervening on the underlying causal patterns.’(ibid: 20)

However, the feedback mechanism is not in isolation of the social norms and the public discourse. The conceptual framework at the beginning of the study constructed agency as a resultant of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators along with the resources and opportunities. Agency thus mediated the achievements, relationships and also reproduced social norms. The study findings have added an essential component of public discourse or public representation in the conceptualization of the interplay between agency and structure which creates the ‘mechanism of imitation’ between the individual and the population as depicted in Figure 2.
Individual agency can be conceptualized in multiple ways either as process or a result, but it would be a fallacy to believe that either works in isolation of the other. Agency is as much a process as a result within the social structures.

**Figure 2 Reworking the Conceptual Map**

The study findings reflected Saltzman Chafetz argument for a multi-level analysis, which takes into account the interplay between material and cultural factors along with the multiple power
relations. Unlike theoretical explanations that consider micro and macro level factors, this study finds it useful to also look at meso level factors i.e. group norms, group control, group resources and opportunities. These groups in case of single migrant women working in BPO and media industry are their families, friends, colleagues and superiors at workplace and community in which they reside. It is imperative to acknowledge that the norms and resources which each of these groups impose on the individual are varied and often contradictory, thus creating a ‘third space of enunciation’.

In figure 2 the material and cultural factors have also acknowledged the role played by public discourses. These public discourses or public representations as identifies in Aoki’s circular-causality approach (as discussed in Pillath (2011)) are multiple and also fragmented. The agency being articulated by women in multiple ways is also an indication of the interplay between cultural and material factors at the macro level, its interpretation and mediation by group norms and resources at the meso level along with the interpretation and intrinsic motivation at micro level. The interpretation of rules, resources, discourse and other factors at each of these levels is interlinked and rather can be called circular. The ‘feedback circle’ (Pillath, 2011) is a useful tool to understand how norms and resources penetrate and maintain the status quo through the multiple layers. However, it will be an oversight to assume that the feedback produces identical result, as it supposes that the individual is inactive. The feedback circle is being mediated by individual’s interpretation of the norms and resources both at the meso and macro level, thus articulating agency that helps them use the resources and deal with norms to achieve their valued beings and doings.
Women’s access to economic resources may be either an enabling factor in her gaining agency or could even be an issue of exercising agency. Women’s contribution to household income can be treated as an enabling factor, which might afford her few freedoms and control over decision making as in case of some of the respondents of the current study. However in case of few others, women’s financial contribution to the family is a matter of exercising a form of agency where they use it to subvert the normative hierarchical or gender structure. This substantiates Malhotra et.al.’s 2002 argument that while conceptually it is possible to distinguish between resources, agency and achievements it is not possible to completely segregate them in developing empowerment indicators. In the effort to operationalize empowerment various domains or dimensions have been segregated as economic, socio-cultural, familial or interpersonal, legal, political and psychological, however to delineate these dimensions is difficult as there is considerable amount of overlap and interlinks (Kishor, 2000; Jejeebhoy, 2000; Malhotra et.al., 2002). A study of self-help groups (SHG) in village of Andhra Pradesh also revealed that women often use resources to attain collective well-being of the family which they value more than their own autonomy. This cannot be seen as empowerment, but at the same time their participation in SHGs and exposure to capital markets enable them in some ways (Lingam, 2008).

Although the domains overlap and have strong interlinks, it is not to say that agency in one domain can translate into agency in all other domains – thus giving an impression that agency is segmentalised. As the findings highlight while single migrant women working in BPOs and media industry show a considerable use of agency in everyday life vis-à-vis familial and certain aspects of socio-cultural and economic domains, the lack of political awareness or what is often
termed as critical consciousness restricts the creative and purposeful use of agency to challenge the existing structural inequalities. Most women who are working in the BPO industry, assume that women have an edge over men in the industry because of the innate qualities or soft skills they possess. In subscribing to this view they are not conscious of how the same argument is used for women’s subordination and limiting women to specific type of jobs thus controlling their labour. The study findings reiterate the conclusive remarks drawn through a study of women who have entered into the world of organised work post-independence by Rama Joshi and Jaonne Liddle presented in the book titled ‘Daughters of Independence’ (2003: 234):

‘...women’s subordination at the top of the social hierarchy no longer consists in domestic seclusion, a ban on education and employment, economic dependence and extensive control over her sexuality, as it did under the caste system. Instead, it consists in controlling the kind, quality and purpose of women’s education, limiting the type and level of employment, the harassment and eve teasing of non-secluded women in education and work and in the requirement that women continue to perform domestic along with paid work.’

Women respondents of the study found themselves either in jobs like customer care service which has limited avenues of growth or in jobs like that of training or human resource management which are considered more suitable for women. It is important to acknowledge here that some women from the study sample who were engaged in jobs which are still considered a male bastion like editor or studio manager do not complain of work related discrimination, but have to deal with everyday harassment of living alone in the city like all other respondents as in case of housing. However, the freedom which physical distance from family entails gives them immense opportunity to interact with opposite sex, explore and choose their partner, explore their sexuality thus subverting the control which patriarchy thrives on.
7.2 Consumerism, Patriarchy and Agency

In an age of increasing consumerism women aspire to have lavish lifestyles and need to have more disposable income for social status. Greater acceptance by families of women’s employment in jobs which gives them mobility and visibility in public domain also is linked to their aspirations of upward mobility. The popular discourse in media promotes consumerism resulting in an understanding that the idea of modernity is dominantly about possession of consumer and lifestyle goods and a performance to display the same. The classic example of this in Indian context is social endorsement of lavish weddings and dowry - which is punishable by law (Acharya, 200). Women’s agency seems to be restricted to domains where they can make choices as a consumer and thus the choices they make are reflective of consumerism rather than agency.

Greater mobility and visibility in public space at night opens up several avenues for women to challenge the existent social norms, which are influenced by the dialectics between the normative structures and the fragmented popular discourses. Women who are part of the labour force are apparently challenging some of the patriarchal values and norms consciously and are also being given concessions by families because of the association of restrictions with low social status and backwardness (Ganguly-Scarse, 2003). However, the patriarchy of the capitalist structure, which lies largely invisible behind the cloak of modernity, is not even acknowledged by these women. Although it will be fallacious to say that they are not conscious of the restrictions that it entails. All the respondents displayed an in depth understanding of behaviours that are approved or the ones disapproved by the family, and therefore they tend to use agency in multiple forms like bargaining, subversion – overt or covert, performance, dissimulation, strategizing and rarely
active resistance. As mentioned earlier the use of strategies indicate women’s acceptance of the patriarchal norms and structures, however the pull and push between these women and their families definitely seem to be loosening the patriarchal ideals. The acceptance of women’s choices in most cases by the family is also indicative of malleability which patriarchy exhibits.

The demonstration of patriarchal malleability should also be studied within the consumerist culture and dominant discourse. As mentioned earlier women are active agents in domains where they can choose as a consumer. Similarly, families also find themselves influenced by the ‘growth story’, ‘shining India’ and ‘consumer is the king’ type of rhetoric. The expectation of the family from these women in view of the fact that they have no physical control over their daughters is that of performance of care, respectability and chastity. The women also play up to it by being perfect consumers – buying gifts for family, sending gifts and flowers on birthdays, anniversaries, rakhi online and also by maintaining lives that are highly segmentalised – good woman for family and hot and happening young girl at work and with friends. Women make a lot of effort to ensure that the twain shall never meet.

Women currently participating in the labour force, especially those who are in dead end jobs like customer care services with no specialised education to support a career, might not aspire for career as an achievement, but for them the ‘valued being’ is to be in a relationship which is glamorous – acquisition of consumer goods; ‘gives them space’- a degree of freedom within the marital relationship; partner who emulates some of the models, TV and film actors who are portrayed as caring, sensitive to the woman’s needs and desires but are also macho and protect them from the big bad world. The popular imagery in advertisements around ‘metrosexual men’
is that of a suave man serving home cooked breakfast to his wife in bed or surprising his wife with an expensive gift given in a special setting (read it as set up in a heritage hotel with music, lights, choicest cuisine on an anniversary). It is interesting that women in dead end jobs do not aspire to contribute to family income by being part of the labour force, rather expect the man to fulfill their aspirations. They seem to be shedding the dual burden of labour, unconsciously, as they do not intend to compete in the labour force, which is inherently unequal, and also expect their man to fulfill their emotional and material needs, thus fall back into the traditional roles subscribed for women in patriarchal societies. Also the limited opportunities and the type of jobs, which are more temporary and boring, leave marriage as the only viable alternative for them. This does not hold true for the women who are ‘career oriented’ and also subscribe to the ‘superwoman’ imagery where a successful woman is the one who handles both career and home.

The analysis of data from this study thus problematizes the assumption that education and wage employment have an impact on women’s empowerment. Education and wage employment although creates an avenue for greater mobility and visibility in public sphere, they do not alone help women develop critical consciousness to challenge the dominant patriarchal structures. Sen’s emphasis on freedom to work outside home for enhancing agency is also problematized by the findings of the study. The underlying assumption is that gainful employment gives women freedom to achieve their ‘valued beings and doings’ and also reduces their dependence on others especially male members of family. This over emphasis does not hold true in case of the women respondents who apparently are independent and detest family control, but within their romantic relationships they enact their normative roles prescribed by the patriarchal structure. Their socialisation in most cases weighs heavily over their new found freedom, as they feel privileged
to have families who consider their daughters and sons equal and have given so much to their daughters. Women definitely do not see this as their right to receive these entitlements. The notion of girl being the beholder of family honour continues to remain strong as that pushes women to put up performances as desired. In their lives family and their performance for them is one segment, which at an emotive level is detached to their life as a single woman working in global industry in Mumbai. The women seem to be balancing family trust in view of temptations of night life in Mumbai.

The dynamism of normative structures is accelerated by the popular discourse, which can support or negate critical consciousness. Basi (2009) in her study of call centres also suggests that while images of traditional Indian women and the new liberated woman might enhance the image of Indian economic liberalisation, they do not necessarily afford women liberation from patriarchal discourses.

7.3 Hybrid Cultures
The women who were interviewed for the study articulated themselves as being positioned in tradition and modernity simultaneously. They seemed to have created a space of their own which was an amalgam of cultural norms, which are termed tradition and western ideals, and practices which are termed modern. Although they describe themselves as epitome of tradition and modernity within the new middle class; the struggle to tread the thin line between being class conscious which manifests in conspicuous consumer behavior and gender consciousness that reproduces notions of chastity and respectability is constant. The identity that they possess and reproduce is locational and fluid as it manifests differently in different spaces based on perceived norms along with assertion of acquired class identity.
Hybridity originated from biology and then was explored within linguistic studies and the racial
studies. The concept of hybridity in the contemporary times has been extended to cultural
studies, in response to the increasing multicultural awareness, in the era of globalization.
Hybridity refers principally to the creation of dynamic mixed cultures from two or more
parent cultures. Bhabha (1986) saw hybridity as a transgressive act of challenging the dominant
authority, values and representations and thereby constituting an act of self-empowerment and
defiance in context of colonization. Bhabha explains that cultural systems are constructed in
‘third space of enunciation’\(^{23}\), thus questioning the purity of cultures and implying hybridity as
inherent. The cultural identities that emerge because of the mixing of culture and cultural
traditions give rise to hybrid identities that are increasingly common in a globalized world.
Kapchan and Strong\(^{1}\) commented ‘hybridity seems to promise a unique analytical vantage
point on the politics of culture by acknowledging the intricate and complex weave of any
heterodox and heteroglossic community.’ Franco (1993)\(^{24}\) also argues hybridity is not new in the
age of globalization, but the technologies which have globalized and transformed culture. Stone's
(1995) work about cyberspace and the construction of trans-sexualities in that realm also
demonstrates that new forms of identity are born from new technologies, though ‘not everyone is
equally radicalized by technology, what of places without satellite dishes and cyberspace and
peoples without mobility?’ Kapchan and Strong, \(1\) : 245). This could also be extended to the
relation of technology with individuals – is radicalization of those who produce technology
different from those who are just end users. In case of women who are end users of technology
and their identity as consumer intersects with other identities, the effects of adopted norms do not
necessarily lead to empowerment.

\(^{23}\) \url{http://www.qub.ac.uk/imperial/key-concepts/Hybridity.htm}

The identity of being Indian is not monolithic, rather there seem to be multiple Indian identities. Diasporic studies (Young, 1996; Anthias, 2001) highlight the struggle between the dominant and minority culture for hegemony seems to be underplayed in a context where everyone apparently shares an understanding of abstract and fluid notion of being an ‘Indian’. The multiple identities – gender, class, caste, regional, religion, which they possess are fluid and do not fall in the binaries of tradition and modern. Women respondents seem to be rearranging the culture by creating new interpretations and reproductions of performance, therefore, hybridities have to be analyzed through their deployment. Women like Hetal, Sujata, Tishya, Zareen, Githa although accept drinking or western attire as a modern trait which they have acquired after joining the workforce, they interpret it within the space which they identify as western and upper middle class and use their agency to reproduce, justify and assert a class identity. This negates Appadurai (1996) claims that a consumer is a mere chooser of consumer products and not an agent as the real agent is the producer of commodities along with the mediascapes and other forces of production. The finding of the study is reaffirmed by Basi’s (200 : 33) observation that ‘Although those in the Third World may seem to be manipulated into buying consumer goods which are alien to and destructive of their cultures, they are in fact actively employing consumer goods to express and forge their own unique identities and in this way are expressing their agency over consumption practices.’

Similarly when women choose to experiment with new forms of co-habitation, they attempt to subvert the existing and acceptable forms of patriarchy. The practice of co-habitation without marriage or social sanction is considered western and polluting. However, women who choose to live in with their boyfriends feel liberated, but unfortunately end up negotiating rather than
subverting by producing signs of marriage to hire an apartment or constantly strategize to escape their parents’ wrath. As Anthias 2001: 22 in her work notes ‘nor does it necessarily lead to transgressivity or empowerment: even where individuals adopt some of the cultural traits of the new society, they may remain marginalized and be seen as strangers’. This negates the assumption that the cultural traits or norms that are being adopted are empowering and are not gendered. Single migrant women work their way through the intersecting notions of gender, family, patriarchy, paid work, migration, class, conspicuous consumerism within dominant discourses which are fragmented. The spaces which are created by these intersections and the ambiguous space between tradition and modernity give these women an opportunity for hybridity. As Upadhya (2006: iv) in her study of Indian information technology workforce observed

‘The new generation of ‘global Indians’, represented by IT professionals, is caught in a web of contradictions around questions of identity and nationality. While they are well travelled, comfortable in international work settings, and masters of the latest technologies, many are nonetheless still embedded in ‘traditional’ social and cultural milieus and also articulate their adherence to ‘traditional values’. This has resulted in a new blending of modernity and tradition...’

The notion of hybridity for some does not translate into accepting hybridity as norm. They rather construct culture in the binary of traditional and modern. Traditional is ‘pure’ whereas modern attempts to pollute the culture. This dichotomy created by the binaries gives rise to the struggle for hegemony where the dominant culture asserts itself. Mumbai has seen numerous struggles like the ones initiated by Shiv Sena and Navnirman Sena to reclaim Mumbai as a Maharashtrain city. This tussle for hegemony between the right wing forces and the market is a project of hegemony. The market forces lure women within the global workforce as producers based on ‘emotional labour’ and as consumers by creating new ideals of the ‘global Indian woman’. The
imagery in popular media is in contrast with the notions of ‘chaste woman’ who should be within the realm of private space. Unfortunately this tussle for hegemony between tradition and modern, fundamentalist forces and market forces bring women in the fore and make them the bone of contention. However, it will be a fallacy to imply that women are thus silent observers. This strips them off the agency, which they articulate in everyday life to negotiate with both these forces. As Punita quipped

‘...when the Ram Sene episode happened in Mangalore, for a while we all didn’t go to pubs, but then we figured out that bringing booze home is better... cheaper and much more fun...it turned into a nice private party...we have continued doing that turn by turn...neighbours also don’t complain if you have a party once in 2-3 months...they think nice girls they don’t go out, they have homely parties...’.

The Ram Sene’s violence against women drinking in pubs was although condemned across the country; it also pushed women to assert themselves more. Punita and her friends’ solution was surely not assertion, but neither was it that of a silent observer. Within the ‘third space of enunciation’ women find immense opportunities and alternatives to negotiate simultaneously with the opposing forces. The fragmented discourse gives them the leeway to broaden the existing fissures or even create new ones in the over bearing structures of gender, patriarchy and capitalism. The pull and push being exerted by individual agency and structure will apparently lead to cracks or fissures that might give rise to a new order.

Women who are educated and move out of patriarchal families for working in organized industry are exposed to modern western culture - leading to increasing consumerist culture and emergence of middle class, which still attaches value to women as family honour. But the honour is bestowed by better education and employment opportunities for their daughters, yet

---

25 In 2009 Ram Sene a small time political outfit attacked women in a Mangalore pub.
performing and maintaining allegiance or even false compliance to families’ choice in major decisions like career and marriage. Education and employment is linked with aspirations that are largely aspirations of a consumer and is seen as a tool for upward mobility. Upward mobility could come with either gaining employment in multi nationals or by marrying a guy who is employed by the multinationals. The aspirations have led to shift in stringent rules around mixing of the sexes, choosing a partner on their own, mobility at night; but this is not to indicate that patriarchal rules do not cease to be. The emphasis on woman as the guardian of family honour continues but the definition of honour seems to be undergoing a change.

7.4 Malleability of Patriarchy

Although the analysis of my data suggests that women are still bound by the patriarchal structure, it would be naïve to paint patriarchy as static. While patriarchy still defines roles, responsibilities and norms, it also demonstrates malleability of varying degree. How we define patriarchy for single migrant women working in global industry would differ from other women in India, but patriarchy is also seemingly giving concessions and making adjustments. In India while historically patriarchy was closely linked with caste, the discussion around caste now seems to be out of the discourse in multinational firms which do not fall under the policy of positive discrimination. Also it could be because of the composition of the industry which is largely upper or middle caste (Upadhya, 2007). However, class has become key in this whole discussion which is demonstrable by the material gains, new ideas around individualism, seeking and prioritising pleasure, mobility and sexuality. The exposure to western lifestyle, choice of dressing, cuisine, and entertainment through popular media also creates hegemonic role models, which the aspiring middle class emulates to move up the social ladder. The exposure to new
ideas around sexuality, cohabitation, social norms give them the opportunity to create their own hybrid identities within the existent normative structure. The constant struggle and negotiation and the dialectics between normative structures and multiple discourses create a ‘third space of enunciation’, which gives women immense opportunities and alternatives to negotiate simultaneously with the opposing forces. The fragmented discourse gives them the leeway to broaden the existing fissures or even create new ones in the over bearing structures of gender, patriarchy and capitalism. The emphasis as demonstrated by most respondents is on performing the image of being traditional Indian woman which in itself has become fuzzy as they contest whether it is important to be dressed like an Indian woman or to feel like one or to behave like one, and each of these – dressing, feeling and behaving have multiple meanings. This is the opportunity which they grab ‘forcing the institutions of male domination to change and adapt to aspects of their resistance’ Liddle and Joshi, 1 : 27. Women’s effort might not be conscious but the contradictions that emerge out of the partnership between patriarchy and capitalism create spaces where women forge hybrid identities from the traditional and modern ideals thus creating a space for change. In fact continual tension persists between commitment to women’s empowerment and maintaining the gendered status quo. The interplay of the social and economic relations guides us to new forms of inequalities along the axis of caste, class, gender, and race. It is more complex and plural and cannot be seen as mere cause and effect.

High public visibility and exposure to new ideas about preoccupations (family, career, love and luxurious life) of women working in global industries is contradicted by impositions of fundamentalist forces that want to push women back into the realm of private. They harp on ‘Indian woman’ being polluted by western ideas without defining and acknowledging the
heterogeneity of this phrase. Their agenda is to protect women of the polluting forces as evident in one of the articles which reported about a Fatwa which prescribes that Muslim women should not travel alone, and be accompanied by a male chaperon (TOI, 9th March, 2011). To justify this the spokesperson of the organisation that issued the fatwa said:

"Don't modern educated women need protection?"

These contradictions and multiple discourses need to be taken into account by the women’s movement. As John (2009) cautions against any false universalism, she emphasises the need to highlight the local differences. The discourse on women belonging to private sphere is used, as an instrument for women’s subordination however visibility in public space alone does not translate into achieving the rights and entitlements. As evident in the study though women’s presence is being acknowledged in urbanscape and nightscape, it does not give them the right to be safe. Rather as discussed earlier questions on their morality, sexuality and safety are raised in an attempt to contain them to spaces where they have a purpose Phadke, 200 . The women’s movement in India has constantly engaged with debates on women’s sexuality, morality, acceptance of women in public spaces, active participation of women in public life, safety at home and at workplace, thus challenging the control of women’s bodies which is bestowed by patriarchy (CREA, 2006).

However, as John (2009) noted it is difficult to get young women to relate positively to the women’s movement. This is not to say that women are not concerned with issues of safety, sexuality, double standards, acceptability and respectability without being judged. One question which was asked to these women was ‘what would they like to change in their society ’ and
surprisingly enough all of them talked about education of girl child, safety of women, fighting hypocrisy in society and other concerns regarding women. But the answer to the following question ‘Do you think you can bring about that change ’ was disappointing. Most women felt that they can either contribute to charity or spend some time undertaking charity work, but none of the participants articulated any desire to bring about a drastic change. Though the study did not engage women in any conversation about feminism, it will be safe to assume that these women do not engage with it. In fact often rhetoric about feminist being bra burning, cigarette smoking woman with a big red bindi and hoarse voice is conjured up, which keeps these women away from ‘them’. As pointed out by Phadke nd, as quoted in John, 200 :

‘English-speaking, upwardly mobile and with strong professional ambitions of their own – feminism was rejected because it seemed to block or mock their desires; for others, particularly lower middle class students, unsure of any future outside of marriage, feminism appeared alienating, unable to touch their destinies.’

Interestingly the conjured up image of a feminist is not so different from the image of a single woman working in BPO or media industry, in public mind who accuses both these groups of polluting the other women. Though these young women articulate and use their agency consciously vis-à-vis their families, they are surely not doing so either at work place or in public life. Women are inactive in public life and do not participate in any political activity or movement thus giving an impression that though they are capable of using agency, their aspirations of change are restricted to individual ‘valued beings and doings’, within a consumerist culture that supports individual accumulation.
7.5 Women, Economy and State

In the era of market liberalisation, Indian government made the legal system more conducive for multinational companies, thus providing greater access to all the resources including human resource. The amendment in Factories Act allowed women to work in manufacturing units during night shifts which was not permissible in pre liberalised India. The BPOs in India are governed by the Shops and Establishment Act and the labour laws of the respective states. Although these laws in most states do not allow women to work in night shifts, governments give special exemptions or provide special permissions to establishments like BPOs, IT industry and media. However, these measures on part of the government seem to be driven by the economic interest of attracting foreign investment in the state rather than greater participation of women in the workforce without time restrictions. This is apparent by the absence of any support system – legal, infrastructural or social for women working in the night shifts at these establishments. Infact little effort has been made to make women’s existence in the nightscape safe and the onus still largely lies on the women as evident by the arguments which follow incidences of molestation, rape or even murder, where the woman is blamed to be dressed ‘provocatively’ or blamed for being out at ‘night’.

In case of women working in BPOs, the discourse is fragmented. Although the government and the BPOs jointly have acknowledged the need to provide security to women, the unsaid policy of most Human Resource Departments in these companies try to deploy women during the day shifts, if the BPO processes do not demand that. The Government also does not feel the need to either generate or recreate any system legal or social vis-à-vis labour issues in BPOs. In 2007 the then Labour Minister had said – ‘Government has no plans to appoint a regulator for overseeing
labour conditions in BPO companies Since labour laws are already applicable to BPOs and are regulated accordingly, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has no proposal to appoint a regulator for BPO companies’ (TOI, 21st July 2007). As Marik (2009) observed ‘Especially, by Section 49 of the SEZ Act (2005), the government is empowered to exempt any SEZ from the operation of any central law, which means for all practical purposes SEZs exist outside the laws of India, though on paper unionization is legal’. It is apparent that the national and local governments in the name of economic reform are focusing on delivering to the international market and multinationals, thus limiting the regulatory frameworks and social welfare system of the country. Bakker and Gill (2008) observe the emergence of ‘new constitutionalism’ that restricts government’s capacity for welfare measures and social redistribution, and promote privatized systems. The emergence of new constitutionalism and retreat of the state along with the consumerist economy leaves these women to negotiate safety and respectability in day to day affairs.

7.6 Implications for Theory and Research

The study intended to expand the understanding of agency and also the various forms it gets articulated in everyday interactions of women who are educated, work in BPO or media industry and stay away from family in a cosmopolitan city Mumbai. The social and cultural capital which these women possess provides them access to resources, opportunities and achievements, but differential outcomes are related to their economic, social and cultural capital which gets mediated through a differential use of agency. The study contests the assumption that education and employment enhances agency. The analysis helped in comprehending that agency is influenced by the rules which are dynamic, spatial and temporal in nature and cultural norms that
may become conceivable through exposure to the discourse – dynamic and fragmented. However articulation of agency is seen in domains that give them a basket of choices along with the anonymity to deal with the consequences. Education and employment as the basis of enhanced agency is not unfounded, but in absence of active engagement with decision making women find it difficult to use their agency in their interest. The absence of collective conscious or action is not just a reflection of growing consumerism which promotes individual achievements and consumption but also of state policies that are in favour of multinationals.

Though these women who were interviewed for the study demonstrated active use of agency with regards to their family, one wonders how these daughters of globalisation will shape their lives post marriage. The acceptance of primacy of marriage in the life cycle and their socialization to believe that family is woman’s primary responsibility raises certain questions for future research. Will these young women, post marriage continue to reproduce social systems and rules, without changing the basic assumptions? Would they resist or subvert patriarchal norms post marriage, in what ways? How would the women who do not aspire to have a career, negotiate for greater freedom and mobility within marriage, which they have experienced while being single? Would their experience of working and living independently enhance their agency and how would they compare with women who did not have the opportunity to stay away from family and work? Though there are no straight answers for these questions, the narratives are indicative of the fissures and fault lines that have started appearing in the patriarchal structures. Though the winds of change are evident, one needs to cautiously tread towards breaking the ‘capitalism-patriarchy partnership’.