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“In the Union I Found Myself”: The Impact of Collectivization of Informal
Economy Women Workers on Gender Relations within the Home

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ABSTRACT

This research is an attempt to engage with women workers in the informal economy in India, their membership to labour organizations and its consequent impact on gender relations within the home. In particular the research focuses on *Dalit* women who belong to a trade union of wastepickers in Pune, India.

Situating the study of intra-household gender relations within a bargaining framework, the thesis proposes that in addition to the focus on improving women's *ability* to bargain for better treatment within their homes, women's *willingness* to bargain must also be taken into account. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with more than one hundred wastepickers and their spouses, the study found that membership to a trade union of wastepickers, has provided women *three* distinct (and interrelated) pathways for change. The first is the impact of material resources in improving women's fall-back positions. The second pathway draws attention to possible changes in women's understandings of self due to the cognitive resources they have access to within the union. The third pathway highlights the role of the union in expanding women's identities and relational networks upon which they base their sense of belonging. I argue that it is the combination of the material, cognitive and relational pathways that improve women's ability and willingness to challenge inequality within the home.

The study found that transformations within the home were most visible in the areas of domestic violence, distribution of household chores, and financial accountability of husbands. However it was the nature of women's engagement with the union that determined the *extent* of intra-household change, and also the *ways* in which women bargained for better treatment. 'Active members', i.e. women who were regular and consistent in their participation in the union, were able to replace *tactical* bargaining with *strategic* actions. It was the use of these strategies that enabled 'active' wastepickers to bring about long-term, transformative changes in intra-household gender relations.

Critical to these strategies was the role men played in facilitating or stalling processes of change. This research found that although initially men resisted and resented their wives participation in the union, it also provided them with opportunities to re-define themselves, and expand their identities. This redefinition of masculinity combined with new privileges that men secured through the union made men more amenable to changes in intra-household gender relations.

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INTRODUCTION

I met Sunita eight years ago while I was working with a trade union of wastepickers in Pune city. She was 22 years old and like most young women her age she was already married and had two young children; a son aged 9 months and a daughter of 2 years.

Sunita picked waste for a living. Every morning at dawn she would set off with her infant son strapped to her back with three large jute sacks in her hands. She would first scour the local garbage bin for anything that might be of recyclable value; used plastic bottles, paper packaging; pieces of scrap metal, unbroken glass bottles. This involved quickly jumping into the large garbage receptacle after checking first that there was enough garbage to cushion her fall inside. She would also check to see that there were no dogs or pigs inside the receptacle that might attack her. If she was lucky she could fill half a sack with recyclables. However in general slum communities like the one she lived in did not generate good quality waste. After sorting through this pile of rubbish she would move on to the middle class neighbourhoods a few kilometres away.

Here the quality of waste was much better. Cardboard boxes, plastic *Coca Cola* bottles and if she was lucky some discarded electrical appliances. On a good day Sunita would manage to fill all her sacks by mid-day. Balancing these on her head she would walk the long journey back home.

In the slum where Sunita lived operated a number of scrap dealers to whom wastepickers like Sunita would sell their '*maal*' (scrap). Every wastepicker had her regular scrap dealer; usually these were relationships built over time, sometimes across generations. Despite this scrap dealers were notorious for trying to cheat illiterate wastepickers like her. They were known to tamper with the scales so that the scrap appeared to weigh less than what it was, or in lieu of actual payment they would hand out credit notes which were easy to lose, the money subsequently never recovered.

However wastepickers like Sunita felt that these issues had become much less in the last ten years or so, ever since the *sanghatna* (union) for wastepickers had come into existence. Over the years they had slowly begun to find the courage to challenge these

underhand practices. Many wastepickers were now refusing to accept credit notes in lieu of money, and some in fact had even begun demanding a *Diwali* bonus from their local scrap dealer!

The *sanghatna* had brought in other changes as well. Over the five years that Sunita had become a member of the union (evidenced by her “photopass” (ID card) that she displayed proudly) she had become part of a community of wastepickers in her *vasti* (slum). While earlier she would scavenge for waste on her own, she now had the option of going along with a few other women who lived close by. Even if she went foraging alone, she always had them to come back to and share stories of her day. This she enjoyed tremendously; the opportunity to talk to someone who understood her reality. Together they would laugh about shared experiences; the loony man who lived near the garbage dump at Goli Maidan who always tried to shoo them away, the lecherous tea vendor on Shivaji road, the kind *madam* in Blue Bird Society who always offered them biscuits and tea; these were the types of stories that made up the lives of her wastepicker community.

Like many other wastepickers, Sunita eagerly attended union meetings both in her slum, as well as at the Union office two bus rides away. She mentioned to me that when she went to the union office she felt as though she could “leave her life behind”. The meetings were all about fun, laughter and companionship. A few times she had been on protest marches alongside hundreds of women like herself. They shouted slogans against the government, and demanded things like pension for when they got old and school uniforms for their children. At these moments she said that she felt that she had “full power”. She attributed this empowerment to the fact that illiterate wastepickers like herself were uniting together and demanding that they be heard. Where else in her life did people listen to her? Union membership had also helped her gain confidence over the years. For instance, if intercepted by a policeman now, instead of crying and begging him to let her go, she would demand to know why he should be interested in ‘checking’ her garbage sacks.

After Sunita had finished selling her scrap to the local dealer she would rush home to cook lunch for her daughter who had been left in the care of her neighbours all morning. Sunita’s husband Vinod was a daily wage labourer who worked for a contractor doing

odd jobs like painting and welding. Since his work was intermittent she could not leave the children to his care. After lunch Sunita would put the children to sleep, and begin her daily household chores. This involved cleaning dishes, washing clothes and sweeping the tiny room that the four of them lived in. In the evenings when the municipal water supply would begin she would wait for hours by the taps for her turn to fill water. After this she would prepare the evening meal, just in time for Vinod's return.

On this particular day Vinod was home by 7 pm, drunk and belligerent. He had been drinking since they got married, so Sunita was quite used to it. Of course the verbal profanities, and the physical abuse did get tiring, but Sunita knew that there was nothing that she could do about it. "Once you are married you belong with your husband" is what her mother told her, when she complained to her about the violence. Today however Vinod seemed more aggressive than usual. When she served him his food he flung his plate across the small room. The food flew everywhere and the children began crying. Sunita tried to pacify them, picked them up and took them over to her sister-in-law who lived next door. Her sister-in-law and brother-in-law were used to hearing Sunita's domestic squabbles through the thin tin sheets of their homes. They tried to pacify the children while Sunita returned home to try and calm Vinod.

On this particular day they could hear Vinod throwing things around; utensils, pots and pans. They could also hear Sunita shouting at her husband, telling him to calm down. He then began beating her, evidenced by her screams and cries for help. They ignored her because as hard as it was to hear Sunita's anguish, it was much harder to get Vinod to see sense. Suddenly however there was silence. A few seconds later they could see flames leap out of Sunita's home.

Three days later at the local government hospital Sunita was pronounced dead. The reason for her death was second degree burns.

Research Questions

Sunita's story is un-exceptional. A typical *Dalit*¹ worker belonging to the vast unorganized sector in India, she worked hard to eke out a meagre living, bore the characteristic double burden of labour and was married to a man who did not think twice before beating her to a pulp. What is unique to Sunita's story however is her association with a *sanghatna* or organization of wastepickers, where it is that I met her.

At the union Sunita's death shocked us all. It later transpired that in a fit of rage she had doused herself in kerosene and lit a match. Hidden behind our collective grief were far deeper questions tinged with guilt. Why had she chosen to take such a drastic step? Why had she not contacted any of us for help? Why had she been unable to stand up to her violent husband?

Organizations like the trade union of wastepickers of which Sunita was a member, have been set up with the aim of bringing together some of the most marginalized and disenfranchised informal women workers. These organizations use the collective strength of their members to protect livelihoods, negotiate higher wages, demand better conditions of work and negotiate access to social security and occupational safety. On a more personal level these organizations have played a critical role in building the reflective and analytical capacities of members like Sunita, fostering self-confidence, and feelings of well-being. This had led to important changes in the way women perceive themselves; as productive workers instead of non-workers, as members of a collective instead of isolated, vulnerable workers, and as citizens in a positions of strength as opposed to powerless victims. However despite this, women like Sunita have continued to face significant inequality within their homes evidenced in this case by the regular domestic violence she faced.

This brings us to the main questions of this thesis. By exploring the lives of other wastepickers like Sunita, who are members of a trade union of wastepickers, I attempt to answer the following research questions: How might working women's affiliations to a labour organisation impact on women's identity, consciousness and sense of self as a

¹ Dalits are the lowest caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy (for a more detailed discussion see section 4.3, fn. 27)

worker, as a citizen and as a person? Might these changes translate into a greater capacity and willingness to bring about desired forms of change within their marital relationships? Under what circumstances are husband's likely to respond positively to these changes in women and what might help to explain their resistance?

It was while I visited Sunita's grieving family in the burns ward of the Government Hospital in Pune that these questions emerged. And it is through this thesis that I attempt to answer them.

The Context

This research project is an attempt to engage with women in the informal economy, their membership to labour organizations and its consequent impact on gender relations within the home. Over the last two decades such organizations of informal workers have sprung up across the globe, including within India (Bonner and Spooner, 2011; Nayak, 2013). Also referred to as 'membership-based organizations of the poor' (MBOPs) (Chen et al, 2007), they collectively represent the voices of some of the most marginalised and disenfranchised workers, and offer immense potential for transforming women's lives; both at work, as well as within their homes.

Empirical studies have shown that MBOPs have been extremely important in validating worker identities for their members, providing legal redress, acting as a channel for carrying the voice of the poor to policy makers and enabling workers to exercise their rights in economic, legal and social spheres (Gothoskar, 1997; Chen et al., 2007; Roever, 2007). Personally membership to such organizations is known to improve self-esteem, self-confidence, bring about a heightened awareness of one's rights and an increased ability to articulate and question injustice (Rowbotham and Mitter, 1994; Vijayan, 1997; Naples, 2002). Though there is considerable literature on the impact of women joining labour organizations, this literature seldom extends its analysis into women's private domestic lives. At the same time studies have shown that significant inequality continues to exist in the personal lives of women despite them joining such organizations (see Kabeer et al., 2013), evidenced in this case by Sunita's death. My thesis is an attempt to explore whether this 'empowerment' that women demonstrate in

the public sphere through membership to such organizations, does in fact trickle into their homes.

In particular I examine one group of informal women workers i.e. wastepickers and their membership to a trade union of wastepickers (the KKPKP) in Pune, India. To understand whether affiliation to a labour organization might translate into women wastepickers being more *able* and *willing* to bring about desired forms of change within the home I use a bargaining framework of analysis.

A central concept used in analysis of intra-household bargaining processes is called the ‘fall-back-position’, which refers to the power that each individual brings to the bargaining process (Nash, 1950). Individuals with the strongest fall-back position will secure the most successful bargaining outcomes. Literature on what constitutes a ‘fall-back-position’ typically focuses on the qualitative and quantitative measures of bargaining power. These include elements, such as access to paid work, property ownership, self-esteem and local gender ideologies which in turn determine the ability of individual family members to engage in intra-household bargaining (Hart, 1992; Agarwal, 1994; Moore, 1994a; Kabeer, 2000). Agarwal (1994) and Sen (1990) in particular highlight the role of women’s awareness of their well-being as critical in determining their ability to bargain within the home. Although there has been considerable emphasis on understanding what prevents women from bargaining within the home, much less attention has been paid to the factors that are likely to make women *more willing* to bargain. My study is an attempt to contribute to a deeper understanding of these factors.

In a study of this kind, it is necessary to contextualize the processes of intra-household bargaining against a background of gender relations in the homes of the men and women who make up this research. Since all the wastepickers in this study belonged to the Dalit caste, my study begins by exploring some of the ways in which Dalit patriarchy expresses itself. Considering that there is very little literature on Dalit intra-household gender relations, my study is an attempt to fill in this gap.

Literature which does exist suggests that Dalit women are more egalitarian and free from the patriarchal constraints that bind upper-caste women. This is evidenced by Dalit

women's equality with men in areas, such as sexuality, speech, physical mobility, choice of work and control over household income (Kapadia, 1995; Ramanathan et al., 2000). Their supposed independence has been largely attributed to the fact that Dalit women have always worked and had access to an independent income (ibid). In addition scholars note that a mark of this 'egalitarianism' is the fact that Dalit women do not accept domestic abuse silently, but are likely to leave an abusive household since (unlike upper-caste women) they are always welcome back to their natal families (Kapadia, 1995; Ilaiah, 1996). Within a bargaining framework the ability to seek parental refuge, as well as access to paid work could potentially enhance a woman's bargaining power.

However contrary to accounts of Dalit women's egalitarian gender relations, the women in my study belonged to homes where significant inequalities continued to persist. For instance the wastepickers routinely faced high levels of domestic violence, during which their access to paid work or parental refuge were insufficient bargaining tools. In addition several of these women bore the disproportionate burden of being the sole breadwinners in the family, being married to men who rarely contributed to the home. Therefore the image of Dalit women as 'promiscuous egalitarians of stereotype' is one that my research questions (Rao, 2015).

Within this context then could membership of women to a formal association, such as a labour organization impact on their lives? And if so, in what ways? Though literature has several examples of the role associations of informal workers play in women's work lives, limited literature extends its analysis into women's homes. This is another gap in literature that I attempt to address.

Through interviews and focus group discussions with unionized and non-unionized wastepickers I found that being part of a network, such as a labour organization, offered women a combination of material, cognitive and relational pathways which had the potential to bring about critical transformations in women's understanding of their place in the world. By building an identity as a worker, gaining access to higher wages, developing skills in negotiation and advocacy, re-defining one's understand of self, expanding ones' spheres of interaction and building new relationships women wastepickers were given resources which improved their *capacity and willingness* to

bargain. In addition it was the *nature of engagement* within the organization that determined the extent of change within women's homes. Women who were consistent in their participation within the KKPKP, developed stronger affective ties with the organization and were more likely to demonstrate a greater degree of transformation within their homes.

Critical to women's ability and willingness to bargain is the role men play in facilitating or stalling these processes of change. Gender relations within the home are the product of changing female and male subjectivities and cannot be attributed solely to changes in women's personhood. This stands in contrast to the implicit assumption undertaken by studies that examine the impact of membership to a labour organization on women's sense of self and consequently the trickle-down effect this has on marital relations *without including how changes in men's identities and subjectivities are also at play while contestation of gender relations takes place within the home* (see Friedemann-Sánchez, 2008; Hill, 2010; Kabeer, 2011).

Given that the domestic sphere is a critical domain where masculine identity can be affirmed or questioned (Gutmann, 2003), this thesis attempt to examines what happens to masculine identity within the home when women through membership to a labour organization might become more conscious of their rights, less afraid to assert these rights and more vocal about the change(s) they desire. Literature on the theorization of masculinities focuses largely on the effects of paid work on men's self-esteem, power and domestic authority (Chant, 2000; Kabeer, 2000; Silberschmidt, 2004; 2005). My research aims at expanding this body of knowledge by focusing on women whose engagement in paid work is not new, but membership to a labour organization is. Within this context I attempt to explore the factors that make men likely to resist intra-household change and circumstances under which men respond more positively to a renegotiation of intra-household gender relations.

The Study

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides a background to the issue of informality within the Indian economy. Presently 92 percent of total employment in the country is informal, with women constituting 86.5 percent of the non-agricultural female workforce (Indian

Labour and Employment Report, 2014). What this means is that 9 out of 10 women in India work within the informal economy, in jobs that are low-skilled, poorly paid, often risky and bereft of any kind of social security. The invisible, informal and dispersed nature of their work makes building a shared sense of identity a tedious process, and organizing for change a herculean effort. In addition mainstream trade unions have largely ignored informal workers.

Despite this over the last three decades informal workers have been making attempts to organize, come together and demand change. The forms and methods by which these workers have organized are varied, though they all share the common aim of giving voice to some of the most marginalized and disenfranchised women workers.

This chapter describes the functioning of one such organization; namely the trade union of wastepickers in Pune also known as the KKPKP. Established in 1993, and currently with over 9000 wastepicker members (92% of who are women) the KKPKP has worked tirelessly to build the capacities of wastepickers like Sunita, so that they can claim for themselves the recognition, respect and dignity that they deserve. This includes advocating for the recognition of wastepickers as "workers" and waste collection as "work" by local, state and national government, organising around social protection schemes and mobilizing around harassment and violence. I argue that the processes by which wastepickers of the KKPKP have secured rights for themselves have clearly led to a range of changes in women's sense of self.

Chapter 2 contextualizes the work of the KKPKP and its potential impact of intra-household gender relations, by situating it within existing kinship and family structures of the wastepicker community. Most of the wastepickers in the KKPKP belong to the Dalit caste; the lowest in the Indian caste hierarchy. This chapter attempts to tease out how gender-relations in Dalit homes actually 'look' and questions the prevalent dichotomy in literature of Dalit women being either singularly 'emancipated' or 'victims of oppression'. Arguing that there Dalit women are not 'more' or 'less' liberated than upper caste women the chapter explores the myriad ways in which Dalit patriarchies manifest themselves in the everyday lives of men and women . Coming from the perspective that gender-relations are co-constituted, the final part of this chapter reviews how Dalit patriarchies impact men and their sense of identity; and

questions how masculinities might be impacted by Dalit women joining a labour organization like the KKPKP.

Chapter 3 offers the theoretical underpinnings to the larger research question of whether women's membership to labour organizations has an impact on gender relations within the home. Situating the study of intra-household gender relations within bargaining models of the household, in particular on the work of Amartya Sen (1990) and Bina Agarwal (1994) it argues that women's bargaining power within the home depends not only upon their access to resources that might increase their ability to bargain, but also upon their actual willingness to initiate the process of bargaining. In addition the degree of transformation of gender relations within the home is contingent upon the extent to which women are willing to bargain for better treatment. I argue that membership to labour organizations provides women access to multiple pathways; namely material, cognitive and relational pathways which impacts both their ability and willingness to challenge hegemonic gender relations within the home.

Material pathways like paid work and access to credit increase women's intra-household bargaining power not in and of themselves but because they are accompanied by the valuation that women attribute to these resources. Cognitively membership to such organizations enables women to develop new understandings of themselves; as workers with dignity, recognition and respect and as women with the 'right to have rights'. Relationally membership to a labour organization provides women access to networks of solidarity and friendship, which in turn gives women an opportunity to develop alternative 'relational selves'. As women expand their identities it destabilizes the primacy of marriage and family as the singular paths of self-definition. This makes women more likely to be willing to engage in re-negotiating intra-household gender relations. The above three pathways are not distinct, discrete and easily untangled from each other; in fact they are intrinsically bound up with each other, and are often interdependent.

Chapter 4 focuses on the methodology of the study and the process of conducting research. The nature of this research was qualitative, with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) being the primary tools of data collection. Using the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) as the site of the study, interviews and

FGDs were conducted with three groups of respondents over a period of 12 months. The first group was that of wastepicker members of the KKPKP, the second group consisted of husbands of these wastepicker, and the third group comprised of wastepickers who were non-unionized and did not belong to any collective or organization. This chapter explores the process of conducting research on sensitive matters like domestic violence and intimacy, and the ethics involved. In addition it describes the complexities and dilemmas of conducting research on domestic violence with couples, the gender hierarchies and boundaries that need to be circumvented when female researchers interview male respondents, and the challenges that ensue.

Chapter 5, 6 and 7 provide the empirical foundations of the research study. Chapter 5 examines the impact of KKPKP membership in women's public and personal lives. In particular it highlights how the *nature* of engagement with the KKPKP plays a critical role in access to the material, cognitive and relational pathways that the union provides. The chapter emphasizes the distinction between 'active' union members who are more involved with the KKPKP, committed towards its larger vision of justice and share an affective bond with the union as compared to 'inactive' union members who are inconsistent in their involvement in union activities and far less emotionally connected with the KKPKP.

Chapter 6 explores in greater depth how the nature of union membership translates into possible changes in intra-household gender relations, by focusing in particular on domestic violence and the lack of financial accountability by husbands. The chapter begins by describing 'tactics' that all women employed when dealing with violence before they were organized into a collective. It then goes on to show how active KKPKP members have bargained for better treatment within the home by drawing on material, cognitive and relational pathways of change and developing 'agentic' strategies. These include being able to assert themselves, demanding accountability from their husbands, and not fulfilling normative obligations towards their spouse. This has reduced the frequency and severity of domestic violence.

Chapter 7 highlights how husbands have responded to the use of these strategies to re-negotiate intra-household gender relations. It situates Dalit masculinity within the context of the notion of '*mothapana*' (superiority), which is regularly enacted in the

spheres of men's notions around paid work, their (lack of) contribution towards household chores, numerous addictions (especially to alcohol) and the incessant domestic violence that they mete out. This chapter delineates how men have responded to women re-negotiating power and authority within the home, primarily through attempts to rescue their threatened masculinity.

The Conclusion weaves together theory with empirical results from the interviews and FGDs. It discusses key findings, and considers the implications of these findings for further practice.

1. ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZED

1.1 The Emergence of the Informal Economy: A Global Snapshot

In the mid 1950s, W. Arthur Lewis developed a theoretical model of economic development based on the assumption that there was an unlimited supply of surplus labour in most developing countries, which would be absorbed into the modern industrial sector as these countries grew. This would lead to a turning point when wages would begin to rise above the subsistence level: what is referred to even today as the 'Lewis Turning Point' (Lewis, 1954). This would then transform low-income traditional economies into dynamic, modern economies. His argument formed the basis of a dual-sector economic model, which assumed that a traditional sector comprised of petty traders, small producers and a range of casual jobs would eventually be absorbed into the formal economy and disappear. However by the mid 1960s concerns arose about widespread unemployment and persistence of these 'traditional' sectors, thus paving the way for a series of studies to examine economic activities in these sectors in greater details.

One of the most influential of these studies was conducted in 1971 by the anthropologist Keith Hart among rural migrants in Accra, Ghana. Using empirical evidence from urban Ghana he demonstrated that many of the activities, that orthodox economists deemed 'traditional', marginal and unproductive were in fact dynamic, efficient, creative and resilient. He coined the term 'informal sector' to characterize previously unacknowledged and diverse income generation activities which had been largely ignored by the state, but had immense growth potential and constituted a hugely productive sector of the Ghanaian economy. According to Hart this 'informal sector' was characterized by self-employment in contrast to the formal sector, which was constituted by wage employment.

Influenced by Hart's work in 1972 the International Labour Organization (ILO) commissioned a seminal study on the Kenyan economy with the purpose of studying this 'informal sector'. According to them informality constituted a *way of doing things* characterized by seven specific features: mode of entry, use of indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale of operation, labour intensive technology, acquisition of

skills through non-formal means, and participation in unregulated and competitive markets (ILO 1972, p. 6). Echoing Hart's study in Ghana this study also found that most informal sector activities were profit making, "a sector of thriving economic activity and a source of Kenya's future wealth" (ILO, 1972, p. 5). This study also made it clear that the informal sector had the potential to create employment and reduce poverty (ILO, 1972).

Within development circles the informal sector received mixed reviews. Many observers still considered the informal sector to be marginal or peripheral. Some of them believed that with sufficient government attention the informal sector in Ghana, Kenya, and other developing countries would strengthen its linkages to the formal sector and break the technological, skill and market constraints inhibiting its growth. Other's critiqued this framework for its failure to recognize the heterogeneity within informal sector enterprises, and exploitative linkages between informal and formal sector (see Birkbeck, 1978; Bromley and Gerry, 1978).

The advent of globalization in 1980s, however, made it clear that the informal sector was one that was here to stay. Contractual work, hourly wages, reduced benefits, and piece rate production became the norm. The debate on the informal sector expanded to include these changes where through subcontracting and flexible specialization production was being reorganized into small, decentralized and more flexible economic units. Economic liberalization in the early 1990s only compounded such informal production relations (Standing, 1999; Chang et al., 2008). There was growing acknowledgement that the informal sector was expanding, and emerging in new guises and in unexpected places, leading to a resurgent interest in the term (Vanek et al., 2012). There were new attempts to define informality by government officials, statisticians and economists, across both developed and developing countries.

In 1993 this interest culminated at the Fifteenth International Conference of Labour Statistics, where a resolution was adopted that required countries in which the informal economy played a significant role, to improve statistical data and measures of productivity of this sector in figures of national accounts. This was accompanied by a statistical definition of the informal sector based on characteristics of production units or enterprises rather than of employment relations.

The “informal sector” thus referred to employment and production that took place in unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises (for example; less than five employees) (ILO, 1993). Though this was a significant step in collection of data on informal employment, the 1993 resolution failed to take into account informal work which was not performed within an informal enterprise.

It is for this reason that in the mid-1990s the International Labour Office (ILO), the international Expert Group on Informal Sector Statistics (called the Delhi Group), and the global research policy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) worked together to broaden this definition of the informal economy (ILO, 2003). The new definition attempted to focus not only on the characteristics of enterprises but also the nature of employment i.e. it includes both *enterprises* that are not legally regulated and also *employment relationships* that are not legally regulated or protected (Chen, 2007). Thus all employment without labour or social protection, whether in informal enterprises, formal enterprises or households were included within their conceptualization of the informal economy.

In 2003 the 17th International Conference of Labour Statistics broadened its own understanding of the informal sector to reflect this new concept of “informal employment”, which it defined it as comprising “the total number of informal jobs, whether carried out in formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises, or households, during a given reference period” (ILO, 2004, p. 4). This framework included all employment arrangements within formal or informal enterprises that left individuals without social protection.

This is how debates about the informal economy played out at the global level. Let me now turn to look at how some of these issues have played a role in the emergence of the informal sector in India.

1.2 The Unorganized Sector in India

The Indian economy has always been characterized by an overwhelming predominance of what is referred to as the 'unorganized sector'. Currently this sector makes up 92% of total employment in the country (NCEUS, 2007).

India has its own unique history with respect to the emergence of the unorganized sector, and its definitions of what constitute informality. Following independence from the British in 1947 as India emerged as a modern nation state, its understanding of development played a significant role in the crystallization of an 'unorganized sector' in the economy.

Post independence India established a Planning Commission (1950) to prepare a blueprint for the country's economic growth. The Commission in its ambitious Five Year plans decided to follow the Nehruvian vision of development which focused on industrialisation and import substitution as ways towards 'modernity'. During this period even though protection was given to traditional small-scale industries, the thrust was on large-scale industrial development and macro processes of marketization. Although redistributive measures (like land reforms) had been envisaged, they took a back seat as they were not seen as integral to achieving the required growth rates (Kalpagam, 1996). The assumption was that the benefits of growth, through the backward and forward linkages in the capital-good sectors, would trickle down to all the classes, including to the people in the traditional sectors. Within this plan model people within the organized sector were conceptualized as 'entrepreneurial' (contributing to growth and capital formation), and those within the unorganized sector were bracketed as those simply 'engaging in activities' while waiting to be absorbed into the organized economy. By the mid 1970s however it became clear that this uptake into the formal economy was far below that which was expected. In addition the benefits of growth were not trickling down to the general population, and in fact there was increasing asset and income inequalities in both rural and urban India. This crystallized the dualism between the unorganized and the organized sectors in the Indian economy.

Following the economic liberalization which ensued in 1991, the labour markets of India underwent several changes which included deteriorating formal employment,

declining labour protection measures and waning labour unions (Agarwala, 2006). During this period the informal economy grew the fastest and absorbed most labour in agriculture, manufacturing, construction, petty trade and services (Harriss-White,2000). However most of these workers had no job security, minimum wage, social security or access to benefits. Their conditions of work were deplorable and exploitative. At the end of 2004-05, about 840 million or 77 per cent of the population were still living on less than 30 cents a day (NCEUS, 2008). It was this group that mostly constituted the unorganized sector in India.

In the decades post liberalization this unorganized sector in India has expanded massively and absorbed most labour in agriculture, manufacturing, construction, petty trade and services (Nayar, 2001; Harriss-White, 2003). In recognition of this in September 2004 the Government of India constituted a National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) to review the status of the informal sector including its size, scope and magnitude of employment (NCEUS, 2009). Up until then estimates of the workforce in the informal economy were made by subtracting the number of workers in the organized sector of the economy from total employment (Kannan and Papola, 2007). One of the first tasks of the NCEUS then was to formulate measurable definitions of the concepts of "unorganized sector" and "unorganized workers", which they defined as;

The unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers....Unorganized workers consist of those working in the unorganized sector or households, excluding regular workers with social security benefits by the employers, and the workers in the formal sector without any employment and social security benefits provided by the employers.

NCEUS, 2008, p.2

Implicit in the above broad definition of unorganized workers is the understanding that informal employment is a wider concept than the informal sector and includes both

workers in the informal sector as well as informal workers in the formal sector (Kannan and Papola, 2007). This definition was very much in line with the ILO approach to informality discussed above. Thus wage workers in the unprotected sector, unprotected wage workers in the organized sector and self-employed workers in the unorganized sector are all included under the category of the unorganized sector (NCEUS, 2007). Currently the informal economy makes up 92% of total employment in the country (Indian Labour and Employment Report, 2014)².

Despite the heterogeneity in the kinds of unorganized sector workers there are several features that they all share in common. In a report prepared by the NCEUS (2007) titled *Conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the unorganised sector* they highlight that poverty, low social status and low levels of education are distinctive features of unorganized workers in India. 79 per cent of informal workers live on less than US\$2 per day. Furthermore 85 per cent of informal wage workers in rural India and 57 percent of such workers in urban India receive wages below the nationally recommended minimum. In terms of education 79 per cent of unorganized workers have less than five years of schooling. There is also a definite caste-bias in the unorganized sector with 88 per cent of the members of scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) and 80 per cent of members of the other-backward castes (OBC) engaged in informal employment of some kind.

In addition much of their work in the unorganized sector is unskilled in nature, with employers relying on casual labour and flexible employment practices and consequently attaching limited importance to skill development and training. In addition conditions of work are deplorable. Long working hours, unhygienic conditions at the workplace, lack of sanitation facilities, delayed payment of wages and absence of safety equipment are commonplace. In general workers in the informal economy can be dismissed arbitrarily, are not entitled to sick leave, accident security, maternity benefits or pension

²The informal workforce is comprised of three main segments. First, informal employment in agriculture – comprised of the self-employed in small-scale farm units and of agricultural labour – which continues to be important in India, represents 60 per cent of total employment. Second, employment in informal enterprises/sector outside of agriculture represents another 28 per cent of total informal employment. Third, informal employment outside informal enterprises and outside of agriculture is an estimated 6 per cent of the total informal workforce (this is the Residual Category in table 3.1). Among the total non-agricultural workforce, 133 million workers or 83 per cent are in the informal economy (ILO, Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture, 2002)

(Sethuraman, 1998). The lack of employment security and social security implies that just one accident or experience of ill-health for the main breadwinner of the family can spiral a family into poverty (Kannan and Papola, 2007).

1.2.1 Women within the Unorganized Sector

A distinguishing feature of the unorganized sector globally, including in India, is the disproportionate percentage of women who find work within it. The proportion of women workers in the informal sector exceeds that of men in most countries (ILO, 2002; Chen, 2007), with women forming “the majority of workers in sub-contracted, temporary or casual work, part-time work and informal occupations” (ILO, 2000, p. 11).

There are several reasons which can be attributed to the over-representation of women in the informal economy. Possibly the most cited reason is socio-cultural norms that assign primary responsibility of domestic chores and social reproduction to women. Defining women solely in terms of their roles as caregivers and housewives, and inflicting on them the double burden of labour, puts constraints on their time and mobility thus ensuring that they are also more willing to accept unorthodox working hours, hazardous working conditions and lower wages (Lim, 1994; Tirado, 1994; Navarro, 2002; Philips, 2003; NCEUS, 2007). Secondly relatively low levels of education and skills often force women into low paying jobs and restricted work opportunities. On the whole therefore women generally find jobs as temporary, part time or contract workers in small factories or home-based units which are generally exempt from labour legislation (Mitter, 1994). Finally work participation rates for women are higher in the informal economy because of the flexible production systems that thrive on the cheap, flexible labour that women provide (Naples and Desai, 2002).

These factors are clearly reflected in the Indian context, where women have historically had peripheral access to work and wages. Socio-cultural norms, like sexual division of labour and female seclusion, play an important role in the Indian context. Firstly the strict gender division of labour in most homes ensures that women take sole responsibility for domestic tasks, leaving them very little time to engage in well-paid labour outside the home (Banerjee, 1991). In 2011-12, the labour force participation rate for women was a mere 23 percent, as opposed to 56 percent for men (India Labour and

Employment Report, 2014). In addition since women are inevitably involved in some kind of productive and/or reproductive activity it places constraints on the time they can invest in education and skill building. In terms of education and skill level 71 per cent of the women workers in India are either illiterate or have education only up to the primary level compared to 49 per cent for men (NCEUS, 2009). This is reflected in the high numbers of women who work in the informal economy,³ as opposed to men. 91 per cent of the non-agricultural female workforce is situated within the informal economy, accounting for nine out of every ten working women. In contrast only 70 percent of men's non-agricultural employment is within the informal economy (ILO, 2002; NCEUS, 2007).

Further when women do work outside the home, they find that the division of labour is highly sex-segregated, with greater value attached to men's roles. This leads to relatively large gender gap in wages. Typically women are over-represented in lower paying contract or casual work, and under-represented in high-income activities (Chen, 2001). Also within the same trade men and women tend to be involved in different activities or types of employment; with men's work usually high valued and paid. In construction work for example men are typically in-charge of doing the skilled, better paid work of laying bricks, whereas women do the heavy labour of carrying headloads of bricks and earth and still get paid less than men (Shramshakti, 1988; NCEUS, 2007).

Another factor which plays an important role in determining the nature and extent of women's work in India are ideas about female seclusion (i.e. the physical and social separation of women from all men who are not their kin). These norms limit women's physical mobility and their participation in public life (Mies, 1982; Lessinger, 1990), however their manifestations vary across caste, class and geographical region. At one extreme are women who are rarely allowed to leave the confines of their homes, and are expected to cover their faces from all men who are not their kin.

At the other end are poor women, usually of the lowest castes who cannot afford to stay within the 'sanctity' of their homes. Therefore they are more willing to work in inhuman conditions just to provide food on the table. Figures indicate that ninety-one

³Women account for about one-third of all informal workers – about 118 million – in the informal economy while men account for two-thirds – about 252 million (ILO, 2002)

per cent of scheduled caste/scheduled tribe women work as domestic servants (in private households), in unorganized manufacturing, trade and construction in India (NCEUS, 2007). Literature indicates how women working in these sectors tend to work long hours, under harsh conditions and receive very low pay (Hill, 2010). In addition they face significant occupational health and safety risks. *Agarbatti* workers for instance often suffer from tuberculosis and other lung diseases because of inhalation of coal dust. Wastepickers complain of gastrointestinal as well as muscular-skeletal ailments because of the nature of their work. Apart from this women in the unorganized sector routinely complain of sexual harassment and physical aggression at their workplace (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2013).

1.2.2 Shramshakti Report

It was in acknowledgement of these challenges that the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) lobbied the Government of India to set up a Commission to study the conditions of women workers in urban and rural India (Datta, 2003). This had already been preceded by the Towards Equality report of 1974 prepared by a government appointed Committee on the Status of Women in India. This report had highlighted that even after three decades of planned development women were the most marginalized and impoverished, with declining work participation rates.

In 1986 the Government of India set up the National Commission on Self Employed Women⁴ in order to undertake a comprehensive study on the working and living conditions of poor women living in poverty (Shramshakti, 1988, p. ix). Headed by Ela Bhat, the founder of SEWA, the Commission decided that it would not only study self-employed women but the "entire gambit of unprotected labouring women" (Shramshakti, 1988, p. ix) including wage-labour, paid and unpaid labour and contract labour.

The *Shramshakti* Report is the most exhaustive and comprehensive report on women in the informal economy in India till date. Through extensive field surveys in different parts of the country it brought into visibility women's extremely vulnerable working

⁴ SEWA has lobbied for the creation of a National Commission to focus on self-employed women (Datta, 2003)

conditions including occupational health hazards and the discrimination that they faced on a day to day basis. It highlighted the fact that among the poor all women work, and most women do not have one principal occupation but instead engage in a number of activities.

The report brought to the notice of policy makers and planners that women's contribution towards the national economy was largely invisible and undervalued. Protective legislation in areas like wages, maternity benefits, child care and social security had not benefitted these women working in the informal economy. In addition these women lacked organizing capabilities, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation (Shramshakti, 1988).

The *Shramshakti* committee concluded by recommending that the Government of India “evolve a strategy to promote organizing of women on a large scale” (ibid, p. 166), including State support for organizing efforts, developing support centres for women to obtain information about their legal rights and protection by the police in the rare cases where women do engage in non-violent protest.

1.3 Organizing Unorganized Women: Issues and Challenges

The recommendations of the *Shramshakti* Report (1988) towards organizing women in the informal economy though extremely pertinent had to contend with the ground realities of millions of women in the unorganized sector who had typically been left out of mainstream organizing efforts. The inability of women in the informal economy in particular to organize themselves reflects a larger issue of women being left out of mainstream organizing efforts in general. Even amongst formal sector workers who were part of trade unions, women had been left out of the benefits of organizing. The unspoken role within mainstream unions was to passively support men and in turn male leadership (Gothoskar, 1997).

As mentioned before, the dominance of trade unions by men continued to have a direct impact on the issues taken up (or not taken up) by mainstream unions. For instance traditionally unions fought to secure a ‘family wage’ for the male breadwinner (Mitter, 1994) assuming that while men took primary responsibility for earning, women's

earnings were only secondary since their primary responsibility was unwaged work in the home.

This meant that even when women did work alongside men in equal numbers unions completely ignored the rights of women workers. For instance they did not oppose job segregation, which relegated women to labour-intensive, low-paying jobs and preserved the better-paying automated jobs for men (Hensman, 1988; Rao and Husain, 1997). They also refused to take on 'women-specific' issues, like sexual harassment, safe transport, maternity leave, child care, domestic violence and verbal abuse by employers which they viewed as divisive and separatist from the common (male) workers struggle (Tirado, 1994; Tripp, 1994; Navarro, 2002; Philips, 2003). Implicitly traditional unions precluded entry to women by their norms and ways of functioning. For example having meetings late into the night or at large distances from the place of work or home often meant that women could not join such gatherings (Nayak, 1990). Apart from ignoring the needs of women from within the formal sector and excluding them from full and fair participation, mainstream unions refused to acknowledge the presence of workers in the informal sector, a disproportionate number of who were women.

They still considered unions to be places where workers responded to the relationship between wage labour and capital, effectively silencing millions of women who shared a rather ambiguous relationship with owners of capital (Ramaswamy, 1988; ILO, 1999). Mainstream trade unions refused to acknowledge the complexities of the situations in which women worked; for example they might be self-employed (wastepickers), or have no one single identifiable employer (contract workers) or not even know who their employers are (home based workers) (Jhabvala, 1997; Gothoskar, 1997; Bhatt, 2006). Being ignored by mainstream trade unions however is just one of the many reasons why women working in the informal economy have found it hard to organize themselves. There are several other factors that contribute to the difficulty in organizing unorganized sector women.

Firstly the invisible, informal nature of their work, without any legal protection or social security, makes organizing a high-risk activity. In a country like India where 50 per cent of unorganized women workers are sole bread earners of their families (Geetika et al., 2011), women's economic dependence on their employers is very high. This does

not leave women with the freedom to object to harsh working conditions and low wages. Gothoskar (1997) recounts how in the late 1980s in industries like *beedi* making, cashew-nut and coir processing the slightest threat of unionization led to employers closing down factories and giving out production to women in their homes.

Secondly, in addition to women's economic dependence on their employers, they are often brought up with ideas about female docility and servility so they fear organizing, standing up and having their voices heard. When women do take initiative the repercussions might be severe, thus preventing women from raising their voice in the first place (Gothoskar, 1997).

Thirdly typically women in the informal economy work in highly segmented labour markets. A dispersed, disaggregated labour force inherently lacks the ability to come together and demand change. With globalization this trend is worsening; the introduction and persistence of flexible labour market strategies and fragmentation in the production process ensures that women are geographically dispersed and therefore unable to organize effectively (Mitter, 1994; Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996).

Lastly a significant hurdle to organizing that women in the unorganized sector have faced is their lack of a common identity (Hill, 2001; Chen et al., 2007). The nature of informal work and the social exclusion faced by women workers makes building a shared sense of identity a tedious, long drawn out process. To compound this problem often women do not see themselves as workers i.e. they do not see what they do as having any economic or social value. The stereotypical perception of men as breadwinners and women as 'temporary' workers, working for 'supplementary' income is still rife, fuelled by the belief that the primary job for women is their role as mothers and wives. Therefore developing a common identity is often a difficult process as a shared identity cannot be assumed, but must be built (Kabeer et al., 2013).

Despite these difficulties women in the informal economy have made attempts to organize; in different forms, over numerous issues and using a variety of strategies. Globally informal women workers are coming together to amplify their visibility, voice and power (WIEGO, 2012). The following section examines a brief history of organizing efforts of unorganized women workers in India.

1.3.1 Organizing Unorganized Women: An Indian Context

As mentioned in the previous section it was in 1974 that the Report on the Committee of Status of Women in India was released. Titled 'Towards Equality', it highlighted the declining work participation rates of women and the overall worsening of employment opportunities (John, 2001). The report made it glaringly obvious that the State led development processes had failed women, particularly poor women. Appalled by women's deteriorating economic circumstances, middle-class feminist activists and intellectuals began to provide radical critiques of the current developmental process and at the same time demand greater recognition of women's labour (John, 2011).

These factors gave impetus to a "new phenomenon in the history of organizing" in the decade of the 1970s (Shramshakti, 1988, p. 102). Groups with distinctly feminist perspectives were formed like the Forum against Rape in Bombay and Progressive Organization of Women in Hyderabad. In addition there was a growth of organizations representing self-employed working women. Notable among these are the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) founded in 1972, and the Working Women's Forum formed in 1978.

The Self Employed Women's Association is a trade union of over 1.3 million poor working women across nine states in India (Jhabvala et al., 2010). The formation of SEWA was perhaps the first step in recognizing self-employed women as 'workers' and part of the labour force that contributes to the national economy. Originally SEWA was affiliated with the Textile Labor Association (TLA), formed in 1917, which strove to ensure fairness in the bargaining process between workers and mill owners. In 1971 a group of migrant women headloaders who were living in the footpath approached the TLA for assistance with housing. As head of the Association's Women's Wing, Ela Bhat, called for a meeting of all these women workers where it was found that their housing problem was just one part of a much larger cycle of poverty and indebtedness (Rose, 1992). As migrant and temporary workers, these women were at the mercy of middlemen and contractors, who often usurped a major part of their earnings (Datta, 2003). Encouraged by Elabehn (as she is commonly called) a group of women workers with similar problems came together and organized a meeting. In 1971 these head-

loaders, vegetable vendors, used-garment dealers, street vendors and hawkers came together to form a workers association (Rose, 1992).

The process of establishing SEWA independent trade union for poor, self-employed women workers highlights both the issue of lack of recognition of informal self-employed workers as capable of organizing, as well as sexism faced within established trade unions. In 1971 when SEWA attempted to register as a union the Labour Department refused to comply because they felt that since there was no recognised employer, the workers would have no one to struggle against. After a year-long struggle SEWA was able to convince the government that informal sector unions did not necessarily need to use confrontational tactics against an ‘employer’ and that the purpose of such a union was primarily the unity of workers. Thus SEWA’s first struggle, at the most basic level, was to obtain official recognition as Trade Union, which they managed to do in 1972 after months of lobbying and negotiation with the government. As an official trade union the main goals of SEWA were to bring social and political visibility to women as workers, provide women access to raw-materials and credit, as well as provide them with the means to control their own income (Rose, 1992).

A decade later SEWA was thrown out of its parent’s organization; the Textile Labour Association TLA (India's oldest and largest union of textile workers) because of its strong feminist and anti-caste stance. The TLA represented workers of the organized sector who was mostly upper caste men. On the other hand SEWA’s members were mostly Dalit women. In 1981 anti-reservation riots broke out in Ahmedabad where members of higher castes attacked Dalits. SEWA spoke out against these atrocities, whereas the TLA remained silent. TLA did not appreciate the outspokenness of SEWA and shortly thereafter expelled it from its fold (Rose, 1992).

By the 1980s influenced by the radical student movements in the country, the Naxalite movement, as well as the growth of the women’s movement informal women workers in other sectors began to mobilize themselves by forming collectives and unions (Chhachhi and Pittin, 1996; Gothoskar, 1997; Agarwala, 2013). Women workers in the textiles, jute, fisheries, *beedi*, cashew and coir industries, home-based workers and own account workers began to form organisations that not only dealt with the immediate

problems surrounding their working and living conditions but also recognized their struggles for dignity and justice.

Following from SEWA a few years later the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Union (1979) formed a women's wing to encourage women construction workers to participate in union activities. Following this the Kerala Fishworkers Union (1981) established an autonomous women's committee within the union in 1988 to counter the lack of women's leadership positions within the main union (Gandhi, 1996; Vijayan, 1997; Nayak, 1990). Women began to take up important roles in peasant struggles in Maharashtra and the mine workers struggles in Madhya Pradesh (Shramshakti, 1988). With the growth of the women's movement and the mushrooming of independent women's organizations, the major mainstream trade union federations, such as CITU, HMS, INTUC, AITUC and BMS⁵ gradually began to form women's wings (ibid). However they were still reluctant to begin organizing workers in the informal economy.

Over the last 25-30 years India has witnessed the mushrooming of a number of independent organizations of women in the informal economy, many of which have sprung from spontaneous mobilization of women against oppressive forces, particularly those threatening their livelihoods (Nayak, 2013). Informal workers have organized in a variety of ways including trade unions, workers' associations outside the formal trade union movement, cooperatives, community based organizations, local, national and transnational networks and federations (Bonner and Spooner, 2012; Agarwala, 2013). The forms and methods by which these workers have organized are varied and innovative, reflecting their multiple lived realities.

Trade unions for example have been formed when it has been extremely important for women to validate a worker identity and get legal redress for labour rights violations (Gothoskar, 1997; Jhabvala 1997; Chen et al., 2007; Kabeer et al., 2013). Often in cases where injustices due to stigma, lack of recognition and respect have been rife, then legitimacy as a worker has been a secondary issue leading to NGOs or collectives being formed (Chen et al, 2007; Kabeer et al., 2013). Similarly, when workers have required mobilization and campaigning they have formed networks, federations and alliances at

⁵ Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)

local, national and international levels (Carre et al., 2000). These varied organizational forms pose a ‘counter hegemonic’ alternative (Naples, 2002, p.10), to the lack of interest by formal Unions in incorporating the issues of these informal workers.

Collectively these organizations make up ‘membership-based organizations of the poor’ (MBOPs) (Chen et al., 2007). MBOPs symbolize a departure from traditional membership based organizations (mainstream formal sector trade unions, co-operatives, political parties etc.) in that the vast majority of their membership-base are poor, and that their governance structure responds to the needs and aspirations of these poor members (Chen et al., 2007). In addition the express aim of MBOPs is to represent the voices of some of the most marginalized and disenfranchised groups, attempt to change policy, foster expression and debate and build individual capacity by bringing improvements to the self-esteem, economic and social wellbeing of their members (Roever, 2007). Thus MBOPs not only struggle for the right to livelihoods, social protection, better conditions of work, regulation and legal protection for their members but also for ‘intangible’ gains like respect, recognition and dignity (Rowbotham and Mitter 1994; Chen et al., 2007; Kabeer et al., 2013).

1.4 Research Questions

The literature however seems to reflect that even though women are joining such organizations and benefitting in a variety of ways significant inequality exists in their personal lives. These gender-specific constraints are many and include: women having to perform all care work, having to take primary responsibility for domestic chores often at the cost of rest and leisure (Kandiyoti, 2000; Ghosh, 2009), the secondary status (both social and in their own perceptions) attached to their earnings, husbands usurping their wives earnings (Irudayam et al., 2011; Kabeer, et al., 2013), resistance (often physical) they might face from male family members when they go out to earn a living for their family (Kabeer, 2000), cultural restrictions on their mobility, and facing the wrath of men and elders in the community when they challenge gender roles and stereotypes within the home or community (Cornwall, 2002; Kabeer, et al., 2013).

My research attempts to explore however whether joining such organizations might have an impact on the existing gender inequality in women’s lives within their homes?

Does empowerment outside the home, trickle into the home? What are the pathways of change? At present there is limited literature that talks about how being part of such organizations might impact intra-household gender relations (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006; Hill, 2010; Kabeer, 2011; Kabeer et al., 2011). In addition the processes through which such transformations occur within the home, including how men react to such changes is an area which needs significantly more study.

It is in attempt to fill part of this gap that I have embarked upon this research. I study a labour organization, in particular a trade union of self-employed wastepickers, to explore whether membership of this trade union has any impact on the intra-household gender relations of its women members.

The core questions that inform my research study are: How might working women's affiliations to a labour organisation impact on their identity, consciousness and sense of self as a worker, as a citizen and as a person? Might these changes translate into a greater capacity and willingness to bring about desired forms of change in the marital relationship? Under what circumstances are husband's likely to respond positively to these changes in women and what might help to explain their resistance? It is these questions that I endeavour to answer by choosing the KKPKP as the site for my study.

1.5 A Case Study of an Organization of Informal Women Workers

My research will focus on one such membership based organization of the poor, namely a trade union of wastepickers situated in Pune, India known as the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP).⁶ My relationship with the union goes back to 2008 when I began working with them on issues of health advocacy. Over a period spanning almost three years I gained valuable insights into the day to day functioning of the union and the formidable scope of its work. What struck me the most however was that the KKPKP seemed to be an organization that was run by its mostly illiterate, Dalit women wastepickers. These women demonstrated a unique sense of ownership over the union, and it soon became obvious that wastepickers perceptions of issues were central to the running of the organization. Most wastepickers whom I interacted with during the course of these few years genuinely believed that the union 'belonged' to them and that

⁶This literally translates into Paper, Glass, Metal/Scrap Workers Union

they were part of a social movement that was much broader than their everyday struggles at work. These wastepickers not only demonstrated an intuitive understanding of their position as Dalit women wastepickers within a highly structured, hierarchical and fragmented society; but they also countered this position through nuanced articulations of their rights to dignity, justice and citizenship. Another defining feature of the KKPKP was the close, enduring and reciprocal relationships (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004), which had been built not only between wastepickers themselves, but between staff-members and wastepickers.

It is for this reason that I, along with so many wastepickers and staff of the KKPKP, were stunned when Sunita (mentioned in the introduction) decided to end her life. Why was a woman who had the confidence to stand up to injustice in her workplace, not able to do the same when faced with violence within her home? Why did not the strength, self-confidence and aggression that she demonstrated regularly in protest marches, meetings and sit-ins with government officials have an impact on her ability to successfully negotiate intra-household tensions? It is these questions that provide the rationale for my research.

1.5.1 Wastepickers: Life before the Union

Wastepickers (also known as ragpickers) are self-employed workers who retrieve paper, plastic, metal, wood and glass from garbage bins that are provided by the municipalities for the disposal of garbage on the street, and from landfill sites where the collected garbage is transported and dumped. They constitute a crucial segment of the urban poor⁷ and play an important though often unrecognized role in resource recovery and the management of urban solid waste (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004; Samson, 2009).

From my interviews I found that most wastepickers had come to Pune in the 1970s after a drought in eastern Maharashtra (Vidharba). They came from families belonging to the lowest caste groups they had been working primarily as landless labourers for wealthy landowners. Following a drought, entire families had shifted to Pune desperately in search of work in order to feed themselves. Women from these families took up

⁷In India it is estimated that there are 1.5 million wastepickers, primarily women from socially marginalized groups (Chaturvedi, 2010).

wastepicking as it was more lucrative than domestic work and relatively free from sexual harassment unlike wage labour. However the conditions of work were miserable. Women had to work extremely long hours to secure good quality scrap. Typically a wastepicker would begin her day at 4am and walk long distances (10-12 kilometres a day) carrying heavy loads. Several women travelled to nearby towns by bus and train to collect waste. Irrespective of where women picked waste, the conditions of work were appalling. Women were forced to jump into garbage receptacles on the sides of the road. In these large garbage bins they often had to fend off dogs, pigs and cats and ‘fight’ over waste. Frequently they were cut by glass or metal shards, or pricked by needles.

In addition to these inhumane conditions wastepickers also faced severe harassment from policemen, municipal authorities and watchmen. Citizens viewed them suspiciously, the police accused them of theft and municipal workers and watchmen demanded bribes (in cash and kind) in exchange for access to waste. ‘Scavengers’, ‘dirty’ and ‘thieves’ are the words that best describe how different sections of society looked upon waste pickers (Bhaskar and Chikarmane, 2012). There was no recognition of wastepicking as work, and wastepickers as workers worthy of dignity and rights. Furthermore being *Dalit*⁸, wastepickers were routinely faced with caste-based discrimination and exclusion in accessing education, food (through the government mandated public-distribution system) and caste related concessions (such as ration-cards) (Narula, 1999; Thorat and Lee, 2006)⁹.

At home too, the conditions were no better. Most women had been married at a very young age and had moved into their husbands home which in most cases was far away from their natal families. Several husbands were alcoholic and abusive, and many men

⁸ Wastepickers are almost exclusively Dalits, more specifically the Mahar and the Matang sub-castes. They rank the lowest within the urban occupational hierarchy, even within the informal economy (Chikarmane et al., 2001).

⁹ According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 2000, approximately 75% of Dalit girls drop out of primary school despite showing keen academic aptitude. Reasons for this are primarily poverty or to escape humiliation, bullying and isolation by classmates, society, and teachers (Thind, 2000). A study by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies on Dalit experiences within the Public Distribution System (PDS) in 531 villages across 5 states (Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) of India found that Dalits routinely faced discrimination in regards to the quantity of goods given out in PDS shops (40%), prices (28%), and favouritism to higher-castes by dominant-caste PDS dealers (48%) (Thorat and Lee, 2006). Anecdotal accounts of Dalit wastepickers in Pune highlight similar issues.

did not work at all post marriage. Several of these women then were sole bread-earners for their families. However despite working long hours, their earnings were meagre and women lived with the perpetual anxiety of not having enough to feed their children. Domestic violence was rife; understood as a 'normal' occurrence that was part of a woman's lot in life. Children did not go to school because they needed to work to supplement the family income, or because they did not have the necessary documentation to enrol.

1.5.2 KKPKP: The Beginnings

With the inception of the Trade Union of Wastepickers (KKPKP) a lot of this changed. Established in 1993, and currently with over 10,000 wastepicker members the KKPKP is an example of women workers in the informal economy organizing to challenge hostile work conditions, protect their livelihoods and improve their lives. The KKPKP is the only trade union of waste pickers in the city of Pune and a majority of its members are illiterate, landless, *Dalits* living in the city's slums (Chikarmane et al., 2001; Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004). Ninety two per cent of these waste-pickers are women, 30 per cent of them are widowed and deserted and 50 per cent of them contribute more than fifty per cent of the household income. Only 8 per cent are literate.

Organizing wastepickers predated the formation of the union, and began as an effort of an Adult Education Program of a local university. At first middle-class, university educated activists came into contact with child wastepickers, who were accompanying their mothers to the Adult education centre. In order to better understand why these children were not in school the activists accompanied these children on their daily rounds of the garbage bins, only to realize that the un-segregated nature of scrap left children no time to go to school. This led to them to campaign for source segregation of garbage in a selected neighbourhood. The collection of source segregated scrap offered children better working conditions and more time for 'education'. Inspired by this, the mothers of these children, who were also wastepickers, decided to send their children to school and collect the segregated scarp themselves. Their earnings improved dramatically because source segregated scrap fetched better rates, reduced their hours of work and improved the actual physical conditions of their labour. A few months later these activists mobilized the same group of wastepickers to protest against an

entrepreneur who wanted to usurp local wastepickers livelihoods by offering services to collect garbage directly from citizens' doorsteps. This would have meant that the garbage bins in the area would potentially be empty, and consequently wastepickers would earn nothing. A 'bin *chipko andolan*¹⁰' ensued, and the entrepreneur withdrew. This was the first of many victories for this group of wastepickers.

After realizing that it was their collective action that had saved the day, these wastepickers began encouraging other wastepickers, like themselves, to join their group. In 1993 a first of a kind convention of wastepickers was organized in Pune, where over 800 wastepickers attended. Here, for the first time ever they collectively voiced their grievances. For women wastepickers in Pune at that point, their major concern was the relentless harassment they had been facing from the police. Arbitrarily being picked up and accused of thieving, having to bribe policemen to prevent arrest or gain permission to pick waste, and the general indignity of their lives were the grievances that wastepickers spoke about at the convention.

This critical mass of wastepickers became the basis on which it was decided at this gathering to form an organization of wastepickers and register it as a trade union. The choice of registering the KKPKP as a trade union served a dual purpose. It underscored KKPKP's vision of establishing scrap collection as "economically productive, socially relevant, and environmentally beneficial work" (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004, p. 2), and consequently sought to recognize wastepickers as 'workers'. At this convention it was also affirmed that the union would use collective action to challenge the injustice, marginalization and isolation that wastepickers had been facing. They would always employ non-violent methods while challenging these systemic injustices. In addition to ensure financial self-sufficiency (Chen et al., 2007), it was also decided that the members would pay a nominal annual fee to support the running of the organisation. And with this the KKPKP was born.

¹⁰Wastepickers held onto garbage bins and refused to let them be carted away by local municipal authorities. This strategy draws upon the Chipko Movement of the 1970s in Uttar Pradesh, India. The movement was essentially an organized resistance to the destruction of forests in which villagers hugged the trees, and prevented the contractors' from felling them. The Chipko movement is widely acclaimed for the high numbers of women who participated in it, as well as for its non-violent Gandhian strategy.

1.5.3 Organizational Culture: Vision and Structure

Since its inception KKP KP has pushed for recognition, rights and better working conditions for wastepickers using a combination of mass mobilization and development activities like a scrap store or a credit union (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004). Underlying these interventions are what Crowley et al. (2007, p. 216) refer to as an “explicit code of moral conduct” driven by the principles of non-violence, democratic participation, honesty, accountability and equality. The KKP KP believes in non-violent and active forms of protest reflecting Gandhi’s concept of *satyagraha* (i.e conscious resistance while holding on to the truth). Furthermore it believes in secular democratic political processes and is not a member of any political party. Social transformation is understood by the KKP KP as a process rather than a one-time event, driven by the understanding that the means and the ends of the struggle are inextricably linked (Eschle, 2001, p. 96; Bickham Mendez, 2005, p. 224). Organizing women workers is then both the aim of the KKP KP, as well as its most powerful instrument of change (Hill, 2010).

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of the KKP KP is the centrality of wastepickers voices in the process of organizing. As described by one of the founder activists, “Waste-pickers and their perceptions of issues were central in the organising process....the reality of the present, and the ongoing process of reflection and analysis enabled them to crystallise the critical issues that are so important in process of organising” (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004, p. 1). According to the founder-activists of the KKP KP poor women workers are encouraged to critically reflect upon their life situation, analyze it, and ask questions. It is through this process that women begin to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions (Rowlands, 1995). By fostering the capacities of wastepickers the KKP KP has ensured that over time these women have assumed a major role in the governance and management of the organization.

The union places a strong emphasis on ownership of the organization by its members and encourages them to hold their elected leaders accountable. The governing board of the union is made up of three middle-class activists and eight wastepickers (six women

and two men). However decision making is the main responsibility of the representative council consisting of 80 wastepicker representatives; 75 women and 5 men who are informally elected. It is this decentralized leadership body which meets every month to deliberate issues, plan and review progress. Decision's within the union and in the council meetings are made through a process of consensus building (instead of majority vote), highlighting the union's efforts towards consultation, negotiation and open discussion. Wastepickers are encouraged to articulate their opinions and question norms, values, hierarchies and power structures both within the organization and outside.

Though the vast majority of KKPKP's members are the working poor, as mentioned above there are a few middle-class activists who work in the union. Over the years these university educated activists have played an important role in the formation and growth of the organization by providing technical and managerial support including applying for external funding , generating policy relevant information, gaining access to policy discussions and finding entry points into the government (Chen et al., 2007; deHaan and Sen, 2007; Roever, 2007). These activists have been very conscious about their different (higher) social and economic backgrounds, and also acknowledge their limited understanding of wastepickers life worlds (see Chikarmane and Narayan, 2013). When differences have arisen between wastepickers and activists (over issues like child labour or child marriage) the organizational culture of discussion, debate, openness and disagreement has enabled them to arrive at meaningful decisions.

1.5.4 Organizational Issues and Strategies

KKPKP conceptualizes social transformation as a process rather than a one –time event, driven by the understanding that the means and the ends of their struggle are inextricably linked (Eschle, 2001; Bickham Mendez, 2005). Since its inception the union has mobilized around economic, social and political issues, with a focus on developing the capacity of its wastepicker members so that they can lay claim to State entitlements and resources.

In the formative years of the KKPKP, recognition of wastepicking as 'work', and wastepickers as 'workers', issues around child labour, and school enrolment of

wastepicker's children were key issues that union members organized around (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004). The KKPKP spearheaded the struggle for recognition of wastepickers as "workers" and scrap collection as "socially relevant, economically productive and environmentally beneficial work" (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2000,p.3). These demands were put forth in 1993 by means of several public demonstrations in which thousands of members participated. Two years later, the Pune Municipal and Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporations conceded to the demand and became the first municipalities in the country to officially register (through the KKPKP) and endorse the identity cards of waste-pickers in recognition of their contribution to the management of urban solid waste. Based on these ID cards designating them as workers, the KKPKP argued that children of wastepickers be included in the Central government scheme for 'Scholarships to Children of those Engaged in Unclean Occupations'. This ensured that wastepickers children were provided the resources necessary to attend school, and could therefore step out of wastepicking themselves.

In addition to entitlements in education, the KKPKP has used State recognition of wastepickers to demand other resources as well. In recognition of the contribution of wastepickers to the city's economy, the KKPKP has demanded health insurance for wastepickers, highlighting the fact that the back-breaking work of segregating garbage saved the municipality millions of rupees every month. At present the KKPKP is spearheading a campaign that demands social security for unorganized sector workers across the country. The Union also runs a savings co-operative, where women can save money, access loans and earn interest. This is especially significant in light of the fact that most banks refuse loans to the poor and local money lenders charge extortionately large amounts of interest. Recently the Union has extended itself to form a co-operative, SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling), which provides door-to-door collection of garbage services in the city of Pune. SWaCH has transformed the image of a wastepicker as one who rummages through 'garbage' to a dignified service provider (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2000).

In addition to mobilizing around economic issues, the KKPKP has had to continuously challenge caste and gender based exploitation and harassment faced by wastepickers in their everyday lives. This includes harassment and extortion by policemen, violence and threats by security guards, and exploitation by scrap dealers in their workplaces. In

addition wastepickers routinely have to face caste-based discrimination, a good example of which is their inability to obtain good quality grains through the public distribution system (PDS). Collective mobilization against these injustices has involved speaking out against such harassment, confronting perpetrators, public shaming of corrupt PDS distributors and petitions to the government to improve access to and quality of PDS services.

Over the last two decades due to the presence of the KKPKP there have been significant changes in the lives of wastepickers in Pune. Most importantly there have been important shifts in societal perceptions towards waste pickers (Bhaskar and Chikarmane, 2012). While earlier they were called ‘thieves’ and ‘scavengers’ today they are looked at as workers and service providers. In addition there is growing recognition of the work that wastepickers do (Bhaskar and Chikarmane, 2012; Chikarmane and Narayan, 2013), an improvement in their conditions of work, access to health care (Scott, 2010), elimination of child labour in wastepicking (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004), and securing wastepickers rights as citizens (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2013).

The processes through which these changes have come about reflect the creativity, flexibility and adaptability of the organization’s strategies. Often the union has resorted to confrontational tactics, like protests marches, demonstrations and public interest litigations to collectively mobilize around and draw attention to issues. In addition to the more direct confrontational tactics the KKPKP has drawn on negotiation, bargaining and lobbying as its main ‘weapons’. KKPKP uses “resources offered by culture, discourse and information” (Kabeer et al., 2013, p. 16), to work within exploitative institutional structures and challenge them continuously (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992; Cohen and Arato, 1994; Alvarez et al., 1998). For instance the union used a popular local festival to challenge the trickle-down theory of development and highlight hierarchies of caste, class and gender. In this festival an earthen pot is filled with curd and cash and suspended from a rope at a considerable height. This has to be reached by men and women by forming a human pyramid; thus signifying that the man at the top gets the bounty by standing on the shoulder(s) of those below him.

Another effective strategy used by the union is to challenge mainstream discourse about wastepickers and their work. For instance to substantiate their claim that wastepickers were contributing substantially to the economy (and were not thieves) often at the cost of their own health, the union conducted a series of micro-studies and used the results of the research to advocate for wastepicker concerns at local, state and national levels. In 2000 the ILO commissioned a formal study through which it was calculated that wastepickers saved the municipal corporation nearly \$330,000 annually in transport costs alone. In addition each wastepicker contributed \$5 of unpaid labour a month to the municipality. At the same time the union conducted a study, which found that a significant number of waste-pickers suffered from occupation related musculo-skeletal problems, respiratory and gastro-intestinal ailments (Chikarmane et al., 2001). On the basis of these studies the union fought for and managed to obtain health insurance for its wastepicker members, paid for by the municipal corporation.

Irrespective of the strategies being used the union's focus has always been on stimulating reflection and analysis among its members and ensuring their full involvement in the process of change. During my three years working with the KKPKP it became obvious that it was union members themselves who were responsible for articulating demands, organizing fellow wastepickers, conducting meetings and developing long term agendas for the union. In addition wastepickers were at the forefront in demonstrations, protest marches and meetings with government officials. Although the middle class educated activists helped wastepickers gain access to various parts of the State machinery, it was these 'uneducated, illiterate' wastepickers themselves who argued their case and put forth their demands.

It is my argument that the processes by which wastepickers of the KKPKP have secured rights for themselves have clearly led to a range of changes in women's sense of self. In particular I explore the following questions: Did being part of the union affect women's ability to re-negotiate existing unequal intra-household gender relations? If so, what were the processes through which these changes came about?

Given that a majority of the wastepickers in the KKPKP are Dalit (those of the lowest caste in the Indian caste hierarchy) these questions need to be addressed within existing

kinship and family structures that determine existing gender relations in the home. This is what the following chapter attempts to do.

2. CONCEPTUALIZING FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND GENDER RELATIONS

A prerequisite to understanding the conditions under which both men and women display resistance or respond positively to attempted changes within the home is to explore the meanings they attach to being part of a family. This chapter examines existing literature on kinship and family structures of the Dalit wastepickers who informed my study in order to understand existing intra-household gender relations, and possibilities of change. It argues that by positioning Dalit intra-household gender relations solely in *opposition* to upper-caste gender relations one loses sight of the fluidity and contradictions inherent within existing Dalit households. It is only through identifying these nuances and complexities of patriarchy as they manifest within Dalit homes that we can begin conceptualizing opportunities for change.

2.1 Family and Kinship in India: The North South Divide

The family has often been theorized as an institution that is characterized by conflict and co-operation, where men and women's interests are both separate and intertwined and where allocations are often unequal and affected by differential bargaining power (Sen, 1990). The notion of entitlement i.e. who has access and control over strategic resources, to food and health care, to education, authority and decision making is determined to a large extent by the norms, ideologies and values that are rooted in kinship systems (Dube, 1997; Kabeer, 2011).

In general scholars have noted that within the Indian context there exists a historical consistency of dichotomous kinship structures and women's autonomy between the North and South of India (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Dube and Palriwala, 1990). While North Indian kinship patterns cover the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana, South Indian kinship systems are prevalent in the Southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, as well as the Eastern states of West Bengal and Orissa (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Karve, 1993).

Differences between North Indian and South Indian kinship systems include customs and ideologies around the way women are viewed and treated, women's entitlements and their rights to resources (Uberoi, 1993). Kinship structures in northern India are very similar to what has been described by Kandiyoti (1988) as 'classic patriarchy'. Under this model of patriarchy women are bound by extremely restrictive codes of behaviour both before and after marriage. Marriage is village and lineage exogamous and caste endogamous. At the time of marriage dowry is paid to the husband's family and after marriage women move to their husband's homes (Karve, 1953; Dyson and Moore, 1983; Uberoi, 1993). Therefore when a young girl enters her husband's home she is essentially an 'outsider' who "is viewed as a threat..(whose) behavior must be closely watched; ...(and) must be re-socialized so that she comes to identify her own interests with those of her husband's kin" (Dyson and Moore, 1983, p. 44). Furthermore since marriage is patrilocal, young women do not have support systems they can access or fall back on in case of problems. Within these north Indian kinship structures husband's who are the 'wife-takers' (instead of the wife-givers), and are the receivers of substantial dowry have an automatically higher status within the conjugal bond. The bride's family are considered socially and ritually inferior to the groom. Just like in classic patriarchy, a husband's honour and reputation (and that of his family) depends upon his wife's chastity. Thus female sexuality is tightly controlled, and there are several restrictions placed on women's mobility. Seclusion of women (purdah) is common practice. Since patterns of descent and inheritance are all dependent on the male line there is considerable pressure for women to give birth to male heirs, which not only increases their standing within the family and society but also provides security to the woman in her old age.

In contrast in south India, classic patriarchy is less visible in its manifestations, though not absent. Within kinship systems in the south endogamous marriage is preferred, with the ideal marriage being between cross-cousins (Karve, 1953; Dyson and Moore, 1983; Kapadia, 1995). At the time of marriage bridewealth is usually paid to the new bride and the practice of dowry is not very common. Since women are married to men within their family they are more likely to be able to interact with their natal kin. Unlike north Indian kinship structures which value hypergamy, in south India social and ritual equality exists between affinally related kin. Men are as likely to enter into social, and economic relations with other males with whom they are related by marriage (i.e.,

affines) as they are with males with whom they are related by blood (i.e., by descent). Since affinity is as important as descent, affective relations between husbands and wives do not pose any threat to relations of descent, and there is a greater indifference to the sex of a child. In addition women's chastity is less important, and both the woman's sexuality and her personal movements are less rigidly controlled. Restrictions on women are less overt, and seem at first to involve no seclusion of women. For instance, in south India women appear on the streets and for public functions, and work outside the home is an expected and regular part of a woman's domestic role especially for lower-income women (Dube and Palriwala, 1990; Lessinger, 1990).

These dichotomous representations of gender relations, present a model which emphasizes female autonomy to be associated largely with South India, and to a less extent with regions in the North. Scholars however have critiqued these cultural models of representation. For instance Dyson and Moore themselves (1983) acknowledge that differences in female autonomy between kinship systems in the North and South of India are 'subtle' (ibid, fn. 31) and in some cases 'slight' (ibid, p. 44). This point is further elucidated by Vera-Sanso (1999) who responding to the dichotomous characterization of North/South India kinship patterns by Dyson and Moore (1983) points out that while kinship patterns and marriage *preferences* might be different between North and South India, in general variations in *female autonomy* might not be so stark.

Empirically Lessinger's (1990) work with women market traders in Madras, India has shown that within South India kinship systems a woman is considered inferior to her brothers, father and husband, and must go to great lengths to prove her honour. For instance a subtle form of male/female separation exists so that both inside the household and outside men and women avoid direct interaction with one another, and the simultaneous use of the same public space. If the sexes must mingle, women (and not men) need to arrange for a 'chaperone'; usually meaning a male relative who accompanies a woman on errands and trips outside the home. In addition there was a strong class aspect to the manifestation of these conventions, with the more affluent classes going to greater lengths to adhere to and preserve them (Lessinger, 1990). Similarly, Vera-Sanso (1995) in a study of two low income settlements in the same city

notes that restrictions on occupational choice of women resembled attitudes to female employment in North India (see Vera-Sanso, 1995).

Similarly Rahman and Rao's (2004) study across Karnataka in South India, and Uttar Pradesh in North India found that marriage preferences across North and South India appeared to be similar in that women in the North did not live any further from their natal kin than women in the South, and women in the South paid dowries that were just as high as those paid by women in the North. In addition with respect to female autonomy they found that despite the assertion that exogamous marriages in North India caused women to lose the "protection" of their own family, endogamous marriage practices which are common in South India did not always ensure the fair and equal treatment of women. For instance marrying an uncle or an older male within the family often resulted in even greater restrictions on a woman's autonomy due to power hierarchies between uncle and niece.

What these examples show us is that women's experiences of patriarchy are dissimilar across geographical location. Therefore rather than *region* as the principal demarcation of female autonomy; caste, class, demography, religion and property ownership are more likely to determine women's agency within the Indian context (Sangari, 1995; Vera-Sanso, 1999). In this thesis I focus particularly on the role of *caste* in mediating how patriarchy manifests itself.

2.2 Caste and Gender Relations

In an Indian context the subordination of women draws not only from patriarchy but also from caste (Dube, 1988; Kapadia, 1995; Ramanathan et al., 2000; Irudayam et al., 2011). For the purpose of this research I will be focusing specifically on patriarchy as it manifests within lower caste communities¹¹, in particular within Dalit households.

The literature on North and South Indian kinship systems cited above has been critiqued for reflecting the position of upper caste women in family, marriage and kinship networks (Desai and Krishnaraj, 1987). As noted by Neera Desai and Maithreyi

¹¹ This term includes Other Backward Castes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes.

Krishnaraj “research of indologists, sociologists, social historians, anthropologists particularly from the pre-independence period provided descriptions of positions of middle class/elite women” (Desai and Krishnaraj 1987, p. 7). ‘Brahminical patriarchy’ (Chakravarty, 1993), as it has come to be known largely invisibilizes experiences of patriarchy as experienced by lower caste women. This lack of attention paid to intra-household gender relations in lower caste families has meant that there is still a great deal of debate about the nature and structure of gender relations in lower caste households, especially within Dalit households.

Furthermore, an attempt to create a more nuanced understanding of how gender relations play out in the lives of Dalit men and women is hindered because of a constant tension between two meta-narratives in kinship literature. On one hand there exist accounts that present Dalit women as sexually liberated and economically independent, free from the patriarchal constraints of upper-caste women (see Kapadia, 1995; Ilaiah, 1996; Lakshmanan, 2004). On the other hand scholars have presented accounts of the Dalit woman as sexually and economically oppressed, especially within the home where they face high levels of domestic violence¹² (Khare, 2000; Irudayam et al., 2011). Recently however scholars like Paik (2009) and Rao (2015) have attempted to bridge these positions and argue that Dalit women’s agency and corresponding intra-household gender relations are contextual, fluid and dynamic in response to “changing experiences, positionalities and subjectivities” (Rao, 2015, p.410).

2.2.1 Dalit women and the Construction of the Autonomous Subject

A common feature of the writings of some mainstream feminist and Dalit scholars (see Ilaiah, Kapadia, 1995; Ilaiah, 1996; Lakshmanan, 2004), has been a near romantic description of Dalit women’s everyday lives. As stated by Lakshmanan (2004) in his research in a village in Tamil Nadu “It is by now a well-established fact that subordinated groups and communities, due to various cultural reasons, have much better or relatively better gender relationships than the dominant castes. Studies have proved that women from Dalit and marginalised sections enjoy a relatively more

¹² It has been argued that the construction of ethnic identities based on linguistic or cultural differences can be seen as a product of an active attempt to create an opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This construction of the ‘Other’ is a primary constituent of ethnic identity (see Barth, 1969).

autonomous status than their counterparts of the dominant castes” (Lakshmanan, 2004, p. 1090). In general the sexuality of upper-caste women is tightly controlled to ensure reproduction of legitimate heirs and maintenance of caste purity in an effort to maintain and control property within a caste-group (Jeffrey and Jeffrey 1994; Dube, 2003). These women typically face strict regulation of their sexuality and labour, both productive and reproductive, often through the practice of seclusion or *purdah* (Liddle and Joshi, 1986; Chakravarty, 1996).

In contrast, there exists a substantial amount of empirical literature that strongly argues that lower caste communities are more egalitarian evidenced by Dalit women’s equality with men in areas such as sexuality, speech, physical mobility, choice of work and control over household income (Kapadia, 1995; Ramanathan et al., 2000). A comment by Liddle and Joshi in their research on seclusion within Indian society elucidates this point of view. “Lower caste women, by contrast, experience far fewer controls over their physical freedom. The economic benefits and the social constraints of seclusion are unknown to them. Sati was never demanded of them, widowhood was no curse, divorce was allowed in many lower-caste communities and widows and divorced people could re-marry without disgrace” (Liddle and Joshi 1986, p. 91). Furthermore a Dalit woman does not perform certain customs like worshipping the husbands’ feet or addressing her husband and elders with veneration (Pawar, 1994; Ilaiah, 1996).

Dalit women notably are known to be more independent, with their mobility and participation in economic activities increasing as they move down the caste hierarchy¹³. In many instances women are the primary bread-earners of their families (Kapadia,

¹³ Scholars such as Lessinger (1990) and Vera-Sanso (2000) point out that despite this rhetoric about women’s autonomy increasing as they move down the caste hierarchy, among intermediate-caste working-class women, female chastity continues to remain a large concern. In particular their studies implicitly critique narratives which point to lower-caste women’s unfettered mobility and access to the market. For example, Lessinger’s study with lower-caste working class women in Madras highlights the contradictory ideological pressure women face when making decisions about employment. On one hand, poverty compels women to work. On the other hand poor, lower-caste women are forced to fend off accusations of infidelity and loss of ‘virtue’ when gaining access to the public sphere (see Lessinger, 1990). Similarly Vera-Sanso (2000) provides empirical evidence to show that workforce participation of intermediate-caste women from low-income settlements in Chennai is mediated by the impact of their work on family reputation. In an attempt to *prove* female chastity women have to *convince* their households and outsiders that they work simply out of necessity and to meet a shortfall. Working-class women’s mobility through economic participation cannot then be taken for granted. What both these studies highlight is that in some cases the practices of poor, intermediate-caste women might differ from those of their Dalit counterparts.

1995; Ramanathan et al., 2000). The labour contribution of poor women to the household (Searle-Chatterjee 1981; Kapadia, 1995; Deliege, 1997), in turn contributes to the egalitarian nature of marital relations among lower caste men and women. Searle-Chatterjee's (1981) study of sweepers in North India found that the sweeper women who earned higher wages than their husbands, controlled household finances, and also expected an egalitarian distribution of chores within the home. In addition unlike upper-caste women who bound by norms of seclusion remain vulnerable and economically dependent, Dalit women always have their labour power to exchange in return for the safety and security of a family (Kapadia, 1995; Ilaiah, 1996; Ramanathan et al., 2000).

It is suggested that Dalit women have far more sexual liberation than upper caste women. Ethnographies of lower caste women describe how Dalit communities permit divorce and remarriage, and Dalit women have greater sexual autonomy (Parry, 1979; Kapadia, 1995; Deliege 1997). Deliege (1997) in his study of the Paraiyar caste in Tamil Nadu found that it was perfectly acceptable for both husband and wife to have multiple sexual partners. Speaking of one such couple he states, "*Karuppaya has had a rather tumultuous love life. He had an affair before his marriage to Selambai. After his marriage he did not break off his relationship with his mistress at all, and it seems that his wife was not much more virtuous.*" (ibid, p.224) The couple separated later on, with the husband re-marrying for the third time. Deliege does not mention what became of Selambai though he does mention that in cases of separation it is perfectly normal for a woman to go back to her parents' home and live there. The assumption here is that Dalit women experience some degree of freedom from monogamous middle class values, as compared to women of the upper castes.

This is also evidenced by empirical research that has found that in general Dalit women do not take physical abuse from their husbands quietly and often retaliate (Kapadia, 1995; Khare, 2000; Rege, 2006). This is quite unlike women from upper-castes who often remain silent in the face of extreme abuse so as to not bring shame upon and dishonour their families (Kapadia, 1995; Ramanathan et al., 2000). Among Dalit women "the "beaten wife has the right to make the attack public by shouting, abusing the husband and if possible beating the husband in return" (Ilaiah, 1996, pp.26-35). They might leave their husbands home temporarily, taking their children, effectively abandoning their husbands for certain lengths of time. Their return to the natal family is

accepted because they are seen as having a right to come home plus they bring their labour value with them (Kapadia, 1995; Grover, 2011). Upper-caste women on the other hand have no such right (Kapadia, 1995; Ramanathan et al., 2000). An attribute then of Dalit women's 'freedom' is that they usually protest against abuse instead of remaining silent; silence being a feature commonly attributed to upper caste women.

2.2.2 Dalit women and the Construction of the Oppressed Subject

However such accounts of Dalit women being more "liberated" than upper caste women have recently been questioned by feminist scholars (see Pawade, 1998; Paik, 2009; Grover, 2011; Sujatha, 2014), who have objected quite strongly to the what they perceive as the "romanticizing of Dalit women's lives" (Paik, 2009, p. 40). Dalit male scholars (see Ilaiah, 1996), for instance have been questioned for their naive projection of egalitarian Dalit households where women have equal choice in decision making and their labour is valued as much as male labour (Sujatha, 2014). What the construction of this narrative of 'free, unfettered, Dalit women' has led to is the omission of a discussion of significant areas of oppression within the lives of these very women. One of these is the domestic violence that Dalit women face, often on a daily basis.

The National Family Health Survey – NFHS (2006) has showed that the prevalence of violence within the homes of women belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes (SC/ST) is much higher as compared to women outside these caste categories. The percentage of SC women facing physical violence in their homes is 41.7% while that of ST women is 39.3%. These figures are much higher than the levels of violence faced by all other women which stand at 26.8%. Additional empirical evidence suggests that Dalit women face significant levels of violence within their homes, particularly from their alcoholic husbands (Rege, 1995).

Despite this domestic violence faced by Dalit women has largely been considered an insignificant issue by both Dalit and non-Dalit scholars and activists for a number of different reasons. Firstly mainstream social movements like the women's movement and the Dalit movement have largely ignored the issues of Dalit women. The women's movement in India till recently, has been accused of being dominated by upper caste, middle-class, educated English speaking activists and scholars, and consequently

subsuming all women as a homogenous category (Sangari and Vaid, 1990; Tharu and Niranjana, 1994; Rege, 2004). Within the Dalit movement as well the interests of Dalit women have been ignored, often in favour of Dalit 'male power politics' (Khare, 2000; Rege, 2006). Issues of domestic violence for instance are looked upon as divisive and potentially harmful to the larger cause of Dalit emancipation. Gender has therefore becoming "a hidden issue, being glossed over in the interests of the community" (Paik, 2009, p. 41).

The second reason for the relative invisibilization of domestic violence in Dalit homes is because in the rare cases when intra-household violence faced by Dalit women is acknowledged it is co-opted into a broader framework of 'women's rights', 'dalit rights' or 'human rights'. This in turn ignores and denies the complex interplay of caste, gender and rights (Sujatha, 2014). Thirdly domestic violence faced by Dalit women tends to be overshadowed by emphasis on the violence that Dalit women face in the public sphere; such as the rape of Dalit women by men of the dominant castes, honour based killings and stripping (see Mason-John, 2008; Paik, 2009; Sujatha 2014).

It is only recently that Dalit human rights and women's groups have started documenting Dalit women's experiences of domestic violence (see V. Geetha, 2008; Irudayam et al., 2011; Sujatha, 2014). In addition recently published Dalit women's testimonies of the early 20th century provide a rich, textured and detailed source of knowledge about intra household gender relations in Dalit households across the country. These 'testimonies' highlight not only the nature of unequal gender relations and domestic abuse, but also its persistence across generations (see Pawar, 1994; Rege, 2006; Kamble, 2008).

For instance Baby Kamble autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* (Kamble, 2008) is probably the first autobiography of a Dalit woman in India and is considered a milestone in the history of Dalit writing. In her writings Kamble who belonged to a Dalit sub-caste (*Mahar*) describes the domestic violence Mahar women in her community had to face on a daily basis.

Husbands flogging their wives as if they were beasts, would do so until the sticks broke with the effort. The heads of these women would break open,

their backbones would be crushed, and some would collapse unconscious. But there was nobody to care for them. They had no food to eat, no proper clothing to cover their bodies; their hair would remain uncombed and tangled, dry from the lack of oil. Women led the most miserable existence. The entire day, the poor daughter-in-law would serve the entire household like a slave. When girls would run away from their in-laws home and go to her natal home—her brother and father would flog her mercilessly and ask the in-laws to take her back. Once she was brought back to her in-laws home, heavy logs of wood would be attached to her legs so that her mobility was severely restricted. The honour accorded to a family was directly proportional to the restrictions imposed on the women of that house. (Kamble, 2008, p. 5)

Talking about the relentless suspicion and physical abuse in her own marriage she says:

This was the life most women led. Every woman knew it by heart....Giving up one's husband and marrying another wouldn't solve the problem because the 'husbandness' would be the same in ever man. So I decided that I won't leave. (ibid, p.155)

Urmila Pawar in her autobiography *Aaydan* (1994) refutes the supposed emancipation of Dalit women and states that:

Along with caste based atrocities she (the Dalit woman) was also constantly under the threat of rape, in the family she had to tolerate the physical violence and other atrocities of men. A myth is harboured that unlike the brahman woman the Dalit woman is free from bondage and stifling restrictions. The pain of the devadasi, the deserted woman ... is ignored in this stand. In fact the woman in the household is yet to get recognition as a full and equal human being. (Pawar, 1994, pp. 84-85, 94)

What these narratives clearly indicate is that domestic violence perpetuated by male members of the family is a regular feature in lower caste families (Khare, 2000; Grover, 2011; Sujatha, 2014).

This view is supported by a recent study by Irudayam et al. (2011) across the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh in India. Narratives of five hundred Dalit women highlighted the high rates of prevalence of verbal and physical abuse. Forty four percent (n= 215) of the 500 Dalit women in the sample faced domestic violence at some point in their lives. Ninety-six percent of these women reported that their husbands routinely used abusive language that was derogatory, sexually explicit and/or directed at a woman's physical attributes or moral character. Seventy-five percent of women reported being physically assaulted at some point in their married lives, commonly with cooking instruments like knives, belts and shoes, bricks and stones, rope, fire or even chillies (ibid, p. 404). Thirty percent of the sample reported a combination of sexual harassment and marital rape (ibid, p. 452). Similarly Grover's research with scheduled caste communities in Delhi's slums found that women routinely faced physical abuse, alcohol related violence, high levels of suspicion, and sexual violence which were regular features of their marital life (Grover, 2011, p. 203).

In addition to domestic violence being rife in Dalit homes, another 'myth' about Dalit women that requires interrogation is the assumption that they have full access to the safety and security of their natal home, in case of violence or trouble in their marital home. Dalit women supposedly have a 'right' to come back to their parental home primarily because they bring their labour value along with them (Ramanathan et al., 2000; Grover, 2011). However empirical evidence provides a different story.

Urmila Pawar in her autobiography *Aaydan* (1994) speaks of her cousin sister Sushila and says:

Sushila's husband was a drunkard and her mother-in-law tortured her; but each time Sushila came home, (my) father would insist on sending her back after a good meal. Finally, Sushila died an untimely death under the pressure of the torture and ill-treatment. (Rege, 2006, p. 356)

Grover's nuanced ethnography of Dalit marriage and kinship structures in urban slums in New Delhi, India explains this further. In her research she found that the option lower caste women had of returning to their natal home afford support and refuge only for a short time. This was because in the long term it was unsustainable as their brothers

(who had their own families to take care of) began to consider the ‘returning’ sister as a burden. Over-staying in one’s natal home therefore, instead of being an assumed right, was something that required continual negotiation, and was not as straightforward as it seemed (Grover, 2011).

2.2.3 Dalit Gender Relations: A Different *kind* of patriarchy.

The accounts above call into question the portrayal of gender relations in Dalit households as decidedly ‘more’ egalitarian and less hierarchical than upper caste households. This stands in stark contrast to scholars who espouse the supposed equality and freedom that Dalit households offer their women. How might one reconcile these contradictory accounts of Dalit women’s lives?

Literature seems to indicate that there are largely two different schools of thought with regards to this matter. One group of scholars continue to suggest that Dalit households are essentially less hierarchical and more egalitarian than upper-caste homes, and attribute any changes taking place within existing gender relations to processes of *Sanskritization*¹⁴ or *Brahminization* (Srinivas, 1962; Kapadia, 1995; 2007; Irudayam et al., 2011). Another group of scholars point to the fluidity and contradictions inherent in Dalit gender relations and suggest that Dalit households are not ‘more’ or ‘less’ equal as compared to higher caste households, but instead embody a patriarchy that is unique to their caste group; i.e. a Dalit patriarchy.

Irudayam et al (2011) belonging to the first school of thought, attribute the high levels of violence in ‘egalitarian’ Dalit households to the assimilation of *brahminical* patriarchal ideologies in the hope of upward caste mobility. Drawing on this process of *sanskritization*, Irudayam et al. (2011) argue that the primary cause behind the erosion of the freedoms and the egalitarian character of lower-caste intimate relationships is lower caste groups emulating upper caste norms like control over women’s body,

¹⁴According to sociologist M. N Srinivas lower caste households emulate upper-caste norms in an effort to move upward in the *caste* hierarchy. This process, which he refers to as ‘*sanskritization*’, is a tool for the oppressed castes to claim for themselves the status and prestige of a higher-caste group. In addition according to Srinivas, *sanskritization* means “not only the adoption of new customs and habits, but also exposure to new ideas and values (which involves) the collective desire to rise high in esteem of friends, neighbours and rivals, and this should be followed by the adoption of methods by which the status of a group is raised” (Srinivas, 1962, pp. 48, 56, 57).

sexuality, resources and labour, acceptance of Dalit male superiority and authority within the family, practicing son preference and perpetration of gender based violence as a matter of male right.

Kapadia (1995) on the other hand while agreeing that lower-caste families emulate dominant caste norms, contends that the reason for this lies in an effort to achieve *class* superiority and not caste-hierarchy. Her research with low-caste families in rural Tamil Nadu elucidates in depth how these processes of change take place. In her study on gender, caste and kinship structures in a village in South India she found that those of the poorer caste (mainly Pallars) still demonstrated visible signs of equality and freedom. For instance Pallar women had a higher status and more independence post marriage due to the fact that usually married close-kin. In addition these women were not bound by strict norms governing their sexuality; for instance separation, divorce and remarriage was acceptable, easy and quick in the Pallar community and could be initiated by women as well as men. Women were generally valued highly because of their productive labour, which also afforded them refuge in their natal home in case of a breakdown in their marriage.

However what Kapadia found was over a period of time “the fundamental dynamics of gender relations among the Pallars were beginning to approximate those of the upper castes, in which men had more freedom to follow their inclinations and women had far few rights in customary law” (ibid, p. 42). Why did this happen? Kapadia attributes it to a process of ‘*Brahminization*’ in lower caste groups, who emulate upper caste behavioural norms in an effort to gain class mobility. In her research she found that class status was becoming exceedingly more important than caste status, and rural non-*brahmins* who were now far more concerned with becoming ‘urbanized’ and ‘modernized’ began to slowly ‘*brahminize* their customs’ (ibid, p. 47).

This occurred in two significant ways. Firstly young married girls were being withdrawn from paid agricultural work outside the home to signify ‘upward mobility’. This transformed them from “agricultural earners to semi-secluded housewives” (ibid, p. 66), not only lowering their economic value but also making them completely dependent on their husbands. With the loss of their productive labour women’s rights to temporary or permanent refuge in their natal home were also being lost. In addition men

began to imitate the upper class preoccupation with women's sexuality and control, thus severely limiting women's mobility. Secondly lower-caste families, emulating upper-caste behaviour gradually began educating their sons. These options were closed to most young girls. As a result of higher education, young lower-caste boys from the villages began stepping out of agriculture and into salaried employment. While this might seem to be an improvement in their lives, and indeed it is, this shift has also had a significant impact on existing gender and kinship norms. Firstly educated, employed young men are beginning to demand a dowry at the time of marriage, instead of agreeing to the traditional bride price. With marriages becoming more expensive for the bride's family, women's status is declining, increasing her vulnerability. Secondly the preoccupation with wealth has meant that traditional cross-kin marriages are being replaced by non-affinal marriages, where the focus is not on kinship relations but instead on how much the bridegroom earns. For young women this means that the support they could have expected from within cross-kin kinship structures is now absent, thus reducing their status and power within their husband's families.

Both Kapadia (1995) and Irudayam et al. (2011) suggest that lower-caste families have always been intrinsically less hierarchical, with women enjoying greater freedoms and a higher status within them. It is a desire to emulate the upper-caste, either to achieve caste-mobility (*sanskritization*), or gain social respect by rising in class status (*brahminization*) which has resulted in the fundamental erosions of these egalitarian gender norms.

However scholars such as Heyer (2014) and Still (2014) argue that changes in Dalit intra-household gender relations are not necessarily due to Sanskritization or Brahmanization. Using empirical data from a study on a Dalit community in western Tamil Nadu, Heyer (2014) found that during the period from the 1980s to the 2000s Dalit women had been gradually withdrawing themselves from agricultural labour to become 'housewives'. Heyer attributes this shift to factors other than an emulation of upper-caste groups, and instead focuses on the (limited) quality of work opportunities available to women, higher incomes brought home by men, increased availability of subsidized food and pensions as well as the improved social attitudes towards valuation of domestic work especially the attention paid towards children's education. It was a

combination of these factors that allowed women the opportunity to *choose* to give up lowly-paid work outside the home and instead become housewives.

Extending this line of thought Still (2014) argues that within the paradigm of Sanskritization and Brahminization such decisions by Dalit women (to withdraw from paid work) might be viewed as a “blind embrace of values that degrade them” (p. 9). However as she argues, Dalits do not just emulate the behaviours and customs of the dominant castes to ‘become like them’, but instead are actively reshaping and transforming these forms of behavior, so that they acquire new and different meanings. “*To be seen as more ‘civilized’ people, Dalits must act in a way that is recognizable to others; they must trade in the common currency. This means that Dalits use the same tools and symbols as other people but in using them to their own ends and giving them their own meaning, they change those tools as they use them.....In other words Dalit men and women Dalit-ise patriarchy*” (ibid, p. 11). Therefore as she explains, although women’s withdrawal from paid work might mean that they lose some of the freedoms that they once took for granted, they might now see these old freedoms as markers of backwardness, thereby reinterpreting what it means to work.

Having said this, what do such actions by Dalit women tell us about patriarchy in Dalit communities? Scholars, such as Chakravarty (2003), Paik (2009) and Rao (2015) argue that Dalit women experiences of patriarchy are “unique as well as shared” (Chakravarty, 2003, p. 88), and that Dalit women are neither completely ‘oppressed’, nor are they singularly ‘liberated’. Instead Dalit gender relations are “fluid, dynamic and intersecting in response to changing experiences, positionalities and subjectivities” (Rao, 2015, p. 410). Along these lines, Ciotti (2014) advocates for a reconstitution of Dalit women subjectivity in a way in which the difference between Dalit and upper-caste women is not assumed to be a given, but instead always remains a question. She cautions that “assuming Dalit women are ‘different’ by definition- and not documenting or unpacking that difference-turns them into *exceptional subjects*” (emphasis added; Ciotti, 2014, p. 307)

In unpacking this difference, Paik in an illuminating essay (2009) argues that it is the *nature* of Dalit women’s oppression that is different from that of Brahmin women and it is not a question of “less or more” (Paik, 2009, p. 45). Women under Dalit patriarchies

are no better or no worse than women under *brahmanical* (upper-caste) patriarchies; the difference only lies in the quality and form that patriarchal oppression takes. She argues that mainstream notions of patriarchy ignore the social, cultural and political “specificity that goes into the making of the dalit woman... and of the power relations and inequality that are tied with the ranked hierarchy” (ibid, p. 42). ‘Dalit patriarchy’ then is an attempt to take into account the uniqueness of Dalit women’s subordination as ‘Dalits’ and as ‘women’.

Reading life histories and autobiographies of Dalit women makes these characteristics of Dalit patriarchal oppression even clearer. For instance Viramma, a woman from the Parai (Dalit) caste in Tamil Nadu, in a series of conversations held between 1980 and 1990 with scholar Josiane Racine, shares with us her life story which highlights these tensions (Viramma et al., 1997). For instance she states that for men and women from her caste having pre-marital or extra-marital relationships is not uncommon and in that sense their sexuality is not tightly controlled;

It is true that our young are happy to have sex before marriage. I even know some who sleep around afterwards. But that’s between us...No one can force us...You can shower (us) with all the gold in the world but the woman has to give her consent. (ibid, pp. 52, 209).

However she also mentions the limits to this freedom; the fact that that women like her ‘fear their husbands the most’ and are often coerced into sex through threats of abuse or actual physical violence.

Viramma’s accounts then demonstrate the presence of a particular kind of patriarchy; one that is probably less rigid and restrictive as compared to upper-caste patriarchy, but nevertheless not as egalitarian as some scholars have espoused. The projection of Dalit households being egalitarian and allowing women greater ‘freedoms’ is then probably only a half-truth. In this research study I take a position similar to Paik (2009) and Rao (2015) and argue for a reinterpretation of Dalit patriarchal oppression by uncovering its nuances and teasing out its complexities. While I am not denying that *Sanskritization* or *Brahminization* might be leading to new forms and experiences of patriarchal practices within Dalit communities, I do not agree with the point of view that prior to this

process, gender relations in Dalit households were largely untouched by a subtext of inequality, power and control. Furthermore as I shall argue in the next chapter, a change in gender norms in Dalit households may occur for reasons other than a desire to emulate upper caste-class norms. In particular I focus on how membership to relational networks such as labour organizations provides women various pathways via which women begin to re-define themselves. Through this process the desire for greater equality within the home becomes a 'felt need' expressed by women themselves, who then gradually begin to re-negotiate and challenge existing unequal intra-household gender relations.

2.3 Hegemonic Masculinity: A Missing Dimension

An essential aspect missing from discussions on patriarchy is how men experience their dominant status. As White (1997) puts it "In the gender and development literature men appear very little, often as hazy background pictures" (ibid, p. 16). Much feminist research in the area of gender and development has portrayed men as 'unmarked' and 'undifferentiated', other than by socio-economic cleavages thus failing to highlight the experiences, difficulties, aspirations and pressures faced by these men (Vera-Sanso, 2000). For instance, *brahminical* patriarchy, while the dominant model to understand women's positions within cultures such as India, can be critiqued for its over-arching emphasis on the impact of the patriarchal contract on women's lives. It does not pay much attention to the fact that within patriarchy men have certain duties and obligations which *they have to fulfil* in order to lay claims to masculinity.

Thus this system of male domination while overtly appearing to benefit men, can be described "as a trap, with masculinity being imposed on all men as a duty" (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 51). Men face the permanent tension of having to 'rise up to be a man' by investing in what it might mean to be masculine in a particular society and culture. Therefore within the family though men might benefit from the variety of ways in which patriarchal power manifests itself, they also have certain obligations they need to fulfil to secure their masculine identity (White, 1997). Male privilege then cannot always be taken for granted, but instead needs to be 'earned' through particular

behaviours and actions which make up what is commonly referred to as ‘respectable masculinity’ (Gutmann, 2003; George, 2006).

In India, empirical literature points to distinct ways in which this ‘respectable masculinity’ is demonstrated and maintained. Writing about marriage and conjugality in urban middle-class joint families in India, Derne (1995) observed that ‘male dominance’ which is characteristic of Indian masculinity, was buttressed by joint family living, as well as restrictions on women’s mobility. His study found that this type of masculinity was justified on grounds of ‘honour’ and ‘tradition’ (ibid, p. 48), with honour being critical to the construction of masculinity and the stress of maintaining this honour being quite high. Offering a different perspective, Alter (1994) argued that masculinity in India has been constructed around the ideology of ‘asceticism and self-control’; a moral and physical alternative to the colonial construction of the Indian male as effeminate and ‘libertene’ (ibid, p. 48). By examining contemporary popular Hindi literature on the *brahmachari* (celibate male) he posited that the pursuit of celibacy (through the retention of semen), and a regimen of diet and exercise had constructed a ‘spiritual’ male body as the hegemonic ideal. Kakar (1992) on the other hand drawing on folklore and mythology within a context of psychoanalysis, focused on the closeness of the mother-son bond as an essential element in the make-up of Indian men.

These understandings of masculinity have been critiqued for their representation of an urban upper-caste ‘hegemonic masculinity’; one that does not represent the lives of those belonging to subordinated groups whose masculinities are marginalized (Connell, 1987; see Osella and Osella, 2006; see Kulkarni, 2013). R.W Connell, a critical masculinity theorist, proposed the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to refer to a ‘set of practices’ coalescing around an idealized type of masculinity as a goal which all men try to reach (Connell, 1987). Those who do attain this goal become the ‘hegemonic males’ whom the ‘marginalized or subordinated males’ try to emulate. In fact scholars have equated hegemonic masculinity with *Brahminical* masculinity as the focus of both is on control over women, and strong notions of individualism and self-sufficiency (Fuller, 1979; Tambiah, 1982; Madan, 1987).

Within an Indian context upper caste Hindu masculinity has been the hegemonic ideal, whereas masculinity among Dalit men has been relegated to the realm of the

‘marginalized’ (Gupta, 2010). This explains in part, the limited literature on how Dalit men negotiate the workings of patriarchy in their everyday lives.

2.3.1 Constructions of Dalit Masculinity

Existing gender relations in Dalit households embody a particular type of masculinity, which for the purpose of this research I shall term ‘Dalit masculinity’. The construction of Dalit masculinities as subordinate has its roots in literature on the construction of the male body in colonial discourse which contrasted the ‘manly’ British with the ‘effeminate’ colonial Indian male (Nandy, 1983; Sinha, 1997). Within this literature the Hindu upper caste and colonial male gaze constructed the Dalit male in binary oppositions; on the one hand, they are projected as meek, docile, passive, childlike, strong but stupid, with an inferior intellect and always servile. On the other hand they are portrayed as wife-beaters, lecherous, criminals, drunkards, violent and threatening (see Gupta, 2010). These constructions of Dalit masculinity have “reproduced certain stereotypes of Dalit male otherness” (Gupta, 2010, p. 315).

Apart from ‘*othering*’ Dalit masculinity, empirical research has found that there have been several attempts to make *invisible* Dalit assertions of masculinity. Dalit masculinities have hence been marginalized by denying Dalit men the space to display and demonstrate aspects of hegemonic masculinity (V. Geetha, 1998, p. 318). For instance Dalit men’s sexual liaisons with upper caste women have routinely been silenced, thus rendering invisible displays of masculine prowess and authority (Anandhi et al. 2002; Rege, 2006). In addition historically Dalit masculinity has been emasculated by *brahminical* patriarchy, which has demanded sexual rights over Dalit women. This has led to a discourse of the inability of Dalit men to protect ‘their’ women against sexual exploitation by upper caste men. As Anandhi et al. (2002) describe this, “If the right to exercise power, employ aggression and dispense justice index masculine identity... none of these attributes were available to Dalit men” (Anandhi et al., 2002, p. 4399).

How have Dalit men responded to the ‘othering’ and ‘invisibilization’ of their masculinity? Essentially Dalit men’s relationship with hegemonic masculinity has been ambivalent; on one hand we have accounts of Dalit men contesting hegemonic

masculinity in different ways, and on another hand we have instances of Dalit men emulating upper caste masculinity.

Accounts of Dalit assertions of masculinity can be traced as far back as the late 19th century in Uttar Pradesh, where Dalit men by engaging in political activities, cultural performances and re-reading of ancient epics, sought to reconstitute their masculinities and “make visible a variety of Dalit ways of being” (see Gupta, 2010,p.323). There was a proliferation of Dalit caste associations, temples, publications and journals. Dalit men began voicing demands for political representation and a share in public appointments. In addition rural Dalits re-interpreted Hindu epics as stories of Dalit honour, valour and chivalry.¹⁵ Enrolment in the army was another way Dalit men attempted to acquire prestige and manhood.

More recent challenges to hegemonic masculinity by Dalit men are detailed in Anandhi et al.’s (2002) study in a village in Tamil Nadu. In their study they found that Dalit masculine identity developed out of contesting upper caste dominance in a number of ways. Firstly the younger generation of Dalit men were gradually refusing to work as agricultural labour for upper-caste households. Secondly they were asserting control over public spaces in the village for instance by smoking in public places to challenge spatial restrictions imposed on them by upper caste men. Lastly Dalit men routinely engaged in public display of violence of varying degrees ranging from petty quarrels to sexual harassment of upper caste women, to affirm their masculinity.

Interestingly even as Dalit masculinity has defied notions of upper-caste (hegemonic) masculinity in the ways described above, it has simultaneously emulated it. Perhaps the most significant demonstration of Dalit men’s aspiration to reach the hegemonic ideal is their control over the mobility and sexuality of ‘their’ women especially their mothers and sisters, as they consider themselves to be the ‘protectors’ of women’s dignity and family honour (Anandhi et al., 2002). This control is manifested in the forms of withdrawal of women from paid work outside the home as well as suspicion over women’s sexuality (Kapadia, 1995; Anandhi et al., 2002). This has become an

¹⁵See ‘The Lay of Brahma’s Marriage’; ‘The Song of Alha’s Marriage’ by Sir George Abraham Grierson who was superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India from 1898 to 1902.

important axis for Dalit masculine assertion and strengthened their claims towards upward mobility.

A routine manifestation of this control of women is domestic violence stemming from suspicion. V. Geetha in a study based in Chennai focussing on women from lower middle classes and working classes (mostly Dalits and OBCs), found that battering by Dalit men of their wives was symptomatic of the sexuality of everyday married life (V. Geetha, 1998). For most men “intercourse was the context in which the conjugal relationship assumed form, coherence and significance” (ibid, p. 316). Thus women’s indifference or refusal to intercourse fuelled men’s suspicion. Power, authority, a will to control and possess were rife in narratives of lower caste women about their husbands. In particular suspicion, control, possessiveness, desire and authority made up an ‘inner logic of masculinity’ (ibid).

Similarly interviews by Verma et al. (2006), with lower-caste men living in slum communities in Mumbai found that these men defined a ‘real’ man as someone was strong and virile; demonstrated through physical and verbal aggression with other men, and sexually coercive behaviour with women. The predominant view of masculinity in sexual relations as espoused by young lower caste men centred on entitlement and dominance (Verma et al., 2006), similar then to *brahminical* patriarchy’s manifestation of hegemonic masculinities.

A final and increasingly interesting understanding of the process by which Dalit men lay claim to hegemonic masculinity is in their newly constructed roles as ‘main breadwinners’ of the family. The male as primary provider for his family or the ‘housewife ethic’ (Osella and Osella, 2000), has largely been explained in social science literature as an upper caste phenomenon. To substantiate this claim research has found that though among lower castes both men and women are expected to provide for the family because they are so poor, in reality it is women who have the ultimate responsibility of providing for the home (Kapadia, 1995). Men can expect to be looked after and fed well, despite not contributing toward the household budget. In addition whatever income a wife earns is expected to be used primarily for household expenses, whereas it is socially acceptable for men to use their incomes on their personal consumption (Standing and Bandhopadhyay, 1985; Kapadia, 1995; Rege, 2006;

Irudayam et al., 2011). Furthermore narratives of Dalit women highlight that often their earnings are usurped by men for alcohol or gambling (Rege, 2006; Irudayam et al., 2011).

Shantabai Dane a Dalit woman from Maharashtra narrates how her parents had a tumultuous relationship with her father being an alcoholic, and selling whatever little valuables they owned to pay for his alcohol. He often beat their mother and never went to work. She says:

My mother used to toil hard throughout the day. Yet (my father) was so much under the influence of the new mother that he often used to beat her up. He was the head of the family, yet he never bothered if there was anything in the house to eat or not. He never did any work for us; he never earned anything for us. On the contrary, he always has his eye on whatever money our mother used to earn for us by doing menial jobs...He would not allow her to save even a single paisa for a rainy day.

(Rege, 2006, p. 136).

What Shantabai is saying is similar to Khare's research in Lucknow in which he found that a majority of Dalit household had husbands who were "careless, lazy, irresponsible and drunk" (Khare, 2000, p. 2011). Six out of ten households had one or more alcoholic men at one time or another (Khare, 2000). Alcoholism amongst Dalit men is a causal factor for, and exacerbates domestic violence (Irudayam et al., 2011).

Empirical research, however, seems to indicate that despite this picture, male breadwinner ideologies are deeply engrained in Dalit homes. Grover (2011) found that among scheduled caste communities in slums in Delhi "male breadwinner ideologies underpin notions of respectability, family reputation and female modesty, which counter the essentialized view that SC women are exempt from upper caste notions of patriarchal honour" (ibid, pp. 37-38). Her findings indicated that the male breadwinner ideology was so pervasive that women engaging in waged work could not necessarily use their income to increase their bargaining position within the household.

Similarly Vera-Sanso (1995) in her study of low income men in Chennai found that male breadwinner ideologies were integral to defining masculinity and a failure to live up to these norms led to feelings of emasculation; so much so that women in such households often did not seek employment outside the home in order to preserve the family's honour and reputation (*maanam*). She found that the most significant feature of masculinity in urban poor homes was 'self-reliance', which was drawn in relation to the family as well as in opposition to female 'dependency'. The features of this self-reliance assumed that family members were dependent and therefore 'answerable' to the person providing for them, which ideally should be the male head of the family (Vera-Sanso, 2000, pp.184-85).

Interestingly although being the primary bread-earner was central to masculine identity, it did not matter if men actually fulfilled this role or not. This was because it was the *ascribed role* that men played as provider which conferred on them recognition, authority and status. Thus even though men might not have worked, they still expected their authority and power within the home to be acknowledged and respected. Thus one way of 'performing' masculinity was by not actually fulfilling the responsibilities that came with being the household head, but instead by "discursively securing the right" (Vera-Sanso, 2000, p. 189), to perform these duties and claiming the rewards that accompanied these responsibilities. This highlights the fact that while male authority may or may not have a material base, male responsibility is always normatively constituted.

2.3.2 Threatened Masculinity

From the above literature it becomes clear that an important yardstick for 'securing' masculinity (including Dalit masculinity) is the control that men demonstrate over their wives and families and the unquestioned obedience they expect in turn. The domestic sphere therefore becomes a critical domain where masculine identity can be affirmed or questioned (Gutmann, 2003). Therefore when any kind of change threatens existing household power relations (and consequently men's identities) tensions within the home are likely to arise¹⁶.

¹⁶ For the purpose of this study I have limited my understanding of men within the family to their roles as husbands, excluding the myriad other roles they might play within the home and outside. Though a

Perhaps the most widely studied indication of this ‘tension’ is men’s reactions to women engaging in paid work outside the home. A majority of these studies have focused on the experiences of poor men and women in what is colloquially referred to as the ‘global south’. The studies point out that in general poor men working in the informal economy have experienced a declining capacity to support their families over the course of their lives (Chant, 2000; Silberschmidt, 2005; Vera-Sanso, 2008). This has resulted in women beginning to engage in paid work, to be able to support their families. Women’s increased access to earnings has changed terms of control in the marital relationship, made some women de-facto heads of the household, and reduced their dependency on men (Chant, 2000; Kabeer, 2000; Cornwall, 2002; Friedmann-Sánchez, 2008). This in turn has threatened men’s sense of identity, power and authority within the home. (Chant, 2000; Kabeer, 2000; Silberschmidt, 2004; 2005).

Additionally since one of the major markers of adult masculine identity is the role a man plays as the ‘head’ of the family (White, 1997; Vera-Sanso, 2000; Chant, 2000; Fuller, 2001; Silberschmidt, 2004), women’s engagement in paid work has led men to experience feelings of disempowerment because of their inability to live up this breadwinner ideal. Researchers have described this as a ‘crisis in masculinity’ (White, 1997; Chant, 2000; Fuller, 2001; Silberschmidt, 2004).

In general it has been largely men from poorer and less privileged groups who have been most affected by the crisis in masculinity since they are least able to live up to hegemonic models of masculinity, which promote the idea of men as providers and household heads (Kabeer, 2007). This has profound effects on their self-esteem and heterosexual marital relations (White, 1997; Chant, 2000; Fuller, 2001; Silberschmidt, 2004; 2005; 2011). Research has found that casual sexual relations, extramarital affairs,

substantial portion of gender relations within the home expresses itself through marital relations between husbands and wives, (changes in) gender relations could also be studied through the other roles men embody, especially that of being a father. In the empirical chapters (particularly Chapter 7) one can see that a few men hinted at the fact that like marriage, fatherhood was an essential pre-condition to achieve a ‘full status’ as an adult. However they also indicated that active, consistent and long-term parenting was not central to their masculine identity (*mothapana*). My research could have additionally explored whether the material and ideological impact of women’s involvement with the KKPKP might have led to changes in men’s notions around fatherhood; their involvement, accountability and how central fatherhood had become to men’s self-definitions. However in this study I have focused solely on men’s roles as husbands.

alcoholism, violence and aggression seem to become critical in the process of ‘rescuing’ a masculinity in crisis and restoring male self-esteem (Strebel et al., 2006; Silberschmidt, 2001; 2005; 2011). In a number of cases men become estranged from their families and desert them. Withdrawing from domestic roles and responsibilities is another way of coping with this constant threat to their authority within the home (Moore, 1994a; Gonzales de la Rocha, 1995; Silberschmidt, 2001).

Despite this bleak picture however researchers have found that in a few cases women engaging in paid work has had a positive impact on certain aspects of intra-household gender relations. For instance in a study done in Lucknow, India it was found that husbands fought and bickered less as long as women brought home wages and took care of household chores (Khare, 2000). Gutmann’s ethnographic study of a low income neighbourhood in Mexico City found that as long as women continued to look after both the children and their husband despite engaging in paid work, men were willing to begin helping with household chores (Gutmann, 2003). This being said there seem to be very few households where responsibility was actually ‘shared’. In most cases men seemed to be ‘helping’ out more, with the primary duty of responsibility for the house still borne by the woman.

A large part of literature that talks about ‘masculinities in crisis’ focuses on women’s engagement in paid work as central to intra-household tension. However the question that also needs to be asked is how men respond to changes in power and control within the home in cases when women have always been working? Does their ‘breadwinner masculinity’ still get as easily bruised? In particular how do men respond to women whose confidence, articulation and demands for better treatment in the home do not necessarily stem from a material resource like paid work, but from a newer, deeper understanding of oneself and one’s place in the world? Under what circumstances are men likely to respond positively to these changes in women and what might help to explain their resistance? These are the questions I attempt to answer in the following chapters.

2.4 Conclusion

As Kumkum Sangari points out, “the private sphere is a distinct ‘political’ site for the direct and tangential formation of the gendered subject” (Sangari, 1993, p. 868). In this chapter we have seen how the family and kinship serve as spaces within which gendered subjectivities are formed, challenged and re-constituted. Though there might be variations in how patriarchy manifests itself across geography and caste, these differences should not blind us to the fact that in general women in South Asia operate within patriarchal kinship ideologies and cultural practices that are largely restrictive (Philips, 2005). Even among Dalit sub-castes there is a visible homogeneity in marital and kinship practices reflected in the ways “parental support is offered (or denied) to daughters, the nature of marital breakdown or conflict...and the endorsement of the male breadwinner ideology” (Grover, 2011, p.30). Power is assumed to be a masculine prerogative, and any attempts by women to usurp this power (through earning, earning more) are seen as threatening. In general then, across castes women are still aware that men’s support is critical to maintaining social status, honour and prestige (Khare, 2000; Rege, 2006; Irudayam et al., 2011), and this in turn impacts their decisions to bargain for better treatment within their homes.

3. THEORIZING INTRA-HOUSEHOLD BARGAINING AND ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

The previous chapter laid out in detail the nature of intra-household gender relations in the homes of Dalit men and women who are part of the KKPKP. Given my interest in understanding how membership to the KKPKP played out in the (re)-negotiation of gender relations in the households of Dalit men and women I will be drawing on literature on household bargaining as my theoretical framework. In this chapter I shall explore some of the theories around how gender relations might be bargained over and negotiated with. It is through understanding these contestations that one might attempt to theorize how membership to a labour organization, such as the KKPKP might bring about a change in gender relations between husbands and wives.

3.1 Neo-Classical Theories of Intra-household Bargaining

The idea that the household is a locus of economic activity was brought into the mainstream by economist Gary Becker (1965) and his theory came to be known as ‘New Household Economics’, according to which it was assumed that households behave as units, and possess one joint utility function i.e. households behave in accordance to a single set of preferences, and combine time, goods purchased from the market and household labour to produce commodities that generate utility for the household (Becker, 1965). According to Becker, arriving at this single set of preferences, however, did not involve significant strife or difference in opinion, because households were presided over by an altruistic household head, who presumably ‘cared sufficiently about other household members to transfer general resources to them’ (Becker, 1981). Thus this ‘benevolent dictator’ as he came to be known, notionally pooled income of all the family members and distributed all produced goods fairly between them. Becker’s contribution though path breaking in the mid-1960s soon drew heavy criticism for its assumption of single-preferences of the household, and lack of focus on intra-household power relations.

Over the last three decades scholars across disciplines have expanded on the understanding of intra-household economics preferring to focus on the individuality of household members and explicitly addressing the question of how individual

preferences may lead to a collective choice. These ‘collective models’ argue instead that households are not undifferentiated units, and that there exist significant power differentials between members of a household, which in turn affect choices, behaviours and decisions within the home.

Most of these collective models draw extensively on game-theoretical bargaining models, which recognize that members of a household often have different and competing interests and that resource allocation within a household ultimately depends upon the strength of his ‘fallback position’ (Nash, 1950). The concept of a fall-back position (also referred to as threat point or breakdown point) was borrowed from Nash’s game theory model and referred to “the level of utility that each party would attain if they did not cooperate” (Hart, 1992, p.115). A person with a stronger fall-back position will have a positive bargaining outcome. In other words, in case of conflict, the preferences of those with greater fall-back positions will prevail. In particular economic positions outside marriage became central to determining the impact of threat-points or fall back positions on intra-household bargaining power.

Over the next few decades bargaining models were differentiated into co-operative bargaining models (see Manser and Brown, 1980; McElroy and Horney, 1981),¹⁷ non-cooperative models (see Ulph, 1988; Kanbur, 1991; Wooley, 1993; Carter and Katz, 1997),¹⁸ and models that take into account separate spheres of activity within a co-operative framework (see Lundberg and Pollak 1993).¹⁹ What all these models had in common was that they attempted (albeit in different ways) to explain the nature of intra-household decision making by recognizing power as a critical dimension of these interactions. However although they opened up the analytical possibility of considering

¹⁷ Bargaining models assume that households may or may not notionally pool their incomes. Models proposed by Manser and Brown (1980) and McElroy and Horney (1981) are known as co-operative bargaining models. The cooperative approach begins by noting that individuals form a household when the benefits associated with doing so exceed those obtainable by being alone. In addition household members are assumed to pool their incomes. On many counts this bargaining model is similar to the unitary model; the point of departure being the rule governing the distribution of resources.

¹⁸ Non-cooperative bargaining models assume that members of a family do not necessarily enter into binding and enforceable contracts with each other. Most importantly, however, unlike co-operative models, these models do not assume that income is pooled. In fact they assume that individuals within the household not only have differing preferences but also act in autonomous ‘sub-economies’.

¹⁹ They posit a model in-between co-operative and non-cooperative wherein individuals might co-operate with one another, but still have separate spheres of activities

power as central to bargaining outcomes, initially they themselves subscribed to a rather narrow resource-based understanding of power.

The assumption was that bargaining power was largely determined by individual resources i.e. the greater a person's access to these resources, the stronger his fall-back position and his ability to bargain. However empirical results were ambiguous. For instance initial research on the impact of women's access to economic resources on her fall-back position and consequently her bargaining power within the home provided mixed results. In particular, women's access to paid employment, which received substantial scholarly attention, had some scholars arguing that improvements in women's income reduced domestic violence and increased control over domestic decision making (Acharya and Bennet, 1983; Rao, 1997; Kishor, 2000; Chen and Snodgrass, 2001; Davin, 2004). At the same time however another group of scholars provided empirical research that contradicted these findings, claiming that access to increased income for women had only a limited impact on women's intra-household bargaining power, if at all (Rahman, 1986; Hashemi et al., 1996). Similarly studies on the impact of women's property ownership on bargaining power within the home has ambiguous results (see ICRW, 2002). Clearly this focus on individual access to resources has been insufficient.

An acknowledgement in this direction and a useful elaboration of the bargaining model was put forth by McElroy (1990). In her study of married couples she found that bargaining power depended not only upon a wife's income but also upon a range of 'extra-household environmental parameters' (EEP's). These EEP's included, but were not limited to, factors such as how well individual family members could do in the re-marriage market, the legal impediments to divorce, a woman's ability to return to her natal homes in cases of marital breakdown and rules regarding alimony, child support and government taxation.

3.2 Intra-Household Bargaining beyond Neo-Classical Theories

Over the years, feminist scholars from the fields of economics, sociology and anthropology expanded understandings of intra-household bargaining by focussing on the workings of power, ideology and meanings within families (Folbre, 1988; Sen, 1990; Hart, 1992; Moore, 1994b). Their work involved the “reconceptualisation of ‘the household’ in relational terms and an analytical as well as empirical focus on the gendered micropolitics of negotiation, cooperation and contestation in different but intersecting institutional arenas” (Hart, 1995; p.61). They argued that bargaining within the home depends not only upon resources but were simultaneously struggles over culturally-constructed meanings and definitions. For instance Whitehead’s comparative study in Ghana and Britain found that the ‘ideology of maternal altruism’ made women always subsume their own needs and preferences to that of their family and children, who always came first (Whitehead, 1981). Her research critiqued the assumption that the relative power of family members mirrored their relative wages in the labour market. Within the ‘conjugal contract’²⁰ she found that in both contexts even though women earned an income, and should have had more bargaining power, actually control over disposal of men and women’s earnings depended upon familial ideologies about roles and responsibilities. Whitehead’s study was crucial as it recognized that the outcome of intra-household bargaining between family members was not only determined by having access to resources, but in fact bargaining outcomes were dependent upon larger socio-cultural factors about the “rights, responsibilities and needs” (Moore, 1994b, p. 87), accorded to individuals within a family. Her acknowledgement of the centrality of domestic ideologies within a family, and their role in setting limits on women’s bargaining power.

Thus, moving beyond narrow resource based understandings of bargaining, these scholars presented the household “as a locus of competing interests, rights, obligations and resources” (Moore, 1994b, p. 87), where successful bargaining depended as much on struggles over meanings, as it did on access to and control over resources. Such understandings of bargaining processes moved beyond the restrictions imposed by

²⁰ Whitehead (1981) uses the term ‘conjugal contract’ to refer to the terms on which husbands and wives exchange labour, goods, income and services within the household.

quantitative bargaining models, which focused almost exclusively on economic factors, towards a less restrictive framework incorporating qualitative dimensions of bargaining²¹.

Perhaps the two most widely cited frameworks for understanding intra-household bargaining from this perspective are those proposed by Amartya Sen (1990) and Bina Agarwal (1994; 1997). Economist Amartya Sen's (1990) point of departure from formal bargaining models was the incorporation of questions of perception and ideology in understanding decision-making within the household. He argued that although bargaining models captured both cooperation and conflict within the home, they had an inadequate 'information base' in that they focused exclusively on individual interests and an assumption of people's clear and unambiguous perceptions of these interests (Sen, 1990, pp. 125-131). Instead Sen focused on the cognitive elements of intra-household bargaining. In particular he argued that a woman's ability to bargain might be diminished not because she has limited access or control over assets, but because she has low self-worth and therefore a limited sense of entitlement over resources that she might have access to. Thus according to him a woman's bargaining power within the

²¹ Despite this re-conceptualization of bargaining frameworks some scholars have argued that these frameworks have remained "bounded, unitary and homogenous" as they assume a standard patriarchal household headed by men (Ruwanpura, 2006, p. 8). This is despite empirical studies having shown that household structures take multiple forms; one of which is that of 'female-headship' (Youssef and Hetler, 1981; Visaria and Visaria, 1985; Chant, 1997; Ruwanpura, 2006). Female heads of households have largely been categorized into *de-jure* and *de-facto heads* (Youssef and Hetler, 1981). *De-jure* headship occurs when women are pushed into assuming headship because of death, divorce or legal separation from the male partner. *De-facto* headship however comes about when there is a temporary absence of a male head either due to migration, conflict or abandonment or due to alcoholism, disablement or unemployment. In the latter case, men are present in the household but relinquish their economic responsibilities. Despite a growing literature on female-headed households and Ruwanpura's (2006) call to incorporate female headship into bargaining frameworks, I have refrained from using the analytical category of 'female-headship' within this study for two reasons. Firstly, my research centres on women in marriages or marriage like situations, so the concept of '*de-jure*' headship does not apply. Secondly, even in cases where husbands have relegated their economic responsibilities towards the home (*de-facto* female headship) it has largely been for short periods of time and therefore has not fundamentally altered household structures and relations. In some cases where husbands did not work for extended periods of time, their wife and children got 'absorbed' into wider-kin networks (most commonly the in-laws). In such cases, women's fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law or older brothers-in-law would assume the position of 'de-facto' head. For the purpose of my research therefore the bargaining frameworks offered by Sen (1990) and Agarwal (1994) were a good place to begin from.

home cannot be defined by solely looking at her material or social assets, because the actual worth of these assets depends upon her self-perception.

Following from this argument Sen (1990) based the ability to bargain upon two factors; perceived contribution response and perceived interest response. According to him, firstly bargaining within a household depended upon one's perception of contribution towards the family (perceived contribution response). The higher ones perceived contribution (both by self and others), the greater ones bargaining power, i.e. household members considered to be making a greater contribution to household economy enjoyed greater bargaining power. Furthermore it was the form (cash versus kind), location (outside the household versus inside the household) and nature (market exchange versus subsistence consumption) of the contribution that determined their value. Therefore it was not only the fact that women engaged in paid work that increased their fall-back position, but instead how they (and their family members) perceived the importance of this income that ultimately determined household bargaining outcomes.

The second factor in Sen's model was the extent to which an individual attached his/her self-interest with his/her personal well-being, known as a 'perceived interest response'. Therefore if an individual subordinated his/her own personal well-being to that of others, then he/she was less likely to be favoured in household allocative outcomes. With respect to Indian women in particular Sen noted that they often unconsciously attached less value to their own well-being than to the well-being of other family members. This distorted women's perceived notions of legitimacy regarding what was deserved and what was not. As he stated:

The lack of perception of personal interest combined with a great concern for family welfare is, of course, just the kind of attitude that helps to sustain the traditional inequalities...The underdog comes to accept the legitimacy of the unequal order and becomes an implicit accomplice. (Sen, 1990, p. 126)

In addition women's interests were also vulnerable to what Sen (1985) termed 'adaptive preferences', wherein women internalized the harshness of their circumstances, became accustomed to them and even came to prefer them (ibid). According to him women may claim to be satisfied with unjust circumstances because they see them as 'normal'. Sen's

analysis of the determinants of intra-household bargaining moves us away from a resource-deficit model, to a model which acknowledges that the real deficit perhaps lies in a woman's understanding of herself. He argued that the ability to bargain depended upon a fundamental transition from a simple acceptance of one's place in the world to a radical questioning of one's situation and entitlements.

Agarwal (1994) critiqued Sen's assumption of women being unaware of their own interests and even *preferring* subordinate treatment and instead argued that women were aware of what constituted their self-interest; and if given the means to do so would act in ways that promoted these interests. According to her the major obstacle in women's lives was not that they did not know that they 'deserved better' but instead the presence of external constraints which prevented them in realizing their interests. Even instances where women appeared to sacrifice their short-term welfare for the benefit of their families and kin were reinterpreted by her as an investment towards their future security, which "would be perfectly in keeping with self-interested behaviour, and need not imply a gap between women's "objective" well-being and their perception of their well-being"(ibid; p.435).

Women emerge from Agarwal's account as less limited by their lack of awareness of self-interest and instead more constrained by the lack of resources they have access to. She argues therefore that, "what may be needed is less a sharpening of women's sense of self-interest than an improvement in their ability to pursue that interest" (Agarwal, 1994, p. 57). Like Sen (1990) she suggested that 'improvements' in women's bargaining power can be achieved through access to employment, but also included a number of others factors, such as; ownership of land, access to communal resources, access to traditional support systems, support from NGOs and the state and the role of social norms.²² In addition she suggested that feminist political activity especially 'gender-progressive coalitions' could go a long way in improving women's capacity to pursue their interests.

²² According to Agarwal (1997) existing social norms are one of the factors determining women's ability to bargain. Norms impinge on bargaining by setting limits on what can be bargained about (eg. the gender division of labour within the home), by determining how bargaining is conducted (i.e. covertly or overtly) and by themselves becoming a factor to be bargained over (eg. norms regarding income-generation by women in societies that place high value on women remaining within the home).

While it might appear that Sen and Agarwal disagree regarding women's degrees of consciousness while articulating their self-interests,²³ we could interpret both their arguments as picking up on *different aspects or moments* of a bargaining process. On certain issues and/or at particular moments women might accept their subordinate position, or see their interests as bound up to that of their family (Sen, 1985; 1990), and therefore be reluctant to challenge inequality within the home. On the other hand, at other moments women might be able to clearly perceive individual self-interests but may lack the external fall-back positions to bargaining successfully (Agarwal, 1994). Therefore instead of viewing Sen (1985; 1990) and Agarwal (1994) as antithetical to one another, one might argue that they are both drawing attention to different aspects of what is essentially a process of bargaining.

What is also common to Sen and Agarwal's accounts is that within their models women's capacity for agency is assumed *a priori*. That is, in general both Sen (1990) and Agarwal (1994) operate from the implicit assumption that when women have access to resources that might strengthen their ability to engage in bargaining, such as a clearer perception of their interests, contributions, ownership of property, support from the State or conducive social norms, they are most likely to operationalize these advantages in order to secure positive bargaining outcomes for themselves. In both their models the ability to bargain is taken to imply a corresponding *willingness* to do so. However as I shall argue although this might be true in some cases, it is not true of all. Moreover simply having the means or ability to bargain does not tell us the *extent to which* women are willing to use these resources to secure positive bargaining outcomes. What needs further exploration then is to determine that assuming women have access to the material and cognitive resources mentioned above what determines their willing to engage in bargaining? In addition, to what extent are women willing to drive a hard bargain?

Empirical studies highlight the fact that women's willingness to bargain is constrained not only by access to material resources, but to a great extent by ideologies and norms regarding family, marriage and kinship. Kabeer's (2000) research with garment workers in Bangladesh highlighted women's reservations in negotiating better outcomes for

²³ See Agarwal (1994) for a detailed discussion of Agarwal's critique on what she considers to be Sen's focus on women's 'false consciousness'.

themselves within the family, despite having access to a number of material and cognitive 'resources'. Locating her study within a society which is known for its assumed male authority and female submissiveness, she found that despite being engaged in paid work, there were limits to the extent to which women were willing to bargain within the home. Women were unwilling to engage in conflict to the point of breakdown.

When women encountered resistance to their desire to take up factory based garment work, they were keen on achieving a consensual solution. In fact they went to substantial lengths and invested a great deal of effort in persuading the male household heads for permission. However if they still did not manage to gain consent they were unlikely to defy male authority because open defiance could jeopardise the material benefits and social protection that accrued to them by virtue of the patriarchal contract. "For most women the benefits of male provision and male protection outweighed the perceived advantages of paid work which had motivated them to seek it in the first place" (Kabeer, 2000, p.130). Thus women were more likely to invest in achieving cooperative outcomes in situations of conflict because they had more to lose from the breakdown of the family.

In addition women were careful to continue maintaining their end of the patriarchal bargain, even though they were now additionally providing for the family. This was borne out by the fact that even though women had managed to persuade their husbands to allow them to work in garment factories, household chores still continued to be a female responsibility. In general women would wake up earlier or go to bed later to ensure they completed their tasks. Women also made notable efforts to ensure that male domestic comforts were not affected in any way; making sure food was cooked and served on time. Finally as Kabeer notes, women made efforts to allay male anxiety and diffuse potential gossip by coming home straight after work and never staying in the factory after hours. Therefore as long as women lived up to their end of the bargain, they could assume that men would continue to provide for and protect them. By situating the processes of bargaining within the actual and imagined 'patriarchal risk' (Cain et al., 1979) that Bangladeshi women face Kabeer's research highlights the fact that even though women might have had the means to bargain, they still faced constraints on the extent to which they were willing to drive a hard bargain.

Thus bargaining models which focus solely on women's *ability* to engage in conflict and/or negotiation within the home might not explain to us the full picture. Despite having access to substantial resources women might be unwilling to engage in intra-household bargaining to the point where it can be transformative, because of the threat of marital dissolution and loss of 'male protection'. This can potentially impede transformation of unequal gender relations in the conjugal sphere. In addition, as I argue, women's willingness to bargain is also determined by how they define their sense of self. Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994) differentiate between 'the unitary and proprietary self' which is celebrated by Western liberalism and liberal feminism, and the self that "is not bounded by skin, but is rather embedded in relationships to others..." (ibid; p.36). A self that is embedded in kinship relations might not only perceive its well-being very differently from a self that is 'independent', but also lend itself to different degrees of risk while engaging in bargaining.

In determining the extent of women's willingness to engage in intra-household bargaining in such contexts, what must also be taken into consideration is the role of relationships in shaping women's identities. I argue that to bring about sustainable, transformative changes in women's private lives we not only need to bring about changes in women's perceptions, access to resources and social norms that govern bargaining, but also women's capacity to participate in and develop new relationships.

3.3 Limits to Bargaining: Marriage, Identity and Patriarchal Connectivity

The limits to bargaining can be understood better if we refer to some of the ideas already discussed in Chapter 2, particularly those around the importance of marriage and kinship in conferring meaning and identity to women's lives. In South Asia in general, marriage is a central, defining feature in the lives of most men and women (Uberoi, 1993; Jeffery and Jeffery, 1994; Kapadia, 1995; Palriwala and Risseeuw, 1996). This is particularly so in India where the family is the locus of personal identity and one's sense of belonging (Uberoi, 1993). Across castes marriage plays a critical role in a conferring social status to a couple, and consequently in developing a social identity. Through marriage and childbearing women and men gain respectability and status, making marriage essential to a sense of self-worth (Thapan, 2003).

Empirical research supports this view. For instance in Kapadia's study across castes in rural Tamil Nadu, she found that a girl did not become a 'full woman' until she was married. It was only post matrimony that a girl's social identity was fully established. Interestingly there was no complementary understanding of a young man needing to be married to be considered 'complete' or 'mature' (Kapadia, 1995). Sheryl Daniels (1980) research on various models of gender relations in south India found that marriage conferred status and respectability to girls. She states:

A woman, traditionally can have respect only as a wife...marriage is not a necessary precondition for respectability for a man as it is for a womanThis social dependence on men and marriage for 'respectability' is highlighted by one of the respondents in her study who says that "Without men, women can't do anything. Without the husband, the wife has no respect. (ibid, p. 17, 67)

Suad Joseph's theory of 'patriarchal connectivity' goes a step further to explain why marriage is not only central to women gaining respectability and status, but also a major building block of women's sense of who they are. In particular she emphasizes the role of relationships in determining women's identities. Based on her research in working class neighbourhoods in Lebanon she argues that women's identities are dependent upon the successful enactment of 'connective relationships' the most central of which are those of marriage and family (Joseph, 1993; 1999). Her study found that unlike western hegemonic notions of a selfhood that were defined by a "bounded, autonomous, separative, individualist self" (Joseph, 1999, p. x), in Lebanese society one's sense of self was relational. This meant that identity saw itself embedded in others, shaped in relation to others, created through linkage, bonding and sociability and woven through lifelong intimate relationships. Although Joseph's research is based in the Middle East, within an Indian context as well scholars argue that identity is constituted relationally i.e. by being embedded in relationships which give meaning and value to people's lives. Within such contexts the family and community is valued more than the individual, people achieve meaning within familial contexts and survival depends upon integration into these networks (Uberoi, 1993; Jeffery and Jeffery, 1994; Kapadia, 1995; Palriwala and Risseuw, 1996).

Joseph's research, however, goes a step further to explain how these relational identities are constituted, based upon her theory of 'patriarchal connectivity'. According to this theory she argues that identity in Lebanon is not only based on being "part of, related, connected" but also upon people 'inviting, requiring and initiating the involvement of *others*' in shaping of the self (Joseph, 1999, p. 54, emphasis added). In particular girls, from a very young age, begin to learn that they require the involvement of *men and elders* in the process of shaping one's self (Joseph, 1993). She describes this as the process of connectivity being shaped by patriarchy, since women 'require' and 'invite' the involvement of significant males/elders in order to define themselves. Conversely patriarchy shapes connectivity by "crafting males and seniors prepared to direct the lives of females and juniors, and females and juniors prepared to respond to the direction of males and seniors" (Joseph, 1993, p.453). Connectivity and patriarchy intertwine to produce men who can control, and women who allow themselves to be controlled. Men and elders in particular have the privilege to enter the boundaries of the self of others, see them as extensions of themselves, make decisions for them, and ultimately direct the relationship. Women on the other hand accept this as normal, signalling healthy and mature relationships.

Therefore it is not merely marriage, but patriarchal connectivity that ultimately shapes a woman's sense of self, and reinforces the importance of familial relationships in her life. When women see themselves as relational beings, where connectivity is determined by proximity to family, especially men within the family, any attempt to shift these relations threatens their sense of security and self. This internalization of a particular understanding of self, derived through marriage, seems to play an important role in women resisting transition or change in their personal lives. Change in such cases is likely to take a very cautious form (if at all), heightening women's stakes in co-operation to keep the family together. In such a case then how do women then recognize and challenge the very relationships that define their identities, give meaning to their lives, and from which they derive a sense of security? How do they begin the process of challenging hegemonic gender norms within the home?

3.4 Associations and Pathways of Intra-household Change

The above theories might explain why women are reluctant to challenge unequal gender norms within the family. My thesis argues that membership to a labour organization can have a transformatory impact on gender relations within the home by increasing women's access to resources, improving their willingness to bargain as well as expanding the extent to which they might challenge inequality within the home.

Literature on women's involvement in alternative associations (organizations) largely focuses on two types of associations; 'everyday' informal networks and more formal networks. March and Taqqu (1986) define informal associations of women as flexible social networks organized around primarily around ties of friendship, kinship and patron-client relationships. These networks have more diffuse structures than formal associations with their boundaries, hierarchies and purpose being less distinct and more flexible over time. Furthermore they lack legal recognition, but gain legitimacy from the collective acquiescence of their member-constituency. Examples include social dance associations, church groups, street based networks, neighbourhood gossip circles, kin networks, pilgrimage groups and religious groups (ibid; Joseph, 1978; Hoodfar, 1997).

Informal networks are typically taken-for-granted networks, which have existed for generations and do not require formal membership. At an individual level they perform important functions; through providing women access to emotional and moral support, opportunities for social interaction, space for articulation of discontent and access to material goods and services. In addition being part of some of these associations might allow women to participate in networks they have 'chosen' to be part of, as opposed to the 'given' networks of family and kinship. However despite this rarely does being part of such networks transform deeply entrenched inequality in the lives of the people who belong to them. There might be several reasons for this. An obvious reason is that many of these informal associations are set up without the *specific intent* to challenge hegemonic societal norms (see Joseph, 1978; Hoodfar, 1997; El-Kholy, 2002). Secondly informal networks often lack the legal and political legitimacy to make claims; and have limited external recognition (Roever, 2007). And lastly a large number of such informal networks are 'defensively' driven; i.e. where women unite on the basis of a shared adversity with the aim of responding to the specific crisis at hand (March

and Taquu, 1986). This focus on ‘emergency’ support and protection gives such associations, instrumental rather than transformatory value.

In comparison, however, are formal networks like NGOs (Kabeer, 2011), trade-unions (Rose, 1992), credit-associations (El-Kholy, 2002; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006), and political parties (Wilson, 2013), which are set up with the specific intention of improving women’s lives. It is these formal associations on which my study is based. Formal associations are typically more hierarchical and structured, with the advantage of having legal legitimacy, which brings about change as a public or institutional level. They are usually started by an outsider with the explicit purpose of bringing about positive change in women’s personal and public lives. Also in most cases belonging to these networks requires some degree of formal or informal membership; while NGO networks are made up of their ‘beneficiaries’, networks like trade unions and political parties have formal membership procedures.

It has been suggested that belonging to formal associations holds significant transformatory potential in the lives of women for a number of reasons. For instance Kabeer’s (2011) research in rural Bangladesh finds that ‘socially-oriented’ NGOs committed to social justice, provide women a ‘critical vantage point’; for women to step back, and assess what it is about their lives that they value and what it is that they would like to change. The NGOs provide a space for them to critically reflect upon their life and relationships while providing a sense of solidarity, comfort and inclusion. In addition scholars have highlighted that membership to labour organizations help in promoting the collective capabilities of women, provides women with a sense of identity, awareness about decision making, courage, respect, recognition and dignity (Chen et al, 2007; Hill, 2010; Kabeer et al., 2013). Most importantly these networks unite women in solidarity, increasing their confidence and creating positions of leverage from which they can assert themselves (March and Taquu, 1986; El-Kholy, 2002; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006; Hill, 2010).

Broadly these resources can be categorized as: material, cognitive and relational. This conceptualization has been put forth by Kabeer (2011), who in her research with rural Bangladeshi women found that their membership to socially oriented development NGOs generated particular kinds of ‘resources’ in their lives. Material resources were

those that led to changes in household economy, cognitive resources reflected changes in awareness and learning, while relational resources reflecting increased solidarity. According to her these resources often “coalesced” at different ‘moments’ and in multiple ways in the process of empowering women (Kabeer, 2011, pp 508-9).

Although formal associations (like the NGOs mentioned in Kabeer’s study) do generate a number of different resources in women’s lives it is often difficult to neatly compartmentalize them, since often the boundaries between these resources are diffuse and overlapping. For instance income, which is commonly understood as a material resource, might operate differently as an asset in intra-household bargaining when viewed through a lens of cognitive empowerment i.e. a woman’s valuation of her paid work might improve her ability to bargain. In such a case income becomes more than simply a material resource, and in fact ‘valuation’ of one’s income emerges as a cognitive ‘pathway’ to empowerment; a pathway that encompasses material and cognitive resources to varying degrees. For the purpose of my research therefore I will step away from using the term ‘resource’ and instead focus on the material, cognitive and relational ‘*pathways*’ that membership to formal networks/associations can bring.

The question that now needs to be addressed is whether these pathways increase women’s ability and willingness to bargain for better treatment within the home. Although several authors have suggested that women who are integrated into networks that are durable and lasting have more power in household decision making, and are less subject to male authority within the home (Moore, 1988; Agarwal, 1994; Hoodfar, 1997; Kabeer, 2000; El-Kholy, 2002), not many of them explain why.

I argue that membership to a formal associations improves women’s bargaining power in three distinct ways. The first is by providing women access to secure work, possibly higher wages and better conditions of work. These material pathways can potentially enhance women’s fall-back-positions. Secondly membership to such organizations empowers women to challenge indignity, disrespect and exclusion they face daily as citizens, workers, wives and mothers. This in turn fosters self-confidence and improved perceptions of one’s self-interests and well-being (Sen, 1990), which are likely to translate into an increased ability to challenge hegemonic gender relations within the home. Lastly membership to networks provides women alternative social relations by

which to define themselves. Thus selfhood rests not only on identities derived through formal family and kinship structures, but on alternative identities women develop as friends, sisters and comrades. This in turn is likely to expand the extent to which women are willing to bargain for better treatment within their homes.

It is the interplay between these material, cognitive and relational pathways which increases their ability and willingness to challenge intra-household gender inequality. The following section provides a brief overview of how these pathways have been operationalized as fall-back positions by different women across multiple settings, and the resultant impact this has on intra-household change.

3.4.1 Material Pathways

The material benefits most commonly reported by women who are part of formal associations, such as labour organizations, have been resources such as access to paid work, higher wages, access to social security, legal protection and credit and provision of facilities like child care centres (see Mitter, 1994; Tirado, 1994; Tripp, 1994; Gothoskar, 1997; Navarro, 2002; Chen et al., 2005; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006; Standing et al., 2010). For instance the Nineteenth of September Union, which is the National Garment Workers Union in Mexico has fought for improved conditions for health and safety of workers that include better lighting, ventilation, cleanliness, toilet paper in the lavatories and clean drinking water. The Union has also helped workers demand increases in wages (Tirado, 1994). Similarly, the Navayuga Beedi Karmika Sangam, a *beedi* workers' union in the city of Hyderabad, India, has fought successfully for economic rights like regular employment, minimum wage, paid maternity leave and paid holidays (Hensman, 2010). Although there has been considerable literature on the impact of such associations of women on their rights at the workplace, there are far fewer studies that delineate their impact on women's personal lives.

To some extent it is within the micro-credit literature that one finds some indication of the impact of material resources on women's empowerment within the home. However the results of these studies offer contradictory evidence. While some evaluations find no effect of micro-credit loans on women's empowerment (Goetz and Sengupta, 1996),

some find negative effects, like increased male violence against women due to a transformation in gender roles (Schuler et al., 1996), and others find positive impacts like women acquiring a greater role in household decision making and gaining freedom of mobility (Pitt et al., 2006).

The ambivalence of these results highlights two important points. Firstly that resources in and of themselves might not necessarily be enough to challenge inequality within homes. For instance as Sen (1990) notes, the perceived value of income (through loans) might be as important as the income itself. Thus in addition to material resources, women might need access to other kinds of cognitive assets, to be able to bargain successfully.

Secondly these studies focus largely on the instrumental value of material resources (in this case credit) without taking into account the processes through which women gain access to such resources i.e. most of these studies focus on women's individual access to and control over credit, and rarely examine the effects of group membership through which these loans are generated. Membership to groups/organizations is seen as an extraneous resource; important only to the extent that they provide women access to various pathways of change. There exists very little literature on the value that various resources acquire *in the context of group membership*.

A recent exception to this is Paromita Sanyal's research on the impact of microcredit on women's empowerment within the home in West Bengal. In her study she differentiates between the "instrumentalist" and the "transformatory" use of women's groups (Molyneux, 1985). The former approach uses credit groups solely to enhance women's financial situation, while the latter primarily uses credit as a means to mobilize women into groups and to stimulate collective action that can contribute to the transformation of gender relations in the long run. On the lines of this distinction her research finds that access to loans via micro-credit itself does not make much of a difference to women's subordinate status within the home. In fact, only in very few cases did microcredit promote women's agency through independent entrepreneurial ventures or enhanced bargaining capacity. In the majority of cases however it was the 'associational aspects' of group membership i.e. the regularity with which women engage in groups that leads to a positive impact on women's agency within the home (Sanyal, 2014, p. 239).

Similarly Holvoet's (2006) study on the effects of microfinance programmes on women's decision making agency in South India also highlights the transformatory potential of women's groups. She found that while 'direct credit delivery to women' did not bring about changes in intra-household decision making patterns, when loans were channelled through women's groups and combined with technical and social awareness training it improved female decision-making in areas, such as loan use, money management and task allocation (which had previously been dominated by men). These effects were even more striking when women had been members of a group for a longer period, met more frequently and had received more intensive training.

It is these 'associational aspects' of women's membership to groups that I wish to expand on further. In this research I attempt to move beyond individual agency and examine the extent to which membership of large collectivities can bring about more sustained change in intra-household gender relations. In particular I would like to draw attention to the cognitive and relational aspects of group membership that unlike material resources, stimulate collective agency that holds a greater potential to bring about sustainable, transformative changes within the home. In this research I attempt to demonstrate how membership to groups, in particular to a labour organization of wastepickers, improves women's position within their families not only because they are (materially) *able* to bargain from a more empowered position, but also because they possess the cognitive and relational resources that make them more *willing* to do so.

3.4.2 Cognitive Pathways: 'New Self-Understandings'

In addition to the material advantages of being part of formal networks, membership to such associations also provides women with cognitive pathways of change, such as building confidence to speak out, develop strategies, and articulate demands (Rowbotham and Mitter, 1994; Hoodfar, 1997; Bickham Mendez, 2002; 2005; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006; Bonner and Spooner, 2012; Kabeer et al., 2013). In doing so women begin to challenge the indignity, exclusion and disrespect they face every day in their homes, at their workplaces and by the State and over time women build a sense of collective agency. In addition women report being able to see themselves in new

ways, and feeling a sense of pride in the work that they do (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2013; Selwyn, 2013, p.61)

Scholars seem to agree that membership to such organizations in general seems to impact what they define as the ‘consciousness’ of their members (Rowbotham and Mitter 1994; Rosa, 1994; Vijayan, 1997; Naples, 2002; Bickham Mendez, 2002; 2005). This has been articulated as ‘political consciousness’ (Rowbotham and Mitter 1994; Rosa, 1994; Vijayan, 1997; Navarro, 2002; Bickham Mendez, 2002; 2005), ‘oppositional consciousness’ (Wells, 2002, p.147), and ‘gender consciousness’ (Naples, 2002, p.270) by various researchers. Despite the different use of terms the idea behind developing the consciousness of workers revolves around gaining greater legitimacy as political actors, heightened awareness of rights, and an increased ability to articulate and question injustice. These new perspectives have provided women tools with which to challenge indignity and disrespect which often buttress hegemonic narratives in their lives such as the sexual division of labour at home, as well as the lack of decision making space within their workplaces (Bickham Mendez, 2005).

In talking about intra-household bargaining when we understand how intricately women’s ideas of who they are linked to their ability to bargain, we begin to see how changing these very understandings of themselves, can bring about a shift in bargaining power. Exploring subjectivities then helps to understand “how and why people uphold, resist and contest dominant values of unequal social relations. It shows how people conceive of their position within social hierarchies and their expectations for the future. It reveals the strategies they employ for defining the present and shaping the future” (Vera-Sanso, 2000, p. 180).

Sen (1990) has touched upon this through this notion of ‘perceived interest’ and ‘perceived contribution’ according to which the amount a woman values her own well-being and her contribution towards the home determines to a large extent her intra-household bargaining power. A few scholars have expanded on Sen’s notion by attempting to delineate the factors which determine why some people are more likely to have a stronger notion of entitlement than others. A significant portion of their analysis rests on how women’s identities are constituted.

For instance Hill (2010), drawing on philosopher Axel Honneth, argues that women's identities are composed of three elements; self-respect, self-esteem and self-confidence, which in turn have an impact on their ability to "intervene, participate and actively engage in work-life reforms that deliver material rewards and improved well-being" (Hill, 2010, p. 113). In contrast Kandiyoti (1987) speaking particularly about women in Turkey theorizes that women's identities are constituted by a "culturally-defined sexed subjectivity" (Kandiyoti (1987, p.335). She argues that 'consciousness' is determined by subjective experiences of femininity and oppression, which embody the great deal of diversity in women's experiences. She posits that one's community and society, and the resultant socio-cultural norms, are what determines one's identity and hence one's 'consciousness'. I draw on this notion of consciousness by suggesting that developing subjective self-understandings is a critical cognitive pathway that enables women to assert themselves and have their voices heard.

What we can see from the studies above is that the term 'identity' or 'consciousness' has been used to designate multiple forms of self conceptions, something that Brubaker and Cooper (2000) term 'self-understandings'. According to them a 'self understanding' is a:

situated subjectivity: one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act..... it belongs to the realm of what Pierre Bourdieu has called *sens pratique*, the practical sense, at once cognitive and emotional, that persons have of themselves and their social world (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p. 17).

Self-understandings imply that people understand themselves in multiple ways at different points in time, and each of these understandings is subjective. Thus not everyone has to conform to a particular understanding of self, but instead each individual can see himself differently in accordance to his experiences and socio-political, cultural contexts. Thus in Hill's example of SEWA workers it is implied that all women need to acquire self-esteem, self-confidence *and* self-respect to develop full personhood. Within this pre-defined notion of identity there is no place for women's multiple conceptualizations of what constitutes their sense of self. However what if for one woman, developing a strong sense of self depends not only upon self-confidence

but also on developing *pride* as a worker? What if self-respect is important to one and group-solidarity or courage to another? A pre-supposition of what constitutes one's identity then needs to be called into question. How do we define identity then?

By using the notion of self-understanding(s) we expand the notion of identity by allowing each individual's sense of self to take on multiple forms, thus privileging his/her own understanding to the question "Who am I?" I argue that membership to a formal network like a labour organizations allows women multiple opportunities to develop new 'self-understandings' and see themselves in new ways. For instance scholars note that being part of such organizations allows women to develop a sense of pride in the work that they do, and seeing themselves perhaps for the first time as 'citizens'. The entire process of organizing, getting together, calling for meetings, holding democratic elections and freedom of speech within such organizations holds immense import as women traditionally have been denied the agency to participate in decision making in their own lives. Often it signifies a tremendous personal and political achievement for them (Bickham Mendez, 2002; 2005; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2008; Chikarmane and Narayan, 2013; Selwyn, 2013).

These new understandings of themselves as workers capable of organizing meetings, speaking out, developing strategies and articulating demands brings with it corresponding feelings of confidence and power. Membership to SEWA in India for example has encouraged individual voice and agency, feelings of wellbeing, boldness and courage, women's mobility, social status and collective agency (Hill, 2010; Standing et al., 2010). Women reported 'seeing themselves' as less afraid of their husbands, family and community at large.

These multiple 'self understandings' of women; as workers, as contributors to the home, as human beings worthy of respect and dignity, as someone with self-confidence, as persons with the ability to fight for justice, as women with an 'oppositional consciousness', as women who retort, fight back, and do not give up; re-define women's sense of self, and over a period of time enable women to begin challenging gender inequality within their homes. I argue that it is these new fluid 'self-understandings' that allow women to transform the very nature of the patriarchal

bargain, and demand changes in discourse, behaviour, norms and ideologies within the home.

3.4.3 Relational Pathways

A significant, though less frequently studied, pathway of intra-household change through membership to networks is that of ‘relationality’. Empirical research states that association with networks enables women to feel supported, expand their social relationships, build solidarity and access a variety of spheres of influence (Hoodfar, 1997; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2008; Kabeer, 2011; Cornwall et al., 2013).

Crueza, a domestic worker in Brazil notes how the headquarters of the domestic workers union became “a hub of activity, of meetings, of friendship, *of us the people who had our own space*” (Cornwall et al, 2013, p.166, italics added). This idea of ‘one’s own space’ can be critical when we think of poor women’s lives most of which might be lived in cloistered slums, overcrowded and with little hope for privacy. It is these “alternative forms of associational life” (Kabeer, 2011, p.503), which provide women with a range of relational resources such as friendship, solidarity, camaraderie and privacy.

However there is limited literature that highlights how relational resources might impact intra-household gender relations. Friedemann-Sánchez’s (2008) research on the fresh-cut-flower industry near Bogota, Columbia is an exception. In her study she found that access to a combination of labour (formal) and kin (informal) networks increased women’s bargaining power within the home and made women better able to resist male domination. This was because these informal networks not only provided women relational resources like emotional support and friendship, but they also provided women access to access to higher paid positions in flower factories. Other formal networks like employees credit associations helped women acquire loans to buy property. This combination of higher income and ownership of property derived through formal associations, along with solidarity that they experienced within informal networks allowed women to temporarily abandon their husbands, withdraw household duties or leave home. Friedemann-Sánchez (2008) therefore argues that it is a

combination of material resources (obtained through formal networks) as well as the solidarity that informal networks provide that improves women's bargaining position.

Kabeer's (2011) research on formal associations in rural Bangladesh found that the friendship, support and solidarity that women found within NGOs formed the basis of creating 'communities of practice'. These alternative forms of associational life engendered regular discussion, dialogue and sharing with respect to matters closest to women. Although over time this enabled women to develop the capacity to engage in collective action against gender injustice, there continued to be limited change in intra-household gender relations. In fact women displayed a greater willingness to challenge inequality in the public domain, as opposed to oppression within the private sphere of the home. Within their homes they sought to bring about change very cautiously and in ways that did not threaten men. Also their contestations in the domestic domain seemed to be driven by a desire for more equality within the family, as opposed to a greater independence outside it, because women were still bound by 'patriarchal risk' and had more to lose (than men) by the breakdown of their marriage (ibid).

Kabeer's research then brings up the same dilemma highlighted earlier in the chapter; i.e. the ability to bargain (because one has access to material, cognitive and/or relational pathways) does not necessarily imply a willingness to do so. What might make women more willing to negotiate and protest against unequal gender norms?

El-Kholy's (2002) research provides a useful direction for further exploration. Though her study focuses on an informal network of women (i.e. spirit possession ceremonies), it provides an important insight into the role of associations in supplementing 'given' relations of kinship and family. Through her ethnographic study in low-income settlements in Cairo she found that spirit ceremonies (*hadra's*) provided a valuable space for women to develop intimate relationships with each other and consequently expand their relational identities. As she describes, these ceremonies became:

an important and separate physical and social space for women where they can forge new relationships outside the confines of their daily lives, relationships which supplement kinship relations...Hadra(s) thus provide a context for the emergence of *new notions of personhood, notions based on*

same-sex friendships, but not on the dominant principles of domestic kinship, such as mothers, daughters, wives, aunts and so forth, which play a central part in defining female identity. (El-Kholy,2002, p. 207, italics added).

The importance of El-Kholy's research, in light of my study, is her emphasis on women's relational self-hood. Although she does not explain further the role of these newly forged relationships on women's bargaining power, her study is vital in that it emphasizes the importance of 'chosen' relationships and their role in re-defining female identity.

While Kabeer (2011) and El-Kholy (2002) are talking about different kinds of associations (formal versus informal) what they share in common is that they both describe women's identities as relational; dependent upon a number of social relationships within and outside the family. Drawing on Suad Joseph's (1999) theory of 'relational-selving', when women's relational-identities are based largely on given networks of kinship and family, they are more likely to be unwilling to challenge unequal hegemonic intra-household norms. As mentioned in the previous section, marriage in an Indian context is embedded within 'patriarchal connectivity' (Joseph, 1993; 1999) within which men's interests, needs and preferences prevail, and men have the privilege of defining the boundaries of what will (and will not) be bargained over and when. An attempt by women to articulate needs that are purely 'selfish' or reflect their own best interests can sabotage the connective relationships that they are part of and in turn threaten their relational identity. How then do women begin to challenge the very relationships that define their identities, give meaning to their lives, and from which they derive a sense of security?

I argue that a critical step in strengthening women's willingness to bargain within the home is the building of alternative identities through which they can define themselves. If we understand selfhood to be relational and identity to be developed based on the social relations individuals' are part of then with respect to informal economy women workers, this sense of self might not only depend on the families that they are part of, but might also be derived from the relationships that they are part of as members of a collective. Women's identities which had up until now been derived solely from their

membership to kinship and family networks now have alternative relationships upon which they can be based. When women derive a sense of friendship, camaraderie or sisterhood from being part of a labour organization these alternative social relations can be used by them to re-define this 'connectivity' that is critical to identity formation. A woman therefore is no longer simply a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law but instead is also a friend, confidante, sister and comrade.

When women begin to define themselves in terms other than those dictated by the men and elders in their family the act of challenging unequal intra-household gender relations might prove less risky given that their identity is not solely derived from hegemonic kinship roles and norms. These new connective identities provide women a sense of belonging and security, and simultaneously enhance the extent to which they might be willing to bargain for better treatment within their homes. It is based on these new relational selves that cognitive and material pathways assume a transformatory significance.

3.5 Strategies and Tactics as Forms of Intra-household Bargaining

Having access to the material, cognitive and relational pathways mentioned above I now move on to the forms that bargaining takes in an attempt to challenge intra-household hegemonic gender norms. Literature on intra-household bargaining draws attention to the fact that often in contexts where social norms prevent explicit bargaining, women might resort to using implicit forms of contestation (Agarwal, 1994; 1997; Kabeer, 2000). This does not mean that women suffer from a 'false consciousness' as suggested by Sen (1990), but instead that they operate within the limits of a 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti, 1988). According to Kandiyoti (1988) women strategize within the constraints of what she terms the 'patriarchal bargain', which influences the specific forms of active or passive resistance that women demonstrate to oppression. In highly patriarchal societies like India these bargains take the form of women adhering to normative rules (giving the impression of 'compliance') in order to reduce the risk of being left without symbolic and material male protection. Adding to this, scholars such as Agarwal (1994) and Risseuw (1988), argue that even though women's actions may signify compliance, compliance does not always imply complicity. After judging and analyzing the situation, women will choose a 'strategic answer' (Risseuw, *ibid*, p.

186), among the available options, in turn demonstrating that they are not ignorant and oppressed as suggested by Sen (1990) but instead limited by their options.

Very often these 'strategic answers' make take the form of covert tactics of defiance, which are not easily noticeable. For instance Agarwal (1994) highlights several forms of women's subtle and covert bargaining strategies from empirical studies across South Asia. For instance spirit possession, using 'silence', diversion of food, hiding income, and contesting male power through song and dance are some of the ways women undermine male superiority and resist hegemonic family structures.

Kabeer (2000) in her research with women garment factory workers in Bangladesh highlights another two important forms of covert bargaining within the home. Firstly she describes how women engaged in a process of 'discursive bargaining' by appealing to shared household goals, and the welfare of the children. These were issues which were difficult for men as 'guardians' of the house to counter, and women therefore managed to secure positive outcomes for themselves. Secondly she highlights how women engaged in what Villareal (1990) terms 'yielding and wielding'. This involved concessions being made in certain areas to win concessions in others. For example women promised their husbands that if they were granted the permission to work in garment factories, their paid work outside the home would not have a negative effect on their primary role as caretakers of their homes.

Although covert resistance need not necessarily imply women's complicity in their oppression (see Agarwal, 1994, p. 424-436), scholars suggest that the impact of such 'hidden' forms of contestation may be short-lived since they operate within the parameters of dominant gender ideologies (Kandiyoti, 1998). In themselves these covert actions are "unlikely to constitute a sufficient condition for effective change" (Agarwal, 1994, p. 436). It has been argued that membership of gender-progressive coalitions can transform such acts of individual-covert resistance into overt forms of bargaining, which can be more effective in bringing about change in gender relations (ibid).

In addition to these forms of covert bargaining, empirical research points to a few cases of women engaging in overt forms of resistance. For instance a study in Kerala found that women who owned property commonly left their homes for short or long periods

of time in response to long-term violence (see Panda and Agarwal's (2005). On the other hand 'property-less' women also engage in similar forms of overt protest. Amongst lower-caste women in India empirical studies have shown that it is common for them to leave their husband's home temporarily in response to domestic violence. In addition lower-caste women often openly retaliate with physical and verbal abuse when faced with violence in their homes (Kapadia, 1995; Khare, 2000; Rege, 2006). They often "make the attack public by shouting, abusing the husband and if possible beating the husband in return" (Ilaiah, 2006, pp.26-35).

Expanding this understanding of women's overt and covert bargaining, I would like to highlight the role of women's consciousness and perceptions in determining the effectiveness of bargaining. I argue that regardless of whether women use overt or covert actions, the effectiveness of women's contestations within the home depends to a great extent upon the emergence of new forms of consciousness through personal and political struggles. It is only when women re-define their sense of self, improve perceptions of their self-worth and challenge ideologies about appropriate male and female behaviour that they open up new spaces of struggle and renegotiation within the existing patriarchal bargain.

To explain this further I use an interpretation of de Certeau's (1984) distinction between tactics and strategies.²⁴ In his influential book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de

²⁴In the influential chapter "Walking in the City", de Certeau asserts that 'the city' is generated by the **strategies** of governments, corporations, and other institutional bodies who produce things like maps that describe the city as a unified whole (de Certeau, 1984). By contrast, the walker at street level moves in ways that are **tactical** and never fully determined by the plans of organizing bodies, taking shortcuts in spite of the strategic grid of the streets. This illustrates Certeau's argument that everyday life works by a process of encroaching upon the territory of others, using the rules and products that already exist in culture in a way that is influenced, but never wholly determined, by those rules and products. Although de Certeau himself does not talk about how or whether the subjugated can make the transition from 'tactics' to 'strategies', scholars have used his work to demonstrate the transition from 'tactic' to 'strategy' (see Bayat, 1997; Blaauvelt, 2003; Devine, 2007).

For instance Joseph Devine (2006, 2007) uses de Certeau's conceptualization of strategies and tactics to illustrate how membership of an NGO in Bangladesh has allowed women and men to move from 'tactical to strategic mobilization' (Devine, 2007, p. 305) with respect to people's engagement with the formal electoral process. He found that in the early days of the existence of the NGO, members were 'forced to react' i.e. negotiate tactically to demands made by competing electoral candidates. What this meant was that post-elections, candidates would renege on their promises thus "confirming de Certeau's (1984) observation that gains secured through tactical practices tend to be fleeting and difficult to consolidate" (ibid, p. 306). However as the organization grew, its members began to mobilize in collective and powerful ways, voicing their discontent. This led to the election of a candidate they had chosen to

Certeau distinguishes between ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’ in an attempt to outline the ways in which individuals unconsciously navigate everyday life in a city. He argues that strategies are the purview of institutions and structures of power who ‘produce’ the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable actions and/or behaviour, while individuals are simply ‘consumers’ who use tactics to operate within these boundaries (‘environments’) already defined by strategies (ibid., p. 37-38).

de Certeau (1984) argues that every strategic practice operates from a ‘fixed position’ that is identifiable and demarcated. This space serves as an independent base from which people plan their interactions with external people, events and circumstances. Strategies presume control and are only available to subjects of ‘will and power’, who objectify their environment in such a way as to create new norms and ways of being. Tactics on the other hand, lack a “proper locus” (ibid. P. 37), survive through improvisation and can only operate within terrains that are borrowed or imposed from outside. This allows for opportunistic interactions (as opposed to planned interventions) which aim at immediate or short-term gains. Tactics are the purview of the non-powerful, an adaption to the environment which has been created by the strategies of the powerful. Tactics therefore symbolize a lack of control.

Following from this I argue that when women do not perceive themselves as entitled or worthy, and having a sense of self that is autonomous from family and kinship relations, their intra-household bargaining (whether overt or covert) is likely to take the form of ‘tactics’. This is because in the absence of a degree of consciousness, awareness of their

support. Devine interprets this as the members securing the “authority or “fixed position” that allowed strategic as opposed to tactical planning” (ibid, p. 306).

Devine (2007) interprets de Certeau’s distinction between ‘strategy’ and ‘tactic’ as follows, “the main difference between a strategy and a tactic is that the former requires a figurative ‘fixed position’ or node that is identifiable, discrete and demarcated. This serves as an autonomous base from which to plan relations with other external agents, events and circumstances. In this instance, people have more control over what they do. A tactic, instead, lacks a fixed position and as a consequence, can only operate on borrowed or imposed terrains. This allows for limited or opportunistic (as opposed to planned) interactions. Here people exercise much less control over what they do” (ibid, p. 305).

My interpretation of de Certeau’s work is similar to that of Devine (2007), in that I extend the use of ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’ beyond the spatiality of the city, to draw on de Certeau’s underlying theme that despite repressive aspects of modern society, there exists an element of creative resistance (tactics) to these structures enacted by ordinary people. I argue that when individuals operate from positions of greater control and power they not only resist these structures but can potentially *transform* tactics into strategies thereby instituting new rules of the game and “actualizing an ordering of social reality on their own terms” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37).

self-interests and the resources to achieve these interests women are likely to bargain within an 'environment' which reflects internalized social and gendered norms. Within such boundaries, women's reactions to inequality and injustice within their homes would reflect what de Certeau describes as 'isolated actions', which provide only temporary relief and safety; with no vision of long term transformative changes (ibid., p. 37). Also as observed by de Certeau (1984) the gains secured through tactical practices are fleeting, discrete and difficult to consolidate. Therefore even if women secure positive bargaining outcomes for themselves in one moment, these wins cannot be consistently assured.

When women embody a new consciousness, and develop new ways of seeing the world based on a sense of entitlement and fairly high perceptions of their self-worth (Sen, 1990), their bargaining begins to resemble 'strategies'. These strategies mark a significant shift in the way(s) women think of themselves; from dependent, fearful wives to independent, confident and courageous women workers. They become means by which women can build an 'autonomous base' (ibid, p. 37), by establishing new boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, challenging hegemonic norms and essentially changing the rules of the game. Strategies emerge when women not only have the resources to bargain, but also a greater willingness to push the boundaries of a bargain. They therefore have the potential to bring about long-term, transformative change and 'an ordering of social reality on their terms' (de Certeau, 1984). In the following chapters I shall use empirical evidence to demonstrate how regular and consistent participation in the union provided women an opportunity to confront intra-household inequality by building strategic bases for themselves.

3.6 Conclusion

Women live within a complex set of social relationships, which are often hierarchical, patriarchal and difficult to change. Ironically it is these very relationships that define women's sense of self and belonging. Any action to challenge inequality within such a context would imply that women would have to challenge the very relationships that give meaning to their lives. Though access to paid work, higher wages, dignity, and avenues to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, are critical to women being able to

question their roles, duties and responsibilities within their homes; they are not enough as a catalyst for change.

What is necessary is an alternative relational definition of women's sense of self developed on the security and consistency that a labour organization offers. It is only within the context of newly developed relational selves, that the patriarchal risk of challenging gender relations within the home reduces. In addition women develop multiple self-understandings through engagement with the labour organization, and /or begin to value their earnings which eventually provide the basis for renegotiations within the home. It is important to mention here that these myriad pathways for change are intrinsically bound up with each other and interdependent. The next two chapters focus on how membership to a trade union of wastepickers in Pune, India provided women with the material, cognitive and relational pathways that were critical in women demanding better treatment within their homes

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND FIELDWORK

4.1 Broad Areas of Enquiry

In the previous chapters I have elaborated on the context behind this research, the existing literature on the research topic and the research questions I aim to examine. In the following chapter, I elaborate on the methodological approaches I chose to adopt and the specific methods of data collection

My research project is an attempt to understand how membership to a labour organization impacts women's private lives, and the processes that account for such change. In particular I examine gender relations in the homes of Dalit women and men, and attempt to understand whether there has been a shift in intra household gender relations once women have joined a labour organization. I have attempted to explore issues around domestic division of labour, control over finances and domestic violence.

As mentioned in previous chapters there has been significant theorization on how gender relations have historically been constructed within the Indian family, and the triggers for their evolution and potential transformation. However much of this literature is not caste specific. Since the manifestation of patriarchies might vary by caste it becomes imperative that a study of intra household gender relations must take into account caste and class markers. Therefore the starting point of this research was ascertaining how gender relations actually 'looked' in Dalit homes.

I began by understanding how gender relations played out in the homes of the men and women I would be interviewing. This was followed by an exploration of how membership to the KKP KP had impacted women's lives, both within the home and outside. In particular I focused on whether the changes it affected in women's identity, consciousness and sense of self as a worker, as a citizen and as a person had translated into a greater capacity and willingness to bring about desired forms of change in their marital relationships. Finally I attempted to understand the circumstances under which men were likely to either respond positively to these changes in women or the reasons for their resistance.

4.2 Chosen Research Methodology

To pursue this research project, I chose to use a qualitative research methodology as I believed that it would be best suited to answer my research questions. Since most of my study focused on women's *experiences* of membership to a labour organization, and the resultant changes that had incurred within the household I needed to select a methodology that allowed for interpretation and reflexivity.

Quantitative frameworks of collecting and analyzing data, while useful in several contexts are often unable to capture the nuances of women's lives, gendered discourses, and 'everyday' experiences. Being highly structured they often analyse relationships between variables in ways that create a static view of social life that is independent of people's lived realities (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative research frameworks, in contrast, are more flexible and lend themselves to contextually sensitive phenomena (Crawford and Popp, 2003).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known. They can also be used to gain new perspective on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively. This fitted in with my research project where I had considerable information on the resources informal economy women had access to when they joined labour organizations, but almost no information on how they use these resources to negotiate unequal intra-household gender relations. Similarly there was a significant dearth of literature that examined men's responses to women's access to these resources.

In addition a qualitative methodology is attuned to the unfolding of events over time and the 'messy-ness' of people's lives. It helps us to capture subjective meaning and to understand how this meaning is created and enacted. My research involved talking to both women and men about their married lives, which usually involved 'plots' that were "multiple, fluid and endlessly shifting" (Gardner, 2002, p.33) As Grover in her study of conjugality in New Delhi's slums observed "marriage interlaces disparate features such as love, violence, money, reproduction, sexuality, vulnerability, jealousy and

cooperation” (Grover, 2011, p. 17). Therefore to highlight, encapsulate and do justice to the emotional complexity of people’s marital lives I chose to use qualitative research methods. Furthermore since wastepickers as a group are vociferous, articulate and vocal, I was of the opinion that using qualitative methodologies that privileged their voice and experiences would be the best suited.

Another advantage of qualitative research is that it allows for more flexibility, enabling themes to evolve, develop, and unfold as the research proceeds (Robson, 2011). Unlike a quantitative research strategy, where the research question is pre-determined based on existing theory, in qualitative research “theory is supposed to be an outcome of an investigation rather than something that precedes it” (Bryman, 2012, p. 384). Charmaz (2006) further notes that flexible guidelines of qualitative research offer a distinct advantage over quantitative research, as they allow the researcher to follow leads as they emerge, like putting together pieces of a puzzle. This emphasis on *process* is critical when we talk about people’s lives, which unfold in fluid ways, and often convey a strong sense of change and flux.

However, I would like to add, that while I am aware of the merits of qualitative research, I am also aware of its limitations. To elaborate, the findings of qualitative research lend themselves to “generalize to theory rather than to populations” (Mitchell, 1983; Bryman, 2012), which is a criticism quantitative researchers have levelled against the ‘subjective-ness’ of qualitative research. Furthermore fieldwork based on a qualitative methodology involves dealing with, analyzing, and representing the ‘experience’ of ones interviewees. However, experience, by itself, is a problematic unit of analysis. Does not the “tangible, sensory, and direct” nature of experience problematize its theoretical articulations? (Jacoby, 2006, p.154) Further, how do we account for cultural/political/contextual differences between the researcher and the respondents in interpreting experience? I aim to keep these questions relevant as I discuss my research methods and ethical considerations in more detail.

Having stated that my research is qualitative in character, the methods of data-collection that I used were ethnographic in nature involving prolonged periods of participant observation and immersion in the social group under study. This is primarily because for three years prior to the commencement of this research I was employed by the

KKPKP. It is during this period (2008-2012) that my socio-economic, political and cultural understanding of the wastepicker community deepened.

The main issues I worked on in the KKPKP were advocacy around livelihoods of wastepickers, health of the workers and education of their children. This involved spending time with wastepickers in the union office, at union meetings, in women's homes and at protest marches and demonstrations on the streets. Over time I developed deep friendships with some of the wastepickers in the union, often spending time with them 'out of hours' in their homes-talking, eating, gossiping and sharing stories. I became part of their lives and their homes; intervening in issues like domestic violence within the home, alcoholism of a spouse, marriages of children, neighbourhood quarrels, the birth of children and grandchildren, hospitalizations, and the death of loved ones. The nature and degree of involvement differed in each case but they led to developing relationships of trust, respect and intimacy with wastepickers in the KKPKP.

It is the length and the intensity of these relationships that allow me to describe my research methodology as drawing on ethnographic methods of enquiry. The time I spent working with the Union was so intense that the boundaries between my work life and personal life dissolved; and for these three years the women of the union became my family, friends and comrades. I witnessed first-hand their pain, joy, sorrow, happiness, rage; and a whole host of other emotions. Ethnographic methods in social science research contribute to an understanding of what bell hooks calls 'a view from below' (hooks, 1984), and I believe that working with the KKPKP greatly helped me achieve this by understand intimately women's ways of being, and the meaning(s) they attributed to events and relationships in their lives. Ethnographic methods of data collection then "with their emphasis on experiences and the words, voice and lives of the participants" (Skeggs, 2001, p. 430), became a natural prelude to my research, and provided the necessary foundation for the in-depth interviews and focused group discussions that I eventually used while collecting data.

4.3 Physical Site of Research

I conducted my fieldwork with the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), i.e. the Trade Union of Wastepickers, located in Pune, India. Pune located approximately 150 kilometres southeast of Mumbai is the eighth largest city in India, with a population of 3.2 million people (Government of India, 2011). The 2011 census indicates that the urban poor make up 50 per cent of Pune's population and forty percent of this population live in slums (GOI, 2011; Burra, 2001).

The Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), also known as the Trade Union of Wastepickers was established in Pune in 1993. Over the last twenty years the KKPKP has organized 10,000 wastepickers living across 110 slums in the city of Pune (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2001).

Wastepickers (also known as ragpickers) retrieve paper, plastic, metal and glass from garbage bins in the streets and from landfill sites where the municipality transports and dumps the city's garbage. They usually travel on foot covering up to 10-12 kilometers a day carrying head-loads of up to 40 kilograms. Some of them travel by train the villages and industrial belts on the outskirts of the city in order to collect scrap. They usually have a 10-12 hour working day, leaving their homes at sunrise and returning at sunset. Their average daily earning is about Rs.100.²⁵ Though they play a critical role in resource recovery and management of urban solid waste their role is rarely recognized by the State and citizens. Within the urban occupational hierarchy of the informal sector as well, wastepickers rank the lowest.

The total population of wastepickers in Pune is estimated to be over 10,000 (KKPKP, n.d.). 2 per cent of these waste-pickers are women, 30 percent of them being widowed/deserted and 50 per cent of them contribute more than fifty per cent of the household income. Only 8 percent of wastepickers are literate.²⁶ They are almost exclusively Dalit,

²⁵ Approximately \$2

²⁶ Unpublished KKPKP Case Study: Chikarmane, Narayan (2000)

the erstwhile 'untouchable' caste, and belong more specifically to the Mahar and the Matang sub-castes.²⁷

Since its inception the aim of the KKPKP has been to secure livelihood for wastepickers with a rights based focus. Over the years the Union has developed its programs in response to the needs expressed by the community of wastepickers and today they address issues in the areas of health, education, credit and livelihoods.

The reasons I chose the KKPKP were several. Firstly it was while employed as an activist with the KKPKP that my research questions emerged. Sunita's death in particular (referred to in the Introduction) is what inspired this study. Secondly KKPKP has always focused on issues of livelihoods and rights, committed to developing a strong worker identity among its members. It provides its members access to various material, cognitive and relational pathways I have identified earlier on in my paper. This blends in perfectly with my project which aims to ascertain whether access to such resources has a consequent impact on gender relations within the home. And lastly being from Pune and having worked previously with the KKPKP I was not only familiar with the layout of the city, the local language and socio-cultural norms, but I also had a fair understanding of how the Union operates, the daily work routine of wastepickers and how to reach them. However I was careful to constantly be aware of the need to be objective, while interviewing women with whom I had developed close relationships with over the years. I do not believe that my relationship with them compromised their responses towards me, because wastepickers are known to be naturally articulate, forthcoming and vocal about their opinions because of the daily struggle in their lives on the street (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004).

²⁷ Dalits are the lowest caste in the Hindu caste hierarchy, regionally divided into various sub-castes. In Maharashtra there are three major groups of Dalits; namely, Mahar, Mang/ Matang, and Chambhar (Cobbler). Wastepickers belong mostly to the Mahar and Mang sub-castes. Historically the Mahar sub-caste had been assigned the work of carrying the dead bodies of animals, cows and buffaloes out of the village, skinning the animals and returning the skin of the animal to its owner. For this service he was entitled to 1/9th of the entire watan (land entitlement) including grain, perquisites and donations (Duff, 1873). In the early 20th century several Mahars embraced Buddhism after the Dalit leader, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar propagated that conversion to Buddhism was the only avenue open for the 'untouchables' to liberate themselves from the oppressive clutches of caste ridden Hindu society. They also refer to themselves as 'neo-buddhists' (Rao, 2009). Mang was one of the 12 balutedars (village service providers), and his main job was to make the leather ropes from the skins of cattle and several other things like leather bag for fetching water from the well for irrigating the land, thongs, whips used by the cultivator. He also acted as the village watchman (Duff, 1873). Both these communities are included in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes category by the Indian government.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

The primary objective of my research was to understand the informal economy women's experiences of membership to a labour organization, and its resultant impact on intra-household gender relations. I also attempted to map husband's reactions to these changes. This kind of research logically would require some kind of before and after comparison. That is, to understand whether membership to a labour organization has actually affected gender relations within the home I would have to compare intra-household gender relations *prior* to women joining a labour organization and *post* them joining one. Similarly in an ideal scenario I would have to measure men's responses both before and after their wives joined a labour organization.

This kind of comparative approach could be carried out in a number of ways. A longitudinal study for example would map gender relations within a home and masculine identities prior to membership of a labour organization, and then after women have been part of the organization for a particular length of time. A study of this nature though most precise, was unfeasible in terms of time and resources.

Another way this kind of comparison could be carried out is by assessing change through recall (Hill, 2010). In this method women and men would be asked to recall and reflect over the impact of labour organization membership on gender relations within their homes. Still another way of conducting this study would be to compare a group of informal economy women workers who are members of a labour organization to informal economy women workers who are not affiliated in any way to such an organization. I used a combination of the last two methods to collect my data. I spoke to women members of KKPKP and their spouses, asking them to recall how union membership had affected their intimate lives. At the same time I spoke to non-unionized informal women workers about existing gender relations within their homes, and compared their responses to those of unionized informal economy wastepickers. To gather this information I used in-depth semi structured interviews, as well as focus group discussions.

4.4.1 In-depth semi-structured Interviews

In my research I used open ended, semi-structured interviews as I believed it to be the best way to understand the complexity of the experiences of women and men who were part of my research, while at the same time stay focused on my research questions. I conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews with wastepicker members of the KKPKP, their spouses and informal economy workers who were not part of any labour organization.

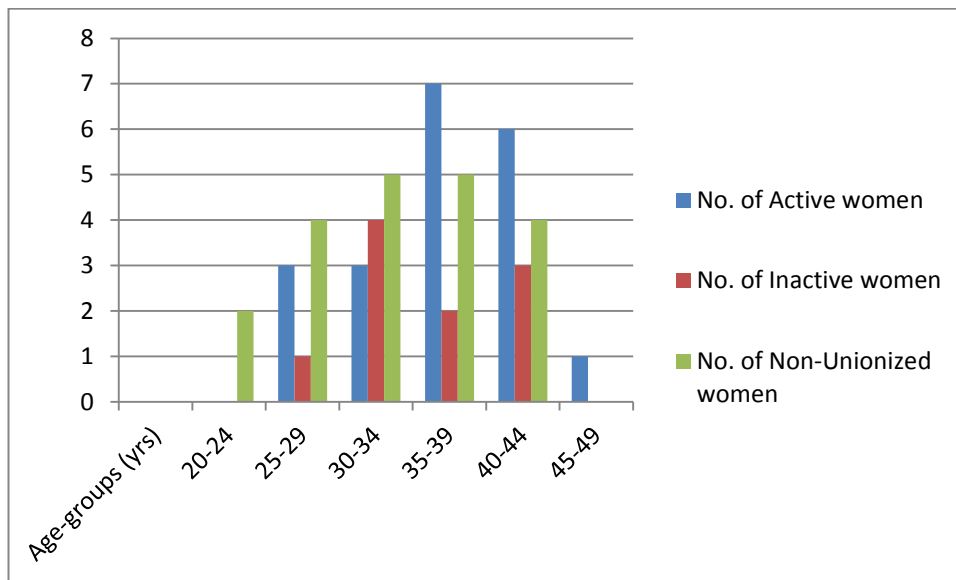
Interviewing is a process of making experience ‘hearable’ and then subjecting it to systematic analysis (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p.210). Interviewing is a powerful research tool when one’s aim is to explore people’s experiences and the contexts that impact and organize their experiences. It offers researchers access to people’s ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher (Reinharz, 1992). This can produce a rigorous account of another person’s perspective (Paget, 1983), and then allow for the researcher and researched to search for meanings together.

In addition in-depth interviews have been successfully used to elicit sensitive information (Helitzer-Allen et al., 1994; Balmer et al. 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Since several aspects of intra-household gender relations touched upon intimate aspects of women’s and men’s married lives in-depth interviews offered me the space, time and flexibility to approach this sensitive area.

I conducted a total of 70 in-depth interviews over a course of 10 months. This included 30 interviews with wastepickers from the KKPKP, 20 interviews with their husbands, and 20 interviews with non-unionized wastepickers.

The unionized wastepickers whom I interviewed were in the age group of 25-45 years. Typically younger women are known to face a higher incidence of domestic violence as compared to older women (Gupta et al., 2012). Older women usually report an abatement in violence either because their children are older and can therefore intervene, or because of the influx of new family members like daughter-in-laws and grandchildren. What this meant for my research was that the women in the younger age

groups (25-35 years) when talking about intra-household gender relations were in many cases currently going through violence. Older women on the other hand contributed to the research largely through ‘recall’. They had the advantage however of a longer association with the Union and therefore were in a better position to compare the ‘before’ and ‘after’ picture of how and why gender relations had changed within their homes during this almost twenty year period. Younger wastepickers contrarily offered valuable insights into how they were currently negotiating critical aspects of child care, distribution of household chores and domestic violence. The figure below shows the age-wise distribution of the number of active (n=20), inactive (n=10) and non-unionized (n=20) wastepickers. It highlights that there was more or less a consistent age-wise distribution across all three categories of wastepickers.



The husbands whom I interviewed were in the age group of 30-55 years, and were spouses of active union members. Ideally, I would have liked to interview all of the spouses of the unionized women wastepickers who were part of my research study. However this was not possible as shall be explained later on in this chapter.

The non-unionized wastepickers whom I interviewed were relatively younger than the unionized wastepickers, and ranged in age from 25-40 years, with most of them being less than 35 years of age. Almost all of these women had heard of the Union and those who had children were keen on joining the KKP KP because they had heard about the union’s role in enabling children’s education. As children grew older and their

educational needs increased, I found that non-unionized women were beginning to joining the Union. This might explain why most of the non-unionized wastepickers I spoke to were not older than 40 years, since they had joined the union before then. Another possible reason for the younger age of non-unionized workers (as compared to unionized women) was because a large number of such women were first generation wastepickers, and unlike unionized wastepickers did not have close family members who picked waste and were members of the KKPKP.

4.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

To complement the interviews I used focus group discussions (FGDs) as another method of data collection. FGDs differ from in-depth interviews in that multiple respondents are interviewed together in a group setting. FGDs ensure that “priority is given to the respondent’s hierarchy of importance, their language and concepts and their frameworks for understanding the world. In this sense focus groups reach that part other methods cannot reach, revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by the more conventional one to one interview or questionnaire” (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 108-109).

Furthermore while in an in-depth interview participants might hesitate to talk about themselves, and at times feel the need to not be entirely honest, FGDs allow a space for participants to draw on collective shared identities, methods of knowing, ways of experiencing the world and relating to it. FGDs can create an atmosphere of mutual trust and sharing, an almost cathartic experience where respondents realize that their concerns are shared by others (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007, p. 199). Madriz (2000) found that among low-income women and women of colour, focus group approaches and collective testimonies fostered more ‘speaking up’ than did individualistic methods such as interview formats.

In addition to the above reasons, I found FGDs particularly helpful because not only did they allow me to gather data from a range of respondents at once but they also helped me understand differences in perspectives among the participants. I could then question these differences in the presence of all participants.

I conducted FGDs with three groups: wastepicker members of KKKPKP, husbands of these women and non-unionized wastepickers. In total I conducted eight FGDs with women; four with unionized wastepickers, three with non-unionized wastepickers and one mixed group FGD with both unionized and non-unionized wastepickers. I conducted three FGDs with husbands of wastepickers. In addition I conducted three Interpretive Focus Groups (IFGs); one each with active wastepickers, inactive wastepickers and husbands of active wastepickers.

The ideal size of focus group has been the subject of much debate (Morgan, 1998; Barbour, 2007; Peek and Fothergill, 2009), however smaller groups are ideal when participants might have a lot to say about a particular topic and/or when they are emotionally preoccupied with the topic at hand (Morgan, 1998). On an average I had between 4-6 members in each focus group.

Before I began an FGD I would state the aim of the group discussion and gain consent from the interviewees. The FGDs were taped (consent permitting) and transcribed. In the beginning I was a little taken aback at how quickly FGDs could go out of hand if not managed well. As a researcher I had to be able to manage the fine line between being controlling, and allowing a focus group to 'take over' the proceedings (Bryman, 2012). This was a skill I developed by and by. Additionally since a huge amount of data was usually generated within a short span of time, FGDs were difficult and time consuming to transcribe and analyse (Bloor et al., 2001; Bryman, 2012). However by making data transcription a regular process of my data collection process I was able to more or less overcome the latter difficulty.

Towards the latter stage of data collection I began using Interpretive Focus Groups (IFGs) with unionized women wastepickers and the spouses who informed this study.²⁸ Developed by Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005) in their work with women in low income communities Interpretive Focus Groups seek to keep local knowledge and subjects at the crux of data analysis. IFGs are gatherings of people who live or work in

²⁸ While I would have liked to use IFGs with all my respondent groups, it was most practical to use these with unionized wastepickers of the KKKPKP and their husbands since I was familiar with where they lived and how to contact them. IFGs required meeting another group of similar respondents to help interpret the data gathered. I did not use IFGs with non-unionized wastepickers as finding similar groups was proving very tedious.

the same overall socio-economic condition as do the people 'under study' to assist in data analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 175). The gathering participants are asked to collaboratively interpret the meanings of the data gathered. Importantly in IFGs the researcher seeks 'co-analysis and not confirmation' of the data previously gathered (Dodson & Schmalzbauer, 2005, p.949). By giving greater understanding to the voices and experiences of the women participants in the interpretation of the data collected these women fulfil the role of expert interpreter.

In addition vulnerable populations like poor, Dalit, wastepickers might hide the real experiences of their everyday lives, especially when talking about sensitive issues. These 'habits of hiding' show up as silences, contradictions or selective telling in conversation (Dodson and Schmalzbauer 2005, Dodson et al. 2007). The use of IFGs enables participants to bring their stories safely into the discourse, without risking exposure or causing harm.

In the case of my research it was after I had gathered and transcribed all my in-depth interviews that I began using Interpretive FGDs. IFGs ideally bring together groups of people whose daily lives are similar to those of the respondents, in an attempt to co-interpret data gathered. As mentioned above, I held IFGs with three groups of respondents; active wastepickers, inactive wastepickers and husbands of active wastepickers. In these interpretive groups I would use oral reporting and excerpts from interviews to stimulate conversation keeping in mind the above questions IFGs primarily were used for three purposes; Firstly to gain more clarity on themes that had emerged from previous interviews and FGDs. For example in an attempt to explore why some members are inactive, in an IFG with Active women I asked them, "When I asked some union members why they did not come for meetings they said that the timings don't suit them. Can you tell me why women feel unable to attend KKPKP meetings?" Secondly I used IFGs to gain insight into terms that were colloquial and not referenced in academic literature. For instance, in an IFG with men I discussed the term '*mothapana*', and what it meant to them. Lastly, I used IFGs to co-interpret data with respondents. For instance in the IFG with Active women I mentioned that my interviews seemed to suggest that active women seemed more comfortable talking about issues of domestic violence outside the confines of their home. I then asked the group why this was the case, and together we built the link between active women having the

courage to openly discuss violence because they had learnt from their time at the union that the ‘personal was political’.

Returning information and the power of analysis back to the wastepickers communities from where the data was generated was my (small) attempt in knowledge co-creation. At the end of the interpretive FGDs I realized that incorporating wastepicker women as *thinkers* and *analysts* within my research study enabled a richer, more accurate narrative of women’s experiences of labour organization membership and the resultant changes in gender dynamics within their homes.

4.5 Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define qualitative data analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” The process of data analysis in this research study involved transcribing interviews and focus group discussions (as well as interpretive focus group discussions) into narratives. This was followed by a process known as coding.

According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the first analytic turn within the qualitative research process. Coding enables core concepts to become clear and allows the simplification of the data (Robson, 2011). It involves a process where the data gathered is separated, sorted, and synthesized, and labels are attached to segments of data that depict the content of that data. Based on the codes that are developed, emergent themes and patterns are identified which are used to interpret new key theories that have arisen from the data collected. These patterns and themes are then integrated to arrive at a composite picture of the research question at hand; in this case of the changing nature of intra household gender relations and masculinities as a result of women workers joining labour organizations.

In this study after data was collected and transcribed I used NVivo, a qualitative research software, to organize and lay out my codes. The codes reflected the main concepts I was attempting to study; the nature of Dalit intra-household gender relations pre-union membership, reasons for women joining the union, the pathways of

empowerment that the union offered, and intra household gender relations post-union membership including men's responses to the same. The process of coding was iterative; it was while I was reading through my transcripts that new codes emerged, and old codes became redundant. For instance the difference between active and 'inactive' union members was not something I had expected and therefore I needed to develop new themes that were relevant to these emerging categories. Similarly men's experiences of '*mothapana*' (Chapter 7) required the developing of new codes.

The process of coding was beneficial in that it enabled me to sort out large volumes of data, and identify patterns and themes across multiple sources. However I also noticed that the process of 'coding', especially when using software like NVivo, could be restrictive in that it forces the researcher to think within the boundaries of already defined codes/themes. To avoid this I simply read (and re-read) my interviews and FGD transcripts multiple times to get a well-rounded picture of what my data was trying to tell me.

4.6 Selection of Participants

1. Sources of data

a) Primary Data

Data was collected from unionized wastepickers, husbands of unionized wastepickers, and from non-unionized wastepickers in Pune using in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

b) Secondary data

Secondary sources of data include:

- 1) Literature on the informal economy and challenges in organizing women informal workers
- 2) Literature on family and kinship systems, especially in relation to Dalit women in Maharashtra.
- 3) Literature on the impact of labour organizations on women's lives.
- 4) Literature on masculinities, and the factors that make men resistant or amenable to change within the home.
- 5) Information from the KKPKP on the scope of their work and interventions.

2. Sampling

The sampling method I employed for this research study was primarily purposive sampling where subjects were selected because of particular characteristics (Patton, 1990). I also used snowball sampling at some points in the research process.

The selection of wastepickers who are part of KKPKP was determined by:

1. The length of time the wastepicker had been part of the Trade Union. Typically a woman who had been part of the Union for atleast five years could be part of the study.
2. The wastepicker should have been married (or in a marriage like arrangement), or if currently single/divorced/widowed she should have been in a marriage like arrangement.

To select wastepickers for the study I used simple random sampling. Wastepickers are spread out across 108 slums in the city of Pune. To select wastepickers randomly across the city I geographically divided Pune into six large areas: Hadapsar, Kothrud, Aundh, Yerwada, Bhavani Peth and Pimpri Chinchwad. Using the KKPKP data base I then did an area-wise sorting of women based on the age criteria and the length of time they had been in the Union. Since the Union did not have data on the current marital status of its members I took the help of *karyakartas* (field workers) to help me identify women in the above geographical areas who were married or were in marriage like situations, to give me a final pool of potential respondents who fit my criteria. Once this was ready I randomly selected women from this final pool.

Husbands of unionized wastepickers were selected on the basis of their ease of availability and the willingness to be interviewed. Out of the 30 wastepickers interviewed, 20 of their spouses could be interviewed.

Snowball sampling was used to identify my 'comparison' group, i.e. wastepickers who were not part of any labour organization. Snowballing is usually used where respondents are difficult to identify and are best located through referral networks (Cooper and Schindler, 2003; Robson, 2011). Since I did not personally know any of these women the method of snowball sampling was best suited. The selection of these informal workers was determined by:

1. The length of time the woman had been working in the informal economy. Typically women who had been working for atleast five years were included in the study.
2. The woman should not belong to any labour organization, but might be a member of a *mahila mandal or bachat gat* (self-help groups) and the likes.

The initial intention of my research had been to compare the lives of wastepickers who were part of the KKPKP with those of non-unionized wastepickers. However it was during the process of data collection that I found that the category of unionized wastepickers was not homogenous, but in fact there were distinct differences between what emerged as two different groups of unionized wastepickers; active and ‘inactive’.

Active union members were those who were far more involved in the union and its activities. These women knew where the union office was and how to get there. They visited the office at least once a month, knew the office staff well and often spent time there even if they did not have any important issue to discuss. Active women also regularly attended union meetings and participated often in demonstrations and protest rallies. On these occasions they were instrumental in getting together and organizing ‘inactive’ wastepicker members of the KKPKP. On the other ‘inactive’ union members attended union meetings sporadically, and visited the union office only if they had major work related issues to sort out. Their participation in demonstrations and protest marches was minimal. On the rare occasion that they did attend these events, it was usually because fieldworkers had visited their homes multiple times and had persuaded them to attend. Out of the thirty women union members that I interviewed, twenty belonged to the ‘active’ category and ten to the ‘inactive’ category.

4.6.1 Who Were the Wastepickers: A Brief Description

Let me now turn to some of the characteristics of the women interviewed for my study. Women workers in the sample were aged between 23 and 45 years of age, with a majority of them being in their 30s. Thirty of the women wastepickers were illiterate, while 16 had some level of basic primary education, and 4 had begun (but not completed) their secondary education. All the women I interviewed were Dalit, belonging in equal number to the Mahar and Matang sub-castes.

Wastepicking was the major occupation of all women, and in a few cases it was supplemented by work as a domestic servant. Almost all women in my study had begun engaging in paid work in the informal economy at a very young age (on an average between 8-9 years). The nature of their occupations as children included agricultural labour in fields, domestic work, working in brick kilns, working as sweepers, waste picking and selling fruits/vegetables.

Most wastepickers I interviewed (35 out of 50) had either been born in Pune or had lived here since a very young age. Several of them had moved to Pune as children along with their families in the 1970s after a drought in eastern Maharashtra (Vidharba). Women from these families took up wastepicking as it was more lucrative than domestic work and relatively free from sexual harassment, unlike in wage labour. Therefore most of my respondents had mothers who had been wastepickers as well, and fathers who engaged in casual wage labour. More than fifty percent reported that their fathers worked irregularly, and often drank too much. 15 wastepickers had migrated to the city (from their villages) post marriage. While in the village they had worked alongside their parents as waged labourers in fields, and it was only after coming to the city that they began picking waste.

Out of the sample of 50 wastepickers whom I interviewed, 30 were members of the KKPKP, and 20 were as yet non-unionized. Members of the KKPKP were mostly second generation wastepickers who had joined the union primarily because they had been convinced to do so by union field workers, who would visit them at their work places and homes and speak to them about the benefits of union membership. A few women also joined because they had an existing family member (in most cases their mother or mother in law) who was already a KKPKP member. In the case of non-unionized wastepickers, all of them had heard about the KKPKP but had not joined the union for several reasons. A few women had grown up children and hence did not think the union would be of much benefit to them. *“My children are grown up now so I have no use for the notebooks you’ll distribute”*, said Laxmi for instance. Similarly several women were members of micro-credit groups in their slums, and therefore did not think they needed the help of the union. Usha illustrates this point when she says, *“I already save every month so what is the need?”* Several women complained of wanting to join but not being able to afford the membership fees.

As for wastepickers husbands, the 20 men in my study fell within the age group of 36-50 years. Half of these men had no education (n=10), a quarter had basic primary education (n=6) and a few had some level of secondary education (n=4). The family background of these men was similar to that of the women, with a majority of men having fathers who were alcoholic and hardly contributing towards the home. Men in my sample began working outside the home at a young age, on an average between the ages of 9-10 years. However unlike young girls, they never participated in household chores, and spent more of their free time playing games with friends, drinking or in some cases 'chasing' women. The average age of marriage for men was 17 years, slightly higher than it was for women. More than half the men in my sample had at some point in their life had one or more major addictions, the most common of which was alcohol.

4.7 Doing Fieldwork

4.7.1 Researching Women

Choosing a Meeting Place

After random selection of women from the KKPKP database I would go to the *vastis* (slums) to meet these women in person and ask them if they would be willing to be interviewed. Since the interview required at least two hours of a woman's time and a relatively private space I rarely conducted interviews with women the first time I met them. I would usually arrange a date, time and venue for a few days later when the woman could manage to free herself from household chores for those few hours. If possible I would note down a phone number by which I could reach the respondent so that I could call and remind her a day before the scheduled interview.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with unionized wastepickers were conducted in the *vastis* (slums), in the union office or at their place of work. The choice of location was entirely up to the wastepicker(s) in question. Some women preferred talking to me when they would take a break from their work, others preferred that I come to their homes in the evenings after they had come home. For some logistically it was easier to meet me in the Union office. During this period I spent almost all evenings in slums

across the city meeting women, getting to know potential respondents and listening to their stories.

What was quite challenging was finding spaces of privacy within the vastis where we could conduct interviews and FGDs. Most women lived in joint families so there were usually elderly in-laws, children and/or daughters-in-law present. In some cases women would 'shoo' everyone out of the house, and we would sit inside and talk. This made me feel slightly guilty especially if young children were watching TV or doing their homework, and were asked to step out of their one-room home. In some cases we managed to gain access to a community hall or a temple to conduct the interview. In one vasti we sat on the roof of the communal toilets, since that was the only 'private' space available! When I interviewed women at their work places, we would normally sit under the shade of a nearby tree on the pavement and talk. Though these various environments were often noisy and chaotic, we had to make do with what was available.

Informed Consent

Before the interviews and focus group discussions, I explained the aim of the project and gained verbal consent from the respondents. The interviews and FGDs were recorded, transcribed, and documented with extensive notes. Active listening was an essential component of the interviewing process. This means that I needed to pay attention to contradictions and confusions, silences and absences, differences in emotional tone and intensity, and facial gestures and body language as sometimes they conveyed more than words (Hesse-Biber, 2012). In some cases women explicitly asked me to not mention anything about our conversation to their husband, or they asked me to turn off my recorder when they were describing sexual pleasure or violence.

Gaining consent from women was more of a formality, and all the women I interviewed looked crestfallen when I mentioned that their names would not be mentioned in the final report because of issues of confidentiality. This was unfortunate because women were keen that *their* stories be told and *their* names be cited. While I agreed with them whole heartedly, I had to explain to them why this was not possible. The dilemma about 'confidentiality' is something I have not resolved as yet.

Process

Building rapport with women was relatively easy especially since I had worked with the Union before. In fact many women thought I was still working with the Union despite my two year absence, and I had to explain to them my new role as a researcher. I was pleasantly surprised at their enthusiasm and pride that not only was I studying *their* lives, but I was doing so in a *baher desh* (foreign country).

In the case of non-unionized wastepickers with whom I had had no contact before, building rapport was not that hard either. Since I used a method of snowball sampling where each wastepicker I interviewed had been referred to me by someone they knew, I think they found it easier to take me into confidence and speak about their lives. My previous association with the Union also played an important role in them being able to trust me.

However in a few cases among both unionized and non-unionized wastepickers I was aware that in the beginning the interviews seemed to appear as a rehearsed performance on part of the respondents. While talking about domestic violence a few women gave me answers which they felt I wanted to hear. My class position and education which are immediately visible to wastepickers led them to say things like, “In *your kind of people* domestic violence doesn’t occur. But with *our kind of people* it is very prevalent. It is normal” Women were responding to me based on what they perceived to be politically correct. “Just going along with the researcher” is a strategy often employed by poor women according to Dodson and Schmalzbauer (2005, p. 951). This is because research subjects often act politically through the interview process- an act of “self-presentation”- and the subject often says what (s)he wants to be heard and present their selves the way they want to be represented (Jacoby, 2006, p.162). Structuring questions in particular ways, paying attention to emotions and silences, and considering narratives formulated in other contexts (discourse and practice) allowed me to overcome these challenges.

Interviews usually lasted for two hours, with repeat interviews conducted if required after I had transcribed the data. FGDs also lasted for approximately the same length of time. Since I interviewed women mostly in the evenings after they had returned from

work, I ate into the time they would have otherwise spent cooking, cleaning or washing clothes and utensils. Invariably because of the interview these tasks would be delegated to the daughters to do, or women would hurriedly cook up a meal so that their husbands could have their food ready when they came home for dinner. This always left me feeling guilty, something which I touch upon in the final section of this chapter.

4.7.2 Researching Men

Research on men conducted by women has received scarce descriptive or analytical attention with respect to the interactional dynamics during the research process (Arendell, 1997; Yong, 2001). However the role of gender in the qualitative research process, its potential impact on the kind of data collected and the final research product is an area which needs to be addressed. The researcher-researched relationship in such contexts involves a constant negotiating and renegotiating between the researcher and the respondent (Yong, 2001).

In general reflexivity in research has called into question issues of gender, race and class and has largely been promoted by feminist scholarship (Hesse-Bieber, 2012). ‘Reflexivity’ involves an awareness that the researcher and researched affect each other mutually and continually in the research process (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). It requires the researcher to recognize, examine, and understand how in addition to one’s social background, location, and assumptions, one’s gender might affect the research process.

Keeping this in mind I would say that interviewing men was a very interesting process, throwing up several challenges and insights. At first I had planned on employing a man as a research assistant to conduct the interviews. This was because I thought that the gender, caste and class differentials between me and my respondents, would be difficult to navigate especially if I wanted to talk about sensitive issues related to intimacy, marriage, sexuality and violence. However as I began interviewing women and developed a deeper understanding of their lives I found that I needed to interview their spouses myself just because I already had an intimate understanding of significant events and occurrences in their conjugal lives. In addition interviewing men would allow me to fill in gaps, notice inconsistencies and raise pertinent questions with both

men and women. In the end I found that interviewing both husbands and wives myself was like putting together pieces of a puzzle; a process that generated rich, complex and ‘whole’ narratives, greater than the sum of its parts. The following section elaborates on some of the complexities and experiences I as a woman faced, while researching men.

Setting up the Interview

In all cases to get in touch with men I initiated contact through their wives. Given the nature of my research, and its questions around intimacy and violence, I needed to seek the wife’s permission before I began interviewing the husband. After acquiring her consent, I would meet the husband, explain to him the purpose of my research and ask him for a suitable time for an interview. Two women requested me not to speak to their husbands because they were terribly abusive, and they feared what would happen to them if their husbands got wind of the fact that they had spoken to an ‘outsider’ about the abuse. There was one wastepicker who was so angry with the Union for not ‘giving her anything’ that she refused to let me speak to her husband

I found coordinating interviews with men extremely challenging. At first men were wary, and wanted to know what kind of information I needed from them. A few expressed concern that I was going to ‘report’ them to the Union or police. Some men made it a point to either cancel interviews last minute or make me wait for inordinate amounts of time before we could begin. Baird (2009) while researching violent young men in Colombia also found that it took much more time and effort to secure the interviews than he had anticipated. Furthermore similar to his research I found that although most men would agree in principle to an interview many turned up late to the designated meeting place, occasionally under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and on numerous occasions they did not turn up at all (Baird, 2009).

Securing interviews with husbands who were alcoholic was quite challenging. For example in one case I visited a man five times across the course of three months; at all different times of the day: 7am, 10am, 12 pm, 5pm, 9pm, hoping to find him sober at least one of these times. He never was, and I finally could not interview him. In another case, a husband who I wanted to interview but who was perpetually drunk as well began hiding from me every time I arrived at his home to interview him. I finally gave up, and

did not interview him. Another time I turned up for an interview only to find the respondent completely drunk, though more than willing to be interviewed. However I declined and rescheduled for another time.

Choosing a Meeting Place

Lee (1997) cautions that women researchers interviewing men should be aware about the potential for harm especially when they are alone and the interview requires both a private setting and conversations around sex. “The very nature of a one off interview means that the interviewer has no prior knowledge of her informant against which she can judge whether or not to feel threatened by the prospect of interacting with him in the private setting of the interview” (Lee, 1997, p. 553). Though this might be true in a variety of research settings, and taking necessary precautions is a must, I did not feel especially threatened at any point during my fieldwork with men.

Largely interviews and focus groups were held in men’s homes in the *vasti* (slum). In one case I visited a man at his place of work,(a housing society where he collected waste. Unlike women whom I could interview in public view in the slums, interviewing a man in any public space within a slum would have drawn much unwanted attention. Therefore all interviews were held in their homes. At first I was concerned about this since most homes in slum usually have about 6-7 family members on average living in one small room. However talking about issues of sex, marriage and violence necessitated some privacy. Little did I imagine that creating the space to talk to men alone would hardly be an issue. I only needed to mention this need for privacy to men and they would immediately order everyone out of the house; irrespective of what they were doing; watching TV, cooking, cleaning, or doing homework. This again become one of those moments where I felt considerable guilt.

During the course of my research family members, friends and colleagues often asked me if I was ever afraid of being alone with these men in their homes. I have always responded saying that I never felt threatened or fearful due to a combination of several factors. Firstly I implicitly trusted the wives of the men I was interviewing and I knew that if there was any reason to be afraid the women would have forewarned me. Secondly several men whom I interviewed knew of the union and admired the work it

did. Being seen as a representative of the union accorded me respect. Thirdly I was aware that my class privilege might automatically protect me, because a poor, lower caste man with minimal resources at his disposal might be wary of causing an upper-caste, class woman any harm. A combination of these factors allowed for me to feel quite safe while conducting my interviews and focus group discussions. Lastly and perhaps most importantly I was determined to use these interview experiences to challenge the stereotype of Dalit men as 'violent, drunk, and abusive'. The men I met were much more than alcoholic, abusive and unemployed. They were men with broken dreams, failed hopes and who were full of shame. They were men who had been labelled and cast-out, who had been rejected and scorned. Violence for them was not only about power and control but also a way of working through the shame, guilt and fear that they experienced daily. In my interviews with these men they came across as men waiting for a chance to re-invent themselves, and hoping for a space where they could share their feelings, hopes and fears; just like their wives could with the KKP.

Informed consent

I took verbal consent from men before each interview and focus group discussion. Like the women, or perhaps more so, men were irritated when I mentioned that I would not use their names in my research. It almost seemed like this was a waste of time for them then, with remarks like, "Then what's the use of talking to me?"

On the other hand in the beginning men were quite guarded and wanted to know in detail what the interviews would be about and what kind of questions I would ask. They were suspicious of me at first, presumably because they must have thought that as a former activist with the Union I was there to interrogate them about complaints made by their wives against them! This is contrary to what other researchers have found while interviewing men. Walls et al. (2010) in their study in Northern Ireland where they explored decision making of men with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) found that most male participants were keen to 'just get on with' the interview. Oliffe and Mróz (2005) have termed this the 'masculine tradition whereby men do not read the instructions but prefer to navigate unexplored territory in a spontaneous and adventurous way'. I however did not find this reflected in my interviews with men, but

instead found this tendency to want to 'just get on' with the interview very strong among women.

I recorded interviews and focus groups on my phone, and most men did not seem to be bothered by this fact. Some men in fact insisted on checking if what they were saying was being recorded, and in some cases I had to stop the interview and play it back to them so that they were assured that it was. Two men insisted on holding the phone closer to their mouth so that it would be clearer in the recording!

Process

Lee and Owens (2002) point out that research that delves into the private sphere or touches upon deeply personal experiences has the potential to be distressing as well as emotive. I did expect some challenges in speaking to men, especially about sensitive issues, since for most of them this was probably the first time they would be talking about their fears and insecurities in their marriage to an 'outsider', and that to a woman. However as I discovered most men were keen to open up with some being more expressive than others.

Interviews generally lasted two hours, and in some cases I came back for a second round of interviews. Focus group discussions lasted slightly longer, and I only did one FGD per group. In both cases the narratives generated were rich and complex. I do acknowledge that my being a woman might have affected the kind of responses that I received particularly with regard to men's attitudes towards domestic violence. However most men seemed very forthcoming and opened up quite early on in the interview process. Men whose wives had been participating in union activities for years were especially eager to be interviewed as this was a chance for someone to 'hear their voice' as they put it. Additionally having someone interested in their experience seemed to have a therapeutic effect for a lot of men (Smith, 1994), with many men thanking me after the interview for listening to 'their side of the story'.

If I was humbled by the fact that women opened up to me so deeply during their interviews, I was positively surprised by men's candid responses and the length of interviews/FGDs. Many times I felt that this was probably the first time men had been

asked about their fears, anxieties and pain. And it probably was. I could sense the initial hesitation in their answers, wary, unsure of why they should trust me. I made it a point to help them understand how I viewed patriarchy as a system that not only oppresses women, but oppresses men in various ways. I was not trying to lead men on to taking on a 'victim' approach, but I realized that this opened a doorway by which they felt that their feelings, fears and anxieties mattered; and were real.

Interviews and FGDs lasted several hours with most men, and they always insisted that I come back for more 'information' at any point in time. They seemed grateful, almost relieved that someone had asked them about their lives; and I found this strange because it was not what I expected. I expected resistance, hostility and terse replies. Instead I received openness, some degree of honesty and often tears. Several men cried during their interviews. This too was something I had not expected; they cried because they were unable to 'deal with' and 'understand' their wives anymore. They cried because they had lost a sense of power, a feeling of control within their homes. They had essentially been emasculated by their strong, articulate wives. And they did not know how to deal with it. One man admitted to me that he often thought of killing himself because he could not deal with the way his wife was treating him. This brought home to me the fact that we have not created enough spaces for men to un-learn and then re-learn how to be a man. We have focussed perhaps disproportionately on 'empowering' women, without paying any attention to how to teach men to accept and learn to live with these 'empowered' women.

There were several moments where men included me as an 'insider'; one man showed me his *chillum* (a clay pipe used to smoke cannabis or tobacco) with excitement and told me where he buys *ganja* (cannabis) regularly, another man began crying and expressed to me how sharing all this intimate information with me made me feel like his sister, another man too wept during the interview and pleaded with me to explain to his wife how she should 'behave properly'. Another husband stated, "*You are now like our friends-circle. You requested me to tell you, that's why I told you. Otherwise why should our household issues be discussed outside?*"

Skills

During the interviews and FGDs I had to keep in mind to use language that was easy to understand, and locally used. For example the Marathi word for masculinity is *mardangi*, but most men did not understand this term. I therefore needed to break it down and explain it to them by describing various attributes of being male; which usually evoked instant recognition and some smiles.

In addition I needed to be aware of my intonation, facial expressions and the way I worded questions. In qualitative research the quality of data collected often depends upon one's skill to subtly cross-examine without creating a feeling of cross-examination within the subject (Baird, 2009). I realized this when one of the respondents who was rather reticent remarked, "You are asking me questions like how the police interrogate someone". Although these were the same questions that invited loquacious answers from other men I realized that for this particular man, they were coming across as threatening. As mentioned before it was instances like this which required alertness, reflexivity and a subtle renegotiate of the researcher-respondent relationship. For men who would talk tangentially and not stick to the questions answered I usually allowed them to continue for a while before refocusing on my questions. I believe transgressions such as these allowed men to feel that they too had gained something from the interview (Arendell, 1997).

Gender Hierarchies

Arendell (1997) in her research with divorced fathers in the USA emphasizes the power dynamics that are at play when a woman studies men. She asks, "Does the power imbalance shift because of the researcher's expertise with respect to the topic being studied... does the overt definition of the situation override or reverse temporarily the usual gender order? Or is the conventional gender hierarchy maintained or re-established across the interaction?" (Arendell, 1997, p. 343)

If I were to answer her questions I would say that gender hierarchies during the course of interviews waxed and waned. All the men I interviewed were aware of the power dynamics at play however they chose to respond to it differently, at different moments

in time. Some men seemed especially respectful and in awe of my role as the 'researcher from London'. Others tried to establish conventional gender hierarchies at several points in the conversation (Devault, 1990). For example some men, unrelated to any question that I had asked, constantly emphasized the superiority of the male race and the need for women to take care of home and hearth. There were a few men who insisted on leading the conversation, and would talk at length and often tangentially about what was being discussed. There was one particular spouse who took it upon himself to 'lecture' me and made sure to tell me how as a 'good' woman I should return home before dark "*Now look at you, you are a good woman. So even though you do this kind of work, you told me you'd like to leave by 7pm. It is good to go home before it gets dark. That's what good women do.*" Two men were especially silent during the interviews and refused to open up. No amount of strategies suggested for interviewing the 'silent man', like probing and prompting helped (OliFFE and Mróz, 2005).

Men also dealt with the researcher-researched power imbalance by assigning different identities to me (Arendell, 1997). At times I was the target of their anger, "You union people have your meetings in the evening, when it is time for my wife to cook". At other times I was the 'honorary male' (Warren, 1988), invited to share their stories of anger and frustration. In response to a question about violence one man replied, "Ask her (his wife). You people are always together." Three men were wary of me and when I began asking them details about their married life they would say, "Hasn't my wife already told you all this?", as if to ascertain how much I already knew.

In one sense men did know that I was implicitly biased towards women and their accounts of the situation. Though I tried hard to come across as a neutral observer, my previous association with the Union often placed me in this role, and it was hard to get out of it.

Setting Boundaries

The gendered power dynamics present in the interview process with men also necessitated the setting up of boundaries around what could be spoken about and how, how much information about oneself should be disclosed, and issues around safety. One of my biggest dilemmas was how as a young woman I could question older men on sex

and intimacy, without seeming to transgress boundaries. I realized that talking about issues of sex and sexuality in an open, honest and matter-of-fact way greatly helped to ease potential discomfort.

Most men looked quite taken aback by my lack of ‘shame’ and matter-of-fact disposition when I first broached the topic of sex. The confidence I displayed belied the nervousness that I actually felt, but it created a space of naturalness and ease, and most men opened up quite easily thereafter. Surprisingly many men did not seem fazed while discussing issues around sex, with me. At first they used more general terms eg “when she doesn’t *behave properly*”, and gradually during the course of the discussion became more candid eg. “when she refuses to *have sex with me*”.

In one interview when a husband told me how angry he was with his wife for having a second daughter, I felt compelled to explain to him how the sex of a child is dependent on the man. So I took out my notebook and drew a diagram of the X and Y chromosomes and tried explaining to him how the male’s Y chromosome is responsible for the sex of the child. He seemed somewhat amused, but not entirely convinced or apologetic about his behaviour towards his wife.

Issues regarding safety though uncommon did come up once. There was one man who drank some alcohol just before our interview to calm his nerves. I did not know that till the interview began and I could smell the alcohol on his breath. His responses during the interview were candid and he spoke a lot about his feelings. I do not know if that was due to the alcohol, but I am assuming it was. This does throw up questions about safety during an interview process, especially since I was alone with each male respondent in a closed room during most interviews.

I was given numerous personal compliments about the colour of my skin, the way I looked, and my youthfulness. I was often at a loss as to how to respond to such behaviour, which was obviously inappropriate and did point towards a pronounced and persistent assertion of masculinity and superiority (Arendell, 1997). In all cases I ignored these innuendos and comments and continued the interviews. Many men wanted to know how my ‘husband’ felt about me coming into slums and talking to men in private. It was interesting that they assumed that I was married, and in a few cases I

did not bother correcting them. On some occasions I did wonder whether wearing a wedding band or a *mangalsutra* would have been useful, because men seemed to be more comfortable talking to me about issues related to intimacy and sexuality when they assumed that I too was married.

4.8 Challenges and Ethics

Qualitative research using in-depth interviewing and focus group discussions as methods of collecting sensitive data raise several ethical and practical issues, some of which can be identified in advance, while others emerge only later in the field (Walls et al., 2010). In general, however, conducting fieldwork goes hand in hand with continuously asking numerous questions linked to ethics and limitations of the process.

Fine et al. (2000) identify the ethical complexity of seeking participation and coproduction of knowledge with people who are racially, economically, ethnically, nationally, and otherwise marginalized. How do you attempt to build knowledge with people who live the conditions under study without disrupting their ways of protecting themselves? How does one grapple with dilemmas of difference, authority, and identification? What constitutes a reflexive relationship between the researcher and the researched? How does one overcome axes of power in the field? How does one account for difference in politics between the researcher and the researcher?

With regards to my research project, fieldwork with Dalit women wastepickers and their spouses posed numerous challenges and raised certain ethical issues along the lines of the questions above. I attempt to elaborate on these in this section.

4.8.1 Reflexivity, Privilege and Positionality

One of the ethical dilemmas that my research project raised revolved around power relations between the researcher and the research subjects. Rather than ignoring ones subjectivity and story, it is argued that a researcher should advocate a participatory research strategy that emphasizes dialectics between the researcher and the researched throughout the project (Cook and Fonow, 1990). This strategy involves recognizing the position, privilege, and power of the researcher vis-à-vis the respondents.

This meant that during the process of data collection I not only needed to be aware of differences in caste, class, language, educational level and feminist consciousness between myself and the women and men who informed my research, but also note how these differences shaped my understanding of the research questions at hand. The need for reflexivity, i.e. to be mindful of my personal positionality, the social and cultural contexts that had been responsible for the framing of my research questions, and the location and position of the women and men that I spoke with had to be an ever present element while conducting my research.

On the whole the interviews and FGDs I conducted were a space where we were able to touch upon some of the most painful and terrifying experiences of women's lives. Women sobbed while recounting tales of intolerable violence. They shared with me hopes and dreams that they had had, of the kind of man they would be married to, of the life they had wanted to live; and how far their present lives were from where they had wanted to be. Their pain and feelings of helplessness were apparent. I was humbled by their stories and touched by the openness with which they shared them with me. What was even more remarkable though, was the tenacity and resilience they exhibited; their sense of humour and shrieks of laughter as they would describe how they would get back at their husbands, or trick their mother-in-laws, their openness in talking about sex with their husbands; what they did not like and did like, making fun of their husbands inability to satisfy them sexually or talking with enthusiasm about how great their sex lives were (leaving me utterly embarrassed)! It was apparent that humour was definitely an instrument they used to soften the blows, so to speak.

However despite the laughter, on the whole interviews were a deeply emotional process for respondents, which made me wonder about what right I had to enter women's lives, encourage them to share with me some of their most painful experiences, and then leave. It was a terribly disconcerting feeling. My only solace however was the fact that most of the women I interviewed had the support of the Union, and the friendship and camaraderie that the Union offered. This might have helped had women needed to reach out for friendship, solidarity and support.

This was not the case with non-unionized wastepickers, who had no such support networks. With these women I attempted some sort of reciprocity by engaging in

different kinds of case work, in my capacity as a trained social worker. In one case, I encouraged a woman's alcoholic husband to be admitted into the Government Hospital, where he was finally diagnosed with tuberculosis. Once he began his treatment I helped him enrol in a de-addiction centre. In a few other cases I managed to link mothers with school going children to a local trust that distributed scholarships to the needy. These young boys and girls were given a years' worth of tuition support. In yet another case I helped raise money for a woman's son who was HIV positive and suffering from cancer. I do understand that the lines between researcher and activist can get blurred at times like this. However the only way I could thank women for their time, for opening up their lives to me and trusting me with their stories was to reciprocate with whatever resources I had at my disposal.

Despite this, my privilege as a researcher never failed to rankle. When a husband would ask everyone in his house to step out because he was being 'interviewed' I felt guilt. When young girls were asked to cook the evening meal so that their mother could speak to me at length, I felt guilt. When wives themselves had to rush through all their evening chores just to make time for an interview I felt terrible.

My privilege as a researcher was perhaps most highlighted in the topic I chose to interview women about, i.e. whether women's joining labour organizations had any effect on gender relations within the home, and masculine identities. For a wastepicker who had to begin her twelve hour work day at 4 am just to earn enough to feed her family, 'changing gender relations' was not exactly an urgent issue requiring immediate resolution. I realized my bias and also the privilege inherent in this bias. Being middle class, and educated, I automatically possessed the luxury to articulate the (lack) of gender equality within the home as an issue that requires attention. For many women their immediate concerns were the education of their children and the costs they had to incur on private English-medium schools, school books and uniforms. Some women expressed their husbands' alcoholism and unwillingness to contribute towards the home as concerns. They wanted help with 'solutions' for these problems, and explaining to me at length about the violence they faced, or how their husbands responded to their participation in the union was not close to arriving at any 'solutions to their problems. Therefore it was imperative for me to be aware of the fact that research relations were never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

I needed to remain aware of my own concerns echoing through the research study; right from the framing of my questions to the analysis of data (Acker et al., 1983).

As a researcher I also needed to take into account my ‘positionality’ since I had been a former paid employee with the wastepickers union over a period of three years (2008-2011). Although this could position me as an ‘insider’ I argue that my position as a researcher would be better described as one of a ‘partial insider’ (Chavez, 2008), or an ‘external-insider’ (Banks, 1998); i.e. although during the course of my work with the wastepickers I developed a deeper understanding of their culture and values, as well as a shared commitment to challenging injustice, I essentially belonged to a community different from the one I was studying. This position as a ‘partial insider’ was beneficial in that it provided me pre-existing knowledge about the context of my research (Bell, 2005), allowed me to be easily accepted by the (wastepicker) community under study (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009), as well as lent me the ability to ask meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues (Merriam et al., 2001). On the other hand since I was not a ‘total-insider’ (Chavez, 2008) I do not believe that my research was plagued by a loss of objectivity (DeLyser, 2001), or researcher bias (Merriam et al., 2001): criticisms commonly levelled against ‘insider’ research.

My biggest concern was that being a ‘partial insider’ might lead to women hesitating in being honest in their responses with me. Considering that the primary emphasis of my research was the role the trade union had played in their lives, being viewed as a (former) representative of the trade union was something that might have worked against me. However what happened was quite the contrary. Instead of telling me ‘what I wanted to hear’, several women used the space of the interview to voice their discontentment and animosity towards the Union. They complained about meetings not being held regularly, *karyakartas* not being available to help, *karyakartas* not answering their phones, and the ubiquitous “we have got nothing from the Union”.

There were other ethical dilemmas regarding that came up during the research process. One was related to men’s responses to questions of domestic violence. There were a few cases where wives had mentioned significant levels of domestic abuse. When questioned about violence in their homes, some husbands stated that though it happens in ‘other peoples’ homes, it did not happen in theirs. This complete denial of violence

was something I had to work around carefully. I needed to be aware of how to explore and challenge contradictory accounts of women and men in ways that were non-threatening and enabled further discussion. In some instances I chose to press them further, challenging their taken for granted constructions and/or inherent contradictions.

I usually began by coaxing men to talk about the violence they had witnessed in ‘other people’s’ homes. I would then attempt to create a safe space by assuring men that my role as a researcher was not to judge them or tell them that they were wrong, but instead to try and find out what are the various pressures and difficulties that they face; so much so that they have to resort to violence. All men eventually admitted to some sort of violence, even though the severity of violence that they described rarely matched that that had been described by their wives.

Quite to the contrary an ethical dilemma I faced was when men admitted to violence and but then wanted me to agree to their justifications for it. For example a husband said to me, *“Yes men have a right to beat their wives. I can say this even in a court of law that a husband’s wife has to do whatever work her husband asks her to do. No one can say anything about this-not even a court of law. Am I saying anything wrong?”*, or *“If you aren’t behaving well with me then what is the use of keeping you? Isn’t that right? Because if she is not sleeping with me then she must have someone outside. Isn’t that correct?”* At moments like this men were usually looking for me to nod my head in agreement before they continued talking, and though I tried my best to stay impassive and not respond, many times my silence was interpreted by them as assent. Though this made me terribly uncomfortable I realized that putting forward my point of view (about how violence was always a choice, and never a right one) might cause the respondent to feel embarrassed and not continue talking to me as candidly as he was. However as I heard more and more of these men’s stories I learnt that without exception each of them had been a victim of marginalization, violence and extreme poverty at some point in their lives. They were all part victim, part victimiser (Baird, 2009).

This issue also came up with respect to men’s drinking which they would justify with statements like, *“We work so hard and get so tired. Our body hurts so much. Then just to numb the pain we drink. Is that really wrong?”* I found myself feeling sympathetic towards their need to drink heavily. I did feel pity for their hard working conditions and

the physical toll it took on their bodies. Alcoholism like violence is a larger structural issue born of poverty, lack of education, lack of work opportunities, a lack of healthy leisure alternatives, pressures of hegemonic masculinity and inter-generational transmission of habits. I found it hard to fault men for their dependence on alcohol.

4.8.2 Responsibilities toward the Respondents while Researching Sensitive Issues

Research ethics include not only conducting research with integrity, honesty, confidentiality, openness, and voluntary participation but also being awareness about the potential risks inherent in the research process. Since a significant dimension of my research involved questions around domestic violence I needed to be especially cautious and conscientious during process of data collection.

My previous experience of working with wastepickers had shown me that they tended to be very open when talking about issues like domestic violence, marital infidelity and conjugal relations. This is in contrast to literature that states that a common issue with domestic violence is its frequent under-reporting (Smith, 1994; Ellsberg et al., 2001). In India especially domestic violence in poor urban settlements is not ‘hidden’, like in the case in middle class homes enabling women to be more open and honest about experiences of abuse. Furthermore as Ellsberg et al. (2001, p. 2) write, “The degree to which openness is achieved depends partly on study-design issues, such as whether questions are clearly worded and easy to understand, and how many times during the interview a woman is asked about violence” However despite this openness and presumed willingness to talk, there are inherent risks while researching violence women face within their homes.

Researching violence against women falls into the realm of ‘sensitive’ topics; defined by Lee and Renzetti (1990) as a topic that may pose a substantial threat to those involved in the research, including “psychic costs, such as guilt, shame, or embarrassment” as well as “unwelcome consequences” (ibid, 1990, p. 511). Though like other sensitive research topics, the issues of confidentiality, problems of disclosure, and the need to ensure adequate and informed consent is prevalent, while researching

violence against women the safety and even the lives of women respondents and interviewers maybe at risk (Ellsberg and Heise, 2002).

Speaking about issues, such as violence and intimacy, not only requires sensitivity, but also necessitates creating and maintaining an environment that is safe (both physically and emotionally) for the respondents and researcher. My concerns included ensuring safety of respondents in contexts in which many of them lived with their abuser, protecting confidentiality when breaches could provoke an attack, and ensuring that the interview process was affirming and did not cause distress (Smith, 1994; Liss and Solomon 1996; Fontes, 1998; Ellsberg and Heise, 1999). In addition I had to take cognisance of the emotional toll the interviews and FGDs took not only on the respondents (described in the previous section), but on me as the researcher; the distress, helplessness, anger, and empathy I felt on hearing the stories of these incredible women and men. Acknowledging that research projects around sensitive topics usually involved ‘emotional work’ was therefore critical to the research process (Hallowell et al., 2005).

While researching violence against women it is recommended that interviews be conducted in women’s houses as it is thought to give them more control over the interview (Fontes, 2004). However in the case of urban informal poor I disagree with this. Ellsberg et al. (2001) while studying domestic violence in Nicaragua found that children, husbands, and in-laws would frequently try to observe the interview or “peek in the doorway to see what [they] were talking about” (Ellsberg et al., 2001, p. 10). There is exactly the same thing that happened in the slums of Pune, where privacy is not highly valued and people move in and out of others homes with ease. Therefore to ensure that participants could bring their stories safely into the discourse, without risking exposure or causing harm, I had a variety of interview sites (Fontes, 2004).

Issues of safety and confidentiality become particularly difficult in my study where multiple members of a family were interviewed (Fontes, 2004). Even though I was interviewing husbands’ and wives’ separately there existed a risk of a husband finding out that his wife had revealed information that he did not want disclosed. To circumvent this problem Ellsberg and Heise (1999) recommend that if researchers want to include questions on violence in studies with men, to avoid rousing husbands’ suspicion these

men should **not** be selected from the same households as women who are part of the study.

This is a serious issue I had to contend with and I attempted to reduce the aforementioned risk by asking the interviewed women's *explicit permission* before I approached her husband. By explicit permission I mean informed consent that included making her aware of the possible ramifications of her husband getting to know what we might have spoken about and alerting her to the possible (violent?) consequences. In addition I ensured that all details of the interview between the wastepicker and me were kept confidential, so that her husband had no way of finding out what we had spoken about. Furthermore while interviewing the husbands I never divulged what their wives had spoken of, attempted to dispel their fears that I was on 'their wives side', and engaged with them through a lens of genuine compassion and openness.

I did face a few challenges with regards to the safety of respondents. In one case I visited a slum late one evening to meet a particular wastepicker to enquire whether she would allow me to interview her. She invited me into her two room home, and we sat on the floor in the kitchen, which doubled up as a bedroom. Her step daughter was making *bhakris* on a wooden fire, and a man whom I presumed was her husband sat in the inner room watching TV. I asked her whether we could go somewhere 'private' to talk because I needed to speak to her about 'personal' issues. To which she responded, *"Nothing is hidden here. My husband knows everything. Of course he will, because he is the one who is to blame. Even my step daughter will vouch for me. I am such a good wife and mother but he beats me over small things. I am fed up of him. And if I could I would just leave. But I want to get my step daughter married off first. My husband is useless. Yes he works as a watchman, in fact he will be leaving now for work. But he has other women. I know that, and everyone else knows that. So what is there to hide?"*

She was speaking loud enough for her husband to hear the conversation, and though I was uncomfortable I was not particularly surprised at her outburst. I had come across several instances of wastepicker women telling off their husbands in front of others. In addition I was being accompanied by Gadebai, one of the most experienced fieldworkers of the union. Gadebai too seemed unfazed by the woman's tirade against her husband (in the presence of her husband), and so I did not insist too much on

moving our 'chat' someplace else. However I was still uncomfortable and in hushed tones, and quite hesitatingly I explained the purpose of my research to the wastepicker, and asked if she might be interested in being interviewed. She agreed and we fixed a date to meet a few days later for the interview.

When I came back on the assigned day, the woman refused to even make eye contact with me. She whispered and told me to go away and that she did not want to participate anymore. I tried asking her why and she did not answer. A neighbour who was sitting close by then told me that she and her husband had had a huge fight the night I had visited, and he had beat her severely. I could only assume that the violence was a result of our conversation. I was shocked and upset. I felt guilty at not following protocol by insisting (despite her protests) that we speak in a private space. I had jeopardized the safety of this woman, and felt regretful at my decision to not follow my instinct and move out of the house to talk.

This incident occurred fairly early on in my data collection process and though it really unnerved me, it also ensured that for the rest of the data collection process I insisted that I speak to women alone, with no one present, despite their protests (if at all). As for the guilt about putting this woman in a vulnerable situation, I have not been able to resolve it. I still feel terrible about not being able to ensure her safety.

In another incident while interviewing a woman at the *bhangaar* shop, her husband (who works with her) came up to us completely drunk and began abusing his wife. He then began shouting obscenities at us and ordered us to stop the interview. The woman was noticeably embarrassed and did not want to cause a showdown in public and so smiled apologetically and left. Her drunk husband continued shouting at her, and other wastepickers intervened and told him to shut up. I could never complete that interview with the woman, though I did interview the husband when he was sober a few weeks later.

In cases where respondents were particularly distressed by the disclosure of the violence that they were facing I ensured that the interview ended on a positive note (Parker and Ulrich, 1990). This was done by reminding the woman of her strength, the potential coping strategies that she had developed and reminding her that the information she had

shared was important and would be used to help other women (Ellsberg and Heise, 1999). In cases where women were part of the Union I often visited these women again along with a *karyakarta* so that the fieldworker could look into the case and provide the necessary support. One woman specifically stated that she wanted the Union's help to separate from her husband. In cases where wastepickers were non-unionized I attempted to offer referrals to domestic violence counselling centres and police stations.

Finally I would like to say that for many of the above ethical dilemmas I do not have concrete solutions. As Fontes (2004) puts it "When a violence against women researcher faces an ethical dilemma, it is unlikely that one single principle or decision-making rule will emerge like a magic wand to dissolve the dilemma and provide unambiguous guidance about how to proceed. Rather, the researcher will often face incompatible ethical imperatives and will decide on a course of action that privileges one while sacrificing another" (Fontes, 2004, p. 171). I can only hope the voices of women which emerge in the following chapters, do some justice to their strength, determination and courage.

5. THE UNION AND PATHWAYS FOR CHANGE

“I found friendship and family in the union. In the *chowky* (police station), *vasti* (slum) and union meetings-I found myself” Mangal

Chapter 1 outlined the need for organizing women working in the informal economy, and in particular focussed on the history and organizational strategies of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) a trade union of wastepickers in Pune, India. Chapter 3 highlighted the various pathways that organizations like the KKPKP provide women so that they might potentially transform their lives.

This chapter attempts to understand how such pathways and processes of engagement within a labour organization, in particular the KKPKP, might have a critical impact on women’s personal lives. In particular I ask the following questions: How does being part of the KKPKP improve women’s lives? Is membership of an organisation like KKPKP transformative, and if so, why? What are the pathways of change that membership to KKPKP provides women?

5.1 Active and ‘Inactive’ Members

The aim of this thesis was to compare the lives of unionized wastepickers in the KKPKP with those of non-unionized wastepickers, to examine whether membership of a collectivity like a trade union might have an impact on intra-household gender relations.

In course of this study I found that not only were there important differences in the degree of transformation of gender relations, post union membership, between unionized and non-unionized wastepickers, but that within the category of unionized wastepickers itself there were significant differences. Among wastepicker members of the KKPKP, i.e. unionized wastepickers, there were some in whose homes considerable transformations had taken place in existing gender relations, while in other homes there had been comparatively very little change. There were those homes in which women currently enjoyed relatively greater freedoms; less domestic violence, husbands help with household chores, greater mobility and far more control over household decision making. Then there were those homes in which domestic violence continued unabated,

wives appeared terrified of their husbands, and women still required their husband's permission to go out of their homes.²⁹

What could account for these intra-household differences considering that all these women were unionized wastepickers? A closer look at the interview transcripts revealed that the only major disparity between both these groups was their *nature of their engagement* with the union; i.e. their expectations from the union, the emotional attachment they felt towards it and the frequency of their involvement in union activities.

The women who demonstrated visible changes in intra-household gender relations post union membership were those who were more involved in the union and its activities, and demonstrated a palpable affective connection with the KKPKP. I shall call these women 'active members'. Active women members visited the union office regularly (at least once a month), knew the office staff well and often spent time in the KKPKP office even if they did not have any important issues to discuss. They remained in close contact with union field workers and called on them regularly for help with matters, both personal and work related. Active women regularly attended union meetings, and consistently participated in demonstrations and protest rallies where they demonstrated the ability to negotiate, strategize and produced well-reasoned arguments. In addition on such occasions they were instrumental in getting together other wastepicker members of the KKPKP. An important distinguishing feature of active members was the high levels of trust and extraordinary emotional investment that they demonstrated towards the union. Over the years active members had developed close friendships with other women like themselves within the union, with most of them considering the union office to be their 'second home'.

Personality wise, women belonging to the active category seemed to possess high levels of self-confidence which fed into their ability to challenge injustice. They seemed to view the world differently; as a place that belonged rightfully to both women and men; even poor, illiterate women like themselves. Within the home these women had strong

²⁹ In fact intra-household gender relations in this latter group were similar to those of the non-unionized wastepickers.

ideas about gender equality and women's rights. They seemed to embody the feminist ideal that 'personal is political'; with all of them addressing issues of domestic tensions openly within the union (and within their homes). Consequently active women tended to 'bargain' for better treatment within their homes, and at the time of the interviews, most of these women reported negligible levels of domestic violence, some amount of spousal help with domestic chores and child-rearing and greater respect and recognition within the home.

On the other hand there was a group of union wastepickers who attended union meetings sporadically, and had yet to develop a strong emotional connection with the KKPKP. I refer to these women as 'inactive' members'. 'Inactive' wastepickers relationship with the union was largely functional; i.e. they approached the union only when they needed something like help with a child's education, money for a loan or work related issues. In particular inactive members rarely sought union intervention in personal matters, possibly because many of these women had natal family support to fall back on. Their involvement with the union was minimal and emotional investment particularly low. In the off-chance that inactive members did attend union events, such as demonstrations or protest marches, it was usually because fieldworkers had visited their homes multiple times and had coerced them into attendance. Perhaps most significantly, 'inactive' wastepicker members of the KKPKP rarely had close friends from within the union.

Unlike active women who defiantly challenged norms regarding 'appropriate' female behaviour, 'inactive' women stayed within the boundaries of a 'good wife and mother'. They would seek permission from their husbands before going out of the house, would return from work 'on time', prepare food 'on time', not expect any help with household chores from their husbands, take sole responsibility of looking after the children, and if they 'failed' to live up to these rules they would accept the violence that was meted out to them. Out of the thirty women union members that I interviewed, twenty belonged to the 'active' category and ten to the 'inactive' category.

In the section below I describe in detail the processes of change that ensued when women initially became members of the KKPKP. These benefits were experienced by all women, irrespective of whether they eventually became active or 'inactive'

members. I then go on to delineate the pathways of change that active women in particular drew on.

5.2 Processes of Change

5.2.1 Building a Worker Identity

One of the first pathways of change when women joined the union was a re-visioning of their identity as a worker. The emergence of the KKP in 1993 and its decision to organize as a trade union had much to do with the fact that not only the wider public, but wastepickers themselves, viewed their occupation not as ‘work’ but as *kachra chivadne* (rummaging through garbage) (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2004, p 2).

Wastepickers who joined the union in its early days had engaged in a protracted struggle for state recognition- to transform wastepickers to "workers" and to change the view of scrap collection to "work". In 1995-96, through a series of public rallies and demonstrations by thousands of wastepickers in the city, the local municipal corporation agreed to register and endorse identity cards of waste-pickers in recognition of their contribution to the management of urban solid waste in the city. The endorsement not only authorised waste-pickers to collect scrap, but also officially granted them the status of a ‘worker’.

For women who had never really thought of wastepicking as ‘work’,³⁰ and instead thought of their work as superfluous, supplementary and simply an extension of their mother-wife ‘duty’, the opportunity to claim an identity as a ‘worker’ was a significant step in redefining their understanding of self (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2013). Over time women began to combine their identities as mothers and wives, with newly acquired identities as workers.

The ‘photopass’³¹ (as most women refer to it) gradually transformed the way women viewed themselves; from a woman foraging in garbage bins to a worker with rights and dignity. Lata, expresses this shift: “I began to feel that I was not **only** a wastepicker, but instead that I was a contributing worker. Contributing to my family and to society.”

³⁰“Work was what you did when you went to an ‘office’—that is work. At least that is how we used to think” (FGD, Hadapsar)

³¹ The ‘photopass’ is a photo-identity card, stamped and endorsed by the Pune Municipal Corporation, that wastepickers acquire upon membership to the KKP.

Furthermore, municipality endorsed ID cards provided women wastepickers of the KKPKP the legal authority to pick waste. For these women, for whom victimization, discrimination, and extortion had been a normal part of their everyday working lives, the legitimacy to pick waste signified a significant victory. It lent their work recognition and dignity:

Earlier the security guards would not let us pick waste from the landfill. They would allow some women in, but only those women who slept with them. The rest of us they would treat so badly. They'd call us thieves, abuse us, throw us out. And on days like that we'd have to go hungry. But after we got our photopass and showed it to them they could not say anything. We'd threaten to call the *sanghatna* if they harassed us. So they quietly let us in.

Vijaya, Inactive KKPKP Wastepicker

I would argue that Vijaya's words describe two simultaneous processes. Having an ID card gave women a new-found worker identity from which wastepickers began to develop the confidence to stand up to authority. They began to challenge their own, well founded fears about foraging for garbage in public spaces. In addition these new self-perceptions were being mirrored by others in society. No longer were wastepickers being simply looked at as 'dirty, thieving, and vulnerable', but their new found worker identity seemed to increase the chance of fair treatment:

Earlier no one gave us any *izzat* (respect). Now because of the *sanghatna* we have recognition and respect. We used to have a lot of harassment from the police earlier. Now they never accuse us of stealing.....Earlier people would cover their noses when they crossed us. Earlier they would say look at these women, so dirty, they make the whole place smell. Today they do not do that. When we go to collect their garbage they instead ask us to come into their homes, they ask about our work, they give us chai and water...They look at us as human-beings.

FGD, Hadapsar, Active Wastepickers

These words evoke the shame and stigma attached with wastepicking, and serve as a reminder that the struggle for rights is also a struggle for recognition (Fraser, 1995). Reducing stigma and fostering dignity has been an integral part of building an identity for wastepickers. In addition for wastepickers being looked at as 'human beings' was a new 'self-understanding' critical to women's perception of themselves. Having their work recognized and valued by others fostered their own sense of self-worth and transformed their self-image (Friedemann Sánchez, 2006).

This shift from being viewed as a nameless, faceless and isolated scavenger, to an economically productive worker deserving respect and recognition is perhaps one of the most significant contributions of union membership to women's lives; and has been a critical marker in women's understandings of themselves. I now turn to consider another improvement borne through union membership.

5.2.2 Improvements in Material Conditions

With relatively unhindered access to garbage, women's earnings and quality of life slowly improved. Women reported being able to afford basic necessities like food, clothing and electricity. Over time as their earnings increased women could make bigger investments like building a house supporting their children's marriage:

The condition of our family improved. We could afford clothes, food and education. Earlier we used to have just a tiny hut. But now I have built this house. I have also married off my daughters.

Pushpa, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

For some women increased earnings meant that they were now able to save money. The union set up its own credit co-operative with the aim of encouraging women to save as well as providing loans at nominal rates of interest. For poor women who were used to living a hand to mouth existence, having extra money to save was something new. Aruna spoke of how although she knew what it meant to save, she never was given an opportunity to do so:

I'd earn but the money was not in my hands; it would be in my mother-in-law's hands. My husband would work, but even his money would go to my mother-in-law. And if my mother-in-law wasn't there, my husband would keep his money with himself, and I'd give him my earnings. Ever since I came here I started putting money into the savings group in the union

Aruna, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Having access to savings and loans lent women a "prescribing voice" in articulating plans for the household (Sanyal, 2014). The prescribing voice lent itself to decisions such as buying material goods for the home, or sending one's children to school. Women also felt proud at having accomplished dreams by themselves, which had earlier seemed impossible. It raised their value in the eyes of their family, as well as altered their own perception of their self-worth. Ever since Aruna started working she said:

I feel that if I am looking after two children then I must be really strong. I feel that I am *bhaari* (amazing).

Aruna, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Along with improved incomes, wastepickers with children of school going age began receiving help from the KKPKP for their education. This included scholarships for meritorious students, interest free loans for higher education and notebooks for the children's studies. The practical support that the union provided had visible and immediate results that helped demonstrate the relevance of the organization in the lives of its wastepicker members (Kabeer et al, 2013).

On the whole women were very keen to provide their children with an education because they did not want them to end up as wastepickers. However many of their husbands demonstrated no real interest in contributing towards their children's education. With limited resources and unsupportive spouses women were forced to keep their children out of school and often took them along to work with them:

Should we spend on books, on clothes or on food? That was our concern; but then with the *sangthana* that became less.

Parvati, Inactive KKPKP wastepicker

The union's anti- child labour stance as well as its pragmatic and visible offering of material support for children's education resulted in a large number of children attending school regularly. This struck an emotional chord with several women, many of whom started participating more regularly in union activities. In addition to material improvements in women's personal lives, the union began getting involved in work-related issues that its members were facing.

5.2.3 Support for Work Related Issues

Prior to joining the KKPKP wastepickers working lives were dominated by fear and injustice. For example women were often falsely accused by the police of theft, or refused access to garbage by municipal workers and security guards unless they offered bribes. It was routine that women faced sexual harassment in their workplace or were cheated by scrap dealers, who paid them less than what they were owed. Being isolated and dispersed wastepickers rarely stood up to any of this exploitation.

However with union membership women began to feel emboldened, courageous and confident in the knowledge that they had the support of the union. They began to seek union intervention when faced with any kind of harassment:

One day soon after I had joined the union I was picked up by the police and taken to the *chowky* (police station) because a *bai* (poor woman) with the same name had stolen her employer's diamond earrings. They made me wait there the whole day and my son was only four months old. I had to stand there and feed him. I finally called Lakshmi (a union representative) and she came there with Nanavre and Shabana (two other union representatives). They created such a ruckus that the policemen begged us for forgiveness. They even demanded that they pay us our days wages lost. I understood then that if we get stuck anywhere, the union will come immediately and will fight on our behalf with whoever it is-the police, or whoever. So in this way we got lots of support.

Lata, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

For illiterate, poor women like Lata, who often found themselves at the receiving end of demeaning stereotypes, police harassment and extortion the presence of middle-class educated activists fighting on their behalf was empowering. In this case not only did the KKPKP challenge the stereotype about poor, thieving working class women it also ensured that Lata was compensated for lost wages.

Typically in a case like this wastepickers would have bribed policeman to let them off false charges, or would have spent a night in jail. Rarely would women have considered challenging police authority so openly or fearlessly. Situations like these, where the union demonstrated how one should stand up to discrimination, benefited women in a number of ways; not only did they learn how to challenge systemic injustice, but they also developed the courage and conviction to do so by themselves

Lata's words also highlight that the union demonstrated support not only by its physical presence, but also by being a fall-back position that women could rely on if required. In the last twenty years since the inception of the union this consistent support has not waned. Union *karyakartas* (field-workers) form the backbone of this support-system. It is this group of *karyakartas* who over the years have always been present when a wastepicker has faced any sort of problem. Wastepickers can call the union office at any time, notify a *karyakartas* about their predicament and expect immediate support. The KKPKP has proved to its members that it can be relied upon.

As Anita said, “*You need people who will talk and fight for you. Money does not get you very far*”. For dispossessed, marginalized, poor women like Anita having an external authority stand up for them was critical in their fight for recognition, dignity and rights. In addition the support of the union was critical in developing feelings of trust and allegiance towards it.

5.3 Active Members and Pathways of Transformation

The above section has described the pathways of change that become available to women upon entering the union. It demonstrated how access to an ID card, unhindered entry to garbage dumps, a gradual increase in one’s earnings, a reduction in police harassment, and recognition and respect were some of the benefits of membership to a trade union.

Yet it was at this point that two categories of membership began to emerge. My research found that the nature of the issues that women wastepickers sought union intervention for determined to a large extent how they subsequently engaged with the union. While interventions in work related issues were an essential step in building a shared identity, it was when the union began helping women with personal and domestic issues that a deeper affinity and sense of belonging to the union and to a wider network of relationality began to develop. This led to greater participation in union activities, and sustained long-term involvement in the KKPKP.

5.3.1 Demonstrating Care and Concern

Collom’s (2011) research on social movements found that if participants in an organization had a transformational experience, they might begin to engage in the organization in ways other than which they originally intended. This was highlighted by the experiences of ‘active’ wastepickers in the KKPKP, where the presence of one such critical incident resulted in women attending union activities with greater frequency and the beginnings of developing an affective connection with the KKPKP.

The nature of personal problems that these wastepickers brought to the union varied; common among them were complaints about alcoholic husbands who did not contribute to the home, domestic violence, truant children and disputes with in-laws. When the

union began to intervene in issues which had until then been relegated to the realm of the 'private', they became 'transformational moments' in which women began to develop a strong affective connection with the union. This happened in a number of ways.

In many cases KKKPKP became a stand in for existing family networks. It supported women through crucial moments of personal distress, demonstrated concern for their well-being and ensured that women did not feel like they were alone. These moments became opportunities for the union to engender feelings of trust, solidarity, friendship and security.

One area in which this was clearly demonstrated was in the area of domestic violence. The prevalence of domestic violence in my sample of respondents was very high, with over 70% of women admitting to have faced significant physical and verbal abuse in their marriage. This figure is significantly higher than NFHS-3 data which reports that the lifetime prevalence of physical violence for women belonging to the 'scheduled caste' category (to which Dalit women belong) is 41.7% (NFHS-3, 2006).³²

Several women had married into homes which were far away from their natal family because of which they had no immediately familial support or recourse when facing domestic abuse. In cases where natal family or in-laws did live in close proximity to the couple and therefore could intervene, it was usually from the perspective of 'patching things up', and rarely with women's rights as the focus. With the absence of any external support systems women felt isolated and helpless. Several had either contemplated or attempted suicide:

My own family never interfered. Even though he would beat me so badly, that sometimes it would draw blood. He'd hit me with anything. But they did not care. They never said anything to him. Not my big brother, my

³² NFHS-3 measures physical and emotional violence faced by women between the age group of 15-49 years. Violence is measured using a modified Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1990), where respondents have to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a set of questions regarding specific acts of violence committed by their current husband, or most recent husband (in case of divorced/widowed women). With regards to the underreporting of violence, the authors of the NFHS-3 state "*Although the use of a CTS-type approach in the measurement of domestic violence is generally considered to be optimal, the possibility of underreporting of violence, particularly of sexual violence, cannot be entirely ruled out in any survey. Caution should always be exercised in interpreting both the overall prevalence of violence and differentials in prevalence between subgroups of the population.*" (NFHS-3, 2005-06, p. 495)

father, elder sister—no one. For them their responsibility was over once I was married. I felt so alone and tried to kill myself twice.

Kusum, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Where do mothers and fathers even question their sons-in-law? Instead they give them respect (*izzat*). They say, “Let it be. Tolerate it. Girls have to put up with this. Husbands are like this, it is their duty to beat (you)” I feel the union has given me more status (*darja*) than even my mother could have given me.

Supriya, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Supriya stresses how important the union was in according women dignity and what she termed ‘*darja*’ (status). Union fieldworkers were well-known for going into women’s homes and speaking directly to their abusive husbands, or for threatening to call the police. The police had usually ignored such women under the pretext of domestic violence being a ‘family issue’ and therefore not under their ‘jurisdiction’. They were now pressurized by the union to record women’s complaints and act on them.

In some cases groups of union members from neighbouring *vastis* (slums) would visit the affected woman’s home and threaten the perpetrator/ husband. In one particular case the union helped one of its members escape from the home of her abusive husband and in-laws. Resembling a TV drama, this young woman fled in the early hours of the morning, hid in a nearby factory, and was then picked up by union representatives before being taken to a shelter. The union helped this woman initiate legal proceedings against her husband, and eventually she managed to get a divorce.

By making public, issues that had previously remained invisible, by openly confronting and publicly sanctioning men for their misdemeanours and by demanding recognition of women’s rights from state authorities the KKPKP was giving its members what Supriya terms ‘*darja*’ (status). Interventions by the union in times like this built feelings of trust, security, and an emotional connection with the KKPKP.

However, not all women sought out such active interventions from the union in times of violence. For some members simply having a space where they would be heard and understood was enough. For these women, who previously had limited opportunities to speak about their lives, being a member of the union made them feel like they now at least had someone with whom they could share their troubles;

Just talking to them was support enough. They shared my sorrow, that's what mattered. I felt understood and my mind felt happy and light. That is the most important benefit I have got from them.

Vaishali, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

The union provided women with an opportunity to speak and be heard, and in doing so validated women's every-day lived experience. As Devine (2007) notes, the union was 'taking their lives seriously' (p. 302):

Earlier I felt there was no one to understand me, no one to listen to me or care for me. I used to live like an orphan. After joining the Union I feel supported. I feel a '*takat*' (strength). If my husband does something, these people will not let him go off scot free.

Aruna, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

For women like Aruna the union traversed traditional boundaries of trade union-worker engagement which typically focus solely on women's rights as workers within a public space. Engaging with women's domestic lives and providing them an avenue to be heard led to wastepickers feelings cared for and understood. In addition several women spoke of how supported they felt by the union's presence.

Pathimba means support—there was someone behind us so we had no reason to fear. With the Union I felt like there was someone to understand us. If I needed to speak to anyone, they were there. Because who else could I speak to? I could not speak to anyone at home, or outside. But I could speak to them at the office. If anything happens to me tomorrow, I know they will help me.

Shanta, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Knowing that they had this support in turn made women feel strong and courageous, thereby redefining the understating of themselves as alone and vulnerable:

They (KKPKP) gave me *himmat* (courage), they gave me *sahara* (support), they gave me *saath* (togetherness).

Lata, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Now I am as strong as a *khamba* (pole), earlier I was not.

Sangita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

For women wastepickers whose lives had been defined by isolation and vulnerability, the support and concern of the KKPKP, its ability to transcend the boundaries between public and private, and its validation of women's concerns were integral towards

women beginning to view themselves as courageous, fearless and having external support.

5.3.2 Union Meetings: Finding a Space of One's Own

For women who had previously felt alone and unheard, being supported, feeling cared for and being valued marked a critical point in their engagement with the union. It gave rise to feelings of trust and affinity, which ultimately laid the foundations for consistent, regular engagement with the union. This included attending monthly union meetings at the KKPKP office, as well as monthly wastepicker meetings (*vasti* meetings) held in each slum.

The monthly union meetings (or '16th meetings' as they are colloquially referred to) are held on the 16th of every month at the KKPKP office. These meetings are attended by the Representative Council of wastepickers; this Council is made up of 80 wastepickers, representing each slum where wastepickers reside and have been informally elected by KKPKP members across these geographical districts. . The monthly meetings provide a space for wastepickers to deliberate, discuss, review and plan around issues that are currently being faced by wastepicker members across the city. Decision making in these meetings is consensual and all members present have to be convinced before any decision is made. In addition to the 16th meetings, wastepickers also meet monthly in their respective slums; these *vasti* meetings are presided over by elected wastepicker representative of the slum as well as a union field worker. The *vasti* meetings provide an opportunity for wastepickers to highlight individual grievances; both work related and personal, and come up with solutions to these issues. At these meetings the *vasti* representatives also convey to the wastepicker members what was discussed in the monthly meeting at the union office.

Initially women simply attended these meetings out of curiosity, a sense of affinity towards the union and/or feelings of loyalty because they had been helped out by the union. Over time however these meetings took on new meaning(s). For instance women realized that union meetings not only gave them a chance to escape the domestic drudgery of everyday life, but also provided them a space where they were free from the watchful gaze of family and neighbours:

At that time (when I joined the union) I did not really think about the purpose of the meetings. I just went because I had so much fun out there. It made me feel good. We'd sing, dance, and enact plays. We'd imitate our drunk husbands-how they talk, walk, piss, dance, abuse. And we could talk so 'freely'. Whatever we wanted to say, we could say. At home our lives were limited to work, getting swears at, and beatings. But here we could joke and laugh. So we'd come back quickly from work, dress quickly and go for the meetings....Every month we attended the meetings. We'd eat, drink tea, eat *vada-pav*. And we'd come home only by 6pm.

Sangita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Sangita's statement highlights that the union meetings provided a space for women to be themselves; with no one telling them what to do, or watching their every move. This view is echoed by Shanta:

At home it is restrictive. At meetings I feel happy because the atmosphere is free.

Shanta, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Meetings became a chance at freedom; freedom to try out new ways of being (Pande, 2013). Monthly group meetings at the union office also helped build solidarity and group cohesion. These 'focused interactions' (Goffman, 1967) produced feelings of reciprocity, mutual recognition and heightened awareness of each other. Gradually women began to 'feel' like they were part of a collective rather than being told that they were part of one (Batliwala, 2013). Additionally meetings also provided women a valuable space to discuss and air grievances, with no restrictions. Women realized that they could gather and talk about anything that they liked (Batliwala, 2013), within an environment where their feelings and problems were respected, understood and valued. The increased freedom of self-expression was cathartic for many women and contributed greatly to their psychological well-being (Sanyal, 2014). Several women said that they felt 'peace of mind' or that their mind felt 'light' when they shared their stories with other wastepickers like themselves:

Who listens to us at home?...Does anyone ask us about our troubles? No. It is like this in every house. So the house is only a place we can sleep at night. It is not a place we can speak about our troubles. We cannot talk to anyone....So we share our *sukh-dukha* (happiness and sadness) with them (the union). Our mind feels light. That's why we feel this space is rightfully ours.

Aruna, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Being able to question, fight, scream and complain in union meetings made the union a space that women could call their 'own'. While poor men have always had the local liquor shop as a socially sanctioned meeting space to air grievances and build networks, poor women have not had an equivalent space to meet because traditionally it has been understood that women belong to the home, in fact "each one to her home" (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006, p. 94). Women have largely been confined to family and kin groups, affording them limited social networks. Additionally, not only were meetings a place for women to share their '*sukh and dukh*' (happiness and sadness) with each other, but they also became spaces where women could exchange vital information and learn new skills from each other.

In meetings we get ideas and strategies from each other. Like, for example, if Vaishali tells me how she dealt with her husband when he came home drunk one night, even I will try the same strategy. We talk about our kids, our families, everything. Also, if one woman says earned Rs. 500 one week but then managed to save Rs. 300 out of that then we all ask her how. And that way we learn new ways of saving money. We get *gyan* (knowledge).

Surekha, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

It is in this context that union meetings and the KKPKP office acquired the significance of a 'space of one's own'. The union and its activities constituted a community reinforcing a set of values and beliefs (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006). Having this space implied a sense of safety and security; a sanctuary where women could be themselves, reflect on their lives, learn from each other, feel cared for and accepted and in the process form relationships of friendship and solidarity.

5.3.3 Building New Relationships

The union gradually became a space for women to develop new friendships and expand definitions of self that were previously limited to their identities as wives and mothers (Kapadia, 1995). We have seen in Chapter 2 that in a country like India women's identities are relational closely intertwined with and defined by the communities and

networks that they are part of. In particular men and elders within a community play an important role in shaping women's identities (Joseph, 1999).

Membership to the KKPKP however allowed women the opportunity to expand this relational selfhood through friendships, solidarity and access to a new community. It was through these alternative relationships that women derived a sense of belonging, security, kinship and family which ultimately laid the foundation for radical re-definitions in women's sense of self. Frequent social interaction through union activities like meetings and protest marches deepened ties among members, built trust, intimacy and mutual care and concern. The union gave women a chance to make friends, who in turn became a source of encouragement and support in times of distress. Within this supportive community women's relational identities were reinforced.

At home our lives are limited to work and the house. We come home tired; cook, clean and sleep. Where is the chance to make friends? We are too busy to talk to anyone or even listen to them. Now at the Union I have friends from all over the city. I never hesitate even for a moment to go for meetings, because I get to meet them. I feel understood and my mind feels light. I like listening to them, and I like sharing my stories with them. I feel supported.

Rekha, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

For women, like Rekha, having the space and the time to develop bonds of friendship, trust and intimacy is a luxury. Long working hours, often the sole responsibility for domestic chores, lack of physical space and restrictions on mobility make investing time and energy in friendships quite difficult. Union meetings on the other hand offered a 'legitimate' space for women to come together, share their experiences of joy and sorrow, support other women and in turn feel supported by them. For women wastepickers the experiences of making new friends, spending time with like-minded people, engaging in new activities, feeling better about oneself and feeling less lonely played an important role in them becoming more embedded within the union (Cohn et al., 2003). Several women referred to the union as a 'second home' symbolizing the proximity in their relationships with each other and the growing sense of community.

When I meet women from the Union I feel like I have met a long lost **relative**, someone from my **natal home**. I feel happy. I feel comforted.

Pushpa, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

I feel that I am closer to the **friends** I have made in the Union than my own blood relatives.

Saru, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

The life we have now; we have found our **aai and baap** (mother and father) in the Union. We have found a family.

Mangal, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

I like going for meetings because I feel like they are all '**our people**'. This is our *sanghatna*, these are our people. We think that the *karyakartas* are like our **daughters**.

FGD, Patil Estate

The multiple ways in which women constructed this new community; as friends, natal family, relatives, mother's, father's and daughters emphasizes the multiple and complex meanings that they derived from being part of this non-kin based collectivity. 'Family' in this case fulfilled basic relational attributes of belonging, community, connection and security in the lives of KKPKP members. In addition these close, enduring, reciprocal relationships provided women an alternative sense of belonging (Chikarmane and Narayan, 2000).

As one respondent said, "I tell him (my husband) that I am not yours anymore. I belong to the *sanghatna* (union)"

Mangal, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Similarly Latabai says, "The *sanghatna* belongs to me, I belong to the *sanghatna*. They are mine and I am theirs"

Lata, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

These statements are important because they add credence to my argument that women in the union understood themselves relationally and defined their identity in terms of 'belonging to' a particular family or kinship network. By finding an alternative sense of belonging within the union women were able to make use of opportunities to re-define themselves. Over a period of time women like Mangal and Lata began to develop an identity that was more ambiguous, multi-layered, and rich. They began to step out of their limited understanding of being 'only a wife/mother/daughter-in-law' and 'only a

wastepicker' and instead embraced a sense of self that was multifaceted and included their newly identities as sisters, comrades and friends. These new relational selves laid the foundation for women to begin important transformations in the way they understood themselves and their place in the world.

5.3.4 Expanding Interaction in the Public Domain

In addition to building new friendships within the KKPKP, union membership provided women an opportunity to expand their spheres of interaction outside the union.

Earlier my life was limited to my house and work, house and work. There was nothing else. But ever since I started going for the *sanghatna* meetings my world expanded. I realized that there was more to life than just my home and work. And we got used to this way of life.

Anita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Leaving the confines of one's home was important not only because it gave women like Anita a chance to leave behind the monotony of their domestic lives, but also because it taught them how to negotiate the world outside. As women's sphere of interaction expanded it led to new understandings of their place in the world, as well as recognition that although they were poor and illiterate they now possessed skills to engage in more empowered ways with the outside world. These transformations took place in a number of ways.

The union provided women with opportunities to travel both within the city and beyond. Within the city women were asked to travel to the union office for monthly meetings or to attend demonstrations and protests in various parts of the city. They were also encouraged to attend similar demonstrations in other cities, to lend solidarity towards common causes. This 'movement' of women within the city and/ or outside was significant given the context of their mobility up until this point. Being illiterate, wastepickers could not read bus numbers or routes, and navigating public transport within the city was quite a daunting task. Coupled with patriarchal norms, which served to restrict their mobility, wastepickers rarely travelled outside their homes unaccompanied. In addition owing to poverty, the farthest women had travelled was to their natal homes in villages a few hours away. The union, by requiring that women attend meetings regularly and encouraging women to travel across the country to

advocate on behalf of the KKPKP, posed a direct challenge to these ways of doing things.

Initially women came to union meetings and demonstrations in groups or accompanied by a male family member. Gradually as they gained the confidence and courage to negotiate public transport, women began attending union activities unaccompanied by their husbands or sons. Several women from a *vasti* would get together and travel by bus to the union office. After a few years, and as women became more familiar with bus routes they started coming to the union office and getting to venues for other activities (like protest marches) by themselves. This slowly extended to women developing the confidence to visit, along with other wastepickers, other cities in the country to further advocacy efforts. Thus the KKPKP presented women with opportunities to interact in public in a way that challenged old (gendered) conventions (Sanyal, 2014). This was a significant achievement as it taught women that they could interact with the world outside their homes without being dependent on men in their family. These new understandings of themselves as women capable of navigating the world outside were critical in building self-confidence.

I learnt to live on my own. And you know how women in the *sanghatna* are; if you give them two, they give you two right back. They do not fear anyone. So now I travel alone by bus irrespective of how late it is. I feel that because of the *sanstha* (organization) I have *himmat* (courage) now. I go to different places and then come home. This is such a big difference in my life.

Saru, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

In addition, stepping into the outside world was critical in providing women with an opportunity to interact with people in positions of power. Almost all the active women who were interviewed described how the union had given them the opportunity to interact with the police, other citizens, lawyers, municipal authorities, politicians and government officials at various levels of the local, state and central government. For women whose lives had previously been restricted to their homes and workplaces, and for whom socially hierarchal relationships were a given, the opportunities to step out of their homes and engage in meaningful ways with people in positions of power and privilege went a long way in changing their self-image. It also gave them knowledge

about how the system works; “knowledge that was new, and powerful” (Cornwall et al., 2013, p. 165).

Earlier the only two places I knew were Pune and my village. Besides these places I knew nothing. Now because of the Union I know more about the world around me. When you step out you get to know how things are, you understand what to say, how to say it, when to say it, how to live and so on. We get to know more people; that is really important.

Surekha, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

For poor Dalit women, like Surekha, who were used to engaging in relationships with people in power from a position of weakness and dependency, being able to interact with the same people from a position of demanding one’s rights was extremely empowering. Instead of pleading and begging to have their needs met, women with the backing of a powerful union now could now demand rights, which they knew they were entitled to. In the process women also developed important skills required to negotiate, bargain and strategize.

Going to the office, sitting for meetings with women, discussing issues I have learned how to speak. I assess the situation and see if it requires me to fight or requires a different, more passive approach. Like in government offices like this fighting gets you nowhere. Now I know what the government is, how to strategize, how it functions, how we should address them, when to be diplomatic—I know all this now.

Vaishali, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Vaishali’s statement above needs to be understood in the context of women who have rarely been visible, articulate or confident enough to engage with the State. Women began to gradually believe that they had the reflective and analytical skills necessary to begin challenging systemic inequalities. Developing the skills to deal with government officials trickled into other areas as well. For instance, Mangal spoke of her new found ability to stake her claim to public space.

Earlier we were scared to go here and there—we were scared to speak, to go anywhere, work anywhere, say anything.... Now because of the union I know that I have strength to talk, to move around. I know how to talk to these officials. I feel that I found freedom. I am not scared anymore.

Mangal, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Expanding women's sphere of interaction contributed to developing new notions of personhood in a number of ways. Firstly it gave women an opportunity to challenge gendered conventions about women's mobility and their place in the home. Secondly it helped women build confidence that they could navigate the outside world on their own. Thirdly it taught women wastepickers various skills of negotiation, diplomacy, reasoning and judgement, which then trickled into other areas of their life as well. And lastly it enabled women to develop new dimensions of their political subjectivity (Cornwall et al., 2013), such as an understanding of themselves as citizens with rights.

5.3.5 Claiming Citizenship

One of the most powerful benefits for wastepickers of being a union member was the development of an understanding of themselves as citizens with entitlements. A crucial dimension of citizenship is the ability to become political agents and the process by which one exercises one's political power (Dagnino, 2005). In this section I will illustrate how having ID cards, engaging in meetings, demonstrations and being exposed to 'new ideas' of justice and rights became processes by which women claimed a new political subjectivity.

As mentioned above having access to an ID card became a critical pathway for previously nameless and, faceless women wastepickers to claim for themselves a new identity as a worker and a contributing citizen. The recognition, dignity and respect with which society began treating wastepickers, translated into women developing a strong identity as citizens who had the 'right to have rights' (Arendt, 1986). Wastepickers began to understand themselves as people who mattered, and who had every right to demand to be treated without any bias or discrimination.

In addition to acquiring ID cards, monthly union meetings that women attended became an important pathway for this transformation from 'dispossessed wastepicker' to 'empowered citizen'. This happened in a number of different ways.

For instance, the entire process of organizing; getting together, calling meetings, holding democratic elections and exercising freedom of speech within the KKPKP held immense import for wastepicker women who traditionally had been denied the agency

to participate in decision making in their own lives. It signified a tremendous personal and political achievement for them (Gothoskar, 1997).

In addition, 'being called for' a meeting was a source of significant pride and prestige not only for women wastepickers, but also for the communities where they lived. The fact that these illiterate women who picked waste for a living were 'important enough' to be part of 'meetings', did not go unnoticed by their husbands, family members and people in their homes, *vastis* and workplaces.

I feel good that someone has called us for a meeting. In the *vasti* people look at us differently. "You? Going for a meeting?" My husband still asks. At work I tell people "I cannot come for work today, I've been called for a meeting by our Union!" People are shocked! "You go for meetings?" they ask. And I say "Yes, of course!" It is a meeting about our rights. I feel really proud. I do not feel that we are **only** wastepickers. *Bhari vat-ta* (It feels fantastic).

Lata, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Lata's statement is important in the context of women who have never been allowed the opportunity to participate in formal decision making outside the home. Through the union, women were being encouraged to take an active part in activities which were usually considered the prerogative of the more educated middle class. This in turn changed their self-perceptions from being 'only a wastepicker' to an individual who was important, knowledgeable and had something valuable to contribute.

In addition the way the union engaged with its members in these meetings was critical in developing self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. Union meetings became a space where women's experiences and perceptions were validated, where their voices became central to the discussions and where reflection and analysis was encouraged. In fact wastepickers themselves decided the agenda of these meetings, and presided over them.

I feel valued when asked to come for meetings...At meetings, *sanghatna karyakartas* (field-staff) do not take decisions on their own. It is all discussed with all the women. They take our opinions into consideration. What should we do? How should we do it? They ask us questions and we discuss everything. Then what moves forward, is what we really want.

Sangita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Several women mentioned that they felt '*hoshar*' (smart) at these meetings because their opinions were deemed important. These positive self-valuations were integral to women's ability to act as citizens. In addition, by sharing their concerns and troubles women wastepickers began to see that there were thousands of women just like them across the city; "I realized that I am not alone" was a common sentiment expressed by several women who had earlier felt lonely and isolated. Meeting other women like themselves made women feel the sense of being part of a collective, part of something much larger than themselves. Women began to think of themselves as 'one of many'. This collective identity emboldened women and helped them feel more courageous and secure in fighting for their rights in the workplace. The feelings of solidarity and a sense of collective were something new, which women like Kavita had not experienced before:

We are always told to be independent, but for people like us it is not possible. So when we come together through a union we have strength, we can become independent ...When I see so many people all united I feel we can defeat anything. I feel so proud....It feels good that we are so many; we are united. And if anyone tries and acts smart with us will we let him get away with it? No! All our women think the same way.

Kavita, Active KKP KP Wastepicker

Collective action was most strongly visible when women took part in demonstrations and protest marches. Women felt powerful at such events and revelled in the strength of solidarity:

When we go for demonstrations, we feel good. People stare at us. We feel proud. People should also feel that women amount to something, they can do something for themselves. People must be looking at us and thinking that they cannot mess with us!"

Rani, Active KKP KP Wastepicker

These demonstrations became a space for women to articulate their resentment against state apparatus, while knowing that it was their collective strength that provided them with the security to do so. Their solidarity was based on a sense of shared oppression and a collective sense of injustice.

In *morchas* I scream so loudly that ten women cannot hear around me! We all yell together “*hum sab ekhain*” (we are all united!). It feels good that we are so many-we are united. And if anyone tries and acts smart with us will we let him get away with it? No! All our women think the same way.

Kavita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

I feel that we have a lot of power and that people will get scared of us. When I see so many people all united I feel we can defeat anything. I feel so proud. We all stand united. Usually shop owners, ration card people, police all give us ‘*dum*’. But at these *morchas* even the police can’t touch us. We shout out slogans against the government in front of them. At that time we have full power. We have courage.

Parvati, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Parvati and Kavita are pointing to the vulnerability of wastepickers in the absence of the union. It is only when individual women came together that they had a voice that could be heard, and hence makes collective demands for self-determination. The solidarity of a union and the sheer numerical strength of their membership was the source from which women drew ‘power to’ challenge state authority. The feeling that they could ‘defeat anything’ was of immense importance for women, who had traditionally lacked the necessary resources and confidence to voice dissent. Whereas earlier the cost of seeking redress for the violation of one’s rights were too high, now unionized wastepickers were gradually finding a way to reclaim citizenship by demanding their rights.

Another pathway towards claiming citizenship was demanding better treatment for oneself based on new ideas of justice, equality and human rights. The union provided women information on a number of different issues; accessing government schemes, applying for caste certificates, and accessing the public distribution system for food grains. In addition, during union meetings larger socio-political issues were discussed, which not only expanded women’s understanding of the world around them, but also gave them the confidence to engage with this world from a position of increased authority.

We get information that benefits us. How to save, scholarships for children. Also we get to know what’s happening in India. We get information. Form our opinions. By listening we get smarter.

Surekha, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

The union also questioned women's acceptance of the fear and injustice that had become a 'normal' part of their lives.

Slowly our '*buddhi*' (mind) changed. The union taught us not to be afraid of anyone. They'd tell us, 'If anyone commits an injustice against you, tell us, don't be afraid, we are there behind you.' They'd tell us not to kill ourselves, burn ourselves, give up our lives out of anger or frustration. They'd say, "If anyone harasses you at work let us know. Don't be afraid. Don't live under the *dabaav* (pressure) of anyone; not the police, not your husband, not your in-laws. No one.

Pallavi, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Some of these 'new ideas' became crucial in the process of contesting meanings, challenging hegemonic narratives and developing multiple new understandings of themselves. For instance most women had viewed wastepicking as an extension of their 'duty' as a mother. They believed that their husbands were the heads of the household and that they ought to feel dependent on him. The union however challenged these views, by encouraging wastepickers to understand the value of the monetary contributions they were making both to their homes as well as to the local municipality. In the process women learnt to recognize that their earnings were not supplementary; but in fact were equal to that of their husbands. In doing this they were able to see themselves differently. Baida describes this transformation in greater detail.

At that time I believed that the head of the house (*karta-gharta*) was my husband...I thought that I had no role to play except to cook and feed him. I wasn't an important part of the household. I was only supposed to take as much money as I needed to run the house and the rest of the money I was supposed to hand back to my husband. So even though I was working earning I would not keep any of the money because he was the '*maalak*' (head). I was not the *maalak* so why should I need any money? This huge misunderstanding I had. When my kids were growing up we were completely dependent on him. If I asked him for money he'd say, "Not today tomorrow, or not tomorrow day after". The children would cry and I would feel so bad. But when I joined the Union I understood the real true situation.

Baida, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

For poor Dalit women, like Baida, engagement in paid work was not something new. However the economic compulsion to work did not necessarily mean that they valued their contributions towards the home, or that it translated into increased autonomy and control over their lives. Baida highlights how norms like men as the 'household head'

and women as the 'dependent' shape women's self perceptions, so much so that women themselves begin to believe in the validity of these norms ("I was not the *maalak* so why should I need any money?").

In Baida's case membership of a trade union has enabled her to question these norms and re-evaluate her perceptions about contribution and work.

The union started filling our heads with ideas. Why should you be afraid of your husband, they would ask? Just as he works, even you work. So why should you keep quiet? Why should you tolerate him treating you badly? When they would say these things it would stick with me. I began thinking, "Just as he works, even I work. God has given him two hands to work, in the same way he has given me two hands to work. Even if my husband is earnings Rs.200 I am earning at least Rs. 100." When I got convinced of this idea then I stopped being scared. I had more courage from that moment on.

Baida, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Gradually, through membership to the union, and developing an identity as a worker and citizen, Baida began to see value in her earnings. She began to recognize her contribution to the running of her home and consequently felt less dependent on her husband. Improved earnings also enhanced her self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. Other active women members of the KKPKP gradually began to display strong ideas about gender equality and women's rights. They began to view the world differently; as a place that belonged rightfully to both women and men; even poor, illiterate women like themselves.

By providing women with information about their rights, the union had raised their political consciousness and personal confidence so they became their own agents of change (Solomon, 2013). In addition these myriad self-understandings; as a citizen, a worker, a wife with a right to respect and dignity, and a contributing member of the household played a critical role in developing an alternative consciousness, which eventually gave women the confidence to begin questioning intra-household inequality.

5.3.6 Providing Leadership Opportunities

Another critical pathway for changing the consciousness of wastepicker members has been to provide them with leadership opportunities within the union. Although the

KKPKP was started by two middle class, university educated activists and has always had dedicated field workers who regularly engage with wastepickers, the emphasis of the union has been to encourage women to articulate their concerns, set the agendas of meetings, and lead protest marches. This decentralized leadership pattern is reflected in its unique governance structure in which wastepickers occupy influential positions. The 10,000 wastepicker members of the union elect eighty of their own representatives, called *vasti pratinidhi's*, who make up the Representative Council of the KKPKP. In addition, wastepickers also make up eight out of eleven positions on the Governing Board of the Union.

The importance of such a governing structure is that it enabled women to begin developing an understanding of themselves as leaders. Women leaders encouraged other wastepicker members to remain united, explained to them the benefits of solidarity, and convinced them about regular attendance in union activities. The leaders also had to meet regularly to deliberate and discuss issues, and often make important decisions on behalf of thousands of wastepickers. All this was possible because these *vasti pratinidhis* had internalized for themselves the importance of solidarity and the advantages of being united. This process was critical in fostering feelings of self-confidence and self-reliance.

In addition leadership opportunities provided women with a chance to question their own deep rooted cultural beliefs about poor women not having the necessary skills and resources to step into positions of leadership and power. This process helped women develop confidence in their own abilities and it fundamentally changed the way they viewed themselves. For example, women began to challenge their own self understandings. Mangal who previously viewed herself as illiterate and ignorant states:

I am so proud of being the treasurer. On 16th meetings³³ I sign people's cheques. I never thought I had it in me to do all this. I used to think that I knew nothing.

Mangal, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

³³ The 16th meetings are the monthly meetings of the KKPKP Representative Council. This body consists of 75 wastepicker members who meet on the 16th of every month all year round.

Mangal being elected into holding a significant post in the union helped challenge her own understanding of herself as a poor illiterate woman who always ‘needed to be told what to do’.

In addition, leadership positions made women ‘visible’. Over time wastepicker leaders became the face of the union. Vocal, articulate and confident women leaders of the KKPKP led protest marches of thousands of women in the streets, held dialogues with important government officials and organized city wide campaigns. Often they were invited to give speeches alongside important dignitaries at events across the city and country. These were transformative moments, not only for the wastepicker, who was standing on stage and speaking, but also for the thousands of wastepickers who were present. Seeing a wastepicker like themselves, on stage, giving a speech allowed them to imagine new ways of being. They could see what women like themselves were capable of achieving, and by extension could see themselves as “being capable, individually and collectively, of imagining and enacting alternative realities” (Sanyal, 2014, p. 96).

The wastepickers who were invited to speak at these events were recognized within their communities and often found themselves written about in the newspapers. This kind of publicity heightened their confidence and belief in themselves, as well as instilling pride in the work that they were doing:

I am no longer the person I used to be. I feel like I have ‘power’ because I am a leader. I feel happy, and proud that people know me! I think that truly my life might be an inspiration for others. I try and offer solutions to women for their problems. Lots of women have worse troubles than me. It is my responsibility to make them strong like me.

Saru, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Saru’s words also highlight how being a leader made women feel a sense of responsibility towards others. This power to motivate others reinforced feelings of solidarity and a collective identity.

This transformation in personhood is captured in the life of Rekha, who has been a wastepicker in the union for the last decade. Rekha and her three young children were abandoned by her alcoholic husband several years ago. On realizing that her husband

had gone off with another woman, Rekha moved out of her husband's home and set up a new house in a slum at the other end of the city. Her husband however came back after a few months and began regularly accosting her at the workplace. He would demand that she comes home with him, verbally abuse her and beat her up in full public view. For years Rekha refused to file a formal police complaint against her husband because she attributed her situation to one of 'bad fate'.

On the day Rekha's husband beat her unconscious outside her workplace. A member of the public found her ID card and called the union office. Union fieldworkers rushed her to hospital. As Rekha described, "*The women from the union took so much care of me. They stayed with me for four nights in the hospital till I was discharged. After that I became a lifelong follower of the union*".

It was after this incident that Rekha began attending union activities more regularly and gradually built a close relationship with union fieldworkers. She finally sought their help in filing a police complaint against her abusive husband. This gave her the courage to refuse him entry into her home, and also to threaten divorce. Today Rekha is one of the most vocal, articulate and confident *vasti pratinidhi's* of the KKPKP, keen on encouraging young mothers to recognize their potential and stand up to domestic abuse. As a leader she attends monthly meeting in the union office, convenes wastepicker meetings in her slum and routinely travels to New Delhi to advocate on behalf of the KKPKP with important government authorities.

Today I have the confidence to go to all ends of the world and tell all women not to be treated badly by their families. Don't go through what I have been through, don't live like that. Become strong. Become like lions. Stand up and fight for your rights. Build your self-confidence by stepping out of the house. Interact with other people, don't sit inside the home. Come out. Earn a living. Speak to people. If you stay at home you won't know what's happening outside, so step out of your homes...why should we suffer this silently? When you step out into the world you get to know the situation outside. And if you don't understand the world outside then ask us.

Rekha, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Rekha's words demonstrate the transformation in personhood that union leadership might bring about. By expanding women's sphere of interaction, building awareness

about their rights and encouraging women to take responsibility for other women like themselves the union enabled Rekha to develop a new understanding of herself as a leader as opposed to a victim. This encouraged her to take responsibility for others, express solidarity and offer solutions to other women like herself.

However not all women experienced such radical changes in their understandings of self, and their place in the world. I will now turn to a category of women whose largely ‘instrumental’ participation in the union did not foster such transformations in their sense of self.

5.4 ‘Inactive’ women and Limits to Change

Unlike active women, the women I term ‘inactive’ members’ of the KKPKP did not demonstrate significant transformations in their understanding of themselves, or of the world around them. I would argue that ‘inactive’ women’s perceptions of self and their wider worldview remained very close to that of the non-unionized wastepickers I interviewed. For ‘inactive’ women workers, this could be attributed not only to the limited frequency of their interactions with the union, but also to the nature of their engagement with the KKPKP.

In particular, one of the most defining features of ‘inactive’ women’s relationship with the union was that they rarely brought to the attention of the KKPKP personal issues that required solving. They perceived the union as a place that solved only work related issues and in general demonstrated very strict boundaries between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’. Also they were reticent when it came to sharing details about their intimate life with other union members.

These domestic issues continue all year round regardless. So why discuss them? Union meetings are spaces to talk about work. Why should we share private issues here?

Umabai, ‘Inactive’ KKPKP Wastepicker

When women like Umabai did not share personal stories within the union, they failed to experience a ‘transformational event’ (Collom, 2011), which could potentially cement their affective ties with the KKPKP. When ‘inactive’ members did not bring their personal matters to the attention of the union, their association with the KKPKP

remained largely functional; i.e., they approached the union only when they needed help with a child's education, money for a loan or work related issues. 'Inactive' members largely drew upon the union for material support, beyond which their involvement with the union was minimal and emotional investment particularly low. Research on social movements has found that when people join movements with overtly utilitarian incentives, such as material benefits or informational incentives, they are unlikely to get deeply involved or participate fully in these movements (Knoke, 1988).

My interviews suggest that one possible reason 'inactive' women refrained from sharing personal matters with the union was because a significant number of these women had some sort of family support structure to help them solve domestic issues, like spousal violence. In particular, most of these women either lived close to their natal families, or had supportive in-laws living close-by. It was this network that they leaned on in times of trouble, and therefore did not feel the need to approach the union for help.

My mother and brother live just next door. So if they heard my husband beat me up they would come and say something to him. They would explain to him not to behave so badly. The kids are young, what will they learn they would say? That's why there was no real need to take anyone else's help.

Sarika, 'Inactive' KKPKP Wastepicker

My research suggests that having supportive family structures was an advantage in that they could intervene immediately (especially in cases of domestic violence). However in the long run having kin based support networks might not necessarily have worked to a woman's advantage because families most often focussed on 'compromise' and on 'making things work'.

When Sarika was asked whether the violence in her home abated because of her proximity to her natal family she said, "*No, he would still beat me everyday. But what could I do? My mother would feel sorry for me but she would say, "This is your naseeb (fate). You have to live it out"*

Similarly Roma said:

My sister-in-law lives in the house next door. But she couldn't say much because everytime she intervened my husband would start fighting with her and accuse her of being a whore. This was embarrassing for her because the

whole *vasti* could see what was happening. So even though my family lived just next door they told me that I had to just put up with his abuse; that it would eventually stop one day.

It would seem therefore that even though ‘inactive’ women might have had family structures to lean on in times of domestic tension, the presence of such support systems only provided temporary relief from violence.

A less obvious reason why ‘inactive’ women didn’t feel confident enough to divulge intimate details to union members was because they had not had the opportunity to develop close, reciprocal relationships with KKP KP staff. Several ‘inactive’ women I interviewed felt let down by union *karyakartas* (fieldworkers) at some point early on in their engagement with the union. All of these women had a variety of complaints about union fieldworkers, such as that they didn’t turn up for monthly meetings, that their mobile phones were always turned off and that they promised to look into work related matters but didn’t do so. It was this lack of connection between field workers and women wastepickers that made women feel like the union was not really interested in them.

When my mother-in-law was admitted we immediately called up the *sanstha* and told them. Isn’t it their responsibility to come and see her? Talk to the doctor? But no one came. Also meetings don’t happen regularly in our *vasti*. We even want to save money and we have the money ready every month, but no *karyakarta* turns up for these meetings. They didn’t even collect our children’s scholarship forms from us.

Rani, ‘Inactive’ KKP KP Wastepicker

Rani’s complaints were similar to those voiced by several other ‘inactive’ members who felt that the union *karyakartas* were not ‘interested’ in them and their issues. When ‘inactive’ members felt that the union did not care about them they failed to develop a strong affective connection with the KKP KP. Such feelings of ‘not being cared about’ mirror the opposite to feelings of care and concern that active union members felt upon joining the KKP KP, and which determined their eventual long term commitment to it. On the whole ‘inactive’ members demonstrated low levels of ownership towards the union and had little interest in, or commitment to long term processes of change.

In addition to union *karyakartas* appearing ‘uninterested’, ‘inactive’ members also had at times unrealistic expectations from the union, and therefore often remained dissatisfied. Several ‘inactive’ women members whom I spoke to understood the function of the union to be similar to that of an NGO (non-governmental organization); an organization that was set up to ‘give’ poor slum women like themselves ‘things’.

When my son passed his 10th standard exams he didn’t get anything from the union. There is another organization in our *vasti* which helps us –they gave my son Rs 1500 as a prize. They even came and helped us with admission in colleges. Isn’t this the duty of our *sanghatna*? This is my expectation. That if we don’t get admission they make a phone call, they help with caste certificates if its needed, or help our kids find jobs. The Union should do things like this.

Alka, ‘Inactive’ KKPKP Wastepicker

Such unrealistic expectations as expressed by Alka are hardly surprising given the growth of NGOs across the city. Conservative estimates state that there is one NGO for every six hundred people (TOI, 2014).³⁴ Most of these NGOs work within the service-delivery paradigm, and women in slums are well-acquainted with receiving material ‘things’ (notebooks for children, food staples, health care etc.) from these organizations. Added to this are several right-wing Hindutva organizations who invariably use ‘muscle-power’ to get things done. Alka’s comment above “if we don’t get admission they make a phone call” refers to one such organization.

The KKPKP however is modelled on an alternative vision of empowerment and justice, and focuses on building women’s capacities so that they themselves can begin to rightfully demand such ‘things’ from the government. This is a long process, and several of the battles that women wastepickers fight today might not yield results in their lifetime. Several ‘inactive’ members had expectations of the union that far exceeded its mandate, which led to invariable disappointment and irritation on their part, and made them feel that participation in the union was not worth their while.

In addition when women interacted with the union solely for the purpose of material gain they lost out on the opportunities to connect with the union and its members

³⁴ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-witnessing-NGO-boom-there-is-1-for-every-600-people/articleshow/30871406.cms> Accessed on 28th May 2015

relationally. 'Inactive' women rarely attended union meetings at the office or even within their own *vasti*, and if they attended demonstrations or protest marches it was only because fieldworkers had visited their homes multiple times and had persuaded them to attend. This provided women with only limited opportunities to expand their relational identities and experience the solidarity and friendship that active women were familiar with. Unlike active women, 'inactive' members rarely had close friends within the union, and did not consider the union to be 'family'.

On the whole 'inactive' members demonstrated low levels of ownership towards the union and had little interest in, or commitment to long term processes of change. When women did not feel emotionally connected to the union not only did it compound their unwillingness to seek union help to solve domestic matters, it also made them less likely to attend union meetings and other activities. This in turn deprived them of the solidarity, connectedness and friendships that regular contact with the union provided. Thus a lack of affective connection with the union was not only a cause of 'inactive' membership, but also a consequence of it. Despite being members of the KKPKP they failed to develop a multifaceted identity, with strong alternative self-understandings.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted pathways via which women wastepickers who had once considered themselves illiterate, invisible and lacking knowledge gradually began to view themselves differently. Material pathways, such as higher wages not only held practical value in that they improved the condition of women's lives, but also allowed for strategic gains through women's valuation of their incomes. Similarly the practical value of having an identity card was that it allowed women unhindered access to garbage. However the strategic value was that it imparted a sense of dignity, respect and recognition to women through fostering an identity as a worker. In this chapter I highlight how the KKPKP provided its members a number of such 'resources', which held practical value; however to transform them into strategic pathways of change required the building of new 'self-understandings'. It was the cognitive pathways of union membership that held the power to transform material and relational resources into long term pathways for change. Women's perceptions of their well-being,

contribution and self-interests laid the foundation for long term transformations within their homes (Sen, 1990).

If we begin to untangle the processes of transformation we can begin to decipher how closely these pathways are intertwined. For instance material resources have the potential to become assets in bargaining based on the cognitive understandings that women derive from them. Similarly, a prerequisite to developing new cognitive understandings of oneself is expanding one's relational identity to include alternative relational selves. Often pathways overlap. For instance the expanded spheres of interaction that union membership provides women can be considered both a cognitive as well as a relational pathway.

This chapter also highlights that not all members of the KKPKP had equal potential to develop relational identities and new understandings of themselves. It was the active members in the union; those who were consistent in their participation and had developed an affective connection with the union who drew extensively on the cognitive and relational pathways of change. The following chapter looks at how women have used these pathways to challenge inequality within the home, in particular in three areas: domestic violence, distribution of household chores and financial accountability of spouses.

6. CHANGES IN INTRA-HOUSEHOLD GENDER RELATIONS

This chapter will examine if membership of the KKPKP had an impact on intra-household gender relations within the homes of the women I interviewed. I begin by describing the nature of marital relations in women's homes before they joined the KKPKP. I focus on the key manifestations of intra-household gender inequality that emerged from my interviews; namely, frequent domestic violence, husband's abdication of breadwinner roles and unequal division of domestic labour. I then delineate how women used the resources they had access to through the KKPKP to bargain for better treatment within their homes. This will allow a comparison of intra-household relations 'before' and 'after' union membership, and to ascertain the extent to which it was membership to the union that brought about reported changes. The chapter will also explore the nature of the bargaining processes, i.e. the various ways in which bargaining takes place and how this ultimately allows women to feel that they can choose differently and demand what is rightfully theirs.

6.1 Dalit women and Marital Choices

Since a major concern of my research is Dalit intra-household gender relations, it is important to get a sense of how these relations played out *in* the marital choices of the young Dalit women I interviewed. Most women in my study were married at the age of 12-13 years (i.e. the same year they started menstruating, or at most a year later). Almost all women had arranged marriages; arranged by parents and elders in the family and in most cases alliances were fixed with members of one's extended family. Marriage to first and second cousins on the mothers and fathers side was very common, in particular the mother's brother and father's sister's son. Very few marriages were fixed with 'outsiders'. There were three women who had self-arranged ('love') marriages, where they chose whom they wanted to marry. All three of these marriages were inter-caste marriages involving men from other Dalit sub-castes. Marriages of this kind usually met with some degree of ostracism; involving a period of separation from both families, followed by reconciliation, usually once grandchildren were born.

Consent of the bride at the time of marriage was not given much importance, though most women in my study agreed that this was changing. Most women said that at the time of their marriage they were too young to understand what was happening and what marriage meant.

In our time it was not part of our culture to ask the girl (if she wanted to get married). Like now we ask girls- we tell them who we are getting them married to, what he does and so on. In our time even we didn't understand who to say yes to or to say no too. We were so young. We just sat in front of whoever our parents brought to us. There was nothing we could do about it.

Baida, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Baida's words highlight how within Dalit communities, from a young age girls begin to learn that they require the involvement of others (particularly elders and men) in the process of shaping one's self. The 'mobilization of kinship structures and morality' to legitimate this behaviour highlights the beginnings of what Suad Joseph (1993) describes as connectivity defined by patriarchy (ibid, p. 453). A few women said that they had been forced to marry despite being resistant to the idea of marriage. Poverty, absentee fathers, alcoholic parent(s), and girls hitting puberty were the primary reasons why most girls were married off young. However none of my respondents seemed especially perturbed by the fact that their 'consent' had not been critical while arranging their marriage. This was because agreeing to marry a spouse chosen by your parents was a way to gain 'izzat'/honour in the community. There was a unanimous agreement among women that 'going ahead of your parents' i.e. disobeying their choice of spouse was not possible because not only did it bring shame to one's parents, but it also signified that they might have 'someone' else in their lives. In addition marrying a spouse of one's own choice meant that the girl could never rely on natal support in case of future marital difficulties.

When our parents arrange our marriage we cannot go against their wishes. We girls have to agree. That has a value because if something goes wrong in your marriage you can always turn to your parents and say, "Why did you marry me to such a man?" You can always ask your parents to support you then. But if you marry someone of your own choice, why will your parents help you? Who will you turn to then?

Parvati, 'Inactive' KKPKP Wastepicker

As I shall point out later in this chapter, despite most women in my study having agreed to their parents' choice of spouse, very few women could rely on the unstinting support of their parents in times of domestic distress.

As for the actual marriage ceremony, it was paid for by the bride's family, who also gave the young bride a dowry (utensils, cupboards, beds and cash). In a few situations of extreme poverty no dowry was given. Post-marriage residence was patrilocal with women moving to men's homes. In most cases this involved living with a joint family consisting of the husband's parents, unmarried sisters and brothers and their wives. It was only in cases of inter-caste marriages where couples had faced opposition to their union they lived on their own immediately after marriage. However once the in-laws accepted the new bride, the couple usually moved into the husband's parents' home.

From the narratives of my respondents it emerged that marriage was a defining feature of Dalit women's identities. Marriage was important in conferring status and respectability, not only to young Dalit women but also to their families.

If you don't want to get married people will ask, "Why is she saying no? There must be someone else in her life". That is why when girls become *shaani* (come of age) they must be married off quickly. Otherwise people talk. That's the use of marriage.

Parvati, 'Inactive' KKPKP Wastepicker

You only become someone with responsibility after you are married. You grow up.

Kavita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Marriage was integral in not only in securing women's '*izzat*' (respect), but also in conferring an adult identity to them. This corroborates with existing literature on the role of marriage in women's lives in South Asia (Uberoi, 1993; Palriwala and Risseuw, 1996; Thapan, 2003). Despite the importance of marriage in women's lives it emerged from my narratives that marital relationships were a source of significant stress and tension in the lives of women. The following section explores this.

6.2 Nature of Inequality within the Home: Dalit women

My findings depart from literature that presents Dalit homes as embodiments of supposedly equal gender relations and Dalit women as sexually ‘liberated’ and ‘free’ from the patriarchal constraints that bind upper-caste women (see Parry, 1979; Kapadia, 1995; Deliege, 1997; Viramma et al., 1997). Domestic violence emerged as the single most defining feature of marital relationships and an accepted part of marital relations. 48 out of 50 women interviewed stated that they had been in marriages in which they had faced significant physical, sexual, verbal and/or emotional abuse.³⁵

Anything triggered violence. Anything. Why isn't this tea hot? Where were you just now? Why is the child crying? Small things. He'd beat me mercilessly. I have stitches in my head. He stabbed me with a knife in my hand. He beat me with belts till my skin came off. He would force me to have sex at all times of the day and night, and even when there were other people in the room he didn't care.

Kanchan, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

These figures are drastically higher than the National Family Health Survey data, which states that in India 41.7 percent of scheduled-caste women (between the ages of 15-49 years) have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their husband in their life time (NFHS-3, 2006). Despite this, domestic violence faced by Dalit women has largely been considered insignificant by both Dalit and non-Dalit scholars and activists (Sujatha, 2014).

Alcoholism was one of the primary triggers for abuse. 40 out of the 50 women in my sample were married to men who at some point in their lives had been abusing alcohol. These figures again are significantly higher than NFHS-3 data, which suggest that only 42% of scheduled caste men report consuming alcohol, with only one out of three men (35%) drinking as frequently as once a week. My data suggests that it was common for

³⁵ The nature of physical violence in my study included pushing, shaking, throwing something at her, slapping, arm twisting, hair pulling, punching, kicking, dragging, beating, trying to choke or burn her on purpose, and threatening her or attacking her with a weapon. Acts of sexual violence by the husband included physically forcing the wife against her will to have sex or perform other sexual acts. Emotional abuse included controlling the wives finances, withdrawing basic necessities (e.g., food, contact with natal family), and having multiple affairs.

men to drink daily after work, and in cases where they were out of work; to drink during the day.

Drunken husbands routinely cast aspersions on their wives fidelity, with suspicion becoming a routine trigger for domestic abuse.

He would follow me everywhere trying to prove I was having affairs with people at work. He would accuse me of sleeping with everyone; the place I'd go to sell my *maal* (scrap), anyone I would speak to- he was so suspicious. He wouldn't let me sit with anyone, talk to anyone, lift my head.

Rekha, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Alcoholism was not the only trigger for violence. In a few cases women reported that husbands became violent when they lacked the privacy to have sex. With cramped living conditions, and several family members usually living in one room this lack of privacy was not unusual. Empirical studies of working class men in South India have found that “(sexual) intercourse was the context in which the conjugal relationship assumed form, coherence and significance” (V. Geetha, 2008, p. 316). This might help to explain why the lack of privacy to have sex might lead to violence.

Women however resented the violence. Most women believed that violence was wrong, though an unavoidable part of conjugality. This is supported by the actions they engaged in when faced with violence; their indignation took the form of physical and/or verbal retaliation, and often temporary abandonment (explained in greater depth in the following section). However women's acknowledgement that there was really nothing they could do to stop this violence, also led to feelings of resignation and helplessness. Their attitudes towards violence strengthen Joseph's (1993) claim that within contexts where identities are relational and patriarchy is strong, “patriarchy shapes connectivity by crafting males...prepared to direct the lives of females....and females.....prepared to respond to the direction of males....” (Joseph, 1993, p. 453). Although Dalit women in my study resented the violence that they faced, they also accepted it as ‘normal’ and a sign of a mature, respectable marital relationship. Their sense of self was entwined within these understandings of what it means to be married, and this internalization of a particular understanding of self had played an important role in women resisting transition or change in their personal lives.

Literature on Dalit women is not only silent around the high levels of domestic violence they face, but also on other areas of intra-household inequality. For instance contrary to accounts of Dalit women's freedom of mobility (see Kapadia, 1995; Ilaiah, 1996; Lakshmanan, 2004), in the narratives I analysed it was apparent that women's mobility was conditional, and highly regulated. When it came to visiting one's natal family or relatives, women were expected to seek their husband's permission before they stepped out of the house. Failure to do so could invite physical and verbal abuse, and accusations of infidelity. Also on these occasions women rarely made these visits alone; they were almost always chaperoned by their husbands or a male or female relative.

With respect to engagement in paid work, my study found that despite significant poverty, Dalit women's entry into paid work could not be taken for granted. Women were *allowed* to leave their homes to engage in paid work *only if* their husbands were not providing enough for the family. There was an implicit understanding among both men and women that in cases where husband's incomes adequately covered all the household expenses, women would withdraw themselves from paid work. Mobility of Dalit women was therefore conditional upon the need of the family for an additional income.

Not only did women need an economic justification to validate their entry into paid work, but the process of obtaining this 'permission' from their husbands depended on them allaying male anxieties. For instance women had to broach the need for an extra income without highlighting the fact that their husband's was failing in their roles as providers. They also had to make sure that their domestic tasks did not suffer because of their engagement in work outside the home.

When I had my second daughter, he was very upset (because it was a girl). So he started drinking. Because of that he started bringing less and less money into the house.... Our family was expanding but income was shrinking....Finally there was no money to even buy oil to put in my hair....So that's when I asked him if I can go out and work. I told him that till I would work and take care of the children, so it would not be a problem for him.

Lata, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Women like Lata were using local discourses of domesticity (Kabeer, 2007), such as ensuring that meals will be prepared on time, children will be looked after and husbands will not be inconvenienced by women's engagement in paid work.

In addition there was a close link between work-related mobility and domestic violence. Women reported that they were beaten when they came home late, dressed up for work, or spoke to other men while at work. Several women reported being followed by their husband's to their workplaces, so that he could ensure that she was not having an affair. Women resented the violence and increased surveillance, but there was little that they could do about it.

There were several accounts of men who stopped working either for short periods of time or permanently after their marriage, leaving the entire responsibility of earning an income on their wives. Despite this husbands still expected to be treated as the heads of the household, and women's contributions towards running their home were rarely acknowledged.

Another aspect of inequality in Dalit women's homes was the lack of financial accountability demonstrated by husbands. This was largely due to men's excessive expenditure on alcohol, gambling and extra-marital affairs. In a few cases husbands began selling off household assets like steel utensils, jewellery or bits of furniture to pay for their alcohol consumption. If women attempted to hold their husbands accountable towards their household responsibilities, for example by asking them for money towards daily expenses, it invariably led to severe violence. As Rekha says:

My husband would leave the house for days, and sometimes for months. We all knew he had gone off with her (the 'mistress'). During that time he wouldn't send even one rupee home. I had four small children to look after, so I would be working all day. My neighbours would take care of the children during the day.

Rekha, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Literature suggests that Dalit women expect an egalitarian distribution of chores within the home owing to their income earning capacity (Searle-Chatterjee, 1981; Deliege, 1997). However my study found that there was a unanimous agreement among almost all the wastepickers I interviewed that cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and utensils,

taking care of the young and the aged were all a wives responsibility. Husbands in contrast were only expected to earn a living, with their wives stepping in to 'supplement' their income in case it fell short.

What is the use of a man who washes vessels? His *adhikar* (authority) becomes less. So you don't want him to do this work. If men do this kind of work he becomes less of a man. People say, "Look at this man—he is under the rule of his wife" They will tease them, pass comments."

Asha, 'Inactive' KKPKP Wastepicker

Such comments indicate the role played by women in co-constituting masculinity; in this case, Dalit interpretations of men's identity.

A final characterization of egalitarian Dalit intra-household gender relations in literature is the casting of Dalit women as having a considerable degree of 'sexual autonomy'. Ethnographies of lower-caste women go so far as to state that like Dalit men, Dalit women are allowed to have multiple sexual partners ((Parry, 1979; Deliege 1997; Viramma et al., 1997). Though women in my study admitted that women do at times have a sexual partner outside marriage, they cautioned that such affairs were morally justifiable only if the concerned woman's husband had stopped contributing towards the running of their home. At times like this 'relying' on other men, was deemed socially acceptable, and the woman was consequently labelled a 'good' woman. On the other hand a 'bad' woman was one who had affairs *even though* her husband was providing a regular income to the house. A woman in my study who admitted to having an affair just for 'fun' mentioned that she was terrified of being labelled 'loose' should people in her community find out. Women did not use the same yardstick to judge Dalit men and their affairs. Although they strongly disapproved of husbands who had extramarital relations, they did not attribute the same judgement of 'good' or 'bad' to Dalit men. In fact disapproval towards men's extramarital affairs stemmed from the material (and not the moral) impact of their affairs of their homes; husbands having affairs would often disappear from their home for days (sometimes months) at a time, would stop giving their wives money to run the home, and also begin accusing their wives of having affairs in their absence.

Not only do such accounts call into question the universal attribution of ‘sexual autonomy’ to Dalit women, but they also highlight the different gender ideologies in operation for men and women. The fear of moral contagion seemed to be unevenly distributed (Vera-Sanso, 2008); while women could expect to be labelled as ‘morally corrupt’, men did not have to share the same worry.

In contrast to this picture of inequality, there were four women who reported limited violence or infidelity in their conjugal relationship. These women felt valued and cherished in their marriages, and felt that for the most part they could share their thoughts and feeling with their husbands. Though women still conformed to their roles as primary care-giver and took sole responsibility for all household chores, they still described their relationships as characterized by freedom and openness.

We would go out *phirayla* (roaming about), we were ‘*ekdum* friendly’. At home our eating, sleeping and so on were very friendly. You’d never think we were husband-wife! Yes on one hand he is my husband but only ‘*paap karnya poorta navra aahe*’ (only to have sex). But he has treated me so well that he never treated me like a wife. Of course with the kids growing older we do have our fights in between, but we don’t have huge fights, he doesn’t beat me *much*, he isn’t suspicious about me, he doesn’t trouble me.

Babita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

While Babita’s description of what constitutes a healthy conjugal relationship is still based on a dynamic of violence and control, in the context of the much greater levels of manipulation and abuse that I encountered in my interviews it can be seen as a more harmonious relationship. Most women echoed Babita’s view that as long as there was minimal violence, no suspicion, and adequate monetary contribution towards household expenses the marital relationship was considered a success. I will now turn from this background of marital relations to looking at how women negotiated these inequalities within their homes.

6.3 Negotiating Intra-Household Inequalities Pre-Union Membership

Literature on intra-household bargaining draws attention to the fact that often when social norms prevent explicit bargaining, inequalities within the home may be

challenged in ways that are less conspicuous. Women might resort to using covert and implicit forms of contestation (Agarwal, 1997; Kabeer, 2000). My research found that in comparison to these studies, the norms of Dalit patriarchy did not limit women to the use of covert forms of defiance, but instead allowed Dalit women to respond overtly and explicitly to injustice within their homes.

However prior to joining the union these responses were largely made up of what Michel de Certeau (1984) termed 'tactics'. Tactics were individual, isolated actions intended to safeguard, protect and shield women who felt vulnerable and alone. Despite the overt and pronounced nature of tactics used by Dalit women, these actions continued to operate within 'terrains imposed from outside' (ibid, p. 37); in particular deeply entrenched norms and internalized belief systems about gender ideologies and appropriate male and female behaviour. This included women's unquestioned deference to husbands, acceptance of domestic violence, fear of being abandoned by husbands and being dependent on their natal families. This reduced tactics to mere 'opportunistic' interventions; reactionary and defensive instead of well thought-out and planned, and thereby limited the degree of transformations within the home.

Women's responses towards domestic violence were perhaps the most indicative of the limited degree of change that could be engendered by the use of such tactics. Most women I interviewed considered domestic violence an unavoidable aspect of conjugality.

My parents used to fight a lot. My father was an alcoholic and would beat my mother. So I knew what to expect when I got married.

Mangal, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Like Mangal there were several women in my study who had grown up seeing their father's being violent towards their mothers. Domestic violence was an attribute of marital relations, which though unpleasant, was unavoidable and to be expected. Women did not view violence through a lens of 'right' or 'wrong'; for them violence was distressing and a nuisance, but a part of marriage. Their reactions to violence therefore were rooted in attempts to reduce the immediate discomfort and distress that it

caused, and did not stem from an understanding of a 'right' to live a life free from violence.

However although women expected violence to be a regular part of conjugality, this does not mean that they accepted it passively and unaware of the impact it had on their well-being. The women in my study did not display the 'adaptive preferences' described by Sen (1990) nor were they the stereotypes of egalitarianism as proposed by several Dalit scholars (see Kapadia, 1995; Ilaiah, 1996; Ramanathan et al., 2000). Instead women protested in several overt ways when faced with violence. One of the most common tactics that women in my study used to deal with domestic violence was to fight back themselves. This included retaliation with verbal and (sometimes) physical abuse, without seeking external help from neighbours or family.

Women also employed tactics of evasion and escape with faced with violence. It was common for women to hide from their husbands when they came home drunk or abusive. Three women recounted how they would escape with their children to the nearest toilets and return only once their drunken husbands had fallen asleep.

He would beat me when he was drunk. On some days he'd throw away all the food and call me dirty names. There used to be days when I'd sneak to the public toilet and hide there. There used to be neighbours who would come and give me food to eat out there. So I would eat in the toilet. Once he was asleep I'd come home.

Pama, 'Inactive' KKPKP Wastepicker

Actions like hiding in the toilet offered only interim relief and safety, because women eventually had to come back to their husband's homes. Since women had accepted violence as an everyday aspect of conjugality their tactic to deal with it merely became an 'adaptation to the environment' (de Certeau, 1984), instead of an active questioning and challenging of it.

In addition to escaping temporarily, there were several women who left their husbands homes for short or long periods of time in response to violence. The efficacy of these responses was determined by the extent of emotional and material support that women received from their families, which was often limited. For instance, though several women returned to their natal families after severe episodes of violence, they knew that

this support was only temporary and that ultimately they would have to go back to their husband's homes. Aruna, for example, would frequently go back to her village after major fights with her husband. In the village she would live in her brother's home, helping in the fields in exchange for food and shelter. However this hospitality was short lived. As she said:

He (brother) would do *kir-kir* (complain). He'd say, "People will call us names. They'll say that your sister is living here only and not willing to go back to her husband's home; what is wrong with her? Now you are married, is there any need for you to stay with us? Go back to your husband.

Aruna, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Although literature on Dalit women attributes a major portion of their 'freedom' to this ability to return to their parent's home, Aruna's words highlight what Grover (2011) has termed the fear of 'overstaying in one's natal home'. When women did not have the security of knowing that their natal home could be a place of refuge indefinitely, it limited their ability to bargain successfully when faced with domestic violence.

Rekha was the only woman in my sample to leave her husband's home permanently with the full support of her in-laws and natal family. This was due to the combination of factors; an extremely abusive husband who was having an affair, his lack of financial contribution to the home, and her constant dependence on her in-laws for material and emotional support, of which they grew weary. My research found that natal families were more likely to be supportive to their daughters when husbands (like in Rekha's case) had completely abdicated their responsibilities towards the home. That is, domestic violence by itself was rarely enough to guarantee women refuge in their natal home. Also, it was only at times like these that women's decisions to temporarily or permanently abandon their husbands were deemed acceptable.

Everyday we'd fight because he was so suspicious. Everyday he'd beat me till I bled. Everyday he'd accuse me of having an affair with someone new. Everyday he'd harass the kids, throw out their food. Even when he worked he didn't give me any money for the house. One day we had another huge fight and my mother-in law told me "Take your kids and go and stay in your mother's home. And earn and eat. Every day we can't solve your *tamaasha* (troubles). My brother-in-law also said "We also have our homes to look

after, so please understand". So I had to leave my husband's home fifteen years ago.

Rekha, Active KKKPKP Wastepicker

I argue that although it might appear that Rekha's decision to leave home was a way of subverting traditional gender norms, what needs to be taken into account was the *intention* behind Rekha's behaviour. Rekha's decision to leave her husband was made from a position of 'optionless choice' (Kabeer, 2000). When her in-laws, who often came to her rescue in times of need, either by intervening when her husband beat her, or by feeding her children when she didn't have any money, asked her to fend for herself she had no other option but to leave. This 'optionless choice' can be defined as a tactic because it was a reaction to an environment which had been created by the 'other' (de Certeau, 1984), and thus Rekha's actions can be viewed as merely adapting to this environment, instead of an active intervention seeking to change it. In addition, as we shall see later on in this chapter, Rekha's decision to leave her husband's home did not end her abuse; her husband began turning up at her work place and regularly assaulting her both physically and verbally, highlighting de Certeau's claim that the gains from tactical moves are often only temporary.

Prior to joining the union women's tactical responses to violence within their homes were circumscribed by both the external environment, as well as women's internalized belief systems about their place within the home. Within this context of unequal interdependence, women's contestations within the home were driven by a desire for more equality within the family, as opposed to greater independence outside it (Kabeer, 2011). The threat of marital breakdown led to women bargaining for change within their homes cautiously; in ways that did not threaten male authority as well as women's identity and sense of belonging. For a few women this entailed keeping quiet and accepting the inequality as highlighted by Ratan.

I don't fight with him. I don't get irritated with him, I don't get angry with him. If he doesn't give me money I don't say anything to him, I don't nag him. I just keep quiet..... Because who are you without your husband? You have to stay with him for the rest of your life. So that's why women keep quiet. That's how we think.

Ratan, Non-unionized Wastepicker

For others this meant challenging their husband but only within the boundaries defined by him. Women continued to live with the fear of being thrown out of their husband's home in case they overstepped the limits of acceptable intra-household contestation.

When we have a fight my husband says "This is my house, get out of here...If you want to live in my house you have to let me do what I want to do (drink). You can't stop me"... If your husband throws you out of the house where will you go? So even though I fight with him a lot, in the end I need to compromise so that we can live together.

Kanta, Non-unionized Wastepicker

Women like Kanta, despite being sole breadwinners for the family, did not value their contributions to their homes. Kanta was single-handedly paying for the education of all three of their children, paying all the bills, and buying the daily ration for the house. Despite this she did not feel a sense of entitlement towards her husband's home.

Women's responses to intra-household inequality were not only circumscribed by their understandings of themselves and their place in the world but also by their limited access to external resources. For instance the absence of a supportive family, made it hard for women to secure successful bargaining outcomes for themselves. Often women's attempts to demand financial accountability from their husbands were met by resistance from within their families.

When he'd drink and gamble I would fight with him. But if my in-laws were around they would tell me off. Especially my mother-in-law. She would very angry with me and say, "How does it matter to you (that he drinks and gambles)? Don't you get enough to eat? This is what all women go through, so shut up. So then I'd have to keep quiet.

Baida, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Women were also limited by their lack of information and skills to negotiate State support systems. Several women mentioned that they did not know how to file a police complaint, and lacked confidence in stepping into a police station by themselves. In addition when a few women did attempt to lodge formal complaints against their husbands with the police they were met with ridicule and a lack of support. The police often refused to register cases of domestic violence because according to them these

were 'private' matters in which the State should not interfere. This furthered women's sense of isolation and distress.

Not all forms of inequality within the home, however, were contested by women. An area of intra-household inequality that continued to thrive without any overt or covert resistance by women was the distribution of household chores. Unlike domestic violence which Dalit women perceived as antithetical to their well-being, sole responsibility for household chores was considered by them as 'normal' and necessary even. 'Normal' because that was the '*paddhat*' (tradition) and necessary because men engaging in household chores made husband's 'less masculine' in the eyes of society. Reflecting this, research in South India has shown that masculinity is largely defined as its role as beneficiary of female domestic labour (see Vera-Sanso, 2000).

Isn't it the way things/the norm (*paddhat*) are all over the world? Also what would people say if they saw my husband washing clothes!

Parvati, 'Inactive' KKPKP Wastepicker

Though it is obvious that women had internalized notions of gendered divisions of labour; I do not agree with Sen's argument that this suggests that such women do not know where their best interests lie (Sen, 1990). On the contrary I feel that it is because women knew what was in their best interests, that they were unwilling to challenge these norms. By protecting their husbands from 'losing' their masculinity in the public sphere, women were strategically placing men in the position of living up to this 'masculinity', hopefully by contributing regularly towards the home.

Additionally, by ensuring this division of household labour, and taking on sole responsibility for household chores Dalit women were fulfilling their end of the 'patriarchal bargain' (Kandiyoti, 1988). This in turn was used as a bargaining tool when husbands failed to live up to their end of the marital contract. This was seen in the withdrawal of these services by women, when their husbands failed to contribute regularly to their homes. It was also a means for women to gain public sympathy in times of domestic violence or husbands extramarital affairs. This was because a 'good' woman who performed her end of the conjugal contract, had earned herself legitimate ground on which to bemoan the actions of her husband.

The accounts above support empirical studies across India, which argue that Dalit women do not remain silent in the face of extreme abuse (Kapadia, 1995; Khare, 2000; Rege, 2006), and often retaliate in pronounced, overt ways. However my study found that despite this, the effects of their defiance were short-lived; providing women only temporary relief from violence. I argue that women's tactical approaches to dealing with injustice were unable to bring about long-term transformation within their homes because their effectiveness was limited by the lack of external sources of support (family and/or police) and women's own understandings of their place in the world. Tactical actions did not question or challenge the terms of the Dalit marital contract; allowing existing systems of domination to perpetuate and therein failing to bring about major transformations in gender-relations within the home. In the following section I delineate how women's sense of self and identity are key determinants of the *ways* in which they bargain within the home; this consequently has an impact on the degree of transformation of gender relations.

6.4 Union Membership and the Renegotiation of Intra-household Gender Relations: Active Women and the Use of Strategies

The above sections have provided a brief background of existing gender relations and the tactics that women used to deal with entrenched inequalities within their homes. The purpose of this research however, is to examine whether post membership to the KKPKP women were better able to re-negotiate inequalities in marital relationships. In this section I explore the forms of this change and the resources and pathways that women drew on.

Through my interviews it became apparent that membership to the KKPKP did in fact play a significant role in enhancing women's ability and willingness to negotiate inequality within their homes. Through regular, intimate participation in the union there was a change in women's thinking, behaviour, perceptions, confidence and self-worth. As women developed a sense of self that was distinct from their identity derived from their family, they were able to question and re-negotiate key relationships within their homes, in particular inequality between husbands and wives. However this was not true for all KKPKP members. Successful negotiation of intra-household gender relations

appeared to depend to *a great extent on the nature of women's engagement with the KKPKP*.

Around midway-through my interviews there began emerging a prototype of two different kinds of households. There were those homes in which women currently enjoyed relatively greater freedoms; less domestic violence, husbands helping with household chores, greater mobility and far more control over decision making. *These were homes of women who were active members of the KKPKP*. In contrast were homes in which domestic violence continued unabated, wives appeared terrified of their husbands, women still needed their husband's permission to step out of the house—opportunities to re-negotiate inequality seemed limited. These homes belonged to women who were *'inactive' members* of the KKPKP and non-unionized wastepickers. Therefore it appeared that on the whole active women members of the KKPKP were able to demand better treatment within their homes, as compared to *'inactive'* and non-unionized women who still felt like they owed primary allegiance to their husbands.

For women wastepickers who began actively engaging with the union, the tactics they had previously used for dealing with gender inequalities within the home gradually became more sophisticated, creative and reflexive. They assumed the form of *'strategies'* embodying the centrality of women's role as empowered actors within them (de Certeau, 1984). The use of strategic actions was made possible by changes in women's understanding of themselves, their entitlements and sense of justice. In addition the expanded relational networks that women found themselves part of lent them the courage and support to use such actions.

Strategies became the means by which women established new boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, challenged hegemonic norms and essentially changed the rules of the game; "actualizing an ordering of social reality on their own terms" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37). This marked a significant shift from the use of tactical practices, as described in the section above, to actions where in women were operating from positions of greater control and power, and thereby engendering long-term, transformative change within their homes.

The most obvious intra-household changes occurred in the areas of domestic violence, alcoholism of husbands, financial management within the home and in a few cases, distribution of household chores. In addition relationships between husbands and wives on the whole appeared to become more egalitarian, not necessarily in terms of equal distribution of chores or child care (because most women themselves did not think these areas needed to change), but in terms of husbands giving their wives respect and acknowledging their contribution to the home.

The strategies used moved along a continuum of overt and visible actions, to more invisible covert ones. Overt strategies included women being more assertive within the home, demanding accountability from their spouses and seeking external support. On the other hand covert strategies involved women ignoring their husbands and abdicating key responsibilities to push for change within their homes. The following sections explore these strategies in greater detail.

6.4.1 Renegotiating Domestic Violence

Probably the most visible and dramatic change in intra-household gender relations was in the area of domestic violence. Out of 20 active women in the Union, 18 had been in relationships where there was significant physical and verbal abuse at the time they joined the union. At present only two women still experienced physical abuse in their marital life, though it was sporadic.

My narratives indicate that after joining the KKPKP active women members began asserting themselves in response to violence, in ways that were uncommon before. Instead of engaging in tactics like hiding from an abusive husband, abandoning their homes temporarily or attempting suicide women began standing their ground and asserting themselves more defiantly when faced with domestic violence. An underlying theme cutting across women's new responses to violence was a shift in their understanding of domestic violence from something which was to be expected as a 'normal' part of conjugality, to violence as a violation of one's rights and therefore unacceptable. As Baida states:

To be honest I got 'real power' in my body only once I joined the *sanghatna*. Why should you be afraid of your husband, they would ask? Why should you tolerate him treating you badly? Why should you put up with abuse? Don't you have a right to live freely? When they would say these things it would stick with me.... Once I joined the union I realized that I deserve to be treated better... I realized that my fears were unfounded. After I understood this I got more strength.

Baida, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Encouraged by the union, women like Baida began to understand themselves as women deserving of respect and dignity which transformed their erstwhile defensive reactions into agency-driven strategies for change.

I would argue that one of the most significant forms of asserting autonomy with respect to domestic violence was women choosing to stay in their homes, instead of leaving in times of extreme distress. While prior to joining the union women recounted how they would escape temporarily when their husbands came home drunk, or leave their homes for short or long periods to seek refuge in their natal homes, now women refused to leave their houses when faced with intoxicated and abusive spouses. They began to stay to confront their husbands and demand better treatment for themselves. Women's refusal to leave their homes despite physical violence embodied a 'strategy' in that women were operating from positions of control and power, and attempting to 'create new norms and ways of being' (de Certeau, 1984).

An important hypothesis on intra-household bargaining put forth by Friedemann-Sánchez (2008) states that women are more likely to stay within their homes and bargain for better treatment if they have both a wage income as well as own property. When women have access *only* to a wage income (and do not own property) they usually choose to opt out of bargaining and leave home. Thus income has proven to be insufficient to bargain within the home, but sufficient to exit (ibid). My study found that this was true of wastepickers before they joined the union, i.e. Even though women wastepickers earned an income, they often left the house temporarily when faced with violence. However after joining the union active wastepickers chose to remain within the home and bargain for better treatment even though on the face of it, their material conditions had not changed. Income which had previously been insufficient to bargain

within the home was now being used by women to assert themselves without exiting the home. What could this change be attributed to?

I argue that as women began to value their income and their contributions towards the home (Sen, 1990), they began to develop a sense of entitlement towards their homes. Therefore although active wastepickers might not have legally owned property (the homes they lived in) it was through membership to the union that they developed within them a sense of *entitlement* to the property. It was this sense of 'entitlement' upon which their decision to stay back was based. Says Pushpa:

Earlier for two-three months at a time I'd rent a room to stay away from him. I couldn't bear staying at home. But then I began thinking-I've built this house as well. I have my own tap, own electric meter. I have paid for the tiles on the floor. It is my house as well. So why should I live somewhere else?

Pushpa, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

In Pushpa's case even though the land on which her house was built, and the actual house itself was legally owned by her husband, her inputs to the house; such as a tap, an electricity meter, tiles, and also utensils, a television and cable TV, made her feel that she had equal ownership over it. The union had played an important role in expanding her understandings of her rights and entitlements, and therefore the time, money and effort she had put into the 'tiles, tap and electric meter' made her believe that this house equally belonged to her. Ownership in her case was not limited to her physically owning the house, but also about a state of mind in which she felt entitled to this sense of ownership. This shows that ownership of property might not solely be derived from women actually owning the physical structure of the home and/or land, but also from new-understandings of one's 'perceived contributions' towards the making of this 'home'.

In addition when Pushpa decided to stay home, and challenge her husband's abusive behaviour she was not only drawing upon new ideas of entitlement, but also upon a repertoire of skills and information gained through union membership.

At union meetings and *morchas* I need to stand in front of others and speak...we have to shout slogans...I began feeling that if I can stand in front of others and talk, then why do I need to tolerate all this *traas* (trouble) at home?I had also learnt how to talk to important people in the government. I could argue with them so well. From this (realization) I got the strength to confront my husband.

Pushpa, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Pushpa's ability to stand up to her husband can be attributed to a 'transfer of skills', where the cognitive skills that are acquired in one domain are transferred over into other areas of their life (Berger et al., 1973). Going into government offices, attending protest marches and being given a 'voice' in union meetings seems to have given Pushpa confidence and courage to state her claim and stand her ground. This highlights the fact that women like her were acknowledging and capitalizing on their strengths; a key requirement if one is to engage in strategic action (de Certeau, 1984).

In addition to staying in their homes and bargaining for better treatment, women also began to openly confront the work related violence they had found themselves at the receiving end of in their homes. Over the years most women wastepickers had borne the brunt of their husband's suspicion for coming home slightly late after work, talking to men scrap shop owners when they went there to sell their *maal* (daily collection of recyclables), wearing a clean *saree* to work, or putting oil in their hair before heading out for the day. While women had always resented their husband's suspicious nature, as well as the violence that followed they had felt limited in their ability to challenge such behaviour. However active membership to the union changed this.

As women began to recognize the value of their earnings, they began threatening to withdraw their labour unless husbands began changing their behaviour. Babita, an active wastepicker with the union, used this strategy with the knowledge that her earnings significantly eased the day to day stress of affording food, electricity and their children's education. Prior to joining the union her husband would routinely accuse her of infidelity and beat her up almost daily to 'teach her a lesson'. Babita would try and explain to her husband how this wasn't true. "*I would try and make him understand*" are the words she used. However after joining the union, developing a worker identity and recognizing how critical her earnings were to the day to day running of their home, she

stopped 'trying to make him understand'. Instead she began *demanding* better treatment by threatening to stop working if his suspicion continued. Her new response highlights a 'perceived contribution response', wherein change within the home was possible not only because of Babita's own valuation of her work and earnings, but also because of her husband's perception of the importance of her income in running their home.

Women's ability to negotiate domestic violence was also enhanced by their new found access to external support systems; particularly the union and the police. Wastepickers who had once lacked the information and confidence necessary to file complaints with the police now began threaten their husbands with police intervention. When women first joined the union, KKPKP representatives would accompany women to police stations to file complaints. It was during these visits that wastepickers learnt how to speak to the police, demand their rights, and ensure that their complaints were taken seriously. The police who were notorious for ignoring matters of domestic violence were forced to take cognizance of women's complaints knowing that they had the backing of a trade union. Over time women developed the confidence to negotiate these systems by themselves.

After the union was formed I went on my own to complain to the police. ...I had power, right? ...The police threatened to arrest my husband if he troubled me. At that moment I felt I could show my power wherever it was needed. Before that who was there for me? No one.

Lata, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

When the police intervened in this '*navra-bayko*' (private) matter, it made Lata feel like her life had value; and that she now had the ability to control how she was treated. With police intervention becoming a fall-back-position, it gave Lata the confidence ('power') to simply use threats of police intervention to prevent domestic violence in the future. This newly acquired knowledge of the police and judicial systems transformed the way women viewed themselves; from *bhikood* (one who is always afraid) to courageous. As Pallavi told me, "*The fear in my heart I have managed to conquer.*"

Apart from approaching the police, women regularly contacted the union for help in times of domestic violence. Most active members of the union had accorded the KKPKP a place in their life as a '*maherghar*' or natal family. For most women marriage

had meant migration from the village to the city, or movement from one slum in the city to another. In most cases women did not have natal family close by, and found themselves as newly-weds in unfamiliar environments. Being part of the union, attending meetings and making friends in the union then was a way to reclaim the security of a natal family. The union in turn took on the role of caretaker and confidante. Furthermore by actually holding husbands accountable for their behaviour, by interventions in cases of domestic violence, the union demonstrated 'stepping in' for the natal family. The constant presence of the union played a significant role in women asserting themselves more vocally. The safety of having the union to fall back on, the sense of support they derived from its presence and the trust they had developed in the constancy of its presence allowed women to bargain for better treatment in ways that were uncommon before. As Gokula, whose husband was alcoholic and abusive, stated:

Before the union came into my life I would sit and cry in one corner whenever we had a fight....But after I joined the union I would tell my husband-Who do you think you are? Do you think no one cares about me? I just have to make one phone call and my entire *sanghatna* will be here. So don't think I have no one.

Gokula, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

In Gokula's case fieldworkers from the union would frequently visit her house to show her husband that she had their support. In doing so the union had made her feel like she was not alone, and had shown her husband that she did in fact have someone who cared about her. At times like this it was also common for union members to form groups and visit the home of the woman facing violence. This group would insist on talking to the abusive husband; by making public what was deemed a 'personal' issue, men were shamed into reducing the levels of violence they inflicted on their wives. For husbands who were used to being easily let off for violence by family networks and neighbours, being held accountable for their abuse was something new. In many cases men felt asahamed at being called out on their behaviour. Women took advantage of men discomfort and un-ease to bargain for better treatment. As Anita said:

I threaten him; I tell him I'll complain to the Union. I tell him that they'll ensure that he gets thrown out of the house, and he'll lose face (*izzat*). In this way I do *dadagiri* (boss him around).

Anita, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Aruna was pointing out her husband's ineptitude at living up to the terms of Dalit masculinity. By attempting to shame him into behaving better, she highlights George's (2006) argument that within working-class communities in India, women play an important role in shaping men's honour. This stands in contrast to literature, which focuses solely on the women's bodies and actions as being the primary sites of men's honour (see Dyson and Moore, 1983; Dube, 1986; Derne, 1995).

Furthermore husband's began to be afraid of union intervention in their lives, and this played a significant role in the reduction of domestic violence. Most men were aware that the union was being 'headed' by two women; upper-middle class, English-speaking, and with political clout. They were also apprised of the fact that the union could take them to the police, and ensure that they get locked in jail. From interviews with men I could gather that they were afraid of police brutality, and also of the loss of 'izzat' (respect) in society that would ensue if were handed over to the police. This was enough to reduce the severity and frequency of further violence. Though most women said that they would not have liked seeing their husband in jail, due to a complex mix of loyalty and fear of retaliation once he was released, the mere threat of a prison lock-up seemed to make men think twice before beating their wives.

However not all strategies involving union intervention were so overt and pronounced. Aruna recounts how instead of asking the union to come and speak to her abusive husband, she insisted that union meetings be held in her house so that her husband could hear what was being discussed. Aruna's strategy was premised on her belief that on hearing about the union's perspective on issues of women's rights, how they dealt with other abusive spouses, and the issues they took to the street for; her husband would be frightened. Her strategy worked well, evidenced by the reduction in domestic violence in her home and her husband referring to union members as "*danger women*".

Women's willingness to seek external support from the union and/or the police was an important step because it signified their ability to question internalized norms about violence being an acceptable part of marital relations. In addition by speaking out about violence, sharing their stories and discussing ways forward women realized that they were not alone. Testament to this is Baida's narrative where she stated that early on in her marriage she didn't complain to anyone about the abuse she was facing because as

she says, “*I felt that everyone is like me. So what is the use of complaining?*” Her husband’s incessant violence had filled her with resignation, loneliness and helplessness. Baida had attempted suicide twice. However fifteen years later, not only is Baida an active leader in the KKPKP, but the same words “*everyone is like me*” are imbued with solidarity, purpose and a common goal of seeking justice.

Earlier my life was limited to my house and work beatings, house and work. And my husband would beat me every day...But ever since I started going for the *sanghatna* meetings I realized I am not alone! Everyone is like me. Everyone’s story is the same. From this I got courage.

Baida, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

It was through membership to the union, and meeting other women like her that Baida realized that she was not alone. The shared experiences of violence, which had at one time made her feel helpless and resigned to her ‘fate’, now became a means of building feelings of mutual recognition, reciprocity and heightened awareness of each other (Goffman, 1967). The KKPKP became a community reinforcing a set of values and beliefs; and in doing so building a sense of connectedness and solidarity.

6.4.2 Renegotiating Financial Accountability

As described in the previous section, a key area of intra-household inequality was a lack of husband’s financial accountability towards the home. This was largely due to husband’s expenditures on alcohol and gambling, as well as the patriarchal privilege of being accorded status, authority and power irrespective of their actual contributions towards the home. Prior to joining the union although women had reprimanded men’s actions, it was not enough to change men’s behaviour. In fact it was commonplace for husband’s to turn violent when questioned about their expenses on alcohol or lack of contribution towards the home

However after joining the union, active wastepickers began *demanding* that their husbands reduce their alcohol intake and contribute financially towards the home. Women began to assert themselves with far more confidence, which involved withdrawing essential ‘services’ like food or sex, when husbands refused to contribute financially towards the home.

Now that I've joined the union and I work as hard as my husband, when he doesn't bring money home I put my foot down. I fight with him. If he doesn't give me money one day, the next day I don't cook for him. Earlier I would try and understand him, explain to him, now I don't....Earlier I used to have less *takat* (strength), and more tolerance. Now I have more *takat* (strength) and less tolerance. Why? Because in my mind I know that I have this support system (the union). I know where my boundaries lie.

Babita, Active KKKPKP Wastepicker

Babita's ability to demand accountability from her husband can be attributed to a number of factors. Membership of the union enabled her to understand her work not as a logical extension of her role as a mother and wife, but instead as a value earning activity in itself. By viewing herself as a worker who contributes to the home, she began to challenge the existing taken for granted state of affairs in which her husband abdicated financial responsibilities towards their home. Empirical studies have shown that the status, authority and power that men acquire as 'breadwinners', is attributed to them even if they do not fulfil their financial responsibilities towards the home. In fact men 'discursively secure the right' to claim the rewards that accompany their ascribed role as provider (Vera-Sanso, 2000). Babita was able to challenge this privilege, and hold her husband accountable as a husband and a father, also because she began attaching self-interest to her well-being; a 'perceived interest response' as conceptualized by Sen (1990).

In addition Babita was re-defining the threshold of acceptable male behaviour. Several women in my study had previously legitimized the alcoholism of their husbands by attributing it to 'bad fate'. They had tolerated their husband's behaviour because the lack of a consensual solution could have negative repercussions for women and their children (Kabeer, 2000). However as women like Babita became active in the union, they began to view these same men as 'liabilities'. The need to 'make them understand' was replaced by a growing intolerance, which was possible because of the presence of the union ('*in my head I know I have this fall-back*'), which could shelter them from the (potential) negative repercussions of standing up to their husband. In the process Babita was able to re-define her boundaries, and challenge existing norms of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour.

A few women threatened to throw their husband's out of the house if they did not contribute towards household expenses. This was done in cases where women had built their homes themselves; by saving money and taking out loans at nominal interest rates from the credit cooperative of the union. They used ownership of their homes to either deny drunken husbands entry, or allow them conditional entry based on their 'good' behaviour. As Mangal states:

I ask him, "Do you want to continue drinking alcohol or live with us?" I tell him that now I've even built myself a house. I cannot take care of you. You either contribute or you leave.....Today when he drinks too much and skips work he comes to me sheepishly and apologises.

Mangal, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Prior to joining the union Mangal would not only hand over all her income to her husband (to pay for his alcohol), but would also hide and shiver with fear when he came home drunk. After she built a house for herself, she gave her alcoholic husband an ultimatum; either he work along with her or he leave the house. He began working alongside her, collective garbage from housing societies. Today Mangal ensures that her husband hands his income over to her and it is out of this that gives him a fixed amount everyday to spend on alcohol. If he drinks too much and cannot get to work she refuses to pay for his alcohol. In addition if he abuses her after drinking, she threatens to throw him out of 'her' house. Mangal's ability to re-negotiate the terms of her marital contract stems not simply from her access to a material resource but more importantly from her ability to translate this into a viable fall-back position. As she says:

Earlier I was so afraid; I thought that without my husband there was no other way to live. What if he left me? What if he found someone else? I would agonize over all this.....But once I joined the union I began to feel that I don't need my husband anymore..... I found the confidence to build a life on my own. I found confidence to challenge injustice.....I found a family.

Mangal, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Mangal's willingness to threaten to throw out her husband from their home can also be attributed to a fundamental shift in her understanding of the importance of marriage in conferring social status, respectability and identity (Uberoi, 1993; Joseph, 1999). Prior to joining the union 'patriarchal risk'; i.e. her fear of being alone, bereft of male

protection made Mangal unwilling to push conflict till the point of breakdown (Kabeer, 2000, p. 132). This was despite Mangal being the sole breadwinner of the family. Also as Joseph (1999) points out, women's identities in such contexts are relational and defined by men and elders. By questioning the involvement of men in defining these connective relationships, women are challenging their very sense of who they are. However after joining the KKP, Mangal was able to question norms of female dependency; both material and symbolic. She began to attribute value to her earnings and contribution to the home. Her ability to challenge her husband's lack of contribution towards their home points to the role of the union in introducing her to new ideas about justice and rights. In addition her willingness to push bargaining to the point where she threatened to throw her husband out of the home, highlights the alternative relational self ("I found a family") that she found within the union. Mangal was therefore able to call into question the 'patriarchy' within patriarchal connectivity (Joseph, 1999), without threatening her own sense of identity and belonging.

When women could not use property ownership as a fall-back position, they devised ingenious schemes to ensure that their husband's financial contributions towards the house were consistent and of an amount they desired. For instance Aruna insisted that her husband begin saving money in a monthly *bhishi*³⁶ under her name. Though he worked as a contract labourer in a factory, he spent most of his income on alcohol. Fed up with having to take sole responsibility for running the home, she threatened to stop working if her husband did not begin saving in the monthly *bhishi*. She was able to bargain for this because she had begun to realize the value of her own earning capabilities. Now her husband contributes Rs 2000 every month to a *bhishi* in her name.

When none of these strategies helped in re-negotiating financial accountability, a few women resorted to what Kabeer (1998, p. 74) terms 'divorce within marriage' to re-define gender relations. Within such an arrangement women began to ignore their husbands, and abdicate their responsibilities as a wife to various degrees; withdrawal of sex and refusal to cook food for one's husband were the most common strategies used. Within an Indian context the cooking and serving of food is a quintessential marker of a

³⁶*Bhishi's* are informal saving groups where each member of the group contributes a fixed amount per week (or month). At the end of every month (or year) one member of the group (picked in turns) is given the entire pool of money collected. *Bhishi's* ensure that regular payments are made, and payments will only be given to the member whose name the *bhishi* is in.

marital relationship (Vera-Sanso, 2000). In addition sexual intercourse is the context in which the conjugal relationship assumes validation, coherence and significance (V. Geetha, 2008). Household chores are performed by women, and Dalit masculinity is partly constituted by men being able to distance themselves from performing these tasks. By withdrawing these 'services' women were not only demonstrating dissatisfaction with their husbands, but also publicly calling into question their authority, status and power within the home. This was possible due to a combination of the material, cognitive and relational pathways of change that women could draw on from the KKPKP. The following story is that of Pallavi, a 31 year old wastepicker and mother of two young girls.

Pallavi was married at the age of 12 to a man much older than her, who was severely abusive since the day they got married. Her husband would also drink excessively, and although he was earning regularly he rarely give her any money to run the home.

Earlier I was so scared of him. When he would hit me I would just sit down and cry. What else could I do?

Pallavi, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

To feed the children and be able to afford to send them to school she began working as a wastepicker and eventually came in contact with the union. Regular participation in union meetings and a keen interest in larger political issues soon made Pallavi a *vastipratinidhi* (wastepicker slum-level representative). Gradually she began representing the KKPKP in their advocacy efforts with local and State governments. According to her, it was stepping out of the house and having 'important people' listen to her that made her feel confident and empowered; shifting her perception of herself from an 'uneducated woman who picks waste' to a 'worker with rights and dignity'. She gradually began seeing herself as someone with the 'right to have rights' (Arendt, 1986), as well as the means to achieve these rights. Simultaneously Pallavi was also beginning to value her income and recognize the importance of her earnings in running their home. On several occasions union *karyakartas* would visit her home, and implore her husband to start taking responsibility for his family by financially contributing towards their well-being. When this did not work, Pallavi took matters into her own hands.

Since her husband was not fulfilling his end of the ‘patriarchal bargain’, she refused to do so as well. She began to withdraw from certain key responsibilities in her marriage, like cooking for her husband, washing his clothes and having sex with him. Over time she began completely ignoring him and his presence in her life. At the time of the interview her husband was sleeping in a separate room that *Pallavi* had purchased *for him*, cooking for himself and washing his own clothes.

It is because of the Union that I can now ignore my husband. For the most part I just pretend that he doesn’t exist. I don’t pay attention to him or his everyday little-little abuse at my work place. Those are small things. They don’t matter anymore. I don’t need him now. I have the union, I have my mother and I have my three kids. That’s all I need. That’s my life. The rest I have let go of, a long time ago.

Pallavi, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Pallavi’s words testify to ‘divorce within marriage’ being used as a strategy to communicate displeasure regarding inequalities within the home. Though she and her husband are still married and living together, she had effectively abdicated most of her responsibilities (as a wife), and in effect both she and her husband lead separate lives. In refusing to live up to gender-role expectations she was challenging traditional norms and ascribed behaviours, creating new boundaries of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour and thereby ‘actualizing an ordering of social reality on (her own) terms’ (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37).

6.4.3 Renegotiating Household Chores

Apart from demanding financial contributions towards running of the home, a few women wastepickers began insisting that husbands help with household chores. Though there was a unanimous agreement among almost all the wastepickers I interviewed that women were primary responsible for cooking, cleaning and washing, several women agreed that ‘help’ from men would be welcome. This took place until the point where women joined the KKPKP, most women were buying groceries, paying rent, paying bills and providing for the children out of a feeling of ‘maternal responsibility’, as an extension of their roles as mothers and wives. However developing a strong identity as a worker, enabled them to question their singular identity as a mother and wife, and assert themselves from their newly assumed position of being an equal worker within the

home. When they understood their work not as a logical extension of their duty towards the family, but instead as a meaningful, income generating right that they had acquired; it enabled them to see themselves differently.

Together with understanding the value of their contribution towards the home, women also began recognizing their double burden of labour. However not all women were keen on sharing household chores with their husbands. A number of women admitted that men engaging in household chores made husband's 'less masculine' in the eyes of society. This is why when women did eventually begin asking men to help with household chores this was only with respect to minor chores within the confines of their homes.

However there were a few exceptions to this. Surekha for example told her husband categorically that he needed to play a greater role in child care responsibilities if she was to continue working as she did. Surekha used her own valuation of her income to bargain for a more equal distribution of child care responsibilities. Her husband now makes tea for the children when they come home from school, and supervises their homework. Vaishali's husband on occasion fills water for household use, and peels and chops vegetables when required. According to Vaishali he does not object to helping her because "*he now recognizes how hard I work*". The fact is that Vaishali had begun working as wastepicker even before she got married. That is, her engagement in paid work was not new. However membership to the KKPKP, acquiring an ID card and developing a strong worker identity resulted in her husband acknowledging the value of her income and consequently offering to help out where he could.

The accounts above highlight how active members of the union used a combination of material, cognitive and relational pathways to transform existing hegemonic gender relations within their homes. However material resources such as paid work and higher wages assumed significance as a fall-back-position only in conjunction with women's newly developed self-confidence, self-worth and perception of their self-interests. Simultaneous to the process of women developing new self-understandings, membership to the KKPKP also provided active members access to an extended relational network of friends, comrades and sisters. These new relational selves formed

the basis for women to challenge the patriarchy inherent in existing connective relationships, without threatening women's relational identities.

6.5 'Inactive'/Non-unionized Members and Limits to Intra-Household Bargaining

The aim of this thesis has been to ascertain if membership to the KKPKP has had an impact on gender relations in the homes of Dalit wastepickers. I began by describing the nature of intra-household gender relations pre-union membership, and then delineated changes that had taken place within women's homes after they had joined the union. To demonstrate that these changes were dependent *upon union membership* I also interviewed non-unionized women, i.e. wastepickers who did not belong to any collective/organization/trade union, as a comparison group. However what I had not expected was that within the group of union members themselves, there would emerge two categories: active and 'inactive'. My data showed that it was the 'active' group of KKPKP members in whose homes there were significant transformations in gender relations, while the 'inactive' group of members reported minimal change. In fact the nature and quality of gender relations in the homes of 'inactive' KKPKP members mirrored that of non-unionized wastepickers. It is for this reason that in the following section I treat them as one group i.e. 'inactive'/non-unionized women.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Dalit wastepickers in general used 'tactics' to address inequality within their homes (de Certeau, 1984); with the effects of such actions being short-lived and temporary. This does not mean that there was no change at all in the homes of women belonging to the 'inactive'/non-unionized category. However, compared to active wastepickers, the degree of transformation in their homes was minimal and like most tactical actions, largely depended upon changes in the external environment.

For instance in the few cases that there was a reduction in domestic violence, it was largely attributable to husbands giving up alcohol due to health issues, sons having grown up and being able to defend their mothers and in one case the presence of a daughter-in-law in front of whom the husband was ashamed to beat his wife. These

were extraneous circumstances over which women had no control. In situations where 'inactive'/ non-unionized women did appear to be in control and seek external help to face violence, the intent behind women's actions was the fact that domestic violence had begun to affect their children. Thus the desire for change did not result in a growing sense of entitlement to respect and dignity, but instead from the immediate need to provide temporary respite to their children.

As compared to this, women who were active members of the union had sought help to deal with domestic violence when *it began affecting them*. The changes they had experienced in their own personhood and the myriad self-understandings they were developing through union membership enabled them to realize the inequality, injustice and lack of respect that many of their relationships embodied. Over time not only did this change their attitudes towards violence, but also altered the urgency with which they responded to it. This transformation had not occurred for 'inactive'/non-unionized wastepickers. Why was this so?

I would argue that there were significant differences in the way active and 'inactive' women engaged with the union, their expectations from it and the resources they felt they had access to because of union membership. Active women seemed to have benefitted the most from the relational and cognitive resources that the union offered. Friendships, solidarity, trust, inclusion, security, sharing, confidence, strength, courage and dignity loom large in their narratives. Active women subsequently demonstrated a considerable shift in the understanding(s) of themselves as women and workers, a growing sense of entitlement and an awareness of their rights. Empowered with a new language of rights they began to recognize abuse as a violation of their dignity. In addition they found within the union, a family. This expansion of their relational identities created a greater willingness to challenge marital relationships, which were vital to their identity and sense of belonging. It was a combination of these transformations that enabled them to deal strategically with domestic violence. On the other hand there were no significant shifts in the way 'inactive'/non-unionized women perceived themselves, their levels of confidence or understandings of their place in the world. This group of women continued to derive their primary identity from being a wife and mother, and the patriarchal risk inherent in challenging these very identities

came in the way of potential long-term change. I will use the example of ‘inactive’/non-unionized women’s responses to domestic violence to further my point.

From my interviews it appeared that unlike active wastepickers of the union, most ‘inactive’/non-unionized women did not recognize domestic violence as an affront to their physical or emotional integrity and instead viewed it as just an unpleasant experience of everyday life. They tended to blame an abusive husband on ‘fate’ and believed that alcohol was the main reason that men engaged in violence. Even though they would leave their homes temporarily to protest against physical violence, they never considered leaving because of the ‘shame’ they would bring to their families if they chose to exit.

Isn’t it the way things are all over the world? Men have the right to hit their wives, but they shouldn’t exercise this right. If you tell them not to hit you, they don’t listen. In fact the violence increases. If you hit him back, people talk.

Ratan, Inactive KKPKP Wastepicker

Narratives of ‘inactive’/non-unionized women indicate that they were terribly afraid of losing ‘*izzat*’ or respect if they made private issues (like domestic violence) ‘public’. These women then stuck within the boundaries of being a ‘good woman’.

Even if he drinks and beats me, in the end he is my husband so I have to tolerate this. I have to live with him even if he abuses me. Because suppose I leave then who will be there to look after my husband? What will people say? One shouldn’t leave one’s husband. He is your husband; even if he hits you, you have to stay with him.

Rani, Inactive KKPKP Wastepicker

Rani’s words stand in stark contrast to active women who although did not exit their homes, stayed put defiantly, demanding better treatment for themselves. A few women also threatened to throw their husbands out. It is important to note that there was a large emphasis placed by ‘inactive’/non-unionized women on the sacrosanct nature of the ‘private’. For them the divide between the public and private was sacred and should be maintained; issues from the ‘private’ should not be brought out into the public. Tales of abusive and alcoholic husbands, truanting children and imposing mother-in-laws remained within the home. This meant that apart from immediate family, no one really

intervened in cases of abuse. In contrast active women had managed to challenge this divide, largely because they had become used to discussing these issues in union meetings. Over time they recognized that issues like domestic violence were shared experiences of injustice that needed to be removed from the sacrosanct ‘private’ realm in order to hold the perpetrators accountable.

‘Inactive’/non-unionized women however were more tolerant of domestic violence because they could not afford materially and symbolically to push conflict till the point of breakdown (Kabeer, 2000). This was despite several women being the main breadwinners in their family. Pama who joined the union 10 years ago, but has been ‘inactive’ member, said that post union membership her earning substantially increased. This was because of the ID card that allowed her access to the nearby municipality owned garbage dump which earlier she had to bribe her way into. She said,

If any security guard tries to intimidate us at work or is rude to us we now have ‘full power’ to tell him off. We tell him he has no right to speak to us like this. Earlier *majboori hoti* (we were vulnerable and dependent). We had to listen to such people. But now we can tell him off with ‘daring’. With the backing of the union we have ‘full power’.

Pama, Inactive KKPKP Wastepicker

Pama was able to use her newly developed worker-identity to challenge the authority and power of male security guards in order to gain an increased access to waste. The backing of the union made her feel powerful and courageous. However when asked if she used this ‘full power’ at home to challenge her husband’s alcoholism and violence she had this to say:

How can I use the ‘full power’ I gain from the Union on him? My husband *needs* to drink before he starts his day, so I give him my money. I do so because I want my children to have a father, and I want to continue to have a husband (*italics added*).

Pama, Active KKPKP Wastepicker

Pama’s words highlight the quintessential dilemma I was faced with when interviewing ‘inactive’ women. This group of women wastepickers possessed strong worker identities; evidenced by their confidence about claiming access to public space, eg. while sorting waste on the pavement, standing up to authority, eg. policemen who might

try to harass them and articulating their right to pick waste, eg. negotiating access to garbage controlled by municipal authorities. However despite this, their courage and empowerment did not seem to trickle into their homes. This was unlike active women, where the ‘transfer of skills’ was quite apparent (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2008). Pama’s example highlights my argument that simply having access to resources like increased income is not sufficient to challenge entrenched patriarchies and its manifestations of hegemonic gender relations within the home. My thesis argues that even if women have access to material resources, they can be used as fall-back positions, only when women attach cognitive value to them i.e. *it is the meaning(s) derived* from these material assets that ultimately define their worth within a bargaining framework. In Pama’s case she felt unable to demand accountability from her husband for his role as father and husband, because she was still dependent on his notional role as ‘provider and protector’. An increase in income in and of itself was insufficient to alter her internalized belief systems, which understood her income-earning solely as an extended responsibility of being a mother and wife.

Pama said that she enjoyed attending meetings because women joked around and shared stories. This made her ‘mind feel light’. However she attended meetings infrequently and had never brought up her husband’s violence in union meetings. I argue that it is only in the context of sustained intimate engagement with the union that women experience the advantages of spontaneous and intimate friendships, solidarity and feelings of belonging. It is in context of these expanded relational networks that women’s ‘connective identities’ are strengthened (Joseph, 1999), which increases their willingness to challenge inequality within the home. In the case of ‘inactive’ women, their limited interactions with the KKPKP prevented the formation of deep friendships and the expansion of relational identities; both of which were critical foundations on which women begin to challenge old beliefs, attitudes and ideas about self. Women like Pama did not attach the same meanings and affect to their relationships with women in the union, thereby continuing to derive their fundamental sense of belonging and identity from their husbands. This in turn limited the extent to which they were willing to challenge these relationships, and in turn perpetuated the inequalities they faced within their homes.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter calls into question the existing literature which espouses that Dalit women enjoy freedom and egalitarian relationships within their homes (Parry, 1979; Kapadia, 1995; Ilaiah, 1996; Deliege, 1997; Khare, 2000). My study found that not only did Dalit women face high levels of domestic violence, accompanied by suspicion and control over their mobility and sexuality, but that norms governing men and women's behaviour did not operate equally for both men and women. In the face of this inequality, however, Dalit women were not simply passive victims of violence. My data suggests that Dalit women openly confront discrimination in the best way that they could with the limited resources at hand. Therefore instead of projecting Dalit households as either completely restrictive or uniquely egalitarian, and operating from a 'pre-set Dalit subjectivity' (Ciotti, 2014, p. 307), I argue that we need to re-interpret Dalit patriarchal oppression by uncovering its nuances and teasing out its complexities.

Narratives in this chapter elaborate the nature of change in Dalit intra-household gender relations when Dalit women wastepickers became members of the KKPKP. My study suggests that it was not simply the joining of the union but the nature of the engagement that mattered. While active women demonstrated noticeable shifts in gendered power dynamics within the home, by building from defensive tactics, towards the use of *agency-driven strategies* of intra-household negotiation, 'inactive' and non-unionized women could not boast of similar changes.

The stories of active women wastepickers highlight the role of the KKPKP in expanding women's identities and sense of belonging, which in turn provided women the opportunity to question and challenge the very environment from which they operated. Instead of their actions being limited by 'terrains imposed from outside' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37), women began to strategize based on new ways of thinking, behaviour, perceptions, confidence and self-worth. Strategic actions were thus made possible because the KKPKP allowed women an opportunity to demarcate their 'own' place; a place of 'will and power' constituted by the cognitive and relational resources they had access to (de Certeau, 1984). As women developed a more complex sense of self that was distinct from the identity derived from their family, they were able to question and

re-negotiate key relationships within their homes, in particular inequality between husbands and wives.

On the other hand 'inactive'/non-unionized women were forced to operate from terrains that were imposed upon from outside (de Certeau, 1984). I.e. existing norms defining Dalit patriarchy and patriarchal connectivity. Their experience of friendship or support from fellow union members was transitory and this group of women continued to use opportunistic tactical actions in the face of inequality within the home. Therefore the nature of intra-household gender relations remained largely unchanged.

Yet of course this is not the final piece of this complex dynamic. Intra-household gender relations are also co-constituted by men who play an integral role in allowing or preventing certain forms of change within the home. The following chapter explores in detail the role of husbands in the process of negotiating inequalities within the home for active Dalit wastepickers of the KKPKP.

7. BECAUSE I AM A MAN!

The previous chapter has focused on changes in intra household dynamics once women wastepickers became active members of a trade union. Central to this process of bargaining and negotiation however are men's subjectivities. Masculinity, understood both as an ideology and a set of practices, determines to a large extent men's reactions to women's bargaining and negotiation. In general when active women joined the union, and began challenging domestic masculine authority, husbands' understanding of who they are commonly understood as the roles they played within the family and the importance attributed to them began to be called into question. This chapter explores how Dalit men in my study interpreted ideas about masculinity, and the role this played in allowing or stalling processes of change within the home.

7.1 Asserting Dalit Masculinity

A central defining feature of Dalit men's identities that emerged from my interviews was that of '*mothapana*' (i.e superiority). This term was explained by them to mean arrogance, conceit and selfishness (i.e. "*rubab, ghamand and mee-pana*", FGD, Hadapsar)³⁷ which all men believed that they were entitled to.

'*Mothapana*' was used to justify various behaviours such as not helping out in household chores, demanding attention from wives, expecting that one's needs be met immediately, and being abusive towards one's spouse. It also ensured that men were self-declared heads of their household, irrespective of whether they fulfilled their responsibilities as husbands and fathers. As one respondent explained it:

Navra = motha (Husband = Superior). This is our village tradition. Husbands are given full respect. Whatever he says, his wife has to listen. She has to do all his work. Whether it is washing his clothes or cooking for him. She is expected to do his '*seva*' (service). She is not supposed to answer back to him, not talk much. Men have always been motha.

Chandrakant

³⁷ Unless mentioned otherwise the FGDs referenced in this chapter are FGDs held with men i.e. the husbands of wastepickers who lived across different slums in the city.

Mothapana was the crux around which men attempted to establish and maintain hierarchy within their homes. Men believed that they were entitled to this sense of superiority because “*They work, do hard manual labour, earn, fill ration and take care of everyone*” (FGD, Taravde Vasti). This reflects findings in literature that suggest that a critical marker of adult masculinity in India is that of being a breadwinner and provider (Vera-Sanso, 2000; Osella and Osella, 2006).

Interestingly men’s inability to live up to their role as ‘breadwinner’ did not lead to reduced feelings of ‘*mothapana*’.³⁸ When challenged about the fact that several men did not work, but still claimed the privileges of ‘*mothapana*’, men put it down to ‘*parampara*’ i.e. culture. As one group of men attested, “*It is a tradition to believe that without me there is nothing*” (FGD, Taravde Vasti). Men’s sense of entitlement then came not from actually engaging in paid work outside the home and fulfilling their end of the patriarchal bargain, but rather from the *notion* that they were ‘ultimately responsible’ for providing for the family. In other words, Dalit men ‘discursively secured the right’ to claim the associated rewards of being the primary breadwinner, without actually engaging in the work themselves (Vera-Sanso, 2000).

Women on the other hand could not stake a claim to ‘*mothapana*’, even though several of them were primary breadwinners for the family. As one group of men stated:

Yes they (women) do work hard. But they work to support the husband. To make ends meet. The man in terms of *izzat* (respect) is the *motha* (superior) person. Imagine if the wife also is ‘*motha*’ (laughter).

FGD, Hadapsar

Thus *mothapana* was the sole prerogative of men and was claimed by them one way or another; by justifying it on the basis that they (were supposed to) provide (the main) income while women were ‘just’ supplementary earners, or on the basis of tradition. Any threat to this *mothapana*, led to feelings of ‘*kamipana*’ (literally translates into ‘less than’), which men avoided at all costs. *Kamipana* led to feelings of emasculation and potential loss of *izzat* (respect) in the community. To avoid feelings of *kamipana*,

³⁸In fact as I show later on in the chapter, to recompense their inability to play the role of ‘provider’ men tended to exhibit greater ‘*mothapana*’ as way to protect a crumbling/threatened masculinity.

men needed to assert their *mothapana*. As we will see in the following section, this understanding of masculinity helps to throw light on some of the intra-household inequalities we discussed in the previous chapter.

7.1.1 Rejecting Household Chores

The following conversation at an FGD in the slums of Hadapsar in Pune highlights how *mothapana* creates conditions for masculinity that men are expected to abide by.

Why should he help with chores? He has gotten married to her, what's the purpose of him getting married? And if he helps with these chores his friends at work as well as those around will make fun of him. They will call him names. They will gossip about him. "Why does he do women's work? Outside he does so much *rubab* (conceit), and at home he does what his wife should be doing". He feels a sense of *kamipana* by doing this work. To protect his *izzat* he doesn't do this kind of work. That way *gup-chup* (quietly) he will help in the house, but he will never admit it outside.

FGD, Hadapsar

This conversation demonstrates that an obvious manifestation of men's '*mothapana*' was their refusal to participate in household chores. Only one husband (out of my sample of 20) consistently helped with household chores without being asked to (this man also happened to be the most educated man in my entire sample). A few men 'helped' their wives in the home when they were sick but they made it a point to stress that they were simply lending a helping hand, and the primary responsibility was that of their wives.

As I was told in another FGD:

He knows how to do everything in the house; cook, clean everything; but he cannot do it. Because his *mothapana* in the house will go. Today if he cooks one *bhaaji* (vegetable), tomorrow his wife will say "add some *phodni* (spice) to the *daal* (lentils)", the next day she will say "make the *chapati*'s (bread)"; so she gets used to all this. It becomes a habit..... We need to make sure everyone remains in their place. So we'll do a few things once in a while, but not too much and not too often.

FGD, Taravde Vasti

Therefore, to legitimize one's position within the family, men not only had to distance themselves from tasks that they considered inferior, but also ensure that women knew

that these tasks were solely their responsibility. This is despite women working long hours (picking waste), sometimes up to 10 hours a day. On the rare occasion that men did help with household chores these were limited to only certain tasks. Chopping and peeling vegetables, cooking an occasional meal, and taking care of the children were tasks that men offered to do if their wives (due to a reason deemed legitimate by the husband) could not do. On the other hand, there was a unanimous agreement among men that washing clothes and washing vessels were tasks that were solely a 'woman's duty'. In the event that their wives could not complete them, a daughter or a female neighbour might help, but men never ventured to do it themselves. Philips (2003) in her research with tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka found that even though women's work had significantly increased in the plantations, men were reluctant to help women with the domestic chores because housework was culturally considered to be 'women's work'. By denying 'femininity' or 'feminine qualities', masculinity is constantly reasserted (Seidler, 1987). Household chores, like laundry, cooking and washing, are decidedly 'feminine' and any attempt by men to take part in such chores might lead to their automatic emasculation. Since masculine identity is often constituted in opposition femininity, for a man to be expected to perform any feminine tasks might be emasculating. "The house itself (especially the kitchen] is defined as feminine; therefore when a man is inside its walls, he runs the risk of being feminized simply by his presence" (Fuller, 2001, p. 138). Men therefore are clear when they say that they only 'help' with these chores thereby implying that the primary responsibility continues to be the woman's.

In the few cases in which men did help with household chores, they would only help with 'indoor' chores like cleaning vegetables, or cooking; to avoid being seen by others and made fun of. Chores, such as washing clothes and vessels, usually done outside the home, in full public view were unanimously avoided by all men. This was because engaging in such tasks made men vulnerable to jokes, teasing and ridicule of other men and women. Men who washed clothes were considered 'less manly', and often teased by other men as being 'under their wife's thumb'. During an FGD men admitted that they were *required* to laugh at and make fun of men who helped too much with domestic chores in order to protect their masculinity. As they said:

If we see someone doing this work we'll say 'he never has done this *kaam* (work), how come he suddenly started doing it? Maybe he is afraid of his wife.' We'll make fun of him because we have to.

FGD, Patil Estate

Here we can see the tension between public and domestic aspects of masculinity (Fuller, 2001). *Mothapana* not only creates conditions of masculinity, but is simultaneously co-created by these very conditions i.e., because a man is '*motha*' (superior), he refuses to do household chores, and because of this refusal he is considered to be '*motha*'. This leads to men not only creating conditions for *mothapana* but also needing to live by them.

Along with men's actions and beliefs, this sense of *mothapana* was co-constituted by women who played an important role in privileging these conditions of masculinity. George (2006) in her research on male honour among working class men in a slum in Mumbai found that masculinity is not only co-constituted by men's own public and private actions (as mentioned above), but also by women's discourses about men's actions. This view is further developed by Vera-Sanso (2016), who asserts that adult masculinity is relational, and is not achieved independently but measured in relation to other's masculinity and to femininity. I found this to be true in my research, where in FGDs with women most of them laughed at the idea of their husbands washing clothes or doing the dishes. "What sort of a *man* is he?" they would chorus. They also admitted that a man's '*izzat*' (honour) is besmirched if he does such tasks.

People also call him names if they see him doing this work. They will say he is not a 'man'. They will ridicule him. Who wants a husband like this? So even if he is living off his wife, he still lives with '*rubab*'-he still lives like a 'man'; he doesn't lift a finger in the house.

FGD, women, Patil Estate

Therefore men's refusal to do household chores was not only aimed at establishing '*mothapana*' outside the home but also an important mechanism to claim '*izzat*' (respect) from the people closest to them (their wives).

7.1.2 On *Bhakri*³⁹ and Sex: Demanding Compliance

Another manifestation of men's *mothapana* was their belief that women needed to be compliant and it was men's duty to ensure their submissiveness. This extended to 'punishing' a wife if she made a mistake, or reacting with violence to 'teach' her how to behave 'properly'. As Baban said:

Why should he respect her? She is his wife. From the moment a man gets married, his wife is his. So he can beat her, abuse her; that's natural. It is his right. That's how I used to think.

Baban

Out of twenty husbands that I interviewed there were only two men who had never engaged in physical violence. All the other men had been abusive for several years, with seven men still engaging in routine domestic violence.

In general, the triggers for violence were, "*bhakri* and sex" (Jagannath). The term '*bhakri*' implied two things. Firstly, in a specific sense it related to mistakes in the preparation of food, which included meals not being cooked on time, food not being 'tasty enough' a husband's choice of food (especially meat) not being available, and a wife spilling food by mistake. Secondly *bhakri* also referred more generally to issues in household management like; the house being a mess, clothes and utensils lying unwashed, children crying, children getting into trouble, complaints from in-laws about the wives behaviour, the wife herself answering back her husband and so on. In addition women were expected to be attentive to their husbands needs and fulfil them immediately.

In addition to *bhakri*, issues around sex were a common reason for men to engage in domestic violence. The most frequent trigger I encountered was when wives refused to sleep with their husbands. This was interpreted by men as a sure sign of infidelity on part of the wife, and a direct attack on his *mothapana*. The loss of *izzat* that this implied meant that domestic violence became a valid response to suspicion.

³⁹The word literally refers to round flat unleavened bread made of ground flour (wheat, millet, jowar, raagi) and water. It is widely consumed across the state of Maharashtra and is a staple in poor households.

If she troubles her husband, if she doesn't behave according to her husband's wishes, especially sleep with her husband, then he can hit her because then the wife is of no use. That's when the fights begin.

Baban

Baban's words are significant because they convey how men viewed sex as a 'duty' that a woman must perform (similar to cooking, cleaning and child-care). This sense of entitlement about sex was part of the 'inner logic of masculinity' (V. Geetha, 2008), and often led to frustration and anger when wives denied their husband's sex.

Men also mentioned that since their houses were small, there was very little privacy, which often meant that they could not have sex. This frustration seems to have been a major contributor to physical violence against their wives. As V. Geetha notes in the case of working class men, it is within the context of sexual intercourse that the conjugal relationship assumes "form, coherence and significance" (V. Geetha, 2008, p. 316). However, despite the importance of sex within the marital relationship, talking about the desire for sex is taboo in Indian society, leaving no space for men and women to talk about sexual desire or frustration openly. My study showed that even though men might be frustrated about a perceived lack of sexual intimacy, they are simultaneously ashamed to talk about it openly and therefore lash out at their wives under different pretexts. This is highlighted in the words of Jagannath who said,

Many times fights are about the wife not wanting to have sex with her husband. These private matters cannot be discussed so we make up other reasons of why we beat our wife; like the food is not tasty, or that she got home late from work. So the fight is because of this reason, but we tell another reason. If men are denied sex, they go mad.

Jagannath

An underlying theme under all these triggers for abuse was the sense of immediacy with which men expected their needs to be fulfilled. If they did not get what they asked for at that very moment, they believed it justified domestic abuse. Additionally, there was a strong rhetoric of 'honour' or *izzat* that ran through these triggering factors of abuse. An unkempt home, a wife who shouted back at her husband, who invited gossip by staying out late, or refused her husband's sexual advances were all assaults on a man's sense of honour, dignity and ultimately his *mothapana*.

Despite the relatively high frequency of violence a few men did express feelings of remorse at their actions. Says Mahesh:

At that moment (when I beat her) it feels good. When I am high I feel powerful, I feel like a king. But the next morning I realize what I have done and I repent. Because I care about my wife.....If you see a man after an episode of violence; see the look on his face. He looks sad and defeated. He regrets what he has done, and he feels sad. He realizes he has made a mistake. But he won't say sorry. Why will he? He will feel *kamipana*.

Mahesh

Mahesh's words show that apart from the act of violence itself being a way to prove one's *mothapana*, the denial of the damage that it caused was another way for men to secure their superiority and perhaps to protect themselves from their own vulnerability.

7.1.3 Alcoholism and Masculinity

During the course of my in-depth interviews with men it became apparent that their narratives were composed by accounts of their various addictions and its effects on their marital lives and work trajectories. Almost all the men I interviewed (except one) had been addicted at some point to hard or soft drugs including alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, cocaine in addition to regular gambling.⁴⁰ Alcohol addiction however was the most common. Fifty percent of the men whom I interviewed had lost jobs because of alcoholism, and had spent a significant amount of their working life drunk and unemployed. In addition, despite excessive alcohol consumption leading to arguments, conflicts, and domestic violence, it was the most widely reported addiction in my sample.

Drinking as a way for Dalit men to affirm their identity has been noted in other parts of India (Anandhi et al., 2002). I found that in addition the relationship between alcohol and masculine identity seemed to change over men's life course. In their adolescent

⁴⁰ Social norms prevented women from smoking, doing drugs and gambling, though several women chewed tobacco, which was culturally acceptable. There were a few accounts of elderly women drinking, but these were rare.

years drinking was a way for young men to define who they were in the company their peers. As boys became men and got married, alcohol became a refuge from the disappointments of life; a way for men to cope with feelings of failure at not being able to live up to the expectations of what it meant to 'be a man' or to deal with the exhaustion of physical labour.

Most of my respondents began smoking, drinking and/or gambling at an average age of 12-13 years. The ease with which men could experiment, at a fairly young age with smoking, chewing tobacco, using different types of hard and/soft drugs and gambling was another aspect of masculinity and its related '*mothapana*'. The most common reason for young boys beginning to drink was the curiosity to find out what it tasted like, and how it felt to be 'drunk'. Several men spoke about seeing older men in their family or *vasti* drink alcohol, and the consequent excitement over trying it out themselves. These boys would usually get together with friends and drink. Significant peer pressure operated on men and was evidenced by Jagannath's quote:

Some men say, "You are afraid of your wife, that's why you don't play cards or drink" So then the man is forced to drink. In my *vasti* this pressure is a lot. Men talk, they gossip about how some men are 'afraid' of their wives. They even say that about me, because I now drink only twice a day.

Jagannath

There were also men who insisted that it was not direct coercion by friends but instead an indirect felt-need to 'belong' that made them drink. This desire to engage in activities that are considered 'masculine' so that one can be accepted by other (males) is another facet of masculinity and its associated '*mothapana*'.

In several low-income populations alcohol consumption has been found to be essential to male friendship (see Gutmann, 2003). My study too found that drinking with friends at a young age was also a way to engage in '*majaa*' or fun. Men in my study said they began drinking to '*yenjoy*' (enjoy) and for 'timepass' i.e. to stave away boredom (Jeffrey, 2010). As boys got older and began working, their drinking companions became co-workers. At this point their justification for alcohol was that it relieved tiredness. Alcohol became a way to numb the physical pain of long hours of hard-manual labour (Vera-Sanso, 2008).

I have to drink. Now I work in all these tall buildings. So I have to carry all this up and down and it is very tiring. My arm constantly hurts, and my legs ache. At night I use hot water to ease the pain in my arm, that's how much it hurts. So when I drink alcohol I forget the pain.

Ramesh

A few men said that they began drinking because of the tension of not earning enough or not having constant work. Kakaram was a respondent who began drinking only recently (2 years ago) when he lost his job in a restaurant. He had worked there for 15 years, and was now unable to find work. As he said:

I don't have work. I drink to prevent my mind from wandering. I'm sitting around all day with nothing to do, my head gets filled with fifty thoughts—I don't have work, I can't provide for my family—so to prevent these thoughts I drink.

Kakaram

Kakaram's account points to the pressures of masculinity, and of having to live up to the roles of primary provider and caretaker. In a similar case Chandrakant recounts how he began drinking soon after his father passed away when he was 12 years old, because of the stress of being forced to provide for his mother and sister. He grew up with an understanding that women needed men to look after them, provide for them and take care of them, and when he could not live up to these expectations he felt like he had failed.

Apart from the fact that men feel compelled to drink because of various pressures, what also emerged from men's narratives was the lack of space for them to talk about these various stressors. This in turn contributed to their decisions to turn to alcohol and/or hard drugs. In contrast to the relational space provided by the union for the women in this study, men seemed to rely on 'substances' to mediate their needs for connection and companionship. For instance one respondent noted that he began drinking after his wife bore him a third daughter. His parents wanted him to have a son, and he felt a sense of '*kamipana*' at not being able to fulfil their wishes. Whether he is justified in feeling like less of a man because he had a daughter instead of a son is not of immediate concern here. Instead what is of importance is the absence of space and a language to articulate one's fears and feelings of emasculation. This particular respondent began drinking heavily soon after.

In another case a respondent who had been drinking since he was 11 years old, recounts how his drinking increased a great deal after his infant daughter died. Another man said he began drinking after he failed his 10th standard examinations. Again the lack of identifiable spaces for men to deal with feelings like loss, grief, shame, regret and failure is palpable. Since being emotional and expressing feelings are essentially considered a feminine prerogative, the issue is further compounded.

Having said this, it must be mentioned that as with domestic violence, most of the respondents I interviewed were aware of how their addictions had ruined their lives and the lives of those closest to them. For examples in two cases wives left their husbands because of their excessive alcohol intake. In others the money spent on alcohol led to severe poverty and deprivation within their homes.

After I stopped drinking there was *shanti* (peace) in the house. Also our condition improved. Earlier we didn't even have a cup to drink water. We didn't have vessels. But after I stopped drinking it all became better. Now we have built a two storey house.

Dadarao.

However weaning themselves off whatever addiction they had was not only about the physical discomfort of withdrawal, but also had implications for men's performance of masculinity. Says Jagannath about his gambling addiction:

When a person wins he is basically taking away everyone else's money. So he is expected to put that back in and continue playing. So he is forced to play. If he doesn't play then fights happen. They abuse each other, beat each other up. Because if one man takes away everyone's money won't the others get angry?

Jagannath

In an effort to prove one's masculinity men are coerced into continuing the cycle of addiction, poverty and violence.

7.1.4 The Precariousness of Male Breadwinning Roles

Literature states that men's identities are intimately connected to their ability to be breadwinners (Chant, 2000; Silberschmidt, 2001; Gutmann, 2003). This is because the work-life trajectories of men assume significance within the home not only because of the material aspect of income-generation, but also because of the notional aspects of what it means to work. So even though men might not work they still shape their identities around economic responsibility and authority (Fuller, 2001).

The work-life trajectories of the men I interviewed were fairly predictable over their life course. In general, most men had begun working early on in life, at an average age of 10-12 years. Men took up various jobs during their lifetime, and almost all these jobs were as casual daily-wage labourers. Depending on the work available and the skills they had acquired men worked as carpenters, painters, electricians, plumbers, milkmen, construction labourers, hotel staff (cooking, washing dishes and housekeeping), wastepickers, scrap traders, rickshaw drivers and watchmen. Contractual salaried work, though highly valued, was hard to come by, and at the time of my interviews only two men were in jobs that paid regular salaries (one was a worker in a factory, and another was a gardener at the airport). Migration for work was not uncommon, with four men from my sample having moved from the village to the city in search of better work opportunities.

Regular, consistent work on the part of men seemed to be the exception, rather than the norm. Of the 50 women whom I interviewed, only 15 husbands provided regularly for their homes.⁴¹ The consistency of their work could be attributed to the fact that none of them drank alcohol for extended periods of time, and therefore could keep up a regular work routine. In the remaining 35 households men worked irregularly with fallow periods, which sometimes lasted for a few years, during which they never brought home an income. As mentioned earlier most of these men drank excessively at various periods in their life, which meant that they were usually too drunk to go to work on several days and therefore could not be employed in a consistent manner.

⁴¹This meant provision of money to household expenses like food, rent, electricity and children's education. Often women's earnings were used towards day to day expenses like ration, and men's earnings were used for fixed expenses like rent and bills.

A constant complaint by respondents however was that work was difficult to come by, and when they found something it was usually hard manual labour, that did not pay enough and required one to work under the rules of a ‘boss’. This has been highlighted in studies on masculinity among lower classes in India, which point out that the precarious nature of informal employment makes regular, consistent work hard to come by (Vera-Sanso 2008; 2016). Low wages, the insecurity of the informal economy, and the age segregated nature of labour markets means that over their life course most men in the informal economy experience a declining capacity to support their families (Vera-Sanso, 2016). In addition, their work is constituted by unsafe working conditions, is physically demanding and reduces their ability to continue working over the years. Several men use alcohol to numb the pain of long hours of manual labour and escape the ‘tension’ of breadwinning, which further intensifies their ‘joblessness’ (Vera-Sanso, 2008).

However, there were a few men in my sample who worked regularly and refuted this claim. These were also the men who had the highest levels of education, with all of them having completed high school. According to them, if one wanted to find work, it was never too hard. All one needed was the will to persevere and work hard. This was exemplified by Lala who had been working as an office boy for the last ten years.

All my friends just sit at home. None of them work. They say that there is no work.....Now they are used to this kind of life. They earn for eight days and then they are content with that money. When they money is over they work some more. So that’s how they live. But for those of us who get paid monthly it is different. Because we know how much our expenses will be, how much we need for ration and so on. So I buy the monthly ration at one time. I feel it is my responsibility. The ones who earn daily don’t think like this.

Lala

Although Lala himself had a contractual job in a private company where he earned a fixed salary every month, his words highlight the stress and uncertainty of daily wage earning that his friends in the *vasti* faced regularly. They offer an insight into the decline in work opportunities for men in the informal economy and the fact that not earning regularly did not allow men to shoulder the responsibility of contributing regularly towards household expenses.

These almost antithetical experiences of men's work lives are important because they are intimately connected to men's sense of identity, feelings of worthiness, and their subsequent claims on obedience, respect and power within their homes. In addition, they also impact women's access to work, as well as the value attributed to the earnings of women. These factors as we know are important determinants of gendered power differentials within the home.

7.1.5 Coping with Women's Breadwinning Roles

Studies across low income households across Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia all provide examples of husbands refusing to give their wives permission to go out to work, despite household poverty or their own unemployment (Sender and Smith, 1990; Bee and Vogel, 1997; Francis, 2002; Blomqvist, 2004). This however, has not been the case with Dalit households where women have always engaged in paid work outside the home.

Though there was a unanimous agreement amongst the men that it was the husband's responsibility to provide for his family, there were very few men who consistently played this role. Most men would give wives money towards running the home as and when they felt like it, and *if* they felt like it. Large portions of their earnings were spent on alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and/or gambling. This inconsistency in contribution towards expenses made it imperative for women to seek work outside the house. On the whole men seemed to acknowledge the need for their wives to work, however they also expressed shame and helplessness at "*making their wives work*" (FGD, Hadapsar).

Historically, due to poverty, Dalit women have always worked, and scholars suggest that Dalit men's superior position within the home might be based more on socio-cultural norms and ideology as opposed to actual incomes. However, with a shift from rural to urban areas, and a rise in modernity, Dalit men have begun staking claims to and begun emulating upper-caste masculinity that dictates that a wife engaging in paid work is cause for anxiety, shame and emasculation (Anandhi et al, 2002; Osella and Osella, 2006).

Men's notions of what constituted an 'honourable masculinity' are of importance here. As one group of men said:

In society people give *izzat* (respect) to men who can afford to keep their women at home. Like if a man says, "It has been 15 years we've been married and I've never needed to send my wife out to work even once". He gains *izzat*.

FGD, Hadapsar

Thus an 'honorable' man typically would not 'send' his wife out to work. At the same time however men acknowledged the fact that they did not have a choice when it came to the need for their wives to work.

We feel a sense of *majboori* (helplessness) that they have to work. We feel a sense of *kamipana*- because there is no solution; so we have to send our wives to work. You need two incomes to support a family.

FGD, Taravde Vasti

The 'shame' and 'helplessness' that men talk about in response to needing their wives income could be understood as Dalit men's claims towards a hegemonic masculinity; one which idealizes the role of men as self-reliant breadwinners, and women as dependent subordinates. Men in my study seemed to be caught between two contradictory positions; an acknowledgement that there was a real need for an extra income (provided by the wife) and their own shame at not being able to provide enough.

The increasing labour force participation of women, particularly in the informal sector has led to what Greig et al., (2000) refer to as a 'male backlash' in which "if men feel their authority is in jeopardy, they may attempt to tighten control over the women and girls around them, especially if it is perceived that female gains toward independence or equality mean a loss in their own entitlement as men" (ibid, p. 23). Empirical studies on reactions by men to women's engagement in paid work show that men engage in a range of hostile behaviours. In some cases, husbands simply left home, in others they used their wives' entry into paid work as a pretext to opt for unemployment or to withdraw their contributions towards the household. Elsewhere male backlash has taken the form of increased domestic violence, appropriation of wives' earnings and engaging in extra marital affairs (Chant and McIlwaine, 1995; Bryceson, 2000; Vera-Sanso, 2000; Silberschmidt, 2001; Chant, 2002; Francis, 2002).

My research found that although most husbands did not actively discourage their wives from working, they did display several forms of subtle resistance in order to defend the notions and privileges of *'mothapana'*. A common tactic was the non-recognition of the primacy of their wives paid labour and their devaluation of it. This implied that even though men acknowledged that in Dalit homes wives needed to work because they were so poor, they continued to relegate women's earnings as 'supplementary'. Men insisted that women's primary roles were that of a wife, daughter-in-law and a mother (*"chool ani mool"*⁴²) with women working only to supplement a husband's income: *"Yes women work, but they work to support the husband. To make ends meet"* (FGD, Taravde Vasti). Women's engagement in paid work was seen as them *"extending their help"* towards the household said Yuvraj, as an extension of their caring, nurturing role as a wife and mother. As Jagannath said, *"She should cook, clean, serve food, wash clothes, vessels, keep the house clean, buy groceries. That's all. Nothing else. She has no responsibility."* According to him women engaged in paid work as a duty and not as a responsibility. Men on the other hand, were the ones with the 'real' responsibility; that of providing for the family. This was seen by men like Jagannath as an onerous task, affording them a position of privilege within the household.

Most men expected women to seek their permission and approval before they considered engaging in paid work outside the home.⁴³ The way women asked for permission is of particular importance here, because it reinforced women's docility and men's *mothapana*. As one male respondent told me:

If the husbands earnings are not enough then a wife on her own accord, with her own understanding and without making the man feel less will begin looking for work. She will ask her husband "Should I go? I'll earn some extra money" And if her husband agrees then she goes.

Ramesh

What this implies is that women were supposed to learn the skills of balancing the urgent need to earn money with their husband's feelings of emasculation. They were not supposed to point out that the men were not fulfilling their end of the patriarchal

⁴²A term used by a respondent where *chool* refers to the '*chula*' or fire that is traditionally used to prepare food. *Mool* is another word for children.

⁴³ The only exception to this were cases where men were too drunk to understand what was going on, so women would go out and work without seeking any permission.

bargain, but instead request permission to find paid work for themselves without challenging their *mothapana*.

Men also routinely expressed suspicion over their wife's whereabouts. One man dealt with suspicion by insisting that he work alongside his wife so that he could "*keep an eye on her*" (Janardhan). Another man allowed his wife to work only because she picked waste alongside a group of women, many whom included his own relatives. Other men admitted to regularly 'checking up' on their wives during work hours. In addition, several men used domestic abuse to reinstate hierarchy and power within the home and recoup their threatened masculinity.

Some men laid down conditions that had to be met before a wife was allowed to step out of the house for work. These largely included ensuring that all household chores had been completed; making sure in-laws and children's needs had been taken care of, demanding that the woman be back at home before her husband, and ensuring that the evening meal was served on time. Failing to live up to these conditions implied 'neglect' on the wife's part, by making men feel that they were no longer considered as important as they should be; and challenging men's authority and control.

Though an important aspect of union membership was women's individual access to paid work and higher wages, what needs further exploration is what happens to men when their wives not only engage in paid work, but also join a collective like a trade union. The following section explores how men responded to a re-negotiation of their entitlements and privileges and a questioning of their *mothapana* catalysed by women's active participation in the KKPKP.

7.2 Wives Joining the KKPKP: The Challenge to Male Identity

Against the above background of what it means to be a Dalit male, this section explores men's reactions to their wives joining and participating in union activities. In general men's responses and feelings about their wives being part of the union were complex and layered. Through their narratives one can get a sense of a gradual process of change in their attitudes; from initial feelings of resentment and suspicion about the union, to curiosity. Over time feelings of trust, acceptance and even pride was apparent in my

sample. However though there were aspects of union membership that men approved of and even actively encouraged, there were certain fall-outs of membership that men resented, and struggled to come to terms with.

As we shall see in the next section it was not women's access to paid work and/or incomes that threatened men's identities, but instead the *meanings* that women derived from their roles as workers that impacted men. When women began to see themselves as workers who were contributing equally (and perhaps more) towards the home, and as women who were beginning to use these new perceptions about their contributions (Sen, 1990) as a base to demand better treatment within their homes, men seemed visibly threatened. Women's participation in the union was providing them with the resources to challenge hegemonic ideologies of control, power and authority within their homes. In addition, individual women's claims for recognition were constantly backed by collective voices of the union demanding respect and dignity.

7.2.1 Resistance and Resentment

Perhaps the two most significant triggers of discomfort for men were their wives getting identity cards and attending union activities, especially meetings. As mentioned in chapter 6, identity cards became a powerful means to provide legitimacy to women's identity as workers. Previous to this, men and women themselves had considered their work as an extension of their duty towards the home. However, with an ID card and the union's support, women began to acknowledge their role as contributing workers in the family. This unsettled men's belief about their unchallenged status as primary providers and consequent heads of the household. It directly challenged their assumed *mothapana*, and the fact that many of the men believed that their wives were supplementary wage earners.

Not only were husbands beginning to be forced to acknowledge their wives as workers, but they also needed to deal with the fact that middle-class union activists saw their wives as intelligent, articulate and capable of making independent decisions. Men slowly realized that while they stayed at home, their wives were being asked to attend meetings as if they were "*important people*" (FGD, Taravde Vasti). In addition, several

men found it very difficult to accept that their wives sense of identity and belongingness could extend beyond their family.

Frustrated at their declining position and the threat represented by their wives' engagement in the union gave rise to a range of hostile behaviours on the part of husbands. A few men gave up working completely, in response to the increased income brought in by their wives. Some men stopped contributing regularly towards household expenses. In addition, most men became increasingly intolerant towards any 'mistake' on the part of their wives in taking care of household duties. Previously insignificant issues like a meal being served a few minutes too late or a child whimpering too much could trigger domestic violence and suspicion.

Men also became increasingly suspicious about their partner's whereabouts. Not being used to having their wives come home late in the evenings or go away on their own to attend union activities provoked several men to accuse their wives of infidelity. A few husbands admitted to allowing their wives permission to attend union meetings simply because they travelled in groups for these meetings. As one male respondent noted,

I knew that it wasn't just my wife who was going. There was a group of women from this slum—even my sister was part of it, my cousin sisters and all—they all are part of the Union. All the *dabbatliwala's* (wastepickers) in this *vasti* are related to me, and they all are members of the union and they all go together and come back together. So it is no problem.

Janardhan

Having family members keeping an eye on one's wife was a way to allay suspicion. A few husbands attended union meetings with their wives, to see "what really happened" at these meetings. Some husbands would hang around, feigning disinterest, when women met in the *vasti* for their weekly union meetings. This was another way for men to see first-hand what went on in the meetings.

Women were also expected to continue to live within the parameters of a 'good woman', by informing their husbands about where they were going, how long they would be and whom they were going with. In general men's initial reaction to women joining the union depended on women fulfilling their ends of the patriarchal bargain, by completing their household chores and being a 'good wife'.

However as women began to attend union meetings, recognize their contributions to the home and gain new ideas of respect and dignity, they began to question their husband's supremacy and authority. Men who were used to be the unquestioned heads of households, whose words became law within the boundaries of their home, now had to contend with women who were becoming far more vocal and embodied in their defiance and demands.

Most men complained about the "insubordination" of their wives which took various forms. Men complained about being told off for drinking too much, not working regularly, gambling and smoking. They resented the fact that their wives were answering-back to them, and complaining about things which they had earlier accepted without fuss. As highlighted by Dilip:

Earlier she didn't talk so well. Now she goes everywhere, talks 'well'. She has become stronger after joining the union. How are our *sanghatna* women? They are not scared of anyone. Because they have the *sanghatna*. They aren't even afraid of their husbands! Now she is like that. Earlier even she was a little afraid of me. She didn't say much to me. But now she just lets off.

Dilip

Men protested because their wives were no longer the docile, timid women that they had married. They did not seem to be afraid of their husbands anymore, and seemed confident enough to navigate the world outside their homes. Some wives even began expressing suspicion over their husband's whereabouts, a previously male prerogative.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for men was when women did not comply with their part of the patriarchal bargain, by refusing to cook or clean for their husband, refusing to sleep with him, wash his clothes or maintain relations with his family. When women ignored their husbands or told them that they were not 'needed' anymore, it hurt them and made them angry. In a few cases women threatened their husbands with exit, or told their husbands to get out of the house.

In one interview a respondent Mhesu said in tears:

Now do you know what she says? “I don’t need you. Do you give us anything?” She doesn’t pay any attention to me. She doesn’t have sex with me. And then she goes and complains to the police. Twice or thrice she went there. She started behaving like this after she began working. She says that she doesn’t have a husband. What kind of wife says that? She won’t ever make my bed to sleep. I have to do it myself. She treats me like I don’t exist. I even have to wash my own clothes.

Mhesu

Mhesu cried during most of his interview. He felt a complete sense of loss of control and a threat to his *mothapana* both within and outside his home. Within the home his wife’s lack of attention to his needs signified by her refusal to have sex with him or make his bed undermined his authority. Outside the home, he felt emasculated when people within his community realized that he was no longer in ‘control’ of his wife. Being made to wash clothes (an act done in full public view in slums) communicated to neighbours that Mhesu did not command authority and respect within his home. When he tried protesting against his wife’s behaviour (usually with physical and verbal violence directed at her), she didn’t back down but instead went ahead and complained to the police. This brought on further shame. Men like Mhesu were not used to being held accountable for their behaviour, particularly violent behaviour. His interview suggests the deep changes occurring within active unionised women and its impact on men’s feelings of superiority and power within their homes.

Men attributed this change in demeanour primarily to the fact that women were “earning *now*.” What this actually meant was that their wives were now themselves aware of the value of their contributions towards the home. When women began being cognizant of the significance of their earnings, and consequently began demanding change within the home, men were quick to blame this on their ‘higher earnings’. As Lala mentions of his wife Surekha:

Now that she has started earning more, her ‘toning’ has changed. She ignores my family completely. She has begun to think “Now even I earn, so why should I take any *kamipana*?” This feeling should never arise. She is the daughter-in-law of the house and she should behave like one. Something automatically changed when she started working.

Lala

Moreover there had been a shared assumption between husbands and wives that private matters were to be confined to the boundaries of a home, and were not to be aired in public. Taking ‘private’ issues into the outside world brought shame and emasculation to men. Now women were defying this implicit understanding, by not only complaining to the union about domestic violence but also getting the police to arrest their husbands.

When they take us to the police station it is shameful—we feel it is a *be-izzati* (loss of respect). Domestic violence is a private issue. If you discuss it in the union then all the women will know about it and people talk. So it spreads.

FGD, Hadapsar.

Thus as women began participating actively in the union, and started challenging male authority within the home, husbands began to realize that their taken-for-granted privileges that accompanied masculinity were being eroded. Their *mothapana* was being threatened. With their identity being challenged, men were unlikely to allow for change within the home.

Women being active in the union, and challenging inequality within their homes led to husbands feeling resentment, shame, embarrassment and helplessness at the loss of control over ‘their women’. How did men deal with this affront to their *mothapana*? Why did they not choose to leave their wives? And why did they finally allow some degree of change in intra-household gender relations?

7.2.2 Acceptance and Pride

Research has shown that when men’s traditional privileges are threatened it can lead to increased frustration, a loss of self-esteem, and a range of hostile behaviours (Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Chant and McIlwaine, 1995; Kapadia, 1995; Mayoux, 1999; Vera-Sanso, 2000; Silberschmidt, 2001; Chant, 2002; Francis, 2002). In some cases, this is expressed in the form of husbands leaving to set up new households with other women or to return to the natal home where they could be looked after by their mothers, sisters and other female kin (Chant and McIlwaine, 1995; Mayoux, 1999; Chant, 2002).

In my study there was a unanimous agreement among all my male respondents that leaving their wives and children was not an option because “*what will people say?*” (FGD, Hadapsar). Literature on classic patriarchy in India highlights not only how honour is closely linked to women’s behaviour, and that bereft of male protection women lose social status but also that men’s status and honour in society is dependent on them conforming to norms about their roles as guardians and providers (Cain et al., 1979; Dyson and Moore, 1983; Palriwala and Risseeuw, 1996).

Being part of a family seems to be a major marker of masculine identity (Chant, 2000; Fuller, 2001). Furthermore, in societies like India where individual and family networks play an important role in mediating one’s access to resources, minimizing risk and providing support, it is no surprise that men are concerned about their ‘image’ within the community. Failure to conform to societal norms of ‘decent behaviour’ can lead to one losing access to kin and other networks (Vera-Sanso, 2008). Research has also found that being part of a family and being cared for by a woman buttresses men’s “psychological well-being” (Chant, 2000, p.208-9). In my study no husband chose to exit the relationship as a result of women’s increased vociferousness and a consequent threat to their *mothapana*.

Over time there was a distinct shift in men’s attitudes towards the KKKPKP, and a begrudging acceptance of their wives participation in its activities. Just as women were unwilling to demand change in their home because it threatened their very sense of whom they were, my study found that men were hesitant to allow change within their homes because it challenged their identity and sense of self. However, over time as men expanded their sense of self, and began (unconsciously) re-defining themselves, it seemed to open a window for change within their homes.

For instance, the identity of male breadwinner was one from which men derived authority and power irrespective of whether they actually worked or not. When women began to challenge this control, because of their own understandings of their contribution towards the household, men resented it. Contrarily, women claiming equal responsibility and recognition for their contributions to the home eased the pressure on men of being sole providers; and increased household incomes allowed men to fulfil their perceived duties as a ‘good’ husband and father.

Men's recognition of the economic benefits of union membership played a critical role in their acceptance of their wives' involvement within it. As women began to earn more, the standard of living of their family improved. Children became educated because the union insisted on enrolling them in school, and provided notebooks and scholarship money as additional impetus. In some cases, the union offered work to husbands as well. In addition, the union helped its members obtain important documents like ration cards, with which they could access the State's public distribution system for food. Husbands who had earlier felt intense pressure to live up to the role of 'primary provider', now felt that there was less stress on them.

Several men who spoke of how they used to be perpetually broke, with not enough food to even feed the children. However once their wives joined the union and began earning enough all these problems went away. In the words of Chandrankant:

When we have less money and need to be careful about how to spend it, it leads to more tension and more fights. Less money leads to *chid-chid* (fights).Now I can buy the children clothes on festivals, I can buy my wife a *saree*.

Chandrakant

His quote highlights how insecurity about limited financial resources can exacerbate household tension and lead to a build-up of stress. In this case higher earnings of his wife allowed him to perform his duties of being a 'good' husband and father by purchasing things for their family. Therefore, he was not only able to abdicate his responsibility as the sole bread-winner, but also continue to demand privileges by maintaining certain performative aspects of this role (buying his wife and children gifts).

Perhaps another way that men began defining themselves was as the husband of someone who was 'popular' and 'doing good work'. Men made frequent comments about how proud they were that everyone in their *vasti* knew their wives, and often approached her for help and advice. Additionally when their wives travelled out of the city or out of the country, or were mentioned in the local newspaper or TV channel it

brought with it feelings of pride and achievement. Husbands basked in local popularity and feelings of being ‘famous’ within the slum.

This made men feel important and buttressed their ‘*mothapana*’. Women often used their increased confidence, newly developed capabilities of reasoning and improved articulation to take on day to day issues their families faced like corruption in the ration shops, or lack of sanitation facilities in their *vasti*. This not only directly benefited their own families, but also the community at large. This became another reason for husbands to be proud of their wives.

Moreover, several men mentioned how ‘even they hadn’t travelled so far’ thus implying that women had done what these men themselves hadn’t managed to as yet. As Yuvraj said:

I feel happy that she travels so much. I don’t even get a chance to go to Jejuri (a village close by) and here she has gone so far (abroad). I haven’t managed to, but my wife has managed to travel so far. They have spent so much money on her, she goes and speaks to all these ministers—none of this is in accordance to our status. So of course I feel happy.

Yuvraj

The fact that his wife Baida has travelled to other countries, that the Union has paid for her tickets and passport, that Baida has advocated on wastepickers behalf to senior members of bureaucracy are rare occurrences for a wastepicker from Phursungi village in Pune.

Women like Baida have managed to experience things that their families could only dream of. They brought fame to their families by claiming an ‘upper caste/class’ luxury for themselves by travelling in an aeroplane, and going abroad. Though there were aspects of jealousy that were evident in her husband’s interview, the dominant message was one of pride in his wife.

For some men acceptance of the union came when the KKPKP directly benefited them, and helped them recoup a damaged masculinity. For instance, the union opened up an opportunity for men to have regular work through its cooperative of door to door wastepickers (SWaCH). Five men (three of whom worked irregularly at one point) took

up work with SWaCH. Now that they were working and earning regularly⁴⁴ they felt that they too were contributing towards the home. They began to regain confidence and feelings of self-worth. The union thus enabled men to fulfil their provider responsibilities towards their family. For these reasons men gradually began to trust the union more, and attribute legitimacy to its opinions.

Jagannath used to be an alcoholic who did not work for several years. When SWaCH was formed, his wife asked him if he'd like to work along with her. He initially agreed because he would get the opportunity to 'keep an eye on her' and ensure she was not having an affair instead of working. Gradually though he began earning well, and continues to work fairly regularly. KKPKP's help in getting him work made him more receptive to opinions of the union in his case particularly with respect to domestic violence.

The Union has done so much good work for us, so we began trusting them and being indebted to them. And we understood that the Union is for our good. It helped us improve our lives (financially), in the way we lived. That's why I felt that I should listen to them... (Over the years) the Union has put a lot of sense into my head. The way I used to think has changed, because of the Union. I used to be so suspicious, but the Union explained to me that I shouldn't think this way. They told me that I shouldn't speak to my wife rudely, that I should give up my bad habits. Gadebai, Lakshmitai would come to our *vasti* and tell me. Or else they'd threaten me. They'd say that if I didn't stop behaving this way they'd complain to the police and the police would beat me up or lock me up. So in this way they changed my thinking. They told us good things because of which my future became better.

Jagannath

I would argue that Jagannath's statement shows that men's attitudes have changed not only because of external threats (e.g., police), but also because they themselves were open to changing their attitudes and self-definitions based on what the union said.

When I asked another respondent if he got angry when the Union told him off for domestic violence, he said:

⁴⁴ The nature of work at SWaCH is such that wastepickers have to be present for everyday of work. Absences are noted by supervisors, and wastepickers stand a chance of losing their job. This strategy works well for men who previously missed work because they drank too much.

No because I knew that what they was saying was right. If someone is telling you something for your good, then why should you feel bad? In fact I felt good that they were asking about us, telling us how to behave well. And because of that everything at home started getting better.

Chandrakant

Whether he really did not mind someone telling him off for abuse against his wife is debatable, but what one can also glean from the above statements is a larger theme of being ‘cared about’ that emerged in a few interviews. The quotes by Jagannath and Chandrakant reflect a sense of belonging that men felt despite of or because of being held accountable for their behaviour by the union. The men who expressed these sentiments seemed to feel that since the union was asking about them and telling them off, their lives and what they did with them mattered (to someone). The union *expected* these men to change, and within these expectations were embedded feelings of relatedness, care, and belonging.

Moreover the union (unintentionally) or indirectly was encouraging men to think of themselves in ways that they were unaccustomed to. By expecting men to change, the union was indicating to them that men did not have to adhere to old self-definitions of masculinity, but in fact could display new behaviours and re-think what it might mean to be a man. As Dilip said:

Some people don’t like the fact that the union intervenes, threatens them or tells them off for not working. They feel offended. But I felt that they expected me to change. They put in so much effort to make me change.

Dilip

Being held accountable made men feel like they mattered. The union came across as an entity genuinely interested in the wellbeing of these men, and this is something that they appreciated. This is not surprising, considering that they were used to getting away with all sorts of behaviours within the home, and in society at large, mainly by virtue of being men. When the union came in, expected men change to their behaviour, encouraged that change and believed it was possible men initially felt threatened, but gradually began to feel a sense of affinity towards the union. In their eyes the union became a legitimizing body whose opinions on matters men began to respect. This translated in part to men acknowledging the difference between ‘right and wrong’ (behaviours), and conceding to their wives demands for a more equal relationship.

Finally men's tolerance towards change in power dynamics within the home also stemmed from developing new ways of expressing control and authority within the home. This meant that their *mothapana* was protected to some extent, because it found new ways of demonstration. Tactics like refusing to help with household chores, complaining about women's 'over-involvement' in union activities, and continuing to engage in small amounts of domestic violence were all ways by which men attempted to re-configure their masculine identities, and show women that within the domestic domain they still held some control and power. This shall be explained further on in the chapter.

7.2.3 Renegotiating Marital Relations

A questioning and expansion of male identities seemed to be a strong base on which we can expect men to be more willing and open to challenges to their masculinity, especially within the home. What the following section explores is the nature of change in women's homes; particularly an understanding of the areas of intra-household inequality in which men did allow some degree of change. From my interviews it could be seen that change within the home came about gradually, at different paces with different couples, and only in certain spheres of domestic gender relations.

The first area of change was in the distribution of household chores. As a result of an increase in household income, as well as the pride and status that union membership brought to the family, there was an initial increase in men's tolerance towards being inconvenienced as a result of their wives attending union activities. Not only did men encourage their wives to attend these activities but they often helped out with household chores if women got late in coming home. For example, a few husbands began helping with child-care by feeding the children when they got back from school and ensuring that they do their homework. Lala who had complained about the 'toning' (high-handedness) of his wife ever since she started working now says:

Usually Surekha comes home only by 7 pm. That is late, but we need her income (to pay the rent and bills). So I end up giving the children tea and something to eat when they come home. Then I make sure they sit down and study.

Lala

At the time of my interview with him, though Lala was still upset about Surekha's high-handedness, he no doubt had begun to value the extent of her contributions towards their home.

Some spouses began helping out with parts of the evening meal like buying vegetables and chopping them, so that their wives could cook quickly when they got home. Vinod, whose wife Kavita is an active member of the KKP KP who travels often out of the city had this to say:

In fact our relationship has become stronger over the years, there is more love. Like when you took her to Brazil, or when she goes to Mumbai or to Delhi then I support her fully. I tell her "Please don't worry about what's happening at home. I'll take care of the kids. I'll adjust my work. You just focus on what you have gone there for" Then she is also relaxed.

Vinod

Vinod's pride that his wife was seeing places that he could only dream of, was a significant factor motivating his taking on main responsibility for running the house in her absence. This account contradicts evidence which suggests men refuse to share domestic and childcare responsibilities in response to women's engagement in paid work (Chant, 2000). However, it must be noted that though men might have begun 'helping' their wives with housework, household chores were still considered to be the primary responsibility of women (Olavarria, 2003; Latapi, 2003).

Secondly and perhaps the most visible change in intra-household gender relations was a reduction in the frequency and intensity of domestic violence. This happened for two main reasons. The first was the obvious threat that the union posed to husbands' abilities to get away with abuse. Men began seeing groups of such women intervening in cases of domestic violence, telling off other husbands, and at times seeking the help of the police. Field workers from the union regularly visited women in their homes,

making the presence of the Union felt. When wives now threatened to have the union intervene in domestic disputes, men had no reason to doubt them. The sustained, continuous presence of the Union was unlike what men were used to seeing. Most women lived far away from their natal families, and in a sense had no strong defence when faced with abuse. Now they not only had people who would stand up for them, and hold their husbands accountable, the union also had links with the police and law enforcement agencies. As Janardhan said:

How are our *sanghtana* women? They threaten to take private matters to the police. So of course we get scared. And nowadays women are very smart. Plus they have 'power' because of the *sanghatna*. It is good. So automatically this power creates a change in the home. They begin to demand that their husband should drink less, if he troubles his wife then she threatens to call the union and complain, or to give a complaint in the police station. So we get scared.

Janardhan

Not all instigators of change were so obvious. Some of the re-negotiation of intra-household dynamics were more subtle, involving a fundamental shift in men's perceptions about their wives and the willingness to engage with them in more egalitarian terms.

Another reason for the reduction in the incidence of violence was that over time men began developing respect for their wives. They began acknowledging their contribution to the home and recognizing how smart their wives really were. This was not only due to the fact that women themselves began demanding dignity and respect, but also because external entities like the police, government bodies, and various international organizations began recognizing the incredible work done by wastepickers and applauding the work of the union.

Since she has stepped out of the house she now knows how people need to behave in their homes. So she tells me off when I drink. If I say anything to her (angrily) she tells me to shut up. Earlier she used to never say anything. Now she does. But she has a point. I shouldn't be yelling at her. I now understand that. If everyone (else) can respect my wife, why shouldn't I?

Baban

The respect and recognition that others showered on wastepickers had a visible impact on how husbands began perceiving their wives.

A third shift in intra-household gender relations was a reduction in husbands' suspicion over their wives' whereabouts when they attended union meetings. When women had just joined the union, they needed to attend union activities along with other women to prevent suspicion from their husbands. Over time however husbands began to develop trust in the union and its activities, and began to allow their wives to attend meetings on their own. A few husbands who were still suspicious of their wives either worked alongside them, or had to face the women's (volatile) reactions to their suspiciousness.

Fourthly, men began speaking positively about the changes in their wives' personality that had come about since they joined the union. Husbands were impressed by the courage, conviction and confidence with which their wives spoke to the police and other government officials. They were taken in with their wives' ability to speak in front of large audiences. Many men mentioned that their wives had *now* 'become *hoshar*' (i.e., smart or, clever) and had learned the skills of diplomacy ("*how to speak, whom to speak to, and what to say*" FGD, Patil Estate). There was an acknowledgement that moving out of the four walls of the home had its benefits. As Janardhan said:

She gets information, she gets to know how other people are, how they speak. So of course you change. Because when you sit at home you don't get to know much but when you step out of the house you listen to other people talk and then that itself is change.

Janardhan

Husbands, who had previously considered their wives to be naive, were now acknowledging their ability to negotiate the world outside. As Baban admitted (with a hint of paternalism):

Her '*doka*' (head) has become 'solid' now. She 'recognizes' people (which means that she can now discern people's personalities). She knows how to conduct herself, talk to others.

Baban

What is interesting to note is that it required the legitimacy of a union for men to accept and acknowledge the fact that their wives were articulate and intelligent. This is not to deny the fact that several women required the presence and support of the union to be able to develop confidence and express themselves. However their innate intelligence, determination and ingenuity which had always been present were only now being acknowledged by their husbands.

7.2.4 Defending Masculinity

As we can see from above, over time there was a begrudging acceptance by men of their wives demands for rights and respect within the home. However, this did not mean that men gave up complete control over their wives. In the process of shedding old patterns of behaviour, husbands began asserting new ways of 'being men'. Although there was a marked loosening in their old methods of control and entitlement, there was a simultaneous remodelling of their masculinity by re-defining the terms of *mothapana*. It is important to note however, that women actively *allowed* men these new ways to recoup their masculinity and re-instate their *mothapana*. In a few cases where they did not allow this to happen it led to a crisis in masculinity for the husbands.

One of the most prevalent ways in which *mothapana* was defended and re-defined was by husbands continuing to engage in sporadic acts of domestic violence as a 'performance'. Violence as a 'performance' was a way for men to secure their masculine authority both within and outside the home. As mentioned in the previous section there was a significant reduction in the frequency and intensity of domestic violence once women joined the union. In a few cases there was also a marked change in the intention behind violent behaviour. Whereas earlier the physical violence was intended at intimidation, exerting control, disciplining, and expecting everything immediately; now abuse became a way to show society (i.e., the children and neighbours) that the man was still the head of the household. Men knew that since women became active in the union no amount of intimidation or threats would 'discipline' their wives. In fact women were turning around and threatening men instead! Thus violent behaviour on the part of men was not intended to instil fear or

discipline in their wives, but instead came from a space of needing to put on a performance to maintain one's identity as the head of the household (Butler, 1990).

Although a few men continued to beat their wives, it was only to the extent with which they could get away with it. While earlier there had been a general disregard for women's capacity to tolerate violence, men were now more acutely aware of how much abuse their wives would put up with, before they complained to the police, walked out or threatened to stop working. All these possibilities (of complaining to an external authority, leaving one's husband or refusing to work) did not exist for most women before they joined the union. Now that husbands were aware of the risk of 'too much' abuse, they simply toned down their violence to a level that was still 'acceptable'.

An example that illustrates this is that of Ashok who would come home drunk every night and beat his wife Kusum. She would run away from the house with her children returning only after he had gone to sleep. Kusum has been an active member of the union for about 20 years now. During this time she sought the help of the police and union members on numerous occasions. She also built herself a house and regularly threatened to throw Ashok out if he did not improve his behaviour. In addition she insisted that he must work alongside her to earn his keep within the home. Ashok still comes home drunk every night mouthing obscenities. Sometimes he attempts to raise his hand on Kusum however he does not actually hit her anymore. In addition his behaviour is not intended to harm, intimidate or control her. He is fully aware that she is the one who makes all the important decisions in the house now; and that if she chose to, she could have him thrown out of the house that belongs to her. Ashok's behaviour then arises from a 'masculinity under threat'; a masculinity that has to prove itself to the outside world. Violence simply became a performative act, to buttress one's masculinity and *mothapana* i.e to show his community that he is still the one in charge, the head of this household, and the one who makes the rules.

Another way in which men defended ideas about *mothapana* was by holding on to the belief that their wives were able to work only because they granted them the permission to do so. Even though this might have been true when women just began working after marriage, it did not apply to most women at the time of my interviews with them. Active union members had been working for several years by then, and there was a

distinct shift from women now 'choosing' to work instead of 'needing' to work. Women stated that they would have gone out and worked irrespective of what their husbands might have said, simply because work gave them freedom. Husbands on the other hand, pretended not to notice this, and preferred to believe that women were able to work, only because they were 'allowing' them to. In a similar vein some men refused to acknowledge the fact that their wives earned more than them. These strategies were used by men to ensure that their *mothapana* remained intact, at least in their eyes.

Thirdly men sought to re-assert their masculinity by beginning to engage regularly in paid work usually after several years of working inconsistently or not working at all. Their decisions to begin working consistently usually came after wives implicitly or explicitly threatened husbands' taken-for-granted patriarchal privileges. Among these were a husband's right to reside in his marital home, his right to appropriate her income, his authority to control her hours and location of work, and his assumption that his earnings would always be greater than hers. When a wife threatened to throw her husband out for not contributing to the home, when she refused to part with her income for him to spend it on alcohol, if she began working longer hours wherever she pleased, or if she earned far more than him; husbands felt obliged to begin working or increase the consistency of their work. Engaging in paid work allowed men to buttress their masculinity by assuming that they still had a legitimate base for them to exert control over the household.

Some men held on to their privileges by continuing to leave women to single-handedly manage all household chores, child care and care of elderly relatives despite women's long work hours. When women did not fulfil this expectation, it gave men a legitimate opportunity to express disappointment, irritation and resentment. Men would complain about their wives 'over-involvement' in the union, and often verbally abuse them. In contradiction, these same men would lend a hand to their wives by looking after the children if they went for meetings, buying and chopping the vegetables if they got late returning home and taking care of the house if they were travelling out of the city for union related work for a few days. Why then did they complain about their wives' over-involvement in the union? I suggest that by expressing discontentment and annoyance men attempted to retain a masculinity that allowed them to be in the position of setting boundaries for intra-household gender roles. By *performing* the role of the male head of

the family and by demanding their share of patriarchal privilege men attempted to reinstate their hierarchy within the home.

Finally, when men could not deploy any of the above tactics to recoup their threatened masculinity it led to a crisis. The narrative of Mhesu is a case in point. Mhesu is a successful *bhangarwala* (scrap dealer), married to Pallavi who is an active wastepicker with the union. Since they got married Mhesu has been abusive and alcoholic. Because of this Pallavi was forced to work, and over time she not only began earning well as a wastepicker but also got herself jobs as a domestic worker. For the last few years she has been managing the house single-handedly on her income. Mhesu earns very well himself, but does not give her a *paisa* of his earnings. Pallavi has decided that since Mhesu does not fulfil his end of the patriarchal bargain, she will not fulfil her obligations as a wife. Over the last few years she has stopped having sex with her husband. She does not cook, wash his clothes, serve him food, or wash his utensils. She even earned enough to buy him a separate room, where she insists he must sleep. She has complained to the police about him so he is scared. If he threatens her, she threatens him back. When he comes home drunk and hits her, she beats him back. Recently he fractured his leg when Pallavi pushed him hard in retaliation to his abuse. Mhesu does not have much community support because the neighbours are aware of how he has treated her. He cannot leave her because he is notorious for his abuse, and would find it hard to find another wife.

This example highlights that women like Pallavi have denied her husband few avenues in which to exert his traditional ideas of masculinity. Even when Mhesu does retaliate with abuse and withdrawal of his income Pallavi ignores him and continues to disregard his presence in their home. Mhesu's performance of masculinity then does not have an audience in his wife. This highlights the importance of women to the construction, performance and practice of masculinity and male identity. (Gutmann, 2003). At the time of Mhesu's interview he seemed to be completely broken. *"I feel sad, I get tension. That's why I drink so much. I can't even speak to anyone about it because it is so embarrassing. What will people think of me?"* Mhesu cried continuously through the interview, and mentioned how often he thinks of killing himself. Having no way to recoup his battered masculinity, Mhesu was struggling to cope with not being needed or wanted in his own home.

7.3 Conclusion

The above chapter describes how Dalit men define themselves in the context of conjugality. Scholars have noted that Dalit men's control over the mobility and sexuality of 'their' women demonstrates an aspiration to hegemonic masculinity (Anandhi et al., 2002). While this might be so, I found that assertion of Dalit men's *mothapana* was not only an attempt at identifying with a hegemonic ideal but also a way for men to conform to acceptable Dalit gender ideologies regarding male behaviour; ideologies co-constituted by both men and women.

It was some of these very ideologies that were challenged when their wives joined the union. As husbands taken for granted privileges began to be eroded, men displayed defiance, anger and increased attempts to control their wives. It was not women's incomes that threatened men's identities, but instead the meanings that women derived from their roles as workers that impacted men. When women began to see themselves as workers who were contributing equally (and perhaps more) towards the home and using these new perceptions about their contributions (Sen, 1990) as a base to demand better treatment within their homes, men seemed visibly threatened. In addition, individual women's claims for recognition were constantly backed by collective voices of the union demanding respect and dignity. Men's identities were challenged not because their capacity to provide was questioned, but instead because women's participation in the union provided them with the resources to challenge hegemonic ideologies of control, power and authority within their homes.

Women active engagement in the union initially gave rise to a range of hostile behaviours in men, many of which mirror descriptions of the reactions of men to women's entry into paid work (see White, 1997; Chant, 2000; Fuller, 2001; Silberschmidt 2004; 2005). A few husbands increased surveillance over wives, tightened control over their mobility, became intolerant towards any mistakes in completion of routine domestic chores and engaged in domestic violence in an attempt to reinforce their authority within the home. Some husband's stopped working completely, while others refused to contribute towards the home. Most men complained about the insubordination of their wives. Primarily men were unwilling to allow change

in their homes because their identities were in threat. However in cases where women were active members of the union, men's reactions began to change over time.

For instance some husbands began to help with household chores like feeding the children when they got home from school, or chopping vegetables in preparation for the evening meal. The husbands who had given up working and/or contributing to the home took up paid work, and began regularly giving their wives money towards running the home. There was a reduction in routine suspicion, as well as in levels of domestic violence. And in several cases there was a growing respect and acceptance of their wives new '*avataar*'. This was because just as women were unwilling to demand change in their home because it threatened their very sense of who they were, men were hesitant to allow change within their homes because it challenged their identity and sense of self. However over time as men expanded their sense of self, and began (unconsciously) re-defining themselves, it seemed to open a window for change within the home. This is in line with Vera-Sanso's (2000) observation that "Distribution of household authority ... does not depend solely on economic power but also on how subjectivities and identities are (re)generated, maintained and contested" (ibid, p.191). In my study I found that men's identities were reshaped in a number of ways.

For instance women claiming equal responsibility and recognition for their contributions to the home eased the pressure on men of being sole providers, although they still expected some of the privileges that came with being the 'primary breadwinner'. Simultaneously association with the union through their wives opened up for men the possibilities of acquiring work that was regular and better-paid. By beginning to work again men began to regain confidence and feelings of self-worth. Also, when the union reached out to such men, and showed them that they were cared about, it made men feel valued. Additionally when their wives travelled out of the city or out of the country, or were mentioned in the local newspaper or TV channel it brought with it feelings of pride and achievement. Husbands basked in local popularity and feelings of being 'famous' within the slum. And lastly, to ease the threat to their masculine identity men found new ways of expressing control and authority; refusing to help with household chores, complaining about women's 'over-involvement' in union activities, putting on domestic violence as a 'performance'; these were all ways by which men attempted to re-configure their wounded masculine identities.

8. CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with the story of Sunita; a wastepicker member of the KKPKP who in spite of being a vocal advocate of wastepickers rights at union meetings and in front of government officials, did not demonstrate similar confidence and ‘voice’ within her home. Subjected to regular violence at the hands of her husband, one day following an altercation with him Sunita poured kerosene on herself, lit a match and ended her life.

This thesis has attempted to explore whether membership of women like Sunita to organizations like the KKPKP might impact on gender relationships within their homes. Does ‘empowerment’ outside the home, trickle into the home? And if so then what are the pathways of change?

My study found that post membership to the KKPKP the most visible changes within the home were in the reduction of the frequency and intensity of domestic violence and improvements in husband’s financial accountability. In addition in several homes husbands began demonstrating increased respect towards their wives and recognition of their contribution as workers. However the transformations occurred only in the homes of women who were ‘active’ members in the union. Sunita, unfortunately was an ‘inactive’ member of the KKPKP. Although she was vocal and articulate in union meetings and protest marches (which is where I met her), her attendance at these events was sporadic at best. Like most ‘inactive’ members Sunita only came to the KKPKP office for work related concerns and had not developed any close friendships within the union. In addition her in-laws who lived next door provided the emotional support she needed when she faced domestic violence, and so Sunita rarely brought personal matters to the notice of union field-workers.

Situating my study of intra-household gender relations within a bargaining framework, I have demonstrated that intra-household bargaining is determined by much more than simply access to and control over resources. In fact it is only when women begin to develop unambiguous perceptions of their own well-being and contributions (Sen, 1990), through membership to the KKPKP for instance, that material and financial resources assume value as fall-back positions. Additionally I argue that intra-household

bargaining involves a major shift in the way both women and men see themselves, their relationships with each other, their rights and obligations within these relationships and the demands they make within them.

My research provides empirical backing to Agarwal's (1994) claim that gender-progressive coalitions can prove to be important determinants of women's intra-household bargaining power: however as I argue, this occurs only when women engage with the organization in a particular *kind of way*. My study showed the nature of membership; in particular the quality, intensity and consistency played an important role in determining the extent of change in women's personal lives. 'Active' membership to the KKPKP not only transformed women's sense of self but also provided women alternative relational identities, which in turn enhanced their willingness to extend the boundaries of bargaining within the home. In addition active membership altered the *ways* in which women bargained for better treatment; Post union membership, active women wastepickers began employing 'strategies' instead of 'tactics' to negotiate key areas of inequality, such as domestic violence and their husband's lack of financial accountability. My study also found that men's identities and resulting privileges were critical in the process of re-negotiating intra-household gender relations. When masculine privileges were threatened, men resisted change within their homes; however when they could recoup these privileges as well as expand their understandings of self, men appeared to be more open to shifts in intra-household power.

Dalit Patriarchy and Limits to Intra-household Change

To understand intra-household gender relations I began by examining existing literature on kinship and family structures of the Dalit wastepickers who informed my study. An attempt to create a nuanced understanding of how gender relations play out in the lives of Dalit men and women has been hindered because of a constant tension between two meta-narratives in Dalit kinship literature. On one hand, literature is rife with accounts of Dalit women's equality with men in areas such as sexuality, speech, physical mobility, choice of work and control over household income (Kapadia, 1995; Ramanathan et al., 2000). On the other hand, scholars have presented accounts of the Dalit woman as sexually and economically oppressed, especially within the home where

they face high levels of domestic violence (Khare, 2000; Irudayam et al., 2011). Both these positions are derived from comparing Dalit women's experiences of oppression against the patriarchal oppression of upper-caste women.

In my thesis however I argue for a position that highlights the fluidity and contradictions inherent in Dalit gender relations. The nature of Dalit women's oppression need not be characterized as 'more' or 'less' equal as compared to upper-caste patriarchy but instead be understood as experiences of patriarchy that are characteristic of their caste group; i.e. a Dalit patriarchy (Paik, 2009). I suggest like Paik (2009) that Dalit households are neither wholly egalitarian nor completely oppressed, and it is necessary to explore the quality and form that their unique patriarchal oppression takes. In addition while assessing the possibilities for change within the homes of these Dalit women wastepickers, I have attempted to make Dalit women's own perceptions of inequality central to my analysis (Agarwal, 1994).

I began by exploring declarations of Dalit women's supposed 'equality' with men in the area of physical mobility and engagement in paid work. The poverty that most Dalit families find themselves in makes it necessary for Dalit women to enter into paid work at a very young age. However literature on Dalit gender relations implicitly assumes that the necessity of women's entry into paid work means that they enjoy greater freedom of mobility as well as unchallenged access (by way of spousal permission) to engage in paid work (Kapadia, 1995; Iliaah, 1996; Ramanathan et al., 2000). The findings of my study call into question both these assumptions.

For instance, my research found that Dalit women's mobility was not as 'un-restricted' as has been portrayed, and in most cases was conditional. Women were *allowed* to leave their homes to engage in paid work *only if* their husbands were not providing enough for the family. There was an implicit understanding among both men and women in my study that when husband's incomes began to adequately cover all the household expenses, women would withdraw themselves from paid work. Mobility of Dalit women was therefore conditional upon the *need* of the family for an additional income. Additionally, when it came to visiting one's natal family or relatives, women were expected to seek their husband's permission before they stepped out of the house. Failure to do so could invite physical and verbal abuse, and accusations of infidelity.

Also on these occasions women rarely made these visits alone; they were almost always chaperoned by their husbands or a male or female relative. My study found that prior to joining the union women adhered to these norms with little protest, and uncritically accepted their position within their homes highlighting what Sen (1990) has referred to as 'adaptive preferences'. Internalization of such social norms; for instance ideologically constructing women as dependents and men as breadwinners or restricting women's physical movement in public spaces, limited women's ability to bargain for better treatment within their homes by defining the boundaries of what could and could not be bargained over (Agarwal, 1997).

With respect to engagement in paid work, my study found that despite significant poverty, Dalit women's entry into paid work could not be taken for granted. Not only did women need an economic justification to validate their entry into paid work, but the process of obtaining this 'permission' from their husbands depended on them allaying male anxieties. For instance women had to broach the need for an extra income without highlighting the fact that their husbands were failing in their roles as providers. They also had to make sure that their domestic tasks did not suffer because of their engagement in work outside the home. Additionally, there was a close link between work related mobility and domestic violence. Women reported that they were beaten when they came home late, dressed up for work, or spoke to other men while at work. Several women reported being followed by their husband's to their workplaces, so that he could ensure that she was not having an affair. Women resented the violence and increased surveillance, but there was little that they could do about it; reflecting Agarwal's (1994) argument that often women know where their best-interests lie, but lack the means to achieve them.

Scholars have argued that it is the labour contribution of Dalit women that supports the egalitarian nature of marital relations in Dalit households (Searle-Chatterjee, 1981; Liddle and Joshi, 1986; Kapadia, 1995; Deleige, 1997). Paid work has been known to increase women's bargaining power by improving their fall-back position. However I found that although women's contributions to the home were significant, most women viewed their incomes as purely supplementary. In fact prior to joining the union, women wastepickers did not even consider what they did to be at work, and consequently did not perceive themselves as workers. Instead they regarded their income generation as an

extension of their roles as wives and mothers, a 'duty' they had towards their family. In turn they felt dependent on their husband's to provide for them. This is why despite that fact that women's earnings were as high as their husbands' (or in several cases the sole income for the family), women did not 'use' their incomes to bargain for better treatment within their homes. The ability to attribute value to one's contributions, what Sen (1990) refers to as 'perceived-contribution response' is critical, if income is to contribute to egalitarian marital relations.

The absence of equality within the home was most starkly evident in the high rates of domestic violence in the homes of Dalit wastepickers. My research found that 48 out of the 50 women interviewed reported more than once incident of physical violence during the course of their marriage. This is much higher than the prevalence rate of 41.7% for domestic violence among ever-married women of the scheduled caste category by the National Family Health Survey- 3. Women's attitudes towards domestic violence were mixed. Most women believed that violence was wrong and unacceptable, though an unavoidable part of conjugality. This is supported by the actions they engaged in when faced with violence; their indignation took the form of physical and/or verbal retaliation, and often temporary abandonment. This supports empirical studies across India which argue that Dalit women do not remain silent in the face of extreme abuse (Kapadia, 1995; Khare, 2000; Rege, 2006). However women's acknowledgement that there was really nothing they could do to stop this violence, also led to feelings of resignation and helplessness. There was only one woman in my sample who believed that men had the 'right' to beat their wives, but also stated that they should abstain from asserting this right.

For the most part women wastepickers then were aware of what constituted their well-being. What they were facing were constraints on their ability to pursue these interests (Agarwal, 1994). These constraints manifested themselves in several ways. Firstly, very few women could rely on long-term natal support when faced with domestic violence. Most women had been told by their mothers at some point or the other, that this was their '*naseeb*' (fate), and that all married women had to endure domestic violence. Even though several women left their homes for short or long periods of time, temporarily abandoning their husbands and abdicating household responsibilities, this acted only as a temporary deterrent to violence. This was because women could not use the right to

parental refuge as an effective bargaining tool because of the very real threat of ‘overstaying’ in their natal homes (Grover, 2011). Secondly, my study found that marriage was a defining feature of Dalit women’s identities, which limited their willingness to pursue what they believed to be in their self-interest. Women in this study brought to my attention the role of marriage in conferring status and respectability, not only to them but also to their families. Marriage was a necessary precondition for ‘respect’ (*izzat*) in society, with women going to great lengths to keep their marriage intact. This corroborates with existing literature on the role of marriage in women’s lives in South Asia (Uberoi, 1993; Palriwala and Risseeuw, 1996; Thapan, 2003). Although women confronted domestic violence to the best of their ability, they were always aware of the high risk of marital dissolution and the consequent loss of belonging, identity and social status. A third constraint on women’s ability to deter violence was the apathy of the police system. Very few women in my sample found the courage and confidence to approach the police to complain about their spouse. In cases when they did, they were largely ignored, and told that the police did not step into ‘matters of the home’. Disheartened they never went back. Unlike women’s restricted mobility or access to paid work, in the case of domestic violence women limited ability to challenge it, was not a consequence of a ‘lack’ in their perceptions of well-being (Sen, 1990), but instead a deficit in their ability to achieve what is in their best interests (Agarwal, 1994).

Inequality within the home also manifested in Dalit women taking sole responsibility for household chores. However unlike domestic violence, which Dalit women perceived as antithetical to their well-being, sole responsibility for household chores was considered by them as ‘normal’ and necessary even. ‘Normal’ because that was the ‘*paddhat*’ (tradition) and necessary because men engaging in household chores made husband’s ‘less masculine’ in the eyes of society. This is why when women did eventually begin asking men to help with household chores this was only with respect to minor chores within the confines of their homes. Though it is obvious that women had internalized notions of gendered divisions of labour, I do not agree with Sen’s argument that this suggests that such women do not know where their best interests lie (Sen, 1990). On the contrary I feel that it is because women knew what was in their best interests, that they were unwilling to challenge these norms. By protecting their husbands from ‘losing’ their masculinity in the public sphere, women were strategically

placing men in the position of living up to this ‘masculinity’, hopefully by contributing regularly towards the home. Additionally, by ensuring this division of household labour, and taking on sole responsibility for household chores Dalit women were fulfilling their end of the ‘patriarchal bargain’ (Kandiyoti, 1988). This in turn was used as a bargaining tool when husbands failed to live up to their end of the marital contract. This was seen in the withdrawal of these services by women, when their husbands failed to contribute regularly to their homes. It was also a means for women to gain public sympathy in times of domestic violence or husbands extramarital affairs. This was because a ‘good’ woman who performed her end of the conjugal contract, had earned herself legitimate ground on which to bemoan the actions of her husband.

A final characterization of egalitarian Dalit intra-household gender relations in literature is the casting of Dalit women as having a considerable degree of ‘sexual autonomy’. Ethnographies of lower-caste women go so far as to state that like Dalit men, Dalit women are allowed to have multiple sexual partners (Parry, 1979; Deliege 1997; Viramma et al., 1997). Though women in my study admitted that women do at times have a sexual partner outside marriage, they cautioned that such affairs were morally justifiable only if the concerned woman’s husband had stopped contributing towards the running of their home. At times like this ‘relying’ on other men, was deemed socially acceptable, and the woman was consequently labelled a ‘good’ woman. On the other hand a ‘bad’ woman was one who had affairs *even though* her husband was providing a regular income to the house. A woman in my study who admitted to having an affair just for ‘fun’ mentioned that she was terrified of being labelled ‘loose’ should people in her community find out. Women did not use the same yardstick to judge Dalit men and their affairs. Although they strongly disapproved of husbands who had extramarital relations, they did not attribute the same judgement of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ to Dalit men. Not only do such accounts call into question the universal attribution of ‘sexual autonomy’ to Dalit women, but they also highlight the different gender ideologies in operation for men and women. The fear of moral contagion seemed to be unevenly distributed (Vera-Sanso, 2008); while women could expect to be labelled as ‘morally corrupt’, men did not have to share the same worry.

The narratives of Dalit women in my study highlight that there is no one ‘pre-defined Dalit subjectivity’ (Ciotti, 2014). Dalit women are neither completely ‘oppressed’ nor

singularly ‘liberated’; their experiences of voice and agency are complex and contradictory, with moments of freedom juxtaposed against moments of oppression. The fluidity, complexity and contradictions within Dalit patriarchy also highlight why Dalit women might be less able and willing to bargain for greater equality within their homes. Firstly the limits to bargaining do not seem to lie solely in the lack of access to resources, but more so in women’s perceptions of the value of these resources (Sen, 1990). This might explain why even though women had access to paid work, they rarely used it to bargain for better treatment within their homes. Secondly when women do identify what constitutes their well-being, very often they lack the means to pursue these interests (Agarwal, 1994). Prior to joining the union the women in my study lacked confidence and skills to approach the police or judicial systems. Additionally even though they had natal families to ‘fall-back’ on, there were limits on the extent of support that they could expect from them. Thirdly women’s reliance on marriage as the singular defining feature of their identities is likely to make them unwilling to bargain for better treatment, even if they are given the means to pursue their interests. This can be seen clearly in the case of inactive women, who despite having access to similar cognitive and material resources from the KKPKP were unwilling to push the boundaries of a bargain. It is for these reasons that membership to the KKPKP played a significant role in re-defining Dalit intra-household gender relations.

The KKPKP and Pathways of Intra-household Change

In this thesis I have argued that the material, cognitive and relational pathways of union membership were used by women at different moments, and in a multitude of ways to strengthen their ability and willingness to bargain for better treatment within their homes.

Scholars have attributed improvements in women’s bargaining power within the home to a number of factors. While Sen (1990) theorized that women access to paid work combined with improved perceptions of their well-being and contributions to the home lent women bargaining power, Agarwal (1994) added on factors, such as property ownership, access to traditional support systems, conducive social norms and support from NGOs. My research provides empirical evidence to the above theories, while also nuancing them further.

I start with Agarwal's claim that support from NGOs or 'gender progressive coalitions' improves women's intra-household bargaining power (Agarwal, 1994; 1997). In my study I found that while membership to KKPKP was necessary to engender long term change within the home, it was not sufficient. It was the *nature of union membership* that was critical in determining women's bargaining power. This is apparent from the fact that it was active members of the union who demonstrated significant changes in intra-household gender relations, as compared to 'inactive' members. This is because active union members did not only rely solely on material resources that the union provided them, but also benefitted greatly from the cognitive and relational pathways of change. It was through their regular contact with the union that active women began to understand the value of their incomes, recognize the significance of their contributions towards the running of the home, and appreciate how their affiliation with the union was bringing additional benefits to the family. Therefore it was not simply having access to material resources that determined women's ability to bargain within the home but instead transformations in the way women understood themselves and their place in the world that determined bargaining power.

In addition my study also demonstrates that labour organizations like the KKPKP, whose main focus is on workers' rights and livelihood protection, can have significant positive impacts on intra-household gender relations without meaning to do so. In this case the KKPKP never focused specifically on issues, such as violence against women. Although union fieldworkers would help women file police complaints, or visit their homes to 'talk' to abusive husbands; the union never had a formal mandate to address inequality within the homes of its members. Despite this, its rights based approach as well as feminist vision of empowerment, created the necessary conditions to begin this process.

A critical finding of my research and perhaps key to understanding why membership to the KKPKP impacted gender relations within women's homes was the KKPKP's ability to engender and focus on *self-transformation* as a pathway for change. This is what Batliwala refers to as a 'mental revolution', wherein women's power developed in their minds; with their own self-image, self-confidence, understanding of their environment and faith in their own knowledge and intelligence (Batliwala, 2013). It was in the lives of active members that these transformations were most apparent.

One aspect of this transformation was women attributing cognitive value to their engagement in paid work, which until now women had not understood as a 'fall-back position'. Women in my study had always engaged in paid work, so access to income was not something new to them. What was new however was the way they viewed their contributions towards the home, engendered by developing an identity as a worker. Prior to joining the union women the majority of women in my study saw their work as a family obligation about which they had little choice. In fact women did not even consider what they did as 'work'; they only thought of it as 'rummaging through garbage'. Upon becoming a member of the KKPKP and securing a photo ID card endorsed by the municipality, women gradually began to re-define the way they saw themselves and claim an identity as a worker. This shift from a nameless, faceless, isolated scavenger to an economically productive worker marked a major shift in women's understanding of themselves. An increase in income, in and of itself was insufficient in increasing women's intra-household bargaining power. It is only when combined with a perception of the value of this income that it became a viable fall-back position. This 'perceived contribution response' was reflected in women's gradual recognition of the significance of their earnings, and their ability to disentangle their work from the primacy of their family responsibilities. Consequently women began to view themselves as less dependent on their husbands for economic support. At union meetings these issues were discussed openly; which not only build a shared identity among workers, but also made women feel like they were not alone. It is through this process that income became a 'fall-back-position' that women could use to bargain for better treatment within their homes.

However this shift in perceptions was not shared by all KKPKP members. There were some 'inactive' members, who despite acquiring an ID card and calling themselves 'workers' continued to understand their work as an extension of their 'duty' towards the family. There were however a few 'inactive' members, who like active members did begin to understand themselves as 'workers' entitled to pride and dignity. They even began to understand the value of their contributions to the home. However unlike active members, they were unable to 'use' these new perceptions of their value to demand better treatment within their homes. The only difference between 'inactive' and active women at this point was the frequency with which they attended union meetings, and their level of involvement in union activities. This shows that the ability to transform

new cognitive *understandings* of one's self into *practice* required the solidarity of a collective.

My study therefore highlights two important points. Firstly while Sen (1990) states that bargaining power depends upon access to paid work *as well as* an improved perception of the value of this work, I found that for women wastepickers paid work becomes a bargaining tool *only if* women attribute value to this work, i.e. the valuation of work was a pre-requisite to it improving bargaining power. Secondly, the ability to transform perceptions of oneself, into new behaviours or actions requires the solidarity of a collective.

I found similar results with respect to property ownership; where for active women a mere *understanding of their entitlement to property* was sufficient to bargain within the home, whereas with 'inactive' members this was not the case. Scholars have found that women's ownership of property can prove to be significant deterrent to domestic violence in the home, as it improves women's bargaining power by constituting a viable exit option (see Panda and Agarwal, 2005). However my study found for women wastepickers property ownership was a fall-back-position not because it constituted a 'viable exit option' for women, but instead because women used property to threaten to throw out their spouse. This was because the wastepickers who owned property were presently living in that property, and bargaining involved asserting one's right to live in one's own house.

Interestingly several active union members asserted their right to occupy the house without owning the property themselves. Over the years with increased incomes and the ability to save, women had converted their tin-shed homes, into '*pukka*' houses made up of bricks and concrete. Valuation of their incomes combined with 'new ideas' of women's rights espoused by the KKPKP, gradually built within active women a sense of entitlement towards their homes. This sense of 'building one's own house', though not the same as owning one's home, was considered by most women as giving them the right to live there and demand better treatment from their husbands. This was not true of 'inactive' women. These members often did not share a similar sense of entitlement despite having contributed to the building of their homes. In the rare case that they did, this *understanding* of entitlement did not translate into *practical actions* that embodied

these ideas. Unlike active women who stayed within their home and threatened to throw husbands out in response to domestic violence, 'inactive' members continued to escape temporarily from their homes.

Another aspect of women's self-transformation was the new understandings women developed of themselves as human being with the right to have rights (Arendt, 1986). Active membership to the union provided an opportunity for wastepickers to organize around their needs and interests leading to public recognition of their rights as workers, as women and as citizens. These self-understandings as citizens, workers and leaders constituted a critical cognitive pathway, which established within them new expectations regarding "treatment appropriate to their category" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992, p.114). The union introduced women to 'new ideas', such as those around domestic violence, where in women began to recognize violence not as an everyday 'inconvenience' but as a violation of their right to dignity, equality and justice. In addition women began to question social norms, which they had internalized such as men's control over their mobility and the authority and compliance that men constantly demanded.

Furthermore through regular participation in the union women's confidence in their capacities grew. Wastepickers developed the skills to engage with people in positions of authority and power; notably government officials and the police. The advocacy and negotiation skills were then 'transferred' into the home (Friedemann-Sánchez, 2008). They provided women in the KKP KP tools with which to challenge ideologies of discrimination and subordination in their lives, especially in the areas of domestic violence, alcoholism and financial accountability of their spouses. Over time new self-understandings combined with women's increased ability to articulate and question injustice provided women the opportunity to question their own expectations of male behaviour, and set new boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Simultaneously women began to redefine the limits of what could be bargained over and expand the boundaries of a bargain (Agarwal, 1997).

This transformation in women can also be attributed in part to the relational support they received from the KKP KP. The ability to be fearless, and have the confidence to challenge hegemonic norms was derived in part from women having the assurance that

they had a collective backing them. Firstly, the union provided everyday practical support to its members (Kabeer et al., 2013). The *consistent* support of the KKPKP was a valuable ‘fall-back-position’, which women used to their advantage. The union regularly intervened in private domestic matters, especially domestic violence, when asked to. This was done through visits by fieldworkers to the homes of women who needed external interventions, groups of women confronting an abusive spouse, or union representatives accompanying women to police stations to file complaints against abusive husbands. These interventions not only built trust in the union, but also made women feel supported and cared for. A sense of solidarity and feelings of being part of a collective emerge strongly from women’s narratives around violence. This is important within the context of norms which dictate that Dalit women should ‘put up’ with violence, expect limited support from their natal families and enjoy only restricted access to their natal homes as a place of refuge.

Secondly, membership to the union also made women feel like they were not alone. Through attending meetings, sharing stories and listening to each other women wastepickers recognized not only their shared experiences of discrimination, marginalization and exploitation but also of courage and resilience. This mutual recognition, produced feelings of affinity, reciprocity and solidarity.

Thirdly, I argue that union membership provided women an opportunity to expand their identities, through the building of alternative ‘relational selves’ (Joseph, 1999). This was important because it opened up a space of contestation through women’s willingness to expand the boundaries of bargaining within their homes. My study showed that prior to joining the union Dalit women wastepickers defined themselves solely in terms of their relationships to others within given family networks. In particular women’s identities were predicated upon their roles as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, what Joseph (1999) terms as ‘connectivity’ defined by patriarchy. Not only did Dalit women ‘require, expect and invite’ the involvement of Dalit men in defining their relational-selves, but they also prescribed to existing notions of maturity that valorized the embeddedness of the self within the ‘other’ i.e. men in one’s family. This could be observed through women’s primary definitions of self as revolving around their roles as wife’s, their hesitance to break up a marriage or ask a husband to leave the home even though they were not economically dependent on him, and their

willingness to put up with domestic violence within the home because “*if it isn't this man, it will be another....we cannot live by ourselves*” (Saru).

However Joseph's theory also states that these intimate selves transform over the course of women's 'personal and social history' (Joseph, 1999, p. 2), and it is here that involvement with the KKKPKP assumes significance. In this thesis I have argued that it was through active membership to the union that women's identities, which up until then had largely been derived from marriage (Uberoi, 1993; Kapadia, 1995; Palriwala and Risseeuw, 1996), began to expand. Their intimate-selves began to include the alternative relationships that they found themselves part of within the union. Being someone's friend, a worker, a leader and a member of a union added a new dimension to women's subjectivities, and also enlarged the network of relationships in which women felt accepted, and felt like they belonged. This was highlighted by Mangal's words to her husband, “*I don't belong to you anymore. I belong to the Union*”. What this meant was that although women still expected the involvement of others in the creating of the 'self', this involvement was not solely dependent upon men within their families. The crafting of alternate relational selves opened up a space of contestation within the home, as it reduced the risk of loss of connective-identity, should bargaining fail. This in turn expanded women's willingness to drive a hard bargain. Through the new cognitive understandings that women had derived, they actively began questioning their own expectations of 'being controlled' as well as men's need 'to control', thus challenging the patriarchy inherent in connectivity.

In conclusion membership to the KKKPKP was critical in improving women's bargaining power within the home in a number of ways. It strengthened women's *ability* to bargain by improving women's fall-back positions by providing a clearer perception of their interests, well-being and contribution, consistent support, a transformation in women's understandings of their place in the world, confidence, information about their rights, and building their capacities so that they could claim these rights. Additionally membership to the KKKPKP improved women's *willingness* to bargain as well as the *extent* to which women bargained, by expanding women's relational identities and challenging the patriarchal structures of domination inherent in connectivity within intra-household gender relations.

Bargaining within the Home: Strategies and Tactics

Literature on intra-household bargaining draws attention to the fact that often in contexts where social norms prevent explicit bargaining, women might resort to using implicit forms of contestation (Agarwal, 1994; 1997; Kabeer, 2000). This is especially true within the belt of 'classic patriarchy' where in order to reduce the risk of being left without male protection, women are most likely to engage warily in processes of bargaining, often engaging in covert tactics of defiance and preferring a consensual solution (Kandiyoti, 1988; Risseuw, 1988; Agarwal 1994; Kabeer, 2000).

However my study found that prior to joining the union Dalit women wastepickers *routinely* engaged in overt, pronounced and visible bargaining within the home; negotiating permission to work outside the home, securing allocation and access to household incomes and as well as responding to the domestic violence that they faced. However despite Dalit women's use of overt forms of contestation, the outcomes of bargaining were temporary and did not engender long-term transformations within the home. This was because prior to joining the union Dalit women wastepickers contestations within the home were limited by their own understandings of their place in the world as well as external constraints to them acting in their self-interests. Their 'tactics' (de Certeau, 1984), although overt and explicit did not call into question social norms which defined the terms of the conjugal contract. They merely represented 'cathartic, expressive actions' where subjects simply 'let off steam' (White, 1994). Agarwal (1994) highlights that an important component of intra-household bargaining is the role of social norms in determining the boundaries of a bargaining (i.e. what can and cannot be bargained over), as well as becoming an object of bargaining themselves. My research found that 'inactive' KKPKP members, despite being vocal and overt in their negotiations within the home failed to shift the boundaries of bargains. This is why their tactical actions offered only temporary respite, since they continued to operate within 'terrains imposed from outside' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 39), i.e. already existing social norms. Such actions allowed the system of domination to perpetuate and thereby failed to bring about transformations in gender-relations within the home.

After joining the union active union women wastepickers, however, began to bargain over norms themselves. Their new self-understandings and feelings of entitlement

enabled them to challenge existing ideologies about male and female behaviour. Their resistance to intra-household inequality took the form of what de Certeau (1984) terms 'strategies'. These included staying put in one's home despite being faced with physical abuse, *demanding* financial accountability from a spouse, controlling the amount a spouse spends on alcohol, and /or seeking external intervention in times of domestic violence. The difference between these (overt) strategies and the previously used (overt) tactics was the degree of consciousness that inspired them. Strategies were used by women based upon the emergence of new forms of consciousness through personal and political engagement with the union, and predicated upon women's recently acquired notions of subjectivity, personhood and consciousness. They marked significant shifts in women's conceptualization of themselves and others; from previously dependent, fearful wives of alcoholic, abusive spouses to independent, confident and courageous women workers who did not have to put up with their husbands behaviour. Intra-household bargaining was carried out from a position where women were aware not only of unequal gender norms but also of their right to a free and equal life. Furthermore, women's new non-kin based connective identities expanded the boundaries of the bargain, with women willing to take on greater risk in the process of securing their rights. Women therefore began operating from positions of greater control and power (de Certeau, 1984).

As a result there were major changes within their homes; Occupational violence reduced, husband's began recognizing their wives contribution to their homes, domestic violence almost ceased, husbands began contributing more regularly towards the home and a few men began helping with child care and household chores. Overall there was a loosening of restrictive norms around women's mobility; women could come home later after meetings without expecting their husbands to be violent, they could speak to other men at the scrap shop without risking abuse, they were allowed to travel within the city on their own as well as travel to other cities within the country.

For the Dalit women in my study, it was regular association with the KKPKP, corresponding transformations in women's sense of self and new relational identities that formed the basis for them to challenge the very terms of the Dalit patriarchal contract. In doing so began a process of actively renegotiating the terms of the patriarchal bargain, opening up new spaces of struggle and redefining notions of

femininity and masculinity. Their strategies became means by which they could establish new boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, challenge hegemonic norms and essentially change the rules of the game (de Certeau, 1984). Over time these strategies led to significant long-term transformations in intra-household gender relations.

Dalit Masculinity and Processes of Change

How did Dalit men respond to women's strategic assertions for greater control and power within their homes? My study found that the ways in which men responded to changes in women's reduced tolerance of domestic violence, increased demands for financial contribution, and expectations of increased mobility was directly connected to their sense of themselves as gendered human beings.

While accounts of Dalit masculinity have largely presented Dalit men as "careless, lazy, irresponsible and drunk" (Khare, 2000, p. 2011), I found that Dalit men's own self-definitions revolved around pressures of having to conform to notions of '*mothapana*' both outside the house, and within it. Men's failed roles as breadwinners, the stress of acquiring decently paid jobs, rising prices and inability to provide for their children not only undermined men's power and authority but also lead to feelings of deep shame, regret and upset. Unfortunately most men struggled with articulating these feelings exacerbated by the limited places where they felt heard and understood.

Within this context Dalit men's responses to women's strategic assertions for greater control and power within their homes stemmed from attempts to re-generate their subjectivities and re-coup their masculinity (Vera-Sanso, 2008). When women initially joined the union, men's reactions were hostile and antagonistic; similar to those noted elsewhere when women have entered paid work (see White, 1997; Chant, 2000; Fuller, 2001; Silberschmidt, 2004; 2005). Husbands increased surveillance over wives, tightened control over their mobility, became intolerant towards any mistakes in completion of routine domestic chores and engaged in domestic violence in an attempt to reinforce their authority within the home. Some husband's stopped working completely, while others refused to contribute towards the home. Most men complained about the insubordination of their wives. I argue that when women joined the KKP, KP, and KKK, they

what was threatened was not only men's identity around being the 'primary' breadwinner (because Dalit women had always worked), but more so the privileges that men had continued to derive from normative understandings of Dalit masculinity.

For instance even though most Dalit men worked irregularly, or were unemployed for long periods of time, their authority and power continued to rest on their 'presumed role' as primary breadwinners. So even though men might not actively fulfil the role of a provider, they continued to 'discursively secure the right' to male privilege and status (Vera-Sanso, 2000). However when women joined the union and began attributing value to their earnings, they also began questioning the power and status that men were continuing to derive simply from their 'ascribed role' as provider. The meanings they derived from their new identity as workers forced a reinterpretation of 'local theories of entitlement' (Moore, 1994b), which up until now that privileged men. Male identity which was built upon ideologies of women as 'supplementary' bread-earners and men as entitled to authority, regardless of a material base was now being challenged.

Similarly as women got more involved with the KKPKP, they began to assertively challenge the control that men demonstrated over their wives and the unquestioned obedience they expected in return. Issues, such as domestic violence, men's lack of financial accountability towards running of the home, or their squandering money on alcohol; which although women had disapproved of and overtly protested against, were slowly being transferred into a realm of 'non-negotiables'. Women's new found dignity and knowledge about their rights combined with the backing of a collective were challenging hegemonic ideologies of control, power and authority within the home. It was these very ideologies, upon which Dalit masculinity had been built, and therefore questioning them, threatened male identities. As women began to gradually re-define the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour men were not included in this 'boundary-making'.

In response to this, men displayed defiance, anger and increased attempts to control their wives. However over time men were able to allow change in their homes as they began to secure new privileges elsewhere (Cornwall, 1997), and redefine (re-coup) masculine identity. However unlike existing male privilege which was largely based upon unquestioned, normative gender ideologies, these new privileges were available to

men only *through* their wives, in particular derived from their wives involvement in the KKPKP. To access these privileges, men were forced to question and eventually abandon certain ways of 'being male'.

Privileges such as not needing to be the 'sole provider' anymore, being able to afford to buy their family gifts, getting a job because of the KKPKP, being 'known' in the *vasti* because of one's wife travels abroad were just some of the 'benefits' of union membership that accrued to men. Additionally, the union provided men opportunities to re-construct Dalit male subjectivities. By challenging men's assumed superiority, and communicating to husbands that they *could* change their behaviours, actions and ways of thinking the union was inadvertently presenting to men opportunities to re-define themselves. Without intending to do so, union *karyakartas* by confronting men's behaviour (especially violence) were opening up spaces of reflection and simultaneously offering men a different lens through which they could look at themselves, and new opportunities to define themselves. Inadvertently the KKPKP had provided men a space to re-think and re-imagine new ways of 'being and doing' (de Certeau, 1984).

Implications for Practice

This thesis has demonstrated the role of 'gender progressive coalitions' in women's struggles for rights, recognition and redistribution (Agarwal, 1994; Fraser, 1995). Given the disproportionately high numbers of Dalit (women) workers in informal employment in India (Chapter 2), as well as the current proliferation of membership-based organizations of informal workers (Chapter 1) there are a few lessons for organizing workers that this thesis offers. Firstly as my research shows it is not simply membership to such organizations that can bring about changes within the home, but in fact the *nature* of this membership that matters. Women who are consistent and regular in participation have a higher chance of developing affective relationships with the organization in question, which in turn can impact their willingness to expand the boundaries of intra-household bargaining. Secondly my thesis highlights the need for workers organizations to transcend the 'public private' dichotomy by addressing the inequalities that women face within the home. My study found that it was only when a trade union began intervening in women's personal issues that women began to feel like

the organization cared about them. This in turn made them more likely to get deeper involved with the union, which paved the way for transformations in gender relations within the home. Thirdly my thesis highlights the importance of cognitive and relational pathways in women's empowerment. In fact material resources, such as income, access to credit and savings groups assumed bargaining potential *only when* combined with women's heightened perceptions of their value, women's belief that they were entitled to a life with dignity and justice, new ways that women began to see themselves, skills and resources they had to seek external help and women's access to chosen relationships which made them feel secure. Lastly my study highlights the immense potential, and urgent need to engage with men when dealing with gender inequality within homes. This role throws some light on the role organizations, such as the KKPKP (despite their focus on women workers), can play in encouraging men to re-define for themselves what it means 'to be a man'.

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WASTEPICKERS

HUSBANDS

Name	Age	Caste	No. of Children	Level of Education	Length of union membership	Nature of Union membership	Name	Age	Nature of Husband's Current Employment	General nature of husband's employment over his life course	Substantial periods of alcoholism leading to loss of employment and/or domestic violence
Anita	39	Matang	4	4th grade	15 years	Active	Dasu	42	Factory worker	Regular	No
Aruna	32	Mahar	2	4th grade	12 years	Active	Baban	39	Factory worker	Irregular	Yes
Baida	39	Matang	4	6th grade	14 years	Active	Yuvraj	50	Wastepicker	Irregular	Yes
Kanchan	32	Mahar	3	2nd grade	14 years	Active	Sanjay	42	Truck Driver	Rare	Yes
Kavita	35	Matang	2	9th grade	9 years	Active	Vinod	39	Rickshaw driver	Regular	No
Pushpa	38	Matang	5	No formal education	11 years	Active	Ramesh	44	Gardener	Rare	Yes
Lata	40	Matang	3	No formal education	23 years	Active	Janardhan	52	Security Guard	Rare	Yes
Mangal	45	Mahar	3	No formal education	23 years	Active	Jagannath	50	Wastepicker	Regular	No
Babita	35	Matang	3	No formal education	6 years	Active	Vilas	40	Painter	Rare	Yes
Pallavi	29	Mahar	2	No formal education	13 years	Active	Mhesu	44	Bhangar-walla	Irregular	Yes

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WASTEPICKERS

HUSBANDS

Name	Age	Caste	No. of Children	Level of Education	Length of union membership	Nature of Union membership	Name	Age	Nature of Husband's Current Employment	General nature of husband's employment over his life course	Substantial periods of alcoholism leading to loss of employment and/or domestic violence
Rekha	40	Mahar	3	7th grade	12 years	Active	Dadarao	60	Daily wage earner	Rare	Yes
Sangita	35	Mahar	4	No formal education	20 years	Active	Mahesh	42	Daily wage earner	Irregular	No
Sapna	41	Matang	3	No formal education	23 years	Active	Sham	47	Wastepicker	Rare	Yes
Shanta	40	Matang	4	No formal education	20 years	Active	Dadarao	47	Daily wage earner	Rare	Yes
Supriya	36	Matang	3	No formal education	17 years	Active	Dilip	45	Wastepicker	Rare	Yes
Surekha	34	Mahar	2	10th grade	7 years	Active	Lala	37	Office boy	Irregular	Yes
Vaishali	29	Mahar	2	No formal education	11 years	Active	Chandrakant	32	Painter	Rare	Yes
Kusum	28	Mahar	3	3rd grade	10 years	Active	Ashok	34	Daily wage earner	Regular	No
Keshar	43	Mahar	3	No formal education	14 years	Active	Not-interviewed	55	Daily wage earner	Irregular	No
Gokula	41	Matang	4	2nd grade	23 years	Active	Not-interviewed	50	Truck-driver	Irregular	Yes

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WASTEPICKERS

HUSBANDS

Name	Age	Caste	No. of Children	Level of Education	Length of union membership	Nature of Union membership	Name	Age	Nature of Husband's Current Employment	General nature of husband's employment over his life course	Substantial periods of alcoholism leading to loss of employment and/or domestic violence
Chaya	35	Matang	3	3rd grade	8 years	Inactive	Sandeep	42	Daily wage earner	Rare	Yes
Ganga	33	Matang	2	No formal education	15 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	39	Musician	Rare	Yes
Nirmala	32	Matang	4	No formal education	12 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	50	Unemployed	Regular	No
Pama	42	Mahar	4	No formal education	18 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	47	Small-business owner	Irregular	Yes
Parvati	40	Mahar	4	No formal education	23 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	55	Daily wage earner	Rare	Yes
Rani	33	Matang	4	No formal education	8 years	Inactive	Kakaram	40	Unemployed	Regular	No
Rupali	29	Matang	2	5th standard	10 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	33	Daily wage earner	Irregular	Yes
Purnima	35	Mahar	2	No formal education	10 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	37	Wastepicker	Irregular	No
Sarika	31	Matang	3	7th	13 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	34	Bus-driver	Rare	Yes
Vijaya	41	Mahar	2	No formal education	10 years	Inactive	Not-interviewed	46	Painter	Rare	Yes

NON UNIONIZED WASTEPICKERS

Name	Age	Caste	No. of children	Education level	Husband's age	Nature of Husband's current employment	General nature of husband's employment over his life course	Substantial periods of alcoholism leading to loss of employment and/or domestic violence
Asha	31	Matang	2	4th grade	35	Unemployed	Regular	No
Renuka	30	Mahar	3	No formal education	40	Daily wage earner	Rarely worked	Yes
Babita	24	Matang	1	No formal education	30	Daily wage earner	Rarely worked	Yes
Jana	32	Mahar	2	No formal education	42	Electrician	Regular	No
Kanta	41	Mahar	3	No formal education	45	Factory worker	Regular	Yes
Lata S	35	Matang	3	5th grade	40	Daily wage earner	Irregular	Yes
Laxmi	38	Matang	6	No formal education	46	Wastepicker	Irregular	No
Kunti	23	Matang	2	6th grade	26	Daily wage earner	Rarely worked	Yes
Shruti	40	Mahar	2	9th grade	42	Factory worker	Regular	No
Ratan	27	Matang	2	5th grade	30	Gardener	Regular	No
Pooja	35	Matang	4	10th grade	37 (deceased)	-	Regular	Yes
Roma	32	Matang	4	5th grade	36	Security Guard	Irregular	Yes

NON UNIONIZED WASTEPICKERS

Name	Age	Caste	No. of children	Education level	Husband's age	Nature of Husband's current employment	General nature of husband's employment over his life course	Substantial periods of alcoholism leading to loss of employment and/or domestic violence
Rukmini	23	Matang	3	No formal education	30	Painter	Regular	No
Sangita M	26	Mahar	3	5th grade	30	Office boy	Regular	No
Kiran	26	Matang	2	3rd grade	40	Daily wage earner	Rarely worked	Yes
Savita	33	Mahar	7	No formal education	29	Truck driver	Regular	No
Shalan	26	Mahar	2	No formal education	35	Daily wage earner	Irregular	Yes
Shobha	30	Matang	3	No formal education	36	Painter	Rarely worked	Yes
Sulbha	30	Mahar	4	No formal education	34	Wastepicker	Irregular	Yes
Usha	26	Mahar	2	6th grade	33	Bhangar-walla	Irregular	Yes

Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions: Unionized Wastepickers

	Location	Number of Women Present
1.	Taravde Vasti	4
2.	Patil Estate Vasti	7
3.	KKPKP Office	6
4.	Indiranagar Vasti	5

Focus Group Discussions: Non- unionized Wastepickers

	Location	Number of Women Present
1.	Topkhana Vasti	5
2.	Patil Estate Vasti	4
3.	Upper Vasti	6

Focus Group Discussions: Unionized and Non- unionized Wastepickers

	Location	Number of Women Present
1.	Baltarun Vasti	5

Focus Group Discussions: Husbands of Wastepickers

	Location	Number of Men Present
1.	Hadapsar	8
2.	Patil Estate Vasti	7
3.	Taravde Vasti	8

Broadly the questions I posed in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were as follows:

Questions for women who are members of KKP KP

What were the reasons for joining a Union? What are the perceived benefits of being part of a labour organization of informal workers? (i.e. a 'before' and 'after' picture) Where have these benefits been felt? In the public sphere and/or in the private? How have these benefits been felt? Why do women feel that being part of a Union has led to some kind of change (or not) in their lives (material/practical and psychological changes)? Has there been a change in child care arrangements, responsibility for household chores/domestic duties, levels of violence, respect/recognition from their husband? How have their husbands reacted to their wives joining a Union? Have these reactions changed over time? How? What factors could be attributed to this change?

Questions for husbands of women who are members of the KKP KP

Are they aware that their wives have joined a union? When did their wives join KKP KP? Why? How have the husbands reacted to their wives joining a Union (material/practical and psychological reactions)? What do men perceive as the benefits of being part of a labour organization for their wives? What are the drawbacks? Where have these benefits been felt? In the public sphere and/or in the private? Has being part of KKP KP 'changed' their wives in any ways? What factors could be attributed to this change? Have any of these changes trickled into the home (material/practical and psychological changes)? Is there a change in the way husbands perceive their wives since they joined the union?

Questions for non-unionized wastepickers

Why have they not joined a labour organization (if such an organization exists)? What do they think are the perceived benefits or drawbacks of such organizations? Do they know anyone who is part of such a labour organization? Has it changed anything in their lives (material/practical and psychological changes)? How? What kind of relationship do they share with their spouse? Who does the household chores/takes care of the children/cooks/cleans? Is there any domestic violence? How do they respond to it?

The Interpretive focus groups include the following underlying guiding questions: (Dodson and Schmalzbauer 2005, pp. 955-56)

1. Am I hearing what is really going on in these women's lives? Does this sound like what is going on in the lives of other wastepickers you know?
2. What else do you think is going on, that is not represented here?
3. I do not understand the meaning of what is being said here. Can you explain to me what this means? (eg. women's attitude towards domestic chores)
4. If you were trying to find out what I am trying to find out about (eg. why are some women inactive and others not), what would you expect people to share?
5. After going over all of the information that I have gathered from our interviews, I have concluded the following. Do you think I have this right?