Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

Literature search indicates that honour has been studied as a cultural phenomenon by anthropologists,\(^1\) and as power and control by feminists. As an example, anthropologists may consider 'reputation' as a positive replacement for the term 'honour' (Welsh 2008), while feminists (Minces 1982; Wikan 2008) has shown how the term 'reputation' is gendered, and that it can become the major precipitating factor for family violence in the name of honour. Feminists from Muslim countries have also challenged the myth that honour is merely a cultural phenomenon, showing instead that it is linked to political economy, militarisation and geo-politics. Similarly, feminists from western countries have pointed out the racist, anti-immigration and Islamophobic connotations of honour. The relegation of honour to 'backward cultures' has led feminists to either forego the term, or to use it within quotes. While most believe that the term cannot be appropriated in a positive manner because of its history and application, this thesis argues that it may be possible for honour to be understood outside its patriarchal connotations. Since the voice of subordinated women was missing from theorisation about honour, it has been studied from the point of view of the perpetrator until now. When women featured, they were victims in most narratives. This thesis derives much of its understanding from women who are unequally placed; most of whom are socially excluded, marginalised or stigmatised. It shows that women can in turn not only challenge patriarchal honour and power, but can also appropriate its meaning from an external, hierarchal concept to an intrinsic and egalitarian one.

Though the major focus on honour has been during the moment of choosing a sexual or romantic partner, the concept and practice of honour exists far beyond that; in fact it exists from early childhood and stays with us thereafter. Not much work has been done on daily codes of conduct that determine what is honourable and what is not. This thesis focuses beyond seismic moments in people's lives; it delves into the

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\(^1\) The conceptualisation of honour by Stewart (1994) and Welsh (2008) have been useful for the thesis.
miniscule ways in which honour shapes attitudes, behaviour and self-worth. This approach helps in understanding the build-up before the outburst of violence; it also helps to understand the social construction of honour. It postulates honour as structural violence.

Honour is certainly gendered. My field work shows that only men from dominant groups possess “intrinsic” honour. Men possess honour; women are patriarchy’s embodied honour. Women do not possess honour; they possess its counterpart, namely shame (see Chowdhry 2007). Men lose honour not through their behaviour, but by the behaviour of women from their families or kinships. Control over women’s behaviour thus becomes imperative, as becomes punishing transgressors. Customarily, women have to choose between honour and power; they lose one because of the other. Men however possess both; in fact the presence of one strengthens the other (see Figure 7.1). This is evident through local nomenclature which is very similar for honour as well as power. Both belong to powerful men from dominant castes. I argue that though women are not traditionally bearers of honour, they are the holders; and, 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 group and is aggravated when group identity is threatened (as in the case of inter-caste marriage, State intervention in community matters or with women’s increased decision-making). I contend that though gross violence in the name of honour may be present in some parts of the country, alternative negotiations happen there as well. Conversely, where such overt violence or killing is not rampant (as in the study areas), the core notion of honour exists in similar ways. The structures of patriarchy and caste construct and reproduce notions of honour for the entire ‘honour group’ (Stewart, ibid).

However, honour is not only gendered; it is also casteist. Men from subordinated groups do not possess honour in the way that dominant men do, but their honour (or lack of it) in the public domain is similar to that of women. It is behavioural and is constantly put to test through daily codes that govern their lives. From physical spaces in the village to learnt behaviour since early childhood, the entire lives of people are directed by these minute codes. Because they become part of one’s growing up, they are not always recognised as power or control, even by those who
are its victims. These norms, customary codes and sexual mores range from the way in which dress up, give eye contact, speak or leave the home. No woman is free from them at any time. It is possible to argue that honour acts in similar ways to caste; creating boundaries with respect to the ‘Other,’ and creating a hierarchal model in which each group tries to emulate the ones above. Giving up of widow re-marriage is one such example.

Dominant men are considered sexual, yet honourable. Women from dominant households have to be asexual in order to be considered as honourable. Men from subordinated groups are considered to be hyper-sexual and therefore dishonouring to the ‘upper’ men by polluting women from the latter’s family. Women from subordinated groups are sexualised; thus they are considered unworthy as well as ‘available’ to dominant men. The structures as documented through the gender-caste matrix in Chapter 4 are suffocating, yet I argue that there are loopholes and leakages in this matrix. The components of the matrix affect each other constantly, thereby being subjected to on-going tensions and negotiations (see Chakravarti 2003). While I concede that agency in one area of life may not always result in more, I show that the presence of women’s rights groups accelerates agency and provides impetus for personal agency to be transformed into collective agency which has the potential to challenge cultural hegemony.

Neither is the concept of honour foolproof. It has numerous loopholes; some to the advantage of the dominant men, but others that expose the hypocrisies within the patriarchal and caste structures. These loopholes manipulate women on the one hand, but they also provide a site for rebellion. Most ruptures in the practice of honour centre around financial transactions. Loss of honour is overlooked where money is concerned. Even though women are not expected to talk to unrelated men, they are made to negotiate with creditors; they may be ‘loaned’ to rich men for favours or to repay debt; families may disregard sexual abuse of a daughter if the perpetrator provides for them financially; and, families may have no compunctions about taking money from sex-workers even as they stigmatises the woman.

Sexuality features as one of the most incriminating factors for loss of honour. Even relationships between husband and wife are monitored carefully so that they don’t
bond too much. Marriage within heteronormative patriarchy is strictly for transactions between kinships, labour and legitimate reproduction. The restrictions get even more stringent with regard to sex before or outside marriage. Any sexual transgression causes severe loss of honour to the family; therefore it is checked in order to maintain respectability for the household within their honour group. The thesis identifies the notion of ‘honour equivalents’ as an added dimension to marriages within ‘caste equivalents,’ by showing how transgressions based on women’s sexuality isolate a household for generations in terms of “beti vyavahar” (the business of transacting daughters).²

Of all the intersections studied in the thesis, the addition of the sexual dimension to any other identity converts an ‘innocent’ victim into a dishonourable one. This has disastrous consequences for women, ranging from early forced marriage to a long-term prison sentence. Sexual morality also justifies vigilante actions by the moral police in terms of raids on sex-workers and bar-dancers, as well as separating parents and children “for the good” of the latter. Abandonment of newborn babies in the case of pregnancies outside marriage is also one such compulsion women face because of family honour.

One can argue that honour is symbolic capital. It is then used to enhance the cultural and social capital of a family. Households with chaste daughters can build political and economic contacts with powerful families as bride-givers and bride-takers. Similarly, if one’s married daughter cohabits with her husband in spite of violence or neglect, the social status of her natal family increases. This results in appropriating more power within the kinship, which further results in more honour for the men of the family. Using proverbs and local idiom Chapter 4 shows how daughters and daughter-in-law are controlled within both homes through the concept of honour in order to increase the worth of their families. Yet, families carefully manipulate women’s sexuality, whether through marriage, or through prostitution. The case of Bedia girls (see Chapters 5 and 6) who are expected to provide for the families through prostitution or the magnetism of the city-life for girls growing up in Dalit

² See Chapter 4 for more details on households being called “bitter” or “lowly” homes; how marriages are arranged only among known families (where the “sari palla” must necessarily touch the other family – “podur laangla pushijey”); or, how the horticulturalist caste (Mali) was cleaved into full-Mali and half-Mali, based on women’s sexual relationships outside the caste
by-lanes of the village highlights the intersectional impact of caste, livelihood, tradition, religion, and the laws of the modern State in rendering some people without honour or rights.\(^3\)

The connivance of public institutions with patriarchal honour was revealed through in-depth conversations with people from diverse social locations. The disbelief of the police, their trivialisation of family violence and the apologist stance of courts when honour related crimes take place indicate how the power of those at the top of the gender-caste hierarchy affects state institutions too. Many life-stories indicate how the state has the ultimate power in not only deciding what an honourable livelihood is, but also in reconstructing the age or caste of an individual. Norms of honour operate within walled institutions, with inmates as well as officials subscribing to gender-caste biases.

This work deals more with the structural, rather than the overt manifestations of honour / violence. That is why it is able to bring out the voices of the right-wing in times when polarisation is not completely evident, as it would be say after a riot. Even the right wing narratives seem 'moderate'; both condemn rape or murder (see Chapter 5). Conversely, interviews with individuals who are not politically associated with right-wing parties are not as 'moderate' as one would have imagined. Gender binaries, justification of sexual molestation by putting the onus on women, justification of wife-beating, avenging family honour and construction of nationalism on the basis of religion and culture are evident in many respondents' narratives. Honour normalises violence and the need for retribution when women from the family digress in sexual or non-sexual arenas of life.

In the era where progressive movements are on the wane we find a resurgence and reinterpretation of religion to attract masses. The sense of collectivity that religion provides, even in modern times gives right-wing religious authorities their power of domination. It provides legitimacy to those who push hegemonic ideas, norms and mores; most of which govern intimate aspects of people's lives and which control women in the name of culture. These contemporary movements look backwards for answers, and shape patriarchy as well as modern concepts such as citizenship based

\(^3\) See Stewart 1994 for how people were rendered 'ehrllos und rechtlos' (honourless and rightless) in Europe for centuries, based on legitimacy at birth, stigmatised professions and 'disgraceful' misdeeds.
on honour. They reconstitute their power when caste and religious authority face challenges from within and outside (Chowdhry 2007).

Further, any movement that challenges patriarchy and inequality is seen as an affront to culture and as subscribing to colonial or western values; thus we see backlash against individuals and groups; either from families, kinships, castes or religions. One can therefore argue that backlash happens because structures are threatened with women’s agency; thus they seek to reconstitute themselves in modern terminology.4 Violent identity politics and cultural nationalism strengthen notions of patriarchal honour and of ‘honour group’ identities, where people rely more and more on “their own kind.” When minorities consolidate for the sake of safety and identity, their women lose out twice over, due to threats from the majority and increased, unreasonable expectations from within their community.

Vibrant movements for democratisation of society are essential to keep the voices of the right-wing subdued and strengthen those of the subordinated (Collins 2002; Fraser 2000). Unless the broader political climate encourages progressive values to flourish, it is quite possible that the right-wing voices will shelve whatever moderation they espouse. Further, the moderate voices of today will become shriller, and those of subordinated groups silenced.

The concept of patriarchal honour percolates into unexpected spaces; its hegemony is imbibed even by groups that are subordinated within patriarchy, such as hijras, kottis, devadasis, sex-workers and mainstream women. Every group tries to demonstrate its superiority over the other in terms of purity that stems from brahminical patriarchy. One finds that structures reconstitute themselves on the margins in an attempt to co-opt those who transgress. Similarly, excluded groups subscribe to mainstream norms in order to overcome the stigma they face due to social exclusion (see Chapter 5).

In spite of the obvious differences among respondents, the presence of structures related to patriarchy, caste, class, heteronormativity, religion, marital status, livelihood and so on are present in most life-stories. The experiences of respondents show the various ways in which honour operates (or is constructed) within

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4 See interviews of Ganesh and Waseem in Chapter 5
patriarchy, and that the ways in which women deal with honour depends on their placement within the family and community.

The thesis has applied the theories of Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), the Matrix of Domination and Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins ibid) to the Indian context by adding these to already existing understanding of Indian activism related to class, caste and gender. It has expanded the application of these theories beyond race, or even caste, to include class, sexualities, genders, masculinities, ability, incarceration, livelihoods and age. It has looked at unequal power within families. It has also used the concept of honour to understand these theories in the context of patriarchal power. It is clear that patriarchal power doesn’t work alone but that other systems of domination help to keep it in place. Not only pre-modern structures such as religion, culture, tradition and customs, but even formal modern structures sometimes work in tandem with patriarchy. On the one hand law of the land considers everyone as equal but on the other, it legitimises patriarchy.

This work has brought in numerous intersections to show how different combinations of oppressive structures precipitate vulnerabilities on the already subordinated groups (see Figures at the end of Chapter 5). Conversely, it has shown that progressive women’s groups that address the intersectionality in people’s lives have the potential to challenge the interlocking and complex matrix of domination. Interventions by these groups take into account the lives realities of women’s lives and do not impose external biases or stereotypes, thereby avoiding the pitfall of violating women’s rights in the process. This thesis argues against identity politics that is based on perpetual victimhood and which is exclusionary. It argues in favour of centre-staging the knowledge and wisdom of those who have experienced domination in order to confront the hegemonic and vertical alignment of gender, sexuality and power. Binaries, whether of gender (in terms of roles, responsibilities and identity); public-private; heterosexual-homosexual; victim-perpetrator; man-

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5 Since the 1970s, the Indian women’s movement has been using the concept of single-double-triple burden / oppression of women from subordinated groups on the basis of caste, class and gender. The theories of Intersectionality and Matrix of Domination add to this understanding by saying that each intersectionality adds more than a mere additional element to the earlier oppression, but that it creates an interlocking system of oppression.
woman, and so on will have to be challenged if a counter-hegemonic understanding of patriarchy and its intersections with other systems of domination has to prevail.

It became clear through the process of research that people who have been marginalised or subordinated have the greatest potential to challenge patriarchal honour and power. Stigmatised groups such as *hijras*, *kotis*, sex-workers and *devadasis* emerge with a critique of patriarchy and of the institution of the heterosexual marriage in unimaginable ways. Their challenge to hegemonic masculinity, and to patrilineality, patrilocality or patrimony becomes apparent when they speak about their daily lives. Their lived realities challenge many patriarchal controls, including that over labour, reproduction, sexuality, mobility and decision-making. The presence of social fathers in the lives of children of sex-workers, the transient kinships among *hijras*, and households built on non-patriarchal tenets are some examples discussed in the thesis. While the actors may not always be conscious of the impact of their actions on patriarchal structures, learning from their experiences can help us to strategise in ways that we have never considered before. Because people’s social location and the intersectionality of their lives create confounding matrices of domination, people in turn learn how to negotiate those in innovative ways (Scott 1990). Simple acts, when juxtaposed against their lived experiences begin to take on a different meaning; what might seem like collaboration emerges as resistance when understood in the context of the event in the person’s life.

Those at the bottom of the power pyramid add significantly new dimensions, not only to the concept but also towards dismantling it in the way that it exists today. Their honour is sought not through caste or patriarchal power but by their resistance to it. Challenging daily codes of behaviour that translate the dominant ideology of patriarchy and caste into action makes them aware of its hypocrisy and fallibility early on in life. The honour that subordinated women seek when they collectivise is based on equality, rights, entitlements, dignity, autonomy and personhood; all these being the hallmark of the modern human rights framework. This re-conceptualisation of honour is based not on theory, but their lived experiences. To us, it promises an understanding of personal honour that is not violent or hierarchal, but is intrinsic to everyone (Stewart 1994:21); not merely an attribute of those at the
top of the gender-caste matrix (see Chapter 4). This shift in paradigm also generates a different kind of knowledge system for all of us; it becomes an epistemological contribution to the meaning of honour itself (Collins 2000). By applying the theories of Intersectionality and the Matrix of Domination to real-life situations, this thesis also suggests ways of combining feminist theory, methodology, academics and intervention. I reiterate that in order to challenge the matrix of domination arising out of interlocking systems of oppression, we need to build resistances that are equally complex as the matrix. Only a multifold approach can break the chains of the matrix on multiple intersections (see Figure 7.2).

When people confront patriarchal power by challenging the concept of honour they simultaneously garner the potential of creating a different kind of power. A democratic and egalitarian environment is essential to nurture equalising power for it not to be sucked in by the 'centres' or taken over by dominating structures that percolate into these spaces. Hard-earned power based on people’s lives, sacrifice and readiness to put the collective good at par with personal aspirations is different from traditional power. This power is created through empowerment, resistance and great personal risk; not through caste, class or gender privilege. It is not the power of the dominator but that of subordinated people; therefore the rules of the game are not the same as before. It is answerable, accountable to collectives and is used on behalf of subordinated people not against them (Allen 2005).

in turn this power allows women to resist patriarchal honour that controls, excludes and brutalises them (Sen 2005). It creates an egalitarian honour that is not dependent on other people’s actions. With the gift of this power absorbed inside their core, women don’t have to choose between power and honour. Empowerment through a progressive group creates an alloy of honour and power that is based on the ethics of caring (Collins ibid), personal conviction and an empathy with those you work with. It allows solidarity with those are not like you; heralding the beginning of inclusive and emancipatory politics.
Questions for Future Research and Interventions

A re-definition of honour carries its own risks. Using a concept that has strong patriarchal, caste and sexual connotations is tricky because an age-old interpretation of the concept is always possible. If 'honour groups', even new / modern ones tend to make a 'particular' type of honour as the hegemonic or normative one, the right to dissent may be affected, even within progressive groups, leading to conformity out of fear of banishment from the collective. The language of modern human rights (with all its limitations), namely self-determination; self-respect; dignity, autonomy; personhood and so on could also be considered as options to the term honour as long as the latter is perceived as an external phenomenon. Similarly any power, however well-conceived faces the risk of becoming hegemonic and centrist. New margins and new exclusions could easily develop around feminist powers too.

Resolutions to some of these dilemmas lie in our engagement with academics as well as with those outside the academia (Burawoy 2000; 2009) so that both sides deepen their understanding of public issues. Similarly, in order to create a counter-hegemonic discourse around the notion of honour, we need alternative knowledge and network societies (Castells 2000a; 2000b; 2001) so that the current focus is altered, based on the voices, real-life experiences and leadership of those who challenge structures through small and big acts.

The thesis throws up numerous questions related to theory, methodology, practice and feminist interventions. In some ways, it opens a Pandora's box. How do we make the intersectionalities 'answerable,' so that women are not lost on the interstices of each intersection? Necessarily we will need to first address internal differences among women, but those should be not to fragment the women's movement but to become inclusive of all women's issues. Aligning with people marginalised and excluded on the basis of any intersection (caste, class, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, occupation, marital status, motherhood and so on) would then be an essential part of the women's movement's agenda. How do we envisage an intersectionality of intervention? How do we theorise or intervene in ways by which everyone feels that 'their' issue is 'our' issue?
To be realistic, can it ever be possible to create true solidarity between women who are so differently placed? With deep structures dividing women, along with histories of exploitation, betrayals and hatred, can it be possible to dismantle multiple systems of domination? How do we abandon the mythical notion of universal sisterhood solidarity and restructure our interventions in which the subordinated are not mere listeners or followers but active leaders of the movement? How do we actually strategise for progressive social transformation based on the conclusions?

Increasing women’s access to progressive organisations clearly helps to make the transition from victim to survivor and from there to becoming an agent of social change. Individual women need to be linked to feminist organisations; the same is true of groups challenging related systems of domination. In turn the feminist movement will have to re-connect with issues of caste and class inequalities. The resistance to the complex matrix of domination necessarily needs to be as complex as the matrix. When it is already so difficult to organise women to identify and address their primary oppression, how do we work on all oppressions simultaneously? Besides, working on caste and class issues necessarily means that we have to work along with men. How does one create these multiple solidarities that don’t contradict each other and offer support as and when needed? How do we work in a way that our world-view includes all subordinated people?

This thesis hopes to be of some use to feminist practitioners, especially those that work on violence against women. It hopes to add to extant knowledge about the concept of honour from an Indian perspective, especially in applying the usage of the concept to understand patriarchal power as it intersects with other systems of domination. By combining empiricism and theory, by applying Black Feminist theories (such as Intersectionality, the Complex Matrix of Domination and Black Feminist Epistemology) to the Indian context, it also hopes to challenge the hegemony of knowledge that is bereft of the understanding of people’s lived realities.
Epilogue and hope for the future

Just as this thesis is going to print, I have received some wonderful news that involves two of my respondents. Sugandhi, the protagonist with the unusual and revolutionary household has just announced two weddings in the family! Her deceased son’s girl-friend (who lives with her) is getting married to a photographer colleague who is a few years younger than her. In spite of resistance from his household, Sugandhi and Vivek are actively preparing for her forthcoming wedding. The second news concerns Ritu, the young woman who escaped an honour killing and lives in Sugandhi’s working class neighbourhood with her small daughter. Widowed at 19 because her brother massacred her husband’s family within months of her marriage, Ritu had been working in a factory at a desk job. With Vivek’s encouragement Ritu has now joined a course to become a physical education teacher. She will now be able to fulfil her childhood dream of becoming a sports teacher in spite of the fact that her family didn’t allow her to jump or play outdoors in her childhood. To top it all, Ritu and Sugandhi’s elder son are getting married next month.

The thesis seems to have a fairy-tale ending; however what Sugandhi has achieved in her lifetime is the testimony of subordinated women resisting and confronting oppressive structures all the time. She gained courage to re-marry as a widow from Vivek’s mother who herself had married her deceased husband’s younger brother in the late 1940s! In turn Sugandhi gave courage to many widows in her neighbourhood to re-marry with dignity through her own example. Now, this enormously important act has come around a full circle, with Sugandhi becoming a ‘bride-giver’ as well as a ‘bride-taker’ of young women who are re-marrying after widowhood. These acts reiterate my belief that courage and social transformation persist in spite of (and because of) oppressive structures of subordination, and that they have the potential to shake up or change these structures.

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6 N28, 57 year old Pahari / Thakur woman; Hindu / Christian, chairperson of the Mumbai district committee of AIDWA; twice married; mother of three children
7 Dr. Vivek Monteiro, Sugandhi’s second husband
8 While Ritu was widowed in the murderous attack on her husband by her brother, Sugandhi’s deceased son’s girl-friend lived in their household even after his death as a widowed daughter / daughter-in-law.
Figure 7.1: The Gendered Binaries of Honour / Shame

MEN (especially dominant ones) possess

Property + Power + Honour

(one important one being) (also over) (being embodied in)

WOMEN of household, kinship are property as well as honour of men

they cause damage to men's property

they cause loss of honour (dishonour) to their men

Women possess 'shame', not honour

When women lose shame

NOTE: Property, power and honour are inter-related and inter-dependent. They are thus directly proportional to each other. Loss of honour (largely through women's transgressions) can result in loss of power for men and households within their kinship. This results in reduced chances of getting brides from or giving brides into powerful, propertied families for present and future generations.
Figure 7.2: Impact of Agency, Based On Nature of Resistance

STRUCTURES OF OPPRESSION AND MATRIX OF DOMINATION

Limited Impact

i) Individual resistance, or groups working on single identity issues

1. Limited impact
2. Can be undermined or co-opted into existing structures
3. Greater possibility of being tired out
4. Risk of moving into victim-based exclusionary politics
5. Recognition possible, but not necessarily egalitarian

Questionable Impact

ii) Exclusionary, victim-based identity politics

1. May strengthen existing structures
2. May create similar structures in different forms
3. Increased risk of violent identity politics by 'Othering' those that are not similar
4. Risk of reactionary, fundamentalist tendencies growing

Multiple Impacts on Hegemonic Structures

iii) Inclusive and progressive collectives working on multiple oppressions

1. Greater and multiple levels of impact on dismantling oppressive structures
2. Generates new power and honour which are non-dominating, answerable, egalitarian, based on personal ethical conduct, non-violent and respectful of other identities
3. Increasing possibility of progressive social transformation