Chapter 4

STRUCTURES OF PATRIARCHAL HONOUR

Chapter 4, the first of the three field-based work based chapters, argues that one of the ways in which patriarchal power operates on a day to day, almost invisible way is through codes of conduct that govern every moment of women’s lives. These codes pave the way for ideological domination by denoting even for oneself what is honourable and what is not, and what kind of behaviour brings shame upon oneself or one’s family and kinship¹ (Chakravarti 2006:151). It argues that the concept of honour percolates daily life, beyond the moment of right to choose partner. Through daily language and proverbs in a rural community in Maharashtra state where honour related crimes are not reported, it shows that the ideology of honour is similar to locales where honour crimes are ‘rampant’.

Honour carries different and hierarchal meanings for men and women, which can be better understood through the intersections of gender, caste, sexuality and structural or overt violence (Chacko 2001:27,106). Just as violence is embodied, so is honour. Honour exists in order for group identity; to define oneself against the ‘other’; thus it exists only as part of a group, and is aggravated when group identity is threatened. Honour groups maintain their boundaries through the life-long control of women from their families and blood-kinship. Though culture helps to operationalise honour on a day to day basis, this chapter gathers empirical evidence to show that honour is not merely a cultural phenomenon but is intrinsically linked to structures of domination. Gender and caste inter-relationships have been explored here to understand how honour helps maintain and reproduce power within a village setting. These intersecting systems of domination which include physical, infrastructural, social, economic, political, symbolic and behavioural controls create a complex

¹ In my field-work area, kinship consists of the ‘bhavki’ (the patrilineal and patrinosocial network, based on blood relations and descent), and the ‘pahune’ (network of families related by marriage). The kindship network is necessarily from the same sub-caste. Members of a bhavki carry the same family name, whereas the pahune have different surnames. Marriage within blood-related families that share the family name (father’s brothers’ or patrilineal cousin brothers’ households), namely the bhavki is considered taboo and incestuous. Marriage alliances take place endogamously among the pahune sub-set of families. The pahune of first choice are the families where earlier daughters have been married into, thus the bridegroom of choice is the paternal aunt’s (father’s sister’s) son.
matrix of oppression. The chapter constructs a gender-caste matrix in order to understand how structures of class, caste and gender operate through insidious daily norms of behaviour. It explores how social exclusion, domination, subordination and marginalisation are strengthened through the concept of honour.

The structures as documented through the gender-caste matrix are suffocating, yet Chapter 4 argues that there are inherent loopholes in the concept of honour which create sites for rebellion\(^2\), negotiations and challenges (Chakravarti et al., 1988). Neither gender nor caste power is immutable; they are constantly subject to change because of the forces of modernisation and due to people’s agency to challenge structures all the time.

**Background of the area in which Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held:**

Pune district, where the FGDs were held is in *paschim* (western) Maharashtra on the Deccan plateau. Pune city is at a distance of 170 kms south-east of Mumbai and at a height of 1850 feet above sea level. Purandar taluka (rural block), one of the 14 *talukas* of Pune district stretches between 20-60 kms from Pune city, further up, at a height of 2500 feet above sea level. Having come under the rain shadow region since the massive drought of 1972, most of the *taluka* is drought-prone. Economically disadvantaged in spite of being part of the prosperous Pune district, the taluka consists of 130 villages, and the population of each village may range from 1500-4000 people. Usually a village has a main residence (*gaothan*), with numerous *wadis* (hamlets) settled around private landholding of prominent families. The main occupations are dry-land agriculture, farm-labour and infrastructure construction through government sponsored anti-drought, or right-to-work programmes. Those who can afford to migrate to the cities do so; some migrate to richer *talukas* for seasonal labour.

Though Brahmins, Sonars (goldsmith) and Guravs (temple-keepers constituted out of the middle castes) enjoy a high social status, they are nominal in number. The Marathas form the bulk of the population (over 70%); they own most of the land

\(^2\) See Bhagwat (1995) for a feminist historical analysis of the writings of Indian women saints from the 13th century onwards. These compositions contain a scathing critique of their daily labour, patriarchy, caste and sexuality.
and also enjoy political, economic and social clout. Marathas range from the high Deshmukh and Shahannah Kuli sub-castes to ‘lower’ sub-groups.³

An interesting feature of this area is the presence of the “Bara Balutedars” - the twelve occupational castes⁴ existing within the feudal subsistence system, akin to the traditional Jajmani⁵ system, constituting around 8% of the population. Artisans ranging from carpenters, blacksmiths, potters and barbers to all Dalit⁶ groups and Muslims are not paid monetarily for their traditional services. The village panchayat pre-decides upon a fixed quantity of harvest that each household in the village has to pay to the artisans once a year, depending upon the former’s landholding. Amongst the various balutedars, traditional services are offered to each other in the spirit of mutuality. Today most members of these occupational caste households have entered the market economy, either in the city or the village itself, resulting in one household carrying on the ‘balutedari’ system, or sharing it with other kinship members on an annual basis. Needless to say, the barter system is based on class and caste power, where land distribution and incomes are skewed and unequal.⁷

The 23 women participants⁸ in the FGDs were health / para-legal workers in MASUM and ranged between the ages of 26 and 58 years. Thirteen belonged to the Maratha caste and the others to artisan or Dalit groups. Seventeen were married, co-habiting women; the others were single (never-married, deserted or widowed). Of the five men participants⁹ (ranging between the ages of 30 and 50 years) that worked in various programmes of MASUM, two were Marathas; the other three from artisan and Dalit castes. All were married and had children.

³ See Jadhav 2011 for a discussion on the constitution and re-constitution of the Maratha caste
⁴ which include the Brahmins and Sonars mentioned earlier
⁵ William H Wiser used the term ‘Jajmani’ to refer to the interaction between different Hindu caste groups in the production and exchange of goods and services. Different terms are used in different parts of India to describe this economic interaction among the castes: in Maharashtra, the term ‘Balutedari’ is used. (2011, Sociology Guide.Com)
⁶ Those at the bottom of the balutedari scale, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and in general, all those that have been discriminated within the caste structure. Most of them have little or no landholding and either work on the fields of the dominant castes, (on daily or yearly wage labour), or work on government sponsored employment schemes
⁷ See Ramchandra et al., (2010) for a detailed village-based socio-economic survey of agrarian relations in Andhra Pradesh
⁸ Malan Zagade, Pramila Pawar, Manisha Kunjir, Kavita Jagtap, Anandi Yadav, Manisha Buddhivant, Vatsala Deokar, Jyoti Chaundkar, Sushila Kad, Sunanda Khelekar, Babita Golande, Kalpana Yadav, Mangal Magar, Ujwala, Yogita, Rohini Kunjir, Sharmila Waghmare, Chhabutai Raut, Vidya Mahamuni, Asha Shinde, Sunanda Jadhav, Mangal Ambale, Mangal Kunjir and Changuka Waghmare
⁹ Dilip Gavhane, Ravi Waghmare, Vilas Indalkar, Sopan Wadkar, Dilip Waghole
Twenty FGDs were held over a period of three months with MASUM’s rural staff to identify the structures of caste, patriarchy and other intersecting systems of hierarchy and domination within the village microcosm. They helped to plot the gender-caste matrix, the nomenclature related to honour and power, the daily norms related to women’s behaviour, the structures, agency, as well as the loopholes and tensions within the caste-gender matrix. Since the participants of the FGDs were part of the village as well as MASUM - the ‘outsiders within’, they were able to enunciate their feminist standpoint along with explaining the normative structures of patriarchy, caste and sexuality within the village setting. As a result, the FGDs combined language as well as criticality because the participants were at once conscious of the structures, as well as being adept at negotiating with these.

Caste and Patriarchal Power and Honour within the Village Setting

a) Caste: The Upper-Lower Divide

Caste is embedded into the physical structure of most villages where the FGDs were held in such a way that caste-based segregation and inequality are normalised and legitimised. Hardly any village can be mapped in the absence of the varchi ves (upper boundary - or entrance) and the khalchi ves (the lower boundary - or exit). In some villages, even the breeze enters the village from the varchi ves. This entrance is often decorated with a welcoming arch and has important embellishments such as the bus stop, better street lights, the few shops, the chavdi (the daily informal meeting place), and, from here branch all the roads and alleys to the rest of the village.

The lanes closest to the upper entrance are meant for the residence of people from the upper (varche) groups (dominant in terms of class, caste, authority, power) whereas lower (khalche) groups (subordinated, marginalised and dispossessed in terms of the above attributes) reside in the lower part of the village. Village

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10 See Annexures 2 and 3 for questionnaires on honour and power related discussions, respectively
11 See Chowdhry 1998:303-304 for a discussion on how caste inequality is legitimised and normalised in a village setting
12 Srinivas (1959) noted that a caste might be said to be dominant when it a numerical majority and it also wields preponderance economic and political power
13 FGD participants noted that possessing / lacking the following attributes put people into the following four categories if a gender-caste matrix were to be constructed:
economics obviously favours the upper groups.\textsuperscript{14} The ‘uppers’ patronise businesses run by their own kind and can even impose economic sanctions against subordinated groups unless the latter have higher political or economic status or have good relations with members of the dominant groups.

Caste honour is also evident in the public display of celebrations. Only the dominant groups (rich Marathas) can have an ostentatious procession\textsuperscript{15} during the wedding. This is a matter of great prestige;\textsuperscript{16} fire-crackers, a live band, a horse or fancy carriage, abundant liquor, street dancing and tossing of money mark the revelry. People will borrow large amounts of money or mortgage their land to put up a pompous show,\textsuperscript{17} most of which is paid for by the bride’s family. Lower groups rarely have their wedding procession pass through the ‘upper’ village. Even death doesn’t provide an escape from caste hierarchy and decorum. The funeral procession of the upper groups goes through the main village and leaves through the upper 5es, whereas that of the lower groups leaves unobtrusively from the lower 5es. Cremation

\textbf{Upper Man}: Belonging to Brahmans, Maratha, Vani or Sonar castes; rich; living in a concrete house with many rooms, electricity, TV, fridge, phone, and other amenities; landholding above 10 acres with irrigated land and advanced farming techniques; owning agricultural assets and vehicles; having access to health facilities and accounts in the bank and post office; an educated family background, knowledge of English; diploma holder; high-placed positions (professionals; bureaucrats; politicians); good connections with people; access to business information; physically strong and healthy; capacity to make decisions; can remarry or commit bigamy.

\textbf{Upper Woman}: Belonging to the same caste status as the Upper Man but substantially lower economic position; enjoying amenities at home, but no property or resources on her name; bank accounts in joint name with husband; educated; employed (teacher, nurse, aanganwadi / haalwadi worker, or doing embroidery and stitching); married women who bear sons (unmarried, widowed and deserted women are shown no respect – cannot remarry); healthy; virtuous; good-looking; no power; having prestige if husband has stature; all benefits reach the Upper Man first.

\textbf{Lower Man}: Belonging to lower halwedars (artisans); Dalits; nomadic tribes; having low economic status; living in mud huts with temporary roofing and outside the main village area; not enough access to electricity or water; ownership of house if rare; possessing scanty resources, very little capital and cultivable land; working as landless labourers; low education; poor job opportunities (labourers, clerks, Class IV workers); not being able to access benefits of the reservation policy; shouldering the responsibility of many family members; sturdy but prone to diseases.

\textbf{Lower Woman}: Belonging to the same class and caste as the Lower Man; not possessing house or property in her name; land-holding if any, is non-irrigated and in the husband’s name; having very low access to education; no job opportunities; having low-paid jobs; even married Lower Women have no honour – widows and deserted women are especially excluded from social festivities; mal-nourished, suffering severe illnesses but without adequate access to treatment.

\textsuperscript{14} Pattanaik (2008) has used and classified the categories ‘Upper’ and ‘Lower’ in his inter and intra-village community study of socio-economic development in UP. He has pointed towards differential access of the upper and lower groups (among Hindus and Muslims) to resources and opportunities

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{varcaat}

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{maan and prati\textit{shtha}}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{jaagiri geli tari chaalet, pan phuger jaata kamaa naye}
areas were segregated on the basis of caste in the villages until recently; in fact many lower groups still cremate their dead in fields.\textsuperscript{18}

The lower part of the village where most of the subordinated castes reside is also used for defaecation by everyone, including the dominant groups. It is thereby designated as the 'shit-pot' (hagandari) of the village! Thorny bushes abound in this dirtied and foul smelling area. Collecting these bushes for an annual village ritual is considered the duty of the subordinated castes. A few years ago for the first time, a youth group from among the 'lower' castes collectively decided to disobey this diktat. They also offered to collect monetary contribution towards the festival from all the lower group homes. The upper castes summarily rejected both these proposals - the bushes had to come from the lower groups and under no circumstance were they to contribute any money towards the festival of the village deity: what were they trying to do, pretending to become rightful denizens? In another instance, a Maratha bridegroom's thirsty entourage inadvertently stopped at a public water-tap in the lower part of the bride's village as they entered it from the 'wrong' end. Thereafter, the upper men from the bride's family admonished the lower group with "How dare you insult us by inviting our bridegroom's family to drink water from here? Don't ever be in such a hurry to loosen your taps for any of our guests." Lower groups can affect the honour of the uppers in such seemingly bizarre ways.

The geo-politics and political economy of the village, well-set in terms of caste and gender hierarchy (see later in this chapter), prepares the stage not only for overt violence and discrimination, but also for structural violence and insidious power to operate (Chakravarti 2006:5). The covert manifestations of power function within the private and the public domains through well-defined codes of caste and patriarchal honour. They allow for upper groups, especially the men to pierce and fix their gaze upon every happening in the village and to control daily life as much as possible, both for the women in their own households as well as those from lower groups. Not much can elude the large and small codes of conduct established by powerful and dominant men in the village setting.

\textsuperscript{18} this is true today also of people who die of HIV-AIDS; they are denied cremation in the village crematorium
b) Patriarchy: The Public-Private Divide

Women from dominant groups have some power outside the home, but very little inside it. With greatly restricted mobility and always under suspicion, they are unable to leave home and can't interact with outsiders, especially lower men. If an upper woman visits neighbours or friends, she is considered shameless: "Why are you loitering around the village like a gurvin?" (*Gurav* are the local temple keepers who also live off grains or flour collected from people's homes). Upper women reported that they may not be allowed to talk or interact with men of the lower groups; to eat in village meals; to see a *tamasha* (folk-theatre); a *kusti* (wrestling match) or any non-religious recreation in the village; to speak publicly’ or to walk through the main village with their footwear on, or with uncovered heads. Women from the upper groups have to be controlled not merely for the sake of their own *aabroo*, but that of the entire family, kinfolk and caste as well. Within the home, there's always the fear of domination and violence from their men, about which they cannot speak out because of honour issues. Return to the natal home even in dire situations is considered shameful. A woman from an upper group has to wait for the men-folk of her household to settle scores with her husband.

Women seen with their heads uncovered in public spaces can render the entire family to lose their *aabroo*, especially among the dominant castes. An upper woman is compared to an irresponsible man loafing around, displaying his penis on his shoulder.¹⁹ However, disdain but not surprise is expressed when a lower group woman is seen with her head uncovered. It is assumed that she will behave like "her own caste," because as a "*balutedar* who has no worth or credit,"²⁰ and who is not endowed with honour,²¹ she is not even expected to behave with decorum.²² Only "honourable"²³ women are well-behaved and are constantly reminded to behave with

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¹⁹ "*chaal chavola, khandyavvar lavola*"
²⁰ "*balutbai, hisaab nahi*"
²¹ *aabroodaar*
²² Crenshaw (1991) notes that rape laws in the USA did not emanate out of respect for all women's rights, but largely to control the sexuality of white women. Black women were not considered worthy of protection from rape because they were expected to be sexually available to white men
²³ *Izzatichya*
restraint. From an early age, women learn to accept defeat because of their secondary status within and outside the home.

Making a speech or submission in a public meeting can render all women without shame (Iaaz). Since women from all castes and religions have lower status, they cannot urinate in public (though men do it all the time) out of fear of losing their shame and modesty. As a result, they don't drink water for hours when they are outdoors.

**Nomenclature for Honour and Power**

Honour is understood in multiple and distinct ways, depending on who is being referred to and on the individual’s placement on the gender-caste matrix of power. Words denoting respectability, value, clout, capability, suitability and so on intrinsically belong to those who are in power within the village. In a word, it is the powerful that ‘possess’ honour. Gender, caste and class lend these power-based characteristics to a select few people in the village.

Men from the upper groups are not only privileged by birth to possess honour; they also determine how others will be possessed (even if temporarily), or dispossessed of honour. Their honour is at risk only through the conduct of their women, but never through theirs. They exert cultural, political and socio-economic power within the village, being called upon to arbitrate when conflict or loss of honour happen in the public or private domain of all castes within the village. Their gaze penetrates the innermost sanctum of the home and securely resides in the highest political office of the village. They are not only above the local law and codes related to honour that govern the rest of the village but they also negotiate power on behalf of (or against) members of the village (see Chacko 2011:66). In the drought-prone,
agrarian, small farmer dominated society where external interventions (including that of the law) are not considered welcome, the power that the men from dominant groups wield is significant. Lack of access to the legal system and corruption within the law enforcement agencies also increases the power of the upper men, including upholding what they may consider to be the honour of the village.

Those who already possess vertical\textsuperscript{30} honour\textsuperscript{31} or status\textsuperscript{32} are not questioned about their sexual conduct\textsuperscript{33} and their behaviour rarely comes under the scanner.\textsuperscript{34} No one dares to talk openly about the sexual relations upper men have with (or force upon) women from their households, including their daughters. The upper men move around with their honour intact, in spite of their obvious sexual liaisons with (or sexual harassment of) lower women, since they are not answerable or accountable to lower groups (see Chapter 2, Section on Honour). Yet this privilege is not accorded to all members of dominant households. Sexual gratification cannot be articulated by a woman from their households because it is her perceived asexuality that sets her apart from the sexualised lower woman, and helps maintain the identity of the honour group. While rich households have status within the caste and religion, the women of their households have to live under bondage,\textsuperscript{35} because their coming out affects the esteem\textsuperscript{16} of the family; thus they have to bear violence to maintain the status of the family.

Crimes of respectable (pratishthit) men from the upper groups are hidden by his kinship (bhakti), but those of lower men are raised publicly, in which case the man may be beaten up and even taken to the police station. Men from the upper groups don't show any guilt or shame when they have perpetrated violence, but saunter around with smugness and conceit (rubaat). Men honour, power and wealth / property are inter-dependent; gain or loss in any one can affect the other. Honour can thus be considered as cultural capital that can be converted into economic, social and political capital, as and when required.

\textsuperscript{30} sthaan
\textsuperscript{31} izzat, ibhrat
\textsuperscript{32} pratishtha
\textsuperscript{33} laangik wartamuk
\textsuperscript{34} See Chapter 2 for a similar concept of seref / sharaf in the Middle East
\textsuperscript{35} bandhan
\textsuperscript{36} moan
On the other hand, women and the khalche or ‘lower’ men do not possess intrinsic honour - the words representing their honour are based on their behaviour, and are indicative of their lower social position. These terms\(^{37}\) denote shame, stigma, lack of decorum, low social status, low intelligence, being bereft of honour and so on. In a word, what these groups possess is not honour, but shame. Women as the property of men, embody the latter’s honour and thus are held responsible for their honour.

The construction of honour for dispossessed groups, including upper women is negative (shame rather than honour\(^{38}\)), not affirmative and is always questionable.\(^{39}\) This already fragile and elusive honour being dependent on the perception of men from the upper groups, can be easily lost through behaviour that is unacceptable to the latter. Whatever little intrinsic honour women possess is dependent on their family’s status and to socially sanctioned behaviour, most of which is restrictive and subservient to the family and kinship network.

Not only do women and lower groups lack intrinsic honour; they are also responsible through their behaviour for the loss of the honour of the upper men.\(^{40}\) Women’s deviation from the expected behaviour of the ‘honourable’, respectable feudal class, or a highly-placed family\(^{41}\) makes the family and kinship lose honour, resulting in severe reprimands of having sullied the name\(^{42}\) and public face\(^{43}\) (cutting the nose\(^{44}\), blackening the face\(^{45}\)) of the family.\(^{46}\) Disfiguring visible body parts is


\(^{38}\) Chowdhry (2007: 16) mentions similar terms: sharm (modesty) and lihaz (deference) with respect to women’s sexuality because “the honour of every family is connected to its girl”; she also notes that women do not possess an honour of their own; only men do

\(^{39}\) “Don’t you have any izzat?”; “You have no ala-mola.”

\(^{40}\) Haeri Shapla 1995 quoted in Wikan (2008: 85) and speaking of Pakistan says “honor, izzat is intimately tied in with a male natural right to possess and control womenfolk…Men possess honour….It follows that women cannot own honor in the same way as men. They represent honor; they symbolize honor; they are honor.”

\(^{41}\) ukh kul

\(^{42}\) noor ghalaalavley (“You’ve dishonoured your father’s name”)\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\) Wikan (2008), notes that Middle Eastern terms related to honour are sometimes synonymous to certain exposed parts of one’s body such as the face, or nose. What is visible to the public is considered as worthy of honour, whereas what is hidden from public view (body parts, family quarrels etc) is worthy of shame and can bring dishonour when exposed to the public gaze.

\(^{44}\) noor ghalaavley

\(^{45}\) toudaila kauly phaalavley

\(^{46}\) Wikan Unni (ref needed) also notes this term among all religions in Middle Eastern societies, where blackening a face is a public act of shaming or dishonouring a person. Defacing what is visible to the public amounts to dishonour.
considered act of shaming and humiliation (Wikan 2008) and the transgressing woman is accused of having done that to her parents\textsuperscript{47} and wider social network.

Local words for power, some of them identical to those used for honour denote manifold types of power. Those related to solid\textsuperscript{48} economic\textsuperscript{49} or political power,\textsuperscript{50} or enjoying political connections and backing of kinship networks\textsuperscript{51} can bring favours, advantage and access to already influential\textsuperscript{52} persons or institutions. Such power can be used to manipulate women’s sexuality, gain more political power by winning elections, terrorise and even to outsource murders.\textsuperscript{53} Local goons and merchants without whose consent not much can ensue in the village\textsuperscript{54} possess muscle power\textsuperscript{55} which they use to show off their might\textsuperscript{56} and to dominate\textsuperscript{57} or gain control\textsuperscript{58} over their caste groups. Local leaders\textsuperscript{59} can usher in dictatorship\textsuperscript{60} due to their close connection\textsuperscript{61} with highly placed politicians, whereby access to basic resources within the village can be denied to anyone not abiding by their diktats. Their fearsome surveillance\textsuperscript{62} and control can wield\textsuperscript{63} strong pressure\textsuperscript{64} over the entire group.

Women, especially from dominant groups gain honour and power through the men they are related to, and especially through their husband’s status; in that sense they possess a vertical honour (see Stewart 1994) which exists as long as they have status in the eyes of their family. It follows that they retain this conditional honour by abiding with their families’ interests and show off their rank, power and position\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{47} The concept of ‘\textit{a}rd’ ‘\textit{ird} in the Middle East also denotes a similar kind of honour that women can bring to their guardians through their behaviour
\textsuperscript{48} bhakkam
\textsuperscript{49} sarthik satta
\textsuperscript{50} ‘I have power in my hands; Mine is the \textit{patil gharana}’
\textsuperscript{51} paathbal
\textsuperscript{52} lambcha vashila
\textsuperscript{53} supari dnyaatadhi
\textsuperscript{54} poan halat nahi
\textsuperscript{55} managat-shahi
\textsuperscript{56} taakd
\textsuperscript{57} dadagiri
\textsuperscript{58} hukumat
\textsuperscript{59} pudhaari
\textsuperscript{60} hukumshahi
\textsuperscript{61} vazan
\textsuperscript{62} vachak
\textsuperscript{63} anmal
\textsuperscript{64} dabkabaa
\textsuperscript{65} again, these are forms of vertical and competitive honour (see Stewart in the Section on Honour in Chapter 2)
by their clothes, jewellery and household items or by the fine food cooked and served in their homes. They gain power by aligning with the upper man irrespective of what he has done, by not interacting with lower men and certainly by not behaving “like the lower woman.” Since women’s power depends on their relationship with the men of the household and on the power that their husbands hold within the home and in the village, they use that reflected power to further their own interests whenever possible. They use this power against those who they have control over, such as daughters-in-law, daughters and younger women in the family.

**Daily Codes of Patriarchal Honour**

Patriarchal controls tag every action of women’s lives through implicit and explicit codes of conduct that are instilled from childhood. Mobility, labour, decision-making, public participation, reproduction, sexuality and adherence to marriage within the institution of the male-headed family are stringently governed by omniscient signs and signals. These mundane and almost invisible mores of decency and ‘honourable’ behaviour reproduce unequal gender relations by exerting symbolic, ideological and material control over women’s sexuality, behaviour and existence, because honour is not merely a cultural construct but is “grounded in material conditions and self-worth” (Chowdhry 2007:16). Imbibed since early childhood these codes define and ‘normalise’ even for one what is honourable and what is not, and what kind of behaviour brings shame and dishonour upon the individual, the family, kinship or caste. **Hierarchy is reinforced** through such codes in the marital home too; thus, a new bride that doesn’t touch people’s feet, doesn’t address even the youngest of the in-law with respectful terminology, and who is not adequately hospitable is considered to be without decorum. Elders maintain strict control over newly married couples so that they do not bond too much as a dyad, or conspire to leave the extended family or kinship network. Affection or intimacy between young couples is strictly discouraged, usually by scolding the woman. If a young married couple chats or sits next to each other, or even if a bride

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66 aho-jaho
67 ala-mola nah!; alya-molyachi; pandharpur chya kolyachi; chaal-reet ahey kal!; valan nah!; taal-mel nah!
68 Chowdhry (2006:2) makes a similar observation; about affection or sexual display between married couples being subjected to distinct suspicion, because marriage is largely about social reproduction and not about the individuals’ needs or desires.
serves food to her husband on her own, she is scolded with " Didn't we ever have husbands? Don't you know how to behave in public? " Similarly, the bride is considered to have abandoned her laaj and aabroo if the young couple stays in bed beyond sunrise.

After marriage, women are necessarily expected to reside in the husband's home. A married woman living in her natal home is comparable to cattle without a leash - uncontrolled and ready to meander into any pasture. Even if a woman stays there because of desertion by her husband, her worth is rendered questionable. If the desertion took place due to an actual or perceived extra-marital affair, she may not be invited to social functions that prominent folk are expected to attend, as her presence would be shaming to the hosts in their fancy get-together. 'Free women' (ranging from non-cohabiting women to those working in MASUM) pose severe threats to the patriarchal order in terms of sexual and physical autonomy, making the control over women's mobility imperative. Women's appearance in the public domain is restricted through aspersions on her reputation, reiterating the fact that reputation is not a gender neutral concept but is a form of controlling women's behaviour and movement. 'Mobile' women are derided with expletives such as one who is "given away to a temple," "not under any one man's control," "without husband or keeper" (the terms 'widowed woman' and 'prostitute' being used synonymously) or an aimlessly wandering woman or cow. Codes of conduct become especially strict with night-travel; thus, if a woman comes home late or goes out in the night, her ibhrat is severely affected.

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69 laaj nasyagath; laaj-aabroo sodun dili
70 see later for a more detailed discussion on this subject
71 bin davnichie janaavar
72 layki
73 pratishthit
74 moklya baya (also see interview with Ganesh for his derisive conception of 'forward' women
75 Ironically, such excessive control over mobility of girls also exists among some Indian immigrants to the UK (Sanghera 2007). This exists in spite of the fact that girls in Indian cities today have increasing freedom of mobility.
76 Welsh’s (2008:x) suggestion that the term honour be replaced by the more neutral term 'reputation' does not hold good for women, as most crimes in the name of honour happen when the reputation of a woman or her family is tarnished
77 murli
78 pasti
79 raand, dedagh
80 gaav-bhaavani
81 gaav-jaaani

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The concept of *chaadar-chaar diwaari* (covering and restricting women to the home), discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to societies where honour crimes and killings are reported (Gul Khattak 1994; Zia 1994) prevails in the area of this field work as well. Women’s inappropriate behaviour such as not being appropriately covered, not being segregated from men or leaving the sanctum of the home causes loss of *izzat / aabroo* to privileged and dominant men (Chowdhry 2006:10). Women encounter sexual commentary of their clothing or nubile body structure from men and boys, including loud declarations of explicit sexual desire and heat. Men don’t lose honour by saying these, but women do simply upon hearing these, or by having such things said about them. Being endowed with honour as fragile as glass, a woman’s actions have the potential to bring instant and permanent dishonour to her family and to the husband. **Control over a woman’s body,** especially in the public domain is also maintained through minute and restraining norms that define womanhood (ibid: 16). Women are not only considered shameless if they walk unrestrained or jauntily, but their gender identity becomes suspect. If they sway their hips or breasts or laugh and talk loudly they are labelled *hogadya* (which means ‘shameless’ for women and ‘stupid’ for men) or *hizda* (intersexual, eunuch or hermaphrodite). If they give eye contact or speak in public, they are considered ‘masculine’.

Men acquire private ownership over children, wife, wealth, money, home, land and vehicles through inheritance, and thus have rightful claim over these. Their control over their assets is considered indisputable. On the contrary, when women try to make a life for themselves by becoming economically independent, they are perceived to lose *izzat, laaj, aabroo*; more so, they dispossess their families of honour too. Money is scarce in the agricultural economy of the drought-prone

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83 *umbraya bahe pakney*
84 *"kay jawani uto chalali ahe”*
85 *"ek chance mila tar khoop maja yei”*
86 *"di ki ang bujh jayegi”*
87 *kachecha bhaanda*
88 *besharam, guir-abroochi*
89 *"hogadyagat chawili” (she walks like a hogadya). This term is similar to the word ‘hizda’, which when used for women means shameless but for men it means unmanly, effeminate or impotent. It may denotes the man’s land; the ‘neither man neither woman’ or transgender nature of the hijra (Jaffry 2008:72)*
90 *maan var karun bin laajyagat laba laba bolit”*
91 *malki*
92 *hakkachi gohta*
93 *taaba*
villages. Upward mobility of artisan or Dalit homes poses a direct threat and loss of control for the upper groups, especially men, leading to anger and intimidating behaviour against enterprising women from lower socio-economic groups. **Control over the earnings** of subordinated groups is strictly maintained by the dominant through sexual denigration of their women. On the one hand, lower women are subjected to comments such as "Why do they need to work? They earn enough by lending their thighs" or "Those ones, they know how to fill their bellies." On the other hand, when a woman from a subordinated group sets up a small livelihood venture, she is ridiculed - "Now she's set up a bazaar (market) - she is bazaar."

Such a woman’s word is not to be taken seriously "because is a street prostitute."

Her economic advancement is considered due to her trading sexuality to an indeterminate number of men for financial favours and advancement.

Women’s sexuality is the weakest link in patriarchy because after all, in spite of the careful crafting of patrilineality, the fact that motherhood is certainty and fatherhood a matter of speculation or faith remains. Fearing this fatal subversion through women’s sexual ‘misdemeanours’, relentless and obsessive **control over women’s sexuality** is pursued throughout her life. A man’s multiple relations are acceptable to society even among Dalit households (Amarsheikh 1984 quoted in Bhagwat 1995) just because he is male (purush, nar) but if a woman so much as speaks to a man, it is assumed that she has a romantic or sexual relation with him and is labelled as promiscuous.

Considering it her fault for ‘encouraging’ or ‘provoking’ the man, he is forgiven: "He’s a male after all, but doesn’t she have any sense?" The affair of an unmarried man does not constitute a loss of honour. A bride would be found in order to ‘fix him up’, and if he’s already married, his wife will be consoled by saying that even if he (or his penis) tends to wander around, he’ll finally return to

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93 "sangdyya diliya ki bhoogtay."
94 "ga kay, patthay ka bay" the only way a lower group woman is expected to make any gain is by being sexually available for the powerful men.
95 this is an innuendo meaning: a market / public woman or a prostitute
96 bazaarbasvi, basvi also means a woman given up to a temple
97 "guand dili."
98 "puchicha sauda karun ghar var anley" (she’s traded her cunt to finance her home)
100 "khulchi gaund dheeli sodli, ghar var anayla" (she’s loosened her bottom to bring her home to the top)
101 "khunai, mokhya bheka, chalali nijayla, kathoon nijan aali, aut ghali"
102 "casti angavvar, gheli shingavvar" (she came on to him, and he tossed her with his horns)
103 also see interviews with Ganesh, Waseem and Mridula in Chapter 5 for similar beliefs.
104 a "tyala adkavney hoit"
her. Men whose wives have died under suspicious circumstances will find younger brides, but if a wife is suspected even as much as having an affair, she will be kept under strict vigilance and may be locked up in the house.

Mass- rapes may be considered horrific but individual rape is trivialised and considered inevitable when a widowed woman dresses up well, when a woman walks spritely, when women stay out of home after nightfall or when women are not covered up properly. Though the community is more sympathetic when a child gets raped, or when dacoits rape women in the house that they plunder (the sympathy is for “innocent victims”), most women are chastised after rape. Yet a woman may be charged of making sexual advances if she refutes those of her male relative, and vicious gossip or disfigurement with acid or kerosene can be used when a girl rejects sexual or romantic advances.

The obsession and concern about purity of the male seed (see Gatwood 1985; Dube 1986; Chowdhry 2007; in Chapter 2 for further discussion) can lead to the most demure wife facing the charge of having an affair. The proverb “She may cover her face, but her gaze is on her gigolo” sums it all. Since passage of property takes place from a father to his blood-related sons, the warning that the “fields are lost through laziness and homes through extra-marital progeny” are constant, nagging fears in men’s minds. Raising doubt about one’s children’s paternity is common by husbands during quarrels or drunken tantrums. Occasionally, a husband starts a fight immediately after delivery, saying that the new-born doesn’t look like him and demands to know “whose parasite” she has brought forth.

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105 “khuntat daloon daloon jagyaar varach yeto”
106 This was bound to happen; "Anyone is bound to take advantage of her"; "Did she expect men to worship her?"
107 “You’re the foolish one, who can blame the man?"; "You should have behaved properly."
108 “nakavar padar ani thevlelyavar nazir”
109 “shet gele aalsani and ghar gele shindakeeni”
110 “naav navrache ani por soivyache”
111 “konaa saarkheey thobad aatel ley kaarley kaahley aahes tu?”
Honour as structural violence

Honour normalises and justifies violence, thus, in that sense it can be considered as structural violence (Galtung 1990; Baxi, U 2005).\textsuperscript{112} When the family perceives a loss of honour, such as when a bride doesn’t bring adequate or the promised dowry, her humiliation, ill-treatment or abuse is justified. If her family doesn’t pay the remainder amount, she may be sent back by her in-law. When a woman files complaints about domestic violence or takes the abusive family to court, she may be taken back on the pretext of ‘compromise’ and then threatened, tortured or killed to recover the family honour that has been lost due to the ‘public scandal’ she created. Even in ‘normal’ times, beatings by the husband are considered as commonplace as the lashings of the rain,\textsuperscript{113} and are validated by family, neighbours and even by the police. Domestic violence is justified at both ends of the caste-matrix: violence in subordinated castes is trivialised because lower men are considered violent and their wives are considered being in need of beatings to keep them in their place; whereas, violence within dominant caste homes goes unchecked because no one dares to intervene, and women from those homes dare not speak out for fear of family honour.

Patriarchal and caste-based violence is often learnt from the tactics of earlier perpetrators. Sometimes brutalised victims / survivors perpetuate it on less powerful people such as farmhands, domestic help, children or other women. Such violence can be perpetuated by women possessing vertical honor, such as having powerful husbands and natal families, and having strong, productive and educated sons. In order to maintain this honourable position, women need to consolidate their position in the family by complying with patriarchy, such as being a good wife, mother of sons and having daughters-in-law. They then become the supervisors of the household, scolding younger women to cater to the needs of the men of the household.

\textsuperscript{112} see Chapter 2 for details.
\textsuperscript{113} *paawsaane jhodley aani navryaane marley tar konala sangayche?*
'Normal' gendered expectations from women such as the responsibility to speedily fetch fuel or water, or to wash everyone's clothes at the common well also lead to violent outbreaks. Women fight or beat each other at the water source, the ration shop, or wherever they are forced to compete for sparse resources, in addition to having to do grueling work inside the home. Exhaustion, awareness of violent consequences for not having accessed the daily fill of water or food, repercussions of reaching home late, and the frustration of unending work generates such violence and bitter quarrels. Earlier quarrels lead to more violence and trading of sexual innuendoes in later episodes. Such violence generates entertainment among male voyeurs, and confirms their opinion that women are uncontrolled, shallow and in need of male control.

**The intersection of caste, gender, sexuality and patriarchal honour**

* a) caste and gender hierarchies

Children from all sections of the village learn about caste and gender hierarchies consciously as well as unconsciously.\(^{114}\) Parents impress these norms upon the children, who also grow up noticing that menial jobs around the house and farm are done by subordinated groups. Soon children from dominant homes learn that occupations are caste-based and when asked to do physical labour will retort with "Am I a *maharin* (Mahar woman) to sweep the village?" Lower wages for the drudgery-filled work that the landless perform make social status and power visible at an early age.

Children from dominant groups notice that leftovers from weddings are given to people from Dalit groups or that leavings\(^{115}\) from the plates of guests are collected by certain marginalised groups.\(^{116}\) The sight of people from poor or artisan groups coming home to ask for food, noticing that stale food is served to domestic help, and the avoidance of physical contact with certain groups, imprints caste hegemony upon impressionable minds. They learn that even though the dominant sections (especially men) may attend the wedding ceremony in a rich or prominent family from a

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\(^{114}\) *kalat-nakalat*  
\(^{115}\) *ashe*  
\(^{116}\) such as the Phasey Paardhi community that is stigmatised, ostracised and also feared as being ruthless dacotts
subordinated caste, they won’t usually eat there unless the food has been cooked by members from a Savarna\(^{117}\) caste.

When children from subordinated groups watch their parents being berated, called lazy, accused of theft, or cheated out of hard-earned money by the dominant sections, they grow up with a battered self-image and an impotent rage. They notice that very few teachers are sensitive to children who can’t pay fees on time, and that they pay attention to the needs and whims of students from powerful households. They also realise that children from dominant castes are not addressed by their caste-names, but that lower groups are.\(^{118}\) This makes hierarchy painfully clear to children from subordinated groups, and they learn not to draw the wrath of their rich or ‘upper’-caste schoolmates by competing with them at studies or sports. They are also warned by their parents to ignore the misbehaviour of dominant people from the village and not to mingle too much with them.

Caste based patriarchal honour is more obvious among the upper groups. Quarrels and domestic strife within upper homes are closely guarded within the four walls and mostly resolved within the caste; on the other hand, quarrels from lower homes can come up for public scrutiny and interventions from upper groups. It’s been MASUM’s experience that during joint sessions for counselling in domestic violence, the Maratha man’s kinfolk come in “such big numbers that they don’t even fit in the room.”\(^{119}\)

\(b\) gender and caste honour

Caste honour is expressed in gendered terms all the time. Loss of honour for upper groups can result merely by being compared to the ‘lowers’. This comparison could be in terms of behaviour,\(^{120}\) or worse, when called any of the following: parasite (as in “someone else’s child growing in your home”\(^{121}\)); orphan (also meaning “of indeterminate parentage”\(^{122}\)); or, as having been conceived of the lower groups such

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\(^{117}\) the three superior and born-again varnas in the Hindu caste system, namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas

\(^{118}\) maharachi, balutedarachi, telyachi

\(^{119}\) Information from MASUM’s counselling centre in Saswad

\(^{120}\) balutavanti, mangavanti

\(^{121}\) bandgul

\(^{122}\) kaarrey
as the Mang, Chambhar, Kumbhar or Muslim (the last category also referred to as 'circumcised' or 'butcher') through one's mother's indiscretions. Such caste-based name calling, when used for people from dominant castes is considered a grave insult and can result in verbal or physical retaliation.

Caste and gender hierarchy represents dominant men as being sexual (yet intrinsically honourable); their women as essentially asexual (therefore respectable); subordinated men as hyper-sexual (therefore dangerous); and subordinated women as sexualised (therefore 'available'). Lower groups are derided with slurs such as "these low caste balutis, the progeny of tamosgi women, they will never improve." When members of Dalit groups don't report for work, the Marathas scoff at them about shirking hard work because "they are used to pimping off their women."

Sexual slurs for women from Maratha households, suggestive of their perceived desire for multiple husbands "like the balutedar women," are commonly noted, indicating that women's life-long monogamy is a central and idealised aspect of defining group honour for dominant castes. Interestingly, even subordinated groups draw boundaries with respect to women's behaviour, though mostly in the arena of work and production. A young wife from a subordinated caste who prefers to work inside the home rather than do agricultural work, is (derisively) compared to a woman from the upper groups: "Does she think she's a hamn (Brahmin woman)?" It is ironic how being compared to the 'other' can become an insult among all sections, with both groups perceiving each other as doing lesser work.

A Maratha household loses tremendous izzat when their son marries a balutedar girl. The family wails, saying "Couldn't he have found someone better?" The family also worries about the 'quality' and the caste-purity of the future progeny. If at all the alliance is accepted, no one gives the subordinated bride's family any respect during the wedding. The dominant groom's immediate family loses status within their own kinship (bhavki). Though the subordinated bride's family doesn't lose face within their own community, they may become vulnerable to violence from the dominant

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123 mahara-mangacha, balutyachi, mangachya patchey, kumbhurachi, landu or khatkachi aulad
124 peethmaagi, nhavand, kavatadi-khisi, chami, beord romoshi
125 interchangeably meant to denote dancer, performer, courtesan or prostitute
126 "bhaad khaychi savay lageli ahey"
sections in the village. The other subordinated group families may inwardly envy them for their suddenly exalted social status, but they also might worry about economic, social, cultural and violent repercussions upon the entire community from the upper groups. For that reason, some of them may outwardly distance themselves from the wedding. The bride’s family may either forego an ostentatious display of gaiety to avoid displeasure of the upper groups, or they may go out of their way to put up a show that is worthy of the groom’s superior status in the village.

c) marriage, caste identity and repercussions based on honour

Marriages do not take place across sub-castes within Marathas, but only among kinship equals. A methodical system of determining who among the kinship equal can be married into, and which sub-castes are considered too closely related for inter-marriage (exogamy within the endogamous system), is put in place through kinship totems (devak). Two kinships sharing a totem cannot inter-marry, as that would be considered incest. A kinship with a ‘superior’ totem may occasionally accept a bride from a low-placed kinship but will not give a daughter to these families, even if all are considered Marathas for all practical purposes. Among the upper Marathas such as the Deshmukhs, the brides have to come from equally high status families or else, many relatives may boycott the wedding and the family can face stigma for years or generations.

Endogamous arranged marriages among honour equals are considered essential for group identity and purity of the male lineage. One can thereby understand why a marriage outside prescribed kin groups can precipitate dishonour for the immediate family as well as the entire kinship. A girl wanting to marry outside the caste is clearly met with disgust and rage. The emasculation of the entire honour group is evident in questions such as "Don’t we have a sexual organ?" or "Is their sexual organ made of gold?" Because honour is not considered a personal entitlement but is collectively owned, a single transgressor can pull the rest of the group into the mire unless s/he is collectively exiled or distanced from the collective (Wiikan 2008).

127 samajik darja
128 "tyanchya laghat koni ubha pan rachat nahit"
129 "wamhala ling navhtey ka?"
130 "tyancha ling sonyaache oache ka?"
This helps explain the collective frenzy of the kinship that seeks revenge and retribution when couples elope.

Unless the immediate family voices disapproval of a member choosing a spouse on his or her own, they may be ostracised\textsuperscript{131} because they have lost ‘everything’ within the kinship.\textsuperscript{132} The severity of chastisement depends upon the caste, sub-caste or family status of the intended spouse’s family. The transgressing couple may not be allowed to enter the family homes for months or years, because they are seen to have behaved selfishly and without any concern for the honour of the elders and the rest of the family. The family is perceived to be the victim in this situation. Exile, disinheritance or physical elimination (in rare and extreme cases) of the uncontrolled\textsuperscript{133} woman or couple may seem justified in the eyes of the larger kinship that steps in if the immediate family is not perceived to be doing enough to restore its honour (Stewart 1994: Wikan 2008). Until then the family may on its own stop interacting\textsuperscript{134} with the broader networks of caste and kinship.\textsuperscript{135}

A groom from a dominant caste will face taunts from his family for having crawled so low,\textsuperscript{136} whereas a lower bride would face insulting behaviour from her in-law and their kinship. Once the romance becomes public, the bride’s parents may additionally face a threat to their honour in case the groom retracts his promise just before the wedding, leaving their daughter sullied forever. They also worry that she may be treated badly by her in-law, and that the children from this alliance may not be fully integrated into the caste, or not find suitable spouses within the caste later on.

If and when an inter-caste marriage is accepted by the family, a bride from a lower caste or poor household is not fully accepted within the husband’s family and she is likely to face humiliation and rejection within the private domain for many years. However, if the bride is from the dominant group, she will eventually be accepted by her in-law since the honour of the subordinated groom’s family is not perceived to

\textsuperscript{131} “vaalit taktaat gharala”
\textsuperscript{132} “tyaanche kai rahile?”
\textsuperscript{133} “dhaak nhavi”
\textsuperscript{134} “kentiya todiene bolmaa?”
\textsuperscript{135} “chaar looaat anhi basat nahi”
\textsuperscript{136} “mahara-manga khali gelaa”
be lost in the public eye. His family might snigger privately by saying “We haven’t lost anything! It’s their nose that got cut.”\textsuperscript{137} A lower groom however is likely to face violence in the public domain and retribution from the upper bride’s kinfolk. Thus, the lower bride faces violence in the private domain and the lower groom in the public domain. Gender and caste honour operate insidiously as well as methodically.

\textbf{d) re-marriage and upward caste mobility}

Marathas gave up widow re-marriage in order to identify themselves as \textit{kshatriyas}, while the \textit{kunbis} retained this practice (Deshpande 2003; Omvedt 1993). In the field work area, rarely are second marriages for women allowed among the Marathas. Such a marriage is not regarded a ‘full’ marriage\textsuperscript{138} and the household is thereafter designated as a ‘bitter’\textsuperscript{139} or lowly\textsuperscript{140} home. Eventually people will begin to eat\textsuperscript{141} with a family that has transgressed such norms, but no marriages\textsuperscript{142} will take place with persons from those families: “We eat at their weddings, but don’t give daughters to them.” Expectation of honourable or respectable behaviour from children (especially daughters) of such households is not to be had, due to their “mixed, inappropriate, vague or impure bloodline.”

Ascetic widowhood is now expected of women from all castes.\textsuperscript{143} Widowed women wearing a \textit{bindi} (Hindu marriage sign), or widowed or deserted women wearing flowers in their hair lead to raised eyebrows and speculations about whom they may be wearing them for, with questions such as “Who could her \textit{vaadi} (protector, owner) be?”

Focus groups revealed that second marriages for women, which were freely allowed in artisan or Dalit groups, have now been stigmatised since lower groups try to emulate the uppers within brahminical patriarchy, mostly through restrictions on women’s mobility, sexuality and autonomy (Chakravarti 2003). If a woman re-

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{naak kaapley}
\textsuperscript{138} addressed euphemistically as \textit{paat lavney, mohtur lavney}
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{kada che ghar}
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{kamitley ghar}
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{roti vyeyahar}
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{betti vyeyahar}
\textsuperscript{143} Gatwood (1985) mentions how the process of incorporation into the caste system entailed giving up sexual autonomy for women (such as accepting the patriarchal \textit{dharmic} marriage prescribed by Manu as the only valid one).
marries, cow-dung is applied to her forehead instead of vermilion during her second wedding ceremony. I suggest that this act is symbolic, as applying cow-dung to anyone's face is considered an act of shaming. It could also mean that the earlier marriage is wiped out before the new vermilion is applied. A woman’s second marriage is considered inferior (it is called mohtoor); it accords secondary status for such a woman in ceremonies; and, can result in insidious social boycott, such as not being invited or welcomed for meals or auspicious events that are centred on co-habitating women.\textsuperscript{145}

e) exclusion from honour group based on sexual transgression

One trait that the artisans have emulated from the dominant castes is subjecting a prospective bride’s family to a stringent check; and, assessing the worth (layki) of that family based on sexual conduct in earlier generations. To avoid making a mistake, arranged marriages don't usually take place among completely unknown families, but only amongst those traceable through some previous kinship contact. The phrase used in this context is “padar laagla pahijey.” — meaning that alliances can take place only if one end of the sari (the pallu or padar) touches another. I suggest that the term padar is suggestive of sexual conduct when used to denote family 'touchability' in terms of marriage. Not only is the sari a woman’s traditional garment, but also that the padar is the ‘honourable’ part of the sari — the end that covers the breasts, shoulders and head. Thus, only if the honour of one family is worthy of the other, can marriages be fixed among them. Family history up to three or five generations is scrutinised during the search for grooms or brides, and since marriages alliances are usually mediated through elderly people, long-term memories of sexual transgressions are revoked in order to rule out the unsuitable. This inspection adds one more dimension to endogamous marriages within caste equivalents, namely that of 'honour equivalents'.

FGD participants reported the cleaving of a caste into two distinct sub-castes among the Mali (namely full-Mali and half-Mali) based on 'sexual pollution' of women. The usage of the English terms ’half’ and ‘full’ in the caste names points towards the

\textsuperscript{144} “sarashin mahunn jevadlya bolvat naahit”
\textsuperscript{145} haldi-kunku
\textsuperscript{146} vegetable growers, horticulturalists, considered slightly lower than Marathas caste-wise though often equal to them in economic status
fairly recent origin of this split based on an on-going process of Brahminisation and Sanskritisation (Srinivas 1952). The 'half-Mali' were created from amongst the original Mali caste to exclude families in which women allegedly had had sexual alliances with non-Mali men, or had been consorts of non-Mali (mainly Maratha men) generations ago. The 'full-Mali' are considered to be 'pure-blooded', untainted and therefore superior to the 'half-Mali' who are considered lower and stigmatised, even though the alleged sexual alliances were with Maratha (upper) men. As the Mali community became economically equal to the Marathas (who themselves are unequal internally, due to strict kinship hierarchy), their group honour and identity mimicked Savarna practices to the extent of creating a lower sub-caste. Intermarriages between the two groups cause full-Mali families to lose izzat. On occasion, a beautiful girl from the half-Mali can be given in marriage to a full-Mali household, but giving a full-Mali daughter in marriage to a half-Mali would be considered a loss of face for the former. Such an alliance would be considered disgraceful and would bring down the status of her progeny in the future, especially when they reach marriageable age.

Ironically heterogenous castes may temporarily align as an honour group to exclude women on the basis of sexual behaviour. The collective izzat of the village, irrespective of caste, is lost if any woman has multiple sexual relations, and the woman may be thrown out of the village to prevent their "sons from getting spoilt." Daughters and daughters-in-law are discouraged or forbidden from visiting the homes of women where many men are seen visiting. Should they visit such neighbours, they are reprimanded for publicly destroying the izzat of the family.

\( \text{f) caste, gender and sexual 'gaze'} \)

Men or boys from the lower groups still don't dare to demonstrate sexual feelings or close contact with girls or women from the upper groups, at least not openly. While subordinated men don't usually dare to 'gaze' at women from the upper groups,

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147 This interesting English nomenclature is a take-off from the original "phool-Mali", meaning "flower-growing Mali."
148 Hypogamy or avalom is acceptable to some extent like the Marathas
149 Hypogamy or pratilom is unacceptable
150 gaur-abroadan, bey-ubbro
151 "amchya izzaticha phuchamana karees ka?"
dominant men can always fix their gaze, accost, seduce, cheat or simply access women from the lower groups. They can enter the homes of those that are under their control and gain sexual access to a woman, sometimes even in the presence of her husband. On such occasions, the husband meekly leaves the home. The subordinated couple accepts this dishonour because of poverty, indebtedness, power relations and social pressure. Such infringements are not spoken about openly, as it would only precipitate further shame and dishonour to their kinship and caste. The humiliated husband may vent his frustration on his wife in private, or she may taunt him within the four walls but the husband would not raise the incident outside, even if he knows it is public knowledge. Sometimes people might get him drunk to nibble out the details for gossip and entertainment.

A woman from a subordinated group is more likely to be harassed, with comments such as “look at that ripe mango” or “she’s such an item.” Such male sexual commentary is considered ‘normal’ when used for Dalit and balutedar women since they anyway considered being uncontrolled and ‘naked’ women. Women, even when they belong to upper groups can rarely counter such comments; they would only lose more izzat. If a woman retorts, it might lead to more abuse or it can result in curtailment of her education and mobility. It can also lead to gang fights between different groups of boys or men. On the other hand, if a woman doesn’t complain nor confront, her compliance is taken for granted, the harassment continues and her own behaviour becomes suspect in everyone’s eyes. Ironically, this too may also result in curtailment of her mobility, education or job.

The subordinated woman faces a greater risk of being sexually ‘used’ at the workplace; on the farm, in rich people’s homes or at the market-place. If she refuses these sexual advances, she may be accused of theft by her employer or supervisor, whereas if she concedes, she may be disgraced in front of the village at any moment. This no-win situation renders her unable to speak out about violence faced

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152 be-izzat
153 “padaala piklai aamha” (fruit-selling women also report on how men make repeated enquiries about the size, shape and firmness of the fruit, as a sexual innuendo to mean the breasts)
154 “kay moul aane”
155 “na dhucor na dhagaara, phutka nagaara”
156 nagova haya
157 “badhumi kurtat”
at the hands of dominant groups. She is herself considered unworthy if the news becomes public, and she may even be thrown out of the village for raising the issue. If a pregnancy occurs through a publicly known alliance, the woman (sometimes along with her husband) is made to leave the village to protect the honour of the upper man. Sexual aspersions are cast on people (especially men) taking up her cause, and they also come under fire from dominant sections in the village to retract their support.

\[g\] patriarchal honour and the crisis of masculinity

Men are not a homogenous category within the village. They move up and down the gender-caste intersectionality depending on hierarchies amongst themselves and as their social position fluctuates. Participants pointed out that hegemonic masculinities (Billman 2006) prevail at the top of the power pyramid. Economically productive adults possessing wealth and education; having a wife and children (especially sons) and being able to control them; belonging to the majority religion and Savarna caste; not having serious addictions; and, those who don’t do any house-work move up the social ladder. Those who don’t conform to the above move down to the lower rungs: even helping the wife at home, caring for her or listening to her advice brings down a man’s esteem dramatically in the eyes of his peer.

Men from the family or kinship can be beaten up under certain grave circumstances. Brothers will beat up a sister’s husband if they think he has gone ‘too far’ in his violence. If a woman commits suicide, her family may beat up her in-law, in spite of not having supported her all the while when she was reporting domestic violence. The village will also justify a woman beating up a serial molester or rapist publicly; her ‘innocence’ would be validated by the act.

Obsession with sexual insults related to the mother (also sister and daughter) was predominant in the proverbs and slang words that FGDs reported. When subordinates have to be insulted, their mother’s sexuality is degraded with expletives such as “I’ll tackle your mother. I’ll get her married again.” Most verbal abuses amongst men relate to defiling the mother of the ‘other’ sexually: explicit mentioning

\[158\] "talayak
\[159\] "Tufhya aaiacha mohtoor laava" - 'mohtoor' being the second, low status marriage of a woman
of her sexual organs, threatening to have sex with his mother in various postures,\textsuperscript{160} "giving" his mother to men of the lower groups,\textsuperscript{161} bestiality imagery with his mother,\textsuperscript{162} and casting aspersions on the other man’s paternity. Since aspersions on the mother’s sexuality can threaten the very identity of a man – his name, his paternity, his blood-kinship and his caste purity, such slurs can result in physical violence.

The idea of a mother having an affair is so inconceivable that it evokes images of murder. Grown up children of widows feel loss of honour\textsuperscript{163} and strained\textsuperscript{164} to interact with others, feeling insulted with the mother’s conduct\textsuperscript{165} even if she has been in a relationship for decades (sons of sex-workers reported a similar shame; see Chapters 5 and 6)

Abusive language related to mothers, sisters and daughters focuses on the man’s incestuous and taboo sexual contact with blood-related women, whereas abuses related to the wife – the woman with whom the man has legitimised sexual contact, are used to emasculate him. Most abuses related to one’s wife are about the husband being subservient to her, of not being able to control her, of pimping her or of being impotent / eunuch. Husbands face great insecurity about their sexual prowess\textsuperscript{166} when their wives have affairs. In fact, a woman’s first pregnancy after the age of 35 raises doubt about the husband’s paternity in the public eye. For a man who has never had children before, it may be a boost to his masculinity, though the doubt of being ‘cuckolded’ may linger in his mind too.

\textbf{The gender-caste matrix of domination}

The gender-caste matrix illustrates the ways in which hierarchy (upper-lower) and exclusion (centre-margin) operate in the lives of people situated in relation to each other within a village. This matrix of domination within “interlocking systems of oppression” (Collins 1990; 2000) includes patriarchy, class, caste, sexuality and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[160]{“ujhiga aaila ubhyagme shavta”}
\footnotetext[161]{“maangala deto”}
\footnotetext[162]{“boeel lavto”; “ghoda lavto”}
\footnotetext[163]{aabroo}
\footnotetext[164]{“dadjan yayche”}
\footnotetext[165]{Is your mother worthy (“ujhiga aai kai shahoni ahey ka”)?
\footnotetext[166]{“Not satisfied with my banana, are you (majhya kelyani bhaagat nahi ka)?” or “Does your dumpling (meaning vagina) have some fancy filling (ujhiga karunjeet saarant bharlay kaan)?”}
\end{footnotes}
other hegemonic systems and thus cannot be simplistically represented in vertical terms, say as a ladder. The matrix is dialectic in nature because the relationship among the gendered and caste-based groups is complex: on the one hand it is embedded in deep structures, but the fact that every component needs the others, also creates sites for negotiation and sometimes, rebellion.

Affectionate, loving as well as selfish and utilitarian is the way in which FGD participants described the relationship of the men with their women, both in the dominant and subordinated groups. The man exerts control and authority over the woman, subjecting her to violence, force and sexual abuse to maintain his command\textsuperscript{167} over her. He expects her to uphold culture and honour, and perform all patriarchal and caste-based rituals.

The dominant man is contemptuous, callous\textsuperscript{168} and neglectful of the lower man. He uses the latter for selfish gain; sometimes provoking him to participate in individual or collective violence. The subordinated man is subjected to violence, discrimination and perpetual suspicion about his perceived misconduct or relationship with women from dominant groups. He is not included in decision-making related to politics or village matters. A Dalit or artisan man that rises in the village is enticed into addictions so that he can be destroyed politically, he is humiliated and beaten publicly, trapped into indebtedness and controlled financially. Control over a subordinated man also makes it easy for rich and powerful men to gain access to women from his family.

In contrast, the subordinated man treats the dominant man with respect and deference. He maintains the pratishtha and maan of the upper man. He is aware that when persons from a dominant group visit his home, he is expected to offer special treatment for fear of upsetting their sanmaan. He doesn’t expect any such treatment or even basic courtesy when he has to visit an upper caste or rich household. He learns not to have eye contact; not speak out in the presence of a dominant person; not answer back; and, not openly disobey anyone who is above him the power matrix (see Scott 1990 for the concept of ‘public’ transcripts). Being under various

\textsuperscript{167} hukumat
\textsuperscript{168} hetsaand
kinds of control of dominant men, he gratifies their wishes by behaving subservient and sycophantic\textsuperscript{169} in order to get his work done.

Even with women from dominant groups, the subordinated man is deferential, respectful and obedient. He takes care to maintain her \textit{maan, sanmaan} and \textit{pratishtha}. He doesn't talk back or talk disrespectfully to her and doesn't subject her to an improper gaze\textsuperscript{170} unless he is economically or politically powerful, and the upper woman is bereft of a male authority figure at home.\textsuperscript{171} Sexual relationships between lower men and upper women are not flaunted; such ‘love-marriages’ are still rare.

On the other hand, the dominant man uses the subordinated woman in multiple ways. She is given lower status and lower wages in spite of unending drudgery. He uses his power and position to gain sexual access and control over her, using her sexually when she needs his patronage, pretending to be sensitive to her requirements until she succumbs to his designs or until he gets weary of her. Widows are cheated out of their money and assets with false promises of getting official work done.

A woman from the dominant groups is contemptuous of the subordinated women. She discriminates, insults and makes the latter perform extra or unnecessary hard work until late hours, with little or no payment. Her relation with the subordinated woman is ambiguous – on the one hand she wields economic, social, political and cultural power over the latter, but she is envious of the lower woman’s relative freedom, and fearful of her sexual liaison with the upper man, her husband. She may vent her anger on the subordinated woman’s husband by insulting him indirectly, such as throwing stones or spitting at a dog and calling the animal insulting and emasculating names (‘eunuch’ or ‘pimp’\textsuperscript{172}), just while the man is passing by. On occasion, a woman from a dominant section fears the subordinated man,\textsuperscript{173} but never as much as she does the dominant man. While she would insult a lower man

\textsuperscript{169} “pudhey pudhey karto”
\textsuperscript{170} “vaat bhasht nahii”
\textsuperscript{171} “vicharnarey koni nahii”
\textsuperscript{172} “hizddi” or “bhaadkhad/ bhaadde”
\textsuperscript{173} Chopra (2007) has discussed the ambiguous relation that women of the employer household have with their male domestic help since the latter is alternately considered subservient and dangerously masculine.
publicly, she would deride her own husband behind his back, as the wife of a rich Maratha once told me that “The old man has had more whores than hair on his head.”

Exalted economic status can make a woman vain and arrogant; similarly good looks, education, fair skin, good clothes and jewellery make her look down upon other women. Women placed lower on the social scale, such as widowed, deserted, single, childless or unmarried women, or those who only have daughters are stigmatised by ‘socially upper’ women.

Men from subordinated groups, in contrast to women from dominant groups, wield power inside the home but not in the public domain. They constantly have to accept their secondary status in public life in the village. A lower group man speaking up in a public meeting is said to have no etiquette. He is also advised to act in accordance to his rank. His suitability to enter a temple or to speak up in a highly-placed home is questioned. He is admonished for not giving adequate respect or value to the upper groups, and may be reminded that he doesn’t have the standing or capacity to participate in events meant for prestigious people. He is vulnerable to false charges of theft or crimes, especially if he is seen to behave in an uppity fashion. He also faces the risk of being accused by dominant sections of defiling their women.

Outside the home, the subordinated man gains power and honour by aligning with dominant men, whereas within the home, he gains power by demanding ‘honourable’ behaviour (akin to the woman from dominant groups) from his own womenfolk. Control over his women becomes essential, as any revolt from within the household would leave him with very little self-worth. Thus, borrowed notions of honour and violence against lower women become tools to maintain power and izzat within the home. The threat of powerful men sexually abusing women from his

174 “mhataryaachya doivar kes kati evdiya raanda jhaalyaat”
175 “valan nahi”
176 “paayrinasaar vagaave”
177 “shobhley ka?” “shobhley ka?”
178 kinnar
179 loyki
household always exists, yet, some men gain favours through their wives' association with dominant men in the village.

The woman from a subordinated group has almost no intrinsic honour or power on the gender-caste matrix. Clearly the matrix is not advantageous to her in any way. She epitomises and embodies the inter-locking and intersecting systems of multiple oppressions. Surviving under the brunt of these suffocating structures, she balances her skills of economic and physical survival using deference, subservience, manipulation and rebellion as and when required. She negotiates her position with the dominant man to her family’s and children’s advantage. She earns the whimsical patronage of the upper woman through a mixture of obedience and empathy, taking care not to threaten or alienate her in any way. Though she has relatively more autonomy and mobility than the upper woman, and is more visible in the public domain due to her agricultural and non-agricultural labour, being placed at the bottom of the power pyramid makes her vulnerable to domination and violence from all the three groups placed above her. Marginal gains may arise through her association with the dominant groups, but those rarely work in her favour. She faces the dual brunt of caste and patriarchal power, both within and outside the home. Ironically it is because of this ‘nothing to lose’ situation, that she is able to question the gender-caste matrix more articulately than any of the other three categories. That has been MASUM’s experience as well as the findings of the FGDs.

The components of the gender-caste matrix, though oppressive, do not exist in water-tight compartments but are in constant dialogue and negotiation with each other. They relate to each other whether wilfully or reluctantly, but they cannot deny the existence of the others because it is only in the context of the ‘others’ that one’s position can be notched on the matrix. Each category engages with the others to consolidate its own power and if possible, to wane that of the others, setting off a series of turmoil, manipulations, tensions and reconciliations. The fact that one cannot exist without the other points towards the strength as well as the weakness of the matrix, yet this dialectic relationship makes the entire matrix subject to tremors and ruptures. It can be kept in place and reproduced only through visible and invisible power, operating through codes, norms and mores explored above. The complex inter-relationships between the various categories of the matrix consolidate
and reproduce the hegemony of gender and caste on the one hand, but offer sites and opportunities for dismantling the same on the other.

**Control over women from blood-kinship to preserve caste and honour-group boundaries**

Early marriage is perceived as the prevention to the daughter’s sexual activity, or of molestation and rape. Ironically, everyone knows that sexual abuse happens, even within the four walls of the home. Families are secretive about abuse of daughters from family members (fathers and grand-fathers included) or neighbours. Concerns related to shame about a daughter’s spoiled reputation or pre-marital pregnancies outweigh those related to her safety and well-being. In fact, a deserted married daughter is preferred to an unmarried one\(^\text{180}\) because ambiguous paternity is preferred to missing paternity.

Suspicion is rife when an unmarried sister merely speaks to a man. When such a sighting is reported, brothers may beat her up because of the loss of izzat to the family. If she’s seen with a boy or likes someone, she may be married off to someone else in great haste. Occasionally the young lovers pre-empt this reaction and try to elope ahead of time.\(^\text{181}\)

The ways in which sexual ‘misdemeanours’\(^\text{182}\) of women from the household are dealt with depends on the context of the transgression. An unmarried sexually active daughter is insulted about her sexual desire,\(^\text{183}\) starved, locked up and her mobility and communication is restricted, or is sent off to a relative’s home far away to save face.\(^\text{184}\) She is shamed with phrases such as “She’s eaten cow dung”\(^\text{185}\) or “She has smeared cow dung on our faces.”\(^\text{186}\) Because the girl is perceived to have made the

\(^{180}\) “an unmarried daughter is like a live coal upon the palm of your hand” ("mulgi mhanjejy talhaatatavarcha nikhora")

\(^{181}\) The precarious situation under which young couples meet leads to hasty elopement, largely out of fear of being caught out, and they run away without any practical planning for the future. MASUM has ‘hidden’ many such couples in the past because they fear for their safety. Most have no recourse to continuing with studies or applying for jobs because they have no certificates with them. The issue becomes problematic when one of them is below the legal age of marriage or doesn’t have the paper-work to prove otherwise.

\(^{182}\) “vaakde pootal padde”

\(^{183}\) “Her pea (meaning clitoris) is getting too jumpy (hicha daana lai nunan martoi)” or “Is your pubis getting too itchy (lai zhyateet aag hotty kaa)?”

\(^{184}\) “tond lapavnya saahti”

\(^{185}\) “shen khaanun ali”

\(^{186}\) “tondala shen phaslay”
family lose face they may even try to kill her or abet her suicide. Since women's pre-marital pregnancies stigmatise them for life, the girl may be married off to the man that got her pregnant without much concern about the consensual or forced nature of the sexual encounters. This usually happens if both belong to the same caste and even if the man is already married (but not if the woman has been ever-married).

The dishonourable behaviour of women from one's own kinship can tarnish a family forever. Desecration of the honour of women from one's own kin (bhavki), even through abusive or slang language is the great insult. This would be an irreversible loss of honour, with no possibility of repeal through any legal measure. Worse still, the suspicion of a 'polluted' mother would put one's very identity in doubt. Any suspicion about one's paternity, blood-kinship or caste identity can render a man without 'legitimate' rights within his honour group.

Control over one's sisters clearly is a mutual goodwill gesture among all males in the kinship network so that everyone in the group can find chaste wives. A wife's sexual transgression may cause temporary loss of face and create risk of the male lineage being tainted, but some 'damage control' is possible by denying paternity. Focus groups revealed that while a wife may be 'loaned' to someone in certain circumstances but a sister would never be. The wife is replaceable with another; any number of them can be discarded through desertion and divorce, but not mothers, sisters and daughters. A wife's leaving is comparable to losing a pubic hair (unworthy and replaceable), but a sister's leaving is like losing one's nose. Since divorce can dissolve the relation with a wife, whereas only death can sever the

187 "naak kapley gele"
188 "Don't show us your face"; "Go blacken your face"; "Go jump under the train"
189 thapka logney
190 marrying the woman to her rapist is also considered a 'solution' to her lost honour
191 See interview with Veena in Chapter 5
192 Chowdhry (2010) mentions 'blood kinship' (bhaichara or brotherhood) in which blood ties make men co-sharers of caste / community honour within the biradari (or the bhavki in my field-work area).
193 see elsewhere in this Chapter
194 In real life, a sister's sexuality is often exploited by the family; many would even live off her 'dubious' earnings, while making her feel dirty at the same time
195 "bayo ko geli tar zhyat gele, bahin / lek geli tar naak gele"
196 In real life one finds more control and obsession with the wife's sexual conduct, rather than the sister's. More beatings and killings take place with respect to wives, probably because of the break-up of the joint family and because of increased neo-locality after marriage.
relation with a sister (Khan 2004), this belief helps understand why male relatives exert extreme control on blood related women, why brothers are reluctant to bring back a sister when she faces domestic violence, or why sisters seeking shelter in the natal family feel compelled to return to their violent husbands. Yet, the hypocrisy related to a sister’s chastity and the desire to control women from outside the kinship network is exposed when a man speaks about his wife’s sister in sexual innuendoes, staking a sexual claim over her or assuming that he has the right to marry her or covet her. Such fantasies are expressed even when men are chastised for behaving irresponsibly or incurring financial losses.

The daughter and daughter-in-law dyad within the patriarchal family

The greatest dishonour that a family can face is when their daughter refuses to stay with her husband for whatever reason. Even widows are encouraged to stay with their in-law. A woman is expected to leave her husband’s home only upon death and if she should return earlier, it is considered to be her fault and her sexual reputation becomes questionable. Parents are admonished for not raising the daughter properly and for encouraging her whining. Since the labour, reproduction and sexuality of a daughter legitimately and solely belong to her husband and his family, parents are taunted that they persuaded her to come back because they wanted to pimp her off. Parents worry about losing face, not being able to find husbands for their other daughters, or about their own daughters-in-law following suit and returning to their parents’ homes.

The daughter-in-law is considered the lawful resident of the household, not the married daughter, because the former is the ‘vessel’ in which the patriarchal family...

197 Sexual relations with the wife’s younger sister when she comes to help with the wife’s delivery are common. It may be legitimised as “the man needing sexual release” when the wife is not ‘available’. Sometimes, the younger sister just relocates to this household. Even when women die in violent circumstances, her younger sister may be considered as the next wife so that the children are taken care of and dowry is forestalled. Often, when a woman is sure of her husband’s intention to re-marry, she brings in the younger sister or cousin as the bride so that her control over the household is somewhat retained.

198 “Let me do as I please (even burning down the house as a consequence) or then let me sleep with your sister” (gharavār havla hajo dēy, naihītār nevhtē shējāri nijō dēy)

199 “Enter the husband’s home in the vertical posture; leave it horizontally (meaning dead) (ubhīyāne jayche aani adhyāne yeyche); “the only two pieces of news that you should hear about your married daughter are that either she’s co-habiting or that she’s dead (lek naandī aikāvī naihītār mēlī aikāvī).”

200 “She must have had a lover in that village, that’s why she was kicked out”; “She must be having a lover in this village, that’s why she keeps running back.”

Bhaua khanu
will be reproduced. "A daughter-in-law as hefty as an urn (kanagee) can flourish here, but a daughter the size of a tiny flower-pod (banagee) cannot"\textsuperscript{202} is a revealing proverb. I suggest that the imagery of the daughter as the flower-pod and the daughter-in-law as the urn is revealing: Kanagee is the urn in which the year's grain is stored. It usually fills up the best part of a room. Banagee is the tiny flower-like pod in which a grain of the humble millet (bajri) is held. It is of no use once the grain has been removed, and thus however small, it is useless and not worthy of storage. The kanagee holds the year's stock; thus, irrespective if its huge size, it is useful and essential for the family's future and survival. I argue that this imagery denotes that the daughter-in-law holds the family's future prosperity in her womb, whereas once you've gotten your daughter married, her womb is an empty shell as far as the natal family is concerned. On the other hand, the grain that grows in the flower-pod will belong\textsuperscript{203} to another family\textsuperscript{204} and so must be 'stored' in that home. The grain in the daughter's womb (as well as the womb itself) belongs to her marital household, especially to the husband\textsuperscript{205} and so must be stored and secured in that home.

The husband owns the womb that makes his lineage fertile, but the wife has no real rights over the husband's home. She can be despatched off soon after the husband dies, because as a widow her womb is rendered useless; besides, her latent sexuality poses a constant threat to the honour to the family. A woman can be sent back to her natal home within days or weeks of her husband's death, largely out of fear that she may claim her husband's share of the property later on. In the case of HIV-AIDS the woman is retained until the husband dies, so that others can be absolved of caring for him – she is thrown out immediately thereafter, unless they need her for agricultural work. Women are dispossessed in both homes once the men have no use for them in either home, and are shuttled between the two according to the whims and needs of the families. Yet, the honour of both homes doesn't allow a third home for women.

\textsuperscript{202} "kanagee vaani soon postey, but banagee vaani lek posat nahi"
\textsuperscript{203} also her labour and sexuality, besides her reproduction
\textsuperscript{204} hence the well-known adage "a daughter is someone else's property ('beti paraaya dhan hoti hain'; 'lek parakyache dhan uste')"
\textsuperscript{205} The concept of 'kshetra' (field / womb) and the 'kshetri' (farmer / owner) exists in Hindu mythology (Gatward 1985). Control over a woman's sexuality is thus considered essential to preserve the continuity and purity of the male seed that fertilises the female earth / field (Dube 1986)
I suggest that the natal family prepares the field, the stalk and the flower in a way that the best quality of grain can be harvested. There ought to be no doubt in anyone’s mind about its purity. The code of all families guarding the honour and purity of their daughter, as well as preparing her for the life in a husband’s home ensures the ‘right’ kind of daughters-in-law for the entire kinship. Conversely, strict codes about the daughter forever residing in the husband’s home ensure that all families within the kinship retain the harvest due to them. I suggest that this give-and-take, whereby raising a daughter according to patriarchal requirements also ensures fine daughters-in-law for the family. Any transgression by one’s daughters\(^{206}\) nullifies the possibility of attaining first-rate spouses for one’s remaining children. This explains why sexual transgressions from earlier generations are tracked down while fixing marriages. This ‘market survey’ ensures uncontaminated seeds for the future. Families are guarding against being ‘conned’; the logic being that if you didn’t contribute your fair share of chaste daughters or unpolluted seed-stock to the kinship, you don’t deserve the same from the kinship either. Ex-communication of the immediate family in terms of roti-beti vyavahaar (the business of sharing food and daughters) unless they themselves exile the truants is not simply an aberration or barbaric practice within certain cultures (see Wikan 2008). Honour is being demanded here as an entitlement or right (see Stewart 1994) among ‘honour equals’ within the heteronormative patriarchal, same-caste kinship (or honour group).

Though sisters and wives superficially seem to be treated in a contrary manner, I suggest that they actually strengthen the patriarchal-caste dyad. These discursive practices originate from a similar ideological framework and work complementarily. On the one hand, controlling the sister’s sexuality is important for all men to have chaste wives; further, the only way in which women will be impelled into marriage and to remain thereafter in their husbands’ homes is through disinherition and dispossession from their natal families. On the other hand, the possessive and patronising control of the wife’s womb ensures lineage and women’s life-long labour (productive, reproductive and sexual) for all families within the network. Controls of patriarchy are reproduced seamlessly through norms related to honour.

\(^{206}\) or sons - not when they have affairs, but when they marry outside the caste
Distinct binaries of daughter and daughter-in-law are critical for the patrilocal family to survive, whereby men in both homes can live there unabated, and lay claim to patrilineal property, but women merely fulfil the needs of both homes without entitlement or rights in either home.

The apparently benign natal family then assumes tremendous importance in this scheme: they raise chaste, dutiful and industrious daughters so that the entire kinship can maintain its purity and honour. They gift these daughters to families of equivalent status (and honour) and get similar gifts in return. A ‘sullied’ gift can be returned, but the giver is thereby dishonoured among his peer. The bride-giving family will convince the other party to re-accept their daughter; even with bribes, persuasion or grovelling, depending on how they perceive the worth of their daughter, and the respective power that the feuding families hold. The blemish upon their honour would not be removed unless the husband re-accepts the daughter. However, in cases where the family perceives their daughter to be the culprit (as in an inter-caste or love-marriage) she would be recovered (sometimes after shaming or killing the boyfriend), exiled or even killed.

In my field work area, even though honour related crimes are not reported, I argue that the life-long control over a sister or daughter, and her permanent banishment into the husband’s family serve the same purpose: the annihilation of a woman relative without bloodshed, in order to usurp property and inheritance (Jafri 2008:2). It can also be argued that honour groups maintain ‘equality’ by keeping their women under life-long control; by regulating their behaviour in the natal as well as marital home, and by the threat of exile from both homes.

**Regaining lost honour.**

In some settings honour, when lost is considered irretrievable (Jafri 2008; Wikan 2008), but FGD participants reported that people do not placidly accept the loss to their honour. They try various means to regain honour and be re-accepted by their kinship because, without the forgiveness of the broader familial and social network, removal of the blemish of dishonour and the return of self-worth are not possible.

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207 through the *kanyadaan* ritual in the wedding ceremony among most Hindus in the field-work area
208 this helps explain why a daughter’s transgressions are a matter of ‘family honour’
Ostracising the transgressors can help to regain lost face within one’s kinship. Once it is made clear that the immediate family disapproves of the black sheep, the family becomes acceptable within the larger network, although with sneers, condescension and pity.

Usually families approach trusted prominent members\textsuperscript{209} from among their relatives when honour is threatened. This approach is essential in order to show respect, gain the support of the elders, and to try and settle the matter as privately as possible. Later, they may also approach their caste panchayat, the village leadership – both traditional and elected, or the legal system through the local police patil and the police station (see Chowdhry 2006:199). A girl may confide in her friends or her mother about her affair, whereas a woman facing violations may approach women’s groups, shelters or the police. Most interventions by traditional arbitrators, besides being corrupt, favour the upper groups and men, wherein family, caste, religious and village honour play a significant role.

In case of pre-marital pregnancy, secretive abortions and a quick, quiet marriage with older, poorer, disabled or already married men may be resorted to. If an abortion is not possible, it is hoped that the pregnancy will pass off as that of the bridegroom, who in turn may accept it if he is impotent or infertile, thereby restoring his own self-worth in the public eye. However, desertion is a possibility when the husband cries foul, as is severe violence and life-long humiliation for the girl in both homes. Participants remembered a 20 year old incident when a young bride had been taken to a clinic by her husband’s family because she starting vomiting a couple of days after the wedding. The doctor confirmed the fact that she was pregnant. Thereafter the in-law and her own maternal uncle (mama) paraded her through the village and beat her severely. It is rumoured that the uncle tried to sell the girl off to a brothel thereafter. It’s ironic that the punishment for having had sex was forcing more sex on her, and that making money out of selling a daughter for sex work was perceived as restoring honour lost by a pregnancy outside marriage. FGD participants voiced the possibility that the uncle himself may have been the abuser of

\textsuperscript{209} pratishtha, maan astelya
the girl and may have wanted to get rid of her after his attempt of palming off the pregnancy to someone else boomeranged.

People from dominant groups regain lost honour through money and clout (pratishtha). Money may be used by the perpetrators to buy or force silence. When benign correctional measures fail, more overt solutions are sought, many of these being violent and violating of the human rights of the transgressor. Since honour has to be acknowledged in public (Stewart:1994), beating someone visibly can also help someone regain honour. If the transgressing boy is from a lower group the police or local gangs may be used by dominant groups to beat him up mercilessly, and the news may be flashed in the local media. The local leadership takes a personal interest in the case, thereby restoring caste honour as well.

**Reflexive (avengeful) honour**

Lost honour can be regained by taking physical revenge on the family, or by sexually humiliating women from the ‘other’ family, especially if they have sexually harassed or raped women from one’s household. Families may carry on a feud for generations due to loss (or perceived loss) of honour. In earlier times, not only were runaway couples beaten but family members would also be goaded to take revenge on the ‘other’ family, with rape and murder being justified to avenge lost honour (Chowdhry 2007:151).

One disturbing aspect about crimes in the name of honour is the active participation of women (CEWLA 2005; MASUM 2006). Women participate in, or abet the ill-treatment and torture of other women; we are also painfully aware of the increasing role of women in violent vigilante groups, or during riots (Butalia 2001). Participants felt that women sense temporary closeness with their men, and experience gratification because men have trusted them by letting them act on their behalf, such as pressing for more dowry from the daughter-in-law. They may also

210 We have encountered many instances of young girls’ pregnancies arising out of family rape. Some fathers, when confronted have said “What’s wrong if I lay claim to the harvest from my field?” or “Why should I let another man taste my fruit before me?”

211 This is the term / category Stewart (1994) uses for knightly or revengeful retaliation when one’s honour is challenged. It may be confusing, as ‘reflexive’ is usually used in a positive sense within Sociology. Please see Chapter 2, Section on Honour for details about the concept of reflexive honour

212 "kaatyone kaata kaadhaycha"
feel some equalisation and power over men, such as during communal riots. They gain *maam-pratishtha* like their men, even if that feeling is momentary. Women may feel that they have control over other men, such as on their sons when they control their daughters-in-law. Controlling younger women by getting the latter to fear and obey them also consolidates their own power over the changing household. The rules of the power-game are firmly laid down when younger women fall in line through brutalisation and codes of conduct within the family.

Women from one family may abuse or beat up people from another family when they perceive their name or honour being compromised by that family. This may happen if that family generates rumours or gossip about oneself, or one’s daughter’s conduct; when someone from that family has a romantic or sexual encounter with one’s children; when one’s daughter is harassed; or, if that family gives support and shelter to one’s battered daughter-in-law.

In many cases, men ‘outsource’ violence through women. Revenge against other families or political opponents is sought by getting women to beat up men or members of the other family. Sometimes women may be incited to beat a transgressing woman in the neighbourhood, such as someone who entertains men in her home, or has an affair with a man from another honour group. Within the home, when men want to move out of the joint family home or want their share of the fields, they may inflame some existing discontent between their respective wives.²¹³ Men play one woman against the other, depending on their interests at that time. Often women are also goaded to beat or discipline other women of the household. While a man may beat his wife or blood relatives without thinking, he may get women to beat up a woman related to him by marriage (daughter-in-law or brother’s wife). This is to avoid severe retaliation from her natal family if he beat her, since the latter may consider a beating to their daughter from a male as a graver loss of honour for themselves.

Women are sometimes aware of men’s games but they use this opportunity to gain more power *vis-a-vis* other women, to enjoy some tentative camaraderie with their husbands and to perpetrate violence on those they wish to. Depending on whom the

²¹³ see interview with Mangal in Chapter 6 for an experience related to such family politics
man is favouring at that moment, women score a point against each other, often through verbal, physical, psychological and economic violence. Mothers-in-law who have been beaten in their youth or have gone through drudgery all their lives, consolidate their son’s power over the rest of the household by controlling younger women, all the time reminding the latter of the easy time they’re having as compared to olden days.

A masculine conflict for power erupts when a married daughter returns home. Besides facing public shame, this act snowballs into more tensions within their family. Sometimes their son’s wife may return to her parents due to the stress of sharing the homestead with the sister-in-law and her children. She may also cite the precedence of her sister-in-law’s return to follow suit, and make her own domestic violence public. In her eyes, her husband’s family has already lost honour by the return of their daughter; besides, if they give shelter to a battered married daughter, they can hardly complain if their daughters-in-law leave the home. Families can therefore lose honour many times over when they support a married daughter. When siblings are cross-married (a brother and sister pair married to another sister-brother pair\textsuperscript{215}) and a sister returns home, the ‘offended’ brother’s wife may be sent back in retaliation, and not brought back until the sister’s husband relents.

**Loopholes in practices related to honour**

On occasion, members of dominant groups can pretend to ‘loan’ honour\textsuperscript{215} to subordinates in order to reap immediate gain or advantage. A local Maratha woman candidate bestowed her brand new sari\textsuperscript{216} upon women from artisan groups on public platforms during her election campaigning. Yet, immediately after winning the election she closed her savings and credit account with MASUM, because she had to walk through the defacement lane for the group meetings that are always held in artisan or Dalit neighbourhoods! The lower groups cannot loan any honour to the upper groups because, in the eyes of the latter, they don’t seem to have any and if they did try, they would only be insulting the upper groups.

\textsuperscript{214} saata-lota
\textsuperscript{215} usni izzat/ usna maan
\textsuperscript{216} “ghadi modayla deney” or “saadi nasavney” is a local custom that bestows honour upon someone by ceremonially draping one’s brand new sari (usually one that is received as a gift) around her in public. Thereafter the owner takes back her sari.
Money power plays an important role in creating amnesia related to traditional honour. The lost izzat of a dominant group family when their daughter married below their caste-status can be regained if her husband's family is rich, politically influential or of some value to the village. If a married daughter helps her natal family financially, she gains respect with them and is welcomed honourably in spite of the earlier transgression. Similarly a woman whose sexual conduct is considered suspect may be temporarily bestowed with respect\(^{217}\) even by those who are contemptuous of her, when they need to borrow money from her.

Women are used over and over again by their families to avoid loss of face, such as being made to beg for extra repayment time from creditors,\(^ {218}\) even if they had not been consulted while taking the loan. The usual norms of not speaking to men or interacting with them in the husband’s absence are temporarily suspended.\(^ {219}\) Naturally women face sexualised and casteist insults from money-lenders on such occasions. A poor man unable to repay his debt may be asked to 'loan' his wife to the creditor sexually, in which case her husband and family are forced to overlook the sexual transaction. Were the woman to confront the creditor on any matter later on, he would publicly put her down by reminding her of her 'whoring'.\(^ {220}\) The husband, in order to regain his own izzat among his own peers\(^ {221}\) may then incite her to slap or beat up the man in public.

The ways in which honour is side-tracked for personal gain point towards the discrepancies and hypocrisies within its concept as well as practice on a day-to-day basis. It can also be argued that these fault-lines simultaneously create sites for manipulation, negotiation and resistance from subordinated groups within the gender-caste matrix, because the fallibility of the idealised notion of honour is exposed through these loopholes.

\(^{217}\) izzat weni izzat dili jatey

\(^{218}\) baatiach puda ghalto jatey

\(^{219}\) jamun-bajun kaama-dola kela jato

\(^{220}\) mas tangalya deun damli, oast aast akak noak seklun bolu

\(^{221}\) iyacka noak khaali hoit mhamun
Understanding complicity and negotiations within the gender-caste matrix

For the upper man, the advantages of the matrix are evident. He gets respect\textsuperscript{222} through the caste-system. The rich among the uppers are accorded high-status\textsuperscript{223} in every social function and their names appear as patrons on wedding cards in the village. Knowledge of government schemes increases the hegemony,\textsuperscript{224} access and power of the dominant man, and also his ability to exploit people economically, socially and sexually. Even though economically weak men from dominant castes may be deemed inferior to the rich amongst their caste, their social hegemony over the subordinated castes persists.

For the upper woman, the advantages of the matrix are ambiguous and conditional. Her 'vertical honour,' namely respect,\textsuperscript{225} exalted status,\textsuperscript{226} value,\textsuperscript{227} importance,\textsuperscript{228} honour\textsuperscript{229} and authority\textsuperscript{230} depend on the respectability of her family,\textsuperscript{231} and on the men in her life. Her worth is enhanced if she is the wife of a local leader or police-patil. Yet her maan is notional\textsuperscript{232} and is based on the condition that she covers her head, doesn't leave the home alone and doesn't mix with lower women. She is objectified and is considered important\textsuperscript{233} only to reproduce for the family. Her feelings or personhood have no value.\textsuperscript{234} Not having the same opportunity as the upper man to access information, travel or ride a vehicle, she is constrained physically, sexually and socially. She can't re-marry, is forced to wear a sari, and has to practice social norms such as ascetic widowhood.

The gender-caste matrix is mostly disadvantageous to the lower man unless he is economically powerful. The dominant man's relationship with the subordinated man is exploitative and oppressive. He is treated disrespectfully, like a servant or a serf, and is subjected to excessive hard work, wage exploitation and violence on the farms.

\textsuperscript{222} maan-paan
\textsuperscript{223} pratishtha
\textsuperscript{224} varchasva
\textsuperscript{225} maan paan
\textsuperscript{226} varchasva
\textsuperscript{227} kinnat
\textsuperscript{228} mothepana
\textsuperscript{229} izat
\textsuperscript{230} adhikar gejwane
\textsuperscript{231} izzat gharana
\textsuperscript{232} kogdepatri
\textsuperscript{233} muhava
\textsuperscript{234} kinnat
of the upper groups. In spite of ‘reservations’ in education and jobs within the public sector, he is unable to speak out in the public domain. He is not accorded the same respect, credibility and status as a tradesman, businessman or politician by the upper man who corners all the gains in order to maintain his power and position. Within the home, the lower man has power over his wife and children, and if he is influential and rich, upon other families within his caste.

As would be expected, the lower woman hardly has any advantage within this interlocking matrix of gender-caste domination. Treated with contempt\textsuperscript{235} she may be expected to perform lowly jobs\textsuperscript{236} such as cleaning the village, be sexually abused, or be used by people for their selfish gain. Her stifling\textsuperscript{237} position doesn’t allow her to take advantage of the reservation policy in education, jobs or in politics, and thus she suffers deprivation due to caste and poverty. She faces violence in the public as well as the private domains.

The advantage of subscribing to the gender-caste matrix for the different categories is dependent on each others’ presence and position within the matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of the caste-gender matrix in the:</th>
<th>for the Upper Man</th>
<th>for the Upper Woman</th>
<th>for the Lower Man</th>
<th>for the Lower Woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Domain</td>
<td>Advantageous</td>
<td>Advantageous</td>
<td>Disadvantageous</td>
<td>Disadvantageous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Domain</td>
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Numerous compromises have to be made by everyone expect the upper man to stay within the gender-caste matrix, since all the others face some disadvantage within it. For women from any section, the matrix carries more disadvantages than advantages. A woman from a dominant caste has to live under the weight of the

\textsuperscript{235} \textit{kuchhata} \textsuperscript{236} \textit{balki kamay} \textsuperscript{237} \textit{kuchambara}
family, having to relinquish her freedom,\textsuperscript{238} including reproductive and sexual autonomy. She has to constantly uphold the culture of the family, wear conservative clothing and touch the feet of all the guests in her husband’s home. She is expected to remove her footwear when she passes a temple or the main village, and can’t leave the home according to her wishes or needs. Upper women stay within the matrix largely out of commitment to their castes.\textsuperscript{239} The lower woman on the other hand doesn’t fancy adhering to the matrix, as she has very little to gain from it, and not much to lose were she to defy it. It is her precarious social position that doesn’t allow for an outright rebellion (see Scott 1990) unless she has the support of a collective.

Participants were unanimous about the fact that once women dare to break out of the gender-caste matrix, their levels of information, self-reliance and decision-making are greatly enhanced. They gain respect (\textit{maan} – note that this term was used for women intrinsically for the first time in the FGDs; and, not because of but \textit{in spite} of the men!). Other women are able to speak fearlessly within their homes once a role-model has been created. Legal help is sought to address domestic violence. Young women who participate in MASUM’s programmes have learnt to ride bicycles, scooters and motorbikes, and wear \textit{salwar-kameez}. Feminist perspectives on health created a positive attitude towards menstruation and gave courage to challenge the misogynist practices around it.

Women from subordinated groups dare to break out after experiencing the importance of collectivising. Through trainings, gatherings, marches and consciousness-raising about constitutional and human rights, they raise demands from the State\textsuperscript{240} for fulfilment of its obligations towards people. Breaking through the matrix has created the opportunity for lower women to express their opinions and use the language of rights, equality and dignity, which in turn has helped reduce injustice.

\textsuperscript{238} swantantrya
\textsuperscript{239} jati koathi maati koaeen
\textsuperscript{240} shasan

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Challenges to customary honour: The complexity of Indian modern

Participants observed that the gradual processes of modernisation, especially during the past two decades, have affected caste and gender-based power in diverse ways, leading to increased freedom for subordinated groups on the one hand, and parental or societal anxiety on the other. It is interesting how in the context of modernisation, words like *maan* and *sanmaan* (respect and honour) were used for the first time to denote women and people from subordinated groups. The creation of livelihood opportunities and jobs outside the caste system, such as in factories has compelled everyone to work side by side. People are still expected to follow norms such as not eating across castes, but men from different castes do eat together when they meet outside the village, especially when they share rooms or visit each other in the city. Access to information is no longer entirely dependent on men from dominant groups; besides, better transport services, television and cell-phones have made the outside world accessible.

Higher educational levels among diverse caste groups have impacted caste relations, at least superficially. Children from *balutedar* and *dalit* castes are not made to sit separately in school now. Artisan communities are no longer made to sit on their haunches during public meals; they are not obliged to eat last (though they may still be expected to do so); nor is food explicitly ‘dropped’ (instead of served) into their plates. They are not blatantly asked to drag dead cattle or to skin dead sheep, nor are they overtly addressed through caste names.¹⁴¹

Gender sensitivity lags behind; though castiest slurs, vocalised openly 20-30 years ago are now cautiously used, sexist slurs continue unabated. Similarly, while lower men are not expected to take off their footwear while walking through the main village in the presence of members from dominant families (*gharanas*) anymore, women from all groups are still expected to do so in many villages even today.²⁴² Wearing footwear or not covering her head while walking through the main village still makes a woman’s *laaj* questionable.

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¹⁴¹ "from the *mohur, chambhar or ramoshi* (*maharacha, chambharacha, ramoshyaoho*)
²⁴² Women, especially of the upper groups are expected to take off their footwear and cover their heads when they walk through the main village and the upper entrance or *vurchi vesh*. Women from the lower groups are expected to emulate this behaviour if they wish to be seen as honourable - *izzataaon*.
The structures of caste and class are reproduced through modernisation, with the already powerful benefitting more; in fact in some ways the economic gap has worsened because of irrigation of rich farmers’ lands, and due to land-selling by the small farmers for immediate monetary gain. Educational and job opportunities in the city have resulted in people moving to cities, yet most still live in slums and insanitary conditions there. With globalised markets reaching out to villages, the urbanisation of rural areas has been rapid, bringing with it cash opportunities as well as addictions, and quick avenues of losing money earned through land-sale or agriculture. Forced migration has resulted in lower groups losing on caste certificates, ration cards and voting opportunities, which in turn results in diminished power because they are no longer a ‘constituency’ for an electoral candidate either in the city or back home. Their meagre land-holding and assets back home are at risk of being usurped by the upper groups.

Patriarchy permeates through the process of urbanisation too. When a husband migrates, the woman from an impoverished home has to cope with multiple burdens and sometimes face near-starvation along with her children. Living without a husband also raises doubts about her chastity, evident in proverbs such as “When others keep you well-stocked with all you need, there’s an advantage in having a husband who’s never present at home.” She may be sexually used by dominant men; her husband may take another wife in the city, or may return with poor health due to low quality food, or being infected with TB or HIV.

On the one hand women’s education, mobility and access to jobs have increased during the past two decades, as has their access to drudgery reducing technologies, resulting in increased izzat both within the home and outside. Yet this is a tense moment in women’s lives since the belief that an educated wife belittles or emasculates her husband is rife in people’s minds.

During the past few years, the growth of telecommunication technology into the villages and some amount of cash-flow due to heightened land prices has resulted in easy access to cell-phones and cyber-cafes. Technology makes it possible for women to gather information on their own and to report domestic violence, yet
unwanted sexual messages, sexually explicit images and stalking of young women are also possible through the phone and internet. There have been recent instances where small boys and girls were made to perform acts depicted in sexually explicit films. Needless to say caste, class, gender and age status determine who will be dominated by whom.

Nuclear families have provided unprecedented gain for women in terms of decreased work-load, increased autonomy, decision-making, empowerment, maan-sanmaan (dignity) and demand for property rights. Better parental dialogue has resulted in solving children’s problems and delay of age at marriage. On the other hand, a woman’s loneliness and risk of violence has increased in nuclear households.

Modernisation also creates an illusion of equality among unequally placed people. Electoral and educational reservations, as well as enhanced access to certain government schemes have simultaneously created a positive as well as stigmatised identity for Dalit caste groups in the village. Even though State presence at the village level guarantees democracy and egalitarianism, a man from the lower group causes loss of honour to the upper group by behaving 'above his station', such as arguing in public with a dominant man or asking for information from the village revenue official (talathi) (see Chowdhry 2007:13). He may be admonished publicly and told to behave\textsuperscript{245} in accordance with his low social stature,\textsuperscript{246} precluding him from asking further questions, because the threats of physical or economic repercussions are real.

Increased political power for women and lower groups has created an unprecedented tension within the gender-caste matrix. Reservation in electoral politics has given representation to lower groups but they are not given any real power in the village panchayat (local self-government). Central or important positions and posts where gains through corruption are possible are not given to elected representatives from lower groups.

\textsuperscript{245} payri pramaane vagavey

\textsuperscript{246} layki
Most women elected representatives have power only on paper because in reality their husbands rule in their name. Within the home they are still ordered around and have to accept the superiority of men, especially in sexual matters. Women, especially from the lower groups may be given temporary status (such as making them sit on the stage) when they become elected representatives, but their participation in decision-making or their authority to implement programmes in the village will never be considered. Women from lower groups are unable to exercise the authority that comes along with the post, both due to lack of information and caste hierarchy.

**Forward and backward journey of challenging the structures**

The early years of building solidarity among women across castes were not easy. Small meetings had to be held in individual caste clusters before women from diverse backgrounds could come together. The decision of not holding meetings in any dominant home (where *balutedar* and Dalit women would feel uncomfortable or outright unwelcome) was resented by powerful men; they being used to patronising all important gatherings in the village by offering space as well as tea. They were equally upset and amused when the political space of the *gram-panchayat* was selected as the permanent weekly meeting venue.

In order to form women’s collectives, the uneasy relationship between Maratha and *balutedar* women had to be acknowledged and addressed. Heated discussions had to be given space, and dialogue facilitated. As some amount of trust grew, *balutedar* women saw the importance of Maratha women allying with them on issues that they as a minority (less than 8% of the population) could never have carried off.

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247 "*satta nagdopareech astey*"

248 Omvedt (2005) observes similarly, that proxy women candidates and the phenomenon of ‘pradhannpatis / sarpanchpatis’ (husbands ruling in their wives’ names) evolved as a result of guaranteed political representation of women by the State. Kulkarni (2007) reiterates this problem and describes how, in Maharashtra “the very first task that the Mahila Rajjatha Andolan (MRA)-supported elected women took up was to assert women’s representation within the Gram Panchayat.”

249 “*hukum sodia jato*”

250 *varchasva*

251 *nirayat sahabhag*

252 *adhyakar*

253 *amulhojasavni*

254 *adhyakar*

255 Collins (2002) also mentions the need for temporary ‘safe spaces’ for subordinated groups in order to resist being objectified as the “Other”

164
Conversely, as *balutedar* women conducted speculum examination on Maratha women, identifying gynaecological disorders and cervical cancer, or worked out safety plans with them to resist domestic violence, an equalisation of power, however transient, became inevitable.

Women from dominant households had to face escalated domestic violence while breaking the framework, they had to listen to taunts and insults within the kinship (being compared to lower women) and faced ostracism (not being invited to social functions) when they supported inter-caste-marriages. They were subjected to numerous pressures to give up resisting and collaborating with the lower groups. For them the break from the gender-caste matrix is not easy. Dress codes, marriage signs, inability to have inter-caste marriage or remarriage still persist. A death within the kinship has to be sombrely observed by all women whereby no woman applies vermilion to her forehead for fourteen days. Due to MASUM’s presence some widowed women now continue to wear the *bindi* and wear colourful clothes, but they are still not allowed to wear the marriage beads or toe-rings. Though many women from dominant castes don’t practice menstrual segregation, they feel unnerved when the family starts putting pressure to sit aside during festivals. The constant worry about what society will say stays with them, especially when they help out in inter-caste marriages. Unable to stop animal slaughter, rituals, possessions and supplications (*navas*) made to the gods, they encounter ideological dilemmas all the time. In order to dismantle the old for the sake of a new era they try to garner support from the new generation, families, friends, relatives and from their own community.

Women from subordinated castes dared to break out of the matrix after experiencing the strength of collective action. They raised demands for better public health services, answerability of the police in case of violence against women, and from elected representatives about spending of village funds. The ‘gaze’ was reversed for the first time, with subordinated women questioning dominant men in full public

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256 *chaunak*
257 this denotes the collective loss of the entire kinship, and is observed only by daughters-in-law; not daughters of the network, unless the latter are staying in (or are visiting) the natal home.
258 *dhagadh hotey*
259 *samaaj*
260 *navayug*
view. Breaking through the matrix created the exhilarating opportunity for oppressed women to speak out their minds, use the language of rights and human rights, and create the hope that injustice can reduce, once challenged.

Women from subordinated groups felt lonely, isolated and disheartened at times because of the tremendous risks they were taking through the local feminist collectives. They still face consequences when they ‘forget’ society’s expectation of constantly remaining subdued. Feminist consciousness creates some sisterhood across caste-groups, but also causes misery because, for subordinated women the risk of violence increases not only within the home but also outside it. When they dared to marry outside the caste, they had to make tremendous adjustments in the new, often hostile household. However, FGD participants were vehement that the opportunity to live a life of dignity outweighs the risks, because one’s courage to challenge the oppressive system gets enhanced. One step against injustice is still worth the repercussions and so it is essential to support inter-caste marriages and sexual rights of all women. As participants said “When women dare to marry inter-caste against the wish of their kinship, one step against caste and patriarchal power and hypocritical honour has been successfully taken.”

MASUM’s relationship with the four components of the gender-caste matrix, at least in the first decade could be summarised somewhat simplistically as follows: dominant men distanced themselves from us and occasionally let their hostility surface once they got to know that we were not useful to them; women from dominant castes aligned with us on gender issues but not on caste; men from subordinated castes felt vindicated when their women confronted caste discrimination in the public sphere – however they were conscious that a formidable ‘adversary’ was being created in the private sphere; whereas, women from subordinated castes, once they had begun to trust us, knew that we were their firm allies, both inside and outside the home.

The desire and courage to transgress gender and caste norms did not begin with MASUM nor are these completely dependent on the local staff members even today. The presence of this feminist group merely accelerated the collective and fearless ways in which women across caste barriers enunciated their demands for human
rights with appropriate information, knowledge, wisdom, compassion and inclusive politics. They were able to nominate appropriate women candidates in the local self-government bodies and get them elected by voting *en block*; ask questions in public spaces hitherto forbidden for all women; question sexual harassment in schools; and, take up rape and molestation issues even when the perpetrators were from dominant castes. What is important is to remember that at the end of the day, alliances (even if nebulous) between women from dominant and subordinated groups have resulted in difficult ground being covered. Besides, every single step has been important in terms of challenging the gender-caste matrix at the individual and collective levels. Women struggle to achieve this in spite of the structures that still separate and isolate them.

Chapter 4 provided a ‘warm-up’ in terms of understanding structures, the changing nature of domination and subordination and how those at the top would like honour and power to operate. It identified the discrepancies in that notion as well as spelt out for whom the structure is advantageous, and who dares to transgress or rebel within the gender-caste matrix. It reiterated that we have so much to learn from these various ways of resistance and why it is those pushed to the margins (or those who moved out of the centres) have the best knowledge of how to push structures around.