Chapter 3

Exploring the Interconnections of Labour, the Making of ‘Bodies’ and Markets: Women as Beauty Workers
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Abstract:

With an introductory discussion on the existing discourse on beauty and beauty industry, this chapter is based on the narratives obtained during fieldwork (December 2015-March 2016) among the beauty parlour workers in Pune city. The chapter examines the various kinds of labour involved in the beauty parlours, how women function, negotiate and survive as ‘beauty workers’ within specific parlours. These narratives strikingly relate beauty to economics, identity, market, and desire. In addition the narratives suggest a deep level of invisibilisation and non recognition of important parts of ‘beauty work’ as ‘work’.
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“.........I was young and I was married. My sasubai (mother in law) one day told me that I should go out, work and explore the world, things that she always wanted to but couldn’t. I only knew the art of making women pretty, that’s what I had learnt working in my cousin’s parlour prior to marriage. My sasubai was quite reluctant but my husband was supportive. He encouraged me to start a parlour. He got me a place and gave me the seed money to start the business. Here I am, running my own business since 20 years, creating employment opportunity for young women, pampering my clients, taking care of my children and family, dealing with banks and marketing agencies and much more. Yet in comparison to my other sister-in laws who are doctors and corporate women, my identity as a beauty worker seldom gets celebrated. I feel it all the time; I feel the pain every moment.”

(Excerpt from interview with Mrs. Manisha Potnis, owner of Femina Beauty Parlour, Karve Nagar, Pune on 11.3.2016)

The narrative above is a part of an interview conducted with a woman working in beauty parlours in Pune city. This narrative very precisely brings out many facet of her life, in fact life of most of the women working as beauty workers- some of which are visible, accepted and rewarded and some being invisible, unaccepted and unrewarded. Beauty parlours and activities associated with it till date are shrouded in mystery, not always the first livelihood option and in many ways stigmatized. While it will not be right to make such generalized statement yet in ways more than one this is the reality of beauty parlours and the workers associated with this work. Beauty parlours are indeed an interesting space for women as it not only provides an employment opportunity for them but also functions as a gateway space from everyday mundane life. Beauty parlour is both a site of labour and pleasure- work for one is pleasure for the other. It’s a space where one’s skills are put to test, where one tends to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct one’s identity. The work itself entails a lot of negotiation skills and hence pushes us to look deep into the various survival strategies that women adopt to continue working in this field. This is what the present work is trying to explore and thus this particular chapter focuses on beauty parlour as a site of inquiry. The concern here is not with beauty per se; but it is an investigation of what is termed as ‘the
beauty industry’ through the specific context of beauty parlours in Pune city. Further, the aim is to reflect on the various aspect of beauty work and its workers and to study their experiences. These experiences however shouldn’t be juxtaposed with the larger debates on ‘beauty’ per se.

**Beauty Parlours- Work for one is Pleasure for other:**

Beauty has been a subject of much debate and conjecture for centuries. It has been a key issue in a range of fields from art to philosophy, from politics to economics. Beauty parlours take us to a world of fantasy and imagination. It reminds us that the enjoyment of ‘mere’ pleasure is an important element of our existence and it knits the mind and body together at a time when it seem all too easily divided (Brand, 2000). Away from the imaginative world, beauty parlours and beauty therapy have become a part of a vast multinational industry, creating employment opportunity to a diverse working population-male, female, inter-sexed and transgender. In fact fashion and beauty industry stands out from the rest of the employment generating agencies in creating a space for multi-gendered identity population.

Black (2004) in her work on beauty salon argues that beauty salon could be studied both as a site of pleasure and relaxation for women and also as a site of labour and employment for other women. In other words, pleasure for one group of women is labour for others in the same fraternity. This is the starting point of the present research whereby an attempt is made to investigate various dimensions of women working as beauty workers in specific parlours in Pune city to understand the interface of gender, labour, identity and negotiation strategies. Keeping parlour work at the centre of enquiry, attempt is to explore the everyday life of women working in beauty parlours and highlight the various negotiation strategies these women adopt to survive in the work while balancing other facet of their lives.

India for the longest period of time resisted the idea of public display of beauty and commodification of female body particularly of ‘chaste’ women. Feminists on the other hand, have continuously raised their voices against any blatant display of sexualized body images as they argue that the commodification of beauty in the market was the result of increasing marketization in the country, and also because of a fractured and dislocated globalization process coupled with a fear of retrenchment of imperialism in the country (Anand, 2002). Both Right and the Left political voices had their specific concern related to beauty and beauty industry. While the former was concerned about the transgressive representation of women’s sexuality and body exposing, the progressive organizations concern was with the commodification of women’s bodies and the spread of sex trade. In such contesting context,
while beauty parlours flourished yet, beauty work as a livelihood option was seldom thought of as an ‘employment opportunity’.

This study is looking at the ‘employment’ aspect of beauty as also an attempt to explore the relationship between the modern consumer cultures and the notion of gender, femininity, sexuality, beauty and work. Further, recognizing the link between body and work, an interconnection, which has been strangely missing in both feminists and economic discourse since both have dealt with each other separately, the aim here is to bring out the fact that it is the beautician’s labour that actually shapes the specific desire of the consumer. The consumer comes to the parlour with a specific idea of beauty, which the therapist translates into reality. While she is an architect sculpting the desire, she as a beauty worker retains her identity.

Outlining the Existing Discourse around Beauty and Beauty Industry:
The fact that the global wellness sector is one of the largest and fastest growing industries with an all-time high of $3.4 trillion\(^1\) market whereby the beauty industry alone is growing at 51% compounding to $1026 billion (ibid.) market globally makes it an important area of study. In line with the global expansion of the wellness sector, India’s wellness sector\(^2\) shares a projected growth from 700 billion INR in 2012 to 1 trillion INR in 2015 which comprises of 55% to 60% market share, growing at an annual growth rate of 20-25% between 2013-2017 thus promising a steady and sustained growth, employability and revenue generation. KPMG\(^3\) wellness sector report\(^4\) released in April 2014 states that “the size of India’s beauty and wellness market would nearly double to Rs.80, 370 crore by 2017/18 from Rs.41, 224 crore in 2012/13.” This projected growth also highlights the booming employment opportunities in the beauty sector. The same KPMG report estimates that the workforce requirements in the beauty sector will grow from 3.4 million in 2013 to 12.1 million in 2022 (ibid) thus creating a larger number of jobs in the sector which both men and women can take up. These are just few statistical records which highlight the global presence and the importance of the beauty sector in today’s time and hence demand a

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\(^1\) The Global Spa and Wellness Economy Monitor report 2014 by Global Wellness Institute, Florida, USA at www.globalwellnessinstitute.org.
\(^2\) Imperative for growth: the wellness industry- 5th Annual wellness conference report, August 2013 at www.pwc.in.
\(^3\) KPMG stands for Klynveld, Peat Marwick and Geordeler. KPMG is a global network of companies that provide tax, audit and advisory services. The names represent four people who connected their individual accounting firms to form this giant global organization which operates in over 155 countries including India.
\(^4\) Beauty and the grooming industry is booming in India: Business Today, September 4, 2014 at www.businesstoday.in
detailed discussion around beauty debates which bring together diverse viewpoints regarding the emergence and growth of the beauty industry in general and beauty parlours on particular.

Universally, parlour is known to play a dual role in the lives of women and now equally for men- a place for pleasure and pampering as also the place for labour and work. Since this study is specific to women and women’s lives, an attempt would be made to explore the existing discourse that surrounds the notion of beauty and beauty industry at large and how it affects the everyday life of women. The discourse may be categorized further into the following sub groups: a) the feminists discourse on beauty, body, sexuality and commodification of women within the broad framework of ‘feminine Mystic’ and ‘Beauty Myth’; b) beauty debate: outlining issues of fear, power and empowerment and lastly, c) the discourse surrounding the economic aspect of beauty industry which is growing at an increasing rate of 20-25% annually over the last two decades with specific focus on India.

A. Feminist Engagements with Beauty Industry: Outlining the Impasse:

“As a matter of principle I stopped shaving my legs and under my arms several years ago…but I look at my legs and know they are no longer attractive, not even to me…to ease my dilemma, in the summertime I bleach my leg hair to a golden fuzz, a compromise that enables me to avoid looking peculiar at the beach. Sometimes I wonder if I’m the only woman in the world who puts color into the hair on her head while she takes color out of the hair on her legs in order to appear feminine enough for convention.”

(Susan Brownmiller, Femininity (1984), pp. 158-159).

The above statement aptly conveys the conflict between the feminist ideologies of 1970s, which rejected sexual objectification and the existing notion of feminine beauty as constructed in the American cultural definition of femininity, which inherently supported the commercialized feminine beauty. The debate around external beautification and sexual objectification of women as against creating an empowering economic opportunity for women brought together various feminists from both the North and the South block and the debate seems to be never ending.

We begin the overview of this debate right from the 1950’s. We need to locate the origins of the debate in the US where they started. Betty Friedan’s work on “Feminine Mystique”

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KPMG wellness sector report September 2014 at www.kpmg.com
(Friedan, 1962, pp 9) highlights the issues that American women were experiencing in the 1950’s and 1960’s regarding the way the women were living their lives. She felt a strange discrepancy between the reality of the lives of women and the image that they were trying to conform-an image; Betty Friedan calls this “Feminine Mystique.” (Ibid) While researching on the question, she found that there was no name to the problem that was troubling women in general in the United States; it was a problem that had not been defined. To quote Friedan - “By the end of 1950s, average American women were married off in their teens and the proportion of women attending college in comparison to men dropped drastically”. By the mid-1950s, sixty percent of the girls dropped out of college to marry or because they were afraid that too much education would put them away from the marriage market. Girls were going steady while in the junior school and getting married in their high schools and giving birth to four, five, six children. In a way women who had once wanted careers were now making careers out of having babies” (Friedan, 1962, pp 14).

American women shunned courses in science as it was thought to be “unfeminine” (Friedan, 1962, pp 15). The suburban housewife was the dream image of young American women and envy of the rest of the world. The women looked happy but the problem lay buried and unspoken. “It was a feeling of dissatisfaction, a yearning that the women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife was struggling alone. As she did all the household works meticulously, she was afraid to ask even to herself the silent question: is this all?” (Friedan, 1962, pp 13, Italics ours)

For almost fifteen years after the Second World War, there was very little written about the yearning of women in the US or globally. The matter written in the magazines and newspapers were related to the relationship of wife to her husband’s and the relationship with their children. Nobody argued whether women were inferior or superior to men. “Almost every woman had a nervous breakdown when she found that she could not breast feed her child. Women dying of cancer refused to take drugs which research had proved might save their lives since the side effect were said to be ‘unfeminine’. If I have only one life, let me live it as a blonde” (Friedan, 1962, pp 15), was the desire of average American women. Women of all age did everything possible to look beautiful, homely and feminine.

While in the Unites states, women were struggling to achieve femininity, the black women were struggling for an identity which would throw the white women in the dark and establish the fact that black was good, it was beautiful. As Hook argues, it was during the late sixties and early seventies that the black images started being commodified as good as against the white women’s image (Hook, 1990).
The two decades of radical action that followed this ‘mystique’ saw the emergence of second wave of feminism in the early nineteen seventies in the US. Western women gained legal and reproductive rights, pursued higher education, entered the trade and profession and overturned and revered belief about their social role. “Moreover Wolf observes that the affluent, educated, liberated women of the First world who enjoyed freedom unavailable to any women ever before did not feel as free as they wanted to. Many were ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns-to do with physical appearance, bodies, face, hair, clothes mattered so much. But in spite of shame, guilt and denial, more and more women were wondering if something important was at stake that had to do with the relationship between female liberation and female beauty” (Wolf, 1990, pp 9).

As Wolf argues further “The more legal and material hindrance that the women broke through, the more strictly, heavily and cruelly images of female beauty came to weigh upon them. In the late nineteen sixties, spending on the consumer goods doubled, pornography became the main media category and American women’s main aim was losing at least ten to fifteen pounds of their existing weight. Women began acquiring money, power, scope and legal recognition like never before but in terms of how they felt about themselves ‘physically’ was worse off than their un-liberated grandmothers. Research showed that most of the attractive successful working women had a secret ‘under life’ poisoning their freedom; infused with notions of beauty, it was a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsession, terror of ageing and dread of lost control” (Wolf, 1990, pp 9).

There was a violent backlash that women in general in US were experiencing. “Most of the women felt that they were in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that used images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement: the beauty-myth. As women released themselves from feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground expanding to the limit of social control” (Wolf, 1990, pp 10). The ideology of beauty became so strong that it even took over motherhood, domesticity, chastity and passivity (Wolf, 1990, pp 11). This counterforce led to various checkmates.

While feminism gave laws against job discrimination based on gender, there evolved various case laws in Britain and US that institutionalized job discrimination based on women’s appearance. Patriarchal domination declined and feminists inspired by Freidan (Friedan, 1992) broke away from the image of housewives and all of a sudden, diet and skin care industries became the new cultural censors of women’s intellectual space, and the happy housewife came to be considered as the arbiter of successful womanhood (Wolf 1990). It
was this very time when women across United States were breaking away from their domestic world and exploring the labour markets to establish their identity as a 'worker'. In order to be part of this labour market, women had to transform themselves to fit into the professional world which required one to conform to a certain image. It was also a time when television created opportunities for different brands to enter people's living room and penetrate human psyche thus setting an accepted standard of beauty which was a necessary prerequisites for entering the labour market and also continuing being in it. Along with advertisement and marketing of different lifestyle products, beauty parlours became an everyday reality for women. Beauty parlours were seen as a kind of reformative work stations, often compared to a clinic, which women preferred to visit to treat any kind of abnormality which come in way of their identity as a ‘woman’ and as a ‘worker’. For example, women regularly visited parlours, to remove unwanted body hair so that they could dress up in the professional attire and yet look feminine.

Wolf (Wolf, 1990) locates the shift in understanding ‘beauty’ historically in the industrial revolution. With Industrial revolution there was a complete shift in the way beauty came to be understood. Before industrial revolution women were rarely exposed to the outside world and for them there was nothing beyond family. ‘Beauty’ was not a serious issue in the marriage market but with industrialization, the whole scenario changed. For the first time technological intervention took place, which could reproduce the images of, how women should look. Inexhaustible but ephemeral beauty work took over from inexhaustible but ephemeral housework. As the economy, law, religion, sexual mores, education and culture were opened up to include women; beauty reconstructed an alternative female world within its own laws, economy, religion, sexuality, education and culture.

But the mass depiction of women as ‘beauty’ is full of contradiction as on the one hand where modern women are growing, moving and expressing their individuality, on the other beauty is in itself by definition inert, timeless and generic. It creates a kind of hallucination where the ‘beauty’ is in direct contradiction to women’s real situation. It has put women in a trap which is rigid, cruel and influential as it has lead to a strong market manipulation where billions and billions of dollars are invested in various industries of beauty products and the mass culture forces them to use and reinforce the hallucination in arising economic spiral.

The question that arises here is why does then the social order feel the need to defend itself by evading the facts of real women, their faces and voices and bodies and reducing the meaning of women to formulaic and endlessly reproduced ‘beautiful’ images? The answer to Wolf is simple–the beauty myth of the present is more insidious. Well we need to explore this
facet a little more to understand why beauty myth of the present times has become more insidious. It is insidious because women are left with no option but to conform to the ‘ideals’. On one hand when women are breaking the stereotypes of being a domesticated woman, a mother and a wife, the very same women are also becoming dupe of the ever expanding beauty industry which has become central to their identity and the very existence. The ideals of conformity weigh heavy on women and the standards set is always laid by patriarchy. It is to be remembered that these standards of beauty are becoming more and more dangerous and unrealistic but still women tend to engage in such life threatening practices of shedding unwanted body fat, looking young and attractive to conform to the accepted standard of beauty and ensure their presence in the market. One is trapped and finds no way to set free!

B. Untying the Beauty Debate: Outlining Issues of Fear, Power and Empowerment:

It is now a universal phenomenon that globally women spend tremendous amount of money, time and energy in diet and exercise program to lose weight on the one hand and spend equal amount of money energy and time in modifying their faces and bodies in parlours, salons and beauty clinics to look the way they are ‘supposed’ to look. The market very actively defines exactly what ‘beauty’ should entail. Women are struggling hard to shed the ‘beauty myth’ which views real women as overweight, chubby, chunky, obese, heavy and too fat. While men as well as women are both subject to the message that being heavy is socially non acceptable, it is devastating for women, who are defined by Western culture much more in terms of their appearance than are men. The social obsession with thinness makes it extremely difficult for women to be socially accepted or to have power if they are heavy as argued by Joy (Joy, 1998). Along with thinness, being fair and well groomed is another ‘requirement’ that the market demands. The beauty parlour growth is in fact a product of this ‘requirement’. It is the beauty parlours that produce the imaginative perceptions of accepted beauty into reality. Beauty parlour is the conduit for structuring the desired images into ‘accepted’ realities. It is a huge market with extremely large companies and multinationals with a significant stake.

The message that social acceptability is dependent on thinness (and fairness and grooming) is transmitted with frightening success. Chernin (1998) describes how the beauty myth and the national obsession with weight and fitness especially for women, is translated into eating disorders. Just as Naomi Wolf points out that the beauty myth is culturally constructed rather
than an objective reality, Chernin too explains that women’s obsession with their weight and hatred of their bodies is similarly a product of a particular historical and cultural location, rather than revealing any truth or natural facts about the way women are or must relate to their bodies. Susan Faludi (Faludi, 1991), views the beauty question in terms of backlash to feminism/women’s movement that hit back at all women with a new crisis, a crisis of self and identity.

The question of concern that arises here is, if American women were happy in achieving so many things like political rights and workers’ rights that they once dreamt of then why aren’t they happy now? Why this confusion? Why this backlash? It can be argued that all these confusions were due to new problem related to bodies and beauties that evolved and emerged after the process of liberation and which women were finding tough to handle. In the 1970s, when women had a “don’t care” attitude towards beauty and appearance, in the 1980s, the whole notion of beauty changed completely. The ‘don’t care’ attitude transformed into a ‘concerned attitude’ of maintaining the beauty standards that were the pre-requisites of continuing in the labour markets.

The women’s movement matured in this period and the progress was made in opening up new job opportunities for women, especially for those in the college-educated middle class, and many employers began to show sensitivity to issues of equity in pay and promotion. The advertising industry also made accommodations to the movement and many of the most objectionable portrayals of women disappeared from advertisements. This was a time when the mainstream women’s movement was fading away, the powerful voices of the radical and the socialist feminists became limited to the university classrooms and feminist conferences and feminist theory were rarely discussed outside the halls of academics. Yet the beauty dilemma persisted in the minds of some. It was time when various popular writings on beauty and struggle with the beauty dilemma emerged attempting to rationalize most women’s continued investment in fashion and cosmetics. One notion that these authors proposed was the fact that women’s reliance on fashion and cosmetics was not the products of sexual objectification produced by a patriarchal society as the radical feminists suggested, but was rather seen as a form of women’s empowerment. They argued that cosmetics and their advertisements are not the product of patriarchy, but of entrepreneurial women who succeeded in one of the few industries open to them. Beauty is one of the few paths to power that women have, whether they be produced or consumed.

“It was also the era of mannequins where all women wanted to be like them with a vital statistics of 34-23-36” (Faludi, 1991, pp 200). It was time when dummies were coming to life,
compelling 'real' 'normal' women and girls to fit into that standard. It was a position of sorts to revive natural womanhood. But while doing so the beauty industries were taking all unnatural, harsh, unhealthy and punitive measures. The beauty industry never advocated the feminists aspirations nor were their motives well thought of and deep. They built fear in the minds of women who were professionally successful and made them believe that their success/work was the worst enemy for their beauty. They were made to believe that their harsh work conditions were responsible for all the wear and tear of their skin texture and beauty per se. As a result, an enumerable number of cosmetics emerged to 'aid' this fear and support the working women in continuing their existence as workers. The economic independence of the working women helped to vastly expand the cosmetic industry and its products. The women became not only the consumer but also the active 'producers' of this vast market. The products that were marketed were also extremely varied taking into account the varied kind of working conditions of different women. There are products for those who are working in harsh conditions as also in air-conditioned offices. The price strategy accompanies the kind of product the kind of woman will buy. The range of prices is such that women across classes can afford to consume these beauty products to adhere to the accepted standards of beauty. For example, there are fairness creams that can be afforded by a construction worker as also by a woman who could be the manager of a big firm. The common thread here is the notion of fairness which is equated to the set standard of beauty which every woman aspires to achieve.

This is how the beauty merchants became successful in selling their products no matter how harmful they were as mostly all the beauty products contained harmful chemicals. The fear of being unbeautiful was so much that the women went to the extent of cosmetic surgery, liposuction and went on for complete liquid diet which they thought would make them thinner and beautiful to an unimaginable height. Various cosmetic products like Revlon started marketing their products as a symbol of 'new life style' and perfume like Charlie hit the success chart as never before. These products were marketed as products for independence and feminine modern women. Women embraced the anti ageing product, which flooded the market, as they were afraid of wrinkles and growing old. “Whatever it may be, the ultimate aim of the progressive women was to fight the odds and emerge victorious whether it is the looks or profession but in doing so they faced continuous backlash from every sphere of life leaving them more vulnerable and confused as never before” (Faludi, 1991).
C. Beauty Industry: Untying the Complex Relationship between Economy, Globalization and Identity:

As discussed in the above section, though the dilemma of beauty remains a serious issue and various discourses are in existence, yet the fact is that at the present times, women do engage in a range of beauty practices and express their agency through variable and active engagements with beauty products. Though women are aware of the harmful effects of body modification they are now much freer in exerting their agencies. Paula Black (2004) in her book very well portrays a complex view of the beauty industry as she brought out that there are various reasons why a woman visits a parlour, namely to pamper, for grooming, health treatment, corrective procedures etc and none of the women visited parlour for reason of beauty. In fact they are very skeptical about the whole process. Thus we see that in this new wave of beauty practices, women are no more used as dupes but they are active agents and are very critical about the beauty practices that they follow.

Turning to India, the whole understanding of beauty and beauty industry changed post Miss World beauty pageant 1996, hosted in Bangalore. For the first time, India and India’s beauty was showcased at a global platform which till the time remained ‘local’ and ‘mystic’. The theme of the pageant “Kashmir to Kanyakumari” was crafted to show India’s cultural diversity and sought to “project unity amidst diversity to remind people of the mother earth that all human beings belong to one big global family” (Oza, 2001). Each contestant was an embodiment of exotic locale worth visiting, particularly with reference to the third world countries. The theme erased the land conflict and also the conflict over minority group thus portraying India as a Hindu nation. It opened up avenues for tourism industry, and various advertising houses found their models for selling their products. In short, the beauty pageant as a single event became responsible for the growth and sustenance of the globalization process. Miss World pageants thus became successful in proving the rest of the world (West) that India is in no way inferior to them when it comes to the display of beauty.

It’s not that the Indian mind became conscious of the beauty in and after the year 1996 as we have record of Indian women participating in Miss World, Miss Universe and other international contests since 1964. A few crowns were won in 1960s and 1980s but we see a drastic change in the 1990s when not only the contestants but various MNCs took active interest in the contest in a very professional way. This event changed the entire thought process of average Indian middle class population. Beauty became real all of a sudden. It was no more restricted to being useful in the marriage markets but women started seeing
economic viability in being beautiful and in beautifying people. Hence in no time beauty industry became one of the most sought after employment opportunity for women. Unlike other kinds of jobs, beauty industry is flexible in hiring people and has now become a lucrative field that generates several employment opportunities to women. More and more women are getting into this business, as they feel safe as women to deal with women. “Even the establishment cost is not much so women with very little money can also start this business and be empowered" (Anand, 2002). Women across caste and class have been able to establish one’s own identity being part of the beauty industry and this aspect will be further elucidated in the following section which discusses the fieldwork experience.

In the service of beauty, women have definitely found a viable economic opportunity in the beauty industry. A recent report by the national Skill development Corporation (NSDC)\(^6\) states that the beauty and the wellness sector is growing at a compound annual growth rate of more than 20 per cent and will need 14.27 million skilled workforce by 2022. The report further states that the estimated market size of the global beauty and wellness industry is around $1.4 trillion and India is among the top five beauty and wellness markets. The beauty and wellness industry in India alone is growing at a CAGR of 18.6 percent and the sector is majorly thriving on the increasing section of affluent and the middle–class population that has started considering beauty as wellness and as a necessity. Employment in Beauty sector is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20%, with 23% in organized and 15% in unorganized segments (Ibid). As regard to the demographic characteristics of the workforce, over 50% of the work force is women and these women come from both mid-income households in the urban sector and from lower socio-economic background in the rural sector (Ibid). Women with minimum educational qualification and some amount of vocational education find jobs easily in this sector. Over the years people’s outlook have changed in general. Though some section of society is still very rigid about beauty profession, more and more section of the society is breaking their class and caste boundaries and accepting beauty work as their livelihood. The challenge still is though women represent half of the working population in the beauty industry, they are yet very less in number in the higher authoritarian position (Ibid).

The above sections bring out the various discourses around the subject of beauty, body modification, culture, construction of femininity and labour associated with beauty and beauty industry. The available literatures gives a very broad perspective about the economics of beauty and, how the beauty industry has become a multibillion industry post

globalization but seldom a research on everyday life of women in relation to beauty parlours. This research work which is broadly based on the field work conducted in Pune city and attempts to bring out the extent in which the beauty practices produce ‘agency’ and ‘choice’ and how women across class both consume and produce beauty to be visible in the labour market.

Practices may be more or less pleasurable, ‘oppressive’ and dangerous, according to time, the situation and participants’ interactions. As observed, different times and context present different degrees of constraints and different opportunities for contesting, negotiating or changing norms; similarly the concept of beauty itself is contested at different times and contexts. Hence it becomes very important to unpack the various strands of beauty, identity and the economics of beauty within the specific context of socio-economic and cultural milieu.

**Methods and Methodology- Researching the Beauty Parlour:**

It has been more than a decade now that the feminist research communities have engaged themselves in dialogue concerning the use of qualitative versus quantitative methods in social research. The debate that has been taking place over the year’s claims that quantitative research has actually transformed individual’s life experience into predefined categories which in turn has distorted women’s experiences and has silenced women’s voice as argued by Hammersley (Hammersley, 1992). Advocates of qualitative methods argue that individual women’s understanding, emotions and actions in the world must be for grounded and quantitative methods may distort women’s experience, however, it may not be true because quantitative methods have their own merits and in a way they supplement the qualitative and limit the bias possible inherent in the qualitative. On the other hand, the traditional quantitative research methodologies have been severely criticized by several feminist on the pretext of being “sexist and elitist, biased, with inadequate objectivity, improper interpretation and over generalization of the findings, an exploitative relation between the researcher and the subject and inadequate data dissemination and utilization” (Hesse-Biber 2004, pp 4)

In response to these criticisms, some feminist researchers recognized the need to discover or develop research methodologies consistent with feminist values (Mies, 1983) that could be advocated for general use in social sciences. The methodology, which they embraced, was primarily qualitative. It was promoted for numerous reasons, often paralleling the
reasons for rejection of quantitative methods. Feminist scholars believe that many aspects of women’s experience have not been articulated or conceptualized within social sciences and the quantitative method has in fact concealed women’s real experience. They thus advocate qualitative methods, which permits women to express their experiences fully and in their own terms. Other reason as to why qualitative methods are so dear to feminists is because it offers a more human, less mechanical relationship between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched’. This over emphasizing dependence on qualitative methods has actually led to charges of feminists being biased, subjective, ideologizing. Several feminists have responded to this by combining methods and feminist have in fact started using both qualitative and quantitative methods together. (Stanley and wise, 1983; Hardings, 1987)

For the present research, feminist economic also known as gendered economic perspective is adopted. Feminist economics precisely studies the gender role in economics which remains neglected in mainstream economics study. Nelson, J (2005) argues that feminist economics challenges the economic analysis which treats women as invisible and reinforces situations oppressive to women by developing innovative research tools to highlight their plight which the mainstream economics has failed. Further a number of feminist economist have emphasized on the relationship between discrimination of women done at the level of their sex and limited opportunity to work in the labour markets, (Bergmann, 1974, pp 103-110). Some noted feminist economist (Bergmann, 1989; Figart, Mutari and Power, 2002) highlight the lacunae of the existing tools of economics to examine the interplay of gender, power, social and economic structure and how all these factors accentuate the inequality in the labour markets.

Beauty work which can be described as ‘care work’ has hardly been studied by economists since beauty work has been traditionally visualized as ‘caring work’ and overtly ‘feminine jobs’, which did not affect the ‘economic men’ as they did not find it relevant to investigate. This is precisely where the presence of feminist economists becomes important as they logically argue how ‘emotion’ and ‘dependency’ and ‘inter personal relationships' become crucial factors for women in the labour market to continue working. (Himmelweit, 1999; Folbre and Nelson, 2000; Bettio and Plantenga, 2004).
In line with the existing feminist’s research methodology techniques, ‘in-depth life history’ method was adopted in this research. And accordingly interviews were conducted with women who are beauty practitioners in the city of Pune. The focus of the study was very specific to exploring the experiences of women working as beauty therapists, what kind of socio-economic and cultural background they represent, the economics of the beauty industry- that is how much they earn and how do they utilize their income, to what extent do they have control over their income, how do they negotiate their salary/payments, what are the various reasons which both encourages and forces them to enter the business of beauty, how do they visualize their future in this sector, what are the issues and challenges that one faces being in this sector and what are the various everyday strategies they negotiate to survive in this sector.

The research being exploratory in nature, the target was not numbers but interacting with women in particular who are currently working in the beauty parlours and who represent a diverse socio-economic and cultural universe. In total three parlours situated in three different socio-economic and spatial strata were considered- one being centrally located at one of the Brahmanical hub of the city- Karve Nagar, the other situated in a multicultural upmarket space like Aundh and the third situated in a semi-fringe locality of Pune- Pashan. The selection of the parlours were done as per the availability of the contacts which were found through friends and acquaintances who were aware about the purpose of the research and confirmed the appropriateness and availability of information as per the aim of the research.

Besides, the parlours where the research was conducted were also chosen to span a range of parlours in terms of differential social space and prices or rates to understand the differences. These parlours are spread over in different strata of the city and were categorized as high, medium and low range parlours. Further the parlours were categorized as per the social status of the clients who visited the parlours, amount they paid for the service, class and qualification of staffs who worked in these parlours and the location in which the parlours are situated. These varied level of differences not only helped in analyzing the parlour as a differential social space but also helped in understanding the labor structure, hierarchy of the pay structure in different parlour spaces, class-caste components.

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7 Life history method is an important technique of qualitative methods in social sciences. It’s a technique not very frequently used in social science but as a methods this technique works best for researchers who are interested in exploring the micro experiences of the subject of the research (here women working in the beauty parlours) within a broad macro external structure (here the unorganized labour markets). For the present research, since the aim was to delve deep into the lives of women working in the beauty parlours in Pune city and not merely look into numbers; the life history techniques best suited the requirement as it gave ample opportunities to understand how the current context of women are intertwined to their life in general and how they relate to the larger unorganized labour market context.
of the beauty workers, diverse service components within a parlour space, skill level and the impact of various multinational companies producing beauty products and how it impacts the business and functioning of the parlour.

After collecting the contact numbers and the persons to be interviewed, appointments were fixed either by visiting the parlour or over phone. Each and every beauty practitioner was first briefed about the purpose of the research and subsequently interviewed over a period of one to one and a half hours time. Every interview was recorded taking due permission from the interviewer. Each of the interviews was conducted in one session except three interviews which were re-recorded after a gap of fifteen days. All were comfortable with the idea of recoding their voice and also with disclosing their identity, though initially few of them were little conscious of being recorded but later on they came to terms with the device. In fact for most of the interviewee it was the first time that someone was recording their work and life for a purpose. This exercise in many ways was also a unique exercise for them and gave women a scope to introspect.

The aim of the research was to record the life narratives of the beauty workers. The interview schedule comprised of few leading questions for the respondents to speak and also guide the narratives. For most part of the interview, respondents were given complete freedom to express themselves their own way keeping in line with the technique of life narrative.

Fifteen respondents from three parlours were interviewed as per the availability and convenience of the respondents over a period of two months (February- March 2016).

The respondents may be further divided into two sets of women:

1. Five women from educationally advantaged socio-economic backgrounds representing upper class and upper caste in the age group of 25 years to 45 years with higher levels of education; all of them with a stable married status.
2. Ten young and middle aged women between the age group of 19 and 37 years of age, with differentiated status such as - married, unmarried, separated and divorced, representing educationally disadvantaged and lower class and caste groups.

All of them had at least completed their secondary level of education except one, who has studied till class four. Women who were interviewed were all Maharashtrians and caste wise they were Brahmins, Marathas, and Dalits. Though the sample size was purposefully small,
yet the sample variety was ensured. Out of the fifteen respondents, majority of the respondents were from Dalit caste.

Since the respondents were working at the time of conducting the interview, the researcher had to wait patiently not to disturb the regular activities of the parlour and yet collect the required information. Here it is necessary to mention that the data collection would not have been possible without the support of the owners of the parlours who were very excited to be part of the research, briefing the staffs about the need of such study and also making arrangements for the staff to talk in between their work as some of them worked on hourly basis. Apart from the beauty workers in the three parlours, two beauty therapists who are not associated with any parlour and did home service were also interviewed. This was initially not decided but as the research progressed, presence of such therapists became real and hence it was thought to be a good exercise to also record the narratives of such women who are working on their own and to study their work life dynamics to compare with those who work in a parlour. Such diversity was thought to be helpful to understand the intricate nuances of beauty workers within the unorganized labour markets.

Fieldwork raises issues which one may not foresee. Entering the real field situation, the contradiction suddenly became very dense. The issues were about interconnection between the personal, private, public, “insider and the outsider” (Mauthner, 1998, pp119-122). Though getting access to the parlours and also the respondents was an easy task yet it was a struggle to make each and every woman believe the importance of such an exercise. Although the women did agree to talk but each one of them had a very curious look on their face and it was indeed difficult for them to understand that their life or for that matter their work could be a subject of research for the other. A couple of the respondents even laughed at the whole project and did say that such work is only possible for those who do not have to think about the survival of the family on a everyday basis. As a researcher it was both a cause of depression and deep introspection as every reason for conducting such research seemed valueless when weighed against their rationality. Without being bogged down by such arguments, in the interest of the research it was best to believe that it may not be struggling for survival on the same level as them, yet both kinds of work, that is the work of the researcher and the work of the beauty therapists or the subject of research were aimed toward survival in some sense. Both are negotiating in different ways to survive in the market, both are participants of the unorganized labour markets.

In addition to interviewing the beauty therapists, a lot of time was spent in the parlours observing and sometimes participating in the process by receiving different kind of
treatments. Hence it is necessary to mention that in some parlours, people rejected permission to sit in the parlour and observe the proceedings since it would disturb the privacy of the clients; but one of the parlours situated in Karve Nagar, was very happy to give access to the entire space and observe the proceedings. This particular parlour is a big one spread around 1100 sq.ft area having exclusive rooms dedicated to different specialized services.

All the materials were transcribed and interpreted fully and read thoroughly several times. All though the materials demanded interpretation, yet attempt was made to remain as close to the data as possible to bring out the perspectives of women as told and highlight the nuances of the beauty parlour work in relation to the unorganized labour markets.

The Economics of Beauty- Identity and Labour within the Parlour:
Focusing largely on interviews and recorded oral testimonies of women, this section highlights how identity and labour gets constructed within the beauty parlours; how women negotiate various strategies to balance domestic affairs and work front and how beauty parlours transform into a transactional economic space creating livelihood opportunities and establishing one’s identity as a worker. As mentioned earlier, parlour provides a dual role that of pleasure and labour. Among its many specialized treatments more and more women visit parlours mainly for pampering and routine grooming.

“I am working in this parlour for the last five years and if you ask me why women visit parlour, I would say women of all ages come to us to be pampered. Clients who visit the parlour are very confident that they will be taken care of very well. As a parlour worker, I have to ensure to give the best, listen to her, give her the exact service she is expecting so that she goes back happy and comes back again. One of my clients who is a software engineer once told me ‘the two hours that I spend in this parlour with you is the best gift that I give myself and keeps me going. I wait for the next visit’ …….I feel great, I feel I am worth something as I am making a difference in other’s life. I love my job”

(Sarvari S. Chauhan, Femina beauty parlour, Kouth Road, 4/3/16)

“One of my clients is 78 years of age. She stays all alone in her big flat in Baner. She is quite active and independent. I visit her twice a month. I just do her pedicure and head massage. She is very loving. She tells me that she waits for me to come and spend time with her. I feel great. I feel loved, I feel wanted. Yes she pays me for the
service but I get a lot more than just money. She on the other hand tells me that she loves my company (laughs).”

(Monica P Shinde, independent beauty therapists, Panchavati, 14.2.16)

The Art of Conversation and Pleasing the Client: Pampering is one of the most important reasons why women visit parlours. It is more of luxury, relaxation, a recluse from the daily life. It is also the best way of escapism for women from all sorts of worries and troubles. This is true for the clients but what about the therapists? Taking from the narratives, one can conclude that as a professional, beauty therapists should be always ready to satisfy her client as the client is paying for it. But it also strikingly brings out the power relation; where the therapists are bound to serve the clients, pamper them even if she is not able to:

“I was exhausted doing all the household work, had a fight with my husband, took out all my anger on my little son and then came to work. And the first thing I knew I had to do was to have a smiling face. I was tired, I was hurt yet my work demanded that I smile. I smiled and I worked. I had to….”

(Kusum A. Pawar, Farenheight Salon, Aundh, 16.3.16)

The world of beauty parlour is indeed an intriguing space and consists of varied layers. Sometimes it might act as a hierarchical space between the clients and the therapists and sometimes the boundaries of hierarchy erased. For instance, Monica, who is an independent therapist and does home service for her clients and who has had a difficult personal life gets loved and pampered by her clients. It is indeed difficult to bring all these different realities under one analytical frame.

As a researcher and observer one can note that while the clients come for pampering, paying a price, there is a certain inter-personal relationship which gets evolved between the client and therapist through conversations. Therapists do not get paid for such conversations, comforting and the patient hearing and the comforting body language which is an integral part of the entire act of a beauty session, this ‘work’ remains invisible as mentioned earlier. Women get paid only for the precise service that they render, not for these ‘peripherals’. However, these peripherals are extremely important and an integral part of the entire service and more importantly the market. It is these inter-personal relationships that make a beauty therapist and the parlour survive and flourish in the market. It is these conversations and comforting and patient hearing that brings back the clients and helps in the very functioning of the industry. These nuances which are part of work neither get paid nor get recorded in any statistics or record of work.
The Parlour becomes a ‘necessity’ for Accepted Appearance: Routine Grooming is another important service that the beauty parlour provides.

Most of the women who visit my parlour are regular clients and they have been coming to me for many years now. I feel one of the most important reasons why these clients are regular because I am both welcoming and yet very professional. I have never compromised on my professionalism. We are friends outside but in my parlour they are just my clients and I am their therapist. I feel more and more women are becoming very regular about routine grooming as they now see the treatment more of a necessity of everyday life than luxury. It makes them feel good and also helps them maintain an ‘accepted’ appearance by setting up the minimum standard of beauty”

(Manisha Potnis, owner of Femina parlour, Kouth Road, 23.3.16)

There is a certain standard of acceptability in terms of personal looks which is created and emphasized by the markets. The consumer who may be a working woman or even otherwise has to look ‘proper and clean’. What does this mean in real terms? She has to have her hands manicured, she has to have waxed body/limbs, properly trimmed eyebrows and upper lips, she has to be ‘fairer’ than her real complexion, she has to be thin, her hair has to be groomed. In other words she has to fit into the market set standards of ‘femininity’. This is the source of the entire foundation of the beauty industry and parlours. Without this ‘grooming’ a working woman will not be able to continue working in her work-place and hence possibly be thrown out of the labour market. In fact, every working space has its own unwritten rules as to how they must ‘look’ their part as a worker of a particular industry or office. There exist certain prototype of looks for each working space and workers belong to that work space must adhere to the ‘norms’. And to adhere to these norms one must be an active consumer of the vast market of the beauty industry.

The norms are not true for the working population alone. The norms enter your homes and pervade all the spaces of living. Even as a housewife, it becomes absolutely necessary to adhere to these norms and look ‘acceptable’. She too is a part of the market. Thus the market encompasses each and every one of us, and hence is the largest market of products and services. The beauty therapists too are not excluded from this market. (In fact, she is reproducing the market) She too has to look prim and proper, not only as an individual but as a professional worker. Her proper look is a part of the survival strategy to continue being in the market.

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8 Routine grooming for therapists interviewed meant shaping eyebrows, upper lip threading, removal of facial hair, body waxing, pedicures, manicures, hair split ends removal and bleach.
The perpetuation of the acceptable beauty norms therefore become a daily necessity rather than a luxury. Visiting a parlour thus becomes an everyday necessity for all women (and now men) across class and economic strata. The therapists on their part have to look their job and also be properly groomed and look clean and presentable.

“The area where I stay is very old fashioned. They cannot see me in jeans and t-shirt and roam about. Here in this parlour, my uniform is jeans and t-shirt. I love wearing them. It makes me feel good. I feel confident and free. I also have to keep myself clean and tidy. When I am grooming my clients, I need to be equally groomed or else they will doubt my capability and not take service from me”

(Aarti, Farenheit Salon, Aundh 17.3.16)

Being clean and presentable is one of the most important prerequisite of survival in the beauty industry. When one has chosen to be part of the care industry, one needs to be very sure of one’s hygiene and cleanliness.

“Maharashtrians are very particular about a lot of things including cleanliness. There were times when the clients used to visit only very specific parlours as they knew their caste, family background and backgrounds of the staff who were working. It’s no more that rigid now but women still prefer to visit parlours they or their friends know of. Affiliation still is an important factor why women prefer to visit same parlour again and again. The consumer is ready to pay any amount to the service provided but as a therapist I need to be careful that I give the best, make my client feel special, do not add unnecessary cost, give treatment which is absolutely necessary and keep a very clean and beautiful environment. Aesthetics is very important to maintain. It is the key to successful business.”

(Manisha Potnis, owner of Femina parlour, Kouth Road, 23.3.16)

Apart from the basic what we are terming as ‘necessities’ of visiting a parlour there are more varied specific needs for which clients visit the parlours. These are for specific health issues and corrective treatment and also counseling.

“I remember one of my clients was a young girl who had a dark patch on her forehead. She was quite disturbed about it. I had to not only do the treatment but I had to talk to her a lot, counsel her and make her feel good. All these are part of my
duty and I do it happily. All I want is to give relief to my clients: ‘Khubsurati to bhagwan ka den hein, lekin dard aapne karmo ka phal hein. Agar mein is dard ko mita sakoo to khubsurati aapne aap dikhne lagega’. 

(Priya, Independent beauty therapists, Pashan, 18.2.16)

**Beauty Therapy as Work and Labour:** The labor structure involved in the beauty industry is neither recognized, nor formally structured and not clearly identifiable. There are different kinds of labor involved in the parlours, some visible and some not. Apart from the physical labor a lot of emotional labor is involved in this service industry, which is neither paid nor gets any recognition. As far as the culture of beauty industry is concerned, in the beginning, in the early 1970’s it was women of rich family from upper castes who ventured into this business. Through years as the market expanded and it became an everyday every person’s requirement, the number of parlours increased and both men and women from every strata started using it and eventually it emerged as a viable labour option. More importantly, getting into the parlour as labour, did not require high educational attainment. The sector depends more upon skills and training which can be acquired independent of formal education. And girls/women from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds could enter this sector and make a livelihood.

Talking to various beauty therapists, it was found that it is much easier for girls to get into parlour business, as it is easy to learn. The course still does not demand much of educational degree as it is an art, which needs to be learnt over a period of time, and once the training is complete, one can start parlour by herself. But on the other side, since this industry is also fast evolving as a technically equipped service provider, lot of emphasis is given on the educational degrees. Now the aim of most of the aspiring students of beauty therapy is to pass internationally recognized examinations and be at par with the beauty therapist of the global world.

“I studied till class ten and there after didn’t want to continue education. I didn’t like math and English so my parents kept me home. My father works as a security guard and so we do not have a lot of money. One day one of my friends who stayed few lanes away from my house told me to attend the beautician course organized by the

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9 Beauty is the gift of God and pain is the result of our deed. If I can relieve the pain, beauty will be visible naturally.
local club. It was free of cost so I went and took training for three months. I was given a certificate at the end of my course and I started working in this parlour Butic. A degree helps. I want to work in a bigger parlour and hence I am saving money to do the international certification course”

(Priya, Butic, Pashan, 28.3.16)

The beauty industry has scope for every one; those who can afford to spend large sums of money and those who cannot. Thus parents, mostly in the rural areas, enroll their daughters for beauty therapy course who cannot afford for a higher education with hope that once the course is complete, they can earn a good living. The same situation exists in the urban areas too. Families belonging to lower socio economic strata in the urban areas prefer to send their daughter for beauty parlour course as over the years people in general have realized the potential economic opportunity in beauty industry. Beauty industry has in a way given hope to all those girls who would mostly turn to the job of maid servants or casual labour. Now that they are enrolled in the beauty therapy course, they dream of a good future with a life of dignity.

The narratives of women interviewed gave an understanding that most of them have either come from rural Maharashtra, married in Pune, learnt beauty therapy and have been working in parlours; or women who have been born and brought up in Pune, representing poor socio economic status, unable to study further learn beautician course. The course fee ranges from fifteen thousand to twenty five thousand rupees depending on the school that one enrolls and the specialization that one does.

“My mother came all the way from Konkan to work in Pune as my father was not doing anything. She came with me and two of my younger brothers. She works in a crèche and has taken care of all out needs. I left my studies after class ten as I wanted to help mother and support my brothers to study and grow in life. One of my mother’s friend suggested that I should take beauty therapy training which will give me a definite job. My mother thought about it and gave twelve thousand from her savings. It was a great step for us. I completed the course and now I am working full time. I have already repaid the entire amount to my mother. I feel good.”

(Archana. R. Khade, Fahrenheit salon, 18.3.16)

Butic is in Pashan area of Pune, close to Pashan slum area. Caters to clients of both the slums and adjacent apartments all representing low socio economic background.
In Pune, most of the training schools exist with the parlour and arrangements are made for examination centrally with the Government body and International beauty schools of Zurich. For those who cannot spend so much, go for certificate course of six months duration and then appear for exams and there is also those who learn just by working in parlour and do not get any recognition of the knowledge by any institution; that is they do not appear for any examination.

Beauty industry is one of the booming industries in India and both girls and boys are seriously taking beauty therapy as profession and making a career out of it. Course like CIDESCO[^11], which is an international examination, ensures that a person undertaking training is competent enough to deal with the clients by herself. Unlike west, India is still far behind as the professionalism of beauty parlours are concerned; they are not articulated as well as in the West but there is a great scope for the semi-skilled and even unskilled labour to achieve decent livelihoods as far as the beauty industry is concerned.

“I did the basic CIDESCO course from Mumbai but for my advance level, I got a scholarship to go to Zurich. It was a great experience. It was a three months rigorous course and I did it well. The course made a huge difference in my style of work and I feel my clients trust me more because I have the qualification”

(Excerpt from interview with Mrs. Manisha Potnis, owner of Femina Beauty Parlour, Karve Nagar, Pune on 11.3.2016)

Along with the international exams, there are a lot of government sponsored exams, which help beauty therapists in achieving certificates and later availing loans for starting business. The state of Maharashtra has recently started its own exam under the banner of Maharashtra Business Training Board (MBTB) whose headquarter is in Kolhapur. To appear for this exam, one has to complete the basic course in beauty therapy, which is of three to six months duration. Association of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology, India (ABTC) conducts examination at the national level and one has to complete advanced course in beauty therapy to appear for this exam and which is a year programme. In this one year programme, one has to learn every detail of skin and body including acupressure, aromatherapy and plastic surgery, which is a new addition to the syllabus. Passing such examination and getting a certificate entails lot of responsibility both on the parts of the

[^11]: CIDESCO stands for Comite international d’Esthetique et de Cosmetologie. It is the World’s major international beauty therapy association who offer beauty training program of international standard and very beauty therapists who wants to make it big in the beauty industry definitely does the certification course which validates their skills and techniques of working in the best parlours. CIDESCO has its head office in Zurich, Switzerland and spread over 40 countries and 5 continents including India.
learners and those who award the degree. Out of the fifteen respondents who were interviewed during the research period, only two had done their MBTB certification and the rest of the respondents had done their training from local beauty school having no affiliation to any recognized board of examination. The prime reason why women avoided such certification is definitely economic as the fees are way too high than the ones paid at the local schools and secondly not all can pass the exam as it requires serious study which many cannot afford to do along with work and domestic chores.

In regard to the selection of therapists for hiring, there are not any fixed rules and eligibility criteria. There are in fact no strict rules for selection of beauty therapists in the parlour. Though with the expansion of the beauty industry, even the hiring process is undergoing a sea change but at least for the present research, the beauty workers were selected on the basis of desire to work, courses done, commitment to work, cleanliness and pleasing personality. Each of the three parlours had mixed work force in terms of caste and class. One therapist did mention that this was not the case a decade back as people were still very strict about caste and customs although they didn’t overtly express. Although times have changed, yet a lot of choice, beliefs and prejudices work in the parlours of Pune city when it comes to the selection and articulation of labor force in the parlours.

Every therapist interviewed talked about the existing hierarchy among various levels of beauty therapists and the types of work. Those who have done diploma courses and later gave international exams are better equipped with skill than the rest. Not all are given the task of hair cut and hair treatment as it is the expert who can do such work. Usually girls start as a help to senior therapists and over time take up clients independently at a later stage. Works like pedicure, manicure, waxing are given to new and lesser trained girls as it is considered to be safer than dealing with hair and skin. This was the view in general in all the parlours under study.

“My family knows that I work at a parlour and that’s it. I have never disclosed to them what exactly I do in the parlour. If I tell that I have to clean the feet and remove body hair, I am sure my family will not be very happy about it. They still have prejudice and it’s a taboo for them to do lowly job as we come from upper caste. They know that I make people beautiful and make them feel good…..”

(Riddhi Bhat, Femina Beauty parlour, Femina Beauty Parlour, Karve Nagar, Pune on 22.3.2016)
The Emotional Labour involved: Apart from the physical labor that is involved in the parlour a lot of emotional labor is also involved that binds the client and the therapists in an undefined relationship and which helps in the growing of business. Since it’s a service industry, a lot many things depend on the behavior of the workers. Emotional labour is an integral part of beauty industry and beauty therapy because the therapists are directly involved with other people’s bodies. The more involved you are emotionally, the better the service you can provide. A couple of the interviewee did talk about how they could experience that they were dealing with more than just the service offered to their clients. They felt that it was their touch and pampering which unleashed communication at a different level not restricted to the treatment offered.

“I remember once I was giving a full body massage to one of my clients who visited the parlour regularly. It was the first time that she was demanding for a body massage and not just facial which I used to do for her. As the treatment progressed, I could feel that she was loosening herself and completely surrendering to me. I can’t express how I felt then. It was a lot of pressure on me. I had to do my job well, I had made her feel confident and yet I had to be detached. It’s really tough. After a point of time, all of a sudden the lady told me that she was craving for such pampering for long but didn’t know how to get. She further told me she was undergoing a separation and is tired visiting court, lawyer, taking care of children and office. I just listened. Deep inside I was feeling happy but I was scared too. The feelings were all too mixed up. I cannot name it…..”

(Riddhi Bhat, Femina Beauty parlour, Femina Beauty Parlour, Karve Nagar, Pune on 22.3.2016)

To be precise it is a complex mix of type of labour within the beauty industry and not very well defined all the times. Along with very rigorous physical labour a lot of emotional labour is involved in this business which remains invisible and not paid for yet, an important component of the service industry. Some of the interviewee did say that during peak season time, that is during any festival time, marriage season and vacation time, they end up working over time. Although they get paid for the extra work, it so happens that due to time constraints many a times, they have to work empty stomach and yet keep a smiling face. These are the challenges of work in the parlour. ‘Once you are in the parlour, you become a commodity and hence you have to be consumed’ said one of the therapists (name not to be revealed) to keep the business going. This is market in the real sense. As an observation, one can argue that it is easy to ‘get in’ but quite a challenge to survive and ‘be in’.
Earning and Survival in Relation to Beauty Parlours:
Referring to the narratives one can argue that beauty parlours in the recent times have been able to provide decent income to low and mid income group population who chose to work in this sector. In context of the present study where majority of the respondents did come from poor socio-economic background and less education, beauty parlours turned out to be a profitable venture for them paying a decent salary in the range of Rs. 3000 to Rs.14000 and more. Though the minimum age of the respondent for the present study is 19 years, majority of the respondents out of the total number of fifteen started working in the parlours as early as at the age of 14 years and 15 years soon after the completion of secondary education or those who did not/ could not wish to continue education for economic and personal reasons.

Further these groups of respondents also represent a class with limited opportunity and working in beauty parlours became a priority option for many who otherwise would have to work as a maid, waste collectors, sales girls, caretaker, vendor etc. Thus many of the respondents who started working without any remuneration, chose to continue being in the sector as they realized that training, certification and experience could be an added advantage for them to secure job in the beauty market and also allow them to negotiate pay and other associated option. Moreover with certain amount of training and some investment women themselves could run their own business and create job opportunity for others in the fraternity. This is one unique sector within the unorganized labour market, where hierarchy within the labour structure is not constant. An employee can become an employer and vice versa depending on the situation and location of the worker. This sector also provides a lot of flexibility in terms of work times and nature of work. Being a feminine space and female workers, it becomes easy to negotiate at different level as required.

“I am working here for the last one year and I am very happy with my salary and commission. It’s better than my previous parlour. I started work at mere Rs.800/- per month and now I am earning Rs.12000/- in just six years. I couldn’t have asked for anything better. I am a single mother and I am proud to be able to take care of all the expenditure in my family. I have even brought a two wheeler, taking a loan from the bank. All this because of the parlour work…..”

(Kusum A. Pawar, Farenheight Salon, Aundh, 16.3 16)
In order to understand how women negotiated about their salary, time of work, utilization of income and management of the household, all had different experiences to share. Since the respondents ranged from being unmarried to being married and separated, each one had a different story to share.

Out of the fifteen respondents who were interviewed the youngest was of 19 years old, unmarried and working in the parlour just for six months. When asked about how she got the job, she said it was through common friends who were earlier working in the same parlour. This girl got Rs. 3000/- as her salary which included the fees for the training that she is still undergoing. When asked how she spends the money, her prompt response was she gave the entire amount to her mother and the mother gave her money whenever she needed. A couple of interviewees who informed that their salary which is between Rs.8000 – Rs.14000 is utilized mainly for their personal use, taking care of the children, paying for fuel, loan, rent of the house and taking care of the everyday expenses. Women who were either separated or divorced were completely dependent on the salary that they got from the parlour as they didn’t have any other source of income.

“I am now staying alone with my two kids for the last two years. The salary that I get from work, almost all of it is spent towards my children and other family needs. I end up saving very little. But still I feel I am in a better position than others who are left alone by their husband and who do not have work. Their life is miserable. They stay at their parent’s house. But how long one can stay like that. You need to be independent; you need to take care of yourself.....”

(Archana. R. Khade, Fahrenheit salon, 18.3.16)

Women who were interviewed were multitasking individuals and in one word they were survivors. Coming from poor socio-economic background, women had to do multi task of taking care of the households, children, and in-laws and then come for work. When asked about what was their average day like, one of the respondents said:

“My day starts at 5.30 am in the morning. The first thing I do after brushing my teeth is to make myself a good cup of tea. As I am drinking tea, I am already making plans for breakfast, lunch, dabba and what should be cooked at night. I stay with my husband, one son and mother in law. Mother-in-law can’t do any work as she has arthritis. My husband had made it very clear at the beginning that if I had to work, I should be able to do it after managing my family. So I couldn’t complain. I had to do
work. After tea, I take shower and enter the kitchen for breakfast. In between, I have to wake up my husband and son and get them on their feet to get ready for the day. Breakfast is usually simple during weekdays and it doesn’t take much time. As the breakfast is ready, I start cooking lunch. Lunch is again usually roti, sabzi, daal and rice. In between cooking, I have to give tea to my mother in law and husband and milk to my son. As the lunch is made, I pack them in three dabbas, one for my husband, one for my son and one for me. The rest I keep for my mother in law to eat in the afternoon. In between, I also get ready for work, give instruction to my mother in law for the day, take instruction from husband, mother in law and even son (laughs) grab little breakfast if time permits and run for work…….”

(Savita. S. Shinde, Butic, Pashan, 22.2.16)

It was not such a grim situation for others, one of the respondents who is separated from her husband had a different experience to share:

“……... I have to take care of my kids, manage household, manage all the expenses etc. I got to know that my husband has an extra marital affair so I decided to stay alone. My in-laws are a great support to me. It’s because my in-laws are taking care of my kids, I can come out of home and work. They are really good and they also take care of me very well. My in-laws supported me with my decision of staying away from their son as they realized it was their son’s fault. Yes my husband is staying with them but you need to understand that he is their son and no parents can easily live without their children and hence they have to give shelter to my husband. But what I am proud of is that after all these challenges my in-laws have stood by me. Let me honestly tell you one thing today, whatever I am, I am because of them. And this I say with a lot of pride. If they hadn’t supported me, I wouldn’t have done anything, being so confident, work and talk like this. For example, I do everything in the morning for my children and send them to school. But once they are back, my in-laws feed my children, take my children to tuition classes, and even help my kids with their home work. No one will do this. So yes, I may not have got a good husband, but my in-laws are my real parents and I am so happy and proud for them.”

(Kusum A. Pawar, Farenheight Salon, Aundh, 16.3 16)

In a similar incidence one of the respondents said the following:

“I got pregnant and hence could not continue working in the parlour as the distance was too far. I needed money and couldn’t afford to stop working completely. One day my father in law brought a pair of scissor, some facial products, a mirror, thread ball and few hair clips. I was clueless but he was very sure that I could do it and I started
working. In my locality women cannot pay much as all of us have money problem but still women come to me. They feel good and I get money. I contribute to my family. It’s a great feeling”

(Nirmala Sanjay Jadhav, Excerpt from interview taken at Pashan basti on 14.2.2016)

It’s indeed a difficult task to unpack such diverse realities. On the one hand when women are at the receiving end of all the drudgery there are also parallel support system which help them sustain and continue living life. The Table 1 below gives a tabular explanation of the range of age and income that the respondent of the present research represent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (in yrs) of respondent and Income</th>
<th>14-19 yrs</th>
<th>20-25 yrs</th>
<th>26-30 yrs</th>
<th>31-35 yrs</th>
<th>36-40 yrs</th>
<th>41-45 yrs</th>
<th>Total No of Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001-3000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3001-5000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5001-10000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10001-15000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15001-20000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20000- above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Constructed by the researcher from field work data conducted in the month of December 2015- March 2016 in Pune)

As mentioned earlier, beauty parlours provide opportunity to a diverse group of women and more for those who do not have adequate means to sustain themselves and find jobs in beauty parlours. As the data reveals women enter the market as young as 14 years of age and start working without any remuneration or very minimum remuneration. These group of women represent the lower socio economic strata and visualize employment potential in beauty parlours for which they enroll as a trainee, paying certain amount of fees which range between Rs. 6000 to Rs.15000 for the basic beauty therapy course, receive a certificate which is not recognized by
any existing beauty therapy schools (since the fees for the recognizable certificates and
diplomas are much higher in the range of 50,000 INR and above) and make themselves ready
for the beauty market to work. Further, referring to the table above, we can argue that younger
the age, less is the income earned and vice versa. Income differs with age not only as a number
but also as an experience. Experience comes with age and practice and hence the data very
clearly brings out the fact the women at a higher age end up getting more payment than the rest.
The correlation between earning scales and age has another perspective. Women might chose
to take up parlour job at a later stage of their life with recognized training and end up earning
more than those who did start working early but lacked academic qualification and any
certification which is nationally and internationally recognized. There is yet another perspective to
age and earning. The higher age women could be those who started their career in the beauty
industry at a young age, but constantly upgraded themselves with time and new techniques and
have ended up being entrepreneurs over a period of time earning much more. In the present
context, both the respondents whose income is Rs.20,000 and above are owners of parlours but
they too started their journey into the work force as beauty workers servicing in parlours owned
by others.

Table 2: Work Profile and the Income Structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of beauty work/income</th>
<th>Pedicure and Manicure</th>
<th>Waxing/bleach and threading</th>
<th>Facial and skin treatment</th>
<th>Hair color/cut and hair treatment</th>
<th>Complete skin and hair treatment</th>
<th>Total No. of Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-4000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>8001-12000</td>
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<td>12001-15000</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>15001-20000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20000-above</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Constructed by the researcher from field work data conducted in the
month of December 2015- March 2016 in Pune)

Table 2 above is an attempt to highlight the different kinds of services that a parlour provides and
the associated incomes a beauty worker would get. The three parlours were situated in three
different socio-economic pockets of the city as mentioned above and naturally the rates of
services did differ across the parlours. However, the workers who worked in these parlours received similar incomes within a certain range for a certain service. For example, women who were doing pedicures and manicures only were paid lesser than the rest of the services. Each of the three parlours provided different beauty services like pedicure and manicure, waxing, bleach and threading, facial and hair treatment including bridal makeup and makeup for different occasion. The varying degree of income difference was based on the location of the parlour, the kind of clients that visited the parlour, equipments, products used and kind of the staffs that were appointed in these parlours. The cost of the service differs due to the quality of the service provided. While talking to fifteen therapists across three parlours, it was observed that not all therapists are equipped to render every kind of service like complete skin and hair care. The reason put forth were the following: First, it is an expensive and time consuming training process to learn the complete beauty therapy and not all can afford to do so. Those coming from the poor socio economic background prefer to learn the very basic of the beauty therapy like waxing, threading, pedicure and manicure as it is cost effective and eventually do similar kinds of work when they get jobs and thus end up earning the lowest which in the present research shows a range between Rs.2000-4000. This category of therapists is usually the one with lesser experience, younger age and may have personal constraints like not be able to work full time and thus remains a low income group. Second, since the present time is the age of specialization, many beauty workers prefer to learn one kind of specialization like skin or/and hair. This group of therapists earns more than the first category of therapists mentioned as most likely they have academic degree, experience and certification to establish them as specialized therapists. Out of the fifteen respondents, three respondents specifically fit in this category and they are also the one who earn a better living. One of the beauty therapists expressed that:

“It is very rare to find a therapist who is an expert in every beauty techniques these days. They have become like doctors who specialize in heart, kidney, brain etc and do not have a holistic understanding of the human anatomy”

(Excerpt from interview of Manish Potnis, owner, Femina Parlour, Karve Nagar, Pune 11.3.16)

Out of the fifteen respondents, only one was confident to identify as a holistic beauty therapist as she has a long years of experience and represents a time when specialization was not a popular matter. In order to give a very clear understanding about the correlation between income and the techniques of service offered, it can be argued that income is directly proportional to the variety of activities and skills that one is able to master. Lower the skills and lower the techniques learnt, lower will be the income and vice versa.
Beauty parlour though a booming sector in India is yet to reach a defined standard of hiring workers and giving payments. Parlours across strata function at a very informal way, based on interpersonal relation, no strict rule of hiring and removal of worker from the job, no additional benefits and security. All transaction happens at an individual level where the employer and employee negotiate on hour of work, remuneration, kinds of work to be done and holidays.

The present research brings out very clearly the fact that those with some kind of prior training and experience are in a better position to bargain and negotiate the money matters. Women who are still with families, young and unmarried do settle for lesser salary and provisions as they may or may not to be contributing directly to the family expenses. The present research has come across women beauty workers who are separated from their husbands or divorced. For these categories of women, it is very difficult to accept lowly paid job and hence even if the distance is a hindrance, women prefer to join parlour, which are big and can afford to pay a higher salary. Though there are instances where in absence of getting any jobs, women did have to negotiate work at a lesser salary, extended hours of work and no added benefits like share of the profit earned. These are some of the challenges that women in general experience in the unorganized labour markets and the present research reproduces the same concerns and uncertainties of the market here in the beauty market.

Ownership and Control over the Income Earned: It’s not new that historically women in the Indian Society have been reticent about the ownership and control over income. This very characteristic feature of women labour force has kept them poor and invisible in the labour market globally and more so in India. Peterson (1987) argues that “women remain poor not only because they live in a poor male household but also because they have limited opportunity in the labour market” (pp.330) and even if they get an entry into the labour markets, they do not have control over their own earnings! The present research too shows similar trends. Women when asked, “How did they utilized their salaries”, majority of the respondent who either are unmarried and stay with families or women who are married with husbands had similar answer stating that they gave the money to ‘parents’ and/or ‘husbands.’ The other very familiar response was that the money is utilized for household expenses. When such a trend in not unusual, the striking fact that got highlighted in all the responses is women ‘hardly used the money for themselves.’ When probed a little deeper, some of the respondents said that they bought things for home, dresses for kids and family members etc. When this was the reality for general women worker, very fascinatingly even the owners of the beauty parlours who were also beauty therapists and included in the study, representing upper class and upper caste had limited control over their income. They very casually said that their husband takes care of the monetary transaction and they are fine with it.
When the same question was asked to women who single handedly took care of her household and children that are the beauty worker who is either separated and/or got divorced had a different story to tell. These women sounded much more confident and knew how to utilize their earnings and hence had control over their income. One of the young respondent, who is a divorcee and stays with her children said,

“I have to earn and manage my household. I am all alone and have to take care of my kids. For me working as a beauty therapist is the best possible option. I had done the beauty therapy course soon after my class ten as I was waiting for my results. Never knew that one day this course could give me a job. I am happy that I can take care of my children and not a burden on my parents. I do my work well and hence I can ask for raise in my salary and luckily my employer has been very kind and supportive”

(Sarika Kamat, Butic, Pashan, interview taken on 29.3.16)

**Concluding Remarks:**

The present research gave valuable insights to the existing discourse on body, beauty, labour and economics. It also attempted to question the existing stereotypes around certain types of labour, beauty work to be precise and highlighted women’s agency as a worker and as an important factor of the unorganized labour markets. Looking at the labor processes involved in the beauty parlours, an attempt was made to understand how one body works/produces towards the achievement of beauty which the other is consuming. It is very interesting to observe that in the beauty parlours, labor is produced to consume and on the other hand labor is consumed for the further production of labor. It thus shows us a beautiful nexus between body visa- vi work and producer visa- vi consumer which is inseparable of each other.

In the course of research, parlour evolved as a “unit of manufacturing” which Foucault (1973) discusses at length in his work and in similar lines, beauty parlours emerged as a service stations where one body molds another body to make it market viable. The touch, the interaction, the cost and the services offered all geared toward a very systematic economic transaction. Once someone enters a parlour, her body is put under a set of regulations; parlours transforms into a service station where one body works on the other to bring perfection as accepted by the society and then prepares them for the outside world.
Beauty parlours were indeed the best space possible to understand the connection between labor processes, gender ideologies and construction of the bodies of workers and those with whom they interacted, their clients. Parlour as a site also led to the understanding of the relation between the body, and paid employment; various survival and negotiation strategies that women entail; how body is looked at as an instrument in the labor processes and construction of the body that guide workers in their relation with clients. While feminist’s scholars did help in creating a tremendous insight into how the female’s body is disciplined, they have missed to comprehend the emotional dynamics underlying the worker’s psyche and women’s involvement as paid workers in the remaking of body. The economists as mentioned earlier have overlooked the very link between body and market! This work thus is an attempt to seek attention to the recognition of such diverse and complex phenomenon which is an intricate part of the concept of labour within the discussed occupational framework of the beauty industry.

References:


