

Domestic labour relations in India

VULNERABILITY AND GENDERED LIFE COURSES IN JAIPUR

Päivi Mattila

INTERKONT BOOKS 19
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Päivi Mattila

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ABSTRACT

This study explores labour relations between domestic workers and employers in India. It is based on interviews with both employers and workers, and ethnographically oriented field work in Jaipur, carried out in 2004–07. Combining development studies with gender studies, labour studies, and childhood studies, it asks how labour relations between domestic workers and employers are formed in Jaipur, and how female domestic workers' trajectories are created. Focusing on female part-time maids and live-in work arrangements, the study analyses children's work in the context of overall work force, not in isolation from it.

Drawing on feminist Marxism, domestic labour relations are seen as an arena of struggle. The study takes an empirical approach, showing how paid domestic work is structured and stratified through intersecting hierarchies of class, caste, gender, age, ethnicity and religion. The importance of class in domestic labour relations is reiterated, but that of caste, so often downplayed by employers, is also emphasized. Domestic workers are crucial to the functioning of middle and upper middle class households, but their function is not just utilitarian. Through them working women and housewives are able to maintain purity and reproduce class distinctions, both between poor and middle classes and lower and upper middle classes.

Despite commodification of work relations, traditional elements of service relationships have been retained, particularly through maternalist practices such as gift giving, creating a peculiar blend of tra-

ditional and market practices. Whilst employers of part-time workers purchase services in a segmented market from a range of workers for specific tasks, such as cleaning and gardening, traditional live-in workers are also hired to serve employers round the clock. Employers and workers grudgingly acknowledged their dependence on one another, employers seeking various strategies to manage fear of servant crime, such as the hiring of children or not employing live-in workers in dual-earning households.

Paid domestic work carries a heavy stigma and provide no entry to other jobs. It is transmitted from mothers to daughters and working girls were often the main income providers in their families.

The diversity of working conditions is analysed through a continuum of vulnerability, generic live-in workers, particularly children and unmarried young women with no close family in Jaipur, being the most vulnerable and experienced part-time workers the least vulnerable. Whilst terms of employment are negotiated informally and individually, some informal standards regarding salary and days off existed for maids. However, employers maintain that workings conditions are a matter of individual, moral choice. Their reluctance to view their role as that of employers and the workers as their employees is one of the main stumbling blocks in the way of improved working conditions.

Key words: paid domestic work, India, children's work, class, caste, gender, life course

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I dedicate this dissertation to Molla and Tulikki, my daughters.

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Päivi Mattila

1 INTRODUCTION

In June 2006, a ten-year old girl Sonu Nirmal Kumar, who worked as a domestic worker for a wealthy household in Mumbai, died after a brutal assault. Her employers, an elderly couple, were away, and their adult daughter looked into the apartment. According to media reports, the woman became enraged on finding the small girl trying a lipstick which belonged to her employer. The case was by no means unique, and stories of similar incidents have often appeared in the Indian media. However, this particular incident caused much public outcry. Was it because it took place in Mumbai, home of the National Domestic Workers Movement, which reacted by holding a series of public demonstrations? Was it because the employer family initially created considerable confusion by trying to make the death look like suicide by hanging? Or was it because of the distressing detail of the lipstick, a personal and intimate item belonging to an upper middle class woman, which a person from the servant class had dared to touch? Alongside a natural empathy, did this incident arouse some hidden feeling of shame about the awful way in which some domestic workers are treated?

* * *

In an unforgettable episode in *White Tiger*, a novel by Aravind Adiga (2008), Balram Halwai, a driver who works for a rich industrialist in Delhi, murders his male employer. After the murder, Balram steals a large sum of money and flees to the other side of India to start a new

life as a petty business man. On the whole, the deceased employer had treated Balram reasonably; he had been polite and had paid the agreed salary. Yet the employer and his brother had tried to force Balram to claim responsibility for a car accident in which the employer's girlfriend had killed a child when driving whilst drunk. It is this that has made Balram carry out his hideous crime, not on the spur of the moment but after careful planning.

* * *

This is a study about paid domestic work in India. My research explores the dynamics of paid domestic work, particularly labour relations between workers and employers. It is based on interviews and ethnographically oriented field work in Jaipur, carried out in 2004–2007. Going back to the two scenes above, how are we to understand the two seemingly contradictory, brutal incidents, one real, one fictional? It is this and related questions that I invite the readers to explore in the following pages.

1.1 Research task and relevance

This research concerns questions of labour relations, the middle class, children's work, gender inequality, and is about working class girls and women struggling for a livelihood in India. My approach to these themes is multidisciplinary, combining development studies with gender studies, labour studies, and childhood studies. I ask how labour relations function in Jaipur and explore transformations taking place in paid domestic work. I also aim to form an understanding of the role of children as part of the domestic labour force, focusing on lifeworlds and work-life trajectories of girls and their mothers in Jaipur in the state of Rajasthan in North-Western India.

In the initial phase of this research project, I read several popular

media articles and reports by international and Indian development and child rights organisations on the exploitation of child domestic workers. These reports were shocking, like many others on children, but there was also something in them that intrigued me. It was the all too familiar tone of victimisation which they adopted when talking about (child) domestic workers, alongside their one-sided picture of Indian employers as abusive and exploitative. Yet I knew that practically all middle class and wealthier Indian families employed workers, and not all of them could possibly be ruthless exploiters. It seemed to me that both these images – of domestic workers as exploited victims and of employers as selfish exploiters – would need to be modified. I thus set out to understand the diversity of Indian labour relations. Even if unequal relationships between workers and employers tend to get accentuated within domestic work structures, these relationships vary.

At the same time, what first surprised me during the field work in India was the ease with which the employers in Jaipur told me about practices that to me seemed rather exploitative. Some may have talked more openly because these matters seemed so self-evident that there was little scientific value in studying them. The nonchalant manner in which some described their practices could also reflect the slightly peripheral location of Jaipur in Rajasthan, where organisation of domestic workers has been slower and less pronounced than in states with more progressive policies towards workers' rights such as Tamil Nadu or Kerala. But mostly, it seemed, the willingness to talk openly about practices which negated basic workers' rights reflected the centrality of paid domestic work as an institution in India, and the normalcy of the subordination involved.

I made two important changes to my initial plan, which was to focus on child domestic workers only. First, since my interest was in the relationship between workers and employers, I decided to include them both in my data. Only by listening to both sides, would it be possible to understand the nature of their labour relations. Second,

in order to understand children's work in a meaningful way, their participation in the labour market needed to be seen in the broader context of domestic work and explored in relation to other (adult) work, not in isolation from it, as well as in relation to employers. I decided to look at children's work as a part of their overall lifeworlds, not as a neatly separable issue, familiar from many donor-driven development policies and programs (see Nieuwenhuys 2009, 148–150).

The academic literature on domestic work in India provided rich anthropological descriptions of the workers or the employers' lives, or their relations. However, most studies included little discussion of the terms of employment and labour rights. There are, however, emerging policy developments regarding the concerns of domestic workers and I also look at domestic work as a question of labour rights. Thus, my aim became the provision of a detailed analysis of domestic work in one context, in Jaipur, and through this contextualised knowledge to try to develop a broader understanding of labour relations in Indian homes generally.

Domestic work, paid and unpaid, has provoked rich and lengthy debates in women and gender studies, especially in the western world. While Moors (2003, 387) has argued that the study of paid domestic work has not been prestigious in academia, I wish to show through this research that the study of paid domestic work in India is relevant and important.

First, households can be perceived as fundamental units of social organisation (Hendon 1996, 48). Therefore, domestic activities and relations have great political and economic significance, and are inseparable from the relationships and processes that make up the 'public domain'. Household relations do not exist in isolation from society as a whole, nor do changes in them occur as a passive response to externally imposed changes (ibid, 47). As the Marxist feminists note, paid domestic work should be seen as part of the societal reproduction system (Romero 20002, 60). As I will argue in this study, in India paid domestic work is essential to the functioning of the middle

class households and their gender dynamics. Any efforts to regularise paid domestic work will potentially have an impact on a significant number of Indian workers and on the employing households.

Second, the study of domestic labour relations inevitably includes consideration of class, caste and other hierarchies in India. As Dickey (2000a, 32) put it: “Domestic service provides an ideal domain for examining the production of class relations and identities. It is an arena in which class is reproduced and challenged on a daily and intimate basis.” As I wish to show, understanding domestic labour relations may enhance our understanding of structural inequality and discrimination embedded in the Indian (or any other) society.

The third motivation for this study stems from the scale and significance of paid domestic work in India. Previous studies (Dickey 2000a; Ray and Qayum 2009) and discussions with any Indian demonstrate that most middle class, upper middle class and rich Indian families employ domestic workers. Therefore the total number of Indians directly or indirectly involved in paid domestic work – as members of an employing household, as workers, or as family members of a domestic worker – is very large.

The role of this sector as an employment provider cannot be neglected. According to India’s Commission of Justice Development and Peace a domestic worker is “an individual employed to do household chores on a temporary, permanent, part time or full time basis” (Srujana 2002). Already in colonial times domestic work was the main growing employment sector for working class women (Banerjee 1996), as there were few employment opportunities for them in the old colonial industries (de Haan 2003, 201).¹ Today, domestic workers, in all their diversity, are one the largest workers’ groups in the informal sector. Whereas both unemployment and underemployment have been on the increase in other sectors (Harriss-White and

1 Domestic service accounted for over 70 % of women workers in modern services, and for 12 % of all occupations in the late 19th century Calcutta (Banerjee 1996).

Gooptu 2000, 91), the category of 'private households with employed persons' has been growing (Parliwala & Neetha, 2006, 21). According to Indian National Sample Survey (NSS) data, there were 2,0 million female workers and 0,3 million male workers in 2001 as compared to 1,2 million female and 0,3 male workers in 1983, showing a substantial increase in the number of female workers (Mehrotra 2008, 2).

It is generally held that the official figures are unreliable and grossly inadequate as domestic work is notoriously under-enumerated. (Gothoskar 2005, 29; Raghuram 2005, 6).² Social Alert (2000, 19), on the basis of information from several Indian civil society organisations, estimates that there are around 20 million domestic workers in India. Of them about 20 % are estimated to be aged under fourteen, and 20–25 % fifteen to twenty. While domestic workers in most countries are mainly women and girls, in India there are relatively large numbers of male workers. Despite this, domestic work is increasingly feminised in India (Ray 2000b), around 90 % of these workers being female (Social Alert 2000). This makes it one of the few sectors which has a female majority (Raghuram 2005, 5), and one of the largest employment providers for women and girls in India.

Finally, as a fourth important motivation for this study I go back to the stories about the exploitation of workers. While I agree with labour researchers who wish to go beyond the exploitation narrative (see Ganguly-Scrase 2007, 322), there is something specific about domestic labour relations which makes them exploitative. As others have shown, the intimacy involved in the labour relations, the hidden nature of the work, and the persistent tendency of the employers to play down their role as 'employers' and instead to hold to a maternalistic role as humanitarians are specific characteristics of this sector. It is

2 The unreliability of the statistics becomes clear in that according to the Census (2001) there are about 1,85 million children aged 5 to 14 engaged in a category which includes domestic work and roadside eateries, more than the total number of workers in the whole sector.

the manifestations of different forms of exploitation and the workers' diverse experiences that I seek to understand by exploring structural factors which contribute to adult and child workers' vulnerability.

1.2 The scope and scale of paid domestic work in India

From colonial times to contemporary practices

Domestic work in India has a long history, and accounts of domestic workers extend from the Vedic era, around 1000 BC to the 19th century colonial period. (see Thapar 2002). Up to and during the colonial period domestic workers, many of them slaves, were divided into those who worked outside in the fields and those who worked indoors. A hierarchy existed between those who worked as their masters' personal attendants and could therefore enter the inner quarters of the house, and those who worked in the courtyard and garden. (Fuchs 1980, 155). Field slaves were typically from untouchable castes, which were prohibited from entering upper caste homes. Most in-house servants were from the low status *shudra* caste and its sub-castes, although some were from the same high castes as their employers (Thapar 2002, 186, 303; Fuchs 1980, 155). The history of domestic work partly overlaps with that of slavery, since domestic slavery existed officially in practically all parts of India until the 19th century, and domestic work was the most common employment of the slaves (Fuchs 1980, 155; Neetha 2003, 122; Thapar 2002, xiii, 303). Although slavery was abolished by law in 1843 slavery in the form of bonded labour continues to exist, in some cases within domestic work (Human Rights Watch 1996, 27).³

In colonial times, domestic service was influenced by other transformations within society. The dichotomy between the outer (*bahir*)

3 Bonded labour was also outlawed in 1976 through the enactment of The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976 (Human Rights Watch 1996, 27).

and the inner (*ghar*) was emphasised in the colonial period (Chatterjee 1993, 119–122). While it was necessary to adapt and imitate Western norms in the outer domain, it became important to maintain the inner domain, the home, as the main domain of conserving Indian identity. The outer world was perceived as the domain of the male, and the inner world, the home, as the domain of the female, and resisting colonial influences at home became mainly a women's task. (ibid). The idea of the home as a 'private space' became increasingly common towards the end of the 19th century, and privacy of the home became part of the middle class identity. The new middle class established the new criteria of social respectability, and while the English/European home often provided an ideal model, its structure and modus operandi were modified according to Indian reformist principles (Banerjee 1996, 7).

As in other colonised countries, the native middle class was placed in a position of subordination to its colonial masters, but in a position of dominance over others (Chatterjee, 1993, 36).⁴ Although the home became the stage for anti-colonial opposition, it would be simplistic to see the home as a domain where Western values were totally rejected. On the contrary, the nationalist paradigm applied a principle of *selection*,⁵ which meant not so much a dismissal of modernity but rather an attempt to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project (Chatterjee 1993, 120–121, 126). Balancing these two was, however, complicated, as noted by Banerjee (1996, 8) in her analysis of 19th century domestic manuals in Bengal:

While the steady stream of references to domestics and the prescription of maternalistic behaviour towards them imply the acceptability of hiring domestic help in colonial Bengal,

4 Studies on the colonial middle class talk about "Hindu" culture. The ability and willingness of "Hindu" culture to extend its hegemonic boundaries to include what was distinctly Islamic became a matter of much contention in 19th and 20th century Bengal (Chatterjee, 1993, 74).

5 Italics from the original text (Chatterjee 1993, 121).

the employment of servants in new middle class homes was viewed with suspicion by the same authors, describing having servants as a negative development brought about by modern Western education.

The standards created for middle class women and the nationalist project emphasised the cultural superiority of the “modern” Indian woman over the Westernised woman, the British *memsahib*⁶ and the “common” woman, considered as coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, and subjected to brutal physical oppression by the male (Chatterjee 1993, 126–130). The numbers of lower-class women as household servants steadily increased as employment of servants emerged as a status symbol of the new middle class or *bhadralok*⁷ (Banerjee, 1996, 8). The British families in India were also able to employ a large number of workers given the very low wages, a custom that many Indians working in the Government adopted (Fuchs 1980, 157–158).

Different perceptions of the colonial influence on domestic labour relationships in India and elsewhere prevail. Romero (2002, 78) argued that paternalistic behaviour towards servants was transmitted and later institutionalised in the New World and in Third World countries under colonialism, an argument which I find too simplistic. In India, Fernandes (2006, 13) argued that while there had been servants long before the colonial period, the idea of servants as part of the symbolic capital of middle class homes became central in colonial times, influenced by British perceptions of middle class homes. By contrast, Mehta (1960, quoted in Rollins 1985) perceived today’s paid domestic work not so much as an outcome of colonial times,

6 The term was originally used as a respectful term for a European married woman in the Bengal Presidency, the first portion denoting “ma’am”. Over the years it became used more widely throughout the British colonies in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa (Chaudhuri 1988, 517).

7 In Bengali language, *bhadralok* means literally a respectable man or a gentleman, but generally refers to the upper castes, as opposed to the poor, uneducated *chhotolok* or *gariblok* (Ray 2000, 695).

but rather as an attenuated survival of patterns prevailing from pre-colonial times. To conclude, while the colonial period and British influence certainly impacted Indian middle class domesticities and domestic labour relations, it would be naive to see the practices of today solely as a colonial heritage. Given the long and wide spread existence of domestic service in the South Asian sub-continent, it is not fruitful to see pre-colonial and colonial times as separable phases, but rather as a continuum of transforming practices in domestic labour relations.

In India today, domestic labour relations are in a process of commodification. The workers increasingly sell their labour power to employers through part-time arrangements. For the employer, it is common to allocate work to different workers who specialise in certain tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, or gardening. In spite of these transformations, domestic workers' roles are in some ways similar to those of servants in the late colonial period. In India, the traditional arrangement where the worker, "24-hours worker", renders her or his time literally into the hands of the employer continues to co-exist alongside the more recent arrangements. At the same time, labour relations are in a process of change and, quite naturally, both sides try to make the best out of the situation.

Paid domestic work as an occupation has historically been disregarded and devalued (Anderson 2000; Romero 2002). Romero (2002, 42) argued that there is nothing intrinsically demeaning about domestic labour, but that the pervasive structural relations of race, class and gender embedded in the labour relationship give it low status. By the paradox of domestic service she means that domestic work is actually a better option than many other low-status jobs available to many of the workers, but it is devalued by them because of the heavy stigma linked to it. In India, it has been considered a particularly stigmatised occupation (Ray and Qayum 2009, 2).

However, paid domestic work in India is characterised by hierarchies, not only between employers and workers, but also among work-

ers themselves. While class can be perceived as the major divide between employers and workers, it is caste, gender, ethnicity, religion, and age, and their intersections, that shape the hierarchies among workers in Jaipur, skillfully and selectively orchestrated by the employers.

Domestic workers can roughly be divided into two main groups: 1) workers who work and live at the employers' house (live-ins), and 2) part-time workers who live in their own homes. I have explored domestic labour relations in general, but my specific focus is on two groups of workers. The first are the maids whose tasks include cleaning floors and washing dishes, usually in several houses every day. They live in their own homes. The second group consists of live-in workers who perform all kinds of tasks, and live with the employer with varying degree of liberty or isolation.

Throughout the research process, the employers time and again spoke about their fears and mistrust of workers and their dependency on the workers. Although their fears seemed somewhat exaggerated, 'servant crimes' are regularly portrayed in the media. However, compared to the scale of paid domestic work it is quite surprising how rare serious breaches of trust are. If the employers fear workers, even if only as a potential threat, the workers have very real fears related to job insecurity, which at least partially explains their subservience to their employers. Many of them, including the maids in my data in Jaipur, are highly dependent on their employers, even if the risk of job loss is now spread by working for several employers.

Regulation of domestic work

Domestic work has traditionally been a grey area in Indian labour legislation. A 'Domestic Workers (Condition of Services) Bill' was introduced as early as 1959, but it has yet to become law (Gothoskar 2005, 1). For years, civil society organisations, most notably the National Domestic Workers Movement, have called for national legislation to regulate domestic workers' rights, as well as for the inclusion of domestic workers under the Minimum Wages Act (1948) and the

Unorganized Workers' Social Security Bill (2008). Although national legislation does not exist, state-level regulation has been enacted, at least in Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, manifesting the nature of the multi level and complex federal political system (Brass 1997, 303–304).⁸

When I discussed the question of regulation of domestic work with Rajasthan government officials during my last field work period in 2007, there were no signs of regulating the sector. At the same time, civil society organizations in Jaipur had begun to lobby for such regulation. Following similar developments in other states, in March 2010 the Chief Minister of the state of Rajasthan proposed the introduction of legislation for the safety of domestic workers there.⁹ The proposed legislation would be entitled 'Domestic Workers' Security Act', and according to the minister the move would provide social security for domestic workers.

The employment of children in domestic work was not legally prohibited when I began this research process, but in 2006 the Government of India imposed an amendment to the existing Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1984).¹⁰ The amendment prohibits the employment of children under fourteen as domestic servants or in roadside cafeterias (*dhabas*), teashops, hotels, and oth-

8 The Maharashtra state adopted a Domestic Workers' Welfare Board Bill in 2009. In addition, state level regulation has led to the inclusion of domestic workers in the Unorganised Sector Bill (2008) in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar; in the Minimum Wages Act in Karnataka (2004), and in Andhra Pradesh (2007); and in Tamil Nadu the Government has established a Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Board in 2007 under section 6 of the Tamil Nadu Manual workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Work) Act 1982. (Kundu 2008,18; <http://www.ndwm.org/resource-centre/default.asp>).

9 Preliminary notification for Minimum Wage Act for Domestic Workers was passed by the Rajasthan Government on 4th July 2007.

10 Child labour legislation has a longer history than this: the issue of the minimum age was raised in the Legislative Assembly of British India in 1921 (Burra, 1995, 12). Several policy initiatives, national plans and programmes directly or indirectly related to child work, such as the National Policy for Children (1974), National Policy on Education (1986), and National Policy for Child Labour (1987) also exist (Bajbai 2003, 7–10).

er hospitality sectors (Save the Children 2007, 2).¹¹ For child rights organisations the enactment of the 2006 amendment was a major achievement, although they remain sceptical about the implementation of the ban. They expressed legitimate concerns over the lack of implementation of the amendment, given the Governments' marginal efforts in putting it into practice.¹²

On an international level, the annual conference of International Labour Organisation adopted in June 2011 the 'Convention on Domestic Workers', an international treaty that binds the member states that ratify it.¹³ The new convention is likely to increase the pressure for the Indian government to enact national legislation on domestic workers' rights.

Since the overwhelming majority of workers in India are in the informal sector, it is not surprising that most domestic workers are not unionised or otherwise organised. The needs of informal sector workers, women workers in particular, have been overlooked by the conservative practices of labour organisations and trade unions (Baruah 2004, 605).¹⁴ However, several domestic workers' organisations have been established in past decades.¹⁵ The most notable among them, the Mumbai-based National Domestic Workers Movement

11 Anyone found violating the ban must be penalised with a punishment ranging from a jail term of three months to two years and/or a fine of 10,000 to 20,000 rupees (Save the Children 2007).

12 Within the first year of the existence of the Amendment, the Government of India announced that there had been 2,229 cases of violations of the law; 38,818 inspections had been carried out, and 211 prosecutions had been filed (Save the Children 2007, 1).

13 http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_157891/lang-en/index.htm Accessed 5.9.2011.

14 There are several organisations of women in the informal sector or 'self-employed' women in India and in South Asia more broadly, which have fought hard to gain recognition, and to organise workers. Among the most well-known are the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Working Women's Forum. (Baruah 2004, 605–606).

15 Several other local, state-level and national organisations, for example, other NGOs and church-related organisations and some women's organisations have also lobbied for domestic workers' rights (Gothoskar 2005, 1).

(NDWM) is today active in most Indian states and has about two million members.¹⁶ Even if action for domestic workers' rights is limited considering the massive size of the labour force, these efforts seem to be shaking established thought about paid domestic work and its practices.

In her study on household workers of Mexican origin in the US, Romero (2002, 45) argued that the workers are struggling to control the work process and transform the employee-employer relationship into a more client-tradesperson relationship, in which labour services rather than labour power are sold. In India, there are signs of similar struggles, even if they are not so open and barely emerging in some states. The workers increasingly try to push labour negotiations towards basic questions of working conditions, such as wages and time off. Employers respond to such calls in varying ways, some wishing to maintain traditional personalised relations, others to introduce more regulated practices.

Gender inequalities in India and Rajasthan

The Constitution of India (1950) prohibits discrimination based on sex as a fundamental right¹⁷, but there remains a yawning gap between *de jure* and *de facto* rights (Agarwal 2000, 37). The extensive literature on the position of girls and women in India shows that gender based discrimination against them is a central feature of Indian society, as well as of South Asia generally.¹⁸ Major questions are, among others, the discrimination against daughters and widows in inheritance; a persistent gender disparity in literacy levels¹⁹; violence

16 <http://www.ndwm.org/> Accessed 14.9.2010.

17 <http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf> Accessed 7.4.2010

18 UNDP's (2009) Gender Development Index ranking at 114 was slightly better than its Human Development Index at 134 (http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_EN_Table_J.pdf). However, on a civil society initiated Gender Equity Index, based on empowerment, economic activity and education, India ranked among the ten least gender equal countries. (<http://www.socialwatch.org/node/11556>).

19 In 2001, the female literacy rate was 54 % compared to male literacy rate of 76 % (Raju 2006, 82).

against women and girls; and at higher than local levels²⁰, a very low percentage of women in public decision-making both in the lower and upper seats of Parliament and in managerial positions in administration (Agarwal 2000, 37; Bhan 2001, 14–15). However, there are significant improvements in, for example, education and health. Both absolute female literacy and women's health care indicators have improved considerably (Bhan 2001, 11). In education, the gender disparity is narrowing, with the enrollment and participation of girls and women increasing in first, second and higher levels of education (Raju 2006, 83–84).²¹ The overall fertility rates (the average number of children per woman) in India has fallen considerably in recent decades from 3.6 children per woman in 1991 to 2.8 in 2006 (UNFPA 2009; Véron 2006, 3).²² In Rajasthan, the fertility rate in 2001 was 3.9 children per woman (UNFPA 2009).

In terms of gender inequality, questions that are particularly pertinent for this study relate to the endemic discrimination against girls and its implications for female workers' lives, female participation in the labour market, and the gendered division of labour at home.

Notwithstanding considerable class, urban-rural and regional differences (between the relatively more gender equal South India and the more conservative Northern India) in most questions related to women's status, preference for sons is prevalent throughout society (Pande & Malhotra 2007, 2). It stems, among other factors, from the dominant idea that sons, as future heirs, support parents in their old age, whereas daughters will belong to the future husbands' family (Kakar 1982, 90). It is widely acknowledged that discrimination

20 In 1993, 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments reserved 33 % of seats for women in the *panchayats*, the local governance bodies (Kaushik 2007, 22).

21 There is no agreement on whether the increased literacy rates and education for girls and women automatically lead to an improved status for women (see, for example, Nussbaum 1995).

22 The Government of India introduced the concept of 'population problem' already in its first five-year plan in 1951, in which rapid population growth was considered an impediment to the country's development (Véron 2003, 1).

against girls is manifested in the sex-selective abortions of female fetuses, which is on the rise despite national legislation^{23,24} Between the Censuses of 1991 and 2001 the sex ratio of girls to boys declined from 945 per 1000 to 927 per 1000 boys Census. In the 2001 Census, some of the regions with the worst figures are amongst the most prosperous in India (Office of the Registrar 2003, 1).²⁵ Abortions, often following a sex-determination test, can be perceived as a strategy to ensure a desired family sex composition and as part of a conscious family building strategy (Sabarwal 2003, 94).²⁶

The under-registration of girls in Censuses and other population surveys may explain some of the sex-ratio biases (Sabarwal 2003, 89), but more importantly, child mortality is higher amongst females than males. It stems from female infanticide and outright neglect, and especially from health and nutritional discrimination against girls during early childhood.²⁷ Whether or not parents discriminate against a living daughter also depends on the sex of her older siblings. (Pande & Malhotra 2007, 3; Sabrawal 2003, 97). In particular, if parents already have sons, they seem more likely to nurture a daughter than if the daughter is at the end of a line of daughters. Girls with two or more elder sisters appear most neglected (ibid).²⁸ One institution

23 'The Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act' (2003), which amended the previous Act of 1994, prohibits sex selection, before or after conception, and regulates, but does not prohibit the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques (Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India 2003, 22).

24 See, for example, Guilmoto 2007, 1; Bhan 2001, 7; Boroaah 2003, 83; Kishwar 1995, 79; Sabarwal 2003, 89; Sen 2001, 4 for a thorough perusal of the question.

25 In the North Indian states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, the ratio was lower than 800 girls per 1000 boys (Office of the Registrar 2003).

26 Feminists in India have been divided by the seeming contradiction in supporting a woman's right to abortion while opposing sex-selective abortion (Kumar 1983 quoted in Sabarwal 2003, 95).

27 The term 'gendercide' has been coined to describe the excessive bias in sex ratios in Asia (*The Economist* March 6th 2010, 61).

28 As a result, such girls have the highest likelihood of being stunted and are less likely to be fully immunised than boys with two or more sisters (Pande & Malhotra 2007, 3).

that severely discriminates against girls is that of dowry, which I discuss in Chapter 8.

The gender structure and division of labour in Rajasthan has been considered as particularly conservative, in spite of improvements in some central development indicators. The historical legacy of patron-clientism combined with political patriarchy continues to influence the lives of women in all groups (Rajagopal 1999, 102).²⁹ As Rajagopal (ibid) argues:

The extreme social restrictions placed on women's freedom of movement and activities suppress women's agency by confining them to the realm of the household and even diminishing their ability to act effectively within this domain.

As a consequence, the gender division of labour relegates most adult women, including those with relatively good education, to the domestic realm (Rajagopal 1999, 106). This perceived role of the 'homemaker', along with the institutions of seclusion (*purdah*),³⁰ sex-segregation, limited mobility, and notions of purity and pollution, honour and shame continue to have a "stranglehold" on women (ibid, 261). There are strong perceptions of what it means to be a good woman:

The awareness of a gender identity begins with deliberate training on how to be a good woman. The image of a good woman who is obedient, sacrificing and religious still has firm hold on the imagination of women in the state. (Rajagopal 1999, 108).

29 According to Rajagopal (1999, 102), the various social customs which reinforce patriarchy – including worship of *sati*, adherence to *purdah*, restrictions on widows, child marriages and female infanticide persist as venerated traditions in the local psyche.

30 The originally Persian word *purdah* (literally 'curtain') refers to several issues: the practice of veiling; to gender segregation, and to the seclusion of women and girls. In Islam, the *purdah* is imposed from puberty in respect of all men except for the very closest; in Hinduism it is imposed after marriage in respect of all the male members of the husband's family except for her husband's youngest brother. (Jolly et. al. 2003, 9; Perez 1996, 100).

In spite of women's increased participation in the labour market, overall women's participation remains much lower than that of men, 25,6 % as opposed to 51,6 in the last Census of 2001. The gender disparity is particularly high in urban areas with 57,1 % urban male work and labour force participation compared to 15,3 % female.³¹ In Rajasthan, the urban gender disparity is also high with 50,8 % male as compared to the very low 9,2 % female labour market participation (Rajasthan Development Report 2006, 41). Despite the generally lower participation rates, there has been a growth in women's employment in the service sector, especially in middle class occupations such as education,³² but this process has been less pronounced in Rajasthan, where many highly educated women stay at home after getting married.

While women's employment has increased to some extent, there is little change in the husband's participation in domestic work in India or Rajasthan. Thus, both wage-earning women and housewives bear the main responsibility for household work. But families who are able to do so, outsource some or most of the household work; having workers being an essential facilitator of the middle class life-style and a sign of class status.

1.3 Previous research

Paid domestic work in the global North and South

Domestic work has been extensively studied within sociology, history, anthropology, gender studies and economics, among other fields. It was one of the central questions in early feminist studies, bring-

31 National Sample Survey (NSS) data of 1999–2000 quoted in Mukhopadhyay and Tendulkar (2006, 6).

32 For example, as a percentage of all teachers at the primary level, female teachers had increased to about 40 % in 2004–05 (Palriwala & Neetha 2006, 21–22).

ing into focus the extensive time women, compared to men, spend in care and domestic work. The early feminist research of the 1960s and 1970s concentrated on women's unpaid work in their own home (Bakan & Stasilius 1995, 303), and looked at domestic work as a burden imposed on women by patriarchy. Gradually paid domestic work entered the discussion, albeit often focussed on as a separate issue to women's unpaid work in their own homes. Discussions on the former mainly looked at the lives of working class women, while those on the latter explored (white) middle class women and their housework.

While it is important to make a theoretical distinction between unpaid and paid domestic work, empirical studies have shown that the two realms are not necessarily unconnected in the lives of domestic workers (Romero 2002, 48). Paid and unpaid care work may overlap during different stages of women's lives and settings (Zimmermann et. al. 2006, 105) and women may shift between the positions of maid and madam, or occupy both (Lan 2003, 204). This, however, is not common in India where hierarchies between workers and employers may be more rigid than in other countries. Moreover, even if female domestic workers shift between paid and unpaid domestic work daily, they make a clear separation between the wage work and domestic chores in their own homes.

Modernisation theories in the 1970s had predicted the demise of paid domestic work, perceiving it as a vanishing occupation (Moors, 2003, 386; Romero 2002, 55; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 4). For example, Coser (1973, 39) saw domestic employee-employer relationships as pre-modern, as inheriting several traits from the traditional master-servant dynamic, and argued – in the case of the United States – that modern household appliances would replace domestic workers by reducing the household work hours. In total contrast to such a prognosis, paid domestic work has grown rapidly in recent

decades all over the world (Moors 2003, 386),³³ making it one of the most common employment sectors for women in many countries.³⁴ (Anderson 2001; Peberdy and Dinat 2005, 5).

The relevance and the size of the sector have contributed to an increasing interest in the analysis of paid domestic work since the 1980s, and particularly from the 1990s onwards. Today, ample scholarly literature on paid domestic work exists. Most recent studies are located in a transnational context, studying paid domestic work performed by migrant workers in Europe (Anderson 2000; Chang 2006; Näre 2007; Gregson and Lowe 1994) and North America (Bakan & Stasiulis 1995; Chang 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2002; Repak 2006; Rollins 1985; Romero 2002; Spitzer et al. 2006). The literature, mostly focusing on Western countries, has emphasised that most work today is performed by female labour migrants from poorer countries. The same is true for paid domestic work in the wealthier East Asian countries of Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan as recent studies show (Cheng 2006; Constable 1997; Dannecker 2005; Keezhangatte 2004; Lan 2003).³⁵ This literature has established the overrepresentation of domestic workers from racial and ethnic minorities. (Anderson 2002; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Romero 2002; Parreñas 2000).³⁶

33 My own region, the Nordic countries, can be seen as an exception for despite the recent increase in hire of domestic workers, including through the au pair system, hiring full-time workers is rare.

34 Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, 246) claims that it was no coincidence that both Coser (1973) and another modernist Chaplan (1978 quoted in Hondagneu-Sotelo) were men who, in her view, underestimated not only the compatibility of modernisation and socioeconomic inequality, but also the seemingly endless activities required to maintain households and child care.

35 Keezhangatte (2004) explores changes in the social relations between Indian domestic workers in Hong Kong and their family members back in India; and Dannecker (2005) on how Bangladeshi women's migration to Malaysia acted as an important agent for transformations of gender relations.

36 Studies have shown that the migrant domestic workers' position depends considerably on their status as citizens/non-citizens (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Zimmermann et al. 2006, 105) and that employers' power over workers increases in the case of undocumented migrants (Anderson 2001, 30).

In spite of the vast differences between the ‘reception’ countries, the studies show considerable similarities in how workers are treated. For example Filipina workers in the United States and Italy shared the experiences of dislocation related to partial citizenship, the pain of family separation, the experience of contradictory class mobility, and the feeling of social exclusion or non-belonging in the migrant community (Parreñas 2001a, 11–12).

The global restructuring of migration flows, with female workers entering domestic work, has resulted in the globalisation of the occupation and in the restructuring of the international division of reproductive labour (Parreñas 2000, 561; 2001, 9).³⁷ Hochschild’s (2001, 131) concept ‘global care chain’ refers to ‘a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring with global chains typically beginning in a poor(er) country and ending in a rich country.’³⁸ This leads to an ‘international transfer of caretaking’, through which middle- and upper-class women transfer their previously unpaid carework to poor immigrant women in exchange for a relatively low wage (Parreñas 2000).³⁹ The transfer, in turn, has led to a significant transnational ‘care deficit’ when domestic workers leave their own children in their country of origin (Zimmerman et al. 2006, 14).⁴⁰

37 Transnational migration of domestic workers has also been perceived as a response to the ‘crisis of care’ in richer countries (Zimmerman et al. 2006, 10), referring, among others, to the care of children, the elderly and the chronically ill.

38 Näre (2008) refers to ‘global care orders’ to capture the multiple, simultaneous, and multi-directional nature of the care flows.

39 This phenomenon has been illustrated in the recent hit movies Lukas Moodysson’s *Mammoth* (2009) and Alejandro González Inárritu’s *Babel* (2006) where domestic workers from the Philippines and Mexico, respectively, take care of the employers’ children while trying to cater for the needs of for their own children through transnational motherhood.

40 An interesting discussion on the emotions within the care chain has risen. Hochschild (2003) argues that an ‘emotional deficit’ emerges as workers express love and affection to the employers’ children instead of their own at home, whereas Zimmermann et al. (2006, 18) point out that developing affection for an employing family does not necessarily signal that feeling for one’s own children back home have been removed or diverted.

Care chains also exist within countries, especially in the developing world, where workers move from rural to urban areas (Hochschild's 2001), and this is particularly relevant in India. There paid domestic work is closely related to rural-urban labour migration (Neetha 2003, 132), and a large percentage of domestic workers in Indian cities are migrants from within the country and, to a lesser extent, from Nepal and Bangladesh. Contemporary migration is not merely an outcome of modernity, since people have "always" moved within the subcontinent of South Asia, including in pre-colonial times (Gardner and Osella 2003, vii; Van der Veer 1995, 4 quoted in Unnithan-Kumar 2003, 165).⁴¹ However, rural-urban migration has intensified since the 1970s, as a result of the post-independence focus of economic investments on the urban centres and the consequent stagnation of rural areas (Srinivasan 1997, 1). Despite more recent efforts to boost rural areas, major differences remain between rural areas in different states as well as within states. For example, in West Bengal there are some villages which by many standards fare better than they did a few decades ago and there are others with stagnating human development indicators (Tenhunen 2010). Migration does not only stem from poverty in the place of origin but also the growing demand for a cheap labour force in large cities, contributing to the flow of domestic workers from particular pockets of out-migration (Neetha 2003, 9).⁴²

Thus, in the cities today, "the urban population is organised around the huge migrant and naturally increasing population, organised into the informal economy dominated by insecure work", and internally segmented on the basis of caste, language, ethnic, and religious identities (Patel 2006, 27–28). However, while the absolute urban popu-

41 The main focus of migration research has been on transnational migration but Gardner and Osella (2003, vii) emphasise the need to study migration within India, and note that there are important social and historical continuities between different types of migration.

42 In Delhi, hundreds of employment agencies specialise in the flow of female migrants from such pocket areas (Neetha 2003, 9).

lation has increased significantly, urbanisation in India has been relatively slow in the past forty to fifty years compared with many other developing countries (Mohan 2006, 59).

Recently, Ray and Qayum (2009, 19) who studied domestic work in Kolkata, India, criticised the transnational discussions for the teleological error that domestic service would follow the same trajectory from a feudal to a capitalist mode everywhere, as well as for the universalism which assumes a uniformity in the effects of capitalism. Moreover, they make the important note that the literature on paid domestic work in the North:

...reflects the unease with the “return” of an occupation and social relation seemingly at odds with life in a “modern”, democratic, postfeminist world, especially for the generations that came of age in the period between the 1960s and 1990s when servant-keeping had declined (Ray and Qayum 2009, 12).

In India, and presumably in most countries of the South, domestic service has never ceased to exist, and as Qayum and Ray (2003, 13) continue:

In contemporary India, keeping servants is not seen as contradictory to capitalist modernity, and no justification is needed for hiring domestic workers. Rather, in an odd reversal, the middle class households without servants are those that feel compelled to justify their position.

These different trajectories, on the one hand, and the significance of paid domestic work in the South, on the other, make it necessary to have contextualised empirical research on these areas. This study is one attempt to do this.⁴³

43 Apart from studies on India, individual studies on countries of the South include, for example, Shah's (2000) analysis on domestic relations in Nepal; Peberdy and Dinar's (2005) study on South Africa, and Dumont's (2000) study on the Philippines.

Previous research on paid domestic work in India

Considering the importance of paid domestic work in India, there are relatively few studies on it, albeit probably more than on any other country of the South. In the study of Indian history, domestic labour has until recently been an unexplored area (Banerjee 1996, 5). However, Banerjee's (1996, 2004) insightful analyses of domestic manuals for middle class women in Bengal in the late 19th century⁴⁴ are an exception and important for my work because of significant similarities between employer attitudes then and today.⁴⁵ The manuals, however, only portray the employers' views. Although 'a new labour history' has emerged in India since the 1990s, broadening to include previously almost invisible groups such as 'unorganised' home-based workers, casual labourers, self-employed artisans and others (Joshi 2003, 6), the historical voices of domestic workers are still missing, reflecting that historical studies on working class women's aspirations and activities are virtually non-existent (Tenhunen 2006, 110). Working class history is tied to its location (Joshi, 2003, 15), and the location of servants' work, at the homes of others, makes writing their history particularly challenging.⁴⁶

By contrast, there is no paucity of colonial period autobiographies and personal narratives of middle class and elite women (Banerjee 2004, 682). Domestic workers alongside with other female workers' groups such as washer women and prostitutes, were among those lower-class female figures which frequently appeared in the Indian 19th century literature in the new social milieu of the new middle

44 Many of the accounts on colonial history concentrate on West Bengal, which was an economically and culturally central area for the British and hosted the colonial capital Calcutta.

45 Domestic manuals were written for British women in India, too. For example, *The Englishwoman in India* gave advice on the treatment of servants (Chaudhuri 1988, 530).

46 Several studies on Indian labour history concentrate on one, often industrial or artisanal location within a particular city; see for example Joshi (2003) on factory workers in Kanpur; Chatterjee (2001) on tea plantation workers in Darjeeling; and Kumar (1988) on artisanal workers in Banaras.

class (Chatterjee 1993, 127). Servants, as “the other”, came to serve two purposes, establishing middle class hegemony and paternalism within the families and being crucial determinants of the character and status of middle class women (Banerjee 1996, 8; 2004, 683). The relationship between employers and workers was based mainly on a difference implicit in the simultaneously nurturing and oppressive aspects of familial ties (Banerjee 2004, 683).

Apart from Mehta’s (1960) early exploration into the domestic servant class in (then) Bombay and Tellis-Nayak’s (1983) exploration into domestic patron-client arrangements in South India, most contemporary research has emerged in the last ten to fifteen years, mainly within sociology, anthropology and labour studies.

One research stream, studies with a migration perspective point to the importance of kin and other social networks among migrant domestic workers in India (Neetha 2002, 2003; Raghuram 1999). In Delhi, Parvati Raghuram (1999, 11) showed that migrant female domestic workers used social networks both to support and to exploit other migrant workers. Migrant women from rural areas appear as the most important “pool” for the urban domestic labour force (Neetha 2003, 132). This can be explained by the gendered nature of the occupation and the ease with which migrants can enter it (ibid). Some of the workers I interviewed are labour migrants and differences in the workers’ work-life trajectories in my data stem partly from the migratory background. Thus, while my main focus is not on migrant labourers, I discuss migration as it emerges from the data. Moreover, my focus is on current labour relations, and therefore an analysis of the migration processes and dynamics is mostly beyond the scope of this study. In any case, the existence a large percentage of migrant workers has implications for the hierarchies in the sector, for the efforts to unionise domestic workers, and potentially for regulatory efforts in the sector.

Other recent studies on paid domestic work in India have explored the role of caste, gender, and class in the sector. In a study among

fourteen *dalit* female sweepers, workers who specify in waste removal and toilet cleaning, Raghuram (2001) showed how the intersections of caste and gender in suburban Delhi stratify domestic work. She demonstrated that asymmetries within society are reproduced and reinforced through paid domestic work. In spite of being at the bottom of the caste hierarchy (see Chapter 2), the sweepers had managed to maintain their caste-based occupational niche, and to use the caste to their advantage. However, the renegotiated gendered division of labour between the women and their husbands mostly benefited the latter. Raka Ray (2000b), using data from interviews with thirty employers and thirty workers from Kolkata in 1998 and 1999, explored gender ideologies and changes in the gendered division of labour, showing how male domestic workers navigate the contrast between their low-status work and the West Bengali ideal of hegemonic masculinity. Both of these studies have been helpful in understanding the complexity in how gender interacts with other social dimensions and organises domestic work.

Domestic labour relations have recently been analysed as class relations by Anne Waldrop (2004), who showed how the building of fences around upper middle class areas, one aspect of a broader differentiation in the urban class structure, was directly related to domestic workers, one of the main commuter groups to enter these areas. Sara Dickey's (2000a; 2000b) insightful analyses focus on the meaning of class within paid domestic work in Madurai in South India. Drawing from interviews with twenty-seven workers and twenty-eight employers (2000a, 35), she emphasised the oppositional nature of their labour relations, which for her are first and foremost a matter of class. Raka Ray and Seemin Qayum (2003; 2009) studied the culture of post-colonial domestic servitude between the employing and servant classes in Kolkata, and Rachel Tolen (2000) explored the knowledge transfers across class boundaries between domestic workers and their employers in Chennai (former Madras)

in Tamil Nadu. Kathinka Froystad (2003; 2005)⁴⁷, through empirical data acquired mainly among employer families in Kanpur Uttar Pradesh, acknowledged the importance of class in domestic labour relations, but emphasised the persistence of caste in the reproduction of master-servant relations. She noted that the upper-caste habit of employing servants contributes to the reproduction of notions of caste, untouchability, and upper-caste superiority (2005, 93).

By and large, the literature shows that practices in domestic labour relations are strikingly similar in different countries around the world (see, for example, Anderson 2000; Cheng 2006; Dickey 2000a; Ray and Qayum 2009; Romero 2002; Shah 2000; Tolen 2000). The structures within which domestic labour relations are established differ considerably in relation to legislation, welfare systems, and gendered divisions of labour, but the similarities, for example, in how the employers and workers talk about each other, show that analysis of domestic labour relations reveals something essential about human nature and behaviour.

To summarise, there is an important body of recent literature on paid domestic work in India. Fruitfully for my work, Dickey (2000a, 2000b), Froystad (2003; 2005), Raghuram (1999, 2001), Ray (2000b) and Tolen (2000) all bring into focus the hierarchies of class, caste, and gender, and my analysis in Jaipur resembles theirs in this respect. However, apart from short referrals to the age of the workers and to the existence of child workers (Tellis-Nayak 1983; Neetha 2001), previous studies have paid little attention to 'age' and 'life course' and how they relate to paid domestic work.

Within the literature on child labour, the existence of child domestic workers has been explored either on a general level (Blagbrough & Glynn 1999) or with a focus on a particular country, for example Haiti

47 Her investigation into domestic labour relations are part of a broader research which deals with upper-caste Hindus' tendencies of 'othering' of Muslims and *dalits* in Kanpur.

(Janak 2000); Ivory Coast (Jacquemin 2004; 2006); the Philippines (Camacho 1999); and Vietnam (Rubenson & Thi Van Anh & Hojer & Johansson 2004). In India, migration trajectories of young girls from Tamil Nadu to other states for paid domestic work have been discussed (Varrell 2002), but given their explicit focus on children, these studies have not looked at how age stratifies the overall sector of this work. Nor, with a notable exception of Shah's (2000) study on domestic child workers and employers in Nepal, have they analysed the work-life trajectories of child domestic workers and the role of work during their life-course, which to me seem important. My aim is to consider paid domestic work and children's work in combination, and to explore the place of child domestic workers in the overall workforce in Indian homes.

With the exception of Chigateri's (2007) study of organising among domestic workers in Bangalore, Neetha's (2003) study in Delhi, and Ray and Qayum's in Kolkata (2009), few studies explicitly focus on efforts to improve domestic workers' rights in India. This may reflect the fact that organising among domestic workers there is a relatively recent phenomenon by comparison with some other countries. I have interviewed some Indian organisations attempting to improve the situation of domestic workers, including domestic child workers, in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Jaipur. The insights of the representatives of such organisations helped me design my research project and provided valuable information on some current trends. Unlike Chigateri (2007), the focus of my study is not on these organisations and their activities. Rather, my aim is to analyse the perceptions employers and workers have of regulation and labour issues.

As we can see, the literature on domestic labour relations in India has so far focused on the largest cities: Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai, with the exception of Froystad's (2003) study in Kanpur in North India. By situating the study in Jaipur, I attempt to provide insights from a new location.

1.4 Research questions

My aim in this study is to explore paid domestic work and domestic labour relations in Jaipur through two main questions:

1. *How are labour relations between domestic workers and employers formed in Jaipur?*
2. *How are female domestic workers' work-life trajectories formed?*

Under (1), my aim is to look at how transitions from traditional service labour relations to market-oriented labour relations are manifested in paid domestic work in Jaipur. I discuss the diverse implications of such transformations for both sides of the labour relation. I explore the formation of domestic labour relations through the following sub-questions: What is the role of domestic workers in the reproduction of middle class domesticities and class distinction? How is paid domestic work organised, and how are labour relations in Jaipur negotiated? How do the social dimensions and hierarchies of class, caste, gender, age/life-course, ethnicity and religion manifest themselves in domestic labour relations, and how are these hierarchies reproduced?

I explore paid domestic work as 'vulnerable employment', aiming to understand the structural factors behind the diversity in worker vulnerability. I ask what factors make workers particularly vulnerable: for example, what is the impact of age on their situation? Here, I perceive vulnerability at work as a continuum with the least and the most vulnerable at the end of the spectrum. I also explore the various 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1983) the workers use when trying to resist exploitative practices. Finally, I examine the strategies used by employers to control the struggle over the labour process.

I embarked on this study with two assumptions about domestic labour relations in middle class homes. I correctly assumed that gender division of labour within them would have remained practically

intact despite the increased level of waged work among women. As we shall see, however, my other assumption, that this increased level would explain the increased use of domestic workers proved far too simple an explanation for a complex phenomenon.

Under (2), I wish to explore work in the context of the lives of female workers, young girls in particular. In every single interview with workers, work was portrayed through and framed within the broader lives of women. For them, poor working conditions are inseparable from other insecurities and vulnerabilities in their lives. Thus, to answer to my second main question, I explore the work-life trajectories of female domestic workers. Since my data comes mainly from working girls and women, I focus largely on female life courses, although I also consider some aspects of the male workers' life courses through the employers' accounts. I discuss how intergenerationality is manifested in various aspects of workers' lives, especially in implicit intergenerational contracts (Kabeer 2000, 465) and in the intergenerational transmission of work.

By acknowledging the agency of children in how they shape their work-life trajectories (see Kabeer and Mahmud 2009, 16) I wish to bring into focus hitherto under-explored experiences of girl domestic workers in India. I argue that when exploring how the structural forces influence girls' work-life courses, it is necessary to understand the diversity of working children's situations and the implications of these differences for their vulnerability.

My considerations in this study are primarily based on material obtained through observation and qualitative interviews in the city of Jaipur in 2005–2006, and 2007. Through a wealth of empirical data my study contributes to the discussion of paid domestic work in India by bringing to the analysis the perspectives of both workers and employers. My approach links in with the works of Tellis-Nayak (1983); Dickey (2000a); Tolen (2000); and Ray and Qayum (2009), who have analysed the nature of the relationship *between* workers and employers using data on both workers and employers. Reasons

for doing so will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Through contextualised analysis, this study is also an attempt to show how working women and girls strive to manage their daily lives and to shed light on the working girls' multifaceted experiences, often less visible in studies on paid domestic work and on children's work. More broadly, through this work I wish to participate in the discussions on gender and labour, on children's work and on hierarchies in contemporary India.

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

This book is structured in the following way. Chapter 2 discusses theoretical approaches and concepts, and Chapter 3 methodological considerations. The main chapters for analysing the data are Chapters 4 to 9. Chapter 4 explores the middle class homes as a scene for domestic labour relations, and discusses how paid domestic work is organised. Moreover, it looks at domestic workers as class markers, explores reasons for hiring workers and discusses the reluctant dependency of both employers and employees on each other. In Chapter 5, I explore the interplay between maternalism and contractualism, the way employers idealise past labour relations, and the rhetoric of family membership. I also look at class anxieties, as well as the mistrust and fears involved in domestic labour relations. Chapter 6 studies paid domestic work as vulnerable employment and aims at understanding the structural factors behind the diversity in worker vulnerability. Through exploring working conditions and terms of employment, I ask what factors make workers particularly vulnerable, for example, how the age or the live-in/live-out position influences their situation. Chapter 7 discusses how hierarchies of caste, gender, age, life-stage, ethnicity, and religion influence labour relations. Chapter 8 focuses on female domestic workers' work-life trajectories, and

discusses how work is transmitted from mothers to daughters, and what underlying reasons support such intergenerational practices. In Chapter 9, I look at workers' emerging resistances, and at how employers oppose or promote contractual labour relations. In addition, I explore the perceptions of both employers and workers as regards potential regulation. Finally, Chapter 10 provides conclusions for the study and discusses its wider implications.

2 THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND CONCEPTS

In this chapter, I introduce the main theoretical discussions and concepts that guide my work. In particular, I discuss conceptualisations of paid domestic work, class and other social hierarchies, vulnerability at work, children's work, female life-courses, and intergenerationality between working mothers and daughters. Like some inspirational studies on paid domestic work in India (see Dickey 2000a; Ray and Qayum 2009) and elsewhere (Romero 2002; Anderson 2000), I aim at a strong contextualisation of the work in everyday realities, practices and negotiations.

I approach paid domestic work by focusing on the *relations* between the two sides, the employers and workers. In doing this, I draw upon Marxist feminist approaches to domestic labour relation analysis, which take into account the context and historic specificity of each labour relation, and find it important to analyse through empirical data how class operates in the relations between the two sides. This approach considers an understanding of class structures and relations critical for social sciences, and intrinsically linked to the analysis of domestic labour relations. (Anderson 2002; Dickey 2000a; Romero 2002; Skeggs 1997, 2). However, to analyse class relations in India, I want to broaden the approach by understanding class relations as symbolic, not simply material (Bourdieu 1984), in line with some important recent contributions to class analysis in India (Fernandes 2006; Säävälä 2010).

The centrality of class became evident from the very first inter-

views with both employers and workers. This, backed by a broad reading of domestic labour relations, is one reason why I perceive domestic labour relations as class relations. However, rather than deciding *a priori* that class is the most important aspect, I approach class and other hierarchies through empirical findings. My approach is to take into account the intersecting social dimensions of gender, caste, age, ethnicity, and religion and analyse their impact and role in domestic labour relations.

Other important discussions of paid domestic work in India relate to its increasing commodification, especially through part-time work, and the simultaneous perseverance of traditional elements which are manifested in maternalism, a peculiar feature of domestic labour relations. Approaching paid domestic work as a form of vulnerable employment, I look at how structural factors such as age contribute to workers' vulnerability, positioning them in what I call a continuum of vulnerability.

Finally, this chapter takes us beyond two-sided labour relations to locate paid domestic work in the context of female workers' lives. The concepts of life course, work-life course and intergenerational transmission of work allow an understanding of how central parameters of female workers' lives, such as marriage, reproduction, or dowry, influence their labour market participation.

2.1 Studying hierarchies in paid domestic work

Domestic labour relations as class relations

The study of paid domestic work has been a favourite of Marxist feminists. Marxist feminism provides helpful insights for investigating paid domestic work "as an occupation located within the class structure of a particular historical situation... as part of the societal reproduction system" (Romero 2002, 59–60). This approach to do-

mestic labour relationships emphasises that: 1) race and gender oppression is not intrinsic to the occupation; 2) the occupation is part of capitalism; 3) domestic work involves physical and ideological reproduction; 4) reproductive labour is devalued because of social divisions of labour; and 5) housewives and domestic workers are both part of the reserve army of the unemployed and thus serve a vital function in the capitalist economy (ibid).

Domestic service or paid domestic work appears “as a capitalist relationship in which race, class, and gender inequalities are part and parcel of the capitalist system of production, not simply residues of slavery or feudalism” (Romero 2002, 59). Thus, structural and market-based imperatives tend to supersede and alter other features of shared or common identification among women (Bakan & Stasilius 1995, 332).⁴⁸ The presence of domestic workers releases wealthier, educated women from the double burden of wage work and household work, also referred to as the ‘second shift’ (Chang 2006, 41). Studies in diverse countries such as the US (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 9) or India (Palriwala & Neetha, 2009, 22–23) show little difference in male participation in household work. As Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002, 9) argue: “Strictly speaking, the presence of immigrant nannies does not enable affluent women to enter the workforce; it enables affluent men to continue avoiding the second shift.” Thus, new inequalities between women from different classes are established while male privileges within the home remain virtually intact (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 23; Fernandes 2006; Shah 2000, 102). As a result, the home becomes one of the sites of class struggle, rendering domestic labour relations essentially conflictual (Romero 2002, 74; Dickey 2000a, 32).

While Romero (2002, 59–60) recognises the differences in the

48 Paid domestic work challenges notions of “sisterhood” as privileged women of one class use the labour of another woman to escape aspects of sexism (Romero 2002), and poses philosophical and practical challenges to feminism and political theory, and to women’s organisations (Anderson 2000).

labour process between domestic work and other settings, she argues that domestic workers are engaged in battles similar to those of other employees, essentially a struggle between employers and workers over working hours, work load, and wages. Since the work often takes place in the informal sector, employers can be perceived as consumers in an essentially unregulated capitalist market, seeking the most work for the lowest wage (Romero, 2002, 11). The household unit is subject to the imperative of class relations comparable in many respects to any workplace. Moreover, given that domestic work takes place within the home, it becomes part of the societal reproduction system and, thus, carries both superstructural and basic economic functions (Romero 2002, 60).⁴⁹ Such an approach has been perceived useful since it “enables us to focus on particular forms of waged domestic labour, each with particular sets of social relations” (Gregson and Lowe 1994, 72).

The Marxist theory in general has been heavily criticised for its lack of context specificity and lack of gender sensitivity, and for its assumption of a quintessential (male) worker (see Bonney 2007, 145; Gregson & Lowe 1994, 72; Rose 1997). The feminist Marxist approach complemented traditional Marxism by making gender central to the analysis of class relations. But it has also been criticised for unsuccessful transformation of the Marxist agenda, and for having similar problems of structuralism, overemphasis of economic structures, and for determinism (Kantola 2007, 51). While it aimed at engendering the analysis, it still seemed to consider gender analysis as subordinate to capital analysis (*ibid.*).

It has been argued that those feminist Marxist-oriented studies which focus on paid domestic work are an exception within the Fem-

49 Vuorela (1987, 202) refers to the tendency of capitalism to change human reproduction relations to serve its own purposes by seeking the cheapest possible reproduction of the commodity labour-power, thus transforming domestic labour and subsistence production into functions of capitalist production. Furthermore, capitalism tends to penetrate the reproductive process, outside its own sphere, by subsuming it into capitalist relations as well.

inist Marxist tradition because of their rigorous contextualisation, time-specificity and gender sensitivity (Beechey and Perkins 1987). Others, however, have criticised these studies for their unsuccessful attempt to explain why the contemporary transformation from unwaged to waged domestic labour has occurred; and for failing to explain the heavily gendered nature of the occupation (Gregson and Lowe 1994, 72). Another criticism is that while the (earlier) studies managed to explain the historical decline of domestic service in the Western countries by the expansion of productive forces and the proletarianisation of women, they did not manage to explain the resurgence of paid domestic work in these countries (Gregson and Lowe 1994, 72).

Two points arise: first, more recent studies (see Bakan and Stalilius 1995; Anderson 2000; Romero 2002) have, in my understanding, provided a rich, gendered, and contextualised analysis of domestic labour relations, and avoided the idea of an occupation which totally disappeared and then re-emerged. Second, the question of the historic disappearance and re-emergence is irrelevant in most countries of the South, where domestic service has never disappeared (Ray and Qayum 2009). Thus, given the different trajectory of domestic work in India, analysis of domestic work in India enriches the general analysis of domestic work.

Whilst the Feminist Marxist approach is in many ways apt for analysing domestic labour relations in India, I find it necessary to complement it with cultural and symbolic elements of class formation, drawing from both Weberian and Bourdieuan tradition. The class analysis, Liechty (2003, 12) argues, “needs to unite a Weberian sensitivity to the powerful role of culture in social life with a Marxian commitment to locate different forms of cultural practice in the context of unequal distributions of power and resource in society”. For Weberians, class is about relations and grounded in economic exchange relations and cultural processes (Wright 1997, 59; Liechty 1997). While a Marxist approach has been viewed as best suited for

an abstract macro-level analysis, Wright (1997, 44–45) suggests, from a Weberian standpoint, that class analysis needs to be located in the exploration of ways in which the social relations of production “are embodied in specific jobs, since jobs are the essential ‘empty places’ filled by individuals within the system of production”. Similarly, labour process theoreticians have emphasised that workers’ interests and ideologies emerge in work places, not merely as an outcome of general class reproduction or socialisation (Julkunen 2008, 26). Liechty (1997, 13), who analysed middle class construction in Nepal, finds important Weber’s insistence that class position (economic power) is distinct from social status (honour or prestige), albeit often tied to it, and the notion that social status is not determined by class alone.

To explain the ways in which both class and social status is reproduced in India, it is helpful to look at Bourdieu’s (1984) class conceptualisations, which build upon Weberian tradition. Like several other studies on class relations in India (see Derné 2008; Dickey 2000a, 2002; Fernandes 2006; Säävälä 2010), I find useful Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of class as a result of economic, cultural and symbolic capital, and about a struggle in these fields. While the fundamental basis of class lies in economic power, the symbolic features are not derivative of economics but nevertheless, play a fundamental role in defining a person’s class (Dickey 2002, 216–217). Thus, by ‘class’, I refer to a set of cultural practices, symbolic and cultural capital and consumption patterns combined with a certain level of wealth and income (Bourdieu 1984).

Class is reproduced through a range of classificatory practices (Bourdieu 1984, 477–479) that are developed as individuals and social groups convert different forms of capital to preserve their relative social standing and capacity for upward mobility. Such practices are not merely individualised or subjective forms of behaviour, but rather the outcome of a dynamic set of processes that are both symbolic and material, and shaped both by longer historical processes and the

temporality of the everyday. In the Indian context, caste has a central role in these symbolic processes, and it intertwines with class in the everyday practices. As Liechty (2003, 8) suggests, rather than taking 'class' for granted as a natural, universal category, I attempt to explain class in domestic labour relations in Jaipur by describing the experience of it in everyday life.⁵⁰

Related to the analysis of class formation, the concept of 'exploitation' is routinely used in labour studies as a process in which employers take advantage of workers' labour power. Most studies are empirical descriptions of 'labour exploitation' and 'exploitative labour relations', leaving the term undefined. (See, e.g., Grant 2008; Holm 2008; Miraftab 1996; Rollins 1985). At its simplest, and using Marxist terms, 'exploitation' refers to the appropriation of surplus through workers' labour power. It is "a process which generates both deprivation and powerlessness, and by virtue of appropriating the surplus, exploiters are able both to obtain much higher levels of economic welfare and to have much higher levels of economic power" (Wright 1997, 187). For the exploited, economic welfare is depressed by virtue of having surplus appropriated from them, and economic power drastically curtailed by their being excluded from control over the allocation of the surplus (*ibid*). Studies on female workers in Asia have referred to exploitation as part of a capitalist system of production that takes advantage of (women's) labour, which is cheap because it is abundant and because the work is defined as a woman's household task (Prügl 1996, 43–44). However, rather than taking 'exploitation' as a self-evident feature of domestic labour relations, one needs to contextualise the different forms of labour extraction, and to situate exploitation within the complex and often contradictory interplay between racialised, economic, and gendered processes that have historically shaped it, and continue to do so (Brace and O'Connell Davidson 2000, 1047).

50 See Skeggs (1997) for the notion of 'living class' in her study on working class women in the UK.

Middle class reproduction in India

While the focus of this study is the relationship between employers and domestic workers, the locus of the economic and symbolic class struggles between them is the middle class home, predominantly of high-caste, Hindu families. Thus, a brief exploration into ‘middle class’ as a distinct category in Indian society is due here. Research on the Indian middle class was long focused on the colonial period (Fernandes, 2006, xvii, Deshpande 2003, 127–128), but recently a number of studies have explored the contemporary middle class domesticities (Dickey 2002; Donner 2008; Säävälä 2010). The middle class, particularly in ex-colonial nations, has been recognised as crucially important in, for example, nation building and maintenance of ideologies and moral standards (Chatterjee, 1993, 35–36; Deshpande, 2003, 127–128).

Since most middle class households in India today employ domestic workers, the size of the employing class correlates with the size of the domestic labour force. In the early 1990s, the size of the middle class was assessed at around 250 to 300 millions, or 30 % of the Indian population, but these figures have been considered exaggerations related to the strong belief in the economic growth of the time (see Fernandes 2006; Deshpande 2003, 134). More recently, efforts to develop ways to measure the size of the middle class on the basis of consumption patterns or the annual income of households have been developed (Fernandes, 2006, 31–34).⁵¹

Liechty (2003, 64) points out that the term middle class is a concept notoriously difficult to “pin down” in objective terms. Since estimates vary considerably with the criteria used, I agree with Säävälä (2010, 9) that “it does not make that much difference if this arbitrary

51 The Indian Censuses provide astonishingly detailed information about the household items and vehicles, the type of latrines and drainages etc. on a state level, indicating the consumption-related living standards of the households. (<http://www.censusindia.net/>)

figure is 150 million or 300 million”.⁵² However, as she points out, in India the middle class population seems to be growing clearly faster than the overall population (*ibid*, 10). Fernandes (2006, xviii) notes that while the boundaries of this social group are both fluid and political in nature, what is new to the Indian middle class is a distinctive social and political identity that represents and lays claim to the benefits of liberalisation. At the heart of this social group’s construct rests the assumption that lower middle class and upwardly mobile working class can potentially join it (*ibid*).

Within these broad parameters, however, one necessarily has to take into account how internal differences based on caste, region, religion and language shape the middle class (Fernandes 2006, xxxiii; Derné 2008, 18; Deshpande 2002, 135; Säävälä 2010). For example, while Fernandes (2006, x) describes the ‘new middle class’ in Mumbai as English-speaking, the use of English in Jaipur is less common among its middle classes than in the larger cities. It may not be very helpful to speak about the middle class as a single entity (Deshpande 2002; Säävälä 2010), and I also talk about middle classes in plural when explicitly referring to the diversity of this group.⁵³

Certain everyday classificatory practices are common to middle class(es). One perceived prerequisite for belonging to the middle class can be location of residence, e.g. living in the correct neighbourhood (Säävälä 2003, 235–237).⁵⁴ Another relates to how people move from one place to another: access to vehicles is a sign of economic

52 The National Council of Applied Economic Research in 2005 estimated the size of the middle class and aspiring middle class population at around 35 % of all households, but only 6 % as ‘middle class proper’ (Säävälä 2010, 9).

53 Chatterjee (1993, 74) has argued that despite the recognition of differences the concept of ‘middle class’ usually refers to Hindu middle class, and to an overwhelmingly “Hindu” middle class culture”, but in most recent studies I see more recognition of plurality also in this respect.

54 In general, different classes live in different areas, the poorer neighbourhoods often pocketed inbetween wealthier areas with enormous income differences between neighbouring areas. Very wealthy households with assets worth 200,000 US dollars may have near-neighbours with assets worth six dollars (Harriss-White and Goopu 2000, 91).

status and when middle class and rich people go out, they usually do it by motor vehicle (Froystad 2005, 113). If the inhabitants of the Jaipur middle class neighbourhoods walked outside, it was only somewhere in the immediate vicinity, or to visit a specific place within the neighbourhood such as the community park or the temple. They commonly travelled by car even to the nearest cornershop.⁵⁵ If there is no driver in the house, married women drive a car, albeit seldom, or hire a taxi or a motor rickshaw, and young unmarried women also drive scooters. Unmarried and married men drive cars, motorcycles or scooters, but I never saw any middle class person ride a bicycle.

Furthermore, in India use of domestic workers is usually essential for classification as 'middle class', whether it is lower, upper or the wealthiest echelon (see Ray and Qayum 2009), facilitating their 'status and lifestyle reproduction' (Anderson 2002, 106).

Intersectional hierarchies in the Indian labour markets

So far, we have discussed domestic labour relations as loci of class struggle and of class and status reproduction. To these analytical departure points need to be added other social dimensions and internal hierarchies which characterise paid domestic work.

The literature on paid domestic work has emphasised gender as a central hierarchical category and major organising principle (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2000; Repak 2006, Rollins 1985; Romero 2002; Ray 2000b; Raghuram 1999). It has also been shown that paid domestic work may transform gender systems through an improvement in the position of migrant women because of their status as income providers in the home country (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Keezhangette 2004). Parreñas (2006, 51), on the other hand, showed how Filipina domestic workers may depart from one system of gender stratification in the Philippines only to enter another one in the richer countries.

⁵⁵ According to the Census (2001), only 5 % of household in urban Rajasthan own a car whereas a sizeable 34 % own a scooter, motor cycle or moped.

Gender is one important dimension also in my analysis and I have aimed to understand and expose “the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organisation of most societies” (Scott 1988, 27). Ray (2000b, 692) has noted that the ideologies and practices of gender, caste, and religion all shape the contours of the workplace and the trajectory of class identities. I take it as a point of departure that the workplace is one important site where gender relations and relations of hierarchy and authority are produced, involving both men and women (de Neve 2004, 67).

Understanding how gender operates in domestic labour relations alone, however, is not enough, as evident from Bridget Anderson’s (2006, 237) question: “How is it that some women exploit others within a general theory of care as women’s work?” While gender may account for many oppressive aspects of domestic labour relations, it does not account for all aspects (Romero 2002).

To proceed, the concept of ‘intersectionality’, first coined by Kimberley Crenshaw (1989) in the context of the black feminist movement in the US, helps to capture the complexity of different hierarchies and to facilitate their analysis (Brah & Phoenix 2004, 75; Harding and Norberg 2005, 2011).⁵⁶ Intersectionality refers to different hierarchical dimensions such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity which all exist in relation to each other. My aim is to recognise the dimensions of social inequality and analyse their interrelationships through the empirical reality of employer-employee relations and everyday employment practices.⁵⁷

Regarding the labour markets in India, it is important to note that while work in the informal sector is largely unregulated, it is far from

56 See Brah & Phoenix (2004, 75) for a discussion on the conceptualisations of intersectionality.

57 Tenhunen (2010, 43) notes that rather than trying to do away with other identities (by emphasising one particular identity), improvements in any one such attribute can contribute to the others by leading to a reinterpretation of all the interconnected attributes that build up one’s status.

unstructured. It is organised through a kind of matrix based on social institutions or hierarchies such as class, caste and gender (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 90), and the asymmetries based on such hierarchies continue to operate in the labour markets in multiple ways (Banerjee & Raju 2009, 122). Capitalism in India is not dissolving the matrix of social institutions but reconfiguring them slowly, unevenly and in diverse ways (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 90). For instance, caste compartmentalises labour markets, stratifies salaries and has an impact on gendered division of labour (ibid, 99).⁵⁸ Evidently, the hierarchies between employers and workers are linked with wider processes of social differentiation in society (Tolen 2000, 64), and reflect them.

Recent discussions about whether domestic labour relations in India are essentially about class or caste hierarchies relate to broader debates on how caste and class interrelate, and on whether class or caste should be seen as a more decisive hierarchy (Béteille 1997; Dickey 2002; Gupta 2000; Tenhunen 2010). Noting that there has been a relative silence about class in the analysis of India, Dickey (2002, 216) argues that class is one of the most salient idioms of identity in contemporary India. In her view domestic labour relations are essentially class relations (Dickey 2000a; 2000b), a position shared by Ray and Qayum (2009) and Tolen (2000). Dickey (2000a, 32) argues that “what makes class a distinct form of hierarchy, not merely a variation of caste, is its fundamental basis in economic power, combined with the status markers that financial resources can produce (education, honour and consumption, for example) which themselves become sources of economic power”. She perceives domestic service as an arena in which class is reproduced and challenged on a daily and intimate basis, and where the workers and employers perceive them-

58 The Governmental system of positive discrimination towards Scheduled Castes and Tribes has had paradoxical consequences: these reservations have entrenched the importance of caste as an institution, and have reinforced the caste-based segmentation, as well as making the reserved castes into an interest group instead of dissolving caste differences (Harriss-White & Gooptu 2000, 99).

selves to be on different sides of class lines.

Others, while not denying the essentiality of class, point to the persistent nature of the caste in domestic labour relations (Froystad 2003, 2005) and to the complex manifestations of caste in organising the sector (Ray and Qayum 2009, 75). According to Sanskrit texts, the Indian caste system traditionally divides people into four main castes or *varnas* – according to a *varna* ordering (from highest to lowest): *brahmins*; *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*, and *shudras* (Béteille 1997; Dumont 1980; Gupta 2000), and to a fifth category of the so called untouchables, considered polluted because of occupations related to polluted substances (Thapar, 2002, 63). In practice, the main caste categories are divided into numerous sub-castes, and there is considerable regional diversity in the system (Béteille 1997; Dumont 1980; Gupta 2000).⁵⁹ For the fifth group, four different terms are used: Untouchables, Scheduled Castes (the SCs), Harijans, and *dalits* (Deliège 1997, 65). The Scheduled Castes is an administrative term used in Indian legislation, also commonly used by the employers I met in Jaipur.⁶⁰ The term *dalit* is preferred by *dalit* activists and particularly in Western India, and it has increasingly replaced other terms in academic and political contexts (Perez 2006, 91). For these reasons I also use that term, except when explicitly referring to the employer speech on SCs or to an administrative context.

Significant improvements in the position of *dalits* have taken place, among them the establishment of a quota system for Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes in the educational and administrative system⁶¹; inclusion of *dalit* demands in the political agenda;

59 See Chatterjee (1993, 179–181) for an extensive analysis of the debate on whether the essence of caste system is in a continuous hierarchy along which castes are ordered in terms of relative purity and pollutions as Dumont (1980) claimed, or whether the essence of caste lies in the differentiation into separate discrete castes (or *jātis*), as Gupta (1984) argued.

60 The word literally means 'ground down' (*dal na*), also translated as oppressed (Perez 2006, 91).

61 In accordance with their proportion of the population, approximately 23 % of jobs and educational opportunities are reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the

and the rise of *dalits* as a political force (Gupta 2000, 100; Kothari 1997, 446; Perez 2006, 91).⁶² These and other transformations notwithstanding, the persistence of the 'caste' system characterises Indian society. One central debate has been on whether caste is an inherent characteristic of Indian society or whether it is an ideological product of the specific precapitalist social formations in Indian history (Chatterjee 1993, 173). The latter position implies that the caste should disappear alongside such pre-capitalist formations, but there is growing evidence that neither the spread of capitalist economic activities nor modern education is bringing an end to caste practices (ibid).

In addition to class, gender and caste, other hierarchies that my empirical data in Jaipur brought into focus were ethnicity and religion, as well as age and life-stage. Studies on transnational domestic work have shown that employers have a tendency to rank workers into a hierarchical order and to reproduce stereotypes on the basis of nationality or race (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 55–57; Anderson 2000; Jureidini 2004, Bakan & Stasiulis 1995). In the South Asian context, several studies mention that ethnicity is one way to stratify domestic work (Gamburd 2000, 187; Shah 2000, 110; Tolen 2000, 66), but they have not offered empirical descriptions of such stratification. My data highlights how ethnicity and religion stratify the sector, and form one basis for the employers' hierarchical ordering of the workers.

Although age is in many situations a constitutive and central dimension, it is frequently missing from studies on intersecting hierarchies (Thorne 2004, 404–405), including literature on paid domestic

Scheduled Tribes (Gupta 2000, 100).

62 In 2007, a *dalit* woman Mayawati Das was appointed Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. In fact, she had already held the post three times for short periods. In spite of corruption allegations, she is a strong symbol for the *dalit* movement. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayawati> accessed 20.10.2010). In 2009, Meira Kumar, another *dalit* woman, was elected the first female Speaker of the Indian Parliament, also an important step for the *dalits*. http://indiatoday.intoday.in/election2009/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&issueid=&id=44903§ionid=90&Itemid, Accessed on 9.6.2009

work. While previous studies on India have provided rich analysis on how paid domestic work is organised on class, gender, and caste lines, age and life stage as organising tools in the market and their influence on employer preferences have received little attention. In addition to analysing how workers' age and life stage influence the organisation of the sector, I also explore how different stages of workers' lives and their labour market participation influence one another.

2.2 Other key concepts for the study of paid domestic work

Commodification of care

The literature on domestic work refers to 'commodification of care', a global capitalist shift in which the informal and unpaid assistance and caregiving of family and friends (typically women) becomes disaggregated into specific tasks and jobs, performed in the market for wages. (Zimmerman et al. 2006, 12; Anderson 2002).⁶³ In such a process, tasks are broken into discrete functions, a highly differentiated and impersonal division of labour prevails, and care becomes specialised and technical rather than holistic and embedded in human relationships (Zimmermann et al. 2006, 20–21). It has been argued that such a process has profound implications for the level of control that careworkers have over themselves, their bodies, and their work (ibid, 12).

The idea of commodification of domestic work captures the Indian trends of increasing part-time work and fragmentation of the

63 Mies et al. (1988 quoted in Zimmermann et al. 2006, 106) talk about housewifisation of paid work. For them, paid work is becoming increasingly feminised, with new jobs drawing more on women's than men's labour. At the same time, work is increasingly organised like women's housework, with jobs that require flexible schedules and which are occupationally segregated. Additionally, many such jobs, like market vending, factory outwork, or childcare, are in the informal sector of the global economy, which is rapidly expanding but, like housework, is not regulated by labour legislation.

work. However, there is a major difference between India and the countries of the West: in India the use of (paid) domestic workers (servants) has never ceased, and thus the shift is not so much from unpaid to paid work, but rather from patron-client-like service relations to market-based relations. Thus, in the Indian context, the question of commodification of domestic work has to be viewed in parallel with the changes in the traditional *jajmani* service relationships between high-caste and low-caste persons; i.e. the food-producing family and the families that supplied them with goods and services (Mandelbaum 1970, 163–164). Traditionally, each village in rural India had its own network of *jajmani* affiliates, establishing a web of relationships among villagers across the land (ibid, 171–172). Such relationships⁶⁴ have been seen as largely replaced by market relationships (Harriss-White 2001, 94; Mandelbaum 1970, 174–174; Tenhunen 2010, 21). It has also been shown that the *jajmani* system as a caste-based gift exchange system never existed as a single economic system, but rather alongside a market economy (Commander 1983; Tenhunen 2008, 1037).⁶⁵

Even though *jajmani* ties have largely disappeared, the dependency of landless labourers on the land-owners continues in rural areas, and the underlying regular patterns of domination and coercion may be reinforced through the rural-urban labour migration (Soni 2006, 316).⁶⁶ The feudal-like patronage may return in the form of

64 Gupta (2000,131) argues that *jajmani* relations never existed in the Hindu religious order in the systematic way they have been said to exist, but rather as a sporadic empirical reality,

65 While *jajmani* relations were the backbone of organization of services in rural India from pre to post-colonial era, Mandelbaum (1970, 162) notes that cash-based transactions were at the same time integral elements of the village economy, and certain traditional occupations were on a contractual rather than a *jajmani* basis.

66 The urban areas of Delhi and its rural hinterlands have been seen as an extension of colonial-style asymmetrical power relations between the expansionist urban elite and the subjugated hinterland, reinforced by the inherited colonial structure of the state administration and enabled by middlemen from the rural elites (Soni 2006, 316).

debt bondage and labour attachment (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2001, 95). Sometimes, the debt ties between landless labourers and landowners lead to non-contractual obligations such as the provision of a male labourers' wife or children as labour force (ibid). There is little information on the existence of rural-urban ties of subjugation within domestic service, but Shah (2000, 94–95) has shown that in Nepal much of the recruitment of servants continues to be done through informal networks of kinship and patron-client ties. These ties link urban areas to the rural hinterland, with the aid of intermediaries who have active connections to both areas.

Maternalism

While labour relations can be seen as increasingly commodified, capitalist relations of selling and buying labour, Anderson (2001, 31) reminds us that domestic labour relationships are peculiar in not being straightforwardly contractual. I approach domestic labour relations as employer-employee relations, but I also take note of the perhaps unique patterns which occur in this sector. Domestic labour relations have a tendency to retain certain non-market features such as personalised relations and maternal benevolence, sometimes purposefully maintained by one or both parties in the relationship as shown both in India (Dickey 2000a, 50–51; Ray and Qayum 2009, 6–7) and in other contexts (see, e.g., Romero 2002, 155; Rollins 1985).

Maternalism is a central phenomenon in the framing of relations with workers by their employers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Rollins 1985; Romero 2002). Maternalism originates from paternalism, which Romero (2002, 79) conceptualises as:

Paternalism is at root a familial relation, and masters expected servants to demonstrate filial loyalty and obedience in return for protection and guidance.

Given that domestic labour relations are in most cases relations between women, maternalism has largely replaced the term paternalism

in the study of domestic work, while they are at times used interchangeably. Romero (2002, 138–139) argues that benevolent maternalism is a form of emotional labour which requires workers to manipulate their feelings in order to fulfill the psychological needs of the employers. Rollins (1985, 155–157) emphasises the exploitation embedded in domestic labour relations in which the typical employers extract more than labour from workers.

What makes domestic service as an occupation more profoundly exploitative than other comparable occupations grows out of the precise element that makes it unique: the personal relationship between employer and employee. What might appear to be the basis of a more humane, less alienating work arrangement allows for a level of psychological exploitation unknown in other occupations. (Rollins 1985, 156)

For Rollins, maternalism and deference are the main dynamics through which psychological exploitation takes place. She (1985, 189) talks about maternalistic rituals, such as giving gifts and borrowing money, which employers use to reinforce the inequality in the relationship. Numerous studies have shown the employers' persistent use of the notion "part of the family", which serves to obscure the fact that the relationship is essentially one of employment (Andresson 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009; Romero 2002; Rotkirch 2008; Shah 2000). Gregson & Lowe (1994, 190) talk about false kinship relations in which both sides of the employment relation are involved. Rollins (1985, 186-189) argues that the friendly relation between the employer and the worker serves to confirm the benevolence of the employers and the childlike inferiority of the worker.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, 207), in turn, argues that one must distinguish between maternalism and 'personalism'. For her, maternalism is a one-way relationship, which is defined primarily by the employers' gestures of charity, unsolicited advice, assistance, and gifts. To such gestures, the workers are obligated to respond with extra hours

of service, personal loyalty, and job commitment. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, 208) locates maternalism in the reproduction of class inequality whereas she perceives personalism as a two-way relationship:

Maternalism underlines the deep class inequalities between employers and employees. More problematically, because employer maternalism positions the employee as needy, deficient, and childlike, it does not allow the employee any dignity and respect. Personalism, by contrast, is a two-way relationship, albeit still asymmetrical. It involves the employer's recognition of the employee as a particular person – the recognition and *consideración*⁶⁷ necessary for dignity and respect to be realized. In the absence of fair wage, reasonable hours, and job autonomy, personalism alone is not enough to upgrade domestic work; but conversely, its absence virtually ensures that the job will be experienced as degrading.

Previous research also notes how the elements of personalism and maternalism make domestic labour relations particularly complex. Another characteristic which distinguishes domestic work from other occupations is its *locus* in the private home, and the intimacy of a home as a work place (Dickey 2000b; Rollins 1985; Romero 2002). Bringing together people from very different backgrounds in intimate and highly personalised interactions in the domestic sphere serves to further obfuscate the relations as not straightforwardly employer-employee (Moors 2003, 389; Anderson 2006, 234–235).

In India, employers let people who they would normally despise, into the most private area of their lives – their home (Dickey 2000a). Domestic work in the private sphere is ambiguous and two-edged, as 'home' can be considered both a protective space and a dangerous working place, with a risk of physical, verbal and sexual abuse, and arbitrary changes in working conditions (Lutz 2004, 94). Essentially, the challenge of home as a working site increases the tendency not to

67 Italics in the original text.

recognise domestic work as real employment but as something women “naturally” do (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 9; Romero 2002).

Romero (2002) explains this by the dichotomous separation between work and family, where housework does not fit the definitions of work as productive labour since it does not produce products which can be exchanged in the capitalist marketplace. The employers are ubiquitously reluctant to perceive themselves as employers, not least because of the implications this would have for their responsibility towards the workers (Romero 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). But workers may be equally reluctant to embrace domestic work as employment given the stigma that the workers themselves associate with it (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 9).

Vulnerability at work

Indian labour markets are generally characterised by the existence of a massive informal sector, the unskilled nature of much manual work, the absolute poverty of most workers, and the fact that even though work is mainly unregulated by the state it is not unstructured (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 90). All these characteristics prevail in paid domestic work. Out of over 390 million workers, only 7 to 8 % of the total labour force, 4 % of the total female labour force and 10 % of the total male labour are in the organised or formal sector (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 89; Hensman 2000, 209; Bhan 2001, 18).⁶⁸ Despite efforts to define informal and formal sectors in India, many different definitions prevail (Naik 2009, 1; Hensman 2000, 257). ‘Informal’, ‘unregulated’ and ‘unorganised’; as well as ‘formal’ and ‘organised’ have been used interchangeably. This is somewhat problematic since there are unorganised workers both in unregulated and regulated jobs; only half the ‘formal’ workers are unionised (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 89). Besides, there are organised workers

68 According to the Census (2001) 91 % of workers among the so called slum population belong to the Census category of ‘Other workers’ and 5 % to the ‘Household Industry workers’, also in the informal sector.

also within informal sectors. Cognisant of the definitional problems, I find Hensman's (2000, 257) definition of informal workers as "all workers, both urban and rural, who are not covered by basic labour legislation, including informal workers in large-scale production" sufficiently descriptive for my purposes. By contrast to them, 'organised' or 'formal' sector workers receive regular wages, are in registered firms, and have access to the state social security system and its framework of labour law' (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 89).⁶⁹

One conceptualisation to understand the nature of paid domestic work in India would be to explore the term 'decent work' which the International Labour Organisation (1999, 15) formulates as "productive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity, in which rights are protected and adequate remuneration and social coverage are provided."⁷⁰ The main elements considered necessary for achieving decent work are: the promotion of labour rights, the promotion of employment, social protection for vulnerable situations, and the promotion of social dialogues (ibid). However, the concept of 'decent work' does not provide an adequate framework for domestic work in India where lack of regulation makes the labour relations insecure as a point of departure, and workers vulnerable. The workers lack basic legal rights such as the right to time off, the right to a minimum wage and the right to regulation of working hours. One must note here, though, that the implementation of even existing labour laws in regulated sectors in India is notoriously weak (Palriwala and Neetha, 2009, 15).

69 Urban workers have also been categorised as self-employed, regular salaried and casual labour, of which those in casual labour have the lowest bargaining power, and among them, women less bargaining power than men (Banerjee and Raju 2009, 117–118). In this grouping, domestic workers can be seen broadly as regular salaried workers, however, bearing in mind the diversity among them, and the fact that not all domestic workers receive regular, or any, salaries.

70 The ILO Director General's Report to the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference in 1999 appears the first official establishment of the term within the ILO (http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/publ/sala/dec_work/ii.htm).

For these reasons, I find the concept of 'vulnerability' suitable. The structural vulnerability of domestic workers around the world has been well documented. In a synthesis of their conditions, Moors (2003, 390) notes that employers' ways of dealing with domestic workers range from harsh domination to more subtle forms of discipline, and various forms may coexist and compete. In transnational contexts, women's immigration status and whether or not they live with their employers have a major impact with undocumented live-in domestic workers in a particularly vulnerable position (Moors 2003, 389). Romero (2002, 8) explains:

Paid domestic labour is not only structured around gender but also is stratified by race and citizenship status, relegating the most vulnerable workers to the least favourable working conditions and placing the most privileged workers in the best positions (Romero, 2002, 8).

Globally, domestic workers have been perceived as particularly vulnerable since the profession differs from other occupations because of its individualised relationships, its unorganised labour force, the fact that it is based on more personal relationships, and because work is geographically scattered amongst private homes. (Neetha 2003, 125; Rollins 1985; Zimmerman et al. 2006, 104).

But how should vulnerability be defined? Since most studies on domestic work in India have not explicitly focused on the question of workers' vulnerability,⁷¹ I lean on a broader reading of labour studies for my conceptualisation of it. At the same time, I agree that workers' lives should be understood within specific historical, cultural and social contexts (see Mohanty 1984; Tenhunen 1997, 5), and in relation to other social constructs such as gendered ideologies (Beechey and Perkins 1987, 9).

71 As a notable exception Neetha (2003) makes an effort to conceptualise the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers in Delhi.

In recent years labour researchers as well as labour organisations, particularly in Europe or North America, have attempted to define worker vulnerability and vulnerability at work (cf. Bolton 2007; Pollert and Charlwood 2009; Saunders 2003). It has been suggested that labour market vulnerability includes issues such as lack of appropriate employment legislation, difficulties in accessing labour rights even on legislated work situations, lack of access to non-statutory benefits, lack of pension schemes, very low salaries, and lack of stable employment (Saunders 2003, 7–8). In addition, Bolton (2007) argues that vulnerability should be seen in the light of the core issues of pay, equity, security and dignity, and how they impact upon the lives of workers.⁷²

The British Trade Union Congress defines vulnerable employment as “precarious work that places people at risk of continuing poverty and injustice resulting from an imbalance of power in the employer-worker relationship” (Pollert & Charlwood 2009, 345). However, it is argued that when vulnerability is defined in narrow terms, the tendency is to look only at symptoms and characteristics associated with ‘risks’ of vulnerability, bypassing the underlying causes of the risks (ibid). Such an approach may narrow vulnerability to a condition which pertains only after exploitation has already taken place. This would imply that to be vulnerable a worker is already a victim of abuse, and unlimited managerial power is only problematic if it amounts to exploitation.

Instead, Pollert & Charlwood (354), who studied the unorganised workers in the United Kingdom, suggest that a definition of vulnerability should be based on a diagnosis of the power imbalance inherent in the employment relationship, which means that “the basis of vulnerability is in the fundamental asymmetry of the capitalist employment relationship between the individual worker and the employer”.

⁷² Recently, the discussion on vulnerability in labour studies has been extended to the concept of *dignity* (Bolton 2007; Sayer 2000b), suggesting that dignity should be looked at from two different dimensions: dignity *in* and *at* work.

Moreover, they (ibid, 344) note that because of the differences among them, workers are not equally vulnerable. The chief differentiator is labour market power which those lacking financially and socially rewarded skills in poor quality jobs do not possess. Hence, they are low paid, one indicator of vulnerability.⁷³ There is a 'spectrum of vulnerability', migrant workers without legal immigration and employee status and thus outside employment law protection being among the most vulnerable (ibid, 344–345). In addition, workers who move between unpaid work (mainly within home and family) and paid employment are particularly vulnerable because they are more likely to have 'non-standard' jobs, which lack official employment contracts and hence leave them outside employment protection (ibid).

What becomes clear from previous studies on paid domestic work is that one must take into account the specificity of each situation, as well as hierarchical dimensions of gender, race, citizenship status and so on (see also Bakan and Stasiulis 1995, 304). In Europe, the domestic workers' immigration status and whether or not they live with their employers have a major impact, and undocumented live-in domestic workers are in a particularly vulnerable position (Anderson 2000).

Critics argue that the rather uncritical approach of labour researchers and organisations to vulnerability discourse may do little more than to victimise the "vulnerable", instead of empowering them (Ho 2008 10–11; Åsman 2008, 18–21). Ho (2008, 11), for example, argues that the discourse on gendered vulnerability is blatantly applied to women in the sex industry in Asia.⁷⁴ In Nepal, the discourse on gendered vulnerability within the anti-trafficking programmes

73 However, what is considered as low pay varies depending on the context. In their study in the UK, Pollert and Charlwood (344) take low pay as half of UK employees earning below median hourly earnings.

74 In Ho's (2008, 11) view, the concept and narrative of vulnerability best serves to create social/sexual panic through the increasingly sensationalised media in Asia, as it portrays helpless and vulnerable subjects who easily fall prey to depraved criminals.

portrays rural women as a homogenous, powerless and victimised group, repeatedly defined as poor, illiterate, uneducated, ignorant and naïve, and because of all this – easy victims of trafficking (Åsman 2008, 18–19).⁷⁵ Similarly, the media have portrayed domestic workers, for example in the Middle East, mainly through horror stories of abuse and harsh working conditions. This has affected the experiences of many other domestic workers, not only the individuals who actually have been abused, as well as the way other people perceive them (Moors 2003, 388).

Most conceptualisations of ‘vulnerable work’ have been developed in the context of European or North American labour markets which are highly organised in spite of the increasing trend toward informal work. What do such conceptualisations offer to an analysis of Indian domestic labour relations which are fully informal and outside national legislation? What are the specific questions one needs to look at in order to discuss vulnerability of domestic workers in India? Can the concept of vulnerability provide a concept for approaching and understanding workers’ situations in a fruitful, non-victimising manner?

In trying to answer these questions, I build upon Pollert and Charlwood’s (2009, 344–345) notion of ‘spectrum of vulnerability’ which in my view allows for capturing the diversity in domestic labour relations. The way I propose to approach vulnerability within the overall context of precarious work is two-fold: 1) to take into account of the diversity of work arrangements (e.g. live-in or part-time work) and the consequent influence on working conditions, and 2) to perceive working conditions as a ‘continuum of vulnerability’, in which each workers’ vulnerability depends on several structural factors such as age or gender.

Most studies on domestic work emphasise that workers are

⁷⁵ The Nepalese and international organisations that propagate the victimising trafficking discourse, have carved out an economic sphere for themselves in what Åsman (2008, 18) calls the ‘rescue industry’.

neither passive victims nor active agents but, to some extent, both (Moors 2003, 391; see also Camacho, 1999, 64; Raghuram 1999, 11). Structural restrictions and opportunities have an impact on each worker's situation. It is my task to find out how these structural positions in labour relations operate and in which ways they influence worker vulnerability.

Approaching children's work

Questions of vulnerability become particularly challenging when studying children in paid domestic work. Two questions have dominated scholarly debates on how to study working children in developing countries. The first is whether childhood in developing countries should be treated similarly to or differently from Western childhood. Embracing the idea of childhood as a social construction (see Ariès 1962, 125)⁷⁶, some researchers have criticised existing research and international advocacy work on behalf of children for its' Eurocentrism (see Boyden 1997; Niewenhuys 1994; 2009). Jo Boyden (1997) called for the recognition of the specificity of each particular childhood. She argued that during the 20th century a specifically European conception of childhood with its essentially white, urban middle class values was exported to the Third World.

Kristoffel Lieten (2005, 3–4), instead, argues that the post-modernist claims that childhood is a culture-specific and, essentially, Western concept are misguided. In his view such approaches have led some to argue that child labour is not repugnant but is actually embedded in local cultures, and should be respected.⁷⁷ He argues that

76 Philippe Ariès is often cited as the founder of 'childhood' on the basis of his book *L'Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960), translated into English as *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) Although philosophers such as Rousseau had discussed the specificity of childhood in life much earlier, Ariès became a standard reference in most studies on childhood. Despite criticism (Pollock 1983, 263 quoted in James and Prout 1997, 17; Ozment 2001, 9–12), Ariès' basic notion that childhood is a social construction rather than a biological fact remains central in many childhood studies.

77 Among the more critical stances towards child labour are those which empha-

Ariès' (1962) study on the historical evolution of childhood in Europe was not culture-specific, but rather class-specific, and emerged in the midst of wider economic changes. Lieten (2005, 2) reminds us that there is a diversity of childhoods within the developing world itself, not just between the West and the rest. Families in today's developing countries have also made a transition from the 'collective' to the private: today children are looked after within households with the future of individuals in mind (ibid). In a similar vein, Sarada Balagopalan (2002, 20) reminds us of the importance of incorporating historical processes affecting non-western childhoods into culturalist attempts to understand multiple childhoods. She asks whether the fixity we assign to childhood among the poor in the Third World ignores the disjunctions that the history of colonialism has produced in these lives.

The second question relates to the call to study children as subjects and worth of study in their own right (James and Prout 1997),⁷⁸ a widely accepted paradigm in most childhood research in the Western context. It has been argued that children's agency has not been recognised in the study of children in developing countries (Boyden 1997; Nieuwenhuys 1994; 2009). Despite some efforts in research and development policy to perceive children as subjects, Nieuwenhuys (2009, 148) argues that child research in the Indian context has generally had an overly negative tone, and is mainly issue-oriented, thus submerging and marginalising the everyday life of the vast majority. It has been dominated by indignation and a feeling of compassion rather than a feeling of sympathy and solidarity (Nieuwenhuys 1994, 4). Such an attitude ultimately betrays a lack of empathy since it leads too easily to a denial of the working children's self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. This does not help to undermine the colonial im-

alise children as active workers who should have a right to work under regulated conditions, and not denied the possibility to earn a living (see Liebel 2004).

78 Simultaneously, the international child rights agenda, largely based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), has established the idea of children as subjects and as active holders of rights, contrary to the previous views of children as passive objects (Lieten 2005, 14).

age of India as a country which lacks a proper notion of childhood (ibid 1994, 4; 2009, 148).

These discussions have two-fold implications for this study. First, I consider children as subjects, and childhood as a social institution that exists beyond the activity of any particular child or adult (James and Prout 1997, 27–28). Second, while norms that govern childhoods vary and are socially constructed, I consider childhood as a biological phase, not merely a social construction. Qvortrup (1999) urges childhood researchers to deal with macro-societal forces and not merely with children's experiences or their reactions in different circumstances. I perceive children as agents who act within and upon the structures, taking into account that the location of the child's family within the socio-economic structure determines the contours of childhood and the practice of agency (Lieten 2005, 17). Acknowledging the diversity in childhoods, I approach children's work as part of their broader life-worlds (Niewenhuys 1994). Moreover, I find it necessary to locate children's work within the whole sector of paid domestic work, and treat children as workers who form part of the overall labour force, not in isolation. I aim to be as specific as possible in my reference to individual working children by taking into account their age, to the extent possible, and sex, since age hierarchies, as a rule, are only valid for specific gender roles (Niewenhuys 1994, 24).

There have also been lengthy debates on terminology: whether work performed by children should be called 'child labour' or 'child work', in which numerous researchers and advocacy agencies such as the International Labour Organisation and Unicef have participated. Considerable efforts were made in the 1990s to establish a common, international framework to define what kind of work is harmful to children and what forms of work, at minimum, should be abolished (Mattila 2001).⁷⁹ One of the distinctions made then was to consider

⁷⁹ One result of the heightened attention was a new international Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 1998, which complemented the previous international standards, the ILO Convention on the Minimum Age

‘child labour’ as harmful and exploitative and ‘child work’ as work that is not detrimental to children. Certain criteria were developed to distinguish between these two, for example, based on the number of working hours, the nature of the work and so on. Liebel (2004, 15) argues that “in contrast to the expression ‘child labour’, the expression ‘children’s work’ avoids a hasty evaluation and renders possible the necessary openness”. Nieuwenhuys (1994, 27) acknowledges the difficulties in attempting to change a firmly rooted concept of ‘child labour’, yet suggests the use of the term ‘children’s work’ rather than ‘child labour’. For her, ‘child labour’ is problematic and too restricted, since it conveys the idea of an abstract and sexually neutral child doing economically valued but undesirable work.

Ten years ago, I also made the distinction between ‘child work’ and ‘child labour’, making an effort to translate these two terms into my native Finnish (see Mattila 1998; 2001). Today, I no longer wish to make this distinction but would prefer to emphasise the need to contextualise children’s work and working conditions. For the purpose of my analysis, I adopt Schildkrout’s (1981, 95 in Nieuwenhuys 1994, 27) definition of child work as ‘any activity done by children which either contributes to production, gives adults free time, facilitates the work of others, or substitutes for the employment of others’.

Servants or domestic workers – a note on concepts

There is no conceptual unity in the extensive literature on paid domestic work. The first question is whether to talk about ‘domestic work’, as most earlier literature has done, or about ‘care work’ or ‘domestic and care work’, as more recent studies suggest. Zimmerman et al (2006, 3–4) talk about ‘care work’ when referring to the multi-faceted labour of home management, housekeeping and care (of the

of Work (1973) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), deemed ineffective in ending children’s work. The widely ratified convention calls for the immediate abolition of child participation in certain forms of work such as prostitution, involuntary participation in armed forces, illegal work, and hazardous work (the most disputable category).

elderly, children and ill) that produces the daily living conditions that make basic human health and well-being possible. By so doing they wish to draw attention to the protective and restorative aspects of carework and to the emotional dimensions involved in it (ibid).⁸⁰ I prefer to use the term 'domestic work' to refer to the work performed in Jaipur households. In this my choice is similar to most others who have studied paid domestic work in India (Dickey 2000a; 2000b; Tolen 2002, Froystad 2003; Raghuram 1999; Ray 2000b). This term is sufficiently broad and reflects the empirical reality more accurately since elements of care work are not as commonly included in domestic workers' tasks in my data as in other contexts.

Those who have studied paid domestic work in India, however, differ more in whether to use the term 'servant' or 'worker'. In India, the English word 'servant' or the equivalent Hindi word *naukar/naukarani* refers generally to all those who work in different tasks in others' homes on a full- or part-time basis. Several researchers (Ray 2000b; Ray and Qayum 2009; Tolen 2000; Froystad 2003) use the term servant, thus giving priority to using the primarily indigenous terms of each country or their English-language equivalents as suggested by Adams and Dickey (2000, 9). While acknowledging the negative connotations that may be associated with the term servant, in their view other terms rarely reflect adequately the circumstances of the people whom they portray. Ray and Qayum (2009, 4) draw attention to the popular usage of the term 'servant' in India, even if some educated, English-speaking Indians consider the term 'servant' politically incorrect and use increasingly the term 'domestic help' when speaking of these workers.⁸¹

80 Bridget Anderson (2006, 229) argues that the central difficulty around whether care should be seen as labour or as emotion, or both, has not been resolved. For her (228) 'it is widely accepted that there are two meanings conflated in the term 'care': care as labour and care as emotion, and it can be very difficult to disentangle the two.'

81 In Finland, by the 1970s the term *domestic helpers* or *assistants* had gradually replaced the terms 'maid' (*piika*) and 'servant' (*palvelija*) which were commonly used earlier (Kilkki 2006, 11).

While I appreciate these notions, it seems that using the term ‘servant’ could overemphasise the employers’ views: it is a popular term both in English and Hindi (*naukar*) among the employer class, but not among the workers, who increasingly consider it degrading. Indian organisations such as the National Domestic Workers Movement also prefer the term ‘domestic workers’. The use of both ‘servant’ and ‘domestic help’ also tends to undermine the perception of domestic work as a form of employment, and may instead re-affirm the distinction between domestic work and other occupations. In order to be methodologically consistent, therefore, I prefer to use the term ‘domestic worker’, similarly to Neetha (2003, 123).⁸² However, I occasionally use the term ‘servant’, when explicitly referring to employers’ views.

Regarding the basic division into ‘live-ins’ and into ‘live-outs’, I use the term ‘live-in worker’ for the generic, all-around workers who live with their employers (see Neetha 2003; Dickey 2000a). The employers in India also talk about “24-hour workers” which effectively captures the nature of their work, as illustrated by my thesis. However, if a live-in worker is hired for one particular purpose, for cooking or driving, for example, I use their occupational titles, and specify their working arrangement, for example, I refer to ‘a live-in cook’.

It is more challenging to find an appropriate term for the diverse group of ‘live-out workers’. The term ‘live-out worker’ usually implies that the worker, residing in his or her own home, works only for one employer. However, in India, most ‘live-out’ workers work for several houses, carrying out one or several tasks in each house. The term ‘self-employed worker’ might be accurate for the situation of a clean-

82 In the context of Turkey, Keklik (2006, 191) talks about paid and unpaid workers to distinguish between salaried domestic workers and those who only receive in-kind compensation such as accommodation or food. While I take serious note of the point that some workers only receive food and accommodation as compensation, I include these workers within the broad category of paid domestic workers to avoid confusion with people who perform unpaid domestic work in their own households.

ing person who manages her or his own, established business in my own country, Finland, but it would not appropriately reflect the acute dependency of the Indian domestic part-time workers on their employers (see Baruah 2004).

The term that I find most suitable is 'part-time worker' (see also Raghuram 1999; Dickey 2000a; Ray and Qayum 2009) which allows me to emphasise the relatively short stay in each employers' house. The problem with this term, though, is that despite this short stay, many work from dawn till dusk seven days a week, which hardly makes it a part-time job. So, whenever possible I refer to the part-time workers by their occupational titles such as maids⁸³, gardeners or washer-men/women and use the term 'part-time worker', when referring generally to workers who live in their homes. However, there is a notable exception to this rule: in India, the largest number of part-time workers are the women and girls who clean the floors and wash the dishes. They are not called by their respective task of cleaning and washing dishes but are referred to in English as maids, domestic help, or maid-servants or in Hindi with *bais* (maids) or *kamwali bais*.⁸⁴ I will also refer to these workers, who are the majority in my data of workers, as maids.

By comparison with discussion on worker terminology, there has been very little discussion on how to refer to employers. When talking about them, those who studied paid domestic work in India have used the term 'master' and 'mistress' (Ray 2000b; Srinivas 1995) or 'employers', often interchangeably. Following my logic with the worker terminology, I use the more neutral term 'employer' in preference to 'master', except when particularly focusing on the patron-client-like

83 A word of caution is due here: the terms 'maid' and 'maidservant' are sometimes used to refer to generic workers with multiple tasks, or to refer to female live-in workers.

84 The Hindi word *bai* is widely used to refer to maid-servants, especially in the Hindi speaking regions, but can also be used as a respectful term when speaking to women in high status positions, e.g. in royal families. In the rural Rajasthan, *bai jhi* can be used to address elder women to show respect.

features of the relationships.

It is at this point that my theoretical approach links up with another important concept, the life course, and that my focus moves from the theoretical approach to labour *relations* to the approach to *workers'* lives and the relations between wage work and other aspects of their lives.

2.3 Work and the life course

From the early phases of this study something that kept emerging from the worker interviews was a broad set of issues related to the female workers' lives not only as workers, but as daughters, wives and mothers. It became important to understand, on the one hand, how paid work influences other aspects of their lives and on the other hand, how the family life influenced all decisions related to work. As I aim to show, the idea of interweave of female life course and participation in paid employment is helpful in understanding the workers' labour market decisions and participation.

The concept of 'life course' encapsulates well some of the central threads that emerged from our conversations, such as the impact of marriage and reproduction on wage work, and offers a (loose) theoretical lens through which to analyse workers' work-life trajectories. First developed within sociology in the 1960s (see Cain 1964), I find Elder's definition (1994, 4) of life course as "a multilevel phenomenon, ranging from structural pathways through social institutions and organisations to the social trajectories of individuals and their developmental pathways" apt for my work.

Earlier studies on life course and work were criticised for their tendency to perceive life course as a sequential path where certain phases – such as a first employment phase, a family phase, and a second employment phase – follow each other in a linear order (Krüger

and Baldus 1999, 359), and for not questioning the sexual division of labour within the family (Beechey and Perkins 1987, 122). More recently, the 'life course' has made it possible to analyse the way in which personal life intersects with social institutions such as education, family, and labour market and the other way around (Krüger & Baldus 1999, 356–359).⁸⁵ The perspective has theoretical relevance also for the structure-agency -debate⁸⁶ since tracking multiple dimensions of life course development over an extended period of time makes it "very clear that structure *and*⁸⁷ personal action determine the life course" (ibid, 356). In my study, it allows for analysis of the interface between work at home and paid work, between life stages and work, and for the analysis of continuities and discontinuities in (women's) work trajectories.

In the context of India, a life course perspective has been adopted, for example, in studies of women's health and reproduction (Das Gupta 1996). Most studies exploring life courses in India focus exclusively, or mostly, on girls and women, and this study is no exception. Despite the gradually increasing interest in men as gendered subjects and in men's lives in South Asia within gender studies, the range has so far been limited to topics such as male sexuality and violence (Osella et. al. 2004, 2; de Neve 2004, 94).⁸⁸

Next, I contextualise the question of work and life course by first discussing general features of women's life courses in India, and then by focusing on the conceptualisations related to work and life course.

85 The concept of 'life-cycle' has also been used in relation to different stages in human life. However, the concept of 'life course' has gained popularity over 'life cycle' since the concept of life-cycle is perceived to imply multiple turns and a relatively fixed or inevitable series of biological stages and ages (Hapke & Ayyankeri 2004, 252).

86 See Giddens (1984) for his theory of structuration which calls for understanding of the interplay between human agency and social structure.

87 Italics in the original text.

88 Compared to the multiplicities of femininities in South Asian studies, men appear in fewer studies and often in a two-dimensional range, either as householders (patrons) or as landless labourers (clients) (Osella et. al. 2004, 2).

Female life course and work in India

While acknowledging the regional and other diversities in the lives of men and women across South Asia, some features emerge in most studies on the life cycle of women, encapsulated by Mines & Lamb (2002, 81) as follows:

In general, a woman can expect to progress over her life from being a daughter in her natal home, to a wife and daughter-in-law in her husband's and in-law's home, to a mother of young children, to a mother-in-law, and finally to an older woman and, frequently, widow.

In spite of girls' structurally weaker position compared to boys (Das Gupta, 1996, 217), girls enjoy more personal freedom and autonomy in their natal homes than they do after getting married (Mines & Lamb 2002, 81). While a daughter-in-law is at the bottom of the household hierarchy and controlled by both women and men in the groom's house, a young married woman is still cherished as a potential child-bearer (Mines and Lamb 2002, 81; Säävälä 2004, 151). Women gain more freedom upon getting older, so that the mother-in-law generation has more freedom in life, is less dominated by males, and has more authority than in earlier life phases. (Das Gupta 1996, 217; Säävälä 2006, 149; Lamb 2002, 57).⁸⁹

It has been argued that men, by contrast, do not experience as many marked transformations in their lives as women, although they too are expected to marry, to have children, to be economically productive, and finally, as the senior male in a household, to assume the role of a central authority (Mines & Lamb 2002, 82). Thus the argument that men experience fewer transformations may reflect the lack of research on male life courses rather than the actual situation. Since there is a tendency to approach different phases of life in the Indian

⁸⁹ Lamb (2002, 57) emphasises that ageing in India is not defined so much in terms of chronological years but rather through one's place in a family cycle.

context as static, it is important to take into account the notion that divisions based on the position in the life cycle are subject to change and transformation (Säävälä 2006, 149).⁹⁰

While a rich literature exists on how gender influences the work situations of women and men in India⁹¹ bringing together work and life course has not been common. Yet different phases and institutions of life such as marriage or parenthood have a central influence on working life. Among the few who combined analyses of work and life course, Hapke and Ayyanketil (2004) explored the gendered livelihood strategies of fishermen and –women in South India through their lives. They introduced the concept of ‘work-life course’. Usefully for my purpose, they define this as “patterns of engagement of men and women in remunerative work throughout their life course” (ibid, 230). In another contribution to the discussion on work and life course, the life cycle approach is central, namely Arjan de Haan’s (2003) analysis of gendered experiences of male and female labour migrants in Kolkata. He showed how young men have a relatively long period when they can move around without (adult) supervision (*ghumna*) and try out jobs here and there. But no such option existed for young women, whose experience was confined to the household, and women migrating on their own usually had to establish some form of conjugal relationship for their security (de Haan 2003, 202–203).

In this context, one notes that studies of European and North American history have perceived domestic work as a ‘bridging occupation’, a way to enter the labour market and move to better jobs in other sectors (Kilkki 2006, 20; Rahikainen 2006, 30; Romero 2002, 57). While some studies have questioned the idea of contemporary domestic work as a bridging occupation (Gregson & Lowe 1994, 67;

90 The age categories, meanings and relations are always shaped both institutionally and through everyday interactions. For example, the transition from ‘child’ to ‘teen’ is negotiated through both institutions and everyday interactions. (Thorne 2004, 404).

91 See, for example, Burra 1995; Kapadia 1995; Mies 1982; Nieuwenhuys 1993; Tenhunen 2006).

Romero 2002), others have documented both upward and downward class mobility of migrant workers. For example, educated middle class Filipina women (see Moors 2003, 390; Parreñas 2008, 93) and Latin American women (see Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001, 198) working as domestic workers in Europe and the United States, and Russian women within Russia (Rotkirch 2008, 286) have experienced downward class mobility. Other migrant workers have managed to 'bridge' to other jobs, or at least to improve their own and their children's lives. (Lutz 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).⁹²

As the forthcoming chapters show, however, paid domestic work in India is not about bridging into other occupations. Instead, it relates in many ways to the specific life stages of the workers, and thus resonates more with the term 'life-cycle service', which historians have used to refer to a practice where unmarried young women and men worked temporarily as rural servants before getting married in 16th to 18th century North and Central Europe (Rahikainen 2006, 28, 255). Today, the engagement of Western university students in care work such as au-pairing is clearly temporary work, related to a particular phase in their work-life trajectories.

Intergenerationality in workers' trajectories

At this point, one more concept is important for understanding the interrelations between life course and work in Jaipur. Not only age, but the interaction between different generations is important. The ideal for Indian families continues to be a system of long-term intergenerational reciprocity, although the ideal does not always reflect reality (Lamb, 2002, 58). Age systems can be viewed as systems of structured inequality, which means that people in differing age cohorts have different and unequal access to valued social status (Foner 1984, 212 quoted in Säävälä 2006, 149). Today, there are indications

92 Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, 188) shows how a daughter of a working-class family in the US rose to a higher class, adapting quickly to her new role as an authoritarian employer of a domestic worker.

of increasing tensions between the generations, for example, due to daughter-in-laws being more educated than their mother-in-laws and closer ties between daughter-in-laws and their husbands (Wadley 2002; Aura 2008).

The concept of generational order as “a social order which organises, constrains and coordinates relations in the social world in a systematic way” can be exploited here (Alanen 1992, 65). Bringing the idea of the generational order into the context of South Asia, Kabeer (2000, 465) refers to ‘implicit intergenerational contract’ as “a shared understanding between family members as to what each owes and can expect from others in the family”. This relates to how relationships between parents and children play out in different phases of life, particularly to how parents view their obligations to their children and what they expect in return. Such an approach has been used, for example, to look at the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Kabeer and Mahmud 2009). In the context of Bangladesh, where poor people rely primarily on the sale of their labour power to meet survival needs, the failure to invest in the human capital of successive generations is likely to be a common route through which the intergenerational transmission of poverty occurs (ibid, 10). Thus, Kabeer and Mahmud (2009, 19) suggest a certain degree of path dependence in life trajectories across generations. Drawing on the ideas of Kabeer and Mahmud, I propose to view mother-daughter continuity at work as ‘intergenerational transmission of work’, as part of a broader concept of intergenerational contracts. These concepts enable the capture of some of the intra-familial processes which are central in domestic workers lives and, especially, in mother-daughter continuity at work. In the following chapters I explore the interlacing of work with other institutions of life and place it into a broader context of the workers’ life course.

In this chapter I have introduced the main theoretical discussions to which this dissertation contributes, and the main concepts that guide me in the next chapters. Before discussing my data, however, I will introduce my methodological approaches.

3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In this chapter I present the methodological scope of this study. I have been theoretically and methodologically influenced by feminist studies, particularly so called post-colonial feminist studies. While many of the methodological insights that guide my work have first emerged within feminist studies and anthropology, they have since become widely embraced within development studies too. I first discuss the questions of positionality, power hierarchies, and ethical concerns, and explore the idea of a situated knowledge. Such questions are particularly pertinent since I have carried out the field work as a foreigner in India. I then proceed to describe the research process in more detail by spelling out the choice of the geographical location, the choice of the methods I used, and describing the main methods, the qualitative interview and observation. While the methods legitimate the information that has been acquired, the methodology asks whether the methods used have been appropriate (Tuomi & Sara-järvi 2002, 11).

3.1 Methodological and ethical choices

On positioning

In feminist studies and development studies there is a wide recognition of the importance of understanding power hierarchies, both in

the situations one studies and in the research setting. Since my study is essentially about hierarchies, it is perhaps even more important to recognise the power relations both between me as a researcher and those I study, and between the two groups in my focus.

Since Chandra Tapalde Mohantys' (1984) ground-breaking article "Under the Western Eyes" which criticised western researchers' tendency to perceive Third World women as a monolithic group of poor victimised women, there has been a rich and sometimes exhausting discussion on how to write about those one studies and about the power relations in the research setting. While Mohanty was later criticised in her turn for portraying Western feminist researchers as a homogenous group, her important reminder of the heterogeneity of Third World women became one of the main elements of what came to be known as 'post-colonial feminism' (Mattila and Vuola 2007, 212–213).⁹³ Other main elements were a critique of the assumption that Western and Third World women have totally different problems, and of Western women's blindness towards their own role in the colonisation of Third World women (*ibid*).

Simultaneously, another major paradigm within anthropology, 'reflexive anthropology' (Scholte 1969), emerged to address similar issues, emphasising the need to acknowledge the researchers' subjectivity, positionality and representation. By the 1990s, the main elements of post-colonial feminism and reflexive critique were incorporated into mainstream anthropology and gender studies, and to an increasing extent, into development studies, if not so much into development practice. As Nencel (2001, 74) summarises it: "Making the (research) decisions explicit is one of the responsibilities of practising a reflexive anthropology". This is what I aim to do in the following sections.

The post-colonial discussion of subjectivity was extended to

93 Another paradigm 'Third World Feminism' stems, at least partly, from post-colonial feminism and is sometimes seen as a form of it (Mattila and Vuola 2007, 211–212).

the question: “Who can speak for ‘the other’?” (hooks 1988; Spivak 1988). The post-modernist concern as to whether the researcher is complicit in neo-colonial knowledge production of silencing ‘subaltern’ voices (Sumner and Tribe 2008, 43) had a strong impact.⁹⁴ So influential has this discussion been that the fear of how to represent “others” correctly has on occasions paralysed research (Nagar 2002, 180). The immobilising effect of the representation question is not unfamiliar to me either. At the beginning of the process, I often wondered whether it was legitimate for me to carry out this research when there are many local researchers in India who could do it (see Scheyvens and Storey 2003, 2; Scheyvens et al. 2003a, 155).⁹⁵ But the cure for fear of colonial anthropology is not its replacement by indigenous anthropology (Madan 1982, 16). To overcome this debate on representation, Saraswati Raju (2002, 173–174) pleads: “We are different but can we talk?” For her, the privileged researcher, whether native or foreign, can still have commonalities with those she studies.

It has been argued that for those involved in gender and women studies paid domestic work was long a sensitive topic since it highlighted inequalities amongst women (Moors 2003, 387). Romero (2002, 43–44) discusses how her colleagues in US academia reacted when she presented her findings on the *Chicana* workers perceptions over working conditions. Many of these colleagues employed domestic workers themselves, felt uneasy about the results and began to

94 Harding and Norberg (2005, 2010) argue that feminist researchers have, as part of a broader debate over knowledge production, contributed to the epistemological crisis of the modern West by writing out the complex ethical dilemmas embedded in research, and by challenging conventional methodologies.

95 Johanna Latvala (2006, 64) describes how in the early phases of her PhD research she asked: “*Who was I to go to Kenya and study women’s lives there in the first place?*” For her, the way to move beyond this question was to carry out more equal and more sensitive research. From this perspective, she found it easier to study well-educated, middle class women, with whom she had more in common than, for example, poor, uneducated women. But not studying poor uneducated women is definitely not the solution to the problem of representation: since there are no uneducated researchers, who would study poor uneducated women if educated women or men would not do it?

defend the employer practices. Given the differences in structuring the state and in organising domestic work in Finland by comparison with the US, Great Britain or India, for example, my experiences are different from those of Romero. Having domestic workers in Finland is not common, and women carry out hours of household work daily, irrespective of their class and educational standing. At the same time, the gender gap in domestic work has diminished, albeit mostly because women do less work than before, rather than men doing more (except for increased participation in child care) (Miettinen 2008).

Historically, however, the situation has been different in Finland: it used to be common to employ workers and up to the early 20th century being a maid was among women's most common occupations (Rahikainen 2006). By the late 20th century full-time domestic workers had gradually disappeared from Finnish homes with, for example, the expansion of women's labour market participation and development of public welfare services such as municipal child care (Rahikainen 2006, 247–249). Since the 1990s, the employment of domestic workers has again increased, and there are indications of this becoming a more common pattern (Rahikainen 2006, 247–249). While it is rare to employ people to do house work on a daily basis, with the exception of child care, it is increasingly common to employ someone for weekly or fortnightly cleaning. I have employed workers for child care and for cleaning. But I have also taken care of children in two private homes in Sweden at the age of sixteen and in France at the age of nineteen, through an organised 'au pair' arrangement. During my school years, I did manual jobs such as dish washing in a cafeteria. These experiences, albeit short-term and student jobs, may have made it a little easier to understand the workers' perspectives. My experience both as an employer and as a worker is quite different from the employment trajectories of most educated women in India. In addition, despite the shortcomings of being an outsider with limited language skills and cultural experience, coming from a country where domestic work is differently organised gave me a different perspective

than local researchers, which may have improved my understanding of the phenomenon. This legitimises the study.

The post-colonial feminist critique assumed that the subject of the Western researchers' studies was a poor, unprivileged person hierarchically much lower than the researcher. This may have been the case in the 1980s, but more recently there has been a significant change in focus so that studies on developing countries, both by foreign and local researchers, increasingly explore the middle classes and the elite.

Kirin Narayan (1993, 671) argued against an entrenched distinction between 'native' and 'non-native' anthropologists and instead proposed that researchers should be seen "in terms of shifting identifications amid a field or interpenetrating communities and power relations". Others have argued that the notions of insider and outsider are not a stable binary, and should rather be seen as continuum where positionalities change in time and space. (Mullings 1999, 340; Scheyvens et al. 2003b, 185). While recognising the changing positionalities I see no reason for a total rejection of the distinctions 'native and non-native', or 'insider and outsider'. In India, I was definitely always regarded first and foremost as an outsider by both employers and workers. What shifted, however, was my class and status relation vis-à-vis different respondents.

Although all recognised me as a white, European researcher, my class status was reminiscent of the employers, given our educational backgrounds and other forms of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), but it was quite different from that of all the workers. In short, with employers I was neither studying down nor studying up (Nader 1972; Scheyvens et al. 2003b), but rather sideways (Boyer and Hannerz 2006, 9; Ståhlberg 2006, 58–59). With some respondents, I felt I was studying up, since they were in a similar class position but much older than I was, an important hierarchical aspect in India. Both I and the Indian interpreter were in a closer 'positional space' (Mullings 1999, 340) to the employers than to the workers. In fact, as an educated working mother, there were many similari-

ties between my life and that of some employer respondents. These commonalities, together with my research topic, provided us with a common frame of reference (Ståhlberg, 2006, 50). It was easy for me to relate to housework and child care issues, despite the notable difference that I shared the work with my partner and did not employ anyone for domestic tasks at the time of the field work.⁹⁶ In fact, these different experiences and perspectives often enriched the discussions (see Scheyvens et al. 2003a, 140). Moreover, I suspect that my interest in the mundane matter of household chores made me seem less a foreign scholar with a high status and more a woman with similar responsibilities. The employers also implicitly acknowledged that, like them, I would have been in position to employ domestic workers had I lived in India.

However, there were fewer similarities between me and the workers: they were uneducated, mostly illiterate, and dependent on their daily labour. Clearly, as an educated woman from a rich country, a person who could travel across the world, move around freely in Jaipur without a male member of the family, and work independently, I was in multiple ways in a more powerful position. Drawing on Maria Mies' (1993, 68) idea of 'partial identification', as a working mother I could partially identify with their joys and concerns, especially those related to the challenges of combining wage work and child care. While recognising what bound me with my respondents and what separated us (*ibid*), as the lowest common denominator we shared an experience of what it is to be a woman and the experience of being treated as a woman in our respective cultures (see Ronkainen 1989, 69).

Although the respondents were interested in my family situation, none asked about my religious background, which they, as Hindus and Sikhs, clearly knew differed from theirs.

96 Ruth Vanita (2004, 69) talks about a syndrome which she calls "*Our patriarchy is better than yours*". I have tried to carefully analyse my own thinking and be aware of such tendency.

Epistemologically, it has been useful for me to think of the research through Donna Haraway's (1991, 188) idea of 'situated knowledge'. By using the metaphor of a camera lens through which one sees a highly specific view, "a partial but wonderfully detailed view", Haraway called for research with a partial perspective and locatable knowledge. She argued that only this kind of knowledge can provide an objective vision, and thus be morally sound. I would be hesitant to claim 'situated knowledge' to be more objective than any other type of knowledge, but I have nevertheless aimed to provide a detailed view on domestic work in Jaipur, one city of India. My knowledge derives almost entirely from Jaipur, and I cannot make generalised claims about domestic work in the whole of India. I can, however, reflect my findings against studies on domestic work in other cities of India, through which I can locate my findings in a broader context.⁹⁷

Studying hierarchical relations

My study is about hierarchies in society, where power is essentially a relation (Young 1990, 31). When I initially decided to study domestic work in India, I had thought of focusing mainly on workers. However, taking into account the notion that rational knowledge is power-sensitive (King 1987, 192 cited in Haraway 1991) and the need to understand the conflictual nature of the culture one studies (Kumar 2006a, 84), I decided to study both employers and workers, the two sides of the same coin (Scheyvens et al. 2003b, 183). Only by doing so would it be possible to begin to understand the complex realities embedded in the labour *relations* between two sides, even if this meant spreading the focus and limiting the time I could spend with each of them. Thus, like Dickey (2000a) I chose a 'relational approach' and interviewed both employers and workers, since "in order

97 For a study on domestic labour relations in Madurai see Dickey 2000a; in Kanpur see Froystad 2004; in Delhi see Neetha 2003 and Raghuram 1999; in Kolkata see Ray 2000 and Ray and Qayum 2009; and in Chennai see Tolen 2000.

to understand class relations in full, one must give equal weight to the perspective of each side” (ibid, 32). Ray (2000b, 693) made a similar choice when aiming to explore the dialectic of employer and employee gender ideologies.

The employing class in Jaipur perceives a three-tier basic class structure consisting of the poor, the middle class, and the rich, and the ones in my data viewed themselves as different not only from the poor but also from the rich. The workers, instead, divide people into two main classes, *bare log* and *chote log*, big and small people. They perceived themselves as ‘small’ and poor and the employers as ‘big’ which for them entailed all wealthier people from lower middle class to the very rich.⁹⁸ The employers and the workers perceive each other clearly as belonging to an opposing class, and used reciprocal oppositional images of each other (see Dickey 2000a, 37). Workers described their employers as rich, as having big and beautiful houses, and as having respected, well-paid jobs. Employers generally described workers as poor and uneducated, to which some added the adjectives uncivilised and dirty. On a more maternalist, and perhaps moralist note, some female employers generalised female domestic workers as “victims of domestic violence by alcoholic husbands”.

I have aimed to give equal weight to the situations of both while acknowledging the power asymmetries between these groups and as Visweswaran (1994) has suggested, I have aimed to recognise and understand, and make such hierarchies visible in my study, as well as to analyse their internal controversies.

The research process always evokes positive and negative emotions (Kleiman & Copp, 1993). However, most researchers doing field work allow themselves to have certain feelings, such as closeness with participants, whilst trying to deny or get rid of emotions they think inappropriate. Field workers are expected to feel for the par-

98 A similar difference between employer and worker class perceptions was found in South India (see Dickey 2000a, 33; Tolen 2000, 67).

ticipants, and when they feel disgusted with participants they probably try to transform their inappropriate feelings into “better” ones. If the researchers fail to have “appropriate” emotions, they may accuse themselves of empathetic incompetence. (ibid, 28–29).

I first went into the field with some negative ideas about the employers, based on the NGO reports and media articles on the exploitation of domestic workers in India. As a result it was a particular challenge at first for me to listen impartially to the often contradictory voices of the workers and the employers. I tried to be constantly cognisant of my preconceptions so that I would not be tempted to see exploitation where it did not exist, or not merely seek confirmation of my preconceptions, and thus fail to see the contradictory information (see Scheyvens et al. 2003b, 190). As the research progressed, it also became easier to empathise with the employers and their daily struggles even if they seemed light compared to those of the workers. On the other hand, whilst I could understand their situation, I did not empathise with those who seemed to be practising outright exploitation. It would have been a difficult ethical question had I seen outright, on-the-spot abuse, such as violence, in the employers’ houses. Although this did not occur, both employers and workers told me about such incidents.

Solidarity through research?

Whatever expectations they might have for these discussions to somehow improve their lives, I will not be able to fulfil them.

This line is an excerpt from my fieldnotes in Jaipur in 2006. The interviews had started well, and I had got to know many workers. With the daily visits to the workers communities, thoughts like this often circled in my head on my way back to the comfortable flat we rented. I agree with those who think good research should aim to bring social progress (Harding and Norberg 2005, 2011) even if Kumar (2006a,

81) rightly notes that since reform is problematic, scholars' responsibility has often been seen to end conveniently before reform is called for. Like many others, I initially took to development studies guided by concern about social justice and inequality, and committed to the generation of useful knowledge that could make a difference. (Sumner & Tribe 2008, 31; Scheyvens et al. 2003b, 187).⁹⁹ But difference of what sort? And useful to whom, when and where?

While I see the question of whether I can contribute in any meaningful way to the lives of those I study in a more positive way from retrospect, the sentence I wrote in Jaipur still captures some of the painful emotions I felt during the research process.¹⁰⁰

It has been argued that the researchers also influence the phenomenon they study (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). The research process definitely has left a significant mark on me, but I am extremely wary of over-emphasising my role in the lives of those I studied. The interviews were at times very emotional and sometimes potentially empowering for us all. However, to claim to have influenced their lives would overemphasise the role of a short-term research project.

In the very early phases of this research, I had thought about participatory action research (Wheeler 2009) but I decided to carry out a rather conventional interview study for several overlapping reasons. First, the kind of potentially empowering participatory research I had in mind would have to have been a long process for it to be meaningful (Scheyvens et al. 2003b, 187). Having become a mother, with all the delays in the research process this entailed, I had more limited time for the research. Secondly, and as importantly, I felt that I did not want to work directly with local organisations, which would have been necessary for the action research with children I had envis-

99 Sumner and Tribe (2008, 36) talk about a 'mixed purpose' of Development Studies on the continuum of purpose ranging from instrumental to theory/abstraction.

100 See Ruth Behar (1996) for a wonderful analysis of the pains and joys of 'the vulnerable researcher' who develops deep emotional ties with the subject of the study and with the research participants.

aged. I did not want to become entangled in the power play of donor funding at this point. I also feared that I would get involved in activities related to child workers which I could not support. Some of the potential ethical problems became evident in discussions with some NGO workers or officials, who were keen to find domestic child workers with my help and punish their employers.

I agree with Kalela (2000), who emphasises that it is the duty of the researcher to do justice to those she or he studies. For Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992, 28), seeing, listening, touching, and recording can at best be acts of solidarity and, above all, of recognition. In this way the researcher can be important as “the Clerk of the Records” (ibid). It is, then, first and foremost through the role of an empathetic listener and conveyor of a message that I want to contribute to social change. Although I sometimes feel that this research may well directly benefit me more than anyone else (see Lather 2001), I hope that through it I can contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon and in the long run, perhaps, to an improvement in workers’ rights.

Gendered choices

Although domestic labour relations provide a window to multiple power hierarchies, this is particularly a study on power hierarchies between women. Whilst one of the issues I analyse through my data is that of gendered domestic labour relations, my main focus was on women and girls (Spheres-Hughes 1992, 25). Out of seventeen employers in my data, only two are men. The decision to interview mainly women in the employer families was a straightforward one, as women are mainly responsible for organising domestic work and for interaction with the domestic workers (see also Dickey 2000a, 33). Both the employers and the workers I met mentioned that the husbands in the employer families rarely spoke with workers.¹⁰¹

101 The two men in my data lived in the same extended family house, and since none worked full-time they spent much time at home. In their house, too, the eldest female member was, in principle, mainly responsible for the workers. But she

Even if the majority of domestic workers in India are female, there is a sizeable number of male workers, a contrast to most other countries. Why, then, did I choose to interview only female workers? First, this decision was guided by my decision to focus on two main forms of domestic work arrangements, live-in work and part-time cleaning work. The latter is carried out by India's largest single group of domestic workers, the maids. Since all maids are girls and women, this naturally limited the sample. Second, although I wanted to explore the live-in work, for ethical reasons I decided not to interview any current live-in workers. This limited the possibility of interviewing male workers, many of whom have live-in arrangements. However, I interviewed some live-in boys during the pilot phase in Kolkata, and observed several male live-in workers in the neighbourhood where I lived in Jaipur, in friends' houses and in the employer respondents' houses.

Since one of my interests relates to the daughters' roles in the family economy, I pondered whether I should also interview the fathers as well as the working girls and their mothers. Whilst the fathers' perspective to the girls' work would have been interesting, I decided to focus on women and girls for two reasons. First, my focus is on paid domestic work, and the fathers did not work in this sector. Second, the everyday life that I could access and that was most visible in the workers' communities was women centred (Spheres-Hughes 1992, 25), and adult men were usually not at home during day time, the best if not the only time for interviewing female workers. Besides, given the considerable restrictions on women's mobility in the urban space in India, it would not have been possible for my female interpreter to conduct interviews in the evenings (see Viswanath & Tandon Mehrotra 2007, 1545; Chopra 2004, 50).

was a very old woman, and given that there were no other women and no daughters-in-law, her two younger brothers were mainly responsible for the workers.

Studying working children

Since children in domestic labour relations are one of my interests, I paid particular attention to ethical and methodological concerns related to them. The importance of listening to children's own perspectives (Alanen 1992) has become evident through empirical studies which show the differences between adult and child views.¹⁰² While I approached children as subjects in their own right, I acknowledged that children are structurally vulnerable in any society because of their biological age and their position.¹⁰³ This puts adult researchers in an inherently more powerful position *vis-à-vis* children, so I took note of specific methods developed to carry out child-sensitive research (Hirsjärvi and Hurme, 2001, 128–133).

I tried to be particularly sensitive in terms of research design and setting, taking the varying ages of participants into consideration. For example, an interview situation may be quite different for a nine-year old than for a fourteen-year old, or for a twelve-year old living in her own home compared to a former child slave of the same age. I tried to build trust and rapport with children in different ways (see Scheyvens et al. 2003b, 184), for example, through repeated visits, and through several interviews. I met most of the children first in groups or in pairs, and only then individually. Some of them brought a friend, usually a cousin or other close relative, to the interviews, which I accepted since I felt it would make the situation more comfortable for them. A social worker was present in the interviews with girls who had previously worked for an abusive employer and now resided in a NGO home. Since time span is different for children (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2001), I limited the duration of the interviews to between twenty and thirty minutes for the younger children. The children in my study sometimes did not follow the usual interview

102 For example, in Ghana the real differences in adults' and children's views on child migration illustrated why it is necessary to consider the reasons children gave for migrating, not merely the adults' accounts (H-Hashim 2005).

103 See American Sociologist Association 1999, 212.

script: for example, they might leave in the middle of the interview if they heard their parents calling them, which I allowed them to do.

Whilst it was my aim to follow standard ethical guidelines, I sometimes had to make a compromise between ethical codes and situational common sense (see Scheyvens et al. 2003a, 140–141). For example, the researcher should in principle ask for consent, preferably a written one, both from the child and from the child's parents or guardians, but this was not always possible. In fact, it would have been absurd to ask for a written permit given that most parents and children in my study were illiterate. We – my interpreter, a research assistant, and me – asked most mothers and children to give their verbal consent. But in the cases of current or former live-in children in NGO centres in Jaipur and Kolkata, even a verbal consent from the parent or guardian would have been impossible since the parents lived far away in rural areas. In their case, I sought for consent from the children themselves and from the social workers, who cooperated or lived with the children.

According to ethical codes (e.g. the American Sociological Association 1997), people should have a full right not to participate, and they should be fully cognisant of this right. Whilst all children in the centres agreed to participate, it is difficult to say how voluntary their participation could ever be, since these children are used to obeying their parents, their employers and NGO staff (see also Scheyvens et al. 2003a, 142–143). It is unlikely that they would refuse an interview on the premises of an organisation which provides them with education, counselling, accommodation or other services (see also Kuula 1999). Bearing this in mind, it was something of a relief that at least one girl and one woman in the workers' community did refuse to participate and never came to the initial informal group discussions.

Some of the Bengali women that I interviewed had been recently interviewed for a survey carried out by the Institute of Development Studies in Jaipur. When we initially went to ask whether they could be interviewed, these women explained that someone had already

come to interview them, but nothing had happened in their lives.¹⁰⁴ I had emphasised to the interpreter and the research assistant that we should not raise any expectations of any kind of support. Despite this, I still have a suspicion that their decision to participate was based partly on expectations of some kind of reward and partly, perhaps, on the knowledge that this time a foreign researcher was involved.

3.2 Methods and research data

Establishing relationships

In total, I spent a little more than six months in India in three periods from 2004 to 2007. The main location of the field work was Jaipur, the thriving capital of the state of Rajasthan, which has a population of 2,1 million according to the Census of India (2001), or 5,2 million people according to the official web pages of the Government of Rajasthan (2009). (See Appendix 1 for a map of India). Rajasthan has a population of 56,5 million (2001), and is characterised by high levels of mortality, fertility, morbidity, under-nutrition, illiteracy and social inequality and a slow decline in poverty (Rajagopal 1999, 123), and by a rich history and culture. Although overall poverty rates have declined steadily, Rajasthan has among the lowest human development indicators in terms of education, health and gender equality in India (UNDP 2002).

My interest in India stems from several visits over the years to India and South Asia in different roles. The reasons for choosing Jaipur as the main site involved several decisions along the way, which were considerably aided by a few individuals and organisations. When I decided to study domestic work in India, I initially thought of focus-

104 See Shah (2000, 112) for an eloquent description of how the domestic workers he interviewed in Nepal asked the breath-taking question: “*What will happen to me after you do this writing?*”

ing on child workers, so I started the research process by contacting organisations that work on this in India. At the same time, Save the Children Finland contacted me and offered to fund part of my field work costs in return for information sharing, giving some training sessions, and writing a policy report upon the finalisation of my dissertation. Given that there were no strings attached to their offer, I accepted it. The contacts provided by Save the Children in Finland and their Indian personnel in India undoubtedly determined my geographical choices, and were very valuable when I began my research. Save the Children Finland and some of their local partner organisations provided me with some useful initial contacts and helped with practical matters such as finding an apartment. However, I was totally independent in terms of research design and process, and the organisations were not aware of my research sites.

During the preparatory field work in 2004 I conducted pilot interviews with workers and employers in Kolkata and Jaipur, and interviewed people in several organisations which work with domestic workers in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Jaipur. These interviews had a double role as they both guided the research design and formed part of the data, although they were not as intensively analysed as the other interviews.

On the basis of the pilot phase I decided to locate my research in Jaipur for several reasons. Initially, I had been thinking of Kolkata and/or Jaipur as research sites since Save the Children UK had pioneering programmes with child domestic workers in both, and was studying child domestic work in West Bengal. However, I decided to narrow the geographical focus to one city for reasons of quality and efficiency.¹⁰⁵ In addition, others had already studied paid domestic work in Kolkata (Ray 2000b) and a few other cities, but not in Jaipur. The Institute for Development Studies Jaipur also welcomed me as a

105 See Marcus (1995, 95, 99–100) for a discussion on the challenges of multi-sited ethnography, which has become increasingly popular among anthropologists.

visiting researcher, a mandatory status for obtaining a researcher visa. Hindi is widely spoken and understood in Jaipur and it was possible to improve my language skills in my home university, whereas Bengali is spoken in Kolkata. Finally, Jaipur admittedly seemed a more convenient place for my field work than Kolkata, despite the latter's hectic beauty, when I had a one-year old child with me.

On my second visit to Jaipur, at the end of 2005, we (I, my then husband, and our daughter) moved into a peaceful middle class neighbourhood where most inhabitants employed domestic workers. We rented a two-room flat with an attached kitchen from a wealthy business family, who lived downstairs. The family employed two live-in workers whom I saw at work every day, which taught me something of domestic labour practices and relations although I decided to interview neither the proprietors nor the workers for my study.¹⁰⁶ Since it was the task of one of these workers to clean our side of the house as well, unlike Dickey (2000a) or Kumar (2006b), I did not have the opportunity to act out the role of an employer in India. Kumar (2006b, 11–12), a native of India residing in the US, felt that it would have been impolite towards Indians not to employ domestic worker(s), which was considered “*a necessity just as purified water or air coolers*”.¹⁰⁷

Whether having one's family in the field has a positive or negative impact on the research depends on many factors, particularly the topic of the research (see Burns McGrath 1998, 64–65; Young Leslie 1998, Linneken 1998; Ronkainen 1989).¹⁰⁸ My topic was so

106 Eskola & Suoranta (2000, 99) argue that there is sometimes a thin line between spying and observation. On occasions, I also got to see intimate aspects of relations between the house owners and their workers, and could not help feeling that this was unintentional spying.

107 See also Kidder (2000) for her experiences as a foreign employer of domestic workers in India.

108 For Burns McGrath (1998, 64–65), studying the decision-making process regarding illness and dying, being a mother and having her three children and husband in Tonga with her, significantly eased entering into informal conversation about the topic of study.

integrally linked to mundane, domestic daily routines that visiting the local homes as a married woman and a mother probably made it easier to approach the subject. My experiences during my research were similar to those of others who felt that being married or being a mother legitimated their work and put them in a superior position to an unmarried or childless woman, a situation I myself had experienced on previous visits to South Asia. (see Sinclair 1998, 127; Linneken 1998, 79; Latvala 2006).¹⁰⁹

Having my (exotic) daughter with me in India helped to pave the way when getting to know people and finding participants for the study in a relatively short time (see Latvala 2006, 44; Kontinen 2006, 236). Walking around the quiet streets of the middle class neighbourhood and watching dogs, cows, birds, flowers and people was the favourite pass-time of my daughter who had just learnt to walk. The only others to walk the streets were street vendors and domestic workers. The residents didn't seem to mind this departure from Indian middle class conformity: on the contrary, they were very tolerant of such working class habits, given that I was an outsider and clearly an educated woman who could afford to rent a relatively expensive flat. I ("the mother of Molla") and my daughter were constantly invited to visit the homes of both familiar and unfamiliar neighbours, for the ubiquitous tea and biscuits.¹¹⁰ As a result I could start having informal discussions about the topic right after we settled in, and the interviews in this neighbourhood paved the way for the employer interviews in other locations, although we lived in this location for only the three winter months of 2005–06 (I stayed elsewhere in 2004 and 2007).

109 Flinn (1998, 109) writes about how the presence of her family in the field made her visibly a more complex person with a variety of roles, which were also under close observation.

110 Flinn (1998, 104) found that for the Pollapese people in Samoa she was often remembered of or referred to as being "the mother of Colin", "the wife of the American teacher, Jim" and so on. First, she had become somewhat disconcerted at being so invisible or forgettable but with time came to interpret it as a measure of a certain type of success, having possibly been appropriately unobtrusive.

Observation and interviews

In order to understand domestic labour relations better, I used several “tracking” strategies (Marcus 1995, 95). I read extensively academic literature, policy reports, and media articles on domestic work in India and I talked to people in different positions, experts and non-expert Indians. However, the main methods of my work were the qualitative interview and observation.

My study is ethnographically oriented in that I aim to get a holistic picture of the phenomenon that I study (Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 105). There were elements of participatory observation such as daily socialising with some of the employers and attending social events in one of the neighbourhoods even if my observation was not participatory in a strict sense (Grönfors 1982, 87-88).¹¹¹ The decision to spend three shorter periods in India instead of one longer period was partly dictated by pragmatic questions. The relatively short duration of each visit may have limited my chances for understanding the micro-politics of the research situation (Reger 2001). However, the repeated visits and interviews with the same persons in 2005-06 and 2007 proved very helpful. Having been able to read the data carefully in-between the field work periods and having been able to read it ‘against’ other studies on domestic work, I was able to see things in a new perspective and notice issues that I had not during the previous visit (see Eskola & Suoranta 2000, 102). Visits in consecutive years also made it possible to observe time-related changes in domestic labour relations, and to see how life course and work intertwine.

Since I was interested in how employers and workers themselves perceive domestic labour relations, and in why they act the way they do, the qualitative interview was a suitable method for this study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 74). This method also suited my aim to provide a detailed, contextualised and situated description of labour

111 I have been able to passively observe domestic work practices during previous visits to India, Bangladesh and Nepal from the early 1990s onwards.

relations (Weiss 1994, 9). Since my main interest was not on quantitative information but on human relations – more specifically labour relations – a survey method would not have been suitable. In addition, half of the interviewees were illiterate, which would have complicated the process and, possibly, led to misunderstandings (ibid, 75). Besides, the Institute of Development Studies in Jaipur was simultaneously conducting a survey on domestic workers in Jaipur commissioned by the ILO, so there was no point in repeating this. Although the scope and methodology of that study is different, it served as a useful reflection point and helped to validate some of my findings.

I carried out semi-structured, thematic interviews with twenty-one domestic workers and seventeen employers in Jaipur, and talked less formally with several others.¹¹² All names of the workers and the employers have been changed to protect their privacy. I interviewed most of them twice in consecutive years, and some of the workers three times. The first interview with each participant was relatively structured and followed more or less the same course. Subsequent interviews had certain common themes but a more open structure, which allowed for more dialogue and variation in the order of themes. (see Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 77).

Interviews with all workers and with nine employers were made in Hindi, and with eight employers in English. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, the English interviews mainly by myself, and the Hindi interviews both interpreted and transcribed by Gargi Gopesh, a native speaker of Hindi. She also understood Bengali, the mother tongue of some workers, even though they conversed in Hindi. While the language did not become a major barrier, the scope for misinterpretation posed by the use of interpreter can never be fully mitigated.¹¹³ Although my Hindi skills were limited, it was

112 For a list of persons interviewed see Appendix 2.

113 See Lindberg (2001) for her experiences in using an interpreter in Kerala.

an advantage that I knew enough to be able to follow the conversation and comment on possible misunderstandings. Interviews with those employers who insisted on speaking English in spite of their limited skills were another challenge. The pilot interviews carried out in Kolkata in 2004 with six workers and two employers were made in English and in Bengali, interpreted and transcribed by Dr. Kakali Das, who also acted as my research assistant.

Gargi, my invaluable assistant and interpreter was a young married Brahmin Hindu woman, a mother of a small child. She had a MA degree from an Indian university, and was pursuing studies for a doctorate degree. However, as she had a three-year old daughter whom she took care of at home, she was not studying or working full time during my field work periods. One should note here that there are very limited chances in India to get a position as a funded post-graduate student. Therefore, such students may be willing take jobs clearly below their merits, including as research assistants for foreign researchers who are able to pay for them. Gargi also welcomed the opportunity to be involved in occasional paid work through my research while her mother-in-law and a live-in worker took care of her daughter during our working sessions. For the respondents, Gargi clearly belonged to the educated middle class. The employers, in particular, usually asked her a few questions which would reveal her caste status.¹¹⁴ I aimed at mitigating the potential bias of her caste and class status by following a similar structure in all the initial interviews, but it was virtually impossible to mitigate the consequences of her status entirely.¹¹⁵ We discussed the ethical choices and issues several times, but we still sometimes differed in our approaches, as any two people usually do.

114 Srinivasan (1997, 91) found that in her field research in rural India one of the very first questions the interviewees asked her was her caste affiliation.

115 Lindberg (2001, 70–71) felt that having a Christian interpreter in Kerala mitigated the biases which might occur when Hindu women of low caste meet with high caste women.

For ethical reasons, the employers and workers I interviewed were not only from different households but also from different geographical locations. Froystad (2003, 90-91) interviewed workers and employers from within the same houses and felt this led to an overemphasis of the employers' perceptions in her otherwise rich ethnographic analysis. The workers she approached were unwilling to talk to her, even when she approached them in privacy. During the pilot phase, I also conducted one interview with three part-time workers in the presence of a woman for whom one of them worked. Even though it was reasonable to expect the employing woman, a long-time human rights activist, to be a caring employer, I think both I and the workers felt uncomfortable in her presence. Froystad's (2003) experiences and the pilot interview supported my decision to rule out interviews of workers in the presence of employers, as well as the interviews with current live-in workers. Interviews with live-in workers, even if done in seeming privacy, could have influenced the content, put both sides in an uncomfortable position, and potentially risked the workers' safety, given the verbal, mental and physical abuse sometimes involved in domestic work. Moreover, even though some of the live-in workers visit their own home every second week, I felt it would have been intrusive to ask them to be interviewed during the few hours of free time with their families. In sum, while I acknowledge that close observation of workers and employers within the same house could have revealed relevant issues about the dynamics of their relationship¹¹⁶, I feel the decision was the right one.

Since I decided not to interview current live-in workers, excepting only the pilot interviews in Kolkata¹¹⁷, I had to find other ways of acquiring information on live-in relations from the worker perspec-

116 For example, by examining closely workers and employers within the same houses in Indonesia, Kathleen M. Adams (2000, 158) was able to understand the role of humour in negotiations and bargaining in labour relations.

117 Interviewing them was more feasible since they (with permission from their employers) participated in an NGO programme, and the interviews were carried out in the centre, outside the employers' premises.

tive. The question was solved, partially at least, since seven workers in my study had previously worked as live-in workers, and they told me about their experiences. I also talked with other live-in workers informally.

I found the respondents to my study through a snow-ball technique. In the case of workers, I was considerably aided by an activist woman whom I met through researchers at the University of Rajasthan. She initially put me in touch with two different communities of domestic workers situated near her home. Unlike most educated people in Jaipur, she knew many domestic workers personally but did not employ any. With her continuous support, it was relatively easy to “find” workers, and even to trace some who moved to a new place on my last stay in Jaipur.

Based on prior information about exploitation of workers, I had initially been sceptical of whether I would find employers willing to discuss their relations with, and practices towards, the workers. My concern was unnecessary: all middle class women and men whom I asked to be interviewed agreed, and as mentioned in Chapter 1, talked quite openly about their practices.

In my experience it is not only the researcher who aims to make the interview situation as comfortable as possible, but also the respondents. The girls whom I interviewed were particularly caring towards me from the beginning. One way to do this was small -talk, for example, about what I and the interpreter were wearing. Although their comments on our suits and on whether the colour suited me or not¹¹⁸ also reflected the significance of what one wears in India (Tienstrakul 2006, 31),¹¹⁹ I perceived these and other questions as the girls’ efforts to make the situation comfortable for me. In the case

118 See Mookherjee (2001, 4–5) for similar field study experiences in India.

119 Linneken (1998) talks about impression management in field work situations, part of which is the question of what one wears. Since my dress was always more or less the same; a *salwar kameez* (a long tunic shirt and trousers) with a *dupatta* scarf, there was no difference in the way I dressed “for” the workers and employers.

of the workers, my initial feeling that I was an intruder who was stealing their precious time between two work shifts was also eased by the relaxed attitude of the girls and women themselves to the interviews. The same was true for some of the employers, who seemed to be making an effort to make me feel welcome and comfortable.

Employers

The ages of the fifteen female and two male employers in my data ranged from around twenty-five to around sixty-five years. As one criterion, I included employers of both live-in and part-time workers in the study. The employers lived mainly in three different Hindu-dominated middle class neighbourhoods in Jaipur. In the state of Rajasthan Hinduism dominates more than in India as a whole.¹²⁰ In my data, too, the clear majority of the employers were Hindus (14), nearly all of high caste, Brahmins and Rajputs. Three were Sikhs by religion. Many female employers had moved to Jaipur from rural Rajasthan or from other states through marriage, and were ethnically mainly Rajasthanis and Punjabis.¹²¹ Most spoke Hindi as their native language, some Punjabi. Unlike the upper middle class in larger cities, none of the employers used English as their main language. Of the employers, five women and one man currently worked full-time, while two ran their own businesses attached to their houses. One other woman worked regularly for some hours a day as a private teacher from within her home. All female and male employers were married, although some lived separately either for marital or work-

120 In Rajasthan, the Hindus account for 88,8 %, Muslims for 8,5 %, Sikhs for 1,4 % and Jains for 1,2 % of the population, compared to the lower national average of Hindus at 79,9% and higher average of Muslims at 13,3%. (Census of India (2001) cited by the Government of Rajasthan <http://www.rajasthan.gov.in/rajgovt/Districtprofile/jaipur.html>. Accessed 12.1.2009.

121 Rajasthan is mainly populated by Rajasthanis, although a number of other ethnicities, such as Bengalis, Punjabis and Sindhs exist. The latter came to Rajasthan from Sindh province, which currently belongs to Pakistan, during the India-Pakistan partition in 1947.

related reasons. The husbands of the employers worked, for example, in textile, jewellery or tourism business, in technology or in government jobs.

Most employers I met with lived in wealthy middle class residential areas in relatively large single houses, which they usually owned. Some were tenants renting one floor in a larger house, and one young couple owned a flat in a recently built apartment building. Although the single-house pattern still dominates, new apartment buildings are mushrooming in Jaipur day by day, as in larger Indian cities. Many houses accommodated an extended family of three (or four) generations, but nuclear families were also common. Men from all ages in these families typically had a university degree and although women were clearly less educated, several had a BA degree. All children in these families studied in private schools, typically in English. The families had a TV and a video-set, one or several mobile phones, stereo-system, refrigerator, a motorbike and/or one or two cars.

The employer interviews took place in their homes, usually in the living room, and lasted between forty-five minutes and one and half hours. We sat around a glass or marble table on sofas or armchairs, the fan swinging above us. Without exception I was offered tea or juice, and biscuits or salty snacks. The atmosphere was tranquil, with occasional background noise from nearby construction sites. Depending on the time of day, part-time workers sometimes worked in the other rooms. In houses which employed live-in workers, they were always around, making short visits to the interview location, bringing in tea or water or carrying out the tray.

Workers

The interviews with workers included women and girls from two main groups, Rajasthanis and Bengalis. They all currently worked as part-time maids carrying out cleaning and washing dishes for several houses. Five had previously worked as live-in workers. The group

of Rajasthani workers consisted of six adult women and their seven working daughters. Sikhs by religion,¹²² they had all lived in Jaipur for most of their lives since they got married (at a very young age), and can be considered local residents. The age of the adult workers varied from around twenty-five to sixty-five, although none of them knew their exact age, as they had not been registered at birth and, more generally, they lacked education. The daughters' ages during our first meetings varied from around nine to eighteen years. These thirteen women and girls, mothers and daughters and one grand-mother, lived in a small colony of the type usually described as a poor *basti*, sandwiched between wealthier neighbourhoods in central Jaipur.¹²³ Their one-room homes had electricity but no running water; water was fetched from a nearby well, and they prepared food on gas stoves outside their one-room accommodation. The families in their community were mostly joint families, and most homes housed around ten people from three or four generations. The security was weak since those who rented a room in a larger building had to fear arbitrary dismissal and those who had built their own concrete houses feared demolition by the authorities. Yet the older workers said that their living conditions were clearly better than, say, twenty years earlier, especially after the installation of electricity.

The six Bengali workers had come to Jaipur in search of work from the district of Cooch Behar in north-eastern West Bengal, near to the Bhutanese and Bangladeshi borders, some years ago (from one year to about ten years at most). This group also included one daughter-

122 In principle, the Sikhs denounce the caste system although in practice there are caste divisions also among Sikhs. One of my assistants suggested that this community would be former Hindu *dalits* (Untouchables), who would have gone through *sanskritisation*, a process through which a low caste or tribe takes over the customs, rituals, beliefs, ideology and life style of higher castes, thus improving its caste position, or turns to another religion (Srinivas 1996, 77).

123 The common term *basti* generally refers to areas inhabited by the urban poor, typically considered as slum settlements (Unnithan-Kumar et al. 2008, 5). See Priya (2007) for a concise description of different types of slum-like settlements in the Indian cities.

mother pair. They were Brahmin Hindus by caste and religion. When I first met the Bengalis in early 2006, they rented rooms in a large apartment building near to the Rajasthanis. Some had electricity, but all fetched water from one shared tap in the basement. The Bengali workers were aged between (approximately) eleven and forty-five, the youngest being unmarried and the others married.

In addition to these two groups, I interviewed two Bihari girls who had previously worked as live-in workers. They had escaped from their employer household and had since lived in a children's centre run by a local NGO. In addition to the interviews with the above-mentioned workers, pilot interviews with six workers and two employers in Kolkata and with two workers (from the group of sweepers) in Jaipur in 2004, and with the other three Bengali workers mentioned earlier provided useful reflection points although I did not use this data in the same weight.

In terms of differences between the employer and worker interviews, my experiences in Jaipur resemble those of Dickey (2000, 35) in Madurai, South India. Most of the interviews with the Rajasthani workers took place in the informant's small home, very close to both Rajasthani and Bengali workers. During the field work in the winter months, we talked on her small porch in the sun, during the hot summer months we sat inside under a fan. This was a place where the workers' husbands or children were less likely to come to ask for them, and where the women and girls seemed comfortable. Moreover, not meeting women in their homes saved them from straining their budget by offering me tea and biscuits (see Scott 1985, 3). I visited their homes, too, when they later invited me to, and conducted some interviews in front of their homes in the common space. The Bengali workers were mostly interviewed on a common roof terrace or in their abysmally small one-room homes. The two Bihari girls were interviewed in the childrens' centre where they lived.

I interviewed all workers (except during the pilot interviews in Kolkata) in groups first, and only after that as individuals or in pairs.

Both Rajasthani and Bengali workers tended to give a sanitised account of their working conditions in our first meeting. However, if one worker in a group interview broke this pattern and started to talk about the employers in a critical manner, the others would follow suit and give a more critical view themselves. Dickey (2000a, 40) describes a similar shift in a conversation with a group of domestic workers in Madurai, in which one worker interrupted what she deemed an excessively positive description of the employers by another in her group. My experiences underline the usefulness of the group interview during the early encounters with informants (see also Dickey 2000a), as well as the importance of conducting more than one interview with each respondent.

In similar vein, after the initial hesitations of our first meetings the workers spoke openly about their family problems during subsequent interviews. In this, my experience differs from Vatuk (2006, 214) who notes that Indian women generally do not speak badly about their husbands to other people or mention private disagreements outside their homes. The women and girls I met, especially the Rajasthanis, spoke openly of the abuse and violence they live with, and criticised the inability of their husbands to provide income for the family.¹²⁴ In a group discussion with three young Bengali migrant women, two women encouraged the third to tell me about the violence she faced from her husband. The way women related spoke about all their problems could also be read as a means to establish agency and to preserve self respect and dignity, as suggested by Bos (2008, 193).

There is a discussion within development studies on whether one should somehow compensate respondents for their participation, with a warning that gift giving may result in a patron-client like relationship (see Scheyvens et al. 2003a, 157). On my assistant's advice,

124 See de Neve (2001; 2004) for how worker women publicly pointed out and ridiculed husbands who were incapable of meeting the masculine ideal of provider, including criticism of their drinking habits.

I gave each worker a new piece of cloth once, at the end of the field work period during which I had interviewed them several times, but not during the visit next year. I did not think this would make them indebted to me, rather it was a kind of compensation for spending their precious free moments between the work shifts and housework with me.¹²⁵ In all our meetings, I provided small snacks, although they often remained untouched. In the case of employers, it would have been out of question for me to provide gifts or any other 'compensation' for them, given our similar social status.

The analysis of data

The main body of my data consists of a total of seventy-one transcribed interviews with workers and employers as individuals, or in pairs and groups. It also includes ten interviews with Indian and international organisations working on the issue of the rights of domestic workers and/or child domestic workers.¹²⁶

I have analysed the data through a content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 105), with the question of *why* guiding the process (Miles and Huberman 1984, 143). Like discourse analysis, content analysis is a method to analyse texts, whether they are transcribed interviews, reports or diaries. I have organised the interview data into a more concise form in order to create more consistent, meaningful information (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 110). This meant that I established certain themes such as working conditions, marriage or child work, and grouped findings under such themes.

Here, it should be noted that content analysis can be perceived both as a method to quantify data, through creating categories and then counting the appearance of the categories in a particular text, or, as I have done, as a qualitative content analysis, where emphasis is not on quantifying elements in the data but rather on looking at the

125 See Groves (2005, 51) for similar questions in a study of child mine workers in Burkina Faso.

126 See Appendix 3.

context in which the themes appear (Silvermann 2001, 122; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 107). My analysis has been empirically grounded, following three basic processes of data reduction, data clustering, and conclusion drawing through abstraction, i.e. creation of theoretical conceptualisations (Miles and Huberman 1984). In drawing conclusions and throughout the analysis, I have aimed to understand what each theme and category means for the research participants themselves (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 115). The analysis was not limited to a certain time period in this research process, but continued throughout (see Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 110).

In addition to the interviews, field notes and relevant academic literature, I also draw from a large number of media articles on domestic work, mainly from Indian printed and electronic media, references to which are given in the text.

As to the limitations of this study, I have mentioned above my decision to focus on some specific workers' groups rather than on domestic workers generally, which obviously limits my focus. Moreover, based on my choice to focus on the female-dominated group of part-time maids, instead of drivers or sweepers, for example, and my deliberate choice not to interview current live-in workers, the main focus of my study is on female workers. The relatively short duration of each field work period as well as the limitations of being a foreign researcher were also discussed above.

4 ORGANISATION OF PAID DOMESTIC WORK IN JAIPUR

Today, a highly stratified and a rather complex division of labour exists among domestic workers in urban India (Raghuram 2001, 607; Lingam 1998, 812). The main distinction is between live-in and part-time workers.¹²⁷ Live-in work used to be the most common arrangement and live-in workers, or 'family retainers' as Ray and Qayum (2009, 67) call them, typically had a long-term relationship with a particular employer family. Although it is difficult to prove statistically, recent studies indicate that today part-time work is the most common work arrangement, having largely, but not completely, replaced live-in labour (Dickey 2000a; Kundu 2008; Neetha 2003; Raghuram 1999; Ray and Qayum 2009). My own observations and the discussions in Jaipur support this, although there are no statistics on the overall number of domestic workers in Jaipur, nor on the relative numbers of live-in workers and part-time workers.

The part-time work is further divided into diverse tasks such as cleaning or gardening, and the part-time workers typically work for several houses every day. There is also a third arrangement, that of full-time – live-out work, but it was not common among the employers I interviewed. Among the live-in workers, the main distinction is

127 Ray and Qayum (2009, 67) further divide the live-in workers in Kolkata into family retainers, mostly men, who have worked for several generations in the same family, and into other live-in workers, who also live with employers. However, I did not find such a division in my data in Jaipur. 'Family retainers' in Kolkata mostly worked for the rich elite, living in colonial mansions, and none of the employers in my data were from such families.

between generic workers, who carry out a range of household tasks, and those employed for one specific task such as cooking.

One reason that urban Indian employers prefer part-time workers is the smaller size of most homes today compared to the large mansions of the past, at least among the wealthy families. Hiring live-in workers, especially adult males, would also be too expensive for the average income middle class, although not for the wealthier upper middle class. Others argue that the increasing demand for part-time workers is related to the growing proportion of middle class women in paid employment outside the home. The so called 'dual career couple' in which both the husband and the wife are involved in paid work, is becoming more common in urban India. (Fernandes 2006, 250; Neetha 2003, 2). At the same time, middle class men have not increased their share of domestic chores, and domestic and care work is seen as the responsibility of women. Such gendered familialism, which regards care as women's responsibility, can be perceived as a state ideology, which influences women's labour participation considerably (Palriwala & Neetha, 2009, 21–22).

The shift towards part-time domestic work has been accompanied by the feminisation of the work force: since women are now a clear majority of part-time workers, they also constitute the majority of domestic workers. Unlike the situation in some other countries, however, male workers have not totally disappeared. A considerable number of men and boys work as live-in workers, or in specific part-time jobs.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of how work is organised in middle class homes in Jaipur. I show how domestic work is outsourced and segregated into a part-time market where the employers buy services according to their individual needs. In addition, I describe briefly the most common domestic occupations, and investigate the work of two groups, part-time maids and generic live-in workers, in more detail. I study the role of domestic workers for middle class status and class reproduction and in ena-

bling the middle class to lead the kind of domestic life they want to lead. Since domestic labour relationships are mainly acted out in middle class homes, the main focus in this chapter is on them, while workers' lives and homes will be explored in Chapter 8.

I also explore the reasons for which domestic workers are hired and ask whether they are hired mainly for their utilitarian or symbolic value. I take particular note of the differences between dual-earning couples and households with a housewife. I also discuss how the shift from live-in work to part-time work transforms labour relations.

4.1 The scene: middle class domesticity

In India, home, *ghar*, and the meanings given to it are central (Tiengtrakul 2006, 30). Home refers both to the physical place of domicile and to an ideological or psychological space to which one has a sense of belonging (ibid, 25). Households are not only a necessity of life but also central to social and cultural reproduction (Moors 2003, 389), and can also be understood as practices (Hendon 1996, 56). The middle class obsession with cleanliness, reflecting traditional Hindu thought on purity and pollution, is one of the most visible pointers to the centrality of the domestic sphere in middle class values (Säävälä 2010, 178).

Homes are also central sites of class reproduction, and meeting points for different classes, especially the higher classes and their domestic workers. While the middle class aim to clearly distinguish themselves from the lower classes, they are actually highly integrated with each other in their daily activities (see Peace 2007, 154). One manifestation of such integration is the outsourcing of all sorts of work as an integral element of middle class life in India (Waldrop 2004). It is very common for the middle class to call for manual labourers for both large and small tasks, from repairing things to pur-

chasing food products, household items and clothes from door-to-door vendors (see Tiwari 2000).¹²⁸

The homes that I visited in Jaipur were usually in an impeccable condition, but achieving this is a time consuming process. The demands for purity and cleanliness are not merely symbolic, since dust settles on surfaces in a matter of hours in Jaipur, a polluted city surrounded with sand deserts. In India the floors are typically washed every day, part of a general heavy cleaning load. Cooking is often extremely time-consuming because of the adherence to rules related to purity and pollution and the multiplicity of dishes. Even if ready-made food is becoming increasingly popular, preparing the dishes takes several hours each day. So, women try to outsource as many tasks as possible: for example, the vegetable vendors who come to their gates sell garlic readily peeled and divided into cloves. All these tasks, and many others, are mainly women's responsibility.

Middle class women as household managers

To explore women's roles in reproducing middle class domesticity, let us look at a lengthy excerpt from Raj Kamal Jha's (2002, 266–269) novel *If you are afraid of heights*, which captures the self- and culturally imposed standards for cleanliness, portrayed through a middle class "Mother" in Kolkata.

After you leave for school, for Mother there are a thousand and one things to do. Chandra (the maid) has already done the dishes, swept and scrubbed the floors, made the bed, fluffed the pillows, aired the bedsheets, but when Mother moves from one room to the other, her eyes pick up the pillows, not in a straight line. One pillowcase hasn't been pulled all the way down so she picks it up, pats it back into shape, fluffs it again, places it on the bed, moves a few steps back to see if she's got it right. No, it's now at an angle to the other, a couple of inches

128 In an upper middle class neighbourhood in Delhi, employers tended to extend their mastery to all people who appeared to be working class, for example, by ordering strangers to perform manual tasks in a common park (Waldrop 2004).

off to the right, she pushes it to the left, now they are in one straight line but the movement of the pillows has rumbled the bedsheet, two creases run diagonally, she tugs at the end that overhangs the bed until the creases are gone.

Now the bed is perfect.

Almost.

The bed out of her mind and her way, at least for now, she looks at the floor. It's clean, she can see the marks the scrubbing has left but what she's drawn to are the specks around the chair's legs. She goes to the kitchen to get the mop, it's behind the gas cylinder, she wets it in the sink, the tap is dry so she has to take water from the bucket in a glass and pour it onto the mop. She watches the water stain the cloth, wrings it just a little bit, she doesn't want the water to drip as she goes from the sink to the room but she wants the wetness to stay so she cups the mop in her hands. And bends down to wipe the rings from the chair legs away.

Now that she has the mop in her hand, what else should be done?

The showcase.

She cleaned it the day before yesterday, it's shut tight, the dust wouldn't have

entered through the glass door but why take a chance? The first shelf has a brass Buddha, two ashtrays made of stained glass, the second has three dolls. She stands there for a while, perhaps thinks about the doll you want, the one in the shop, in the red dress.

And so the "Mother" went on and on, going through her clearly middle class apartment in Kolkata. Home management in Jaipur and other Indian cities is largely a women's world, and women bear almost the sole responsibility for housework (Agarwal 2000; Fernandes 2006; Palriwala & Neetha 2009; Säävälä 2010; Tiengtrakul 2006; Tiwari 2002). Traditionally, women were responsible for house-work inside the house and men for work around the house,¹²⁹ but in urban fami-

129 Husband and wife have been described as two wheels of one cart, each wheel performing its own function. The wife is expected to manage the home

lies today there is much less work outside. According to the Indian National Time Use Survey, in 1998–99 men spent on average thirty-six minutes per day on unpaid care work while women spent about five hours (Palriwala & Neetha, 2009, 22–23).¹³⁰

Women take pride in maintaining the home well and measure their own success by how they create a home for their family. Moreover, their status depends upon how well they are able to maintain the home (Donner 2008; Tiengtrakul 2006, 30, 49). Since many women spend most of their lives within familial parameters, the centrality of the family and the household in their lives cannot be overemphasised (Dube 1996, 2).

The idea of gender complementarity within middle class families has meant and still means in many families that husbands are responsible for the provision of income and women for the home. Even in larger cities such as Mumbai, where significant changes have occurred in the gendered middle class norms related to the joint family structure, to behaviour in public space, and in the age of marriage, the actual experiences of working women continue to be structured around the dual shifts of labour within the workplace and household (Fernandes 2006, 163). There is an alternative ethos of women's agency and the ability to lead her family out of economical and social challenges exists in India (Tiengtrakul 2006, 33-34), but it was not explicitly expressed among the people I met in Jaipur.

In Jaipur, every single female employer I met, both housewives and wage-earning women, told me they were solely responsible for household work: as one put it, "*In India men don't do household work. I mean all the home business is women's business. Even if the wife is a working wife, like I am, I don't get any kind of help from my husband in household work.*" Their husbands did minimally household duties,

front and husband the outdoor one, and they are expected not to interfere in each other's spheres (Tiwari 2002, 30)

130 When calculated only for those who actually participate in care work, men spent 1 hour and 12 minutes on such work while women spent 5 hours 36 minutes (Palriwala & Neetha, 2009, 22–23).

limited to the occasional preparation of tea or an omelette¹³¹.

The gendered division of labour has remained virtually intact, but women do not manage the “home business” on their own. As Faye Dudden (quoted in Romero 2002, 84) has noted:

Domesticity’s new view on women’s roles, while implicitly assigning the domestic to drudge work, called employers to ‘higher’ tasks and to supervision.

While both middle and working class women in Jaipur have the main responsibility for housework, the ability of the middle class to hire workers to ease their burden accentuates the differences between them and reproduces class contradictions (Romero 2002, 82-83). In Nepal, Shah (2000, 102) argues that domestic workers “play a crucial (albeit unrecognized) role in economically and culturally subsidizing the advancement of women from another class.” Although it has been argued (Shurmer-Smith 2000, 50) that the ability to employ workers in India distinguishes the ordinary middle class from the upper middle class, my data show that both groups frequently hire workers. However, the number of workers, the frequency of their visits, and their tasks varied considerably depending on each employer’s needs and economic standing.

Success in managing the house requires the right mix of workers. Perhaps the most important decision for the employers is whether to hire part-time or live-in workers. Out of the seventeen employers in my data, ten employ only part-time workers and seven employ both (see Appendix 2). Nearly all households employed at least a maid and a sweeper, and most also a washerwoman or man. Two wealthier upper middle class families employed five different workers. It was not uncommon in wealthy families in the early 20th century 10 to 20 servants (King 2007, 56), but I have never come across such large numbers, although I have understood that this may occur in the rich-

131 In some social circles in India, among younger couples in academia, for example, men may also participate (Agarwal 2000, 55).

est families in India.¹³² In terms of total working hours, the employer who hired most labour power had two live-in workers and one live-out cook who worked a full day from 9.30 a.m. to 7.30 p.m., as well as one part-time worker.

It is usually the women who supervise domestic workers. Coordinating their schedules requires considerable organisation, and is particularly challenging for wage working women. Both women employed outside the home and housewives need to plan and structure their day around the workers' visits, since usually at least two different workers visit a single household within the same day, maids usually twice a day.

Even if part of women's work is outsourced to domestic workers, the overall amount is so time-consuming that there remains much for most women to do themselves. Those who carry out minimal work themselves continue to have the overall responsibility to ensure that tasks get done (Agarwal 2000, 48). Agarwal (2000, 55–56) argues that the fact that middle class families hire domestic help actually cloaks the reality that a large number of tasks are still done by women in such families. To examine the supervisory roles and the significance of domestic workers for middle class domesticity, we can look at Kripas' day in managing her four part-time workers. In terms of her role as an employer, Kripa can be seen as a rather typical upper middle class, high caste employer of her generation.

**Kripa's day:
supervising domestic workers in an upper middle class home**

It is early morning and Kripa, about fifty-year old Brahmin housewife, is doing the morning *puja*, a worship ritual in the small home temple. The beautiful altar adjoins the living room, allowing for easy

132 Having a very large household staff is a phenomenon known also elsewhere in Asia. In her study on Java in Indonesia, Weix (2000, 141) writes about a wealthy, female entrepreneur whose staff includes forty workers, of different ages and sexes.

accessibility and a view for guests.¹³³ As in so many other upper middle class homes, the spacious living room accommodates a TV-set, a sofa set and a large dining table. The kitchen, next to the living-room, is rather small but it is meant for cooking, not eating. The two-storey house is a little worn-out but comfortable and it is clean everywhere. As always, the bathroom is out of sight in the furthest corner of the house, behind the bedrooms.

The gate bell rings and Kripa lets in a man in his early forties. It is the driver, who works from early morning till late evening but lives in his own home. Since they do not have a cook, Kripa has woken up early to prepare the breakfast. She now offers the driver some leftovers and tea while he waits patiently for Kripa's eldest daughter to get ready. Driving the adult daughter to work is one of the driver's main duties. Kripa's son and younger daughter drive scooters to their jobs. All Kripa's children are still unmarried but arrangements for their marriages are being made. Her husband works in another city, but when he is in town the driver takes him wherever needed. Kripa and her husband both have a Masters Degrees but whereas her husband works as a manager in public sector, Kripa has never worked outside home since her marriage

Hurrying her daughter off, Kripa is now home alone with her own mother, *ammaji*, the grandmother. She is getting a little irritated since the maid, Nirmala, is late again. But there she comes, a little after 10 a.m., complaining about her husband's drinking. Kripa listens politely for a moment, although she would rather not. Nirmala originally comes from Bihar and has worked for Kripa's household for four years now. Kripa has also become familiar with her small daughter, whom Nirmala has brought along to work a couple of times. Nirmala works for four other houses in the same neighbourhood.

Time for work, the young woman picks up the broom and sweeps

133 Säävälä (2010, 179) notes that household altars are increasingly moved away from the protected interior spaces of homes to more neutral spaces to become more accessible to visitors.

the floor. After sweeping, she mops the floor with a piece of wet cloth. Then to the kitchen where dishes from yesterday evening and this morning wait in a large pile. She throws the left-overs away, carries the steel utensils outside in a big emal basin, and starts the washing with cold water under the tap. After finishing and bringing the dishes back to the kitchen, Kripa gives Nirmala a small pile of her mother's clothes. Kripa washes the clothes of all other family members in a washing machine herself, but hands the grandmother's clothes to Nirmala who washes them in less than fifteen minutes. Completing her tasks in about two hours, she hurries away after having refused, as always, the tea which Kripa sometimes offers her. In the meantime, the sweeper has completed her work in ten minutes. She first swept the street in front of the house, and then took out the garbage bag that Nirmala gave her - in this Brahmin house the sweeper never enters the house. She then threw the garbage onto the nearest empty plot, where garbage is generally thrown for scavengers to collect and for cows to eat.

Later in the afternoon the gardener arrives, waiting for Kripa's instructions in his quiet manner. There is no proper garden in this house, only a few plant pots on the small terrace in front of the house and some plants surrounding the gate. So he only comes here about once a fortnight.

At 5 p.m., Nirmala, the maid, is back for the second shift. This time, she gets her work done in a little less than 30 minutes. She only needs to wash the lunch dishes. Kripa had eaten lunch with her old mother and her youngest daughter, and, before that, drank tea with her niece who had come to discuss a detail related to an upcoming wedding.

In the evening the driver brings the elder daughter back from work. Now it is time for Kripa and her younger daughter, who has come back from her work by scooter, to go together to the nearest market. The driver carries the vegetables back to the car. At home, Kripa and her daughters start dinner preparations. At around 8 p.m.

the driver leaves for home with instructions for the next day. Kripa’s supervisory work for the day is over and she continues the dinner preparations, expecting two relatives to join them.

The following table is a summary of Kripa’s workers, their tasks and schedules:

Table 1. Kripa’s workers, their tasks, schedules

Occupation	Tasks	Schedule
Maid (woman)	Cleaning floors Washing dishes Washing some clothes	10–12 a.m. 4–4.30 p.m.
Driver (man)	Drives daughters (and father) to work	8 a.m.–7 p.m./8 p.m.
Sweeper (woman)	Sweeps the front of the house Takes out the garbage	Every second day, 10 minutes each time
Gardener (man)	Gardening work	Twice a week
Washerwoman	Ironing, washing clothes	Every second day

This overview of Kripa’s day shows how work is differentiated into clearly separable tasks and outsourced to different workers. Next, I examine further the commodification of domestic work, which characterises particularly the part-time work.

4.2 Organising paid domestic work

Traditionally, much work in agriculture and service occupations was performed on a part-time basis, both in India and elsewhere. What is new is that whole occupations are being organised on a part-time basis, especially within cleaning, food preparation and serving, and care

work (Beechey and Perkins 1987, 1–2). As we have seen, servants have always been common in wealthy households in India, but a recent phenomenon is segmentation into highly specific tasks and the increased demand for such services in middle class families who are not particularly wealthy. It should be noted, however, that task-based segmentation was not entirely unknown earlier, given the caste-specific divisions in the organisation of household labour.

In today's urban India, the boundary between work performed by family members and by domestic workers appears stricter than it was some decades ago when the boundaries between different family members and servants in rural household work were rather flexible (see Trawick 1992, 84–85).¹³⁴ Women employers outsource tasks they dislike according to an 'order of avoidance' (Froystad 2003), retaining only those they are willing to carry out themselves. In Froystad's (2003) data, gathered from upper-caste Hindu employers in Kanpur in North India a rough, decreasing order of avoidance was: 1) cleaning toilets, 2) cleaning bathrooms, 3) washing floors, 4) dish-washing, 5) dusting, 6) washing clothes, 7) cutting vegetables and 8) cooking (ibid, 78). If a family could afford to have only one domestic worker, they would choose to have their toilets and bathrooms cleaned. In Kolkata, Ray and Qayum (2009, 153) found that the most avoided tasks were washing dishes and cleaning toilets.¹³⁵

The order of avoidance in Jaipur is very similar to that in Kolkata. By contrast, it differs from Kanpur in that several employers I met cleaned toilets themselves. What the Jaipur employers most avoided

134 While all members of a household in Trawick's (1992, 84–85) study on rural South India did the same work, some of them did more, following an implicit order grading the people by age, degree of centrality to the household, caste, and sex. The further down one was in the hierarchy, the dirtier, heavier, and more onerous his or her work was.

135 The working class women in Kumar's study (2006, 65–66) in Banaras listed as their main tasks replenishing water, cleaning the house, washing clothes and drying and folding them, grinding, preserving, cooking and serving food, cleaning the dishes, sewing and mending; out of which they considered cooking the most rewarding mentally and washing dishes and clothes the most laborious.

was washing the dishes, waste removal (a task missing from Froystad's list) and sweeping outside the house. Only two of seventeen employers did the first of these tasks, none the second or third. Hindu considerations of purity are not the only reasons to avoid certain tasks. The easy availability of a labour force organised to cater for middle class needs makes hiring services attractive, and suits the increasingly consumerist mind.

Commodified part-time work

In my data, all employers of part-time workers employed a part-time maid, *bai*, to carry out two main tasks, cleaning the floor and washing the dishes. In the part-time market, the performance of these two tasks is highly gender-segregated, carried out only by female workers. The maids' ages varied considerably: the girls in my data had all started to work at around eight years, and the eldest was a grand-mother of about sixty years. The part-time maids appear the single largest occupational group of domestic workers in Jaipur and in India which explains at least partly the sharp increase in the proportion of female domestic workers. (see Palriwala & Neetha 2009, 21).

Another large occupational group is the sweepers, *jamadars/jamadarnis* whose task is to take the household waste to public dumps within the neighbourhoods; to sweep the street in front of the house; and, in some houses, to clean the toilets.¹³⁶ Out of seventeen employers in my data only two did not employ a sweeper in 2006 and only one in 2007. Both these houses had live-in workers who carried out the sweepers' tasks. These are peripheral to the household management and can be performed rapidly (Raghuram, 2001, 611),¹³⁷ but they are crucial for the employers for reasons of purity and pollution.

136 'Sweepers', the English name for *jamadars/jamadarnis* used in India should not be confused with those who carry out the task of 'sweeping' which refers to the double-task of sweeping and mopping inside the house.

137 In Noida, suburban Delhi, the female *jamadarnis* worked for a 15 to 60 households per day, visiting each house for about 15 minutes (Raghuram 2001, 611).

In all three neighbourhoods in my study, sweepers were employed collectively for the whole colony or for one street of a colony, in one of them by a residential association.¹³⁸ The sweepers were the most diverse group in terms of gender and age, both female and male, adults and children being involved. However, they were all *dalits* by caste, to be examined more closely in Chapter 7.

The washing and ironing of clothes is also an essential task for the middle class. In India, clothes are an important signifier of one's social standing, and they must look clean and well-maintained (see Froystad 2005). Most employers in my data outsourced washing and ironing of clothes to a washerwoman or -man, a *dhoban* or a *dhobi*. Some clothes, like cotton *saris*, were taken not only to be ironed but also to be starched.¹³⁹ This is seldom carried out at the employers' home: *dhobis* and *dhobans* wash the laundry elsewhere, scrubbing clothes with soap by hand. Those houses which had a washing machine only outsourced ironing. There are small ironing corner-shops situated within each neighbourhood where the employers or one of the workers take the laundry.

Another time-consuming task in middle class homes is cooking, but in Jaipur cooks, *rasoiyas*, in Jaipur were not nearly as common as maids or sweepers. In my data, only two families, both among the wealthiest, employed a cook. Traditionally, male cooks were preferred, as women are considered impure during menstruation and childbirth (Srinivas 1995, 272; Kapadia 1995, 93)¹⁴⁰, and the majority of cooks that I came across were indeed men. A cook's salary was

138 See Fernandes (2006) for an insightful analysis of the middle class residential associations.

139 In Kanpur, the standard rates for starching and/or ironing *saris* were not affordable for all middle class families, thus women sometimes preferred to use cheap polyester *saris* which did not require starching or ironing, a necessary practice for more expensive cotton *saris* (Froystad (2005, 106).

140 Different castes have different attitudes to menstrual impurity. While menstruating women in all castes should not enter a temple, the women in some Brahmin families may not cook for their families, may not sleep with them, and should eat separately (Kapadia 1995, 93).

not a heavy investment for the upper middle class, but out of reach for average middle class families.

Hiring a cook is not merely a question of finances. Food is ubiquitously significant in India (Saunders 2007, 209)¹⁴¹ and several women in my data emphasised that they enjoy cooking and do not want to hire anybody for this job. This also reflects the common middle class Hindu preference for food prepared at home by related women (Säävälä 2010, 130). But cooking in middle class homes is a highly time-consuming activity since meals always consist of several dishes. While women preserved the overall responsibility for cooking, it was relatively common to assign some menial tasks such as cutting vegetables or making dough to the generic live-in workers or to maids.

In addition to maids, sweepers, washerwomen or /men and cooks, those who lived in a single family house commonly employed a gardener, *mali*. They were all adult men, and visited wealthier homes with a large garden daily but most houses once or twice a week. Another all-male occupation was that of driver. Only a few upper middle class families employed one, two out of the seventeen families in my data. One of these lived with the employer and the other at his own home. Very rich families may also employ male guards, *chowkidar*, but not the middle class of my data.

Finally, an essential task which has been extensively discussed in the context of domestic and care work in Western countries is care of the elderly and children. Contrary to my assumption, it was not common to employ child carers in Jaipur. None of the families in my data employed an *ayah*. In one joint family a generic female live-in worker took care of the employers' three-year old granddaughter as one of her tasks, but the child was never left in the house alone with her. Another employer, a young woman who had recently delivered her

141 For Indians in a Hindu context, food is much more than sustenance. What a person ingests shapes and reshapes the identity and character of a person on a daily basis, and both ethnographic and textual data demonstrate the deep value that food has for Hindus (Saunders 2007, 213).

first child, was planning to hire an *ayah* and to go back to work. Concerned about poor working girls' lack of skills in providing the proper food and cleaning the baby, she emphasised how difficult it would be to find someone suitable.¹⁴² When I met her a year later she was still staying at home with her children, as she had never found an appropriate person.

The situation may be different in Delhi or Mumbai, where parents commonly hire child carers, *ayahs*.¹⁴³ Previous studies in Kolkata point on the one hand to the popularity of child minders (Donner 2008), and on the other hand to the rarity of child caretakers (Ray and Qayum 2009). In any case, Donner's (2008) analysis of middle class motherhood in Kolkata illustrates that some aspects of child care cannot be outsourced, most importantly the responsibility for children's educational success. Motherhood, more than anything else, confers a purpose and identity for Indian women who always define themselves in relation and connection to other intimate people (Kakar 1981, 56). The ability to supervise their children to success at school is increasingly considered a yardstick of good motherhood (Donner 2008). This has led middle class mothers to devote a great deal of time to the guidance of their school-age children, accentuating their need for domestic workers.

While the education of children today certainly requires much time and effort, it does not seem to explain the increased demand for domestic workers in Jaipur. There, young childless couples or employers with adult children hired as many domestic workers as the families with school-aged children. One reason for the lack of *ayahs* in Jaipur compared to other cities may be a stronger ideal of the mother as responsible for child care. Moreover, mothers of young children tend to participate less in wage work in Jaipur than in larger

142 The mothers in Kolkata also doubted the domestic workers' skills in caring for their children, even for those below school-age. They also worried that if children spent too much time with domestic workers they would start adapting the speaking style of domestic workers (Donner 2008, 144–145).

143 See, for example, Sharma & Ravishankar (2005, 1).

cities. In addition, middle class and upper middle class parents typically have only one or two children, which limits the acute need for child care to fewer years than would have been the case some twenty years ago.

As it happens, not many old or permanently ill people lived in my respondents' homes, so workers were not hired for the particular purpose of caring for elderly. One employer, whose old father-in-law had recently passed away, told that her male live-in worker had previously been responsible for the care of the old man, including intimate tasks such as changing his underclothes and bedpan.

The age and gender of the workers structure paid domestic work. As has been mentioned, some jobs are carried out by men, some by women, some by both adults and children, and some, namely the male-occupations of driver, cook, and gardener, virtually only by adults. I elaborate the gender, age, caste and other hierarchical dimensions in detail in Chapter 7. The following table summarises the most common part-time workers of Jaipur middle class homes and the frequency of their visits, their tasks, and their sex.

Table 2. Part-time workers

The worker	Tasks	Frequency of visit	Sex
Maids <i>bais</i>	Sweeping and mopping, washing the dishes	1–2 times per day	Women and girls
Washerwomen/ men <i>dhobi/dhoban</i>	Washing clothes (and ironing)	2–4 times per week,	Women and men
Gardeners	Gardening work	1–2 times per week (daily in one house)	Men
Drivers	Driving	Full day (or live-in)	Men
Sweepers <i>jamadars</i>	Taking out garbage, sweeping housefront, cleaning toilet	10–15 minutes per house	Men, boys, women, girls
Child care takers	Full-day care or assist the mother/grandmother	Full day (or live-in)	Women and girls

As we have seen, commodification of domestic labour relations is manifested in the shift from service relationships between families to individualised relationships, the increase in part-time work, and the segregation of part-time work into specific tasks. In part-time relations, the workers' labour force can be increasingly seen as a commodity which the middle class and the rich purchase in the market. In this context, it is tempting to ask whether commodity logic (even in the personified form of a domestic worker) fits better the image of the modern, consuming, middle class Indian than the traditional master-servant relationship. As an illustration of what these trends imply for the workers I next explore the labour relationship in more detail from the part-time maids' perspective.

Maids at work

Maids are the back-bone of middle class housekeeping in Jaipur. The nineteen part-time maids in my data typically worked for three to four houses. However, three worked for one house only, and one for five houses. I also interviewed three Bengali maids who all worked for eight to nine houses daily, although they were not part of my main data.

Since poor and wealthy neighbourhoods are located next to each other in Jaipur workers usually lived near their employers, within a five to fifteen minutes walking distance. While the streets of the middle class colonies were otherwise quiet during the day-time, there was a steady traffic of domestic workers walking to and from their employers' homes. Since walking outside from one place to another is strongly associated with the strata of people for whom walking is a necessity (Froystad 2005, 110), domestic workers and other manual labourers stood out in the middle class residential areas.

Maids usually visited each employer house twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon. From a workers perspective, the working day consists of two separate shifts. Most workers leave for their first house around 7.45 a.m. Some, like Preet, had to start work in the first house as early as 6 a.m. since, "*The (employer) ladies are work-*

ing women. So I have to finish working before she leaves the house.” The employers’ preference to be at home when the workers perform their work mainly relates to safety concerns which I discuss in Chapter 7. Matching their schedules with those of employers is relatively easy for maids who work for two or three houses, but often difficult for those who work for more houses. In addition, workers sometimes ended quarrelled with other workers in the employers’ houses on job coordination and schedules.

After finishing the morning shift, workers go home for a couple of hours. At home they eat lunch, take a nap, and carry out household work: they wash utensils and clothes, clean the home, take care of children and siblings, carry water from the community well, and so on. However, going home between the shifts is not always possible. When a Bengali woman called Vibha moved to a new location she did not find work near to their new house. Thus, Vibha, who worked for three houses, could not go home between her morning and evening shifts, and instead spent the break at a tea stall close to her work places.

To illustrate how maids’ work is organised Table 3 shows the working schedule of Surindra, a fourteen-year old maid who works seven days a week in three houses.

Table 3. Surindra’s working schedule and tasks

8 a.m. – 9 or 9.30 a.m.	Sweeping and mopping and washing the dishes, 1 st house
9.40 a.m. – 10.30 a.m.	Sweeping and mopping and washing the dishes, 2 nd house
10.30 a.m. – 1 p.m.	Sweeping and mopping and washing the dishes, 3 rd house
1.15 p.m. – 3.45 p.m.	Break at home: taking bath, (cooking lunch if mother not at home), having lunch, sleeping, household work
4 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.	Washing the dishes, 1 st house
4.45 p.m. – 5.15 p.m.	Washing the dishes 2 nd house
5.30 p.m. – 6.00 p.m.	Washing the dishes, 3 rd house

Previous studies have showed that part-time workers are often employed purely to carry out the expected specific tasks in the minimum number of hours (Beechey and Perkins 1987, 3). Because of their tight schedules, maids in Jaipur take little if any breaks during their performance in each house, and do not spend much time in conversing with employers. Yet, depending on their relationships with each employer, some spend at least a little discussing with their employers, as one of the girls said: “*I do not move on (to the next house) before having a good conversation with the employer*”.

The main tasks of the maids are cleaning floors and washing dishes. Cleaning the floor, *charu pochā*, involves a combination of sweeping, *charu lagana*, and mopping, *pochā lagana*. Upon their arrival for their morning shift in each house, the maids begin by sweeping the floor with a broom in a bow-down position, in rapid, circle-like movements. Next, squatting down they mop the floors with a wet cloth. The floors are usually cleaned once a day in the morning and in most houses, maids both sweep and mop. In one employer house the mother and the adult daughters swept the floor while the worker carried out the more demanding mopping. In my data, dusting was usually not an assigned task of the maids, although it may be common in other cities (see Ray and Qayum 2009 in Kolkata).

The maids’ other main task is to wash the dishes, *bartan dhona*, which is done by hand in Jaipur. While dishwashers are increasingly common among the middle class in larger cities, in my data not a single employer had a dishwasher, although all had running water. As noted, washing dishes is the task almost every employer disliked most and they tried to avoid it at all costs. Only two of thirteen employers of part-time workers, and none of those who had live-in workers, washed the dishes themselves. Those two, both housewives, said they disliked the quality of maids’ work.

Having at least three to four different dishes for each meal, in addition to the essential rice and bread, ensures an extensive pile of dishes every day. For the employers, therefore, the peculiar double-

shift is the most convenient way to solve the dishwashing problem, a task they want to avoid because of both purity considerations and the time-consuming and menial nature of the task.

Maids wash the dishes from the previous evening and breakfast during the morning shift, and the lunch dishes during the afternoon shift. In traditional Hindu thought it is bad practice to leave dirty dishes unwashed overnight. This relates to the idea of *jutha*, according to which food that has come into contact with spittle or mouth is considered contaminated and polluted (Dupe 1996, 22; Das 1979, 95). It follows that utensils too become *jutha* after eating. If possible, *jutha* dishes should not be brought back into the kitchen unless they can be washed immediately.

Today, only a few high caste families adhere strictly to this rule. Most employers were flexible with the rule and it was more important for them not to have to wash dishes themselves. Thus, they seemed happy about leaving the dinner dishes for the maid to wash the next morning. This shows the purity rules are relatively flexible: faced with the options of leaving dirty dishes overnight or having to do the menial task of washing dishes, most middle class women choose the former.¹⁴⁴ Only one family which employed part-time workers, a Brahmin family, strictly adhered to *jutha* rules which meant that their dinner dishes could not wait for the next morning. Since a live-in worker was not an option for the wage-earning female employer, the family solved the problem by hiring one more worker, a part-time cook whose tasks included washing the dishes immediately after dinner.

Purity considerations, backed up by hints about necessary class distinctions, were offered as an explanation as to why maids usually wash utensils outside the house under a tap with cold running water instead of using the kitchen sink. Said one employer:

144 See Säävälä (2010, 193–195) for how considerations of ritual purity related to the important housewarming ritual can sometimes be compromised, for contradictory motives.

She (the maid) throws the leftover food in the water pipe and because of this it gets blocked. Then, a foul smell also comes. Many of the times I have asked her not to do it, but whenever she sees that there is no one watching she quickly throws everything in the sink.

It appears impossible for the employers to throw their own leftovers into the dustbin. From the workers' perspective this was one of the major drawbacks of their work, as one explained: "*Employers behave like animals. They do not throw waste food in bin. It is scattered all in the sink. So we feel it is dirty to wash but unfortunately (we) have to do it.*"

Not only employers detested dishwashing, but maids also. They complained vehemently about greasy plates and the cold water in the chilly winter months. Even in the houses where there is running hot water, the workers are made to use cold water for washing utensils. Namita, a young Rajasthani woman said: "*Make me do sweeping and mopping. It is the washing of the utensils I hate most. In the summer it is still bearable but in the winter it is just chilling.*"

Another girl, Sumita, about fifteen years old, raised the same point, as well as questioning the cleanliness of dishes when they are washed with cold water:

S: Stored water is always very cold. I get very angry with that.

P: Why?

S: Utensils are very greasy and cold water does not remove (the grease) properly.

Not letting the workers use heated water for the dishes leads to poorer washing. Yet this was the practice in all houses. Today it is standard for middle class homes in Jaipur to have a boiler for hot water, but usually only in the bathroom. Thus heating the water would take time and cost money. Moreover, making workers use only cold water seems to be one way of making the class distinction, especially in water-scarce Rajasthan, where running hot water is considered a luxury of the rich.

These issues: whether workers wash dishes with warm or cold

water, whether they wash them in the kitchen sink or outside, and the fact that it is the workers who always remove the left-overs, are all examples of the struggle over the labour process. But even if some workers were in a position to complain about the cold water or the leftover food, their complaints had little impact.

While outsourcing work to part-time workers today is the most popular form of labour relation for both houses with housewives and wage working women, the live-in arrangement has by no means disappeared, as we shall see below.

”I don’t have to go for a single thing”: the live-in arrangement

*“Sweeping, mopping, dusting, brooming, and cleaning utensils.
All other work like getting milk, going out and cycling for the shop...
I don’t have to go for a single thing. He does everything.”*

This is how Sheha, a wealthy Brahmin woman and a mother of two teenage sons, summarised the tasks of her live-in worker in a rather complacent tone, reflecting the high caste ideal of not having to perform manual work. As if this was not enough, her worker also did the laundry, assisted in food preparation, tended the garden, and took out the dog. In Jaipur, live-in workers are typically responsible for cleaning work, including the daily sweeping, mopping and dusting, washing cars, hanging laundry out to dry, and so on. One employer explained proudly how their illiterate live-in worker had learnt to answer the phone and write down the number of the person calling. Workers open the gate for entering and departing vehicles, lock the gate in the evening, purchase daily food items and run other errands. They may engage in gardening work, assist in cooking and in the care of the elderly or children, depending on the total number of workers. The workers, who miraculously manage to be in the right place despite their work load, also serve tea, drinks and snacks to the family

members and their guests and may help in serving the dinner.¹⁴⁵

Seven employers in my data had live-in workers. The employers of live-in workers were among the wealthiest in my data, and portrayed themselves as upper middle class. Five out of seven had family members who had travelled in Europe or in the US, a highly prestigious and expensive undertaking which clearly separates them from the average middle classes. Two of these families employed two live-in workers and five had one live-in worker, making the total number of live-in workers in their houses nine. Of them, one was a live-in driver and the other eight were generic workers.

Full-time, live-in paid domestic work in India is more likely to be done by men (Raghuram 2001, 608). While there are no statistics, this appeared to be the situation in Jaipur also. Out of the nine live-in workers eight were male, for reasons to be elaborated in Chapter 7.

All these employers also had one or two additional part-time workers such as sweepers, maids or live-out cooks. One of the employers, whose live-in worker was a boy of about nine, explained that since the worker was so young he was not able to do all the work. For this reason she also employed a part-time maid to wash the dishes twice a day.

Still, the number of workers today was clearly lower than the array of workers in the employers' childhood homes, especially when the father had worked for the Government. Hari, one such employer, described the change between his childhood home and today like this:

Oh, our childhood was completely different. Like my father was a very senior officer in the government. Those days we used to have five to six servants, not one. Like the driver was different, the cook was different, gardener was different... We had a nice time in our childhood (laughs)... But now it's very difficult. It's ok if you can keep one and treat him well. So actually, they are all in one. Like he does gardening also, he does little shopping also, cooks also.

145 Some high caste families adhered to the rule that those who clean floors should not serve meals, as in to Froystad's (2005, 88) findings in Kanpur.

Although Hari's comment "*They are all in one*" is highly illustrative, the employers tended to downplay the work load and the heavy labour it entails. One employer had a son of about the same age as their ten-year old live-in worker. This is how she described the tasks of the worker, who was also responsible for cleaning the house: "*Sometimes chopping the vegetables, you know small, small work. Like I have a small kid so he plays with him, keeps playing with him, keeps busy with him.*"

The live-in workers' schedule was similar in every house. They all worked for seven days a week, beginning at 6 or 7 a.m. and working until 10 or 11 p.m. In all houses, the total working hours per day were about 16–18 hours, confirmed by both employers and workers. One employer specifically mentioned that "*sometimes he can even finish already at 8.30 p.m.*", illustrating the standard of very late working hours. However, Rekha, a former live-in worker, had started work as early as 4 a.m. in the morning by preparing breakfast for one member of the employer family. She worked non-stop until 5 p.m., when she was allowed to have a one-hour break, and then continued into the night.

The employers made no effort to conceal the twenty-four hour service nature of the job. On the contrary, several of them emphasised the importance of having someone always at their call, as one woman in her fifties declared: "*I need to have someone to serve me for 24 hours*". Another male employer in his sixties said: "*(I have had) Always one. Because I can't live without a person who can attend me anytime I want.*"

It is the habit to give workers a one- or two-hour afternoon-break during which they eat lunch, have a rest, and wash themselves, and in some houses, watch TV if others are watching. However, the line between what the employers consider free time and work becomes blurred. One employer mentioned that during the break her live-in worker takes care the garden and another said the worker cleans the kitchen, hardly leisure time activities.

The live-in worker as a non-person

The live-in workers in Jaipur can be perceived as archetypes of Goffman's description of servants as 'non-persons':

The classic type of non-person in our society is the servant. This person is expected to be present in the front region while the host is presenting a performance of hospitality to the guest of the establishment. While in some sense the servant is part of the host's team, in certain ways he is defined by both performers and audience as someone who isn't there."(Goffman 1959, 150–151)

They are supposed to be at hand literally 24 hours a day, but at the same time, to remain in the shadows. Some of the live-in servants had mastered this skill to perfection, as if to follow James Joyce's (1916) well-quoted maxim, "absence as the highest form of presence".¹⁴⁶ When I was doing the interviews for this study, the live-in workers would always serve me something to drink and remain in the background for potential instructions.

In an early 19th century book on domestic manners in the US, a high class man tells how he and his wife are accustomed to having a servant girl sleep in the same room. When asked why, the husband replied: "If I wanted a glass of water during the night, what would become of me." (Trollope 1832, 56–57 quoted in Goffman 1951, 151). Goffman (ibid) views this as extreme and notes that the presence of servants usually poses some restriction upon the behaviour of those they serve. Yet, such non-personification was observable among a few employers in Jaipur, notably those who employed live-in workers. To illustrate this, in one house, one of the family's two live-in workers slept on the floor in the female employers' bedroom. This way, the worker was immediately available to give her medicine or other help

146 The famous maxim is expressed by the main figure Stephen in Joyce's autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

during the night, just as he might have been in the 19th century US. Meetu, the employer, explained the morning routine of these strange room-mates: at 6 a.m. she would tell the live-in worker to “*get up and start doing your work*” while she would enjoy a peaceful morning in bed.

Meetu’s arrangement illustrates the boys’ treatment as a Goffmanian non-person, but it also shows how every waking hour is regulated by the employers. This regulation extends to bodily practices such as hygiene, clothing and, as evident here, sleep (see Arnado 2003, 162).

Anderson (2000) has discussed the emotional labour involved in domestic work, and such aspects existed in the live-in relations also in Jaipur. Meetu was the only employer who explicitly referred to this emotional labour as a worker’s duty. Meetu, who lived with her adult son, daughter-in-law and her much-travelled husband, specified that keeping her company was one of the live-in workers’ chores. She candidly explained that she orders the workers to sit on the floor when she is watching TV since “*somebody should be here with me.*”

The way Meetu is able to make workers do whatever she wants – by making one sleep in her room and the other watch TV with her – shows how she effectively reproduces the remarkable class distinction between herself and her workers through control and outright subordination.

Living conditions

“*They have a world of their own there, they have everything they need*” said a male employer, referring to the living arrangements of his two male live-in workers. The workers and their employers did indeed live in worlds of their own, poles apart under the same roof. These two workers, for example, shared a room of about two meters square, the cook slept on a cement bed, and the young generic live-in worker on the floor, where he unfolded a mattress every night. With literally no space for anything else, the room got very cold in the winter

months and hot in the summer. This was probably not very different from their native village in Nepal, but strikingly different from the employers' spacious rooms, air-conditioned during the hot months and heated in the chilly winter months. Moreover, the food was of different quality.¹⁴⁷

This striking difference between rhetoric and practice was apparent also in the house of Sheha, the employer who emphasised most how good the situation of her live-in worker was and how much money he was able to save. She even claimed similarities between her son and the worker: "*He has everything he needs, just like my sons*".¹⁴⁸ When I first interviewed Sheha, I did not ask to see the room of the worker. In the following year when I met her, she again said how good his living conditions were. This time I politely asked her if I could see the worker's room. If she was surprised she hid it well and immediately agreed, taking me to the roof terrace where the worker lived in a tiny attached room. It was late May and more than forty degrees Celsius, and the room was very hot. There was no fan, although the employer had earlier mentioned that there was one. The room contained the ubiquitous cement bed and a mattress, and a sink and toilet outside the room on the roof. This was about all there was.

Given sexual taboos and safety concerns (see Chapter 7), female live-in workers are usually accommodated within the employers' house, instead of the garage or the roof where male workers stay. The only employer in my data to employ a female live-in worker had accommodated her in a large room inside the house. The room was basic if spacious, and during the periods when the family had no live-in worker, family members themselves used it. By contrast, the same

147 At the beginning of my stay in Jaipur, I was once about to buy rice from a street-vendor who came to the gate of the house in which we lived. The landlady noticed this and hurried to advise me not to buy that rice, since it was not only much cheaper but also of lower quality, meant for, for example, domestic workers.

148 An employer of a live-in worker in Dickey's (2000a, 48) study also emphasised how the servant has 'all the comforts', showing the pan-Indian nature of such rhetorics.

family had placed their former male worker in the garage. However, not all female workers have a space or room of their own. In both Kolkata and Jaipur, the young live-in girls I met had slept either on the kitchen floor or on the floor in the room of a female family member, for instance, the grandmother's.

One should not idealise past domestic labour relations, as my employer respondents constantly did. Nevertheless, in modern middle class houses live-in workers' living conditions may be more precarious than earlier since the workers today lack clearly demarcated servants' quarters (see King 2007, 45), either having the tiniest private space, or have no space of their own at all.

4.3 Reluctant dependencies

*"Uh Oh... only one thing is worse than bad maid: No Maid!
All the best in the quest for a new maid."*¹⁴⁹

The quote from a 2009 internet discussion between anonymous Indian women about their maids is a response from a fellow-employer to a woman whose female cook had resigned after she had called the food bad. As an articulation of the mutual but asymmetrical reliance of employers and domestic workers on one another previous studies have used the terms 'mutual dependencies' (Dickey 2000a) or 'precarious dependencies' (Gill 1994, quoted in Shah 2000). I propose to describe the relationship 'reluctant dependency', since it is a dependency neither side really wants.

Employers of both part-time and live-in workers, as well as both wage working women and housewives, emphasised their dependency on the workers. As the quote above emphasises, the employers'

149 <http://orangeicecandy.blogspot.com/2009/03/who-moved-my-paneer.html>

dependency is most clearly manifested when a worker is absent because of the live-in workers' biannual vacation or because of disruption of the labour relation. Such disruption is often very stressful for employers. A couple of women said that doing the maids' work for some time is not a problem, but others complained of great difficulties while they found a new worker. For example, Swati, a housewife, described the prolongation of her maid's initial one-week vacation to several months as a "very heavy" period in her life. Since middle class women, especially the wealthiest, are not used to manual work, they seem to find even light tasks arduous.

Another woman repeatedly told about the difficulties she had faced since her cook had gone to Nepal for a month, which coincided with the visit of a sick relative for one and half weeks. Her discomfort seemed to grow day by day to the point of exasperation, aggravated by the unexpected resignation of her other live-in worker, responsible for everything else, half way through this period.

Domestic workers are particularly important for young daughters-in-law in joint middle class families, still common in Jaipur despite the increase in nuclear families in India (see Agarwal 2000, 56). Upon entering the in-laws' house, the bulk of the responsibility for domestic work shifts to the daughters-in-law, even if overall control remains with the mother-in-law.

One recently married young woman who had moved to her *sasural* (the in-laws home), compared the relatively carefree life in her original home and her new situation. There had been several domestic workers in her upper middle class natal home and her mother had the main responsibility for cooking. Now she had several responsibilities, including the meals. When I last met her, she was exhausted because the live-in cook had been on his biannual leave for about a week. She almost burst into tears while explaining that the cook would not come back for three more weeks. This meant that she had to wake up to prepare the breakfast for her husband and in-laws at 6 a.m., and to prepare all the other dishes as well. The shock of the new

responsibility was evident when she complained that life had become a burden and despairingly sighed: “*Work, work, nothing but work*”.¹⁵⁰ Yet this family employed not only a live-in cook but also part-time workers, which shows how demanding the homely tasks are. Her desperation also reflects the link between women’s sense of power and their position within the relational network of the family (see Tiengtrakul 2006, 44). The workers they employed served as a status symbol, but they also served a very real utilitarian purpose by saving the poor daughter-in-law much time.

To my question as to which is more dependent on the other – the workers or the employers – employers invariably responded by saying that it was they, sometimes accompanied by a warm laugh or a humorous comment. Shanti, the working woman, elaborated:

I think I’m more dependent (laughs). What I feel is that I’m really dependent. Sometimes I feel that my key is in their hands. Sometimes, like, the last woman will come with the message that she’s not turning up so it becomes so difficult for me and sometimes my programme I have to, I mean, coordinate with their programme. So I have to negotiate my programme accordingly, like my *bai* has gone on leave so I had to negotiate my programme with her leave. “I don’t know, as long as my *bai* is not there so I won’t be able to come to do this or that”. So I am a bit controlled by them, that’s what I can say.

The offhand and humorous manner with which Shanti refers to her dependency also seems to include the recognition that ultimately the workers depend on her even more. While employers and workers alike said that each depends on the other, the workers’ dependency is of a different kind, as their everyday survival depends on the income from the work.¹⁵¹ But part-time workers’ dependency today

150 In Hyderabad, Säävälä (2010, 53) found that daughter-in-laws who entered a family through a love marriage, and without a dowry, were made to do excessive house work compared to those who entered a family through arranged marriages along with a dowry.

151 An interesting angle on the question of dependency is provided in Kidder’s (2000) analysis of her own experiences as expatriate employer in Delhi, where

is, perhaps, above anything else economic. Workers were also aware of their employers' sense of dependency. Punam, one working girl, mentioned that if she had to take some time off due to a funeral or wedding, employers manage, but "*only with great difficulty*". The sense of being dependent makes employers uncomfortable, even resentful. As Shanti continued: "*What I feel is that whatever way you treat them, they never feel that they are treated well, they always feel that, they always try to take advantage of your situation.*"

These comments show that working women cannot rely on their husbands to participate in house work even in the workers' absence. However, a few women emphasised that they want to raise their sons to behave differently and to start taking part in household work. One employer, a working woman, proudly told me of her son's ability to prepare tea or to make an omelette if need be, not to mention the extraordinary fact that he once cleaned the floor when the maid was absent and she herself had to leave to work early in the morning: "*Can you imagine, my son did the sweeping and mopping.*"

Previous studies have discussed the question of children who grow up with workers to serve them (see Froystad 2003). Although all children of those who employ several workers in Jaipur generally do little housework, the gender difference in the socialisation into domestic tasks was evident. Girls participated in several activities, especially cooking, but boys did not.

4.4 Reasons for hiring domestic workers

Wage-earning women and housewives

Outsourcing time-consuming tasks to workers eases the work-burden of female employers considerably. Especially those women who

her ignorance and foreignness made her particularly dependent on local domestic workers.

worked full-time outside home emphasised that workers were a necessity for them, given their responsibilities at home and at work.¹⁵² It took Shanti almost two hours to reach work, yet she had to make sure that all meals were ready for her husband and teenage son. No wonder she disapproved of housewives when I asked her about reasons for employing workers:

It is actually a very tricky question. Not only that you can afford. Of course sometimes it becomes a status symbol also. So with me it's different because I am a working woman. I need it, this is my necessity and not my luxury. Otherwise, in middle class, it becomes a status symbol if you employ (domestic workers). Like I see housewives, they don't have anything else to do all day, I mean, they just have to look after themselves and look after the house, and then they go chatting and...so it becomes also a status symbol. This has a value.

As we can see, Shanti takes a morally superior stance by explicitly contrasting her situation with that of the “lazy” housewives, and emphasising that domestic workers are a necessity for working women where as they are merely a status symbol for housewives.¹⁵³ Her comment takes us to the different reasons for hiring workers, which ranged from mainly pragmatic or utilitarian to more symbolic reasons related to status reproduction (Shah 2000, 102). While it is difficult to make clear distinction between different types of employers¹⁵⁴, certain loose categorisations based on the reasons for employing workers can be made. Middle class families in Jaipur employ workers to ease women's domestic burden, to avoid impure and menial tasks, and to reproduce class status. For employed women, utilitarian reasons are

152 In Russia, domestic workers were an integral part of a luxurious life for some, but a dire necessity for others, and many working women who employed domestic workers were themselves in a dire economic situation (Rotkirch 2008).

153 In the same vein, female doctors in Tiwari's (2002, 167) study in Jaipur noted that for them as working women servants were not a luxury or a status symbol but rather a necessity in sharing their work load.

154 Romero (2002, 196-197) categorized employers into different prototypes: 1) bosses; 2) utopian feminists; 3) dodgers and duckers; 4) the common victims; 5) maternalists; and 6) contractors.

central. For housewives, these are also important but as we have seen, the symbolic reasons are sometimes even more important.

Peculiarly, housewives portrayed themselves as just as dependent on workers as working women. One of them, Mala, employed three part-time workers for herself, her husband and their two unmarried adult children. For the time being, her eldest daughter was also staying in the house with her small baby. To the question of who is more dependent on whom, Mala replied: “*We are more dependent on workers which is not right. When she does not come then the whole system gets upset. The whole situation becomes very annoying and irritating. That’s why at least we should be in a habit of working.*”

Mala, an out-spoken woman, portrays herself as almost totally dependent on domestic workers, and so did most other housewives. Mala was by no means inactive: she helped to take care of her daughter and her new-born son, who were staying in her house at the time of the interview, and cooked for the family together with her daughters. Thus, Mala seems to consider herself capable of doing some tasks, but emphasises her dependency on workers to perform particular demeaning tasks (see Romero 2002, 130). It appears that Mala wanted to avoid washing dishes or cleaning work to the extent that she considered herself almost incapable of performing these tasks. She continued our discussion by restating that she is “*completely dependent*” on the workers but that she had taught her two daughters to sweep, mop and wash dishes.

Most employers did not consider the time they spend at home as an opportunity to do household work, except for cooking and child care.

One should, however, be wary of drawing too overarching conclusions about the difference between the housewives and the working women. Both groups wanted to avoid washing dishes and other tasks high in the order of avoidance. Moreover, the line between a housewife and a working woman is fluid. Three out of the seven live-in employers worked from home, one gave private tuition and two ran their

own businesses. While one of the two entrepreneurs focused on the symbolic aspects of having a live-in worker, the other woman emphasised her constrained situation, which left her no choice other than to employ a live-in worker, a boy from Nepal. She had previously employed only part-time workers, but since her business had grown she changed to a live-in worker. The following excerpt shows how she balances between what she considers two non-ideal options:

P: Why do you prefer a 24-hours worker?

S: Because I am busy now. I used to get late for lunch and my children had to wait after coming home from school. So I felt it to be a good option.

P: Are you satisfied with his work?

S: I have to be satisfied because there is no other better option.

There was a certain generational gap as well. Younger women, though not all of them, emphasised the effectiveness and utilitarian purpose of having domestic workers. “*We Indian women want to save time in everything*”, said Shuliba, a married woman of about 30 who had recently given birth to her first child. She had a BA degree, and was planning to return to work soon. She also talked candidly about how cheap it is to hire workers. Her approach was pragmatic, and lacked the maternalistic and apologetic tone of some of the older employers.

Domestic work as a class marker

A famous Bollywood actress, Raina Sen, told one interviewer about the shooting for her role in Aparna Sen’s (2010) film *Japanese Wife*:

Believe or not, as part of her workshop (preparations for the shooting) I even had to cut the vegetables, wash all the household clothes and the utensils in the kitchen and also make the bed every day, though I had never entered the kitchen in my house neither before the workshop nor after it.¹⁵⁵

155 <http://www.newkerala.com/topstory-fullnews-15893.html>, accessed on 20.9.2009.

Sen's comment shows how it is virtually unthinkable for women in her strata, the very rich, to perform any manual household work. Although none of my respondents belonged to this upper strata, the actress's tone was not unfamiliar to them either, especially to those who employed live-in workers. Some tasks, such as washing dishes, are time-consuming and need to be carried out everyday. Other tasks, such as switching on a fan or fine-tuned cleaning work like polishing surfaces, could either be easily performed by the employers themselves or need not to be carried out on a daily basis. Such tasks are not even necessarily contaminating by nature, so caste and purity considerations do not explain why the employers do not carry them out. To emphasise this point, it was routine practice for live-in workers to open the gate when employers came home, even in the middle of the night. One employer explained in detail the daily evening routine: first their live-in worker closes the gate and locks everything up. After that, she or her husband would go to check that everything had been locked up properly. From this it seems that the main point for the employers is to avoid the physical act of closing the gate, as well as to show that they have the authority to make someone carry out such an act, visible even for passers-by and neighbours.

Sometimes I felt it would have been easier for employers to do some of the tasks themselves. For instance, once I was interviewing an upper middle class woman, and we both sat on her bed with a small fan located right next to us. Yet she called the live-in worker in twice during the one-and-half-hour discussion, first to turn the fan to a higher and then to a lower setting.¹⁵⁶ The explanation for such manoeuvring is that bossing workers around continues to be part of the reproduction of status and class distinction. Especially those who employ live-in workers make them carry out a number of symbolic and status-related tasks.

¹⁵⁶ Froystad (2003, 77) describes a very similar incident in a middle class home in Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

Preferring manual labour to household appliances

The self-portrayal of being dependent and the comment that Indian women want to save time wherever they can contrasts with the reluctance of employers to ease their work load by using household appliances. Laundry machines are becoming increasingly popular, yet none of the seventeen employers in the data had a dishwasher. The few who owned a vacuum-cleaner hardly ever used them. This contrasts sharply with the modernisation forecasts of the early 1970s, which predicted the gradual disappearance of domestic service as a result of household appliances in the western context (see Coser 1973). Quite the opposite, even when there was a vacuum-cleaner available the domestic workers in my data were not allowed to use it. Since it was the workers who cleaned the houses, the appliances would remain intact.¹⁵⁷ One employer explained to me laughingly that she had purchased a vacuum-cleaner after she had seen one in a neighbour's house, but had only used it a couple of times for show.

Why were there not more appliances, and why did the employers not use the existing ones? The women themselves referred to the cheap labour and the quality of work as reasons. When I asked Uma why she thought none of the families in her neighbourhood had a dishwasher, she promptly replied: *"Because, you know, this labour is so cheap. We can pay. And electricity is much more than that. We have to pay more for electricity than the labour."*

Not only is the labour cheap, but, in the view of two of those few who mentioned the quality of work, the workers washed the dishes better than a machine would do.¹⁵⁸ One woman pointed out that

157 In Italy, in some houses migrant domestic workers were not permitted to use the dishwashers except after big parties. While the employers justified this by arguing that the dishes become cleaner when washed by hand, the discriminatory nature of such practices is evident. (Näre 2008).

158 See Weix (2000, 141) for a discussion with an Indonesian employer who similarly makes a comparison between Indonesian domestic workers and household appliances, joking that Indonesian workers are better than American household appliances.

having a dishwasher would take up more of her time. First, she proclaimed, you would have to take away all food leftovers, then arrange the dishes, then take them out and rearrange them. In the same time, she thought, one could just as easily wash them by hand. For her, the alternatives were having workers to wash by hand or having a washing-machine and using it herself.

Judging from what is taking place in larger cities such as Mumbai, dishwashers are likely to become more popular in the future, at least among the wealthier upper middle class, facilitated by looser purity rules over the *jutha* dishes. If this happens several scenarios are possible. One is that the workers will be used to run the dishwashers. Presently, workers operate laundry machines in some houses. One possible scenario is the reallocation of tasks so that maids would be hired only for cleaning, or for cleaning and for filling and emptying the dishwasher. Some of these scenarios could lead to a considerable loss of working hours available for maids, which could have severe implications for their impoverished families. However, there are so many tasks in the middle class homes that whatever the future scenario in terms of dishwashers and other machines, it is likely that the outsourcing of work will continue, even if there are slight changes.



A maid washing dishes, her employer in the background.

4.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have discussed the centrality of domestic workers to middle class households in Jaipur. The hire of domestic workers should be perceived in the light of the history of ideals of middle class domesticity, as a means of class reproduction, and as a consequence both of the increase in wage-earning among educated women and of the existence of large number of poor people in need of work. Homes are central settings for the middle class to display status, and a major responsibility of married women in Jaipur. Since cheap labour force is widely available, virtually all middle class families outsource a varying amount of their domestic workload to domestic workers.

Of the two main work arrangements, part-time and live-in, the first is today more common. Part-time work has become a commodified market where the employers outsource domestic tasks typically to several task-specific workers, organised on the basis of gender, age, religion, and caste. Following market logic, the work has become increasingly divided into narrow tasks and outsourced to cater for the employers' individual needs, schedules, and economic standing. The wealthier upper middle class may employ a gardener, a driver, a cook or any combination of these. By contrast, hiring child carers was not as common as, for example, in Kolkata (Donner 2008), since it was rare for mothers of small children to work in Jaipur. Managing workers' schedules and tasks takes considerable time, since an average middle class family employs at least a maid, a sweeper and a washerman/woman. In spite of the difficulties in matching schedules, the system enables the middle class to live to the expected standards of domesticity with relatively little cost and effort.

The tasks that female employers most want to avoid are washing dishes and cleaning, neatly performed by the maids, the largest single group of workers. Their work is organised around morning and evening shifts. The evident struggle within the labour process between employers and workers is clearly manifested in the small but

highly important details related to washing dishes: workers resent having to wash greasy dishes with cold water and detest the way employers leave left-overs on their plates.

The increase in part-time work has not led to the disappearance of the live-in arrangement, which continues as a rearticulated merging of the patron-client and the commodified. Live-in work, aptly referred to as a world of “unfreedom” (Ray and Qayum 2009, 78), is less common but continues to thrive among the upper middle class families, in particular those of high caste. The live-in workers can be seen as embodiments of Goffman’s (1959) non-persons, as ever-present shadows, illustrated by the local idiom of ‘24-hour workers’. By contrast with the situation when they themselves were children, the employers today have only one or two “all-in-one” live-in workers, or a combination of one generic and one task-specific worker such as a cook. The line between work and free time is totally blurred, and there was a tendency to devalue the work, for example, by describing gardening or child care as a free time activity. This shows how employers continue to perceive that they purchase the whole person, not just that person’s labour, as evidenced in the use of the term ‘owners’ of the workers.

Employers differed in need and outlook. We can differentiate between wage working women, for whom workers serve a clearly utilitarian purpose (Shah 2000) and housewives for whom workers also have great symbolic value. The wage-earning women emphasised how workers for them were an absolute necessity because of their difficult schedules, portraying housewives as lazy. There were also some indications of a generational difference between the young employer women and the older ones. For younger women, domestic workers appeared more a pragmatic necessity than a status symbol, even if these two are not totally incompatible.

Wage-earning women understandably felt they were very dependent on domestic workers but more surprisingly, so did housewives. This reflects the fact that there is also plenty of work for housewives,

and the avoidance of menial work is one way for middle class families to reproduce class distinctions between them and the lower classes, underlining the symbolic value of workers as a status marker.

My findings support earlier arguments that being able to employ domestic workers in Jaipur is an important classificatory practice and a sign of having achieved middle- or upper-class status (see Dickey 2000a; Ray and Qayum 2009; Shah 2000; Waldrop 2004). In Jaipur, having domestic workers was clearly one sign of belonging to the middle class, whether its lower or upper echelons, and some employers themselves pointed to the workers having a role in making the class distinction. However, the employment of workers is one way of distinguishing not only between employers and workers but also between the affluent upper middle class and the ordinary middle class (see Derner 2008, 18, 45; Säävälä 2010, 118).¹⁵⁹ By being able to employ live-in workers, some of the wealthy upper middle class families aim to make the distinction between them and the average or even the less wealthy upper middle class. They were also the employers to lean mostly on relations of patronage, and taking avoidance of physical work to its extreme.

Säävälä (2010, 118) has noted how crucial it is for members of the middle class to defend their class position as “one of us”, for them the main object of the class struggle is to ensure their position in the middle class. This requires constant vigilance and an ability to adopt new ways of thinking to secure their position in the class struggle. In Jaipur, I noted that although the ability to employ domestic workers reinforces the middle class status of all employers, the element of status reproduction was more evident in the employment of live-in workers (see also Romero 2002, 155).

I have illustrated the co-existence of a wide range of diverse labour relationships within Indian homes (see also Romero 2002, 172).

159 See Skeggs (1997) for a discussion on ‘respectability’ as a central marker of class, not only between middle and lower classes but also between different working classes.

Transformations in employer-worker relationship in Jaipur manifest broader transitions from service to market or contractual relationship in India (see Tenhunen 2010). Commodification of work has not, however, led to the disappearance of maternalist practices. Dovel-tailing Ray and Qayum (2009), I argue that patron-client-like, maternalist features merge with the commodified and market-like features of work, creating a peculiar combination of traditional and new patterns. This is in line with Romero's (2002, 172) point that "the interpersonalist relationship is not a premodern feudal remnant but a social relationship existing within a capitalist economy". In Jaipur, both sides try to exploit the maternalist and contractual features of the relation as best they can. Obviously, the employers have more power than workers, and the possibilities for workers to influence the labour relation vary. The relation between employers and workers is strongly hierarchical as well as asymmetrical, and wrought with mistrust and anxiety. It is to these issues that I will turn in the next chapter.



A maid sweeping and mopping, like every morning.

5 LABOUR RELATIONS IN TRANSITION

In this chapter, I explore further the nature of the relationship between employers and domestic workers. I study the employer views of differences between workers of the past and of today. I then show how employers continue to act through the frame of maternalism, evident in, for example, the provision of gifts, and the rhetoric of “*like a family member*” and “*like a human being*”. The last part of this chapter is about trust, mistrust and fears, and about how to trust someone against one’s instinct. I look at how employers talk about the anxieties and risks related to having workers in their homes. Moreover, I explore the causes of anxiety, as well as different strategies for managing the anxieties and risks.

5.1 Between maternalism and contractualism

Nostalgic glorification of past relations

“*Oh, servants have always been with us*”, said one middle class female employer while we were sipping tea on her worn-out velvet sofa in Jaipur. Employers whom I met frequently referred to the “*servants of the past*” as opposed to the present ones. Their comments entailed a lingering sense of nostalgia and a longing for a past when employers and workers shared “*a mutual belonging*”. The employers linked the lack of mutual belonging to the increased demands of the workers, re-

flected in comments such as “workers are more demanding now”; “they want to become instantly rich”, and “today they are after money only”.

Many employers I met recalled the *jajmani* relationships of their childhood villages, the long-lasting relations between their own high-caste families and low-caste families performing diverse forms of manual labour for them. The workers at that time were not necessarily given a wage, but instead received goods in exchange for their labour. The employers repeatedly expressed their disappointment with “today’s workers”, who no longer agree to do extra tasks as their forebears did. Said Mala, a woman in her early sixties:

They (workers) have changed a lot. Before the maids always belonged to the low stratas of the society in the sense of their economic and social foundation. But they worked properly, they were honest. They never had any problem in doing extra work. They were not after money. They wanted affection and care and there was a sense of belonging. But nowadays they have become materialistic. They want more money and less work. They think they are equal to you. They need TV to watch, and they want (to have) leave. This was not how it was before.

Interestingly, Mala’s daughter Shuliba, a married woman aged about 30, elaborated the difference between her childhood workers and those of today in almost exactly the same words as her mother Mala, as well as other women of the older generation. This probably reflects the crystallised narratives running in the family but also the strength of such views. In a separate discussion, Shuliba noted:

In my childhood, the maids were, like, more dedicated to their work. Now today, they are looking for money only. Like, ok, even if you just gave them more work, they easily did it. But nowadays, what you are paying, they only do that work, that much work, but not extra work. And not even so much only, they can’t perform as good work as before. This is the only difference.

Yet, while her mother Mala had lived in a village at the time when *jajmani* relationships still existed, Shuliba had always lived in a city, and their family had only employed part-time workers. The way these

two women contrasted servants of the past and present, the selfish and greedy “*servants of today*” and the loyal and non-selfish “*servants of the past*”, was also almost identical to the nostalgic glorification of the past found in the 19th century manuals (see Banerjee 1996, 10–11).¹⁶⁰ Their authors suggested a process of steady deterioration in the employer-worker relationship, a result of British influence, and the marginalisation of workers in the rapidly growing middle class culture, in which the pre-modern bond of the patron and the client was being replaced by a more commodified one (ibid, 9–11).

It appears that the employers wanted to maintain elements of maternalist relations based on subordination of workers instead of employer-employee relations based on an economic contract. The resentment over the loss of control over workers was exemplified in the words of Kripa, usually a warm-hearted housewife: “*Previously, you could say anything to them, still they never talked back. But now scolding is different. You cannot even talk to them, they warn you that they will leave the job.*”

In Kripa’s view, the main reason behind this change was the increased demand for domestic workers, itself a result of the increased labour market participation of middle class women. She noted that the workers do not fear the loss of their job anymore: “*this is the thing which gives them courage*”.¹⁶¹ Yet, in the very same interview she told me how she had dismissed one maid for “*talking back*” just a few years ago. Having explained how she always gives each of her workers a new *sari*, sweets and a 200 rupee¹⁶² bonus on the festivals of Diwali and Holi, she described the following incident:

160 The nostalgic idealisation resembles the strong sense of nostalgia among Chinese employers’ of Filipina maids in Hong Kong (Constable 1997, 40).

161 The tendency to blame unionisation for changes in workers’ behaviour was absent in Jaipur but has emerged in larger cities. In Mumbai, middle class women complained that they could not instruct unionised domestic workers on how to clean their rooms, echoing broader middle class rhetoric on unmanageable, unionised workers (Fernandes 2006, 167). Similarly, two upper class women in Kolkata told me how unionised workers were creating problems for the employers.

162 On 5th January 2011 the exchange rate was one Indian rupee per 0,02 euros.

The previous maid, I also used to give her much. So on the very next day of Diwali there were guests sitting here and I was in the kitchen. She started quarrelling with me that you did not give a *sari* to me. I said that I have bought one for you, relax, when I will be free I will give it to you. But she did not calm down. She said I do not care about your guests. I then gave her the *sari* but removed her from work for creating that mess.

Kripa's comment reflects her reluctance, and that of many others, to give up the relationships in which workers are tied to employers through loyalty (see also Ray and Qayum 2009). Kripa's maid seems to try to see the relationship as a contractual one between an employer and employee and the *sari* as part of agreed terms of employment. Kripa, instead, acts on a principle of maternalism and considers the gift-giving an act of charity, not as part of a labour contract. Her comment also reflects the efforts to maintain the class distinction by rules related to the expected behaviour of the subordinate. The worker "*creates the mess*" by quarrelling in front of Kripa's guests, and does not behave in a subordinate manner like traditional servants.

However, not all employers portrayed today's workers as greedy. Three employers noted emphatically that life has become more expensive for workers too. One of them was Susheela, a teacher about to retire, who had employed domestic workers for thirty years. When I asked her whether there are changes in domestic workers, she answered:

At that time their requirements were less, work was of quality and a sense of belonging was always there. But now they have become professionals and commercialised. They finish work quickly and go. They are not at all ready to do extra work. You have to give them clothes and money as reward. They were sincere before. But it is not their fault either. There is a high price rise and we have also become totally dependent on them. Their living standard has also changed.

Moreover, Susheela felt that both sides were to blame for the disappearance of "*mutual belonging*". As an example of the loss of this bond she mentioned that workers were not invited to family functions

such as weddings anymore. The fact that only one employer in my data mentioned that she invites maids to family functions aptly reflects the changes in the labour relationship. This was Mala, in some ways a stereotype benevolent maternalist employer. When I asked her whether it was common to invite workers to such occasions, she said: *“Mostly those people (invite workers) who think that they are also humans, they also have the right to eat and enjoy someday. Such people invite workers, so it is not common.”*

Mala’s comment was reinforced by workers, who said that most employers do not invite them to celebrations. However, some Rajasthani workers told me about long-term employers who had attended weddings in their families, and correspondingly invited the workers to theirs.

Several factors reflect the shift in the nature of the labour relations into the realm of capitalism: the relations are often short-lived, most workers work for several houses per day, and many are labour migrants. In general, the Bengalis in my data tended to have less contact with their employers than the locals. While some Rajasthani workers talked about the loss of the sense of belonging in the same vein as the employers, the Bengalis had less such concerns, and two specifically indicated they did not want to have a close relationship with employers. Instead of maternalist ties, they looked for a contractual, employee-employer -like relationship.

Despite the employers’ nostalgia for the sense of belonging, most employers and workers knew little of one another’s lives. On being asked what kind of people her employers were, one part-time worker noted: *“How could I tell whether they are rich or poor because they will not share anything.”* Her comment highlights the asymmetry in which workers are expected to have a familial interest in the employing family even though this is not reciprocated.

As for the live-in workers, the employers sometimes knew remarkably little about them, not even their proper names. In fact, employers seemed to know more about their part-time maids’ lives than their

live-in workers', reflecting the role of live-in workers as non-persons (see Chapter 4). However, two employer families that had employed live-in workers from the same rural families for many years had a little more contact with them. One of these families had even been involved in arranging the marriage and organising the wedding ceremony of a long-time live-in worker, held in the vicinity of her house. But this was uncommon, and most employers of live-in workers had nothing to do with their workers' families

Patron–client or employer–employee relations?

Despite the gradual and partial shift from relations between families to market relations, the employers were reluctant to discuss workers' rights and to recognise their role as what they actually are: employers. If employers in the UK have been criticised for being "awkward, amateur employers"¹⁶³, the employers I met in Jaipur were having major difficulties in perceiving themselves as employers at all, or their workers as their employees.

My discussions with workers and employers about what makes a good employer or worker further reveal the tensions between the two sides. When workers described what 'good employers' were like they referred to the way employers treat workers and to the working conditions they provide, not so much to personal traits. Lali, a married Rajasthani woman with more than ten years' working experience, explained that workers recognise whether a new employer is good or bad from the very first day. For her, good employers are "*those who do not annoy and irritate the workers and do not make them carry out extra work.*"

Employers, on the other hand, referred to personal traits as most important in a good worker, not the work performance. In fact, the

163 Jones (2002, 2) criticises the British for being "a nation of awkward, amateur employers, often feeling ill-equipped to tackle the responsibilities that go with formal employment and unsure how to deal with either rewards for good work or with poor performance".

employers rarely talked about the quality of the work; for most it seemed a secondary or an irrelevant concern. The single most important quality mentioned by most employers, was trustworthiness while several also mentioned that workers “*should not talk back*”, expecting workers to respect an old order where employers command and submissive workers nod in acknowledgement.

Shuliba, who employed part-time workers, defined a good worker as follows: “*I want the worker to be soft-spoken, clean, and a good worker, and dedicated to the work. That’s all.*” She elaborated further by contrasting good and bad workers:

Bad workers are the opposite. Not good-spoken, they are even too harsh, and in the beginning they ask, whatever their salary is 200 or 300 rupees, they just ask us to give them 50 rupees. They are false-spoken, very very false-spoken they are. Like ‘we want 50 rupees’, they even charge before they start working. And if we can’t give them, they start speaking so rude.

As Shuliba’s comment illustrates, the employers tended to downplay the legitimacy of worker demands for better working conditions by portraying them to personal characteristics such as greed and selfishness.

Some employers and workers emphasised the importance of reciprocal behaviour. Preet, the oldest worker, noted that “*if we are good, the employers are also good*”. In a similar vein, one employer said: “*It’s mutual, if you treat them well, we are also treated well, it is a matter of give and take.*”

In Jaipur, those who employed live-in workers emphasised that they were doing a favour for a poor family in need of help.¹⁶⁴ By contrast, only a few who employed part-time workers portrayed themselves as helping poor people. Most did not claim to be humanitarians but emphasised the mutual dependency between them and the workers. Even those who did portray themselves as do-gooders were

164 In the US, there was a common illusion among white middle class women that employing other women for cleaning work is a form of social benefit which reduces the unemployment rate (Romero 2002, 130).

well aware that workers are a convenience made possible by stark inequalities in society, and that workers usually have no alternative to this work.

While both employers and workers noted that labour relationships have lost the sense of mutual belonging, these relationships may still entail elements of warmth and mutual empathy. The duration of the relationship, personal characteristics, and the life history of each employer and worker naturally influence the way each relationship develops. Some of my conversations with employers reflected the complex emotions that may develop between employers and workers, especially if a worker is taken into a house as a very small child. However, workers rarely talked emotionally about their past employers.

The contested gift and other maternalist practices

Practices of maternalist benevolence can be perceived as an employer strategy through which employers aim to control the labour process (see Romero 2002; Rollins 1985; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). In the context of the overall Indian labour markets, Harriss-White and Gooptu (2001, 102) perceive 'gift' as a primitive form of occupational welfare through which capital acts opportunistically tie up labour the gift-giver does not wish to lose. In this section I examine how maternalist benevolence such as 'gift-giving' complicates the labour relation and obfuscates the terms of employment.

Gift-giving is a persistent phenomenon in domestic labour relations everywhere, and one of the most concrete examples of maternalism (Rollins 1985; Romero 2002; Weix 2000). In Jaipur, the provision of gifts in the form of new and old clothes was a common employment strategy, through which employers aim to portray themselves as generous (see Romero 2002, 157).

Usually employers provide two *saris*¹⁶⁵ per year, a new *sari* on Di-

165 A *sari* is a six-meter long piece of cloth, which is the traditional dress of women, mainly married women, in India. It is commonly used and it comes in all materials, patterns, and colours.

wali and a used one on Holi, the two most important Hindu festivals. The unmarried younger girls, who do not yet wear a *sari*, were given a blouse and/or a skirt or a *salwar-kameez*. The question of *saris* was a contested one, since some employers provided new *saris*, but some only used *saris*, a reason for bitter complaints among the workers.¹⁶⁶ Gift-giving was notably a women's domain: it would not have been appropriate for their husbands, who in general communicate minimally with part-time workers.

The workers, especially the experienced ones, denounced the idea of a gift and strove to make the provision of clothes a non-monetary part of their wage deal, whereas most employers framed it as an act of benevolence. The only employer who considered *saris* as part of the wage deal was Shanti, an employer of four part-time workers, who differentiated between the provision of new *saris* and the charity-like provision of old clothes:

Once a year, on Diwali, to all the bais, three¹⁶⁷ of them, I have to give one new dress. And old dresses of course they are not counted. Whether you give them ten or five or whatever, a new dress they count, one dress, one new dress on Diwali we give.

In spite of the employers' claims, providing the *saris* is not a significant financial cost even for those with many workers. In fact, the workers in my data reminded me that employers kept giving them cheap *saris*. Although *saris* worth of thousands of rupees exist, one can also purchase cheap polyester *saris* for around Rs 150 (about three euros).

Given the excessive number of *saris* most middle class women possess, donation of used clothes to maids sometimes appeared a way to get rid of old clothes. Several workers referred to the poor condition

166 In Kolkata the employers tried to avoid employing a new domestic worker just before Diwali or Holi since they would immediately have to buy a new sari (Tenhunen 2006, 124).

167 Although Shanti hires four workers she only talks about three here, showing that she excludes the *dalit* caste sweeper from the provision of clothes.

of the clothes they received. Once, when two Bengali workers were discussing the *sari* practice with me, a third woman, who had listened to the discussion while hanging washed clothes on a line, butted in and shouted: “*They give us ragged clothes, about to be torn off.*” They all laughed, seemingly enjoying the momentary ridiculing of their stingy employers. One girl, whose employer never gave her new dresses, told me that if the used clothes she was given were in a decent condition she would wear them, otherwise she would make dusters for her own home out of them. It is an irony that the workers may end up cleaning their own homes with dusters made out of their employers’ used clothes, initially meant to reinforce the self-image of a benevolent employer.

The youngest girls were not so negative about the gift-giving as the adult workers. Kamala, about eleven years old, explained how her employer had once taken her to the market to buy clothes for her, a unique episode in my data. For her this was the only time that she had received new clothes from an employer – trousers along with a T-shirt, a common outfit for girls of her age. She recalled well how much they had cost, Rs 150 in total, a meagre sum for her employers. But it was the event of going to the market with the employer which had been memorable for Kamala, not the clothes: “*I was very happy when going to the market. I thought that I would have stayed there forever. I was more happy to see the market than getting the dress.*”

Girls in Kamala’s community rarely get the chance to visit new places, such as the market in the city centre, or to move beyond their usual routes. What she says here also shows how maternalism sometimes includes elements of personalism (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) which may include mutually positive experiences. One may also ask whether the employers sometimes develop a genuine care for the child workers, although my data does not support this.

Maternalist acts that employers or workers I met talked about included lending money to workers, letting workers store their valuables in the employers’ house and providing financial help for workers’

children. All these acts complicate the interdependence of employers and workers. While most workers had not stored money with their employers, other studies have noted this practice, reflecting the real constraints of poor women in finding a saving mechanism (Baruah 2004, 611).¹⁶⁸ A couple of workers had borrowed money from their employers, either small advance-installments of the monthly salary or larger sums for dowry. For example, Namita's mother borrowed Rs 10,000 from Namita's employer for her dowry. Nevertheless, it was not common for employers to be involved in arranging their workers' marriages.¹⁶⁹

Kripa, whom we met in the previous chapter, had felt sorry for her maid whose alcoholic husband consumed her income, and as a result advised the maid to keep her savings box in her house in order to save money for emergency situations. Another maid had once brought her children to Kripa's house to escape a violent husband, and Kripa had offered food for them all. On another occasion, the dwelling of the maid had burnt down and Kripa had instantly given her Rs. 200 cash as well as three *saris*, a petticoat and a blouse. She also let the maid store a trunk with her property saved from the fire in her house for some time.

Maternalist benevolence may extend to workers' children. Several employers had supported children of their workers at some point, by assisting in school fees, providing gifts to new-born babies, lending money for the daughters' dowries and so on. Out of twenty-one workers, three had received direct financial support for their own school fees or for their children's fees. Among them, Namita's employer had paid part of her school fees for several years. This may be why she was able to stay at school for eight years, clearly longer than the other workers, and knew how to both read and write.

168 Given the absence of secure places in which to deposit their money, poor working women often turn to traders, middlemen, husbands and grown-up sons for 'safe keeping,' with negative consequences (Baruah 2004, 611).

169 In Aura's (2008, 58) study made in Bangalore South India, some parentless maids had found a husband through the help of their employers.

Of the employers, only one currently supported the education of her workers' children. This was Rajni, whose relationship with her part-time maid and the maid's two children was one of the clearest manifestations of the ambiguity of maternalism. The family of Rajni's maid of several years lived in a deserted house on the opposite side of the street. Her two children went to school and they usually came to Rajni's house afterwards. They did their school work, with which Rajni sometimes helped them. In addition, the children did some housework, as Rajni said, "*helped in small tasks*", such as serving drinks for guests, helping with cleaning and so on.

No doubt Rajni perceived the arrangement as a charitable activity, one based on genuine good-will. The tone in which Rajni spoke about the maid and her children was different from most employers. But the arrangement could be looked as an exploitation of free labour under the pretext of helping the children. It could also be looked as reciprocity: the children got to stay in Rajni's spacious home, they were given a snack and they were able to do their school work. In exchange, they did some housework, although their mother remained responsible for most of it.

While none of the employers in my data accommodated whole families of domestic workers, I heard of such practices among very wealthy families. Once I attended a party where most guests had a common interest in human rights and social justice. A woman from an apparently wealthy family had two young boys with her. She told me that they were her long-time female servant's sons, and they "*had been in our family*" for years. She emphasised how well the servants were treated in her home, and that both boys went to school.¹⁷⁰ I noticed the boys ate the same food as everyone else in the party, in my experience something highly unusual.

170 Indonesian employers "take up" girls and boys as social dependents, paying their education and other costs in addition to wages. These children, some as young as seven, attend primary and secondary school in the morning and do household tasks the rest of the day. (Weix 2000, 142)

What are we to make of these cases? For one thing, they show that maternalism, as a framework for labour relations, cannot simply be judged as positive or negative. Moreover, they show that maternalism survives both in part-time and live-in relations, not as a relic of patron-client relations but as a continuing practice. To consider these acts purely as strategic maternalism, and as such exploitative, is too simplistic. One way to conceptualise the situation is to distinguish personalism from maternalism (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Some of the relations certainly include a personalist element, but I would argue that personalist relations – like any close human relationship – may also be exploitative. For my purposes it is sufficient to state that employers often aim to frame the relationship in maternalist terms, and some employers and workers develop closer relations than others. But while such a framework may provide important support for individual workers and their families, it obfuscates the employers' responsibilities and workers' rights. Consequently, it may weaken the worker's bargaining position.

Gift-giving is not the only benevolent strategy that workers decry. Except for the youngest ones, workers were aware of the employers' maternalist strategies but found it very difficult to resist them. One worker told how she had earlier worked for twelve hours daily, and was made to do all work in the house. She described the dichotomy between kind treatment and hard work: "*With love they made me do all the work. Like cooking, serving food, and so on.*"

Sometimes, maternalist charity was the best thing workers could expect. This was evident when Lali compared her three employers, saying that two were inconsiderate because they kept assigning her extra duties without paying, but the "*third house is concerned and they never refused anything I asked for*". What she meant by this was that this employer sometimes gave her used clothes, or a meagre Rs. 15 to 20 for extra tasks such as cutting vegetables or staying late to wash dishes after guests. Lali had so little bargaining power as a worker that she considered this compensation as a sign of the employer's spe-

cial consideration, not as her right. She still recalled warmly how this employer had personally come to her house to give her Rs. 250 and baby clothes when her twins were born.

While Aasdeep, Lali and other women that I met were explicit about the need for better working conditions, they constantly wavered between their expectation of a maternalist and a more contractual relationship. Aasdeep, for example, displayed a maternalist logic in relation to her daughter's wedding expenses and her long-time employer:

They are very rich, they should show a bit of humanity. She (the daughter) had to leave her school whilst she was working for them. She studied till 5th standard. After that she empathised with the conditions of our household, and started to work.

We can see that Aasdeep places the relationship on a personalised level by appealing to the employer's humanity. This shows how practices of master-servant and market-like relations co-exist and are strategically employed by both sides, even if leaning on maternalist benevolence can be a double-edged sword for the workers.¹⁷¹ Similarly, in Kolkata (see Tenhunen 2006, 125) maids wanted to draw clear lines regarding the demands made of them, but were also interested in maintaining some features of the patron-client relationship. Although this type of ambivalent relationship served to obscure working conditions, it also provided more security than most other available jobs in the unorganised sector (*ibid*). A similar approach was common also among Mexican workers in the US: while the structure of work remained the main focus of their struggle, they also recognised the importance of personal relationships with their employers (Romero 2002, 171).

171 See Kindler (2009, 9) for a discussion on personalisation as a double-edged sword for Ukrainian domestic workers in Poland: personalisation put the migrant workers at risk of being exploited but was used as a potential resources for migrants with an unstable status.

The relationship does not have to be particularly close in order for emotional coercion (Kindler 2009, 6) to occur. In a group discussion, three Bengali workers told me how difficult it had been for them to demand a proper wage or leave when they had recently arrived in Jaipur. After having lived in Jaipur for many years, they now felt that they could ask for a higher wage and refuse extra work. Yet, the element of obfuscation was there: “*But even now if some family is very affectionate or loving, we cannot resist them in anything.*”

Emotional coercion is easier when workers are in an otherwise vulnerable position, as live-in workers, children, or recently arrived migrants are, a question I explore in Chapter six.

From “like a family member” to “human being”?

The use of kinship terminology for biologically unrelated persons, ‘fictive kinship’, is common in relations between domestic employers and workers (see Weix 2000; Adams 2000).¹⁷² In India, people generally use kinship terminology for large and changing groups of people (Freed 1963, 86). While the use of kin terminology in rural areas formed part of a consistent and inclusive fictive genealogical system linking families of all castes, there is no such system in urban areas (Freed 1963, 86; Vatuk 1969, 255). The use of kinship terms in non-kinship contexts imparts a sense of the familial to an alien context, and converts strangers into fictive kin members (Chopra 2009, 99). However, the use of kin terminology between employers and workers in India differs from other contexts since the purpose is not to imply a particular closeness or familiarity (Dickey 2000a, 35).

In Jaipur, both the employers and workers frequently address one another as kin, not to imply any particular familiarity but rather as a polite form of addressing one another (see also Dickey 2000a, 35). Workers called employers *bhabiji* (sister-in-law) and employers’

172 In the context of the UK, Gregson & Lowe (1994, 167) argue that domestic labour relations are grounded in ‘false kinship’ and/or friendship which make them different from most other employment sectors.

daughters-in-law *didi* (elder sister). Employers commonly addressed their female domestic workers as *bai*, or in its polite form *baiji*¹⁷³. Some of the workers, young girls in particular, were also called by their first names. The employers' children sometimes addressed the maids with other kin names such as *didi* (elder sister), *bua* (father's sister), *mausi* (mother's sister) and so on.

The live-in workers, however, were often addressed in a less respectful manner. Several employers addressed their male live-in workers from India and Nepal by the derogatory term *chhotu* (small one) in the place of a proper noun. When I asked the employers about the workers' real names, they sometimes had to struggle hard to remember it. Using such terminology underlines the perception of workers as non-persons and as childlike – another form of familiar rhetoric used also in 19th century India (Banerjee 1996)¹⁷⁴ and domestic relations elsewhere (Rollins 1985, 161).¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the use of childlike terminology in relation to male live-in workers may devalue their masculinity.¹⁷⁶ This serves to asexualise the male workers, and thus, alleviate any employer anxieties related to sexuality (see Chapter 7).

The use of kinship terminology, whether fictive or false, takes us to another general thread in domestic labour relations, namely the representation of the workers as 'part of the family' by the employers (Anderson 2006, 234). This rhetoric prevails among employers in

173 The *ji* is regularly added to address adults, especially older persons, to show politeness and respect. It is used to address both women and men, and to address politely a person of lower status, such as a domestic worker, rickshaw drivers etc. *Baiji* has several meanings: in addition to domestic maids, it may be used as a respectful term for an older woman to imply 'lady' (of high or royal origin), 'madam' or 'sister'.

174 The 19th century manuals instructed employers to treat servants "as if they are your adopted children... punish them with affection." (Banerjee, 1996, 8–9).

175 Weix (2000, 138) showed how Indonesian employers drew heavily on paternal and maternal roles, as if to extend the debts of parental care to their social dependents. Servants were socialized much like children are – to be loyal and to show gratitude to those who hire them.

176 In as distant context, as in Naples, Italy, the female employers sometimes refused to make the effort to learn a worker's foreign-sounding name and instead invented a shorthand name to address the worker (Näre 2010, 72).

Jaipur, too, but to a decreasing extent. The rhetoric of 'like a family member' is mainly reserved for occasions when employers talk to other people, especially outsiders like me, about their servants. Only one worker mentioned that her daughter had been addressed as *beti* (daughter) by one employer. When employers discuss their workers with friends and relatives, they use neither kinship terminology nor the 'family member' rhetoric, but instead talk about "my servant" or "my maid".

The clearest difference in the language used is between part-time and live-in workers. In my data, it was mainly the employers of live-in workers who maintained the rhetoric of workers 'as a family member' (see also Dickey 2000a, 35), whereas the employers of part-time workers rarely used such idioms.¹⁷⁷ The 'family member' idiom was more commonly used in relation to child or young workers than older workers. The use of kinship language is also gendered: I never heard anybody refer to boy workers as *betas* (sons). Perhaps the idea of referring to servant boys as sons is simply impossible in a culture where sons are generally more valued than daughters. There may be a greater difference between a servant boy and a son of a respectable family than between a servant girl and a daughter of such a family. The way workers are addressed also depends on their tasks and their caste. A *dalit* sweeper, for example, could not possibly be referred to as a family member, as becomes evident in Chapter 7.

The diverse use of kinship notions reflects the ambiguities embedded in the relationships. Susheela's narration about her previous live-in worker captures this in a poignant manner; she told me a long and emotional story about a girl who had lived with her since the age of three. The girl's parents had also worked for Susheela but when they moved to another place, the youngest daughter stayed on and worked as a live-in for more than ten years. Susheela, who now employed

177 Balram Halwai, the fictional driver turned businessman introduced in the opening passage of this dissertation, comments in the book that he would never insult his servants by calling them 'family members'.

two live-in boys, had terminated the labour relationship some years back because she had caught the girl using a landline phone without her permission. Although Susheela frequently used the idiom “*like my own daughter*” during the interview, this small incident had been enough for her to dismiss the girl, whose status at once shifted from “like a daughter” to that of subordinate worker.¹⁷⁸ The way Susheela referred to the girl both as “*like my own daughter*” and as “*a 24-hour worker*” in our two-hour discussion, shows how she used these maternalist idioms strategically and at the same time made clear her own limits as an employer.

One audible sign that servants have been striving more autonomy is the difference between their conceptions of kinship and those of the employers (Weix 2000, 139). While some employers in Jaipur continued to use the rhetoric of ‘like a family member’, the workers, adults in particular, denounced such terminology. Not a single worker referred to their current relationship with their employers as ‘one of the family’, and only one adult worker and one child referred to their relation with a previous employer as ‘like a family member’. In addition, one mother who told me how one of her daughter’s employers kept referring to her as “*like our own daughter*”, pointed out the element of false kinship and considered such language empty rhetoric, noting bitterly: “*She calls her her own daughter but who would make one’s own daughter work like this?*”

But even if workers disliked such language it was more difficult to criticise it openly.¹⁷⁹ For one thing, workers sometimes use the same rhetoric for their own purposes.¹⁸⁰ One such context relates to the

178 Keklik (2006, 192) describes girls who work as unpaid live-in domestic workers in Turkey as ‘pseudo-daughters’ or ‘pseudo-sisters’.

179 Rollins (1985, 159–160) found that even though workers in the US disliked the way employers called them by their first names or “girls”, workers themselves used such language. Rollins sees this as a sign of the “colonised mind”, where language has become to serve the interests of the powerful.

180 Within the dyeing industry in South India, kinship idioms were regularly used by employers with moral connotations of trust, cooperation and reciprocity so as to bind workers to them (De Neve 2008 quoted in Venkatesan 2006, 77).

working daughters' safety, and mothers sometimes used the employer expression 'like a daughter', if only to set their own mind at rest. When I asked Jagdeep, whose daughters do housework, about any risks involved in this, she quickly replied: "*We do not work in such families. Where ever we work they are people of good character. They treat them as sisters or daughters. Then we do not talk to male members.*"

As employment of part-time workers only is becoming more common, the rhetoric on family membership was increasingly replaced by a discourse on treating servants like a human being. For example, employers who wanted to emphasise what good employers they were, emphasised how they treated workers like a human being instead of referring to treating workers as members of the family.

The notion of treating someone *like* a human being re-emphasises the earlier point that employers perceive the working class poor as fundamentally different from themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that employers cannot make the dubious claim over family membership in relation to their part-time workers reflects the fact that employers have less power over the personhood of part-time workers than over live-in workers. Hence the co-existence of divergent rhetorical practices, that of workers as 'family members', and that of workers as 'like human beings', reflects the wide range of labour relationships and employer styles.

5.2 Class anxieties and mistrust

"They think they can become like us"

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the employers and workers in Jaipur are from different social classes. Since they meet on a daily

While workers partly resisted this practice, they were aware that kinship entails duty and obligation and they used this to encourage employers to take more responsibility for their welfare.

and intimate basis, it is not surprising that both groups construct ideas about 'the other' through these relations.

There was an inherent conflict between the employer and worker classes, observable in the way workers portrayed themselves in opposition to the employers (cf. Dickey 2000a; 2000b). It could also be observed in the way several employers expressed concern over workers wanting to move up on the class ladder, to "become like us". One employer described these changes in a lengthy manner:

Things are changing, they are changing very fast. For me, it's actually economy, and I feel that consumerism is leading a lot to all these things. Because naturally everyone wants to have all these things and they want to become instantly rich, *haina*. And then lack of patience also. And, the servants, their aspirations are same. I was talking about my *bai's* daughter who's getting married. I mean I was so amazed by her demand, the kind of *sari* she wanted, the kind of suit she wanted, the things she wanted. She was demanding of her own mother, you know, I want a camera, I want this, I want that. And then *bindi*.¹⁸¹ For her the wedding she wanted, one *bindi* was for 50 rupees, one was for 100 rupees. I mean, when I got married, I didn't have a heart to tell my mum that I want this or that. My father was not there, but even if my father had been there, I would not have demanded. But I was saying 'why do you want this,' I told her (the servant's daughter) that the one with 50 rupees is better. She said 'No no, I like this 100 rupees one'. And her mother, she allowed her to take both of them. She said '*Nahi nahi, beti ke sadhi ek bar hoti hai*'¹⁸². And I mean, I mean, considering her salary and the things which she was trying to give to her daughter it was, I mean, it is amazing. So naturally you also feel, actually the *bais* also feel that we should have that, they also aspire, they also think that they should have all these things what other people are having.

Shanti appears to worry about maintaining the cultural and symbolic distinction between classes, acquired through consumption patterns

181 A decoration put on the forehead between the eyes, which traditionally reflected caste status. Today, *bindis* exist in all possible forms and price, and are commonly used by Indian women irrespective of class.

182 'No no, one's daughter only gets married once.'

(see also Fernandes 2006, 75).¹⁸³ In Kanpur in North-India, Froystad (2005, 106) found that upper middle class families made an explicit comparison with their domestic workers when they talked about the importance of maintaining their clothes well: “*Unless we starch them (the saris), we will look like maids!*”. My respondents also commonly pointed to the difference between them and their workers, and emphasised the necessity to maintain such distinctions. Some of them worried that the differences in habitus was getting blurred because workers, as employers saw it, tried to copy middle class dressing styles. However, one employer did not perceive such sartorial changes as entirely negative: “*There are positive changes also. They (workers) come clean and well-dressed so they do not look ugly while sitting with us. They enjoy and participate in family celebrations with enthusiasm.*”

Shanti’s comment, like those of several employers, indicated a sense of being threatened by workers’ potential upward class mobility. But how realistic are such concerns? Is it possible for domestic workers to become middle class, and is employment in domestic work an avenue for potential upward class mobility in Jaipur?

In India, there are examples of working class poor people who have managed to rise to the middle class. For example, Dickey (2002) showed how Anjali, the daughter of a high caste but poor richkshaw-driver, managed to upgrade her class status to something approaching lower middle class through acquisition of higher education and cultural adaptation. This required considerable constraints and sacrifices from her parents (ibid, 216–217).¹⁸⁴ Dickey (ibid) argues that the upward class mobility among the working class poor is rare and difficult, requiring an effort by the whole family. It also involves con-

183 In Fernandes’ (2006, 75) study in Mumbai, middle class women commented on female domestic workers’ use of beauty salons or adoption of new fashion practices with a sense of discomfort.

184 The upgrading of Anjali’s status is a family effort, and Dickey (2002, 217) convincingly treats family as the locus of class. Through Anjali, the whole family may be able to acquire something of a lower middle class status, despite their own low financial and economic status.

siderable risk-taking by investing in an expensive education in the hope of, for example, getting a husband of higher class standing, and also frequently the payment of bribes to various officials (Transparency International India 2005).¹⁸⁵

In several societies, domestic work functions as a bridging occupation, as a way to enter the labour market and move to better jobs in other sectors (see Chapter 2). For the workers in my data, domestic work was neither a bridging occupation nor a facilitator of upward social mobility. Striving for even lower middle class standing or for other occupations was beyond the imagination of the girls and women I met.

A study on Indian women migrating for domestic work abroad indicated that the remittances women sent home may enable class mobility through better education of the next generation (Raghuram 2005, 25). But what about workers' children in Jaipur? Both Bengali and Rajasthani mothers hoped that their youngest children, boys and girls who were still below school age or at school, would be able to work in what they considered a better occupation such as "*in an office*". Especially the Bengali families aspired to educate their youngest children and to be able to build a house in their native West Bengal.¹⁸⁶ But for those daughters who were already wage-earners, neither Bengali nor Rajasthani women foresaw any other job prospects. In general, the women and girls considered domestic work the only available or imaginable employment for them.¹⁸⁷ Only one worker, a young girl,

185 Among the Indian citizens, 62 % had firsthand experience of paying a bribe or "using a contact" to get something done in a public office (2005, 5).

186 Yet, Nair (1999, 215–217) showed that the employment opportunities of returning migrants in Kerala did not always improve upon return, and their income level often rose only marginally.

187 See Lingam (1998, 816–817) for a study on working class community in Mumbai, characterised by very low occupational mobility. The clear majority of men and women remained in the same occupation, and the notion of upward mobility meant movement from the informal sector to the formal sector. 'Downward' mobility for women in the economic sense was the movement towards becoming a housewife, which, however, women in her study perceived as providing a higher status, as well as a respite from heavy low paid work.

said that she could imagine herself in some other job. There is a gendered angle here also, since the mothers had some hopes for better jobs for their sons, but not for their daughters. The only goal was the short-term one of getting them properly and respectably married (see Chapter 8). As Brahmin Hindus and Sikhs, none of the worker groups were eligible for the caste-based reservation quotas in education.

Baruah (2007, 2102) notes that living in a slum or other informal settlement provided with water and sanitation services in India has a strong dignifying effect on the residents in general and on women in particular, because they perform the bulk of family and household maintenance activities. Thus being able to show signs of improved living standards appeared important for the working class women and girls in Jaipur. Even if upward class mobility was not foreseeable, they aspired for material improvements. The elder women explained that their living standards had improved in past decades. For example, they now had electricity. Several families had been able to purchase a TV, which has much symbolic value and other signs of wealth. At the same time, however, there was scarcity of water and the sanitation facilities were poor, which affected the daily lives of women and girls in particular.¹⁸⁸

While the Bengalis especially tried to save for the future, the Rajasthan women aspired to be able to maintain a reasonable living standard, and at least not fall deeper into poverty. In short, participation in wage work at least enabled class stability (see Raghuram 2005, 25). But they felt that middle class living standards had risen relatively fast. When I asked Preet, who had worked in houses for more than twenty years, about the living conditions of the employers through time, she replied: "*They (employers) have become rich but that is of no use to us.*"

188 See Mehrotra (2008, 8–9) for detailed information on living standards in five Jaipur *bastis* inhabited by domestic workers' families.

The anxiety over class rise relates to broader on-going transformations such as the crumbling of old social boundaries between classes and castes (Waldrop 2004), and to broader middle class boundary creation (Fernandes 2006). As one sign of such changes, the middle class faces the fact that neither their own servants nor other servant-looking strangers necessarily follow their orders anymore, thus posing, to some extent, a threat (Waldrop 2004, 99). One urban middle class response to these changes is to restrict access to middle class living spaces through the process of ‘fortification,’ manifested in the increased number of gated and guarded residential areas in large cities such as New Delhi (*ibid*, 94), or the strengthening of the middle class neighbourhood associations in Mumbai (Fernandes 2006, 139–141).¹⁸⁹ There is an apparent contradiction between the middle class aim to restrict the movement of the working class, especially the servants and the vendors, and their dependence on the very same people (Waldrop 2004, 94). In Golf Links, an upper middle class neighbourhood in New Delhi, the concrete gating process followed an episode in which a male servant was involved in kidnapping a middle class boy (*ibid*).

It is not easy to understand why Golf Links homeowners decided that gating would be an appropriate solution to the perceived increase in crime that the kidnapping represented to them. After all, since servants continued to live within the colony in so-called servant quarters, servants were already in insider positions and no gates could change that. (Waldrop 2004, 94).

In Jaipur, similar processes of middle class boundary building are emerging in wealthier middle class residential areas. For example, in the colony where I stayed the question of whether the colony, so far in principle accessible to anybody, should be gated or not was a topic

189 In Hyderabad, such tendencies extended to the lower middle class of low-caste background, as demonstrated in the difficulty an ex-untouchable family had in renting a flat in a middle class residential area (Säävälä 2010, 185–186).

of delicate discussions. I could not help thinking that closed gates would make it more complicated for the residents to acquire all the products they purchased on their doorsteps, and all the services performed by domestic workers.

To sum up, employer anxiety over workers' upward class mobility seems exaggerated, if not out of place. It seems to stem from spreading consumer practices such as the ability of the working class to purchase similar clothes. But, as Fernandes (2006, 75) points out, such occurrences are only one dimension of middle class formation. Even if the employers' sense of threat seems exaggerated, what is real and tangible is their increasing fear of the workers, a reflection of the antagonism between the employing and working classes.

“Domestic danger” and talk of mistrust

A 2010 article in *The Hindu*, one of the largest newspapers in India, referred to maids in the homes of the Delhi citizens as “domestic danger”, citing the increase in cases of maids or replacement agencies who have “duped gullible employers”. Another article in the paper denounces: “Even those coming through trusted references may be tempted to act dangerously after they are exposed to material prosperity.” (*The Hindu*, 7th February 2004). The reportage on ‘servant crimes’ constitutes part of a broader genre of reports on increased crime committed by lower class persons (Waldrop 2004, 98).

The Indian media often portrays employers as highly vulnerable, almost as if they constantly have to fear for their lives. Domestic workers are routinely portrayed as guilty of murders and other crimes before the cases are even investigated. For example, in 2008, a fourteen-year old girl Arushi Talwar was found dead in her bedroom in suburban Delhi. The police immediately announced that a missing Nepali servant was the prime suspect and a team was sent all the way to Nepal in search of the worker. However, only a day after the girl's body had been found, the suspected domestic workers' body was also found on a roof terrace. Later, the father of the girl was convicted

of the two murders. According to the media, the victims had learnt about the father's extra-marital affair, which might have led him to take action. The precise details of what happened are not the point here but the attitude of both media and police to domestic workers is. Frequent media reportage on theft, murder and kidnapping committed by domestic workers fuels the employers' sense of insecurity and their talk of workers' dishonesty.

In this light, it was hardly surprising that in Jaipur employers referred to the domestic workers as a threat in our conversations in Jaipur, strongly reminiscent of discussions with employers about servant theft in Madurai (Dickey 2000b, 476). Still, I was surprised by how centrally the perceived threat of domestic worker crime figured in the interviews: almost every employer brought it up, many routinely portraying workers as a group of people from whom one could expect anything. When I asked Shuliba whether workers could work in her house in her family's absence, she promptly replied:

S: No, we really can't trust the servants. So whatever, like, jewellery, and money and expensive things, we can't keep in our place. We have to keep in a locker.

P: But otherwise they can come while you are away?

S: Actually we can't trust them. Because we don't have their permanent addresses, because they usually live in a rented place. This is the reason.

The tendency to blame domestic workers for theft and other crime in middle class homes and the suspicion towards them is nothing new, even if it has become more intense and more pronounced.¹⁹⁰ The employers' tone in Jaipur echoed the 19th century manuals, which stereotyped servants' nature by alluding to their propensity to theft (Banerjee 1996, 10–11).¹⁹¹ The manuals also emphasised that the

190 See also Srinivas (1995, 274) for the tendency to complain how difficult it is to find reliable servants, compared to the past.

191 Similarly, late 19th century reformist texts about, and for, prosperous Muslim women also discussed how servants should be controlled and watched to avoid petty theft and wastage (Minault 1994, 109–117).

risk of servant crime increases if the employers themselves do not treat servants in the correct manner:

They (servants) were considered incapable of taking responsibility, and always susceptible to potential slippage – committing crime, bypassing orders or engaging in some other forms of wrongful activity. Thus, the servant remained an object to be controlled, disciplined, and punished, but with temperance and love, under the aegis of middle class paternal authority. (Banerjee 1996, 10)

In Jaipur, one young employer woman who employed two part-timers contrasted the live-in worker of her childhood home with today's workers:

Before they were very good and innocent like the Nepali boy in my childhood (home). But nowadays you are always fearful that they may steal. And if you have a girl in the family then the risk increases more. But that time we were three young sisters in the family but still we never feared for anything like that.

This employer talk of trust and fear was combined with ethnic stereotyping and certain ethnic groups were universally described as unreliable (see Chapter 7). In Shanti's view, employers of part-time workers in Jaipur usually prefer Rajasthani workers and try to avoid the Biharis. In spite of this, she employed two part-time workers from Bihar and one from Rajasthan. She explained that she could hand over the house key to a Rajasthani washerwoman but she would never hand it to her Bihari workers. When I asked her why this was, she elaborated:

S: It's actually, I mean, it is crime. Because Biharis they are very, I mean I'm not generalising but the circumstances are such that to survive even in Bihar it's like a jungle *raj* (reign)¹⁹² so most of the Biharis they are going out

192 *Raj* translates to reign. In India, the *raj* usually refers to the British colonial rule over India in 1858–1947 but the speaker here uses the word in the general meaning of reign.

of the state. But what they have is, that they have that something in their mind that of course like, if she's earning 300 rupees per month from my house and if she gets a chance to get 3,000 rupees or maybe 30,000 rupees if she takes anything. If it's very valuable or precious, suppose. And naturally, I feel that most of them, because there are many cases so what they do is sometimes they have, I mean, murdered the employers. There are also old ladies sometimes there in the house so.

P: In Jaipur also?

S: In Jaipur, I mean, I have heard in the papers, I have read. But I don't know any of the families which have undergone all this thing, an accident.

It is evident that mistrust of domestic workers was common both in earlier times and still is today. Frequent sensational crime reportage causes high levels of fear in those who read it (Heath 1984, 263). In addition, the English language newspapers' frequent crime reports give an impression that crime is increasing (Waldrop 2004, 98). Media reports certainly fueled employers' anxieties in Jaipur. But is there something else behind their anxiety that makes them fearful?

Reasons for employer anxiety

Despite employer rhetoric of servant crime, the overall incidence of crime in India is low on an international scale (Pasupuleti et al. 2009, 135; Winslow 2010, 21).¹⁹³ In the past two decades, the property crime rate has dropped, with comparatively very low rates of burglary (9 per 100,000 in 2004) and theft (27 per 100,000) (Pasupuleti et al., 135).¹⁹⁴ Looking at comparative crime statistics, one might even wonder why so little crime takes place given the presence of workers in all the middle class and rich houses. It is acknowledged, however, that the official crime statistics may reflect a serious under-report-

193 A UN crime index, a compilation of several major offences, shows that the combined total crime index for India is 76 per 100,000 inhabitants compared to Japan, a country with a low crime rate, at 1737 per 100,000, and to the United States, a country with a high crime rate at 4184 per 100,000 (Winslow 2010, 21).

194 As a comparison, the burglary rate in the United States in 2004 was 730 per 100,000 and theft crimes in 2005 were 2,366 per 100,000 (Pasupuleti et al. 2009, 135).

ing of crimes, both by local police officials and victims of crimes. (Shrivastava 1991, 190; Dreze and Khera 2000, 336). But even if one suspects under-reporting of household theft, the occurrence of crime alone is not sufficient to explain the employers' fears.

On the one hand, the employers of live-in workers feel vulnerable because the workers can observe their intimate life and know "*all our secrets*". On the other hand, anxiety occurs because of the independence of the part-time workers, who come and go and are not in any sense possessed by individual employers. Several employers of part-time workers mentioned that not knowing where their workers live makes them anxious. Kripa, who only knows where two out of her five workers reside, noted that knowing the address would be useful in case of either absenteeism or potential crime:

We should know their places. Like as for the maid, suppose she does not come someday. Then we can go and check if she is in some problem and same is for the driver. And if he commits any mistake, then we can go and catch him at his place. But we do not know the places of the sweeper and the gardener.

The question of not knowing where the workers live has become more pertinent with the influx of labour migrants to domestic work in Jaipur. On their arrival in Jaipur, all Bengali workers had first lived with their relatives for some months, and after that they had changed residence at least twice. In general, employers had less contact with migrants and their families than with local workers whose places of residence they often knew.

This general lack of information over the workers' backgrounds fuels employer insecurity, as does the considerable turnover in the market (see Chapter 6). There is also a fear of sexual transgression (see Chapter 7). Moreover, middle class employers are aware of the profound difference in the living conditions between themselves and the poor, even if most have never visited a poor neighbourhood or home. Hence exposing their home to workers makes them feel vul-

nerable. (See also Dickey 2000b, 476).

Despite the extensive talk on workers' untrustworthiness, most employers said they had no personal experience of theft or other mischief. Nevertheless, almost all the employers said they knew of crimes against acquaintances or others in Jaipur. The occurrence of crime, mainly theft, is obviously one reason for anxiety. In 2006, as an example, several employers referred to a local news story about a domestic worker who had recently kidnapped an employer's child for ransom. Five out of seventeen employers reported personal experiences of theft or minor fraud. Let us first look at what happened to Malti, an upper middle class businesswoman. When I came to interview her the second time in 2007, Malti, who had previously employed one live-in worker boy and two part-time workers, immediately started to tell me about the following incident.

Her twelve- to thirteen-year old live-in worker had stolen a large sum of money from the till of Malti's shop, attached to the family house. According to Malti, the young boy had been taking small sums of money, such as Rs. 500 or 1000 notes each day, which eventually made her suspicious. After she started keeping a count on the money, she caught the boy red-handed one day. Malti's male relative, who works in the legal sector, called the police. The police came and made an investigation, and took the boy with them. When I asked what happened to him, Malti explained that he had not been taken to jail, he was "*just punished*" in the police station by the police who "*beat him*". In the end Malti managed to get back Rs. 2400, including the Rs. 700 he had taken on the day he was caught.

What really annoyed Malti was that the boy never admitted the theft. According to her, the boy had taken about Rs. 30,000 to 40,000 altogether, a huge sum compared to his meagre monthly salary of Rs. 900. Malti had learnt that the boy had made a hiding place in his parents' house, in another locality in Jaipur, to store the money. When I asked whether this incident was reported in the newspaper, Malti said: "*We did not tell. It's not that big.*" But she continued: "*It's a lot of*

money, you know, for him, he could make a house there.”

The other incidents had occurred years earlier. Shuliba said that a worker in her mother-in-law's house had once stolen a piece of gold jewellery. With the help of a friend, the mother-in-law had gone to the worker's house and got it back after a heated discussion. Similarly, Kripa had suspected that one of her previous maids had stolen a gold ear-ring which had fallen from her ear, since the worker had stopped coming to work in her house soon after Kripa had lost it. Kripa never went to the maid's house to claim the ring but one day she had seen her passing, stopped her, and asked why she had stopped working at Kripa's house. The worker had declared that she has so much work that she could not manage it. When Kripa had asked about the ear-ring the woman had quickly walked away. When asked whether she had reported this to the police, Kripa explained: *“No, because I thought she is poor and the police will torture her for this little money.”*

Rajni told me that a part-time worker had stolen a toothpaste tube for which she had been dismissed, and Meetu had dismissed her long-time live-in worker for having used the landline phone without permission.

Several workers complained about how they are the first to be suspected and blamed for pilfering. Deepti explained how some employers had dismissed a worker on the basis of false accusations of thievery. When I asked her whether this was common she answered: *“Well, both things are there. There are employers who falsely blame workers, and there are also workers who steal. So it is not all employers' fault. They [the workers] are all situation-ridden. Greed makes you do so.”*

Dismissal appears a common reaction to theft among employers in Jaipur, but it is more difficult to say how much violence is used as a punishment to real or alleged misbehaviour. Sheha, one employer, had heard from her own live-in worker that some neighbouring employer had recently accused a maid of stealing some gold. The case had not been solved, but the employer had beaten the maid badly and dismissed her. While Sheha empathised with the dismissed worker,

whose case had never even been investigated, she did not seem to question the violent punishment given to her.

In Madurai employers were sometimes ready to overlook petty theft for the sake of a long-term labour relation (Dickey 2000b, 477). But in all incidents that employers in Jaipur told me about, theft or suspicion of theft led to the dismissal of the worker, irrespective of what they had stolen. Like questions related to sexuality, servant crimes are a delicate matter surrounded by secrecy, and it is possible that more such incidents do take place. People may be hesitant to speak of recent events outside their family for reasons of family honour and fear of ill omen. But they may also fear that people might think them bad employers, since they have not been able to keep a worker satisfied. Moreover, they may be worried that if other workers hear of such cases, they might be more inclined to steal.

These examples show us another paradox related to domestic labour relations: if workers are perceived as so untrustworthy, why do employers place them in a position of trust? Moreover, if the threat of theft causes so much stress, would it not be easier just to carry out more housework oneself? This is certainly not what employers in Jaipur do. Instead, they try to manage security threats and their anxiety through other means. The immediate dismissal of workers for theft or even suspected theft and their violent punishment can be seen as strategies to manage anxieties and control workers. Below I will explore other strategies which are used to prevent cases such as those described above.

5.3 Managing “fear of servants”

Building trust and other safety measures

Whether the employers exaggerate the potential safety risks or not, opening one’s home to strangers makes one vulnerable. Thus most

employers in Jaipur perceived honesty and trustworthiness as the most important virtue when looking for a new worker. (See also Dickey 2000b, 474). One way the employers try to manage risks is to build trust with the workers so that they would not resent the employers. Where as managing anxiety is not the only reason why many employers aim at good relations with workers, some employers explicitly mentioned treating workers well in order to avoid “*misbehaviour*”. As in any human relation, building trust is a two-way process and takes time, and many felt that it had become more difficult because of the more contractual, short-term nature of the relations. As one employer said:

It is natural that you face some difficulties while adjusting with a new servant. There is always a bond of understanding with an old servant. He understands you very well and you understand him very well, about his likes and dislikes, whether he is honest, he is not a thief. But with a new one you always have to start fresh.

Individual incidents notwithstanding, most employers said they had never experienced theft or any other problem during their years as employers. Some emphasised their “*good luck*” but others specified that since they had been “*good employers*”, the workers had not felt a need to commit any crime. One of them, Susheela, perceived employer and worker behaviour as mutually reinforcing: “*We try to keep them happy and so they do*”. She felt her good employer behaviour would be rewarded and told me about one incident when a wild dog had bitten a maid in front of their house. Immediately, her daughter-in-law took her to their home, washed her wound and took her to a hospital in her car. The daughter-in-law also took the worker home and informed her husband. The next day she got her immunised and Susheela’s family paid the medical bills. This example of maternalist benevolence not only indicates Susheela’s kindness (and kind she was) but may also be seen as an example of how employers build trust through kind behaviour (Dickey 2000b, 478). The maternalist

gifts discussed earlier could also be part of the strategy to prevent unwanted worker behaviour. Thus, one of the embedded meanings of the regular notions of mutual behaviour was that if one treats worker well, they may be less inclined to misbehave.¹⁹⁵

In Jaipur, safety concerns are decisive as to whether one employs a live-in or a part-time worker, and partly determine whether a family hires adult or child workers and male or female workers (see Chapter 7). One way for middle class working women to manage their anxiety is to not to employ live-in workers. Although safety is not the only reason to prefer part-time workers, it is certainly a significant concern. In my data, all seven houses to employ live-in workers had one or several adult family members at home throughout the day.

Conversely, none of the dual-earning couples employed a live-in worker. In a way, it would be logical for the busy working women to prefer live-in workers, to whom they could outsource all housework, but the situation was the opposite. Each of those who worked outside home said that they did not prefer a live-in worker because of safety concerns, as one said: *“I prefer a part-time worker because of safety reasons. For full time (worker) there should be someone at home.”*

As an occasional employer of cleaners in my native Finland, I have never been at home while they work. In fact, those professionals often explicitly tell the employers not to be at home so that they can work smoothly. In Jaipur, by contrast, most employers explicitly said they would never leave a worker alone in their home, even if this sometimes required considerable effort in matching schedules. Only one said that if the worker comes late and they really need to go out, they leave the key at their neighbour’s house for the maid to pick up.

Shanti, a wage-earning woman who did not want workers to be in

195 In Scott’s (1985, 11) study among Hindu peasants in Malaysia, charity as a form of social control was also not explicitly discussed, except when a land-owner directly mentioned that they had to keep giving alms to the poor labourers even if they stole, since not providing charity would only lead to further stealing, creating a vicious circle.

her house without her present, found it very difficult to match their schedules with hers. In fact, she explained that she sometimes ended up doing some of their work. Moreover, she paid more in total for the four workers than she would have had to pay for one live-in worker. Yet she told me that she would never consider employing a live-in worker to avoid all the schedule-mapping:

S: No, no, no. Because this is a thing, because for 2,000 rupees I can easily have a live-in servant, but I don't trust. Because live-in servants are the ones who are the, who have committed most of the crimes, because they know every detail, where one sleeps and what is the schedule and what is going on. Actually from a 24-hour servant nothing can be hidden. *Ha* (yes), so they know all your secrets, they know your places, secret places also, and they also know for how many days master is out and you have that time. And like my house is lonely from 9 till 3 o'clock till my son comes. From nine to three they have *full* time for whatever they want to do. And, like my son is also there so I can't trust to leave the house.

P: You never had a live-in worker?

S: No. I have never and I *will* never have.

Other control practices include the holding of a probationary period to check a new worker for a couple of weeks or months to test their honesty, for example, by exposing them to temptations by leaving some money in the open.¹⁹⁶ While some employers said they also checked the quality of work, few had turned workers away because they were not being satisfied with the work quality.

Nisha, who employed three part-time workers, explained her preferences and practices in terms of new workers: "*They should have a family and their family should be known to us, so any time they cheat we can go and catch them. They should be clean and honest. We check them for one to two months, and then we trust them.*"

Another safety measure is to keep all valuables in a locked place. The employers of both part-time and live-in workers applied such

196 See Dickey (2000b, 476) for a similar practice in Madurai.

safety procedures, but there were additional control measures for live-in workers. One measure that is sometimes applied in Jaipur is the restriction of movement and limiting leisure time because of the potential risks when workers visit their relatives or peers. Two employers explicitly said that if workers meet with other workers, they might start to plan something against the employers. A more extreme way to curb workers' freedom is locking them inside when employers go out.¹⁹⁷ While none of the employers said they locked workers in, several mentioned that this was a prevalent practice in "other families" in Jaipur. Two girls, who previously worked as live-ins, had been locked in the employers' house for two years while they worked there.

What do these safety measures and the open mistrust imply to workers? In studies of worker behaviour, it has been argued that lack of trust in workers' behaviour may crowd out trustworthy behaviour, reducing people's willingness to make an effort to be virtuous (Sayer 2007a, 571). Ehrenreich (2001, 211) has pointed to the humiliating nature of employer practices such as searching employees' purses to check against thievery or random drug testing in the context of low wage jobs in the US. Such practices signal not only a lack of trust in workers' competence but also a lack of respect for them as people. In Jaipur, my worker respondents also found control measures humiliating, even if they were used to them as routine practice.¹⁹⁸

Child workers as a safety strategy

In Jaipur, choosing children or young, unmarried workers is one safety strategy especially for those who employ live-in workers. This strategy is important for managing general safety concerns as well as

197 In the Philippines, locking maids inside the bedroom or the house was one of several control mechanisms related to movement and space (Arnado 2003, 164).

198 In Romero's study (2002, 87) of Mexican workers in the US, the employers instituted a collection of supervisory techniques and tested the reliability of the workers in different ways.

anxieties related to sexuality. Let us in this section peruse more closely how Sheha, who employed one live-in worker and one part-time worker, discusses the question of trust in domestic labour relations. When I interviewed her in 2006, she employed a live-in boy of about ten years, and she said she preferred a child worker, and a boy for that matter. She showed open disgust towards part-time maids as evident from her gendered fears:

That slum area, the *bais* (the part-time female maids) have a big gang there, they discuss everything there. But he (the live-in boy) doesn't go that way. Otherwise he's free but he doesn't go. He knows what's right and wrong. He knows that "my aunty" (the employer) gives him everything so why should he go to the wrong side.

Sheha clearly perceives the isolation of her worker as a strategy to control risks, since the boy stayed practically always in the house. In fact, he hardly had any leisure time during which he might "get ideas" from other servants.

When I met Sheha again a year later, the unexpected theft in her sister Malti's house had influenced her thinking. The boy, who stole money from her sister, had known Sheha's worker and now she emphasised that "my boy" had gotten into bad company. Since Sheha had assumed that employing a child would protect her (and her sister) from crime, her trust was clearly shaken by a theft committed by a boy of equal age. Whereas she had told me a year earlier that she could fully trust her live-in worker, she confessed to me the following year:

Mine, both are nice, I find no problem with them, you know. Even today, you know, I can rely on them. And they are not doing anything wrong here. They are such nice people, you know, like I can trust them. But (pauses, lowers her voice), I don't. I am still little careful with these people, as they did the (robbery).

After the theft, Sheha had substituted the small boy, who had "fallen into bad company" with his older brother, who had earlier worked for

Sheha for several years. Somewhat inconsistently, Sheha explained that the initial plan had always been for the older brother to return to her house after a couple of years. She also told that she had recently learnt about the new legislation which bans the use of child domestic workers, indicating that the ban was one reason for sending the younger brother back to his village. The elder brother, now seventeen to eighteen years old, had originally started to work for Sheha when he was around ten. Thus, Sheha had known him for much longer than his smaller brother, which now seemed to make him more reliable. During our conversation, she kept repeating how there is a risk that “*these boys*” fall into the wrong company:

If they come directly from their village, you know, they are very fresh and they just do their work, very innocent people there. But once they come and fall in the company like P (the worker in the sister’s house) and all, this... so.

The smaller brother, ‘Chotu’, whom she had sent back to his village, was also waiting to come back to Jaipur for work. But Sheha seemed doubtful about what to do given the boy’s dubious contact with the “*thief*” boy. She mentioned that she did not want the boy to come back unless she herself could find a proper family for him because “*otherwise he gets spoiled*”.

I have so far presented several employers’ safety measures. One additional measure was to register the names and photographs of domestic workers at the police station. According to a local police order all households were supposed to do this. The idea of this is precisely to help the police trace a worker in case of a crime. Yet only one out of seventeen employers in my data had registered her workers. The general understanding among the employers was that “*nobody does it*” or “*most people never do it*”, although some mentioned that in Delhi everyone registers their workers. Some suspected that only very rich employers with live-in workers register their workers in Jaipur, as one said:

Rich and high-class people do it because they always need a 24-hour worker. Then they have large sums of money and jewellery in their home so they need police verification. But in middle class families servants also know that they (the employers) don't have much. A servant knows everything.

The contradiction between the discussion on servant crime and the fact that the employers had not registered their workers is intriguing. It begs the question of why the employers, who carry out several other measures to ease their anxiety, do not do what would seem the most obvious thing to do.

This may reflect a general mistrust against the police. The employers may also feel that it would be insulting for the workers if they demanded that they do this. Would it be more difficult to uphold maternalist relations based on subordination and benevolence if they were officialised in this sense? Not registering workers may also reflect the discrepancy between the rhetoric of fear and everyday relations in which few employers had been duped by their workers.

5.4 Conclusions

As we have seen, there is a tendency not to frame the relationship as one between an employer and employee. By portraying workers as greedy and by idealising the workers of the past, employers in Jaipur downplay the workers' legitimate demands for better working conditions. The tendency to draw a line between the work of today and that of the past is broader one: sociological labour studies generally tend to draw a line between old and the new work, thereby undermining the diversity of both current and past work (Julkunen 2008, 13). Yet, my data show that the idealisation of the past and criticism towards today's workers is strikingly similar with both contemporary employers in South India (Dickey 2000a, 37) and late 19th century employers (Banerjee 1996). This forces us to ask how much of what

we see in Jaipur is about transition and how much is about slight variations in old existing patterns.¹⁹⁹ What seems evident, in any case, is that today there is much more diversity in labour relations, explicit in diverse work arrangements and changing discursive practices. Social mobility in India has also increased, even if domestic workers are realistically not among those to rise in class status. The need to guard one's class position is reflected in the middle class and upper middle class employers' sense of the fragility of and worry over their position.

What is common to most employers is the tendency to try to maintain at least some elements of the maternalist relation towards workers. Acts of maternalist benevolence such as small gifts or financial support to workers' children continue to shape the relationships. The most common gift is the provision of two *saris* per year but the employers and workers frame the act differently. Employers continue to portray the clothes as a gift which qualifies them as human employers, whereas the maids try to frame *saris* as a standard practice, as an add-on to their low salaries, not as an act which they should be grateful for.

The ubiquitous rhetoric of 'like a family member', familiar from other countries, existed in Jaipur too, but discursive changes were taking place along with the increase in part-time work. Today, kinship terms were used by part-time employers and workers mainly as a polite form of speech, not so much to reinforce the workers' subordinate position. However, those who employed live-in workers talked about the workers in demeaning terms. In any case, the rhetoric of 'treating servants like family members' was increasingly replaced by a rhetoric of 'treating servants like human beings'.

199 There has been a certain tension between traditional history, which emphasises the continuous development of social phenomena over time, and argument by analogy, which cuts across the idea of continuous development. Argument by analogy leapfrogs through time in order to confirm or challenge the conventions of the present. (Tosh 2006, 2).

Upward class mobility through paid domestic work was not likely for the domestic workers I met. Thus my findings in Jaipur support the notion that upward mobility of the working class poor generally requires great effort (Dickey 2002), and that upward mobility in the labour markets is particularly difficult for the lower classes (Banerjee & Raju 2009, 120, 122). The situation may be different in larger cities.

The claims of the employers I met in Jaipur about the untrustworthiness of today's domestic workers seems to form part of a pan-Indian discussion, as my employer respondents' accounts were remarkably similar to those documented by Dickey (2000a) in Madurai and Ray and Qayum (2009) in Kolkata. These discussions and the mistrust itself can be perceived as manifestations of broader class anxieties and the middle class tendency to distance itself from the lower classes. The employers' fears are accentuated not only by the perception of increased crime, fueled effectively by the media, but also by the transition towards short-term and more anonymous labour relations.

In addition, having several part-time workers visit one's house every day increases employers' sense of vulnerability. Yet safety concerns are among the main reasons why those who do wage work do not hire live-in workers, which would free them from the constantly changing stream of workers. Singlemindedly, the employers who worked outside the home did not want any worker to stay in their house while they were out, despite the time pressures caused by combining wage and household work. Other measures to manage anxiety were efforts to build trust, the locking up of valuables, use of child workers, or the more extreme practice of locking workers either in the house or out the house. Even these measures did not always prevent crime. Recently, one of the employers had caught her live-in worker boy stealing a considerable sum of money. Such cases make all workers potential culprits, as evident from the workers' complaints about the employers' suspicions towards them.

6 WORKING CONDITIONS – THE CONTINUUM OF VULNERABILITY

Around the world, typical problems of live-in workers such as excessive working hours, no rest days, no overtime compensation, low wages, inadequate health insurance coverage, exposure to physical and sexual harassment, violence and abuse, and restricted movement beyond the employer's home have been well documented (Demaret 2004, 1). The workers I met in Jaipur lacked basic workers' rights such as right to leave, right to a minimum wage and right to the regulation of working hours. Some of these problems are specific to paid domestic work, some apply to much of the informal work in India. These conditions generally do not resemble the International Labour Organisation's (2006) notion of 'decent work' (see Chapter 2), making domestic work, especially live-in work, a form of vulnerable employment.

In this chapter, I investigate the terms of employment and working conditions, in particular recruitment practices and basic terms of employment.²⁰⁰ In the Indian informal labour market, the constant workings of gender and caste, age and the stage of the life-cycle contribute to significant differences in the terms of employment (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2001, 92). Taking the notion of domestic work

200 In examining the terms of employment in Jaipur, comparison with Mehrotra's (2008) findings based on a survey among domestic workers there was useful. However, while my findings are based on what both workers and employers have told me, Mehrotra's findings are based on workers' accounts only.

as 'vulnerable employment' as a point of departure, I situate paid domestic workers on a continuum with the structurally most and least vulnerable at opposite ends. The degree of vulnerability of domestic workers in Jaipur depends on various factors. In my understanding, at least the following are important: type of working arrangement (part-time or live-in), gender, age, language skills, degree of contact with one's own family, and the familiarity with Jaipur (locals vs migrants). The variable level of vulnerability relates to differences in the workers' bargaining power and in their ability to claim their rights. While it is possible for some workers to be relatively vocal about their demands, others are not able to discuss their terms of employment.

6.1 Recruiting workers

Widespread poverty in India, especially in rural areas, ensures a large workers' pool from within Rajasthan and other states of India. Statistics do not exist but it appears that large groups of migrant domestic workers in Jaipur originate from the states of West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam, as well as from Nepal.

Patron-client- and market-like features co-exist in recruitment practices. In Jaipur, recruitment of domestic workers is characterised by informality and individuality. Unlike larger cities such as Delhi (Neetha 2003, 9–10), only a few agencies that recruit or place domestic workers existed in Jaipur during the time of my field work. None of the employers I met were familiar with such agencies or had used their services, even though they were aware that agencies were popular in larger cities.

Recruiting maids

Recruitment of maids and other part-time workers takes place largely through the grapevine. The significance of the neighbourhood in

Jaipur was evident in recruitment of domestic workers, even if interaction within the new middle class residential areas in India is becoming more strained than in earlier decades (see Säävälä 2010, 187). Sharing information with neighbours is a major source for employers to find new workers, and is particularly important for newcomers. For example, one employer family which had recently moved to Jaipur found a maid with the help of their landlady. The employer explained: “*As I am new to this place I cannot let anybody get in without knowing them*”. The landlady informed them about local hiring practices, but her involvement certainly also relates to having control over access to the building.

Related to the mistrust discussed in the previous chapter, all employers of part-time workers emphasised the necessity to have a recommendation from previous employers, and they opted for someone who already works for other houses in the vicinity. This suits workers, who like to have all their places of employment within walking distance of each other.

Workers rarely come directly to a potential employers’ door to ask for a job and employers try to avoid asking a potential worker directly. Only one employer recruited a worker who came to her door in search of work, which was perhaps reflected in the lesser role of this maid in her house: she only came once a day for sweeping and mopping, not to wash dishes. Shanti, who employs four part-time workers, told how she had once been in such dire need of a new worker that she had employed a woman who had knocked at her door looking for a job. Pointing out how unusual this had been, she emphasised the need for prior recommendations:

(We) make it a point that somebody else knows her, for past two or three years... As far as possible we make it a point that we get some sort of report about the character, about their behaviour, how they behave and their routine of work and their regularity. We try to make.

Part-time maids look for a job through similar informal channels as

employers look for workers: by asking their current employers for other houses in need of a worker, asking other workers, asking guards in apartment buildings, and more rarely, asking potential employers directly. It is not uncommon for a worker to take over a job from another worker, for example, when workers get married, have children or fall ill. Typically, these transfers take place within the female kin nucleus (see Chapter 8) or at least within the ethnic group.

Although several workers said that finding work is difficult, it seems that compared to many other informal sector jobs, work can be found in a relatively short period. Moreover, the maids pool the risk of losing one house by working for several employers. Working for several employers is not only a question of financial security, but also increases work security, even if it makes the working day strenuous.

Live-in workers – echoes of patron-client relations

Live-in workers, most of whom are migrants, are also mainly recruited through informal channels, by spreading the word of the need for a new worker. While most live-in relationships were spontaneous and based on individual agreements, some live-in arrangements entailed more institutionalised elements, echoing the traditional *jajmani* service relations between wealthy and poor families (see Chapter 2).

The continuation of some form of patronage or labour attachment was evident in Rekha's case. She was one of two Bihari girls who lived in an NGO home when I met her, after she had escaped an abusive employer's house through a toilet window some years earlier. Rekha's father had sent her to work for the daughter of a landlord in whose fields the father worked in the village. As I read of the situation, the ties between the employers and her own family back in the village rendered Rekha's situation highly precarious. Her father may have been indebted to the land-owning family, a very common phenomenon among landless labourers. Indebted or not, it is necessary for them to keep on good relations with the employer to ensure future job opportunities at the farms. Such ties may make it more difficult

for the workers, especially children, to complain about the employers. Rekha described her entry into work in Jaipur at the age of nine as follows:

My father had a friend in Jaipur. The daughter of this friend got married in Jaipur. This daughter told her own father that she needs one girl to work in her house. So that woman's father told my father, and my father thought that it is the time to send me (for work) here (in Jaipur).

Although Rekha euphemistically used the term a 'friend' (*dost*), the social worker, who was present in our discussion, said that the employer was far from a friend. As the social worker saw the situation, it was a continuation, or at least reminiscent, of a patronage or labour attachment. In her view, the landlord's 'hint' to the father to send one of his daughters was probably worded something like: "*Send your daughter to my daughter's place.*"

The way Sheha, one of the employers, recruited new live-in workers also resembled patron-client ties and family-based ties of labour attachment. For years, Sheha's family had received live-in worker boys from one particular family in rural Bihar. In addition, Sheha had placed several boys from the same Bihari family in her relatives' houses, acting as a kind of intermediary. For example, when her sister Malti needed a new live-in worker, Sheha informed her own live-in worker about this. The boy then told his father, who lives in a village in Bihar, who sent one of his nephews by train to Sheha's house in Jaipur. From there, Sheha took the new boy to her sister's house. Malti, by contrast, told me that she would never place workers in other families for fears of potential problems in the labour relationship. Moreover, she would not help in finding her old workers places with new families. In our last meeting, she was just about to dismiss a live-in boy from Bihar because she was expecting her previous worker, whom she preferred, to come back. When I asked her what would happen to the worker to be dismissed, she explained:

He'll go to his parents. We'll inform (them), yeah. He'll find some other job. We would like to set him, but it's not easy. If we send (him) somewhere else, and he does something wrong, we'll be responsible so we don't want to do that. If it was within my family, like my mother or anybody, then I would send but some others, I don't take a risk.

My findings on the recruitment of live-in workers in Jaipur resemble Shah's (2000, 97) on Nepal, where kinship ties funneled the workers from a particular village and family into the patron's kinship network in Kathmandu over the generations. In Jaipur, rural employer-worker relations seem sometimes to extend to urban areas, resembling the traditional service relations between two families, but not necessarily with the land-based ties. This underlines my earlier point that patron-client-like relations continue to exist alongside commodified relations.

The market logic is becoming more dominant also within the live-in arrangement, reinforced by labour migration. As an illustration, the Bengali workers in my data had come to Jaipur without any pre-arranged employment. On their arrival, the mothers started to look for a live-in position for their daughters and for a part-time position for themselves, which usually took a couple of months. Before they found their first job they lived with relatives. It is rather common for migrant domestic workers to bring new workers from their home village when they go for their biannual leave, sometimes, though not always, acting upon a request by an employer in Jaipur. This way, the employers shift the responsibility of finding a trustworthy worker partly to the worker, as Malti explained: "*We tell them only, get me a new one if you are going, get a new one for me, so they do it sometimes.*"

Those who employ a live-in worker to replace another retain the worker to be replaced, at least for a while, to train the newcomer. By contrast, when a worker decides to leave a job, he or she may leave quite abruptly, on the very day of announcing the decision.

Women are mostly responsible for recruiting part-time workers. Their husbands or other adult males in the house rarely speak with

the workers, or only give short commands. (See also Ray 2000b, 698). However, husbands do have a role, ascribed by gender ideology, in the recruitment of live-in workers. Malti, who runs a small business and employs two part-time workers and one live-in worker, explained:

M: Maids, I decide it. Because it is just for the utensils. But this fellow he's going to stay full-time here at home, you know, males can decide much better, I think.

P: Why is this?

M: Because males they keep moving more outside, females are more at home. So they don't come in touch with different, these, these kind of people, servant class. So they (husbands) know these kind of people. I also, like, I also talk to them, but finally he (husband) talks to me "*thik hai?* (is it ok?)", when I say yes he's fine, we need him. So he says yeah, fine.

Why does the husband make the final decision on whom to hire when it is Malti who is almost totally in charge of supervising and managing the worker? This contradiction has to be explained through the deep-rooted gender norms, intersecting with ideas related to class and caste. Both Malti and her sister said that men are apt to decide on the recruitment of the live-in workers. In some ways, these sisters did not represent the traditional archetype of a Rajasthani woman: they worked, albeit from within their homes, they had travelled, and they were very outspoken. Yet a closer look revealed that these Brahmin women did not venture much beyond home without their husbands, worked on the home premises (as an entrepreneur and as a private teacher), and fitted well into the Brahmin ideal of an upper middle class woman.

Continuity in work relations

Both workers and employers value continuity and long-term relationships, but my data shows that paid domestic work is changing fast. The fact that I interviewed most of the same employers and workers both in 2006 and over a year later in 2007 made it possible to ob-

serve changes in tenure. Almost all employers had changed at least one of their workers, and many of the part-time workers worked in at least one different house from a year earlier. These discontinuities illustrate how market-logic has penetrated relations in paid domestic work in Jaipur and are in line with previous findings on the increasing tendency to have short-term labour relationships (see Dickey 2000a). It is worth noting, however, that not all labour relations were long-term in the colonial era, as one employer wrote in her late 19th century memoir:

They do not work for more than one to two years. And if the employer and the domestic do not stay together for long, they do no develop any far reaching ties. (Banerjee 1996, 11)

Nevertheless, the turnover today appears higher. The only employer whose situation had not changed in one year was Shanti. Of her four workers, the washerwoman had worked for her for fifteen years, the cook for six and half years and the maid for more than two years. For Shanti, these long relations underlined what a good employer she was, and she had a point, as such long-lasting contracts were rare.

The duration of the agreement is typically not discussed upon recruitment. This means that the employers can dismiss workers at any point. Similarly, workers can resign at any point, at least theoretically. Their possibility to do so varies considerably, though, depending on whether they are live-in or part-time workers and according to their age, the numbers of the houses they work in and so on.

It appeared more common for the employers to suddenly dismiss a worker than the other way around. According to both employers and workers this occurs simply by telling the worker not to come any more, and by paying the wage until that day. The reasons for dismissing a worker were many. Some were dismissed after the unofficial probationary period, some because of absenteeism from work. As discussed earlier, others were dismissed after being caught thieving or being suspected of it, or for behaving in a 'wrong' manner.

Since recommendations from previous employers are important in searching for employment, having been dismissed was highly problematic for workers: *“They (potential employers) ask again and again why the former employers turned us out.”*

But workers may also leave a job. They may resign from work with an employer for whom they have just started to work for, for example, because of job expansion or some other problem. As one explained: *“We work for two days and then we say we cannot work extra. So you employ someone else.”* Experienced workers who know the market well and work for several houses have most bargaining power vis-à-vis the employers. Sometimes such workers may even be in a position to change jobs on the basis of a higher monthly salary. Preet, the oldest worker in my data, a woman of about sixty years, recalled her twenty-year career as a domestic worker: *“I kept on changing according to the salary. Wherever I got a good amount, I joined. I have worked in ten to twelve houses.”*

While young girls generally have less bargaining power than older workers, the girls in my data sometimes used the threat of resignation as a means of bargaining. For example, Namita, eighteen years, told me that she had left her job, the only house she had worked for, three or four times because the employers were *“maniacs about the cleanliness”*. Moreover, they kept making her do extra work and complaining about her work quality. Namita explained how the employers became very rude and shouted bitterly, even if only one utensil was not perfectly clean. After Namita had told them she was about to resign, the employers had come to look for her the very next day and to ask her to continue to work. First came the mother-in-law of the employer family, and then another domestic worker had been sent to look for her. Namita, seemingly proud of her ability to act like this, said that the employers had to come to ask for her back three or four times. Finally, Namita’s mother told her to go back to this work, which she did.

A significant reason for the fluctuation relates to the female and

male workers' life-course. Since there is no maternity leave for domestic workers (see Chapter 8) maids usually stop working when a baby is due, which usually cuts her employment relationships. If women return to work after the baby is born, they usually have to look for new employers. Migrant male live-in workers often stop working when they return to their home village to get married.

6.2 The struggle over wages and leave

*“They treat us well. They give us respect, they do not yell.
But they do not give us leave or higher wages.”*

This is how Aasdeep, a Rajasthani worker and mother of two working girls, summarised the asymmetrical relationship between workers and employers. Her comment captures some of the central questions in the struggle between employers and workers over the terms of employment today.²⁰¹ As illustrated in the previous chapters, employers lean on maternalist practices and notions of humanity. Workers in Jaipur also wished they would be treated as humans, and embraced maternalist acts such as offering tea. But what they really emphasised as the issues at stake were the terms of employment: wages, regular leave, and agreed tasks without job expansion.

Because of the highly personalised dynamics in agreeing the terms of employment there is considerable variation in working conditions, even within the same locality. At the same time, certain local standards exist, both in part-time and live-in work. The main issues negotiated between workers and employers in Jaipur are wages, leave, job

201 The negotiations between domestic workers and employers could be, at least metaphorically, compared to those between a wife and husband in Indian homes. Intriguingly, in the former relation, both negotiators are women, and in the latter, women and men.

expansion and wage increments. Issues that are not being discussed include job security, maternity leave, sick leave, health issues or any other employment-related social benefits. In recent years, workers have been able to push for some informal standards related to wages, and increasingly, to leave.²⁰²

Maids' wages

For the majority of workers, wages were the most critical issue. In Jaipur, there are certain local standards regarding the basis on which wages are counted, even if they vary according to locality. The maids' wages are based on the number of rooms (for sweeping and mopping) and the number of the family members (for washing dishes).²⁰³ In 2006 and 2007, one employer paid on average around Rs. 300 for a maid for sweeping and mopping and for washing dishes. If the maids only did one of these two tasks, wages were lower. This meant that part-time maids working for three to four houses earned from Rs. 900 to Rs. 1200 a month.²⁰⁴

The workers share information about the rates through their ethnic networks. The most experienced ones may use the local standards as a negotiation strategy and decline an employer who does not pay the standard rate.²⁰⁵ It appears that the informal standards increase the maids' bargaining power. In any case, the standards make it easier for both sides to negotiate the wage. Once an employer and a worker

202 In the US, domestic workers' strategies when trying to establish control over their work included: increasing the opportunities for job flexibility, increasing pay and benefits, establishing and enforcing an implicit contract specifying tasks, minimising contact with employers, defining themselves as professional housekeepers, and creating a small-business-like environment (Romero 2002, 177).

203 Each occupational group has its own rating system: for example, washermen and women are paid piece rates for each piece of clothes washed and ironed.

204 The information is based on what the maids and the employers told me. The information on the salaries of other occupational groups is only based on what the employers told me, since I did not interview workers from the other groups.

205 See Romero (2002, 177) on opting for several employers as a strategy to gain control over work process.

agree on a position, short negotiations over the salary and other terms take place. Typically, the workers propose a sum that is little higher than she is willing to agree on, and the employer responds with a lower. Adult workers negotiate for themselves, but mothers negotiated the salaries and other terms for their working daughters. On gaining experience, the girls may start to negotiate more independently.

The workers, both adults and children, were painfully aware that their salaries were a low monthly investment for the employers and they resented the unwillingness of the employers to increase them. The workers did not get a raise automatically but instead had to bargain with each employer every year. However, the idea of an annual increment was gradually emerging in the domestic labour market in Jaipur. Most employers claimed they had increased the maids' salaries between my meetings with them in 2006 and 2007, indicating the maids' capacity to push for standardised practices. Employers appeal to their individual situation when they refuse to pay the expected rate or to increase the salary. Gurmeet, about sixteen years, explained how one employer, for whom she had worked for several years, had justified not raising the salary: *"I have asked (for an increment) many of the time but they say my daughter has gone out to study and my son is also out. I should rather cut your salary since the family size is (now) small."*

The significance of the workers' salaries for their employers differs considerably depending on their own financial situation and obviously on the number of workers they employ. On average, employers spent less than a thousand rupees (less than 17 euros) a month for the common combination of a maid, a washerwoman/man and a sweeper. This was not a financial challenge for any employer, and as one of them noted: *"It's cheaper to hire a servant than to buy a machine"*. However, the cost of four to five workers is not affordable for an average middle class family, as discussed in Chapter 5. For example, Gurmeet spent a total of Rs. 1635 on her four workers' salaries: Rs. 750 for the maid, Rs. 600 for the gardener, Rs. 25 for the sweeper, and Rs. 260 for the washerwoman. Educated middle class women

may themselves earn very little, for example, from office work. One young married woman with a BA degree earned less than Rs. 10,000 from her business job. Frequently middle class women's work in India is also temporary and insecure (Fernandes 2006, 102, 126-128). But none of the women in the employer families in my data was solely responsible for the family finances, and in most families husbands had clearly the highest income.

There was a hint of rivalry between the Rajasthanis and Bengalis, the two groups which dominated the maids' market. The Rajasthani workers repeatedly explained how their employers forced them to agree to a lower salary, or otherwise they would hire a Bengali. It was a common sentiment among the Rajasthanis that ever since Bengalis had started arriving in great numbers to work as domestic workers in Jaipur, the prices had crashed. This had caused resentment among local workers: "*The Bengalis have come recently. They have spoiled our rates but now we have made them to understand so they have also started taking higher salaries. Now they do not snatch our jobs like they used to do.*"

In spite of these concerns, my data suggest that the wage level of Bengali and Rajasthani maids was similar. However, the Bengali workers also confirmed that those Bengali workers who have recently arrived to Jaipur may work for lower wages until they get to know the local wage level.

For part-time maids, a continuous problem is the question of 'job expansion' or, quite felicitously, 'job creep' (see McGrath & DeFilippis 2009, 79), in which domestic workers are hired for one job but are eventually asked to do two or three. In Jaipur, both Rajasthani and Bengali workers complained that they were often asked to carry out extra tasks without additional compensation. Employers, on the other hand, complained bitterly that the workers of today do not agree to carry out additional tasks.

Extra tasks included hanging wet clothes to dry or folding washed clothes, dusting, cutting vegetables, making dough for the *chappati*

bread, cleaning rice or wheat or otherwise helping in the kitchen, and so on. However, the maids refused outright to wash the toilet, considered a *dalit* task. One of the girls had been made to massage the scalp of the employers' adult daughter with oil, which she considered a major annoyance.

In a group discussion, the Rajasthani girls told how employers typically ask them to work for extra hours during festive seasons, which irritated them considerably. For example, before the Diwali festival they were asked to organise the cupboards, either with or without previous notice. Speaking in unison they expressed their feelings about this: *"We also have a family and children. We also have to celebrate the festivals, so what if we are poor. We also need leave, we also celebrate and cook at home."*

The way employers tried to include extra tasks in maids' routines shows the limited control of workers over the work process. Some workers got a small financial compensation for the extra tasks, others got none. When I discussed the job expansion with Bengali workers, one of them shouted: *"They say that we have to clean floors and to wash utensils but gradually and firmly they make us do all the work."*

Workers may try to resist job expansion, but it is difficult, especially for the young girls. Punam, a fifteen-year old Rajasthani girl, explained how employers made her to do more than the assigned tasks, for example, hanging clothes to dry or folding them. When I asked her what she does then, she courageously said: *"I bluntly and straightforwardly refuse them. I tell that I cannot do this. But many of them force me to do this. Then I get angry but I don't usually show it (to them)."*

Her sister Gurmeet, a tenacious and warm-hearted teenage girl, also complained strongly about the demands to do extra work. Yet, she said that during her employers' menstruation, she replaces her employer in making tea for her family, since the family complied with the traditional Hindu notion of menstruation period as polluting. Gurmeet empathised with the female employer, whose mother-in-

law did not permit her to prepare tea during menstruation and said that “*at least I could help her this much*”. Her comment shows how workers sometimes embrace a personalised relationship with an employer and that a contractual relation does not necessarily exclude elements of personalised support. We also note that personal traits inevitably matter in how a domestic labour relationship turns out.

While the employers constantly tried to get more labour for the same wages, all maids in my data were at least paid wages regularly. This makes their position relatively secure compared to the live-in workers whose remuneration we next explore.

Remuneration of the live-in workers

The live-in workers in Jaipur are more vulnerable to individual employers’ considerations and whims. Their working conditions typically included all the violations of basic workers’ rights stipulated by international labour regulation: the excessive working hours, no rest days, and low wages were a reality. Practices in the remuneration of live-in workers varied more than those for part-time workers, in particular dependent on task, age and gender.

According to the employers in my data, the salaries of their live-in workers ranged from Rs. 900 to Rs. 2000 at the time of the data collection in 2005–07. The ones with lowest monthly salaries were among the youngest: a boy who was around 12 to 13 was paid Rs. 900 a month. The youngest of all of them, a boy around ten years of age, got Rs. 1200, having already worked for the same employer for two years. The highest salaries were paid to a live-in driver, Rs. 2500 a month, and to an adult female live-in worker who helped to take care of a three-year old girl in addition to doing all other tasks of the house, Rs. 2000 per month. The salary level for live-in workers, including for child workers, in Jaipur seems higher than that of Kolkata, where the salaries of the child workers I interviewed in 2004 ranged from a meagre Rs. 150 a month to Rs. 300. The salaries in Mumbai

and Delhi, however, appear higher than those of Jaipur.²⁰⁶

There is extensive evidence of women in India being paid lower wages than men for the same job, especially in the informal sector (Bhan 2001, 12–14).²⁰⁷ Conditions of work vary wildly among the live-in workers themselves and gender is one factor in this. An adult male cook of high caste not only has a higher wage but is also in a much more secure position vis-à-vis the employer than a generic all-around worker, especially a child worker. The young age tends to increase the risks. Child workers usually have the lowest salaries and the least, if any, time off. Live-in workers typically send most or at least part of their wage to their parents or other relatives mail order. When the parents of child workers live in Jaipur, it is common for the mothers to collect the wages every second week or every month, which also provides moment for the children to see their mothers. Parental control over their children's wages was evident both in Jaipur and Kolkata, and as we have seen children do not always know how much they are paid or even whether they are paid or not.²⁰⁸

Employers portrayed workers' compensation as a kind of package consisting of free accomodation, food and clothes – on top of the wage. One gave a specific list: “*Clothes, food, bed-clothes, toothpaste, oil, cream soap. All necessities of life including medicine.*” Another highlighted the financial benefits of the live-in arrangement:

In my opinion they are very lucky. Because their entire salary of the year is their saving. They don't have to spend even a single *paisa*, a single penny. The food is free for them, clothes are free for them, accommodation is free for them, water is free for them, electricity is free for them. So their entire salary of the year is their saving. Which they take and give to their parents.

206 For example, one family told that they paid a full-time *ayah* for child care in Delhi Rs. 6000 a month in 2005. (<http://www.bajajcapital.com/magazine/coverstory-july.html>)

207 For example, among manual construction workers, daily male wages in a recent study in Ahmedabad were more than twice the average female wage (Baruah 2010, 207).

208 In Kolkata, two out of five children I interviewed during the pilot study had no idea of how much they were being paid.

He added that they also give “*lot of tips*” to the workers, for example on Holi or Diwali, or if India wins at cricket they may give the workers five or ten rupees. It is a marginal sum both for the employers and workers, but may well serve to reinforce the idea of a servant who is in continuous gratitude towards the master.

While most live-in workers are paid wages, there are those who receive no financial compensation.²⁰⁹ In the context of Nepal, Shah (2000, 89) reminded us that a failure to understand that the relationship between some of the workers and their employers does not involve wages may lead to a serious misreading of the situation. Keeping Shah’s point in mind, in my view it is absolutely necessary to understand the diversity of workers’ situations, including whether they are paid wages or not.

How common is it for workers not to receive any wages? My findings in Jaipur indicate that this is not exceptional for child live-in workers. Among those girls and women in my data who had previously worked as a live-in, several had not been paid at some point.

For example, Rekha and Rani, the two girls in an NGO home, had never received wages during their years at work. They were not sure, however, whether the employer had sent something to their parents or not. Shivali, a young Bengali woman, had received no wages in one of her earlier live-in employers’ houses. She revealed this only during our second meeting, in a small group when we were discussing the problems that one of them had faced at work. Shivali, who had sat quiet for some time, butted into the conversation and told us that the other girl, Kajal, had not been paid properly. Then she started talking about herself: “*Forget about the wages, they never even gave me an old, used sari*”.

How do girls and women end up in such situations? The reasons

209 The practice of only providing accommodation, food and clothes and not paying any money to domestic child workers is reported in many countries. See Keklik (2006, 191) on Turkey, Jacquiem’s (2004) study on Senegal; and Shah’s (2000) study on Nepal.

are many. In Rekha's and Rani's case there was nothing the girls could do about their situation. Locked inside when the employers went for work, they could not tell anybody about it. They were victims of continuous violence by the female employer and had lost all contact with their own relatives. They were in the worst possible position of vulnerability.

Shivali had been in a better position during her previous live-in years. Her own mother and other relatives lived in Jaipur, and she had contact with them, including time off every second Sunday. During her last live-in position she was already married. When I asked her why she stayed with that employer for a whole year without a pay, she explained that she had been helpless as she was pregnant and could not get a job elsewhere. Besides, the employer had first told her to work only for one hour per day as payment for the accommodation. But gradually the working hours had increased so that she ended up working from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. with no pay.

Thus the live-in workers are in a more vulnerable position regarding wages as well as other terms of employment. In the part-time market, the existence of informal local standards makes the workers less vulnerable. In addition, workers work for several houses, and share information with each other which makes outright exploitation such as not paying wages more difficult. The working conditions in the part-time market resemble regulated labour relations with mutually agreed wages, even if there is a continuous struggle over the leave and extra tasks.

Pushing for standards, negotiating leave

There was considerable variation in whether the workers in Jaipur could take monthly leave or not. There were two different practices among part-time maids, which reflect the transitory nature of their situation. Most Rajasthani maids worked for seven days a week, and had no agreement with their employers to obtain regular leave. They considered the lack of time off as a major drawback of their work.

However, although they told me during our first meeting that they seldom managed to take any leave, they later told me that sometimes they just failed to show up at work, a highly frustrating practice for the employers. The oldest of them actually told me that she takes four leave days a month.

When I asked Punam, one of girls, which working condition is most critical, she declared: “*Higher salary. As far as leaves are concerned I take one or two days of leave without telling them.*” But she then clarified that in fact her mother usually substitutes for her if she does not go to work, and mentioned that her employers get very angry on these occasions. Despite this, leave is something about which she confronted her employers, at least to some extent, by simply refusing to accept no time off. Punam’s comment illustrates the very real struggle over the terms of employment in which workers and employers were involved. While some employers agreed that the maids could have a day off for a family occasion, others would expect them still to do the morning shift. Another way of extracting labour from the worker should they take a day off, even if legitimately, was to leave that day’s work for them the next day. Typically, this meant a huge pile of the previous day’s dishes waiting for them.

Contrary to the sporadic practices among the Rajasthanis, all Bengali maids in my data took three to four days’ leave every month.²¹⁰ The Rajasthani workers were aware of the Bengali workers’ better terms of employment in this regard. One of them mentioned that the Bengali women living close-by had actually encouraged them to ask for leave too. Yet the Rajasthanis had not managed to do so, even though they worked in the same middle class neighbourhoods. As I understand it, these diverse practices between different ethnic groups reflect two issues. On the one hand, the workers align strongly with their own ethnic group (Patel 2006, 28) rather than with the broad-

210 In a study in Bangalore in South India, a similar variety of conditions in terms of leaves existed. Some workers had managed to negotiate a regular day off whereas others worked a seven-day a week (Chigateri 2007, 5).

er working class, and since there is no common platform such as a union, they mainly aim at improvements for that group. Employers, on the other hand, seem more willing to grant leave for the Bengalis, generally considered as trustworthy maids and good workers, than for the local workers. Most of all, it appeared that the Bengalis had managed to create among themselves and across the city an atmosphere which encouraged all of them to demand leave, even if many employers actively resisted this.

The on-going negotiation over time off is reflected in the comments of Lali, an experienced Rajasthani maid. When I met her in 2006, Lali explained the question of leave mainly from an employer perspective: *“As far as leave is concerned, we are far better than the Bengalis; they take four to five days off and do not even intimate before taking leave.”* But one year later in 2007, she had just started work in a new house. This time, Lali told the employer right away that she took two leave days per month. Unlike her previous employers, this employer had immediately agreed, since they had previously had a Bengali worker who had taken four to six days of leave per month. An agreement on regular time off was a new situation for Lali. When we discussed how she managed to achieve this, she emphasised the contractual nature of the agreement:

Because I initially told them. Before I joined them I told that I will take two leaves per month, and they agreed. So this brought the difference. They do not pay us for medicine. We bear the expenses ourselves, so at least they have to give leave to rest.

While the maids have started to push for regular days off, most employers expressed strong dissatisfaction with this.²¹¹ Some simply said that they did not want to provide leave for their maids: *“Actually,*

211 Employers were not so worried about the leave of other workers such as gardeners, or sweepers who also work seven days a week. In suburban Delhi, Raghuram (2001, 612) also noted that the sweepers' absenteeism was easily overlooked since cleaning toilets and removing refuse were not viewed as essential daily tasks like the maids' tasks.

I do prefer not to give them any leaves." Mala's answer to my question on how many leave days her maid has reflects well the employers' unwillingness: *"She takes three to four days although I refuse. I say that if you need leave at least come in the morning and finish the work."*

Mala told how her current maid, who had worked for her for a long time, had in the past couple of years started to demand monthly days off. In general, the employers felt that the workers' demand for leave was a significant recent change. One employer reminded me that ten years ago it was out of question for the maids to demand or take days off. When I asked Mala where she thought this change came from she said: *"Everyone (says it). They have learnt it from each other."*

Most employers felt that time off is something that should be negotiated case by case when a need arises, not applied regularly as a workers' right. This is shown by Shanti, who said she is not particularly strict with the leave. According to her, all her four part-time workers take four leave days per month: *"All of them (have four days), if they need it."* We note the ambiguous "if they need it" in Shanti's comment. Yet Shanti claimed that her workers normally take even more than four days leave per month, clearly more than the average in Jaipur. Accordingly, she felt that the workers have started *"to take me for granted"*. It even happened that one of them took leave from Shanti's house and went to work in other houses to make more money. For example, the cook, whom Shanti most depends on, kept on taking extra days off: *"Like the cook has already taken two days this month, although today is only the 6th (of February), you know. Actually, she is very smart."*

Different policies regarding the maids' leave creates an ambivalent situation for workers who have several employers, one of whom can be lax with leave and another one reluctant to give it. Again, the least vulnerable workers may be able to use the looser policy of some employers as a negotiation strategy with others.

The system of leaves is different for live-in workers. It is standard

for them to have leave of about one month, either once a year or once every two years to visit their homes in other states or in Nepal. During their absence, the workers' relatives, a younger brother for example, may step in as a substitute. In other cases, the employers carry out some work themselves and employ a part-time maid for cleaning and washing of dishes.

Whether the live-in workers have any days off monthly depends on each individual employer, but the employers and workers gave a very similar picture of the leave and breaks permitted for live-in workers. In most houses, the workers have two hours off every second Sunday. Only one live-in worker, already a grand-mother herself, had two leave days per month, according to her employer. However, it is doubtful that she actually had this much leave, since the employer's daughter-in-law hinted to me in a private discussion that this was not really the case in reality.

The reluctance to allow time off for the workers underlines the employers' need to have someone in their service all the time. Otherwise, would it make such a difference if they allowed the live-in workers some more free time every week? Another reason that may make employers reluctant to allow leave relates to the fact that workers see their relatives and friends. This, as some believe, may influence them in a negative way (see Chapter 5).

Other relevant questions related to working conditions are, what happens when a worker falls ill, and the question of maternity, but none of them were taken up in the job negotiations. Both Rajasthani and Bengali maids said that not having any right to sick leave is a considerable challenge. If workers were absent from work for being ill the employers typically deducted the wage for those days. If they were ill for several days or longer, they were sometimes expected to provide a substitute worker, or sacked. Younger sisters may substitute for older sisters, and daughters may substitute for mothers, or the other way around. None of the workers were provided with medicines by the employer. One girl said that her employer, who was a doctor, had

helped her by buying the necessary medicines but had deducted the price from her wage. It appears that some, though not most, live-in workers may receive medical treatment from the employers, and some employers said they had given medicines to their live-in workers.

Isolated live-in children – the most vulnerable

Above we have seen that workers are in diverse positions regarding the basic questions of wages, leaves, and job expansion. Workers' negotiation power relates to, among other things, their experience and age, and whether they are part-time or live-in workers. Furthermore, workers who have recently migrated to Jaipur are in a more vulnerable position than those who have lived there for a longer time, or for their whole lives. The Bengalis told me that it is easy for the employers to cheat those who have recently arrived in the city: "*They have a great workload and a low salary (when they arrive).*" And as we have seen, some of them had received no wages when they had recently arrived. Moreover, the language barrier weakened their initial position: "*That time we did not know Hindi and we were also shy.*"

The situation is particularly precarious for child migrants, placing them at the other extreme of the continuum of vulnerability. As an illustration, let us look at Shivali's niece, Meera, who was about eleven years in 2006 when I first met her. She was then working as a part-time worker in a house. Before this, she had started as a live-in worker in another house. Meera told me that she had only stayed there for three days after which she had called her mother to pick her up, and had left the employment. As a reason she simply said: "*I missed my parents, I did not like the job.*" When I asked her why she did not like it, she repeated in a straightforward manner that only children can: "*My parents were not with me, I felt lonely.*" The pain of family separation among domestic worker mothers has been well illustrated by, e.g. Parreñas (2001b), but less discussion has occurred on the pain of children who are separated from their families by work, so tangible in Meera's face and voice. Since this turned out to be the only time I

had a chance to meet Meera, she might have left things untold; as in my experience the workers usually did not talk about specific negative experiences in our first meetings. At least she had been able to use the employers' phone and leave the place, which is not always the case. During my next visits to the Bengalis, Meera had gone to the village – to finally meet the parents she had missed so dearly.

Next year, I heard from the other Bengali workers that Meera's situation had changed again. In 2007, Meera's mother had also arrived in Jaipur, and she had placed Meera again as a live-in worker. The mother had also moved to live in a new location and I was not able to meet her, but Meera's aunt Shivali, with whom she had lived earlier, told me that Meera was now satisfied and did not want to leave the house this time. The house where she now stayed was the one for which she had previously worked as a part-time worker. I had seen their pressing housing situation, but I could not help but think of Meera's face when she had told me a year earlier that she never ever wants to work as a live-in worker anymore.

Sandhya, another young Bengali woman, had started as a live-in worker when she was thirteen years. But her parents lived very close, within about ten minutes walking distance. Sandhya was allowed to go to meet her parents about once a week for a couple of hours, although she never stayed with them overnight.

The sense of the vicinity of the parents or other close relatives is likely to influence how the workers are treated. The fact that Meera and Sandhya had close relatives in Jaipur and were able to meet them regularly, if only for two hours every second Sunday, put them in at least a marginally better position than those who had no parents or other close kin in Jaipur.

Such was the situation of Rekha and Rani, the two girls from Bihar we met earlier. They had been placed in Jaipur to work but their families lived far away in the state of Bihar. Rekha was sent to Jaipur alone by train and the employers themselves brought Rani on the visit to their native Bihar. As discussed earlier, the girls had been

regularly beaten and maltreated by the female employer. Rekha had once been so badly beaten that she had to stay in hospital for a week, pressed by the employers not to tell what had really happened to her. The girls were not paid, at least not to their knowledge. It seems that when workers are not paid salaries, and are only provided accommodation and food, the employers internalise more easily the idea that they own the workers, making them more prone to abuse and exploitation. (see Keklik 2006, 195–196).

Not knowing the language of the employers adds to the vulnerability and risk of abuse. Rekha, the younger girl, told that when she arrived in Jaipur she knew very little Hindi and often did not understand the employers' orders. Thus, she was not able to perform the tasks she was expected to do. Consequently, the employer scolded her. Lack of common language is frustrating for both parties of the labour relation, but it can have severe consequences for workers if the employers' frustration leads to, for example, violent behaviour.

The girls' isolation in the house was absolute. When I asked Rani whether she had been in touch with her father (her mother had died earlier) during her time in the employer house, she recalled: "*Whenever the employers' father called (from Bihar) I asked him about my father and asked him to make my father call me. They always said "I will ask" but they never did.*" When Rekha went to visit her home village with a social worker after she had escaped from the house and ended up in the NGO home, her family members were surprised to see her alive. The isolation is one issue which makes Rekha and Rani and children in similar situations particularly vulnerable. The girls were locked into the house when the employer went out, and they had no knowledge of their surroundings. The only time they could get out was when they were sometimes permitted to go to the swing located within the premises of the apartment building, a memory Rekha still seemed to cherish.

The isolation of the employers' house is mentally more demanding for young children, even if no particular abuse is involved. The fact

that employers and parents usually exclude the children totally from the labour negotiations weakens their position, since the employers perceive themselves as responsible towards the parents – whom they rarely if ever see – not towards the worker. At worst, as in the case of Rekha and Rani, the working conditions remind one of slavery, although the employers as well as the parents may perceive it through the framework of a patron-client relation. Slavery can be perceived as a forceful appropriation of the person, who as a slave is under the complete control of the master, and has no say over her or his affairs (van den Anker 2004). The situation of child domestic workers at times comes very close to this definition.

My data support previous findings (see Save the Children 2007) of the live-in children's high risk of violence. Apart from potential violence and accidents, for example, in the kitchen, a more invisible health effect on children in domestic work is chronic illness due to poor nutrition and lack of sleep, which has the hardest impact on the youngest live-in workers.

These cases are not exceptional. A non-governmental organisation I visited in Kolkata in 2004 was just working on a legal case in which a female employer had seriously beaten a young live-in girl, and several similar cases have been documented by non-governmental organisations. Such cases, for example the murder of Sonu Kumar portrayed in the opening passage of this study, are also regularly reported in the media. Thus factors that make migrant live-in children particularly vulnerable and locate them at one end of the continuum of vulnerability are: isolation and lack of any contact with family members, lack of mutually intelligible language, lack of salary, and continuous treatment as slave-like non-persons. Although these children were girls, boys in similar conditions may also face severe abuse. The mobility of live-in girls and boys I interviewed in Kolkata in 2004 was severely restricted, and they all worked extremely long days for a minimal salary.

One may ask whether the situation in which the girls lived ren-

dered them completely passive victims with no agency of their own. But as the case of the Bihari girls clearly shows, although the slave-like person may have no freedom to decide on his or her own affairs, within the employer's domain, they continue to possess a free will.²¹² It is this limited agency that they effectively used when they fled through a toilet window.

As we have seen, paid domestic work in Jaipur may be a highly precarious undertaking. But what is the perception of the employer class in terms of the exploitation embedded in the relations, and how do they justify their existing practices?

6.3 Exploitative employers?

In Jaipur, most employers maintained a morally pious stance in regard to their role towards the workers. Several employers regularly referred to the notion of humanity and presented themselves as morally superior employers who treated workers respectfully, as opposed to exploitative employers who did not consider workers as 'human beings'. The mismatch between how employers perceived themselves and how they actually treated workers was stark, as revealed in the contrast between the humanity jargon and the live-in workers' working conditions.

One employer, a man whose extended family hired two live-in workers, was keen to emphasise their superiority as employers: "*The situation, you know it, in our family and our house is quite different from other families*". When elaborating the difference between his house and the others, he said that workers in many houses do not get enough food and what they get is of worse quality. Moreover, he continued,

212 Van den Anker (2004) notes that one must differentiate between the variety and complexity of arrangements within contemporary slavery if the policy measures are to be successful.

workers are shouted at and tortured, and when their employers go out, they may lock the house and force the workers to stand outside waiting. When explaining why his family had a different attitude, he continued:

Especially our eldest brother, he believes in the values of life. That no matter if somebody is poor or he is working for you, he should be treated well and should be treated as a human being. He has no right to force them...

At this point, his brother stepped into the conversation, and they literally talked in unison when they continued the sentence: “...*force them or humiliate them or torture them.*”

When I tried to explore what they meant by this, these and other employers vaguely referred to “*the others*” or to distant friends. A couple of them specified that they had never encountered abuse in their own neighbourhood. In contrast, Sheha told me how her own elderly mother had mistreated her workers. She felt that good relations with workers act as a kind of shield against misbehaviour and crime, and explained how there were two different ways of treating workers in her own immediate family. While all three sisters and their mother employed live-in workers, Sheha felt only two of them treated workers well. She compared herself with her mother and her younger sister Malti (whose money had been stolen, see Chapter 5), who in her view did not treat workers well, leading to a high turnover in workers. By contrast, in her own and her elder sisters’ house there was much less flux: “*We never change (workers)*”, which she perceived a sign of a good employer. Sheha said that a young live-in worker boy in her mother’s house had tried to commit suicide because the mother constantly treated him badly. The differences between Sheha and her family members show that despite similarities in workers’ conditions across Jaipur, the way workers are treated is also an individual choice, and reflects multiple moralities.

Only one employer explicitly mentioned that if she saw bad treatment she would not accept it: “*I have never heard about it in my neigh-*

bourhood. Otherwise I would not have let it happen.” Others had a more reserved attitude, which seemed to imply that even if they were aware of abuse in families they knew, they would not get involved.

For the Jaipur employers, exploitation of workers equated to their perception of inhumanity: physical or mental violence, or not providing proper food. With the exception of one employer, they did not refer to exploitation in terms of not paying proper wages, or not providing vacation or breaks during the work day.

The framework of maternalism and the workers’ dependency on employers may make workers hesitant or even reluctant to speak about violence or other abuse that may occur in the employers’ homes. The workers I met usually created a rather positive image of the employers in our first meeting, but later begun to tell me about exploitative practices such as non-payment of wages or rude behaviour. I acknowledge that workers are reluctant to talk about abuse, especially sexual harassment or abuse, within their work places. Even so, it seems that the risk of violence and exploitation is lower in part-time work than in live-in work, even if violence may occur in both circumstances. As we have seen, the former live-in workers Rekha and Rani were regularly beaten by their employer. Another live-in worker told how an employer used to pinch her. Among part-time workers, only one girl said that she had been beaten in one of her employers’ houses, and then by the employers’ children. She had asked them to stop but *“I was helpless, those kids were stubborn and arrogant. They disobeyed their parents.”*

6.4 Conclusions

Perceiving paid domestic work as vulnerable employment, I have in this chapter explored the wide range of terms of employment and working conditions in Jaipur middle class homes. I argue that work-

ing conditions, and the ability of workers to influence their situation, can be perceived as a continuum, with the extremely vulnerable at the one end, and the ones with more bargaining power at the other.

Part-time workers usually have no long-term ties between their family and the employer's, and they are recruited informally through neighbourhood networking. The recruitment of the live-in workers sometimes echoes traditional service relations between land owning and labouring families, as exemplified by the two girls whose landless labourer parents in Bihar had sent their young daughters to the houses of their Bihari land-owners' relatives in Jaipur, placing children in highly precarious situations.

While the ideal of long-term relationships prevails, my data has shown that labour relations in this sector are far from static, with a rather heavy turnover. As in Madurai (Dickey 2000a), the tendency in Jaipur is also towards short-term relationships. However, the fluctuation within these relations is not entirely new: complaints about the worker flux were reflected already in the 19th century domestic manuals. What seems to more recent, though, is that both sides are active in terminating labour relationships. Today, it is possible also for some workers to leave an employer who gives them an excessive work burden. Their ability to do so is facilitated by the fact that new employment can be obtained relatively easily compared to other sectors. In addition, since maids work for several houses, losing one house does not have a dramatic effect on their income. Even if this is only possible for the more experienced workers, it is a sign of an increasing ability of workers to exercise their agency in the part-time labour market.

Although paid domestic work was not officially regulated during the period of my data collection, certain local standards existed in working conditions as regards wages and time off, in both the part-time and the live-in market, even if such standards are regularly bypassed. Wages were the single most important term of employment for the maids. Their wages were based on certain common criteria in

all localities, and the salaries of both Bengali and Rajasthani workers were of the same (low) level. The second most important term of employment for the maids was the question of leave. There was more variety among workers regarding this. The Bengali maids invariably took a few days of leave per month while the Rajasthani workers had not succeeded in obtaining such regular leave. The lack of formal regulation and lack of workers' organisations maintain the strong ethnic alignment above any worker solidarity or alignment with those of similar occupation.

There was more diversity in working conditions in the live-in market. For instance, several workers had not been paid any wages at all at some point of their live-in work trajectory. The extremely long working days and a marginal two-hour break every second week were standard among the live-in workers, and the employers made no particular attempt to palliate these terms.

Several structural factors related to age, gender, migration status, and lack of contact with one's own family, among others, make some workers much more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than others. On the basis of my data, I agree with Dickey (2000b, 469) that being a part-time worker increases independence and decreases vulnerability. With that central distinction in mind, there are also distinctions between different groups of live-in workers. It appears that the risk of abuse increases significantly with isolation and with young age. Adult male live-in workers who are hired for a specific occupation such as cooks and drivers are in an entirely different situation than generic child workers. Those who have migrated to, or have been sent to Jaipur alone are in the most precarious situation, and their position can approach that of a slave.

The following chapter continues to elaborate the social structure of paid domestic work. As mentioned in this chapter, caste and gender configurations structure the market, beyond the basic division between live-in and part-time work, as do age, ethnicity and religion.

7 HIERARCHIES IN PAID DOMESTIC WORK

“*Oh, finding a good worker is so hard*” I was told by various employers, in almost identical words, when we discussed the recruitment of new workers. What they meant is that in principle finding a worker is easy, but it is more difficult to find a worker with the right combination of social attributes. Even though paid domestic work is not regulated by the state, it is well structured through hierarchies and social dimensions of caste, gender, age, ethnicity, and religion, in the same way as other informal sectors of work in India (see Harriss-White and Gooptu 2000, 90). There is a micro-cosmos in which each domestic worker has her or his place, determined by these social dimensions.

In the previous chapters I have shown how class hierarchies are reproduced through domestic work. By exploring the employers’ perceptions and preferences, this chapter shows how other hierarchies, and their interactions, structure paid domestic work. One cannot answer the simple question ‘who works for whom’ without understanding the social hierarchies, and how they interrelate. These societal structures are often so tightly interrelated that it is sometimes impossible to see what the influence of each particular one is, hence the need for an intersectional approach (see Crenshaw 1989; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Yural-Davis 2007). My aim in this chapter is to analyse the role of each dimension, and their interrelationship.

I start by looking at caste, followed by gender, age and life-stage, and see how they structure the sector. In that context, I discuss the questions of sexuality and employers’ gendered preferences. I then

turn to the role of ethnicity and religion in their recruitment. In the last section, I will show how employers practice the rhetoric of 'othering', familiar from other studies on domestic work (Cheng 2006). Finally, I discuss how, from the employers' perspective, all hierarchies ultimately merge into the dichotomy of clean and dirty, a very disturbing perspective from the workers' point of view.

7.1 Caste transitions and fixities

Caste in transition

Traditionally, domestic work was organised on the basis of caste system in which purity is central (Raghuram 2001,1). As discussed in Chapter 2, the caste system is flexible and in transition. But the trends in the transitions in the caste equations are contradictory and heterogeneous (Tenhunen 2010, 43). The caste hierarchy varies from one region to another and extensive labour migration contributes to the renegotiation of the caste system and to the loosening of its grip. (Srinivasan 1997, 3; Raghuram 2001, 2). While the pollution barrier is an enduring legacy for high- and low-caste people, the principal division today is between the Untouchables (Scheduled Castes) and the rest (Bayly 1999 quoted in Iversen and Raghavendra 2006, 316). This was also the main division within paid domestic work in Jaipur.

Dalits constitute a significant percentage of the population of India (16,2 %) and of Rajasthan in particular (17,2 %) (Office of the Registrar General 2001, 1).²¹³ While the societal position of *dalits* has undergone a significant transformation due to political mobilisation and governmental anti-discriminatory policies, the perception

213 In the Indian administration, the Scheduled Castes have been grouped together with so called Scheduled Tribes, mostly indigenous populations, who comprise 8,2 % of the population (cf. Census of India 2001). Together, these groups are classed by the abbreviation SC/STs in the administrative context.

of *dalits* as polluted has persevered.

The caste system in Rajasthan has been perceived as particularly rigid:

The social structure in Rajasthan, which has been both feudal and conservative, is highly caste structured. The social stratification remains caste-based leading to a rigid stratification with an emphasis on status assigned by birth. And despite the emergence of class stratification, the caste continues to maintain its hold on its members with regard to marriage, occupational pursuits and commensal [sic] relationships.' (Rajagopal 1999, 99).

But in Rajasthan, as elsewhere, caste is a dynamic institution subject to changes, and processes such as urbanisation have led to a re-negotiation of caste hierarchies in paid domestic work. (Rajagopal 1999, 99; Raghuram, 2001, 614).

In Jaipur, I came across caste configurations in all interviews with employers, less so with the workers. However, my respondents differed considerably in how openly they expressed their views about caste, manifesting its changing nature. In India today it is considered politically incorrect to be openly discriminatory on the basis of caste (Betèille 1991, 3, see also Lindberg 2001, 148), and most employers I met played down the significance of caste. Several employers made a point of opposing old practices with comments such as: "*I don't like castism*" and "*We don't practice castism.*"²¹⁴ One of them, who said she does not have any caste bar, mentioned in this context that her family are *Arya Samajies*, who do not believe in the caste system.²¹⁵ But as

214 In a study of an urban neighbourhood in Kolkata, Tenhunen (1998, 84) found that while people de-emphasised caste differences, class differences appeared to be caste-like. Those who identified themselves as upper class maintained a distance from the lower class in the same way as upper castes traditionally maintained a distance from the lower castes.

215 *Arya Samaj* is a reformist Hindu movement founded in 1875. One of its official objectives has been to abolish the caste system. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/37454/Arya-Samaj>

Froystad (2003, 76) notes, one needs to take seriously the disparity between discursive frameworks and everyday practices when analysing social distinctions in India. No doubt, in spite of the employers' declarations, caste continued to shape domestic undertakings. The common expression of 'practising castism' is quite emblematic since it embodies the idea of caste not only as a discursive matter but as a practice. It is the practices of recruitment and purity rules that are maintained, despite the rhetoric of change.

While most employers first announced that they have no caste-bar when recruiting a new worker, all except one later clarified that the *dalits* were an exception and they would not employ "an SC".²¹⁶ However, only one employer, an elderly Brahmin woman, said that caste is the most important criterion for her when selecting a worker. In a somewhat apologetic voice, she further explained: "*My mother and mother-in-law never preferred SC/ST or a Muslim, so I also do not prefer them. I was brought up like this. I work by hand (myself) if I do not find a proper maid.*"

Apart from the essential division between other castes and the *dalits*, workers in my data were from different caste backgrounds. The relevance of caste for the employers depends on the nature of each particular task, and whether that task is considered polluting or not. Caste is not nearly as important if the family employs a maid only for cleaning and washing dishes, as it is if they employ, for example, a cook.

While a middle class person could never work as a domestic worker, caste and class status does not always correlate: caste is not automatically a sign of a person's economic status. Dickey (2002, 216) points out that "there is no straightforward correspondence between class and caste rankings, and any person can at least theoretically be or become a member of any class". Thus, in India today there are poor Brahmins, especially in the rural areas, and rich and successful *dalits*.

216 A person belonging to the Scheduled Castes.

This is evident in my data, as the group of Bengali maids were Brahmins.²¹⁷ They were all labour migrants from poor villages in the district of Cooch Bihar in West Bengal. They had come to Jaipur knowing that they would work as maids or live-in workers, although such work contrasts with their caste standing.²¹⁸ As we can see, in their case class clearly overrules caste as a hierarchical dimension.

Although it is usually easy for Indians to guess the caste of a local person, employers told me that they do not always know the caste of workers who have migrated. If workers give their surname, it is usually possible to know their caste background, but one employer mentioned that since her maid had not given her surname she had nothing but her appearance to judge from. Another employer explained the slight discomfort like this:

If I knew he was an SC, I would not let him work in the kitchen, especially in the kitchen, otherwise all the work he could do. You see, people coming from Bihar, who knows which caste they are? They may say I'm Brahmin, I'm this. What do we know whether what they say is correct, whether it's true? The person should be neat. And if I knew he's SC, I would not allow.

Sometimes workers looking for a job try, and may even succeed, in hiding their caste background, which seems to be making employers rather uneasy. Similarly, in suburban Delhi, some sweeper women had taken up the work of domestic maids, which entailed concealing their *dalit* caste status (Raghuram 2001, 612).

Some employers in Jaipur directly asked their workers about their caste, while others considered it politically incorrect to do so. As one said, "*It is a matter of belief, we believe what they say.*" When I asked

217 Their case is not unique: Tolen's (2000, 54) study in Chennai showed that there were Brahmins among domestic workers, and anecdotal discussions with other scholars also show that this is possible.

218 In Kolkata, a Brahmin bus driver said that he had to swallow his pride in the situation of mismatch between his high caste and low-status occupation (Tenhunen 1998, 84). He continued to perform religious rituals related to his caste and to maintain his high caste status through lifestyle (*ibid*).

another employer whom I asked whether she knew the caste of her workers, she explained:

It's, uh, it's, sometimes it becomes difficult, frankly speaking. If you see anybody sweeping (the street) and like that, you think she or he belongs to an SC caste but if they are well dressed and, uh, it becomes difficult to just identify whether he or she's an SC or normal caste person. So it's totally on their honesty.

Do employers ignore the caste of their workers or do they only pretend not to know? Some Indian scholars with whom I discussed this matter were of the view that the Jaipur employers only pretend not to be aware of their workers' caste in order to appear politically correct. In India, it is not uncommon among academics, human rights activists and others, to refuse to discuss their own caste status, for example. One way or the other, what is obvious is that large-scale migration does change the situation and may even make hiding caste status possible.

Caste concerns did not appear as relevant for workers as for employers. This is understandable, since the employers would still regard them as inferior and stigmatised whether they were Brahmins or *dalits*.²¹⁹ This supports the previous notion that domestic workers consider there to be two main classes: the rich and the poor.

In my reading, caste had little importance for the maids in Jaipur, but it was decisive for those in occupations related to substances and pollution. The Bengali maids' Brahmin caste neither helped them in the labour market nor protected them from humiliating treatment.²²⁰ In fact, neither the Rajasthani Sikhs nor the Bengali Brahmins spoke

219 However, Srinivasan's (1997, 3) notion that the caste hierarchy had no consequence for the labour migrants in Delhi seems somewhat exaggerated.

220 Similar findings are reported in the informal construction sector, where all workers were earlier from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but today also upper caste workers exist (Baruah 2010, 208). This may reflect both the loss of employment in other sectors and the fact that upper caste women have begun to take waged work due to decline or loss of male breadwinner wages (ibid).

about caste unless specifically enquired about it. Regarding the workers' attitudes, they usually had a good idea of their employers' caste, especially if they worked for Brahmins, Rajputs or other high caste families, but they never specifically referred to this when, for example, talking of the way employers treat them. Again, this illustrates the two-tier class perception of the workers.

For the employers in Jaipur, caste concerns are most evident regarding occupations related to substances of the human body and to food, the sweepers and cooks, the two occupational groups of lowest and highest status among workers.²²¹ Previous chapters have shed some light on the manifestations of purity considerations in domestic work, which I next explore further.

Cooking, waste management and purity rules

Hinduism traditionally considered as polluted certain occupational groups such as barbers, tanners, washermen/women, sweepers and those who work with dead animals. In Dumont's (1980) influential model, the hierarchies of Indian society were framed around the dimensions of pure and impure, and the location of people on the scale of pure-impure depended upon the scale of their involvement within biological or organic substances considered impure. Dumont's one-dimensional purity-pollution scale has since been heavily criticised for overemphasising the purity-pollution aspect, for lack of empirical evidence since in reality the purity-impurity scale never existed in a linear form, and for confusions in, for example, which castes can accept food or water from others, and which cannot (Gupta 2000, 35; Mines and Lamb 2004, 168). Today, an emerging consensus exists that while purity is important, caste is not solely about purity (Tenhunen 2009, 89). The idea of the multiple meanings of caste (ibid) helps to understand the seeming inconsistencies in how caste operates in domestic labour relations in Jaipur today. However, no-

221 See Raghuram (2001, 1) for a similar finding in suburban Delhi.

tions about the centrality of purity and pollution, especially within the home, remain valid.

The idea of pollution relates to the broader idea of disgust as one of the basic human emotions, specifically related to a particular motivational system (hunger) and to a particular part of the body (mouth) (Rozin et al. 2000, 638). Douglas (1966) has pointed out that cultural constructions on pollution are not specific to Hinduism but exist universally. As a bio-social phenomenon, the sense of disgust is transmitted through associations (Sarmaja 2001, 8–9, 15). In several cultures, even the tiniest contact with a person considered to be polluted may feel polluting if that person is associated with a source of pollution such as rotten meat (*ibid*).

In India, purity considerations are loosening, but they persist in domestic tasks directly related to purity and pollution such as cooking and waste management. The links between traditional notions of caste, purity and pollution and the preparation and eating of food are intimated and strong (Iversen and Raghavernda 2006, 311). Since pollution is transmitted through interaction with polluted substances or persons, preparing and handling food are tasks which continue to be covered by caste rules. Despite the loosened purity rules, the relational idiom of food and the play of rituals, articulated by the mutual intermeshing of caste and gender, continue to be critical for the functioning of families (Dube 1999, 20–21). According to purity considerations, higher caste persons, especially Brahmins, should not receive hot or cooked food from lower castes (Marriott 1976). Against this background, it is unsurprising that one occupation in which caste considerations have endured is that of cooks. However, a low-caste person may handle uncooked food, and employers often engaged other domestic workers, though not *dalits*, in food preparations such as the time-consuming cutting of raw vegetables.

Cooks are not nearly as common as maids or sweepers but when one is employed, Hindu employers in Jaipur invariably preferred

them to be high-caste (see also Ray and Qayum 2009, 54).²²² Even if employers were reluctant to speak about caste on a general level, they talked openly about the necessity for the cook to be high caste.²²³ But high caste cooks were not always easy to find, and employers sometimes had to make do with a cook from a lower caste. Moreover, even the Brahmin employers seemed increasingly ready to compromise the Brahminity of a cook if the person was otherwise appropriate and had good recommendations, and was from another relatively high caste.

The question of caste was relevant also in the small but important task of washing the utensils of home deities. The Hindu families, especially the high castes, often have a home temple, the size of which reflects both the wealth of the family and their religious interest. The ritual of daily care of the home deities and the propitiation of ancestors, to be carried out in the temple, are a major responsibility of women (Dube 1996, 8). In houses which adhere strictly to purity rules, most notably Brahmins, domestic workers were not asked to clean the deities' utensils. One employer, who usually washed the utensils of deities herself, said that when she had fallen ill she had asked the Brahmin driver to wash them, not the low-caste maid. A Brahmin maid told me that her employer asks her to clean the temple and wash the utensils of deities during her employer's menstruation, during which she is considered polluted. (See Dupe 1996, 9–10; Das 1979, 91; Kapadia 1995, 93).

The most strictly caste-based occupation in Jaipur is that of the sweepers, the *jamadars* (male) and the *jamadarnis* (female). When

222 While the families in my data employed no child carers, in Tamil Nadu a Brahmin *ayah* may cost more than a non-Brahmin one, indicating similar caste preferences as those for cooks in Jaipur. (Sharma & Ravishankar 2005, 2) <http://www.bajajcapital.com/magazine/coverstory-july.html>

223 See Iversen and Raghavendra (2006) for a study on the significance of caste in small eateries in South India. There, some SC caste members managed to make it to kitchen supply work, with the notable exception of the occupation of cook, provided that they concealed their caste origin, sometimes with the full understanding of the owner of the locale.

I asked employers in Jaipur who their domestic workers were, they routinely forgot to mention one group of workers: the sweepers. Yet, all except but one household in my data employed them. Why did employers forget to mention them? This can be partly explained by circumstances. The employers do not necessarily see the sweepers during their short visits, often organised so that sweepers do not enter the house. Moreover, the sweeper's salary is very low compared to other workers and insignificant for the family budget. But most importantly, it appears that employers were reluctant to even mention sweepers, given their *dalit* caste status and the nature of their work as polluting.²²⁴

The sweepers are the lowest within the hierarchy of domestic workers and this is so self-evident that employers did not even think that they practised what they call castism in relation to sweepers. When I asked one of them whether she knew the caste of the sweeper, she was openly astonished by my question, assuming I would automatically know this.

Sweepers? Sweepers are from SC. But they only do, like, cleaning the toilets. Not any other (task). Like, they can't enter our home. (They can enter) only from the outside, in the toilet only. Even when they enter in our toilet we get their legs washed from outside in tap.

The only house which did not employ a separate sweeper was one in which the male employer strongly emphasised that his family did not “*practice castism*”. This was a Brahmin household whose members had travelled widely, some having lived in the larger cities of Mumbai and Delhi, as well as in Europe and the US. In terms of caste, this

224 Caste status may also work as an advantage for the sweepers. In a suburb of Delhi, the sweepers were one of the few castes to survive the integration of the caste-based division of work into new organisational regimes (Raghuram 2001, 13). They maintained their specialisation and benefitted from the process. In that sense, if not in any other, the lack of competition from other groups could be seen as compensating for the extremely low status of the sweepers.

house was unique in my data in the sense that their generic live-in worker was a *dalit*.

While both sweepers and washerwomen/men are *dalits*, the latter were not perceived nearly as polluting as sweepers. This was evident in that employers never forgot to mention the washerwomen/men in the way that they remained silent about sweepers. In addition, I observed female employers communicating with the washerwomen in the same manner as they did with maids, but not with sweepers. This highlights two issues: the flexible nature of purity rules (see Froystad 2003) and the existence of several *dalit* sub-castes.²²⁵

In all houses, sweepers took out the garbage and swept the yard, but they cleaned bathrooms only in some houses. The employers seemed to choose between the best of two bad options: either have the 'polluted' sweeper clean it or do the task themselves. Given the perception that pollution might enter the house through the sweepers, most employers preferred not to let them enter the house. Some houses had a backdoor which made it possible for the sweeper to enter the bathroom from the outside. But if there was no separate entrance to the toilet and sweepers had to enter the house, another worker washed his or her walking route afterwards. Some of the maids I met complained about how their employers made them to wait until the sweeper had finished cleaning the bathrooms, causing a schedule problem.

Some employers chose to clean the toilet themselves, a contrast with Ray and Qayum's (2009, 152) study in Kolkata, where all employers outsourced this task. Irrespective of who cleaned the bathrooms, this simple act was loaded with cultural meanings and contestations. One employer praised her non-*dalit* male live-in worker because he agreed to clean her toilet, a task most non-*dalit* workers would not accept. When asked who cleans the bathroom, another

225 There are sub-castes also among those who engage in scavenging and sweeper jobs, for example the Balmikis and the Bhangis (Fuchs 1980, 242).

employer said: “*I myself can clean, and they (her two live-in workers) clean. Because if I can clean they also can clean.*”

In other words, her live-in workers who are not *dalits*, should not in principle have to do this, but she expects them to because she herself is willing to do it.

It is not only employers who reproduce caste hierarchies. The maids also referred to their higher status compared to the sweepers: “*At least we are better than sweepers*”, said one. Some workers mentioned that if they were sometimes asked to do the job of the sweepers they would refuse. If a maid was absent, the sweeper would never be asked to carry out the maids’ work.²²⁶ But at the same time, several workers resented the employers’ stigmatising attitude towards sweepers, saying: “*They are also human beings*”.

7.2 Gender, age and life-stage in employer preferences

A gendered division of labour renegotiated

Paid domestic work continues to be highly gendered, although considerable changes have taken place in the division of labour, such as the feminisation of the labour force. This growth in the number of female workers has led to a further downgrading of the status of the occupation, and to a change in the nature of tasks performed by women and men. (Ray 2000b, 692–694; Raghuram 1999, 3). As mentioned, female workers, women and girls, today outnumber male workers in Jaipur.

Being a domestic worker contrasts starkly with the hegemonic ideals of masculinity in India, largely based on middle class notions

226 A similar pattern was evident in Raghuram’s (2001, 612) study in suburban Delhi: the part-time maids were also asked to perform the tasks of the sweepers in case of their absence. However, the sweepers would never be asked perform the tasks of the maid.

which underline men's roles as household supporters and protectors, and as those who refuse menial labour (Ray 2000b, 710; Ray and Qayum 2009, 136). In Jaipur, I did not come across any men or boys performing the maids' typical tasks, cleaning and washing dishes, in the part-time market. By contrast, generic male live-in workers clean and wash dishes, and perform other work considered feminine and inferior (Ray and Qayum 2009, 136). Male workers were also involved in the care of the elderly, including tasks regarded with disgust such as changing underclothes or a bedpan.²²⁷

Migration has led to diverse shifts in the gendered divisions of paid and unpaid work (see Palriwala and Uberoi 2008, 43). One such shift is the renegotiation of the masculinity of male migrants through their work (see also Ray 2000b, 692). Since local men in Jaipur would not engage in the most menial tasks, all generic live-in male workers whom I encountered were migrants from within India or Nepal, perhaps more willing to compromise the non-masculine nature of the work.

Gender and caste hierarchies intertwine in several ways in the division of labour. Srinivas notes (1995, 272) that the growing feminisation of domestic work, in general, points to the loosening hold of traditional ideas of purity and impurity in urban India. Traditionally, cooks in Hindu homes were not only Brahmins but also men, since women are considered impure during menstruation and childbirth (Srinivas 1995, 272). We have already seen that cooks are no longer necessarily Brahmins, and another compromise is that women are today employed as cooks, albeit less than men. This can be seen as a sign of the restructuration of caste-gender-nexus in paid domestic work, and the loosening of purity rules.

Above I have shown that Brahmin girls and women may end up in the low-status job of maid. By contrast, Brahmin men in the do-

227 This contrasts with most Western countries, where such tasks are typically performed by women, as are intensive forms of care for the elderly (Isaksen 2005, 123).

mestic sector still tend to work in the occupations of relatively higher status such as cooks or drivers. Male cooks are the highest tier in the hierarchy of workers, and among the highest paid among servants in Jaipur and elsewhere in the sub-continent (see also Srinivas 1995, 272; Shah 2000, 92).²²⁸ Consequently, high caste live-in cooks seldom take part in other tasks such as cleaning, and some abstain from washing dishes (see Shah 2000, 92). But even high caste men, especially migrant workers, today may have to compromise on this. One employer told me about a young Brahmin man from another state who had come to her in search of a job as a cook. She had told him that she did not need a cook but rather an all-around live-in servant. At first the man had argued that as a Brahmin he did not do cleaning work, but since he desperately needed a job he finally agreed to carry out all household tasks. Thus, he had to accept a position which would compromise ideals related to the essential privileges of being both a man and high-caste.

Unmarried boys and girls as live-in workers

Among the middle class, those who employ live-in workers were more specific in their gender and age preferences. At the time of my field work, out of the seven multi-tasked live-in workers in my data, six were below eighteen, their ages ranging from about ten to seventeen.²²⁹ All those six were boys, while the only adult live-in worker was a woman. The live-in cooks and drivers that I encountered, however, were adult men.

Many employers were of the view that children cannot perform

228 See also Chatterjee (2001, 149) for an exploration of gendered hierarchies between workers in the estates of tea plantation managers in North Bengal. Male cooks in the bungalows are at the highest tier of the status pyramid, male valets and kitchen helpers on its second tier, and women workers carry out the more menial jobs of cleaning, washing dishes and babysitting.

229 However, a word of caution: ages were not known with certainty. First, employers had usually not explicitly asked the age, and second, the workers themselves do not always know their exact age, which is common among poor Indians who do not have a birth certificate.

quite the same tasks as adult workers. This begs the question of why several of them employed child workers in preference to adults, and how this relates to the gendered division of labour. Recent studies on child domestic workers in India have pointed to lower wages and children's obedience as reasons to choose children instead of adults (Save the Children UK 2007, 25; GTZ 2002). The assumption that children are easier to control and less likely to "cause trouble" was expressed by some in Jaipur. A male employer of a fourteen-year old live-in worker explained:

When they are young, they can be trained, they can be educated. You can teach them how to do things, how to behave. But if they are adults when they arrive, they don't learn things since they already have their habits. It is hard to change their habits.

However, I argue that the reasons are more complicated than that, and can only be understood by analysing how workers' age, gender and life-stage, as well as employer anxieties over sexuality, influence the recruitment decisions. Such questions were present in my discussions with Sheha who employed a boy of about ten as a live-in worker. For her, there were two main reasons for preferring "a small boy". First, she was worried about her own safety when alone in the house: "Normally I'm alone here. I can't take a risk." Thus, she did not want to employ an adult man. As if to justify her preferences Sheha continued: "They are like children, you know, they are small kids to me. And I am very happy with these kids, they talk, they share, they laugh, they sing. You know, they always do so I don't prefer bigger ones."

But there were also other reasons for preferring a child or a young worker. Sheha said she did not want to employ a married man since she would then have to accommodate his wife and children as well. Thus not only the biological age but also the life-stage, especially whether workers are married or not, which determined employer preferences. The only male live-in workers who were married were in high-status jobs, either as cooks or as drivers, whereas the generic

male live-in workers were all unmarried. By contrast, the only current female live-in worker in my data was a married woman.

The employers of part-time workers were generally less specific about the worker's age or marital status than those who hired live-in workers. Some of them explicitly said they preferred unmarried young women as maids, but most said that age and marital status were not among the main criteria. Indeed, they have much less to worry about since workers do not live on the same premises and have much less intimate contact with them. A young woman who was looking for a carer for her baby was more selective. She specifically sought a young unmarried woman, preferably aged sixteen to eighteen, but certainly not much younger, since a girl of twelve, she explained, would lack child care skills.

I also noted differences between employers of live-in and part-time workers as regards their attitudes to the employment of children. Several employers of part-time workers explicitly said they would not want to employ young children because "*children should be at school.*" One elaborated: "*There are many (employer) families who do not prefer young girls because they think it is a sin to use the labour of young girls.*" These comments notwithstanding, it was not uncommon that maids' daughters substituted for their mothers. Hence, even if some employers spoke out against employment of children, in practice most were ready to accept them, at least as substitute workers. All girls and young women in my data had started to work when they were around eight to ten years old, in line with Mehrotra's (2008) survey in Jaipur.

The employers of live-in workers lacked the moral stance of the part-time employers, and emphasised parental responsibility in deciding whether children work or not. Malti elaborated her preferences and the question of children's work:

See caste I don't bother much but the man or whomever I keep should be clean, neat and tidy, that's all. I prefer that. Regarding the age [of a worker],

if the parent is ready to make him work so I employ the person. If the parent says no, my kid is small, I don't want him to do this work then I say ok, this is your wish. If the parents themselves are sending them to work, then what's the matter, they must be needy of something, then, they need money because they are sending.

Employer anxieties over sexuality

The part-time market in Jaipur has a relatively straightforward gendered division of labour, but the gendered preferences in the live-in market are more nuanced and reflect the employer anxieties over sexuality. Most employers of live-in workers preferred a male worker, but only unmarried boys or young men.²³⁰ The reasons for preferring boys, or rather avoiding girls, relates centrally to the notions of women's mobility, to anxiety over female and male sexuality and to the vulnerability of girl workers.

Many high caste families of the employer class adhere to the restrictions on women's mobility, enhanced by the class notions of not having to move unnecessarily because of menial tasks. Thus, most female employers of live-in workers rarely went outdoors and sent their live-in workers instead. Each and every employer of a live-in worker emphasised that they can send a boy to run errands such as shopping, whereas they could not send a girl in the same way.

Why this was the case must be understood in the light of the need to preserve the respectability of unmarried girls. The marrying off of daughters is an intense preoccupation in Hindu families (Fruzzetti and Östör 1998, 43). Even allegations of inappropriate sexual behaviour could be disastrous for a girl's marriage prospects and for the family honour. Hence, whilst the parents send their daughters to work for wealthy families in far away places, the responsibility for the daughter's sexuality partly shifts to the employers, at least ideally, a responsibility that most employers preferred not to take. One of the employers explained:

230 See also Ray (2000, 697) in Kolkata for a similar finding. In contrast, in Madurai in South India almost all workers were women (Dickey 2000a, 34).

Boys, they are more active. They can go out and get milk and bread and do whatever but girls, here, they cannot. It's not safe. Like you can't get a girl again and again, you go and get that and get this. A boy, they can ride a cycle and they can go and get whatever you want, again and again. You know, for a girl, it's very risky here, every time.

For all this, female live-in workers also exist and some of the young women in my data had worked as a live-in before getting married. If male workers are such a priority for the employers who employs the girls? The employer preferences depend on whether they themselves have daughters or not, since male workers are considered a threat to one's daughters. Each and every respondent said that if there were daughters in the family, they could not employ a male live-in worker.²³¹ Indeed, there was not a single unmarried daughter in the houses which had male live-in workers. One female employer told me that there had been a live-in Nepali boy in her childhood home but this had not been perceived as a risk since he had been only about eight years old when he was hired: "*They (workers) were very good and innocent earlier. We were three young sisters in the family but still we never feared for such a thing.*"

Female employers feared for their own safety too, but much less than for their unmarried daughters. Malti, who worked together with her husband in a home-based business, compared her situation with that of her sister Sheha, whose husband travelled extensively:

My brother-in-law, he's at work, so nobody's (*sic*) at home, he goes out. So she's alone at home, she doesn't want anyone elder, bigger, there at home. Here (in her house), everybody's there. My husband is often here, and so many other employers are here. So, I don't find any difficulty.

As we can see, she considers there to be "*nobody*" at home when the husband or another adult male family member is not there. For Malti, the fact that her husband was mostly around at home, alongside with

231 Similarly, Ray (2000, 698) notes that in Kolkata nobody wanted a male servant in the house when there was a young daughter there.

other employees, worked as a shield whereas her sister was alone at home.

The only household to employ a female live-in worker was the one with an unmarried daughter.²³² This household had previously employed a male worker but since the granddaughter was born, they had changed to female workers. She explained this in terms of vulnerability:

I have a granddaughter. She may not be safe in the presence of a male. Secondly, crime has increased a lot and this may be more dangerous with a male servant. Thirdly, we are mostly two ladies in the house, me and my daughter-in-law so again it is better to have a female maid servant.

This informant was concerned both for her granddaughter's safety and for the respectability of the female worker. She explained the problem with having a young girl in the house: "*We had to pay complete attention to her, she was in her teen years and was slowly getting inclined towards the neighbourhood male worker. For hours, she sat on the terrace aimlessly.*" To solve both these questions, she dismissed the young girl, who had worked for the family after her granddaughter was born, and hired a widowed woman in her fifties instead.

Those three employers who ran home-based enterprises said that if they had a girl live-in worker they would constantly worry that their male employees would get involved with her. One of them had previously employed a live-in girl but since she did not trust her other male workers, she had taken the girl with her on journeys all the way to Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Ajmer in Rajasthan.²³³

232 Despite the small sample in my data, one could assume that the lack of daughters in the employer houses reflects the strong son -preference prevalent in Jaipur and in India. The sex ratio has worsened in Jaipur from 925 to 1000 males in 1991 to 897 females to 1000 males in 2001. This is below the state-average of 909 females to 1000 males in Rajasthan, and clearly below the national average of 927 females to 1000 males in India. (UNFPA 2003, 12–13).

233 Since this is the same employer who wanted someone to attend her full-time (even during the night) the usefulness of having the girl with her all the time was presumably an additional advantage.

The employers make considerable efforts to ease their concerns related to male sexuality and their own safety. Meetu, whose husband travels for long periods, had two male live-in workers. Since she did not want to be alone with the boys in the house, she had employed a third worker, an adult woman as a cook. She actually paid this woman, who stayed in the house from morning until about 6 p.m. more (Rs. 2000) than the live-in workers (Rs. 1500 each). She was aware that this was higher than the local standard but she was paying not only for the cooking and washing of the dishes but also for her sense of safety.²³⁴

Ambiguously enough, Meetu, had hired a female worker so that she was not the only woman in the house, but wanted the other live-in boy to sleep in the same room with her (see Chapter 4). This would have been out of question had the worker been an adult male, especially in the light of her previous experiences. Meetu told me about an episode of sexual transgression which had taken place many years ago during her husband's duty travel. Her then male live-in worker had slept in her room on the floor, and one night she had suddenly woken up and was shocked to find that the young man was beside her. This is the only incident of this type in my data: whether the worker had also made further advances or harassed Meetu in some way is a matter for speculation, since she did not mention anything else. Still shaken by the memory of this incident, Meetu said she now preferred children as live-in workers, and after an unsuccessful episode with a girl worker, only boys.

What of the female employers' fears over sexual contact between their husbands or sons, and female domestic workers? In Madurai, sex between household members and servants was a form of mixing which employers feared intensely, but rarely mentioned (Dickey 2000b, 477). Similarly, neither employers nor workers in Jaipur men-

234 This female worker was also made to wash the employer's underwear, even if the live-in boys washed everything else, an example of the fine-tuned gendered labour divisions.

tioned the potential sexual advances between male family members and female workers, since even the mention of such possibilities could damage the reputation of the families involved.²³⁵ But although none of the employers talked about this, female employers' anxiety over their husbands' sexual interest in the workers could be one additional reason for preferring male workers.

7.3 Drawing boundaries

Fine-tuned preferences: ethnicity and religion

The racial and ethnic discrimination of domestic workers in a transnational context has been carefully documented (Cheng 2006; Parreñas 2000). Different populations of workers are frequently stereotyped by employers as 'ideal employees' for particular tasks or for a live-in position (Romero 2002, 8). This illustrates the human tendency to homogenise social categories, such as ethnicity, and to treat all who belong to a particular social category as sharing particular natural attributes (Yural-Davis 2006, 199).

In Jaipur, ethnicity appears increasingly important as a recruitment criterion. The ethnic hierarchy (see Anderson 2000) of each employer is shaped by experiences with previous workers and by the micro-cosmos of paid domestic work in each neighbourhood. The political correctness I encountered when employers talked about caste was absent when we discussed ethnic preferences. Open prejudice prevailed and stereotypes of certain ethnic groups thrived, related to dishonesty, cleanliness, laziness and so on.²³⁶ While some portrayed

235 One of Dickey's (2000b, 477) employer respondents in Madurai said that Indian movies which have portrayed love affairs between servants and employers may put such ideas into the workers' minds.

236 In Delhi and Mumbai, I was told that many employers prefer girls from tribal communities because they have a reputation as good housekeepers. According to NGOs there is an increasing flow of trafficked girls from Jharkhand and Chattisgarh to these cities.

the Bihari workers as “hard-talking” and “too clever”, or even “dangerous”, others felt the same way about the Bengalis. Many preferred Nepali live-in workers, while one employer felt that Nepalis have become “*dangerous*” and “*capable of doing anything*”. One employer described her unwilling compromise:

We do not trust Biharis. Previously, I had a local Rajasthani but she never worked properly. She thought that I will not turn her out (give the sack) since I am a Rajasthani. But she took leave without telling me and I fired her. Now I have a Bihari and I’m fearful of her all the time. But she works neatly. You have to trust them.

By contrast, Malti, who lived in the same neighbourhood, had nothing against Biharis but says she would never employ a Bengali or a Nepali:

No, Nepalis I have never got, Nepalis are like Bengalis. My husband doesn’t believe Nepalis. He says if Nepali people do anything, there’s no one to catch him, no one can catch him. He goes with the passport and all, he goes to Nepal, it’s not easy to catch. If they are local like Assamese, Indian, it’s easier to get hold of them.

In addition to negative stereotypes, there are also more pragmatic reasons behind these ethnic preferences. Those who employ live-in workers usually prefer migrant workers since they do not demand to go home, for example, on weekends. Arti, a retired male employer of two live-in workers, explained:

We would not like to have from Rajasthan because since their homes and villages are quite close so they can go any time. Like this fellow (his Bihari live-in worker), he’s practically here for one year. But the other one, the driver he’s from Rajasthan so he goes to his village at least three times in one year. And Holi also, Diwali also. But this fellow doesn’t go to Bihar three times a year.

Sandhya, a Bengali part-time maid who had moved to Jaipur about five years ago, gave her own reason why many employers preferred

Bengali migrants over local workers: “They prefer Bengalis because Rajasthanis talk back. But we do not understand Hindi properly so there is no way to talk back.”

The workers also had negative stereotypes about workers of other ethnic groups.²³⁷ Punam, a local girl who worked in the same house with a Bihari live-in worker, commented on Biharis: “They are not good people. They have a very rough and heavy voice.”

In terms of religion, previous studies on stratification within paid domestic work in India include little discussion on its role in recruitment. The issue was not discussed at length by the employers or workers I met either, but this did not mean that the religious background was irrelevant. On the contrary, the employers I met with had strong opinions about the beliefs of the workers.

Except for two, all Hindu and Sikh employers explicitly said that they would not employ a Muslim worker, whereas Hindu employers had nothing against employing Sikh workers and vice versa. Several employers mentioned that while they otherwise had no preferences, they would not hire a *dalit* or a Muslim person. On their scale of avoidance, Muslim workers seemed equal to Hindu *dalit* workers.²³⁸ These strong views may reflect not only the traditional Hindu perception of non-Hindus as being polluted but also more political, anti-Muslim tendencies in Jaipur and Rajasthan. It appears that Hindu employers in Kolkata were more willing to employ Muslim maids, at least in those residential areas which were adjacent to Muslim slums (see Ray and Qayum 2009, 75).²³⁹

237 See Thapa (2001, 154) for similar, negative ethnic stereotyping by a domestic worker in Delhi.

238 In the anthropology of South Asia, the question of whether or not Muslims in the region are organised according to a system of caste has been heavily debated. Most agree that the Muslim population of the subcontinent are ranked in some kind of prestige hierarchy, both among themselves and in relations to Hindu castes (Vatuk 1997, 227).

239 In Delhi, Christian domestic workers from Chattisgarh and Bihar are often preferred by Hindu and Christian families, but there is only a small Christian population in Jaipur and none of the employers had ever had a Christian worker.

There were, nevertheless exceptions among Jaipur employers. During the first interviews with employers in 2005-06, only one employer, a Sikh woman, employed a young Muslim girl as a maid, albeit only for sweeping and mopping, as she washed the dishes herself. Next year, one Hindu employer within the same neighbourhood, who had earlier said that she would never hire a Muslim worker, hired the same Muslim girl. This time, in 2007, the employer emphasised her tolerance in employing a Muslim.

Employers were not the only ones who had negative views on Muslims. A couple of workers also said that they would never work in a Muslim house and none of them had ever worked in one. Since most studies on domestic work in India have so far concentrated on Hindu families, and to some extent discussed Christian and Sikh workers/employers (see Tellis-Nayak 1983) there is evidently a lack of knowledge about domestic labour relations in the Muslim homes. My data indicates clear religious divisions on 'who works for whom', and it may be assumed that Muslim workers mainly work for Muslim employers (see also Ray and Qayum 2009, 75), but the question definitely merits further examination in Jaipur and elsewhere.

Workers as genetically inferior, stigmatised and dirty

While the significance of caste is changing and gendered divisions are being renegotiated, what prevails is the employer notion of workers as fundamentally different. When social divisions are 'naturalised' they are seen as resulting from biological destiny linked to differential genetic pools of intelligence and personal characteristics (Cohen 1988 quoted in Yuval-Davis, 2006, 199). Such naturalisation is a common feature in the studies on domestic worker-employer relationships. For example, in Taiwan the representation of Filipina and Thai domestic workers as savages in need of being civilised and modernised served as a major mechanism of 'othering' among the Taiwanese employers (Cheng 2006, 135).

In my data, such a tendency was evident in the perception of

workers as genetically inferior, cultivated particularly by employers of live-in workers. One of them, Sheha, underlined her own moral values by telling me how she had encouraged her live-in boy to go to school, but without success, and concluded: "*It is genetical. You can't change them. If they want to work, they'll work. If they want to beg, they'll beg, it is very difficult. It's from the blood, you know.*"

To me, the suggestion that the boy should go to school seemed rhetorical, serving the employer's moral needs more than anything else: how could the boy possibly have gone to school given the 24-hour nature of his job and the lack of language skills?

The idea that poor people were genetically different was also mentioned by the Bengali workers' landlady. She once butted into a group discussion I was having with the Bengali workers, while passing by, and said so that all of us could hear:

They (the Bengali migrants) do not belong to any town or district. They live in a forest and are tribal people. They used to eat raw flesh, catch fish and eat it raw without cooking. They have told me when they arrived.

Yet these Bengali workers were not so called tribal people but Brahmin Hindus, in fact higher in the caste hierarchy than the inconsiderate landlady. Although none of these young women had completed school in their native West Bengal, they were insistent that they wanted to educate their own Jaipur-born children. The landlady, however, pointed openly at the Bengali children in the building and claimed that none of them go to school and that all of them will be put to work in houses sooner or later. Given her powerful position as the landlady, the Bengali women could say nothing to correct her.

What aggravates the perception of domestic workers as inherently inferior, compared to other working class poor, is that their occupation is traditionally perceived as among the most stigmatised. Goffman (1963, 4–5) differentiates between three types of stigma: 1) physical deformities; 2) blemishes of individual character perceived as weak; and 3) tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion. The lat-

ter type, Goffman (ibid) argues, “can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family”. The social stigma attached to paid domestic work and the performers of the work, the middle class perception of poor people as genetically inferior and dirty, resembles the third type, and indirectly leads to the second type of stigma: the perception that the workers are morally susceptible and untrustworthy by nature.

Many domestic workers have internalised the heavy stigma related to their work and the idea of this work as dirty. According to Goffman (1963, 7) “shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individuals’ perception of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can readily see himself as not possessing”.

When I asked Surindra, fourteen years old, why she thought the middle class do not value this job she replied immediately: “*What is so good in working at others’ house, to wash their used utensils, to clean and mop their dust. So definitely it is not a good job.*”

If there was one word which employers used to put together the feeling of disgust, the stigma of paid domestic work, and the perception of workers as genetically inferior, it was the word ‘dirty’. In almost every single conversation I had with them, employers made the distinction into clean and dirty. In Dickey’s study in Madurai (2000b, 475) servants were perceived as a vehicle to transport dirt and infection into middle class homes and thus threaten their clean but vulnerable family members.²⁴⁰ Concern about dirt and disease often appeared to be rationalised from purity concerns (ibid). The way employers in Jaipur explained how they first look at cleanliness when they recruit a new worker was virtually identical to comments by Dickey’s respondents, which underlines the importance of the question of cleanliness in India.

240 In Delhi, middle class employers used notions of ‘dirt’ when referring to the common front-streets, parks and back-alleys of their residential area, and made a point of avoiding them (Waldrop 2004, 99).

In a study among cashew workers in Kerala, Lindberg (2001, 163) suggested that a shift from an aversion to ritual impurity toward a more materialist concern with uncleanliness has occurred. The same appears true in Jaipur where, as we have seen, the idea of cleanliness today goes beyond the caste-based considerations of purity and pollution, and relates to a much broader agenda. It could be argued that all other hierarchies - class, caste, gender, age, ethnicity, and religion – today merge into one and a worker becomes ‘dirty’ or ‘clean’. Even the high caste domestic workers are considered to be dirty by definition, in effect, “hosts of dirt” (Dickey 2000b, 476).

Employers were meticulous about their concern over the workers’ dirtiness. Telling about her recruitment criteria and procedure, Meetu, employer of two live-in workers and two part-time workers, explained: “*I look at the cleanliness. I ask that you first take bath and change the clothes, and wash the clothes perfectly.*”

Sheha merged the idea of who is clean and dirty with gender and age. Given her preference for a boy live-in worker, live-out female workers seemed to her the embodiment of dirtiness:

S: I don’t want who ever *bai* (maid). Normally, you know, they come with a disease.

P: What disease?

M: Skin-problems, cough-problems, you know. And the day they arrive, they are so dirty, they’re so dirty they stink like anybody, you know, you can’t tolerate all that. Their hair, and they’re not at all clean, you know.

Harvendra, who only employed a maid, said that there is only one major requirement for her: “*I have no caste bar, I do not believe in castism. They should be clean. Any background (ethnicity), I have not any particular preferences, whomsoever come to search work, I give it.*”

If I think of the periods when I myself have hired somebody to clean my house, it has been the quality of the cleaning work that has mattered most. For the employers in Jaipur, on the other hand, this seemed of little concern. In fact, none of them mentioned it as a

criterion when recruiting a new worker, whether a maid or a live-in worker. It was more important that the person was clean than that they cleaned properly. Underlying this appeared to be an assumption by the employers that if workers themselves were clean, the quality of work would be good.²⁴¹

Everyday consequences of inferiority

One of the paradoxes of domestic labour relations in India is that while workers and their tasks evoke strong negative emotions in employers, they meet with workers every day in the intimacy of a home. Thus, they draw boundaries between themselves and workers through a range of everyday practices. As has become clear, caste is not the only rule governing such practices. On the contrary, employers apply rules related to food, space and bodily movements to all domestic workers irrespective of caste, gender, or age, although the purity/pollution rules are looser in the case of high-caste workers such as cooks.

The spatial deference and segregation within the employers' house (see Parreñas 2008, 101) is manifested in a set of unspoken but well-established rules. One such rule is the 'politics of sitting' (Ray and Qayum 2009, 149). Domestic workers never sit on the same level as the employers at the table or on the sofa, but instead either on the floor or on a small stool. While workers in many houses watch TV during their short breaks or in passing, it would be out of the question for them to sit on the sofa with members of the employer family.²⁴² In a group discussion, the Bengali workers, Brahmins them-

241 See Dickey (2000b, 474) for very similar findings in Madurai where being clean also appeared to equate with doing work cleanly, which all contributed to keeping the employer family clean.

242 Nearly all of my respondents lived in relatively large houses, but for the flat-residents in Ray and Qayum's (2009, 151) study in Kolkata the TV watching presented an additional dilemma: how to deal with the fact that workers watch the same programs in a small space and may, potentially, experience similar emotions and thus emotional proximity.

selves, told how they were explicitly told not even to touch the employers' sofa or bed. Once again, this illustrates how the low status of a being a 'servant' overrides these workers' high caste.

The live-in workers never eat together with the employers, but either in the kitchen, where employers never eat, or in their own rooms, and always only after the others have finished.²⁴³ The workers never use same toilets as the employers, and part-time maids avoided having to go to the toilet on the employers' premises. These practices are traditional forms of caste segregation, but today they are applied to domestic workers irrespective of their caste.

One of the practices which workers found particularly degrading and humiliating was being offered tea (and food for live-in workers) in separate utensils.²⁴⁴ This is discussed in detail in Chapter 9, but let us first look at a few points directly related to the discussion here. In some houses, only *dalits* need to use different cups, but in most houses the practice concerned all domestic workers, even Brahmins.²⁴⁵ One employer, Meetu, commented in a matter-of-fact style on why she keeps separate utensils for workers: "*Different caste, and we don't know what sickness they can have in their blood. Because where they live they don't get enough to eat.*" As we can see, Meetu first mentions the caste factor but then brings the dirtiness of workers onto a broader level, justifying her practices by hygiene and health concerns.

The overt concern about workers' cleanliness was contradicted by the fact that the male live-in workers whom I met daily practically always wore the same clothes, a worn out pullover and trousers. If

243 See Tellis-Nayak (1983, 69) on South India and Ray & Qayum (2009, 148–49) on Kolkata for similar descriptions of spatial segregation.

244 Tenhunen (2010) shows how offering and drinking tea was strictly regulated on a caste basis in rural West Bengal: the low-caste Bagdi workers could eat in a higher caste household but they would typically have to wash the dishes they had eaten from in order to not to pollute their hosts.

245 Chigateri (2007, 8) calls the serving of food and drinks to domestic workers in Bangalore in different cups and plates as 'symbolic violence', related to the understanding of workers as "dirty" even if they are the ones who clean the houses of others.

cleanliness is such a concern, not providing more clothes to workers seems strange, but this can perhaps be understood if the idea is that it is the persons that are inherently dirty, not the clothes.

Some of the workers protest, even if only among themselves, about the stigma and the shadow of dirtiness employers cast on them. Even if they had internalised, to some extent at least, the idea of their work as stigmatised, they rejected the portrayal of themselves as dirty. Thus, workers and employers saw the question of dirtiness in opposite ways. The employers perceived – and portrayed – workers as dirty, not necessarily their work (except for sweepers). The workers, by contrast, perceived their work as somewhat dirty, but rejected the idea of themselves as dirty.

Marriot (1976) argued that many Hindus understand themselves not as ‘individuals’ in the Western sense of integral wholes, but rather as ‘dividuals’, as divisible persons made of particular substances that can flow across boundaries, and can thus be shared, exchanged, and transferred (see also Marriott and Inden quoted in Mines and Lamb 2002, 199). Intriguingly, it seems that workers may become clean with time and through a long-term employer-employee relationship, at least if they are of high caste. A couple of Bengali workers explained that once they had been working for a long time for the same employer, the employer had started to offer tea or water in the same cups that she herself used. One of Shivali’s employers previously gave her water in a separate glass but nowadays she was allowed to take water for herself, a change she said she had asked for. Kajal, who was listening to this discussion, continued: “*Maybe (it is) because they have seen that you are not dirty.*”

Thus, it appears that the idea of workers as dirty may, to some extent, diminish once the employers get to know the persons well. The Rajasthanis told of no similar episodes, which may underline that it was easier for the Brahmin workers to ‘become clean’ in the

employers' eyes.²⁴⁶

Hierarchies based on caste, ethnicity, age, gender and religion exist among domestic workers as well. These hierarchies are played out and reproduced through daily socialisation and job coordination, especially in houses with several workers. For example, in one house I frequented, there was a visible hierarchy between the two male live-in workers from Nepal, a cook and a generic worker. The cook's superiority was based both on seniority and the higher status of work as well as the related higher caste status.

It would be easy to perceive discriminatory practices as mainly stemming from the caste system, and view them as predominantly Indian and South Asian. However, studies on domestic work in different contexts show alarmingly similar discriminatory and exclusory practices in different contexts. In the United States, female live-in workers could not eat in the dining room nor in the presence of the employers' husband, even if they sometimes had lunch together with the female employer in the kitchen (Rollins 1985, 172). In Italy, employers made their Filipina domestic workers use separate utensils (see Parreñas 2008, 99). In different European contexts, the employers' fear of the "other" was so strong that some employers feared that the migrant workers' bodies would contaminate their homes (Anderson 2002, 108). Therefore, domestic workers were commonly required to wash their clothes separately from the family, and given their own cutlery and plates (*ibid*).

246 In Tenhunen's (2010, 38) study in rural West Bengal, low-caste villagers said that their rise in class status through wealth had made it possible for them to sit on the same level at the table with high castes and to not have to wash their own utensils, which had been the case earlier. But Tenhunen (*ibid*) notes that she never actually saw this happening, which may reflect the aspirations of low-caste persons rather than actual changes.

7.4 Conclusions

Social hierarchies related to class, caste, gender, age and life stage, ethnicity, and religion organise the domestic labour market and relations within this market. Thus, the answer to the important question of who works for whom is far from arbitrary. The seemingly innocent employer notion of “how difficult it is to find a good worker these days” conceals the intersectional hierarchical dimensions that stratify the market. Employers’ preferences in terms of caste, gender, age, religion and ethnicity partly explain the segmentation of domestic work and its’ allocation to several workers, leading to more fine-tuned recruitment decisions.

Much debate has ensued on whether class is increasingly replacing caste as the basis of the social system or not (see, e.g. Bêteille 1997; Gupta 2000; Perez 2006). Especially those belonging to high castes may use caste as a metaphor for class (Perez 2006, 105). As my findings from paid domestic work indicate, caste has not lost its significance, nor has it been entirely replaced by class. Instead, class and caste can be interconnected. Froystad (2003, 74) has argued that previous studies on domestic relations may have overlooked the influence of caste, since it is precisely the domestic master-servant relations that effectively reproduce notions of caste.²⁴⁷ While my data underlines the importance of class as a foreground category (Tolen 2000; Dickey 2000a), my findings are similar with Froystad in that caste continues to structure domestic labour relations in Jaipur in overt and subtle ways. However, the importance of caste varies depending on the nature of the task, on the employers’ own caste background, on their adherence to purity rules, as well as on other social dimensions. My findings do not support Delière’s (2002) notion of

247 Froystad (2003, 76) is aware, however, that some of the differences in the analytical focus might be explained by the fact that Tolen and Dickey have studied domestic work in South India where caste boundaries maybe be less stark than in the state of Uttar Pradesh in Northern India, which she studied.

the disappearance of untouchability in India. The main division between *dalits* and other castes has survived caste transformations, and most employers explicitly said they would not allow a *dalit* worker to enter their homes.

All domestic workers in Jaipur today belong to “groups who are on the wrong side of the social barrier” (Douglas 1966).²⁴⁸ But as to whether class or caste mainly determines their position, it is helpful to look at the Brahmin Bengali maids in my data. They work for Hindu employers of diverse castes, many of whom are lower than them in the caste hierarchy. For the Bengali workers, therefore, class status as uneducated poor is more decisive than caste. Their high caste does not protect them from the stigma attached to paid domestic work.

The gender-based division of labour and employer preferences are further specified through age and life-stage, especially among employers who keep live-in workers. Those who employ live-in workers in Jaipur clearly prefer male live-in workers both for status reasons and because of unwillingness to take responsibility for the respectability of female live-in workers. Employers prefer unmarried young men or boys instead to married ones. They are expected to be more subservient, less likely to cause trouble of one sort or another, and not to have a wife and children to support. Cooks and drivers, however, are usually married men. But such is the fear over male workers’ sexuality that boys and men are only hired when there are no daughters in the employing family.

Those who only employ part-time workers are less specific on age and life-stage, and they follow the existing gendered practices, e.g., all maids are female. These employers in general were more concerned about children who work and their lack of education than those with live-in workers who considered the question of whether children work or not as purely a parental decision.

248 Zenger (2006, 49) talks about Unofficial and Official India, where the minority, the rich, take part in the activities phenomena of Official India and the majority – the poor – are the Unofficial.

Negative stereotypes related to different ethnic groups and prejudices against Muslim workers were rampant among the employers, creating a degree of ethnic hierarchy among the workers themselves. The sort of political correctness that characterised discussions on caste (“*I don’t practice castism*”) was visibly absent when ethnicity was discussed and there was unconcealed ethnic and religious discrimination. Most Hindu and Sikh employers were insistent that they would not employ a Muslim, and only two had ever employed a Muslim maid during their years as employers. The employers’ negative attitudes towards particular ethnic group/s were shared by, or possibly transferred to, the workers.

The body politics (Moors 2003, 390) of the clothes that the employers provide, the control over hygiene, and the kind of food they provide for the live-in workers are all important symbolic and material ways to construct and reproduce the hierarchical relationship. Employers perceive domestic workers, irrespective of their caste, as inherently dirty and practice outright hygienic control over them, especially the live-in workers. For workers, such practices are very upsetting. Employers reproduce the class distinction through several discriminatory practices related to eating, drinking tea, space and place, and clothing. In this, my findings are in line with those of Ray and Qayum (2009) in Kolkata or Tellik-Nayaks’ (1986) in South India.

Discriminatory and exclusory employer practices are by no means a specifically South Asian phenomenon, which underlines that they are not only about caste and caste-related purity considerations. Instead, everyday segregatory practices which originate from caste considerations have become class-based acts of distinction and subordination.

To conclude, the penetration of market logic into the domestic labour market makes employers increasingly look for a precise combination of attributes in a new worker. In general, employers with only one or two part-time workers with fewer tasks were least particular

in their criteria concerning the workers.

Up to this point, the main focus has been on the world of the employers and their households, the scene for paid domestic work. In the next chapter, we shall move on to explore the lives and life courses of the female maids in Jaipur, and look at the labour relation from their perspectives.

8 WORKING MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

This chapter analyses how participation in paid domestic work affects female domestic workers' lives. I begin by exploring the general parameters that define and determine female work patterns and work life courses. How do women's reproductive roles and life stages and interrelate with their work? How is the participation of mothers and daughters in paid domestic work intertwined through implicit, inter-generational contracts? I then study the role of work in the lives of the girls in the Bengali and Rajasthani communities. In order to capture some of the essential questions in girls' work – why they work, what their work arrangements are, and how work shapes their lives and vice versa – one needs to look beyond their work places and arrangements and take into account the overall context of precarious girlhood. All the girls and women in my data worked as part-time maids at the time of the interviews, but had previous experiences in live-in work. This allows me to study how both live-in and part-time work are manifested in work-life trajectories.

8.1 Female work-life courses

The stories of the hard-working Rajasthani women were stories of bitterness. I certainly saw joy and laughter, but they were filled with resentment against what life had offered them. Their bitterness did

not only concern their work, although they perceived this as degrading and the labour relations as highly unequal. The women, especially the older ones, resented the poverty in which they continued to live, the lack of facilities in their cramped houses, the lack of steady income from their husbands, and the general insecurity they faced. Theirs were also stories of anxiety. Their main concerns related to daily survival, to getting their daughters married and raising the dowry, and to their husbands' alcohol consumption and the threat of their violent behaviour. Some certainly used my interview as an opportunity to complain about their hardships, and they may have thought, at least during our first encounter, that I might be in a position to support them somehow. But their self-image as victims can also be perceived as a means to establish their agency and to preserve self respect and dignity (Bos 2008, 193).²⁴⁹ Such framing turns women into 'powerful victims' (ibid) who succeed in providing and caring for their families despite the difficulties.

The portrayal of victimhood was less tangible in the Bengali women's interviews, even if their hardships were often were similar. They had made the brave move to Jaipur in order to make money for their families and were determined in their pursuit of economic improvement. In short, they were more future-oriented, which may explain their different their self-portrayal.

The parameters of women's labour market participation

Amidst general insecurities in life, paid domestic work in Jaipur provides a relatively steady and secure income for poor women and girls, despite the hazards and injustices the work entails. While the women had to work for their survival, their options were limited by illiteracy

249 The self-portrayal of being a victim was apparent in the context of female rape victims, who used victim status both as a strategic and a normative move: only by appealing to their victim status were they able to avoid the trap of being seen as an evil, sexually obsessed female, who deserved what happened to her (Kapur 2001, 20).

and lack of education, the care responsibilities at home, and the need to do protected work (see Dickey 2000a, 33). The workers I met regarded work as an inescapable and necessary part of their life, and domestic work as an occupation suitable for their class standing.

All eleven married workers in my data, both Rajasthanis and Bengalis, preferred part-time domestic work to live-in work, since it was the most convenient solution for them. All the young Bengali women had worked as live-ins before getting married. Work as a part-time maid in two shifts was relatively easy to combine with care work at home.

In India women's labour market mobility is lower than that of men for many reasons, among them socio-cultural barriers, lack of adequate skills and gender bias in hiring (Bhan 2001, 18). However, mobility in the labour market is not a straightforward question of moving from one occupation to another, or moving to jobs of higher status. For women in particular, the close connection between life course and work trajectories, and interconnections between personal life and work or other social institutions (Krüger & Baldus 1999, 356), makes mobility a more complex phenomenon. Women may move in and out of the labour market depending on their households' financial requirements (Lingam 1998, 814).

For the Rajasthani women and girls, domestic work was the most easily available and pragmatic solution, and practically the only one, apart from working alone at home doing piece-rate embroidery work. What none of the girls or women mentioned, however, was that at least one woman and one girl had apparently been involved in sex work at earlier point in life. There was no way of confirming this information, provided by my research assistant who lived close to the workers. If true, this suggests that sex work, even more stigmatised than domestic work, was probably the only alternative to it, at least in this particular impoverished community.

None of the Bengalis in my data had worked in other occupations in Jaipur, where they had come for the particular purpose of

domestic work. At home in West-Bengal they had been engaged in agricultural work. Some migrant Bengali women in Jaipur may look for construction work as their first option, but as elsewhere in India job opportunities for women in this sector have decreased (Mehrotra 2008, 4).²⁵⁰

The women had no choice but to accept their double-burden of wage work and household work. But they bitterly commented on the fact that neither their husbands nor sons took any responsibility for the housework. In this respect, their comments resembled those of their middle class counterparts.

Women's labour force participation is generally linked to domestic authority (e.g. Vera-Sanso 2000, 182–183). However, it is not possible to measure solely on the basis of women's accounts whether participation in wage work increases their authority or agency at home (ibid). My data on women and girls does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the implications of wage work on gendered power relations, but it does indicate that they were diverse and complex.

While men had much control over their wives in terms of mobility, sexuality and household relations, participation in wage work increased women's financial decision-making power. Men seemed economically dependent on their wives and daughters, contrasting mainstream 'gender and development'-notions of women's economic subordination (see Vera-Sanso 2008, 5). The responsibility for major household costs as well as dowry payments had shifted to a large extent to the women, especially in the Rajasthani community. However, these may well be unwanted responsibilities, even if they bring certain authority. Moreover, these responsibilities indicate that women could spend very little money directly on themselves.²⁵¹

250 Women represent about half of the about 30 million construction workers in India. However, the increased demand for skilled construction workers in urban India has meant that there are fewer jobs for unskilled manual workers, in particular for women. (Baruah 2010, 198, 201).

251 However, I take Vera-Sanso's (2008, 55) point that women's statements on not spending money on themselves should not be taken at face value, nor should

There seemed to be a difference between the Rajasthanis and the Bengali migrants' in the role of women's wage work for the gender relations in the family. The participation in wage work provided the Bengali women with independent money and more bargaining power at home than they would have had in their native villages. The seed of transformation in gender roles was planted in the act of migration: building upon the existing social networks among Bengali workers, some women had initiated their own move to Jaipur, and had facilitated the migration of others. This contributed to the women's sense of having more room for manoeuvre in Jaipur. As one said: "*We are more free here*". Moreover, unlike the Rajasthani husbands, the Bengali migrants' husbands participated in household chores, at least to some extent, and they contributed more income to the household expenses than their local male counterparts.²⁵² However, none of the Bengalis mentioned the quest for increased liberty as a cause for their migration, which they regarded as having a purely economic purpose. This is in line with Neetha's (2003, 30) findings in Delhi, but contrary to Srinivas' (1997, 4) who stated that migration among Tamil women workers in Delhi was like a ticket to freedom.

In spite of their relative financial authority both Bengali and Rajasthani women and girls were considerably more tied to the domestic sphere than men and boys. This resulted both from social restrictions on female mobility and from having so much work at home. Thus, their access to outside world beyond home and employers' homes, and to information about available options, was more limited than that of boys and men.

Previous studies have emphasised the couple's joint decision-making in regard the labour market strategies (Myrdal and Klein 1956,

it be automatically assumed that mothers are intrinsically more altruistic than fathers.

252 See Unnithan-Kumar (2003) for an analysis of renegotiations and reconstructions over 'self' in the context of reproductive choices among female and male migrants from rural areas to Jaipur.

quoted in in Bonney 2007, 150). Among the Rajasthani families in my data, instead, there was a peculiar absence of husbands in any decision-making related to female labour market participation. To understand this, we need next to discuss the housewife ideal.

The impossible housewife ideal

The high caste Hindu ideology that married women should not work outside home is today being renegotiated as more women in all classes participate in paid employment. A contrasting trend, however, is the strengthening of this ideology in lower caste and working class communities (Lindberg 2001; Kapadia 1995). Yet it is extremely difficult for poor working class women to uphold it given their everyday survival needs. (See also Dickey 2000b, 468; Lindberg 2001, 320; Tenhunen 2006, 112).

In Jaipur this ideology was more persistent among the Sikh Rajasthani workers than the Brahmin Bengalis, manifested in the tendency of the Rajasthani mothers to downplay or even hide their wage work. In our first conversations, all the Rajasthani girls emphasised that in their community “*mothers do not work (outside)*”, or “*married women do not work*” or “*Mother stays at home, we do not let her go out to work.*” They explained to me that they themselves were working so that their mothers could stay at home, as culturally appropriate. Some mothers also initially told me that they did not work outside home, but it later turned out that all those in my data worked for wages.

Most women and girls were first reluctant to admit that married women had to work because of financial pressures, but not all were ashamed of their work, and instead portrayed themselves as hard workers. By contrast with others, these women openly said that there is no rule in their community that women should not work outside their homes. On a similar note, female domestic workers in Kolkata were conscious of the low status of working women in general and of their occupation in particular, but still perceived their ability to work and earn as a source of power (Tenhunen 2006, 112).

Among the Rajasthanis, however, there was one group of women who did not work, namely recently married daughters-in-law. The moral prescriptions for young women emphasise social invisibility (Das 1979, 97), and these rules were strongly adhered to by the young women who had recently entered the community through marriage. They were more secluded than other women and rarely ventured outside home. Eventually they too might take up paid domestic work, but not before it became an absolute financial necessity and they had become mothers.

The approach of the Bengali women to wage work after getting married was more pragmatic. They were less concerned with the housewife ideology and none of them concealed the fact that all women in their community were working, particularly as this was their main purpose in coming to Jaipur.

Transmission of work within the family

In Jaipur today, paid domestic work runs in the family. All female domestic workers in my data had other female family members working in the same occupation and some were third generation domestic workers. This work was transmitted from mothers to daughters, from elder to younger sisters, and sometimes from other female relatives such as cousins, a pattern of generational transmission that exemplifies the strong female-kin nucleus within Indian families (Aura 2008, 306).

As an illustration of how girls enter paid domestic work, let us look at Jagdeep and her two working daughters, Radha and Kamala, aged around thirteen and eleven. Their family, originally from rural Rajasthan, had lived in central Jaipur for two generations. Jagdeep, who estimated her age as thirty, had six children. Four were her own and two were adopted after their mother, her sister, had committed suicide. Her husband and in-laws included, there were ten people in the extended family. Jagdeep had worked as a maid for years and still worked for one house. Her daughter, Radha, started to work alongside her mother when she was about ten. They had at first shared

the work, Jagdeep sweeping and mopping while Radha washed the dishes.

At first Radha had still attended school and worked only during the weekends and evenings, but she gradually took full responsibility for one employer house while her mother looked for a new one. When she began to work independently, Radha stopped going to school altogether. Later, the mother-daughter pair was offered another house to work in. Since Radha already worked for several houses by then, her younger sister Kamala, then around eight years old, entered the market, as she put, “*so that my mother could pay different bills, it could be a help to her.*” Now it was Kamala’s turn to learn the trade from her mother. Eventually, she also started working independently, and stopped going to school at the second grade.

The work trajectories of Jagdeep, Radha and Kamala were typical in many ways. Most girls are introduced to the work by first working alongside their mothers, elder sisters, or other close female kin (see also Kapadia 1995, 201) and gradually start independent work. Initially they try to combine school and work, but then they leave school altogether, as we shall discuss later in this chapter.

Fathers also share work with their sons in these communities, although boys generally continued at school much longer than their sisters. Among the Rajasthanis I met, several boys accompanied their fathers to temporary construction work (see Mehrotra 2008, 4). Some Bengali boys had odd jobs in restaurants, hotels, offices and so on. The father-son transmission of work would merit further study.

Studies on poor people’s livelihoods have shown that one of the reasons why casual labour households are vulnerable is the irregularity and unpredictability of the income flows (Kabeer and Mahmud 2009, 14). Among domestic workers’ families in Jaipur, having several members of the family in relatively steady paid employment acted as a shield against economic insecurities (see Srinivisan 1997, 4). Even if one family member loses a job, falls ill or gets married, the family still has a pool of workers, a kind of labour reserve within the family.

Marriage and work trajectories

“What’s happened to her?”, I found myself thinking when Namita, a young nineteen-year old woman came to meet me with her two-month old son in her lap in a hot May afternoon in 2007. Naturally, the delivery and the care for her new-born had taken their toll. Still, the difference between the radiant girl whom I had met a year earlier, and the pale young mother and wife she had become, was stark. At eighteen, Namita had been slightly older than an average bride in her community and physically ready for child bearing, but she now seemed to suffer from both anaemia and malnutrition. Following a tradition, she had returned to her mother’s house for a couple of months to recover from giving birth while her mother helped her with the baby, so I could meet her again.

Namita’s warm-hearted mother Sukhmeet was enthusiastic about her grandson, and I watched her washing the baby with strong, elegant hands. Namita rested on the common bed of the one-room house which accommodated Namita’s three younger siblings, her parents and grand parents.

When we discussed Namita’s new situation regarding employment, Namita herself said that life was now easier since she did not have to do paid domestic work. As the only girl in my data who could read and write, she took pride in being able to help her illiterate in-laws to read official documents. Sukhmeet also said it was good that Namita did not have to work in houses anymore. She repeated several times that Namita had worked and earned money for the family ever since she was about eight. Now, as a married woman, she should get some rest.

But rest was definitely not what Namita was getting. Sukhmeet later told me that Namita had a very heavy burden in her new in-laws house, caring for a disabled mother-in-law on top of all the other housework. Visibly disappointed with the in-laws, Sukhmeet told me that the young husband was already a heavy drinker, could not read, and brought almost no income to the family.

Historians in Europe refer to a practice where unmarried young women and men worked temporarily as servants before getting married in 16th to 18th century north and central Europe as 'life-cycle service' (Rahikainen 2006, 28, 255), a practice which continued in some form into the mid-20th century. In Jaipur, something similar took place, as Namita's case shows. Both Namita's own family as well as her in-laws considered it inappropriate for a newly-wed woman to continue wage work. When Namita got married her fourteen-year old sister Mahi took over the house which had earned her Rs. 1000 per month. Mahi had stayed at school longer than most girls in their community, but the family could not afford to lose its highest paying job. Namita's employers agreed to transfer the job from one sister to another, so Mahi "inherited" the housework.

The institution of marriage plays a central role in female work-life trajectories and determines their labour market participation in different ways. Like Namita, the girls in the Rajasthani community usually stopped working upon getting married as "*the in-laws do not permit it*". Whether or not they ever re-start work depends on their husband and in-laws, but given the economic pressures, many go back to work after some years. Whereas other girls spoke about the cultural prohibitions on women's wage work, Gurmeet was more pragmatic about why she would not work after getting married: "*You already have lot of work once you get married. How much will I be able to work then?*"

The Bengali community's perceptions and practices related to work and marriage differed from the Rajasthanis'. Drawn to Jaipur by wage work itself, participation in work was prioritised whenever the situation allows and the cultural ideals related to married women's work did not often crop up in their interviews. For example, Shivali, like other young Bengali women I met, had worked as a live-in since her arrival in Jaipur when she was about ten. Once she got married when about fifteen she quit the live-in work. After she returned from the wedding festivities in West Bengal, she soon went back to work, this

time as a part-time maid in three houses. She again stopped working towards the end of her pregnancy and stayed at home when her baby girl was small. Once the baby grew a little older, Shivali went back to work as a maid again.

Part-time work made it possible to earn wages while still doing care work at home, but it was certainly not an easy life. The female workers were controlled both by home disciplines and labour disciplines. Once the girls get married and start to live with their husbands and in-laws or their own parents, labour discipline is replaced by home discipline. Those who had previously worked as live-ins mentioned that despite their harsh experiences, life became more difficult once they began to live with their husband. Shivali, for example, had received no wage in her first employer family. In spite of her resentment over that, she said the time before she got married was better. *“There was no worry before. Now I have to cook for the husband and feed the baby. Before I was free.”*

Motherhood and wage work

Despite the strong ideal that married women should not work, most women go back to work some years after getting married, the Bengali women earlier. But becoming a mother has implications for participation in wage work. In India, the Maternity Benefit Act (1961) prohibits employment of women in any establishment for a period before and after childbirth, and provides for payment of maternity benefits to them, but this legislation applies only to the organised sector (Bajpai 2003, 408–410) and has no impact on informal paid domestic work. The workers I met could not even imagine that maternity leave could be a workers’ right.

Since employers depend heavily on maids, they are very reluctant to hold a job for a worker who needs time off for maternity, but instead usually employ someone else. Thus, female domestic workers typically have to give up their jobs when heavily pregnant. There was no system of substitute workers, although their own female fam-

ily members sometimes substituted for them. It was more common for the workers to look for entirely new houses when returning to work. This means that they not only lose precious income for several months but thereafter have the challenge of finding a good new employer. They can at least be relatively certain of finding new houses when they return to work, whereas in other sectors women may have to go back to work within a couple of weeks of giving birth (Palriwala & Neetha, 2009, 28).

What about the worker's children? Child care and other reproductive labour can be perceived as a scarce resource (Romero 2002, 21), and for many working women in India extensive child care responsibilities are a major hurdle for participation in employment (Siddiqui 2004, 79). There is an array of legislation²⁵³ with provisions for child care, both in organised and unorganised sectors in India, but they all lay down a minimum number of women to be employed for the rules to become operative. This excludes workers in small units such as homes (Bajpai 2004, 410-412).²⁵⁴ By focusing entirely on the female workers, the legislation also reinforces the assumption that child care is a mother's responsibility (ibid).²⁵⁵ The mothers I met in Jaipur had no access to public child-care facilities, and had to organise the care of their children in some other way.

For the maids in Jaipur, paid domestic work provided relatively attractive employment compared to other jobs, since it could be found

253 In the organised sector, the Factories Act (1948); the Mines Act (1950); and the Plantations Act (1951), and in the unorganised sector, the Contract Labour Act (1970) and the Interstate Migrant Workers Act (1980) oblige employers to provide crèches for small children (Bajpai 2004, 410, 412).

254 Moreover, by focusing on the number of employees in an establishment, the legislation neglects the developmental rights of children (Bajpai 2004, 412).

255 A specific feature of the Indian government's developmental and social policy is the refusal to recognise care either as a social responsibility or as work (Palriwala & Neetha 2009, 19-20). The non-recognition of care rests on two questionable assumptions: first, it is assumed that the state interacts with families and community networks rather than with individual citizens, and second, women are viewed as dependent family members and mothers and treated as such rather than as economically independent workers or citizens.

near home, which facilitated the combination of wage work and child care as well as other responsibilities (see also Dickey 2000b 464; Parthasarthi et al. 2004, 365–366; Lingam 1998, 818). Moreover, work in two shifts made it possible for women to move easily back and forth between home and work. (See Srinivasan 1997, 5; Palriwala & Neetha 2009, 28; Parthasarthi et al. 2004, 365).

In other Asian countries, in the Philippines for example (Arnado 2003), domestic workers may hire even poorer women to work in their own homes, but in Jaipur the maids, struggling for daily food and income, were in no position to hire others. Instead, they carried out much of the care work themselves and allocated some of it to family members, creating care chains (Hochschild 2001) among close female kin (see also Neetha 2003, 40). In both Rajasthani and Bengali groups, mothers of small children or babies left them under the surveillance of female kin or their own older children.

As an illustration, Lali, a Rajasthani worker with four small children, left her baby-twins in the care of her mother, her sister or her nieces during her work in four houses. All these female kin also worked as maids between them they managed to share the work and the child care. Lali's eldest daughter, eight years old, also took care of her siblings when she was not at school.

Leaving children under the surveillance of young relatives or older siblings is not without problems. Heymann's (2006) multi-country study on care challenges among poor working families in the developing world convincingly showed that when no governmental care facilities for the poor exist, it is often the workers' children or other children who look after the smallest children.²⁵⁶ The challenges of child care provided by other children were evident; increased risk of accident, and developmental and behavioural problems among

²⁵⁶ The study showed a clear class gradient in care: poor parents with the least educational opportunities were most likely to leave their pre-school children in the care of another child (ibid, 24–26, 35).

the cared for children (ibid, 24–25; 26; 35).²⁵⁷ In South India poor farm labourer women had to leave babies in the care of their siblings, sometimes as young as five years (Kapadia 1995, 200). Older girls of eleven and twelve years had become full-time surrogate mothers, doing all housework and child care and also participating in agricultural wage labour whenever possible (ibid, 202).

In Jaipur, organising child care was a considerable challenge for both Rajasthani and Bengali families, and children were often cared for by older children. For example, when Meera arrived in Jaipur at the age of ten she had to care for her aunt Shivali's baby for eight months. Shivali was away from home only for about two hours at a time, but it was a heavy responsibility for a ten-year old child.

In some sectors it is common for workers to take children to work with them (see Narayan 2008), but not in domestic work.²⁵⁸ Deepti, an experienced worker told me that employers immediately ask potential workers where they will leave their babies during work. In the neighbourhood I lived in, one part-time maid sometimes took her two-year old daughter to the small park located next to the houses in which she worked, which enabled her to keep some sort of watch over her while she played on the slide and swings. The girl sometimes stayed in the park for an hour or so, despite the risks of injury. If she started crying loudly, the mother sometimes hurried into the park to care for the child's needs, but sometimes she could not.²⁵⁹ Often the

257 Scheper-Hughes (1992, 10) also mentions how women who worked, for example, as domestic workers, had to leave their babies, even the newborns, at home unattended or attended by siblings who were barely older themselves.

258 In a study of women employed through a governmental employment programme in Tamil Nadu, child care and bringing children along to the work place was found to be a common cause of work place harassment from supervisors and colleagues or for a salary cut (Narayan 2008, 11).

259 See also Heymann (2006, 28) for a case of a Mexican domestic worker who tied her small daughter to a table in the house where she was working. Similar practices are reported from working mothers in India (Narayanan 2008, 12). Such arrangements protect children from the immediate danger of accidents but may have a negative long-term developmental impact (Heymann 2006, 28).

girl played with my daughter of the same age, providing me with my own challenge of combining care work and field work, a comparison that seems somehow ridiculous, if no less tangible.

Very wealthy Jaipur families may facilitate combination of work and child care by accommodating live-in workers with their children. However, this is not common and none of the workers I met had lived with their children at an employers' place, in contrast to Kolkata where domestic workers' children and spouses were commonly accommodated in the servant quarters in the basement of large apartment buildings (Ray and Qayum 2009). Only one of all the employers I interviewed had once accommodated a whole family from Bihar.

8.2 Precarious girlhood

There was a sense of transition in the lives of the working girls in Jaipur during the time after they left school and entered work but before they got married. Like domestic worker girls in Vietnam (Rubenson et al. 2004, 398), the so called teenage years in Jaipur were also a period of awaiting marriage. During this time, girls are socialised into womanhood, prepared especially for becoming a married woman and, eventually, a mother. The life-cycle of Indian girls and women can be condensed into three stages: first, as a daughter to; second, as a wife (and daughter-in-law); and third, as a mother (Kakar 1981, 56–57). In the social ideology of the North Indian patrilineal family, a daughter's stay in her natal home is a temporary stage and her period of full potential as wife and mother belong to another patrilineal line (Tiengtarkul 2006, 24).

While growing up is a process filled with contradictions for girls and boys anywhere, the girls in Jaipur had less chance than boys to negotiate parental and societal expectations. In India, the differences in the lives of daughters and sons become more clearly demarcated

during youth (Ganguly-Scrase 2007, 326). Boys do not have social markers of physical maturity, and are treated as children longer. They stay longer at school and are not trained to work in any occupation until their late teens (Ganguly-Scrase 2007, 326). In Jaipur, the boys in the families I met with attended school for much longer than their sisters. Since they were involved in virtually no house work, they had generally more free time than the girls. But apart from wage work and domestic responsibilities, girls too spent time socialising with kin and friends within the neighbourhood, and visiting the temple.

Discrimination against girls starts early. As an extreme example, Lali, one of the Rajasthani mothers, said that when she gave birth to a third girl her husband told her to throw the baby out. When she finally gave birth to a son, one of twins, there was a visible difference in the size of the baby daughter and son. Notably, the mother breast-fed the son whereas the daughter was fed from the bottle with a milk powder formula.

Given boys' higher educational level and other advantages compared to their sisters, one could even ask whether there is a difference in the social status between the young men and women from within the same family, if only in their appearance. The way they looked in their neat shirts and jeans, the boys and young men, at least to my non-cultivated eye, could have passed as educated lower middle class, whereas the girls and women could not.

Girls as income providers – an implicit intergenerational contract

The literature on gender and development in India (and elsewhere) has legitimately called for a better understanding of women's economic contributions, given that women are often the main breadwinners in poor families (Neetha 2004; 1681)²⁶⁰ However, with a few notable exceptions (see, e.g., Kapadia's 1995; Niewenhuis 1994), this literature has largely focused on adult women (and men) as income

260 For an extensive theoretical discussion on breadwinning work and its critique see Warren (2007).

providers and has not taken into account children's economic roles. To look only at the financial roles of adult women and men does not capture the situation in the workers' communities in Jaipur since children, and girls in particular, have a substantive role in the gendered income generation. While the mothers in these families had the overall economic responsibility, their own income was not necessarily the largest. Instead, their daughters often had the highest income, higher even than that of their brothers, mothers, or fathers, who worked on daily contracts in construction work and were sometimes unemployed for long periods.²⁶¹

One of the cardinal values in India has been filial respect and support for parents, manifested in particular as the expectation that the son will support parents in their old age (Croll 2006, 473; Das 1979, 90).²⁶² This norm can be considered an explicitly pronounced intergenerational contract. But I found that another, implicit intergenerational contract prevailed among working class families in Jaipur. (See Kabeer 2000, 465). Unmarried daughters were expected to support their parents as long as they lived at home, even if this expectation was not necessarily pronounced. This contract also contrasts with the perception of implicit intergenerational contracts as ones in which the working generation (adults) makes transfers of goods and services to both the young and the old (see Collard 2000, 454).

In a working class neighbourhood in Kolkata unmarried daughters' earnings were characterised as separate money, pocket money which was not used for their families' daily living expenses (Tenhunen 1997, 157). By contrast, in Jaipur the daughters' income was used almost entirely for living costs and for dowry savings, similarly

261 In poor families in Bangalore, mothers stepped into the father's place as income provider when their husbands were unable to provide income due to death, negligence, alcoholism or gambling. For example, they might sell jewellery to enable children to continue their education (Aura 2008, 44).

262 Across Asia, ethnographic literature shows that in spite of fears of weakening of filial obligations due to nucleation, urbanisation and a generational gap, filial support has remained strong (Croll 2006).

to Kapadia's (1995, 200–202) findings on female child labour in rural Tamil Nadu. All girls said that they kept a minimal sum of Rs. 15 to 50 per month for themselves (to buy candy or make-up) and gave the rest of the Rs. 300 to 1000 to their mothers to spend on the family. In the case of those who had previously worked as live-ins, the mothers had collected their salaries at the employers' house.

One of the girls, Surindra, seemed to participate more in the family's economic planning than the other girls. She took great pride in having been able to purchase a 21' colour TV which cost Rs. 15,000 in instalments. She had paid the Rs. 760 monthly instalments herself from her monthly earnings of Rs. 1,500.

Both Rajasthani and Bengali women mentioned that daughters sacrifice themselves and help their poor parents by earning money and by carrying out housework at home. This reflects what economists have called the altruist motivations behind generational transfers, assumed to at least partially motivate generational transfers (Collard 2000, 456–467). The mothers recognised and valued the daughters' economic contributions and the gendered nature of the intergenerational contract involved. Some compared the lazy, unhelpful sons to the diligent dutiful daughters, but none of the girls or mothers explicitly complained of this situation. The daughters "*understand the needs of their parents*", unlike the sons, "*who are not considerate for the needs of their family*".

The fathers' role in the daughters' employment seemed to range from passive to ambivalent, although it should be noted that my findings are based only on what women and girls told me, not the fathers themselves. Studies have reported that working women often have to ask their husband's consent for taking up employment (Gupta 2006, 76) but little is known about the consent of fathers to their daughters' employment. Both mothers and daughters of the Rajasthani group raised this question in our conversations, and the mothers noted that even if fathers opposed the idea of daughters' work in principle, they quietly accepted it in fact. One mother, Jagdeep, explained that her

husband brought in only marginal income from his irregular construction work. Thus the household income consisted mainly of her wage and those of Radha and Kamala, whom I introduced earlier. Jagdeep elaborated on her daughters' participation in paid employment:

He (the husband) was initially opposing (daughters) work but I can not help it because we need something to eat and wear. He is not at all concerned with our requirements. So we have to earn. My husband himself is a part time worker and whatever he earns he spends in drinking.

Girls, in particular, were worried about the shame their work caused to their fathers. Some said that their fathers were not even aware of their involvement in paid domestic work. For example, Mahi, the fourteen-year old girl who had recently stopped school and started work, assumed that her father did not know she was working as a domestic worker: *"Parents are worried (for my safety) but the reason for not telling my father is that he will feel bad that he cannot earn much and his daughter has to go out for earning."*

Mahi may have believed that her father did not know about her work but her mother later told me that he was well aware of it. Whoever was correct, this shows how sensitive the question of having female family members in paid domestic work is for some men. On the basis of what the women and girls said, it appears that the daughters' participation in wage-work hurts the pride of the fathers, those who should in principle provide income for the family. Gurmeet, one of the girls, said that even if her father did not like the fact that she and her sister were working, he had to accept the economic realities:

Many times he has asked us to leave the job. Then my mother asks him to give money for our wedding, sweets, food and clothes. She says that if you provide them all that, they will stop working. Nowadays no one helps in their wedding so let them earn for their dowry.

In addition to the irregularity of the fathers' income, the men spent much of their income on their personal needs, such as alcohol, whereas women and girls spent practically all their income on household needs. (See also Kapadia 1995, 205–208; Kundu 2008, 9).²⁶³ The question of husbands spending on alcohol came up with every single Rajasthani mother and with almost all the girls, less so with the Bengalis.²⁶⁴ When Aasdeep explained that her fourteen-year old daughter Surindra is the main income provider in her family, she commented on her husband's economic role: "*His earning does not have any meaning. Whatever he earns, he spends on him, on his drinking. He is drunk right now, too.*" And indeed, on many of my visits to this community I saw some of the fathers visibly drunk, irrespective of the time of the day.²⁶⁵

Who makes the decision that girls should enter wage work in Jaipur? In previous literature, Iversen (2002, 828) showed that boys in rural Karnataka often decided autonomously to migrate to Bangalore for work, sometimes against their parents wishes, and there was an element of adventure in their decision.²⁶⁶ In the same vein, Niewenhuys (1994) found that in Kerala girls too persuaded their fathers to allow them to move to the city for work, despite the loss of status this caused for them. Thus, child migration is not always initiated in as unfortunate a way as that of Rekha and Rani, the Bihari girls discussed in Chapter 6.

263 For detailed accounts on the women's and men's use of money see Tenhunen (1997, 153–171) in Kolkata and Kapadia (1995, 205–208) in rural Tamil Nadu.

264 See Parthasarathi et al. (2004, 366) on Bhimavaram in Andhra Pradesh and Tenhunen (1997, 167) on Kolkata for similar accounts of men's excessive alcohol use in poor workers' communities.

265 See Vera-Sanso (2000, 181) for an analysis of how differently men portray the role their drinking, emphasising the recuperation of an overworked provider, the building of social capital involved, and portraying wives – with their contradictory demands – as a major source of their difficulties.

266 In the Philippines, the majority of girls migrating to Metro Manila for domestic work had also themselves made the decision to migrate (Camacho 1999, 64). See also Hashim (2005) for a study on independent child migration from rural Ghana to the capital Accra, and the different reasons parents and children gave for the move.

Taking note of these important findings, my data show that girls in Jaipur entered paid domestic work, both part-time and live-in work, first and foremost to help their parents overcome economic hurdles, not to gain experience nor for adventure. However, peer pressure and the example of their elder sisters also influenced the decision to begin wage work, especially for the Rajasthani girls. I find it very difficult to fully isolate the girls' own agency in deciding to enter wage work from that of their mothers. The girls do participate in the decision-making, but their decisions are heavily informed by the explicit or implicit pressure to support parents. Thus, I suggest that their entry into work is based on a joint decision, reflecting the implicit intergenerational contract between mothers and daughters and based on joint household interests (Iversen 2002).

The detrimental dowry

It is arguable that the most influential element on the finances of poor families is the dowry, detrimental for those with several daughters and beneficial for those with several sons. While some argue that dowry is both a constraining and an enabling factor for women, especially in a transnational context (see Gallo 2008, 198),²⁶⁷ most research identifies mainly negative consequences for girls and women. These include dowry-related crimes against women, the parents' economic burden in arranging their daughters' marriages, strained relationships between the families involved in the transaction, and the early marriage of girls (Tenhunen 2008, 1036; Mathur et al. 2003, 5–6).²⁶⁸ It is also an economic transaction which directly benefits the groom's family, and more indirectly and potentially, the future children of the couple. I further argue that for poor families the dowry has a sig-

267 See Gallo (2008), Kalpagam (2008) and Sheel (2008) for analyses on dowry payments in the context of transnational Indian marriages.

268 While dowry problems apply to all stratas, the early marriage is more prevalent among poor families. There are indications that the dowry demands in South Asia increase with age of girls upon marriage which creates pressure for parents to marry their daughters early (Mathur et al. 2003, 5).

nificant impact on girls' labour market participation and their educational level.

Despite the efforts of women's rights activists (Ray 2000a) and the illegality of the practice (dowry was outlawed in India in 1961), dowry demands and payments have increased in Jaipur as everywhere in India, across boundaries of economic status, caste, ethnicity, or religion (Aura 2008; Kapadia 1995; Sheel 2008; Tenhunen 2008).²⁶⁹ In the traditional north Indian marriage system, dowry comprised gifts that accompanied the gift of a maiden, which as such had spiritual merit, enhancing the status and family honour of the giver (Sheel 2008, 216). In India today, it typically consists of gifts and cash given by the bride's parents to the bride and the groom and his family at the time of marriage (Uberoi 1997, 232). The earlier perception of dowry as a premortem inheritance of woman (Tambiah 1973, 64) has been heavily criticised since it has been shown that the brides do not gain control over it (Kapadia 1995, 22; Tenhunen 2009, 133). Instead, the new marriage market has created a perception of daughters as a financial liability (Kapadia 1995, 67). Upper caste and upper class attitudes have spread to lower castes and classes, among whom there was previously no tradition of high dowry payments to grooms (*ibid*). Instead of being merely economic considerations in a class society, dowry payments re-articulate both the tradition and market, as well as gender, ritual and class identities (Tenhunen 2008, 1036).

Although arranging the marriage is mainly the fathers' responsibility in rural India, in urban settings women often have a more active role (see Tenhunen 2009, 134). The women I met in Jaipur had the main responsibility for organising the marriages of their children. A few Rajasthani women explained that while this should in principle be a joint parental responsibility, it is in practice their responsibility

269 A few studies show situations where dowry had not been exercised, especially in South India, for example, in Bangalore (Aura 2008, 57) and among Brahmin Tamils (Kalpagam 2008, 113), which reminds of regional variation and indicates the dowry system's more significant hold in Northern India.

due to the husbands' heavy drinking and general absenteeism.

In Kolkata, working mothers saved a large part of their own wage for their daughters' dowries (Tenhunen 1997, 161–162). This was also the case in Jaipur, but in addition each working daughter was expected to contribute for her own dowry. Ironically, the girls often left school so that they could work to finance their forthcoming marriages, thus providing the income their fathers could not. For example, Namita's mother said that they had spent the incredibly high sum of Rs. 100,000 rupees on Namita's wedding and dowry, consisting of cash, household items and jewellery.²⁷⁰ Considering Namita's mother's active role in organising the marriage, it is easy to understand her disappointment over what they had received in return for all the money collected after years of hard work – an illiterate, unemployed husband and a heavy domestic workload.

How is it possible for poor families to collect so much money? Namita's mother told me that the dowry was raised from loans and about Rs. 50,000 of their savings, the product of years of work by Namita and herself. They had borrowed 10,000 rupees from Namita's employer, a debt that her sister Mahi was now working to pay off, Rs. 500 being deducted every month from her wage of Rs. 1,000. Once that money was paid, the family would start to save for Mahi's dowry, and so the vicious cycle of poverty and dowry-raising would continue.

For poor families in India, high dowry payments have the potential to bring upward social mobility if they manage to marry off their daughters into families of better social standing (see Kapadia 1995; Tenhunen 2008). However, even in these cases I argue that the dowry system has severe implications for female labour market participation and contributes to the vicious circle of lack of education and poverty, and should be carefully analysed in any development policy related to girls' rights or children's work.

270 In rural West Bengal, the highest strata of the rural society could demand up to Rs. 150,000 as dowry while labourers' dowry demands were lower (Tenhunen 2009, 128).

Anxiety over sexuality and family honour

In India, daughters are viewed as the repositories of the family honour, and socialised to the idea that the family honour, *izzat*, lies with them (Das 1979, 2; Säävälä 2006, 150).²⁷¹ It is thought that girls need special protection during the time between the onset of puberty upon the first menstruation and marriage (Säävälä 2006, 150; Ganguly-Scrase 2007, 326). The girl steps into an auspicious but precarious liminal period in her life, during which her parents have the responsibility to protect her virtue and to find a suitable groom (Säävälä 2006, 150).

Surveillance of their daughters is challenging for the parents of working girls, who have to move outside their home environments daily, especially since it is known that urban areas are not safe for girls and women. Access to public spaces is deeply gendered (Viswanath & Tandon Mehrotra 2007, 1542). Sexual harassment in public spaces has been conceptualised as a form of non-criminal street violence, and it has a remarkable impact on women's access to them (Koskela & Tani 2005, 418).²⁷² A study in Delhi, notorious for being one of most unsafe cities in the world for women, showed that the fear of harassment in public places structures women's lives and movements. Moreover, women are not seen as legitimate users of public space, unless they are going to a specific location or activity, such as work. (ibid). The class ingredient of this gendered fear was as evident in Jaipur as it is in Delhi: poor women commute by walking or by public transportation and their fears are very different from those who live in the relative safety of a middle class colony (Viswanath & Tandon Mehrotra 2007, 1542). Though smaller than Delhi, Jaipur is also a

271 While it has been argued that the main threat to the purity of caste derives from female sexuality, Das (1979, 92) argues that the major threat related to female sexuality is not so much the purity of caste but rather the family honour.

272 Women do not, however, surrender to sexual harassment without resistance. On the contrary, at least in some contexts women are able to reclaim space and work as active agents in public, which should remind us not to (re)produce a picture of women only as victims (Koskela & Tani 2005, 418).

large, growing urban centre in which women's access to and safety in public spaces seemed equally challenged, possibly even more difficult given the prevailing conservative gender norms. The discussions I had with working women and girls in Jaipur reinforced my own observations.

The adult women I met did not seem too worried about their own physical safety, but they were particularly concerned about their unmarried daughters, moving to and from their work places, and the risks to family honour. Any inappropriate behaviour, such as talking to strange boys or men, physical contact or even rumour of sexual contact, could damage their marriage prospects. The need for protection and surveillance of girls influenced the parents' choice of the girls' work, and both mothers and daughters often referred to the question in our conversations.

If a close work location facilitates the combination of work and child care for married women, it is equally important for safety reasons. Compared to other potential manual labour jobs, paid domestic work makes it easier for the parents to watch over their girls, at least in principle. Since many of the fathers were absent most of the day, either at work or socialising, the mothers were responsible for monitoring their daughters' behaviour and for keeping an eye on them.²⁷³ They restricted the girls' movements, constantly warned them about perils and dangers and reminded them of the family honour (see Bos 2008, 146). Such warnings about the potential for sexual victimisation are a central feature of women's socialisation in different contexts (Macmillan et al. 2000, 8). While mothers gave various instructions such as to avoid the sun, their main advice was to never talk to strange men or boys on their way to and from work. They explained how they had taught their daughters what to do in case of so called

273 By contrast, in Bangalore the fathers regulated the movements of young women outside home (Aura 2008, 45).

eve-teasing²⁷⁴ on the road. One proudly told how her daughter had once taken her slipper from her foot and used it to hit the man who had tried to harass her, just as she had advised her to do. Another explained that her daughter had picked up a stone and thrown it at one man in a similar situation.

Safety concerns also influence working schedules. Women fear the night, and as Viswanath and Tandon-Mehrotra (2007, 1545) note it is less acceptable for women to be seen out after dark. The mothers I met were reluctant to work in the evenings or to let their daughters do this, even if they were often asked to do so. When they did accept it, during dinner parties for example, they tried to get an employers' family member to escort them home.

If streets are unsafe, there are risks in the employers' houses as well. It has been shown that in working life "harassment contains a strong element of power: the victim experiences extreme pressure because the offender can have power over her future" (Koskela & Tani 2005, 420). It seems that the parents have to choose between two bad options: part-time work or live-in work, the urban public space or the risks within the employers' house. Both Rajasthani and Bengali mothers worried for the safety of their girls, but the two communities had adopted different solutions: the unmarried Rajasthani girls worked as part-timers, the unmarried Bengali girls mostly in live-in work.

The Rajasthani mothers and daughters both emphasised that they did not want the girls to work as live-in workers. Out of seven girls only one had worked as a live-in, and then only for a couple of months. Most did not specify why live-in work was not suitable, but one expressed her concerns openly: "*My conscience does not allow overnight stay for my child. How could I trust employers in the night?*" When I asked her if she had ever heard of abuse towards live-in worker girls

274 In India, the common term 'eve-teasing' is euphemism for public sexual harassment of women and girls by men. The 'eve' originates from the biblical Eve (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve_teasing).

she continued: *“No, I have never heard of anything wrong happening but still I am fearful. You can earn life-long but once respect is lost it can never be earned back.”*

Even in part-time work, the mothers thought it important to know the employer family well in order to know that their daughters were safe. Aasdeep, Surindras’ mother mentioned that long-term labour relationships contribute to the sense of safety. Surindra began working when she was around eight years old and at fourteen she was an experienced worker, but she had to be carefully monitored because of her precarious age and phase of life:

Surindra feels the same as I do: she does not like this work. Sometimes she yells that I will not work for such little wage. But they (employers) say we will pay only this much. If you have to work then work, otherwise leave. But I think we have been working for such a long time, we know these people very well. It is safe so we continue working.

When asked whether she felt something might go wrong in the employers’ house, she continued: *“No, I do not fear. As far as the family is concerned they treat her as a daughter. So I do not fear for anything wrong to happen. And if she gets late in the evening they escort her to home.”*

The responsibility for the respectability of daughters and the related burden of arranging their marriage lies heavy on the women’s shoulders. They fear not only that someone would harass their daughters but also that the girls themselves would get into close contact with boys or men. Moreover, their husbands seem to consider it the mothers’ fault if something goes wrong. Jagdeep, whose husband regularly assaulted her physically, described in an agonised tone her fear of how her husband would react if something would happen to her daughters at work or on the way to work:

They (daughters) are very tired (of work). And I am also fearful that they may run away one day. Their father will kill me if it happens one day. He

will say that it was your decision to employ them. So many times I accompany them to their work places.

A common reason for violence against women in their homes is the suspicion over the wife's sexual laxity or infidelity, as shown in a study in Chennai (Vatuk 2006, 212). Working women are at a special risk for such accusations and escalating abuse, since they cannot avoid coming into contact with unrelated men on a daily basis (ibid). As we see in Jaipur, husbands may attack their wives over suspicions about the daughters' conduct. The painful irony is that the women and daughters provide most income for the household, yet the husbands accuse them of misbehaviour on the way to work.²⁷⁵

Had some of the girls been sexually abused on the road or in the employers' homes, beyond verbal street harassment? In South India, Dickey (2000b, 477) noted that fears about sexual transgression between employers and workers are almost never mentioned, since merely talking of this could cause great damage to the reputation of the family or its women. Neither Rajasthanis nor Bengalis told of personal experiences of sexual harassment or abuse in employer homes, but even if they had faced this they probably would not have mentioned it, either to me or the local interpreter. A typical answer to a question about abuse would be something like this: "*nothing like that has ever happened to girls in our community*", but a few mentioned that they knew that "*something happened to girls we know*" or to girls in other communities, implying that such incidents had occurred.

While choosing part-time work was a question of pride and of safety for the Rajasthani mothers, the Bengali families organised their unmarried daughters' work differently. Among them it was common for the girls to work as live-in workers before they got married. The

275 Many women in Vatuk's study (2006, 213) viewed occasional violence caused by minor mishaps an expected and self-evident part of marital life. People at all levels of the society, including the law-makers, tended to share such views, and Vatuk (ibid) quoted a male lawyer as saying: "Every man beats his wife sometimes. You can't just draw a firm line against it altogether!"

four young married Bengali women, three of whom were still below eighteen years, had all worked as live-in workers when they had first arrived in Jaipur.²⁷⁶ Unlike the two Bihari girls who had been sent to Jaipur on their own, all the Bengali girls had come to Jaipur with one or two parents of their own.

The Bengali families preferred to place daughters in a live-in arrangement for several reasons. Firstly, having one or more family members stay at an employers' house eases accommodation pressure. The Bengalis I met with lived in very small rented rooms. For example, Shivali and her husband, their two-year old daughter, and Shivali's mother lived together in an abysmally small room of no more than four square meters when I first met them. The year after, they had moved to a new location where the room was similar, if not even smaller. Since it was summer when I met them in there, Vibha and her sister, a newcomer to Jaipur, slept on the roof terrace while Shivali and her husband and daughter shared the tiny room.

Putting daughters into live-in work also means one person less to feed, even if none of the women mentioned this. What is important, though, is that as live-in workers they may make more money than as part-time workers, ideally at least. For example, Sandhya, a recently married Bengali woman, worked as a maid in three houses when I met her and earned Rs. 1200 in total. Her twelve-year old sister worked in one house as a live-in worker and also earned Rs. 1200 rupees. But since she only visited home for two hours every fifteen days, her parents were able to save on food and had more space in their small flat.

In Chapter 6 I argued that the live-in arrangement increases vulnerability. Were the parents concerned about this? In contrast to the streetwise Rajasthani workers, the Bengalis may have found the employers' home safer than the road in an initially unfamiliar city. Vibha, a Bengali woman in her forties, explained why she preferred

276 In Mehrotra's (2008) study in Jaipur, girls enter paid domestic work at around 10 years old.

to her daughter to be in live-in work before she got married: *“It’s not good for them to work as part-time worker and roam from door to door.”* Her daughter had started to work as a live-in worker and although the wage had been very low at that time, the mother valued the relative safety of the arrangement.

Even if the Bengali parents may hope the employers take some responsibility for the girls’ protection, they constantly worried about the risks involved in the live-in arrangement. Kajal, one married Bengali woman, had previously worked as a live-in, and now her two younger sisters did. Kajal first described rather euphemistically her middle-sister’s situation, comparing it to her own situation as a married woman:

We are no longer girls. We are married so for us this life (part-time work) is better. But for my sister it is better to work for 24-hours because you cannot trust anybody nowadays. So you can be teased or molested on the road. So it is safe for her to work in a single house. Now my sister is their responsibility. So we are satisfied that she is being treated like their own daughter.

But when our discussion developed, Kajal went on to explain that her sister had already left two former employers’ houses. In the first, the employers had given her only four *chapattis* per day to eat, three in the morning and one in the evening. She had not been allowed to meet her own family, and the employer had said that she would not be paid for the first two months. The second employer also prohibited her from meeting her own family. Now, Kajal’s mother had selected a third house and they were satisfied with the treatment: *“They keep her very well. Now my mother says it’s okay, she pays less but our daughter is well there.”* After two bad experiences her mother had initially been very worried, but after she had seen the conditions in the third house she had calmed down. As an example of positive treatment Kajal told me that the third employer makes her mother tea and offers her snacks on her visits to meet her daughter and to

collect her wage at the employer's house.

As if the two exploitative employers were not enough, Kajal's youngest sister Kalpana had also faced problems as a live-in worker, having started work at the age of eight. An older Bengali live-in worker had asked the mother to place Kalpana as a live-in worker in a house where the mother worked part-time, and had promised to take care of her. But it turned out that the other worker forced Kalpana to do all the work. Hence her mother had taken her back home after eighteen days, and again they had to look for a new employer. As Kajal summarised it, the safety of the live-in arrangement is relative: "*It is very risky.*" But the recently arrived migrant families have little choice but to hope for the best and trust their instinct.

Working girls and education

"I do not want her to work. But this is only what I feel, rest is up to fate. I want her to study till possible. We wasted our life, I do not want her to waste her life", said Lali, a worn-out, stern woman of about twenty-five, when we discussed her work trajectory and her visions for her daughters' lives. Considering how young Lali herself was, the way she looked at her life was disturbing. Yet, her perceptions were common among the domestic workers I met in Jaipur.

It is acknowledged that children's work correlates, albeit not always directly, with the ineffectiveness of the educational system.²⁷⁷ The Constitution of India (Ninetythird Constitution Amendment) says that "the state shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may by law determine" (article 21 A), and that it is the duty of the parents or guardians to provide opportunities for education to the child/ward between the age of six and fourteen years (article 51 K)

277 Work alone does not explain low school attendance in India or elsewhere. In India, a significant number of children who do not attend school do not work (Bajpai 2003, 332) although statistics on child labour may grossly underestimate the amount of work children do within their homes.

(Bajpai 2003, 338). A long-awaited amendment to the Constitution, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) was recently enacted, setting the modalities of the provision of free and compulsory education for children between 6 and 14, and came into force in 1 April 2010.

On a policy level, an abundance of national plans on both child labour and education exist.²⁷⁸ As a result of significant governmental efforts, the primary school enrolment rates in Rajasthan have increased considerably for both boys and girls in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁷⁹ Yet, the drop-out rates remain high, especially for girls, and in the upper grades of the primary school there are far less girls (Rajagopal, 1999, 123). Improved educational facilities combined with general perceptions over the value of education have led to significant changes in school attendance among the poor working communities in Jaipur. However, my data shows that mere attendance at school does not necessarily lead to a long-lasting impact on the lives of the girls and women, underlining the importance of the quality of education.

Unlike their mothers, who had never been to school, all Rajasthani girls in my data had attended school, at least for some years. But only one of the seven girls, Namita, had stayed in school until class eight. She was also the one whose employer had paid part of her school costs. All six others had stopped after a couple of years at school.²⁸⁰ Although the concept of what it is to be educated needs

278 The Tenth Five-year plan on education called for achieving universal elementary education by 2007, a target not met, followed by a governmental announcement of achieving the target by 2010 (Bajpai 2003, 337).

279 The Government of India has a long history of promoting education of girls. Already in 1882, the Indian Education Commission noted the extremely backward condition of girls' education and recommended that public funds should be allocated to support girls' schools. Since then, the Government has launched numerous strategies at national and state-levels to improve education in general, and girls' education in particular. (Rajagopal 1999).

280 Mehrotra (2008, 4) found that the overwhelming majority of Rajasthani domestic workers' children attended school, but she does not specify how many years they stayed at school, which could be a relevant indicator in terms of learning results.

local contextualisation, there was a clear difference between Namita and the other girls: Namita knew how to read and write and the others did not. Simply attending school for couple of years did not lead to lasting literacy skills.²⁸¹

In terms of education, paid domestic work is a kind of double-edged sword. Previous studies on child labour have shown that working children often combine school and work, and in principle part-time domestic work facilitates combination of school and work because of the relatively short shifts (see e.g. Rahman Doftori 2004, 109; Shah 2000; Arnado 2003, 4–5).²⁸² But easy entry into work has meant that girls tend to slide into the world of wage work and gradually drop out of school altogether. This is what happened to the Rajasthan girls, who dropped out of school as they started independent work in more houses. Surindra, for example, studied until 5th standard, going to school in the morning and to work in the evening. But at around eleven years old she left school because combining school and work became too tiring and the schedules too difficult to match. Furthermore, none of the children in live-in work that I came across in Jaipur and Kolkata had been to school alongside their work, even though this has been reported among live-in workers in Nepal (Shah 2000, 96), Indonesia (Weix 2000, 142) and the Philippines (Arnado 2003, 4–5).

The interviews with both mothers and daughters showed an am-

281 In Uttar Pradesh, young educated men considered someone with an Eight Class pass 'educated' and those who dropped out of school before this as uneducated (Jeffrey et al. 2008, 65).

282 A number of development projects in various countries support the combination of education and domestic work, typically in schools run by non-governmental organisations. See Rahman Doftori (2004) for a detailed study on NGO's educational strategies in Bangladesh and Nepal, where large numbers of children, particularly girls, in NGO schools are domestic workers. While acknowledging the NGO schools' major role in providing education in Bangladesh and Nepal, the study noted the risks of educational ghettoisation with different standards for poor working children, lack of links between NGO education and further education and skill training, and the functioning of NGO schools as islands of excellence without any broader impact on national education policies (ibid, 133–135).

bivalent attitude to education. The mothers, on the one hand, talked about the importance of education which they regretted not having received themselves. Several said that they hoped their daughters would have a better life than they had had, illustrating, at least on an ideal level, the support mothers extend to their daughters in urban India (see Aura 2008, 306–308).

In particular, mothers did not want their daughters to marry as early as themselves, some of whom had been married off when they were less than ten years old. “*We know better now*”, one mother said, emphasising the negative health consequences of an early marriage and motherhood.

Parents had managed to raise the age of marriage. At the time of this research, girls in the Rajasthani community were typically married at sixteen to eighteen years old, and at fifteen to seventeen in the Bengali community, both later than the previous generation. However, there was a clear discrepancy between the ideals of education and the practice of early drop-out. The parents did not decide on their children’s education or entry into work single-handedly. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, children themselves also shaped their educational pathways in the midst of structural constraints (Kabeer and Mahmud 2009, 16). Similarly, girls in Jaipur also took part in shaping their educational and work trajectories. Understandably, they were doubtful about the value of education. The nearest public school seemed to have major problems, such as one teacher for a large group of children of all ages and very limited facilities.²⁸³ It is difficult to say how much the girls’ decision to discontinue schooling reflected the lack of quality education and how much it was influenced by the explicit or implicit pressure to support parents economically. The looming burden of dowries makes wage work an attractive choice, especially for families with several daughters.

283 Reddy (2006, 267–268) notes that illiterate parents may feel more at ease dealing with employers than with school since they are familiar with the rules of the labour market but not those of school.

Wage work was the most important but not the only reason for dropping out of school. In my data, one girl mentioned that she had been harassed by boys there, and another mentioned bullying (see also Jeffrey et al. 2008, 60).²⁸⁴ The youngest girls referred to the example set by their older sisters or peers as a reason for leaving school (see also Kabeer and Mahmud 2009, 17).

The attitudes of the Bengali women towards education depended on whether they perceived themselves as temporary inhabitants planning to return home, or whether they planned to stay in Jaipur, both being represented among the small group I got to know. All young Bengali women had attended school in West Bengal (see Mehrotra 2008, 4), albeit usually only for few years, but none had been to school since their arrival in Jaipur as non-Hindi speakers five to ten years earlier. For example, Kajal's two younger sisters had studied in West Bengal until 7th and 3rd standard. When I asked Kajal why the younger sister did not go to school in Jaipur at the age of eight she told me: *"My mother says we will go back to the village so there is no use to put her in school."* Instead, as we have learnt, both sisters were placed as live-in workers.

A certain indifference towards education and their future prevailed among both Bengalis and Rajasthanis. Shivali, a Bengali woman who started working at the age of ten, said that her live-in employers had tried to teach her: *"But I never showed any interest."* When asked why she replied: *"Because after studying I would also have to do only domestic work so what is the use of studying? When I never studied in childhood, how would I develop an interest?"*

The lack of any prospect of upward mobility and approaching marriage made girls question the relevance of education. My data indicates that in spite of the increasing value of girls' education, this did not seem an important asset in the marriage market for either

284 Harassment of girls in their neighbourhoods, on the way to the school and in buses, is one of the reasons for girls to drop out of school in India (Viswanath & Mehrotra 2007, 1545).

regional group.²⁸⁵

Although their older children were not at school, the young married Bengali women, aged about sixteen to twenty-five years, wanted to educate their Jaipur-borne children, who were able to speak Hindi. Deepti, who had already been in Jaipur for ten years, had made great efforts to enable her eight-year old son attend a private school, planning to send her second son there as well. Deepti was also the only one to talk about her difficulties in ensuring that her son attended school when she was out at work herself, a concern that some parents in Mehrotra's (2008, 4) data raised as a reason for not sending children to school. Parents may be more willing to invest in education for their sons than their daughters, but Shivali and her young husband, at least, were eager to send their three-year old girl to school. Only time will tell whether this happens. When I visited her community there were at least ten large Bengali families in the building, but only two boys and none of the girls were at school. Shivali's own niece, eleven-year old Meera, had never been to school in Jaipur, a sign that the place of birth of the migrants' children may be an important factor in determining whether they go to school, those born in Jaipur being more likely to.

Lack of future prospects

“My dreams are shattered now. When I was young I had dreams. I used to think that I will study and get a good job and will improve my living standard. But now, the reality is different.”

Gurmeet, the Rajasthani girl who made this dramatic comment, was only about sixteen years old. Her remark reflects the disquieting pessimism and hopelessness. I encountered among the young girls

285 In Tamil Nadu, young educated Christian Paraiyar women were frustrated that despite their education and ensuing salaried jobs, the dowry that was demanded from them was as high as that of uneducated brides (Kapadia 1995, 59).

in Jaipur.²⁸⁶ The girls did highlight their active efforts²⁸⁷ in resisting demanding employers, but they felt powerless over their own future. All the unmarried girls, except for the youngest one who did not reply to the question, emphasised that they have no say in their future, which is “*in the hands of God*” or “*in the hands of parents*”. A few mentioned that since recently married women in their community do not usually do not work outside home, they assumed that their future in-laws would not let them work. As to what would happen in the years before marriage, one girl expressed the feelings of them all: “*ye kaam hi - domestic work, only this, what else could I do?*” Previous studies have pointed to the psychosocial impact of participation in paid domestic work (Blagbrough 2008), and to how child domestic workers begin to perceive themselves as inferior and stigmatised. The sole thing that Surindra, an expressive Rajasthani girl, could think to do for the future was to pray that her father stopped drinking. When I then asked how she saw herself in five years time, she replied: “*Nothing will change. I may be married by the time. More than that I do not dream because they never come true.*”

What, if any, part does wage work play in this disillusionment? When answering this it is important to look at the intergenerational contract between mothers and daughters (see also 8.2.1). According to Kabeer and Mahmud (2009, 10) intergenerational transmission of poverty commonly occurs in contexts where poor people rely primarily on the sale of their labour to meet survival needs, accompanied with a failure to invest in the human capital of successive generations. They note that while investments in human capital can be made in any stage of an individual’s life course, it is the investments in childhood that have critical implications for subsequent opportunities.

286 In this light, it is understandable that one of the aims of Save the Children Finland’s project in rural Rajasthan was to encourage girls to dream (personal communication with Mukesh Lath, Save the Children Finland, Programme Manager, 24.5.2007).

287 See Vatuk (2006, 220) on this, what she calls ‘agentive actions’.

Parents play a critical role in determining whether such investments are made. (ibid).

My observations among working girls and mothers in Jaipur support this argument. The indifferent attitude of parents towards education creates in turn an indifferent attitude in their children, and despite their rhetoric on the importance of education, they understandably opt for the immediate benefits of wage work. Although beneficial in the short term, the implicit intergenerational contract of daughters' support to parents, in my understanding, is one of the mechanisms which reproduce the transmission of poverty and powerlessness in the lives of the girls. The combination of dropping out of school for wage work, the dowry, and marrying early creates a vicious circle in which the girls, later women, alternate between staying at home and participation in wage work. By sending their daughters to earn wage at an early age, parents effectively bar them from most of the options that might otherwise become available to them. Obviously, given the many factors involved, whether those options would prove to be better or not cannot be known, but at least the girls could dream of diverse paths.²⁸⁸ These dynamics must, of course, be understood in a context of persisting lack of public services and inequality between the poor and the wealthy, the uneducated and the educated, where even the educated young people have major difficulties in finding relevant employment (see Jeffrey et al. 2008).

Workers' perceptions of children's work

The Rajasthani girls I met had entered part-time work at around seven to eight years, the Bengali girls were placed as live-in when they were around eight to ten, correlating with Mehrotra's (2008) survey

288 In a study in the Philippines child domestic workers associated a better life largely with security: having a house, a stable job, and money. They also wanted to be able to spend more time with their families and have families of their own, as well as to learn new things, have friends, and help others (Blagbrough 2008, 36).

in Jaipur and studies elsewhere in India.²⁸⁹ What do the girls feel about the broader debate on child labour and children's work?

Except for the youngest girl, all girls in my data were aware of the term 'child labour'. They had heard about working children on TV and from the employers. The girls were ambivalent over whether they themselves were, or had been, child workers. However, most seemed to consider their position better than that of working children in other sectors. In separate interviews, two girls said how touched they had been by the child workers they had seen on TV, and by the fact that so many children have to start work at a very young age.

One of them explained: *"I saw it on TV and I became very passionate about them. They were very young, they were polishing shoes and making lakh bengals.²⁹⁰ I have a lot of sympathy for them."* When I asked whether she felt her current work was better than what she had seen, she continued: *"I feel this work is okay but I really feel sorry for those children. They do not get to study, no proper nourishment, no play time. They are forced to do work. Now the police has set them free."*

When I asked Surindra, another girl who felt sorry for child workers she had seen on TV, whether she was or had been a child worker herself, Surindra reflected for a while and then referred to the time when she begun working: *"I did not have so much knowledge that time. I never thought about this. But now sometimes I feel like this."* She had started working when she was seven or eight and she now said that the proper age to start working would be around fourteen years.

While the girls of about eleven to eighteen did not find the actual work particularly heavy, several mentioned that it had been hard when they had begun working. Those who had worked both as a live-in and part-time offered different views. Among former live-in workers, one mentioned that taking care of a small baby had been

289 In Tamil Nadu, the youngest child domestic workers were seven years old, and the average age of entry was ten years (Blagbrough 2008, 9). However, the study does not specify whether this was for part-time or live-in work, or both.

290 A popular type of bracelet worn by women and girls in India.

difficult, but in general they did not perceive the individual tasks as particularly strenuous. However, they thought of the long working days and the never-ending list of tasks as exhausting.

What did the others think about an appropriate age to enter work? Two out of nine said that around ten to twelve years old would be a good age, while the two previous live-in workers said that children should not have to work at all. Others mentioned that children should be a little older than they now were on entering wage work. Shivali, a young Bengali woman who had started to work as a live-in worker at the age of ten, paused to think about the question of child labour and child workers, and after a while noted: *“I never thought like that. I just worked.”*

Namita recalled how she had heard on TV that former child workers had been taken out of work and provided with education. When I asked her what she thought about this, she almost shouted: *“Alas! I would also have studied in spite of working, but now I am trapped.”*

Namita did not differentiate between domestic work and other jobs:

N: Yes, there is child labour (in houses). My employers also asked me to employ my younger sister for baby sitting. I even did that but later I removed her because they expanded her work. I used to finish most part but once I left they asked her for mopping and sweeping. Then after two months I removed her. I also felt she was too young to work. Now my mother says put her to work, too, but I scold my mother.

P: Did they pay her separately?

N: Yes, they paid Rs. 800 per month for taking care of the baby. I used to finish my work early and she came a bit later. But after I left they asked her to work. I even quarrelled for this, that she is here only for baby sitting, do not ask her for any other work.

When I asked Namita whether she missed the Rs. 800 that her sister had been earning, she solemnly said: *“Not at the cost of my younger sister. At least my sister is fine. She was not in proper health either.”*

Mothers were ambivalent about when the girls should start work-

ing. Most said not before they were around fifteen to sixteen, or even twenty years old. Namita's mother explicitly said they would not prefer their daughters to work at all: *"No one wants their children to work but we have to make them work. I think the right age (to start) would be twenty years."* But her ideal was far from the reality. By the time her own daughter Namita turned eighteen, she had already worked for ten years.

Interestingly, Namita had argued with her mother about not sending her younger sister Mahi to work, thus pushing the boundaries of the intergenerational contract. Namita succeeded relatively well in her efforts to keep her sister at school. We have seen earlier that Mahi had to quit school when Namita got married, but she had managed to stay until she was fourteen, longer than most girls in her community. For the household economy, though, her relatively late entry into work meant that she would have fewer years to pay off Namita's dowry debts as well as save for her own dowry.

But Shivali, a Bengali worker, said that it should be up to the parents to decide when their daughters should start working, and continued: *"No parents will like their daughters to work. My mother, for example, tried very hard to educate me but she was helpless. She had three daughters to get married and we had no father to support us."*

Legislation which prohibits the employment of children below 14 in houses was enacted by the government of India between my field work periods in 2006 and 2007, and we discussed it with both the mothers and the girls when I met them again. Notwithstanding their ideas about the proper age of entry to work, all mothers emphasised that their families depended on the girls' income. Both mothers and daughters said the implementation of the legislation would be problematic. One of them concluded: *"Yes, it will be a problem for the whole community."* Another one said: *"It is not at all realistic. Those families who have six to seven children to feed and no one to earn. How will they meet their expenses then?"*

Working-class mothers in Kumar's (2006a, 73) study in Banaras

said that children and youth might become lazy if they did not work during their school breaks and holidays, and they would use “the hype about child labour” as an excuse not to work. However, the mothers in Jaipur expressed no such concern nor did the idea of work as an apprenticeship come up in any of the interviews. The mothers simply recognised participation in employment as a burden for themselves and for their daughters.

8.3 Conclusions

In order to understand the role of work in the female domestic workers’ lives, one must look at their broader life situations. Through interviews with girls and women of different generations from the same families, this chapter has shown how the individual woman’s work trajectory depends on the trajectories of other girls and women in the family.

Participation in wage work for domestic workers in Jaipur is inescapable and necessary for the daily survival of their families. They do not perceive it as a means of empowerment. For the particular groups in my study it was also practically the only available option. In the first part of this chapter, I showed that in spite of its low status and weak terms of employment, paid domestic work provides married women with a relatively manageable combination of wage work and their own domestic responsibilities, especially child care. This is especially due to the practice of working in two shifts, allowing them to work in their own homes during the day-time shift. The workers, just like their female employers, were almost entirely responsible for the running of their own homes. These working women, who could not hire others to help them while they were out at work, supported one another by organising the care of the smallest children within the close kin-group.

Although many women participate in the labour market, the ideal that married women should not work prevails among the Rajasthanis. While some of the elder women portrayed themselves as hard workers, the daughters were eager to emphasise that married women should not work, and that due to their help, their own mothers could stay at home, even if this was not the case. For the Bengali migrants, however, the ideal of the non-working married woman played little role: they had arrived in Jaipur precisely in order to earn a living.

Previous studies on gender and migration in India have pointed to the sex-differentiated migration patterns, such as the importance of ethnic social networks for female migrants (Raghuram 1999; Neetha 2002; 2004) and to the changing gender-related norms through migration (Parliwala and Uberoi 2008, Srinivasan 1997; Neetha 2004, 1681). Srinivasan (1997, 1–2, 8) shows that working class Tamil women in Delhi felt that the bonds of caste and gender were much less binding, and they had managed to push their male family members to share some of the house work and to contribute most of their income to household expenses, which was rare in the rural areas. By contrast, Neetha (2003, 132–133) found that the quest for personal freedom and the rejection of traditional gender roles did not apply to migrant domestic workers in her data in Delhi. Almost all women in her data gave poverty, lack of food and scarce job opportunities at the place of origin as most important reasons for migration, a decision in which many had had a substantial role.²⁹¹

In the latter part of the chapter I focused on working girls. There is a strong intergenerational element in how girls enter paid domestic work. I strongly agree with those who emphasise the importance of studying the generational nature in kin relations in India (see Aura 2008, 308). Among the female domestic workers in Jaipur, work is

291 In Mumbai, Telugu migrants grouped reasons for leaving rural areas into 'survival reasons' (inadequate work, no work, insufficient work to support family, etc.) and 'developmental reasons' (nature of work unsatisfactory, to seek better job/income, offered a better job, etc.) (Lingam 1998, 811).

transmitted from mothers to daughters within the family. Moreover, work is transmitted from elder to younger sisters. This dynamic needs to be considered in policy measures intended to improve educational attendance, livelihoods of poor families, and the position of girls more generally.

In my understanding the mother-daughter ties at work are manifestations of an implicit intergenerational contract. This differs from the prevailing intergenerational contract of filial duty according to which sons are expected to support their parents in their old age. Since the support of the girls is not explicitly acknowledged, it may further contribute to the widespread perception of girls as a liability and to their low self-image. The transmission of work from one family member to another often relates to major events in their lives, especially marriage and childbearing. For the employers, the interfamilial transmission of work provides an easily accessible pool of workers, and many prefer maids from families they are already familiar with.

Previous studies on domestic work have by and large disregarded the role of daughters in the overall family work and income generation (see e.g. Dickey 2000a; Neetha 2003; Ray and Qayum 2009). I have suggested that a more careful examination of the household dynamics of income generation is needed, taking into account the role of children, both boys and girls, as providers. In both Bengali and Rajasthani families, mothers and daughters together were the main providers for their families, and in some families the unmarried girls had the highest income of all. Even if fathers in particular resent their daughters' work, having several members of the family in wage work provides more income security amidst the general irregularity and unpredictability of the intra-family income flows (see Kabeer and Mahmud 2009, 14). In addition, families with several daughters face the heavy burden of the dowry, and the girls' salaries were a considerable asset in saving for their own dowry payments.

Some scholars have noted generational conflicts and parents' worries over loosening of intergenerational ties (see Lamb 2000). By con-

trast, the mothers in Jaipur had a central role in outlining their daughters' future. My findings are similar to those of Rubenson et al. (2004, 398) who studied domestic worker girls in Vietnam. In both places girls perceive themselves first and foremost as family members who have responsibilities towards their parents and other relatives. If girls in Hanoi viewed their own interests as secondary or did not consider them at all (ibid), most girls whom I met took a slightly different stance. They did not think their own needs as merely secondary, but they were aware of the fact that there was very little room for them to push their own needs beyond the broader family considerations. The girls entered work to support their parents, not to gain experience or for adventure (see Iversen 2002; Niewenhuys 1994). However, the decision to enter work was not solely made by their parents. Part-time working girls also shape their educational and work trajectories. However, it is very difficult to identify the will of the daughters in this process, given the strong implicit pressure to help their parents. The situation appears different for those who are replaced by their migrant parents as live-in workers. In their case, the parents seem to be exercising a clearer decision-making role than in the somewhat entangled decision-making in the part-time work.

While mothers are active in bringing their daughters into the realm of work, they constantly worry about the risks for the girls' respectability, since it is their task to marry the daughters off. The Rajasthani mothers considered paid domestic work which is close to home a relatively safe option. For them, live-in work was out of the question and considered morally dubious. The Bengali migrants, however, rationalised differently, and concern for the girls' safety on the way to work was one reason for why they chose to place their daughters as live-in workers. Ideally, they would also make more money through live-in work, but in reality several Bengalis had faced severe problems with it. None of the worker informants told me about sexual abuse involving them, although they did describe cases where wages had not been paid and girls had been made to work excessively. Addition-

ally, children in live-in worked missed their parents.

In terms of education, the attitudes of both mothers and daughters were ambivalent. In principle education was valued, but a sense of schooling being pointless, the girls' own indifference and the mothers' financial constraints acted against school attendance.

Globally, education has become "one of the key concepts implicated in the provision of 'average' or 'normal' childhood" (Boyden 1997, 200). As Jeffrey et al. (2008, 6–7) point out "the notion that education is intrinsically beneficial is now widely circulated by governments, non-state actors and local people". The question of education in the domestic workers' communities in Jaipur must be looked at in the light of the iconic importance of education among poor people. While not denying the potentially transformative value of education and its potential role as a key catalyst for social change (Drèze and Sen 1995, 109), I agree with Jeffrey et al. (2008, 7–8) who emphasise the conditional in Drèze and Sen's approach: "education *can* improve people's access to multiple freedoms *if* other conditions permit".²⁹² I wholeheartedly join them (ibid 2008, 8) in that they certainly do not want to argue against efforts to expand educational opportunities for the poor in India. But my study supports their findings in rural Uttar Pradesh in north India, that neither the mere attendance at school for a couple of years, nor education per se, necessarily lead to long-lasting, or indeed any, improvements in the lives of young people. Thus one must understand the context within which education takes place, and be critical of the ability of education to automatically improve lives.

The older part-time working girls described proudly their acts of resistance such as threatening to quit a job in work place disputes. Yet, they have relatively little room for manoeuvre either at work or at home, and they lacked future projections apart from the evident submission to the parents' plans for their marriages. The general stigma

292 Italics in the original text.

related to domestic work, but also the ambivalent hidden nature of the work in the workers' own families may make it more difficult for them to think of their work as one occupation among many and to professionalise its content. This, in turn, makes organising and unionising difficult. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, domestic workers are increasingly trying to push for standardised practices and to frame labour relations as relations between an employer and an employee.

9 HUMAN TREATMENT OR WORKERS' RIGHTS?

Several researchers have studied the relationship between employers and workers mainly as an interpersonal relationship, focusing on the dialectic of intimacy and domination. In such approaches, the struggles of the workers have been understood as strategies to minimize subjugation and familiarity. This tends to limit the workers' struggles to coping strategies which aim at maintaining dignity and self-esteem.

Instead, I approach the labour relationship as an instance of struggle over the labour process (see Romero 2002, 166–169) and ask in this chapter what resistance strategies workers use in trying to transform that process and to oppose employer practices. This chapter also looks at the strategies used by employers to control the labour process and resist change.

Labour studies have shown how economically disadvantaged people engage in various forms of resistance, such as expressive culture or daily industrial sabotage, which may not conform to the traditional ideas of class politics (Rose 1997, 136).²⁹³ In spite of the asymmetrical position of workers and employers in Jaipur, workers try to transform the work process through everyday interactions and labour negotiations and through overt and subtle strategies. In situations of extremely unequal and asymmetric power relations, the forms of

293 See Mcallister Groves and Chang (1999) and Bakan and Stasilius (1995, 322) for resistance strategies, for example, the use of social networks in paid domestic work.

resistance that workers may use have certain common features: they require little or no coordination or planning, they often represent a form of individual self-help, and they typically avoid any direct confrontation with authority or with elite norms (Scott 1985, 29).

The focus in this chapter is on the relationships in part-time work, since that is where the most articulated and intense struggles are currently taking place. Finally, I discuss the views of both workers and employers on potential regulation of domestic work, and juxtapose these perceptions with ongoing efforts to regulate domestic work and to organise domestic workers in India.

9.1 Everyday resistance and bargaining power

In spite of their limited capacity to influence the terms of employment, the workers engage in various forms of everyday resistance. Given the asymmetric power balance, they may prefer to try and change the labour relations by hidden methods. The workers I met in Jaipur told me about disguised forms of defiance. Punam, who found dishwashing the most disagreeable of her assigned tasks, explained how she defied the employer by not washing dishes in the required manner:

Because they (utensils) are very dirty. They leave food pieces, waste food in them only. These utensils stink. So I do not like washing them. I hate it. They (employers) tell me to first clean them with plain water and then apply detergent on them. But when they shout at me, I just wash with plain water.

Similarly, one of the disguised ways in which maids in Kolkata protested against employers was to do the work mechanically without bothering about efficiency or quality (see Tenhunen 2006, 126). In Jaipur, another resistance strategy is to show one's sentiments when

confronted by rude or demeaning employer behaviour, though this may only be possible for the more experienced maids. Surindra, who was about fourteen, explained how she often got angry when her employers would not let her use warm water to wash dishes. She struck a balance showing irritation, but not too much: *"I do not show my anger, I do not like doing it. I show only a little bit of my angerness."*

Whether or not workers are able to show discontent depends on the duration of the relationship and the individual characteristics of both employers and workers. Namita, who had worked for the same employer for many years, said that she showed her annoyance with employers openly. For example, when they complained about the quality of her work, she responded by remarking, *"this is the way we work, if there is a problem, then let us go"*. Threatening to leave the job is one of the few available ways to confront employers' demands for job expansion, or rude behaviour, and for this reason widely used. Some may even get a wage rise by this tactic.

While live-in workers continue to be shadow-like figures who quietly nod in reply when ordered to do something, part-time maids sometimes "talk back". The ability to talk back – to openly express their agency – is a central tenet in the struggle over the labour process, and it was something the employers often criticised in *"today's workers"*. Both workers and employers told of heated arguments between the two sides. The outspoken Gurmeet had quite a warm relationship with one of her employers. She had a friendly chat with them every day, and was not afraid of confronting them, even yelling at them. *"They are now accustomed to me, and I am used to them. They know my habit,"* she explained. According to her the employers yelled at her too, especially when she was late for the afternoon shift. Although they had asked her to come at 3 p.m. she might turn up at 4 p.m. She explained her reaction on such occasions: *"Then I say that at 4 p.m. you people sleep, and at 3 p.m. is my sleeping time. I will come according to my mood."*

When I next met Gurmeet she said that she and her employers

“*rule each other*”. She went on to explain how she had been late for one of her employers the previous week because she had had an interview with me and the interpreter:

Like day before yesterday while I was talking to you people (me and interpreter) I got late and my employers asked me for the reason. I told it was due to the meeting with you. They then teased that ‘now you people also have meetings’. I replied ‘why could you people only have meetings’?

While it was possible for Gurmeet to talk back, she felt it was not the same for other working girls in her community: “*Only I have the guts*.” The resistance of youngest girls is usually limited to threatening to leave a job and to talking behind the employers’ backs. These acts of resistance may be empowering for the girls, but they take place within the safe framework of the maternalist labour relation. Allowing a certain amount of unwanted behaviour may also be a conscious or unconscious employer strategy.

There is great variation in workers’ ability to confront employers, dependent on several factors. The lack of bargaining power directly relates to how workers are placed in the continuum of vulnerability discussed in Chapter 6. As we have seen, it is easiest for experienced adult workers, who work for several employers to stand up to the employers. By contrast, the vulnerable child live-in workers who have no close family in Jaipur have the least bargaining power. Life-stage also has an impact: workers with small children or those saving for a dowry are highly dependent on their employers and thus more vulnerable to work insecurity.

Ultimately, the bargaining power of all workers and their ability to confront employers is greatly restricted by the need to preserve their job (see also Baruah 2004, 607). Even if employers emphasise their dependence on the workers, both sides know that they can dismiss a worker any time they wish. As Preet, an elderly worker and Gurmeet’s grand mother, said: “*I do not like quarrelling, so when they ask to mop again, I obey. Otherwise they could turn me out.*” With this bottom

line in mind, neither Gurmeet, who talked back openly, nor Preet, who preferred not to argue with her employers, had much chance to influence the terms of employment. Gurmeet had not received annual increments, nor had she been able to negotiate herself any regular leave. Although her employers had been sympathetic when she fell severely ill, they had not provided her with medicine or help with the doctor's bills. And while one of her three employers sometimes gave her extra money of about 15 to 20 rupees or chocolate and biscuits, the same employer made her work "too hard", adding tasks such as cutting vegetables and cleaning rice or wheat to her job without paying extra. For her, one of her three employers was exceptionally considerate, as she did not cut her wage when she was absent from work for being ill, as the other employers did.

While Preet complained about the working conditions, she also said there were good sides to their job. She seemed to bring the discussion back within the limits of maternalist benevolence, as if to show her loyalty or obedience: *"Our employers are good people, they let us watch TV after finishing the work. They give us tea, breakfast and clothes, too. New clothes once in a year on Diwali, and old clothes any other time of the year"*.

In contrast to domestic workers in other countries (see Romero 2002), workers in Jaipur were not able to influence the work process. Only one worker in my data mentioned having had control over the way she worked once:

Cooking, washing clothes, mopping, sweeping. They were very good people, uncle worked in a bank. They never treated me as a servant. I worked according to my own wish. They took me with them for a picnic, too. Now they have moved to Delhi.

Her experience of working "according to my own wish" was unique, the only time any of my interviewees, either workers or employers, referred to a worker having the power to decide how she worked. A more typical case, an example of lack of control over the work proc-

ess, was when one girl told me that in some of the houses she cleaned the employers' children walked on the floor while she was mopping it, leaving footprints. When she tried to ask them not to do this the employers' children got angry. Her mother had advised her not to speak to them to avoid quarrelling.

Tea as a symbol of resistance and human treatment

A symbolically significant arena of everyday resistance is the seemingly mundane matter of serving tea for the workers. In Chapter 7 I mentioned the degrading practice of offering tea in separate cups. Refusal to drink tea offered in separate cups had become an act of resistance for some workers in Jaipur, as one Bengali woman explained: *"Whenever they give me water or tea in a separate glass or cup I refuse to take it. Till today I have not taken anything in separate utensils."*

While most employers do offer tea, albeit in separate cups, it was increasingly the habit among employers not to offer it. In fact, workers and employers both referred to the serving of tea and snacks as an example of what they considered as human treatment, even if all employers kept silent about the separate cups.

As we can see, the workers' negotiation space is often so limited that they bargain over such issues as which cups they drink tea from. Deepti, an experienced Bengali worker, who had worked both live-in and part-time, was even ready to compromise over the separate cups, but she found the micro-politics of how cups were arranged inhuman. When I asked her what makes a good employer, she sighed heavily: *"Well, giving (food, tea) in separate utensils is okay, but the thing which hurts is that they keep our utensils outside the kitchen, like on the staircase or on the window. This thing is very strange."*

Shivali and Kajal, two recently married Bengali Brahmin workers, combined practices related to untouchability and the question of humanity. Shivali started by noting that the employers believe that they are superior to the workers. She continued:

S: Otherwise they would have treated us like humans.

K: Where I go (to work) they drink tea by sitting on the sofa but ask us to sit on the floor. We feel very bad, we are not *jamadars*, we have not cleaned their toilets.

P: Is it common that they do not like you to sit on the sofa or touch their bed?

K: No, there are people who think that we are also humans. They do not practice untouchability. For example, the house I am working in, I take tea in their utensils.

S: There are very few houses in Jaipur who do not give us separate utensils to eat. Overwhelming majority are bad, only few are good.

Tea was a powerful symbol also for the employers. Shanti, who was passionate about discrimination against women and girls in India, referred to her childhood home as an inspiration for the way she treated workers:

What I feel is the way we were brought up, we always considered servants as human beings. My mother never treated them as servants. I mean they were just part of the family. Like they were fed, they were given food also. And the kind of food which they were given that kind of food we ate, it was almost the similar kind of food which my Mum gave to them.

P: Same?

S: Same stuff, and for the festivals also. And they were given two to three times of clothes, also, per year. I mean, from the beginning, even now I never treat my servants as servants. I treat them as human beings. And I look after their, I mean, look after their problems also. If my *bai* says today I have a headache and all, I make special tea for them. Of course, they have, everyday they have tea and breakfast and whatever but I make special tea, the masala tea for headaches and sometimes they need...But today only my, my *bai*, who is working for me doing the sweeping and mopping for me, she said my whole body is aching. So I ask what have you taken? She said "I have taken tablets". I said "Have you eaten something or not?" (She replied) "I haven't", so I made tea.

For Shanti, human treatment of workers culminated in the provision of tea and snacks. When I met her again one year after our first discussion, she told me how she had overheard her three domestic work-

ers talking about her and saying that she treated them well and gives them *pakorās*²⁹⁴. She contrasted herself, the enlightened employer, with the non-human employers who did not offer tea and snacks and commanded workers in a masterful tone, for example, by using the common phrase “*arre kya?*”²⁹⁵

It is very different now. I mean servants *are* treated as servants. I mean, they are abused, they are not well looked after and I have seen in many families which I know, I mean the servant comes and there’s *log* (people) in the house and they are not even offered a cup of tea.

As another example of inhumanity, Shanti told how one of her neighbours had been astonished that Shanti had installed a fan in the kitchen for her worker who cooked and washed the dishes. For Shanti, not allowing the worker to use a fan was “*inhuman for she (the worker) is also a human being and it’s hot for her too.*”

The expressions relished by employers such as “*not treating servants as servants*” are adapted in the workers’ own language: “*They never treated me as a servant*”, one worker said when referring to a former employer whom she had found better than any other employer, using exactly the same expression as Shanti, the employer.

The employers perceive the transition towards contractualisation very differently from workers, putting them clearly on opposing sides. Whereas both workers and employers participate in the negotiations over working conditions, employers try to remain in control of the transformations in the sector. One employer strategy is to lean on the rhetoric of ‘human treatment’ and ‘humanity’ instead of workers’ rights, thereby directing the discussion away from working conditions such as time off or wages.

294 A popular South Asian snack, often served with tea, or eaten as an appetizer.

295 “*Arre kya?*” can be translated as “what is this?”, “what now?” and it is used here to describe a commanding tone of speaking to workers.

9.2 Regulating workers' rights

As long as the labour relations are not formally regulated both sides try to use the best available strategies in the negotiations with the other side. What do employers and workers in Jaipur think of potential regulation, including the regulation of children's work? In trying to answer this question, I draw on my interview data and from the discussions I had with civil society representatives and officials who are involved in the question of regulating paid domestic work, the National Domestic Workers Movement and other Indian and international NGOs in Jaipur, Delhi and Kolkata, as well as some officials of the Rajasthan government.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the efforts to regulate domestic work are gaining ground, most notably highlighted in the adoption of an international convention on domestic workers in 2011 in the International Labour Conference, the most important platform for international tripartite²⁹⁶ debate on labour issues. The convention was at least partly a result of the intensive lobbying and increasing pressure from organisations such as Migrant Forum Asia, Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery International, and the internationally recognised Indian National Domestic Workers Movement. During the negotiations, India was among those countries which proposed a resolution that would have limited the international commitment to a non-binding recommendation rather than a convention, but this was rejected (Varghese 2010, 1). The national coordinator of the National Domestic Workers Movement in India, commented on the 2010 decision to adopt the Convention freshly:

The decision of the Conference to adopt a Convention rather than a Recommendation is a recognition by the international community that domestic workers are workers with rights that are comparable to other workers. This is a major victory for the

296 Governments and employers' and workers' organisations.

workers. The stand of the government of India is an indication of the many battles that will have to be fought by the workers and their advocates to realise their rights in the country". (Varghese 2010).

In spite of India's initial hesitation, India was quick to sign the new convention in following the adoption in 2011.²⁹⁷ The signing is likely to give a major boost for campaigning towards the ratification of the international convention and for national regulation in India. Below, we explore what the employers and workers in Jaipur think of potential regulation.

Should workers have rights? – Employer perspectives

Towards the end of my last field work period, one of my research assistants, Rani, and I were standing in the tiny kitchen of Lakshmi, a leftist women's rights activist, who helped me in my research.²⁹⁸ I was interviewing Lakshmi on the issue of regulation of domestic work while she was making *chapatis* for her son, on holiday from school. Lakshmi employed no domestic workers despite her high education and her busy schedule. I knew that she would have to leave to the law court straight after our discussion to act as a witness in a case related to violence against one woman. The most important part of the interview with this passionate woman turned out to be the debate between her and Rani, a highly educated married woman.

Lakshmi, the activist, explained what issues she felt should be regulated: health care, leave, wages, education for children, safety and prevention of sexual harassment and abuse. When I asked her what rights she thought the employers would be least willing to give, she replied without hesitation: "*Leaves, because they are used to their servants.*" But here Rani, whose house employed live-in and part-time workers, got involved: "*But as an employer, I feel that I can give salary*

297 <http://theshillongtimes.com/2011/08/01/ilo-convention-on-domestic-workers> Accessed 5.9.2011

298 These names are pseudonyms.

and leaves according to the norms. But then no extra things like gifts or clothes because when they have everything they are demanding, then why should I do anything extra for them?"

At this point Lakshmi, the activist, pointed out that clothes are not that important. But Rani perceived the question of responsibility for workers as a broader question than merely the provision of clothes, as can be seen in her next comment:

I can even guarantee their safety in my home. But then I will have the enjoyment of being free from any other human and moral responsibility. Like my maid was sick and for a month she stayed in a hospital. I took care of all expenses like medical bill, blood test, X-ray, admission fee, and even a proper diet. Though she had been ill from the day she joined me. Her medication was not my legal responsibility but I did that on human grounds. It was a social service. If they will get their rights, then the employers should be freed from such responsibility.

Lakshmi, vehement in her agenda, replied to this that if the government would not provide health services, the employers would have to pay for them. At this point Rani asked, understandably, why the employer should have to pay double, to which Lakshmi simply said: *"Then do not keep a worker."* But Rani pointed out that the families of domestic workers she had met in Jaipur were totally dependent on the income they got from paid domestic work, and challenged Lakshmi: *"Do you think that they will support you for your ideology of not keeping any servants?"*

The debate between these two women deals with some fundamental questions related to rights of domestic workers and potential regulation, reflecting the struggle over the labour process and the class conflict inherent in domestic labour relations. It also shows how discussion on workers' rights shifts easily into a debate on whether the middle class should hire domestic workers or not. Through their activities and work, both these women were more informed than average people on the situation of domestic workers. Their perceptions are of importance as it is people like them who may have decisive

roles in bringing changes forward, while the distance between their perceptions is symptomatic of the challenging posed by the whole question of domestic workers' rights. Bearing this in mind, I shall now move on to discuss the opinion of other employers I interviewed in Jaipur.

* * *

Most employers I met were aware that although domestic work was not regulated in Jaipur there were ongoing regularisation efforts in others Indian states. Their views on whether regularisation would be positive or negative were diverse. Most who employed part-time workers said regularisation would be good for the employers, and a couple that noted it would be good for employees too. However, unlike the workers, most employers were vague as to what should be regulated and only few explicitly mentioned the question of the wage level or leave. Not one referred to issues such as health services or maternity leave, as if these were beyond their comprehension.

Shanti was one of the employers who said regulation would be helpful, adding that there was no dignity of labour in India, which should "*copy this from the West*". Shanti linked the exploitation of workers to the lack of rules and rights:

I think it would be helpful for both. I mean for them also because sometimes they really get exploited, some of the houses there's so much of work and then they are not paid well and sometimes the servants also, they exploit the employers. So there should be a fair rule so they know that if they are going to do this, they'll get this. There should be clear-cut kind of rules. So both should be aware. It would be better for both.

A teacher by profession, Shanti told of an argument she had had with her part-time cook over the amount of time off. The cook had justified her claims for more by pointing out that Shanti herself had many *chuttis*, days off, per month. Shanti explained, "*So I said 'You can take*

four chuttis, it's more than enough.' So she, of course, she is demanding more, she is a very smart woman, she is aware of her rights."

Two employers mentioned that regulation would make hiring workers easier since they would not have to negotiate or bargain every time. One noted that rules on better wages would make workers less inclined to misbehave, which would increase the employers' safety. Another pointed to the inequalities in terms of employment, some employers providing more benefits for workers than others, suggesting that rules should be created for this reason:

Government should impose some rules because it is not necessary that every employer gives them other benefits than salary. So in order to equalise, there should be some rules. There should be some pension for their old ages. If they have any accident, for this also they should get an insurance of life policy, like in Haryana they give pension to citizens who are sixty-eight years old or above.

Inequality in workers' wages was also noted by one employer, who thought there should be an upper limit to the maids' salaries, since there was currently extreme variation.

The views of those who employed live-in workers clearly differed from those with part-time workers. I asked two brothers whose family hired one live-in worker, whether organisation of workers would be helpful for employers. The elder brother said: "*Not helpful for the owners, helpful for them (workers) actually. Somebody is working for three years and the salary is not increased, so it is helpful for the workers.*"

His illustrative slip of referring to employers as owners shows how he continues to feel, at least to a certain extent, that he owns the worker. This paternalist attitude contrasts with the more contractually-oriented perceptions of most employers of part-time workers. The ambivalence over workers' rights on a general level, and the resistance to regulation on an individual level, was also apparent in his brothers' comment:

For the employers, they think it is a head ache, yeah, if they are organised, they'll create problems for us, uh, for them. But in the long run, it might be beneficial for the employer, for the employers also. Because they can be, you can go to an agency, to that organisation, they have their office. And they can help in tracing them, or in case something happens.

While he said regulation of domestic work and organisation of workers would be beneficial in the long run, the immediate advantage for the employers would mainly relate to questions of safety, making it easier to trace them if a crime was committed. The informant seemed to resist potential regulation from above, but he later said that most employers could provide better wages without any difficulty: "*As far I know it would not create problems. Because the cost of living is getting more and more, it is rising everyday. So it is a legitimate demand, it is a reasonable demand.*"

Only one employer, a wealthy Brahmin woman, explicitly opposed any regulation, saying it should be up to individual employers to decide on the terms of employment. Interestingly, she argued that salary levels should depend on the ability of employers to pay:

See, regarding the payment, it depends on the place where he (sic) (the employer) is working. If he's working in a very good post, they can pay, anything they can pay. But there are people like us, we have limitations to pay them. It's not that they would get 2,500 rupees, that we will not pay. Because we know how much work needs to be done. We'll do it according to our requirements, how much work he's going to do, we'll pay that much.

At a meagre Rs. 900, her live-in worker had the lowest salary of all during the time of the interview. Her comment was reminiscent of Chigateri's (2007, 8) findings in Bangalore, where employers alluded to their own inability to provide better salaries or salary rises. Whether or not the employers would pay more was mainly seen as a question of employers' generosity and their ability to do so, not as a question of workers' rights. In Jaipur, such an attitude prevailed especially among those who employed live-in workers. Those who hired

live-in workers seemed to enjoy their roles as masters and mistresses most, and were most reluctant to give up the patron-client-like relations.

Workers' views on regularisation

When the question of regulation was discussed with workers, all except the two youngest girls were vocal and articulate about the need for regulation. Issues that were raised were the need to regulate wages and leave and detailed questions related to the work process such as the number of dishes to be washed. Workers' views on which term of employment needs regulation most varied, reflecting the ages of the workers and the prior understanding of the idea of workers' rights. Almost all workers considered improved and standardised wages as most important need. Surindra, a young girl, said: *"If they do not have to give leave then they should not, but they should pay us properly since we are working here so long, so we should be paid accordingly."* For example, one of the older workers, who was paid Rs. 300 per each house (in 2006), said an appropriate salary would be Rs. 1,000 per house, whereas others talked about lower rates as the ideal minimum. Those who had previously worked as live-in workers mentioned that such workers should get from Rs. 2,000 to 2,500 per month as a minimum, more than double the amount that most multi-tasked live-in workers currently earned. Provision of minimum wages has also been high on the agenda of the domestic workers movements at both national and regional level, for example in Tamil Nadu and north-east India (Domestic Workers' Link 2008).

Some workers, like Namita, talked about the details of their work: *"I would limit the number of utensils to be washed per day. Because for me, they are the biggest problem."*

The two ex-live-in workers emphasised different things, which probably reflected the fact that they lived in an NGO-run children's centre and attended school. One of them, Nirmala, said there should be proper education and proper food, and workers should be edu-

cated so “*they can become something else in the future*”. As regards live-in children, she thought it most important that the workers should not be locked inside, as she had been, and that they should be paid a salary each month, which she had never received.

Despite their everyday resistance, the workers in Jaipur had very limited means through which they might professionalise their status to that of proper employees. For them, the idea that the status of paid domestic work could be upgraded through improved working conditions seemed intangible.²⁹⁹ Their comments reflected both their lack of experience outside this occupation and the internalised idea that this was the only job available for them.

Namita, who had the best education of the workers and knew how to read and write, noted bitterly that even after studying domestic work had been the only work available to her. She felt that the job had such a low status that it would not be valued more even if the terms of employment were improved: “*Still I would have to wash other people’s utensils and sweep and mop their houses. Nothing, including the status, will change with increased wages or a monthly leave.*”

While the majority of workers were very pessimistic about any prospect of more respect for their work, one girl thought the occupation would become more valued if the terms of employment would improve: “*Yes, it will be appreciated, after all, we are also human beings.*”

The general disillusionment of working class women with the government was reflected in their scepticism as to the potential of any regulation. Previously, they had had bad experiences when they had approached local officials about rights to which they were entitled, to ask for coupons for poor families, for instance. Preet, who had worked as a domestic worker for twenty-five years, laconically noted: “*No one pays attention to us*”.

299 See Romero (2002, 185–190) for a discussion on how workers in the US aimed to upgrade their status from domestic workers to expert housekeepers, who work for clients or customers, through creating a business-like environment.

The fight for recognition

The need to organise domestic workers has been recognised around Asia, but very few trade unions have systematically supported this (Lindsay 2007, 72). In the US, there was a difference in how unionised and non-unionised domestic workers perceived their position: the union members had an occupational identity and felt they had some control over their work whereas the non-union members considered the work as merely a means to an end, expressing powerless resignation (Coley quoted in Romero 2002, 171). Lack of organisation among women applies to the informal sector more generally and relates to the extremely precarious financial situation of poor working women. For them, missing one day's work may be critical, undermining their bargaining power. Moreover, there is a history of obstruction and harassment of self-employed women's organisations in India, which adds to women's initial reluctance to participate in organised activities (Baruah 2004, 607, 623).

In an early study of paid domestic work in Bombay, Mehta (1960, 47 quoted in Rollins 1985, 44) argued that there are five major factors which hinder the organisation of domestic workers: 1) the heterogeneity of the group and the fact that they work separated from one another; 2) the personal and sometimes intimate relationship between employer and employee, which makes workers consider organising inappropriate; 3) the privileged positions of some workers which they would not want to threaten; 4) the perception of many workers of their position as temporary; and 5) the "apathy, ignorance" and pervasive depression among workers because of their low-paid and low-prestige jobs.

None of the workers I met in Jaipur were unionised and it seems that the challenges Mehta described fifty years ago are still largely valid. Even in states with a longer history of domestic workers' organisations in which state-level regulation now exists, such as Karnataka, most workers are unaware of these rules (Chigateri 2007). In Kolkata, unions have either not taken any interest in organisa-

tion of domestic workers or have given up after their initial attempts, as the dispersed workplaces have made collective action so difficult (Ray 2000b, 713). For live-in workers, isolation and lack of free time makes participation in organisational activities even more challenging (see Lindsay 2004, 72).

For all the difficulties, unionisation is critical for attempts to improve the domestic workers' situation. Among the potential gains, organisation of women in other informal sectors in India has provided women with a source of affiliation and identity beyond family and kinship structures, as well as enabling them to develop potential in fighting exploitation as a group, and to establish relationships of mutual respect with employers and other sections of society as a group (see Baruah 2004, 614).

The picture of workers' struggle and resistance is more complex than that of mere apathy, ignorance, or powerless resignation, and those who support domestic workers' efforts to organise should take into account their diverse potential both to resist employers and to unionise.

Chigateri (2007, 8) has noted the ambivalent relationship of domestic workers in Bangalore to the value of the work they do. While the workers in her study perceived themselves as indispensable to the employers, they were aware that their work was not recognised as 'work' by those very same employers. Most workers I met in Jaipur saw things in the same way: they were acutely aware of the stigma that surrounded their work and its devaluation by the society around them. Surindra, a fourteen-year old experienced worker explained why she thinks this is: "*What is so good in working at other people's houses? To wash their dirty utensils, to clean and mop their dust?*"

The presence of a large number of migrant workers in the domestic labour force in Jaipur may influence the workers' struggle to change the labour relationship in various ways. Do migrant workers make it more difficult for the local workers to negotiate standardised rules or to organise themselves? Are they a block against formalis-

ing workers' rights as has been suggested, for example, in the state of Kerala in Southern India³⁰⁰?

The answer is not straightforward, and these questions would merit further study. Among the urban population in India the strong segmentation into caste, ethnicity and religion-based networks may hinder entire groups from improving their situation, even if the networks have also provided opportunities for some individuals from these groups to move up the social ladder (Patel 2006, 28). In order to create a sense of a common goal, the workers would need to move beyond ethnicity-based networks. (See also Neetha 2003, Romero 2002). The employers sometimes use the ethnic competition as a strategy in wage negotiations, and by so doing may impede the emergence of a common workers' solidarity. The fact that so many workers in Jaipur are migrants may make it more difficult for workers to organise themselves.

The question of how both to promote domestic workers' rights in cities and to discourage rural-urban migration for domestic work was on the agenda of the organisations that I met in Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. The director of a Delhi-based organisation, Nirmala Niketan, which promotes domestic workers' rights, explained that there had been initial hesitancy about encouraging unionisation among workers, since it was felt that this would only attract more workers from other states. The National Domestic Workers Movement, which has its head-office in Mumbai and operates in most Indian states, has programmes in rural areas from which large numbers of girls migrate to cities, as do some other organisations. According to Sister Jeanne Devos, the National Coordinator of the Movement, their approach is not to prohibit them from leaving but to help them make a "solid choice" based on realistic information about the conditions.

Given the workers' low self-image and the reluctance of the middle

300 Personal communication with Dr. V.J. Varghese, Centre of Development Studies, Trivandrum.

class to assume the role of employers, it is logical that the National Domestic Workers Movement, the Karnataka Domestic Workers Movement and other organisations have the recognition of domestic work as employment as one of their central goals (Chigateri 2007, 9). Among the issues that these organisations have dealt with are unionisation, formation of cooperatives, credit and savings groups, vocational training, social activities, employment exchanges, support services, child care, providing congregation places, legal and general advise, and support in disputes with employers and within families (Gothoskar 2005, 1–2).

Jeanne Devos told me in an interview that the movement's long-term goals were to have domestic work recognised as a job like any other and to remove its stigma, to have the rights of domestic workers as workers recognised, to have their voices heard and to build leadership so that domestic workers can speak for themselves. She emphasised that organisation of domestic workers is a long process and that when they started their work about in Mumbai fifteen years ago no-one talked about domestic workers, as if they did not exist as group. Now they have become a noticeable group, to the extent that politicians have recognised their potential as voters. The language has changed so that average people increasingly speak about 'domestic workers', not about 'maid servants'. From her perspective the fact that employers now compare their workers' wages and ask how much they should pay them is a remarkable sign of change. Previously, they would have considered wages as pocket money.

In 2005 in Jaipur, a small organisation which previously worked for the rights of female construction workers started to organise domestic workers and provide them with services. The coordinator, Mewa Bharati, was one of the persons involved in the preparation of a survey on domestic workers in Jaipur with the Jaipur Institute of Development Studies and a Delhi-based women's rights NGO, 'Jagori'. The group has created contacts with similar organisations in other

states, including the National Domestic Workers Movement³⁰¹, but not with trade unions in Rajasthan, which until December 2010 had not taken an interest in the question. The Jaipur organisation was planning on becoming a union of domestic workers, with issues such as the basic working conditions, salaries and leave, as well as ration cards, widow pensions, retirement plans, the education of workers' children and work place harassment on their agenda. The organisation had begun to raise awareness among domestic workers in some poor neighbourhoods with mainly Rajasthani and Bengali workers, and local leaders were gradually emerging.

When I met them in 2007, the groups seemed to have a somewhat peculiar double-role, that of a union-to-be pushing for workers' rights and that of a kind of recruitment agency, a question which may create a conflict of interests. In 2007 they had placed only a few workers but employers were increasingly contacting them. Similarly, Nirmala Niketan, which had worked with domestic workers in Delhi for years, balanced its roles as a workers' rights organisation and a placement agency. While they criticised existing recruitment agencies and tried to act as a watchdog over them, they also placed workers in houses. It is difficult to say what direction the work of such a recently established organisation in Jaipur will take. At least, through the work of this organisation and others, the issue of domestic workers' rights was gradually emerging in Rajasthan. Concrete signs of this are the new organisation(s), consultations between officials and the civil society, the law initiative, the NGO campaigns working for children in domestic work, and surveys conducted on domestic workers, among others.

Baruah (2004, 609–610) has noted that the existing self-employed women's organisations in India, representing women workers from diverse sectors, have three main challenges: 1) financial sustain-

301 The National Domestic Workers Movement has an offshoot in Banswara district in Rajasthan, although so far with limited activities compared to many other states. http://ndwm.org/?page_id=105.

ability; 2) managerial and administrative sustainability; and 3) collaboration with the private sector and governmental infrastructure. While analysing the programs designed for domestic workers in India is beyond the scope of this study, it appears that the organisations of paid domestic workers may need to struggle with similar organisational challenges.

There are a considerable number of male workers in paid domestic work. Thus any organisation for women alone, risks their exclusion, a question these organisations need to take into account.

Regularisation and unionisation are obviously not the only thing which could potentially improve workers' conditions. One interesting process relates to the foreseeable boom in recruitment agencies in Jaipur and their impact on the market, whatever positive and negative effects this may entail. If such agencies were properly monitored by officials, the agencies could facilitate proper agreements on terms of employment. If such agencies are allowed to thrive uncontrolled and without legislation, their impact might even be negative for both sides.

In India mobile phones have proved an important means of communication among poor workers, for example, for rural labourers to share information on market rates (Tenhunen 2010) and for job seekers. Mobile phones may change the domestic labour market and also provide a tool through technology-based social entrepreneurship such as that provided by Babajobs.com³⁰², India's largest mobile and web portal for the informal sector. In the largest cities as Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore, thousands of job-seeking maids, *aiayhs* and cooks already look for employment through this and other net-based and telecom services. Despite complaints about the lack of service guarantee and the number of general complaints against the companies (Free Press Journal 2009), they could potentially increase workers' bargaining power and allow for pre-agreement of terms, besides making the labour relationships more visible. Whether or not this

302 <http://www.babajob.com>

will become a useful tool for domestic workers in Jaipur remains to be seen, as not a single worker in my data possessed a mobile phone.

Several Indian organisations such as the National Domestic Workers Movement and international organisations such as Save the Children (SC) have placed the question of child domestic workers on their agenda in India. For example, SC has made efforts to limit children's migration from Jharkand to Mumbai or from rural West Bengal to Kolkata by sensitising parents and local authorities on the problems of sending children to work in cities. In Kolkata, Mumbai and Jaipur, local organisations, funded by international organisations, had activities such as evening classes for domestic workers, public awareness raising, and surveys into child domestic work.³⁰³ Education centres specifically for children who had dropped out of regular school had been established in Kolkata and Mumbai.³⁰⁴ In Jaipur, SC funded another organisation, CUTS International (Consumer Unity & Trust Society), to carry out small-scale sensitisation programmes aimed at, for example, raising awareness on child domestic workers among school children and lobbying for legislation.

The ban on child domestic workers enacted by the Government of India in October 2006, has made it illegal to employ children below fourteen years as domestic workers. The legislation was extensively covered in the media. The articles centered around describing the conditions of child workers and on speculating on whether the ban can possibly be effective, most emphasising the educational needs of child workers and suggesting that the ban alone cannot significantly change the situation.

In May 2007, when I met my respondents again, all employers and several workers, both adults and children, had heard about the new legislation. Some of the workers heard about the law from their employers, some from TV. Of the employers in Jaipur one said she

303 http://www.crin.org/docs/save_uk_cl_ind.pdf

304 Personal communication with Manab Ray, Manager, Save the Children/UK West Bengal Office, 14.6.2004.

had reacted to the legislation. She had earlier employed a live-in boy of about ten, but had now taken in his place the elder brother, who had worked for her some years earlier. She mentioned, however, having been involved in placing the boy in a new employer house. One of the working girls told me that her employer had advised her not to bring anyone below 14 to substitute for her or to work with her in their house. These examples show that the question of child workers in Jaipur middle class homes has appeared on the agenda.

Based on my findings, close cooperation between general domestic workers' organisations and those working with/on child domestic work would be fruitful. As my study indicates, it would be important to take into account the children's work-life situation, the continuum between mothers and daughters, and to make a distinction between part-time cleaning work and live-in arrangements for those who are older than 14. Since the question of youth unemployment is also a concern in India it is useful to consider the group of children between fourteen to eighteen years as young workers who should have rights specifically intended for young workers. It might not be fruitful to ban them from all work, but rather to regulate and limit their working hours. Live-in work places young workers in a clearly more vulnerable situation than part-time work, and the prohibition of live-in work for all those under 18 should be considered.

If the proposal of the Chief Minister of Rajasthan (see Chapter 1) to regulate domestic work is to be accepted, several possible scenarios arise. Given the general failure to enforce labour legislation in India, one might assume that there would be no immediate significant changes. Yet, as we have seen, the emerging agenda towards regulation was reflected in both employer and worker perceptions in my data, and there is no halting the trend. The recent successful campaigning and lobbying, especially in southern states of India, has shown that organising is enabling domestic workers to make collective demands to the governments of these states. That domestic workers too have rights is something that employers have to face.

9.3 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored the ways workers resist exploitative terms of employment and demeaning practices in Jaipur. As we have seen earlier, employers largely dictate the terms of employment. But as Julkunen (2008, 30) reminds us, even workers in a highly marginalised space aim to control their work and define their ways of working. If there is no official space for doing so, their efforts emerge as informal organisation and subtle means of resistance, 'the weapons of the weak' (Scott 1985).

In Jaipur direct resistance was expressed through threats to quit, as well as talking back and refusal of the employers' efforts to extract more labour through extra work. As a more subtle form of resistance, several workers refused tea offered to them in separate cups. The micro-politics of whether and how tea is served illustrates well the limited negotiation space of workers. Employers who portrayed themselves as 'human', highlighted the aspect of offering tea to workers as a sign of a good employer.

There are notable differences among employers. The ones most directly opposed to shift towards more contractual relationships are typically those employing live-in workers. By contrast, employers of part-time workers are more willing to recognise the need for regularisation and consider some workers' claims as legitimate, even if they are unwilling to see themselves as responsible for improving working conditions.

The workers' potential to confront employers depends considerably on their position on the continuum of vulnerability, and was related to work experience, age, life stage, and their work arrangement (live-out or live-in). Most experienced workers, whose income did not depend on a single employer and who were able to share information on wages with others, were best positioned to confront employers. Least able to do this were the most vulnerable, isolated live-in child workers. Even if most forms of resistance are well within the

accepted limits, the employers directly or indirectly resist the efforts to transform the relationship to a more contractual one.

If there are to be significant changes in the position of domestic workers in India in the coming years, it will be up to the part-time maids to lead the struggle and push them through. They are much better positioned than live-in workers to participate in joint activities, to organise, and to stand up to the employers. Obviously effective national and state-level legislation on both adult and child work as well as unionisation would be necessary steps towards improvements in the working conditions. Such processes are currently emerging both in Rajasthan and others parts of India, encouraged by international developments towards establishing domestic workers' rights. Women in India are already politically active on all levels, in spite of their low official representation, and representatives of domestic workers are likely to become get increasingly engaged in political processes. My study shows that even non-unionised workers do not merely accept their fate in apathy or ignorance. They do fight back, even if they are sceptical of their strength and potential to do so.

10 CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined labour relations between employers and domestic workers in Jaipur, the state of Rajasthan in north-west India. My first main research question was how labour relationships between domestic workers and employers are formed in Jaipur. Of the different workers toiling in Indian middle class homes today, I have focused on two different worker-employer relationships: those between employers and part-time female maids, and those between employers and live-in workers, both male and female. My second main research question was the study of female domestic workers' work-life trajectories. Here my particular focus was on the generational dynamics between mothers and daughters and on children's work.

My research material consists of seventy-one interviews and ethnographically oriented field work in Jaipur carried out over a total of six months in 2004–07. As well as providing a summary of my main findings, this concluding chapter discusses the theoretical and methodological implications of this study; the relevance of my results for policy debates, and areas requiring further research.

10.1 Commodified labour relations and persisting traditions

How are labour relations between domestic workers and employers formed in Jaipur today? How are they affected by the trends towards

commodification and processes to regulate working conditions? My results showed that while domestic labour relations have increasingly shifted from patron-client service relations towards market-like relationships, this has not obliterated the patron-client-like characteristics of the service relationships. Current employer-employee relations maintain elements from the traditional system, although they are increasingly organised on market principles. This hybrid relationship allows the employers to exploit both systems and to continue to deny their role as employers with stipulated responsibilities towards workers.

A full complement of domestic workers, for those who could afford it, would be a maid for cleaning and dish-washing, a gardener to water plants, a washerwoman (or man) to pick up dirty laundry, a driver to take people to the market, and a sweeper to take out the garbage and clean the toilet. My descriptions of the daily visitors to an upper middle class home in Jaipur have illustrated the segmentation and outsourcing of middle class domestic tasks along market principles. I have analysed how the relations between the employers and workers in Jaipur appear during the transition from service to market relationship. Chapter 4 showed that the part-time market relationships largely followed a market logic, employers purchasing services in a highly segmented market from a wide range of workers, each performing a specific task such as cleaning or washing clothes. The presence of workers in middle class homes not only caters to their articulated domestic requirements but, as a clear status marker, also contributes to reproducing the class distinction between the poor and the middle class, and, perhaps even more importantly, between upper and lower middle classes.

My findings indicate a trend towards more part-time work and fewer live-in arrangements in Jaipur. Similar findings have been reported from other Indian cities (Neetha 2003, Dickey 2000a; Ray and Qayum 2009). However, my study shows that the live-in arrangement retains an important role. There is, however, a difference

between earlier and contemporary live-in workers in Jaipur, in that today's live-in arrangements are more short-lived and increasingly a contract between strangers, not between families.

My initial assumption that the gender division of labour within middle class homes has remained virtually intact despite the increase in women's wage work proved correct. Middle class women were almost entirely responsible for domestic management, with the exception that some younger husbands participated in child care. However, my other assumption that women's increased labour market participation would largely explain the increased use of domestic workers proved more difficult to substantiate, as it was a complicated issue. All middle class working women employed at least two domestic workers, but working women did not necessarily employ more than non-working women and their families. In fact, both groups portrayed themselves as equally dependent on workers, as reflected, for example, in their reluctance to provide leave for the workers.

Furthermore, women who go out to work only employ part-time workers, although it might be expected that they would need live-in workers most. Why is this so? Unlike middle class women in Mumbai (Fernandes 2006), few employers in Jaipur rejected the live-in arrangement for reasons of privacy. More significant for the decrease of live-in work were safety concerns. Employers prefer not to have a worker in their house while they are out at work. Consequently, not a single dual-earning couple in my data employed a live-in worker, in spite of the wives' indisputable challenges in combining wage work and housework.

Employers can be categorised according to the utilitarian or symbolic value of the workers. My data suggests a difference in the treatment, practices and attitudes between working women and housewives, and between those who employ part-time and live-in workers. Working women who employ a maid, a washerwoman (or man) and a sweeper do this first and foremost to free themselves from some of the time-consuming domestic tasks which are difficult to combine

with full-time wage work. But the reasons for hiring workers were never purely utilitarian, as symbolic reasons involving purity considerations and class status were also important to wage working women. This was shown, for example, in their almost universal practice of outsourcing the non-demanding and rapid task of taking out the garbage, which all employers allocated to sweepers.

Employing live-in workers, on the other hand, had a considerable symbolic value related to the ability to have a servant, a '24-hour worker', always at hand. By contrast with the multitude of in-house servants that once worked in the respondents' childhood homes, however, live-in workers today were usually 'all-in-one', or at most worked as part of a pair. These arrangements have maintained patron-client-like elements, such as the blurring of working time and leisure time, the treatment of workers as childlike or as 'nonpersons', and the perception held by employers that they 'owned' the workers. Unsurprisingly, those who employ live-in workers are those who lean most heavily on maternalist practices and use of derogatory names, underlining the workers' subservience and the perception of them as childlike. They reproduce the myth about mutually embracing live-in relations, but the reality is different. For instance, the employers knew astonishingly little of their 24-hour workers, in some cases not even their names.

In any case, the division of employers into those who employ part-time and those who employ live-in workers is a somewhat strained one, since it is common for the same employer to have both part-time and live-in workers, or alternate between the two depending on their own stage of life.

As we have seen, rather than the mistress-servant relations based on maternalist practices being replaced, they are reproduced and retained, creating a peculiar merge of traditional and market-like practices. While the commodity logic has largely penetrated the part-time market, employers try to maintain maternalist practices in order to control the labour process. Thus maternalism is strongly embedded

within the capitalist logic of increasingly contractual domestic labour relationships. In this, my findings are in line with Romero's (2002, 172), in that "the interpersonalist relationship is not a premodern feudalistic remnant but a social relationship existing within a capitalist economy". While the institution of domestic service has been re-emerging in recent decades in Western countries with the appearance of a newly available migrant labour force, the institution never ceased to exist in India. There paid domestic work is neither traditional nor modern, but both, showing the formidable strength of this institution through time.

Class anxieties

My findings confirm previous arguments about the overarching importance of class in domestic labour relations in India (Dickey 2000a; Tolen 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009). Employment of live-in workers and outsourcing of work to part-time workers was a clear class marker between the poor and the middle classes as well as between upper middle and lower middle classes. Chapter 5 showed that employers expressed concern about class status, reflected, for example, in nervous comments about how the working class imitates middle class consumption patterns. Bengali women, more so than their Rajasthanian counterparts, were more determined in their aspirations for better living standards and potential upward mobility for their children through education. However, paid domestic work was neither a bridge occupation nor a springboard to the middle class. If the rise to middle class was beyond the imagination of the workers, the employers' uneasiness begs the question, how fragile is the class system?

The employers' discomfort reflects two distinct class behaviours. The older wealthy families, the upper middle class, aim to make themselves distinct from both the poor and the lower middle class in order to maintain their class position. However, families that have recently acquired a middle class status wish to distinguish themselves mainly from the poor or those acquiring a lower middle class status.

These differences demonstrate the importance of understanding differences within the Indian middle classes, as previously showed by Säävälä (2010) and Derné (2008).

Employers were also concerned about having workers in the intimate space of home. There was a great deal of rhetoric about workers' untrustworthiness, and the fear of potential servant crime was tangible. The employers' dependency on workers made them seek strategies to manage fear and build trust. These included a requirement for recommendations from previous employers before employing someone, keeping valuables in a safe place, testing workers by exposing them to temptations and not employing live-in workers in dual-earning households. This atmosphere of mistrust has its consequences and may lead to a withering away of the already weakening "sense of belonging", one that many employers missed. The situation is unlikely to be improved by the increasing tendency to gate wealthy residential areas in Jaipur.

Safety concerns also partly explain why employers prefer young children as live-in workers, a problem that has merited little attention in previous studies. Ray and Qayum (2009) are among the few to discuss the existence of children in the work force, albeit briefly, but others, for instance, Dickey (2000a) and Froystad (2003) ignore the question of age in their otherwise full analyses. In Jaipur, employers perceived children as easier to control and train as required, and less likely to steal or commit other crime. Employers of live-in workers saw employment of children as a parental decision, not a moral dilemma for themselves. In part-time work, workers' age and life-stage is not an important concern. While several part-time employers perceived hiring children negatively, many still employed young girls, at least as a substitute for their mothers.

The continuum of vulnerability

Commodification of labour relations does not automatically lead to labour relations based on mutual agreements and contracts. On

the contrary, Chapter 6 showed that the lack of regulation facilitates varied terms of employment. Domestic workers' conditions are very heterogeneous. I decided to analyse them as a continuum of vulnerability, with the most vulnerable at one end and the least vulnerable at the other.

Workers are recruited through the grapevine, and no employer had used the recruitment agencies so common in Delhi and other larger cities. Despite the ideal of stable employer-worker relationships, domestic labour relations are in a process of continuous change, illustrating the infiltration of a commodified supply and demand pattern into the realm of paid domestic work. In spite of the highly individualistic employment practices, maids in Jaipur have managed to establish some common standards related to their terms of employment. Even if these informal standards are frequently bypassed, they constitute a major step ahead from fully individualistic terms of employment. Thus maids' wages are generally very low but relatively standardised. Some tensions exist between the Rajasthani and the migrant Bengali workers, who are easily blamed for stealing the local jobs and pushing down the wage level, although I found similar wage levels among both groups. For most employers, the typical combination of a maid, a sweeper and washerwoman or man is easily affordable, while salaries of cooks and drivers are out of reach of the average middle class.

Interestingly, the Bengali workers had managed to push for a regular monthly leave whereas the Rajasthanis had no such agreement. Employers may use the ethnic divisions and differences to their advantage, and even play the two groups off against one another by claiming that some worker group demands lower wages or less leave.

Employers were not particularly keen on household appliances, and even when they existed they often remained unused as "*labour is so cheap*". Human workers seemed to have more status and pragmatic value than machines.

My study shows that on the continuum of vulnerability the gener-

ic live-in workers, particularly children and unmarried young women who have no close family in Jaipur, are among the most vulnerable and prone to diverse forms of exploitation and violation of their rights. At the other end of the continuum are part-time workers who live in their own homes, especially the more experienced adult married workers who work for several houses, and who do not, therefore, depend on one single employer. Since my focus has been on part-time maids and live-in workers, my data does not lend itself to situating all occupational groups on this continuum. Nevertheless, we may argue that adult, male workers in the most valued occupations such as cook or driver are better positioned in the continuum than most female workers. Their situation improves further if they happen to be of high caste and of suitable ethnic background.

Stratified labour markets

In Chapter 7, I showed that even if the labour relationships operate in the realm of informal markets, they are well structured and highly stratified. The answer to the question, 'who works for whom', is far from arbitrary or co-incidental. Consequently, the seemingly innocent employer notion of "*how difficult it is to find a good worker these days*" conceals the intersectional hierarchical dimensions that stratify the market. These hierarchies partly explain the segmentation of domestic work and its' division among several workers.

Even if class defined each and every relationship, my findings support Froystad's (2003) notion that caste is also reproduced through everyday master-servant relations. I agree with Bêteille (1997, 174–176) that different status criteria, different symbols of distinction and different strategies of exclusion do not fit into one single, unified hierarchical design, but continue to co-exist. In Jaipur, caste continues to stratify domestic work, but its importance varies depending on the nature of the task and the employers' own caste background. Moreover, migration has a considerable impact on caste relations, manifested in the presence of the Brahmin maids from West Bengal.

My results illustrate the increased flexibility of caste relations. While some employers, Brahmins in particular, were particular about having a high-caste cook, caste concerns were not decisive for others. Yet, the basic dividing line between the *dalits* (SCs) and other castes is persistent: nearly all employers explicitly stated that they would not employ “an SC” to work inside their house, only as sweepers who are usually not allowed to enter it. In this my data does not give support to Deliége’s (2002) arguments about the disappearance of the practices of untouchability.

Negative stereotypes about particular ethnic groups and religions were rife, reflecting the prevailing ethnic hierarchies. Notably, the political correctness that characterised discussions on caste was absent regarding overt ethnic and religious discrimination. Most Hindu and Sikh employers said they would not employ a Muslim, and only two of them had ever employed a Muslim maid during their years as employers. Employers portrayed all poor workers, but especially certain ethnic groups, as genetically inferior and in need of being civilised. Similar results have been reported by Cheng (2006).

The penetration of market logic into the domestic labour market makes employers increasingly look for exactly the right combination of attributes in a new worker. Hierarchies of caste and ethnicity intersect with gender and age, and are played out in the recruitment preferences, especially in recruitment of live-in workers. Gendered labour divisions are being renegotiated but not in isolation from other hierarchies. We have seen how employers prefer unmarried male live-in workers, such as high-caste male cooks, but female maids, to mention a couple of examples. One gendered recruitment pattern was clear in every case, namely that while all employers of live-in workers preferred male workers, families with unmarried daughters would not employ a male worker because of fears for their daughters’ safety.

10.2 The precarious trajectories of female workers

My second main research question concerned female workers' life trajectories. The study demonstrates that these are closely related to other spheres and stages of the female life course, such as marriage and maternity. Moreover, I argue that there is an implicit intergenerational contract between daughters and parents, manifested in the transmission of paid domestic work from mothers to daughters.

Existing literature pays little attention to age, generation and life stage, and one of my main contributions is to demonstrate the interplay of wage work with other aspects of women's lives. In Chapter 8 I showed that female life stages, especially the pivotal role of marriage, largely determine the participation of girls and women in paid domestic work. The two-shift nature and close location of work facilitates the combination of employment and child care or other domestic responsibilities. It also allows for parental surveillance of their unmarried working daughters, whose reputation is a major concern for the parents. Work is transferred within the family from mothers to daughters, whose entry into paid work leads to gradual dropping out of school. Work is also passed on from older to younger sisters, underlining the importance of the intra-familial nucleus of female kin. For employers, these practices ensure a continuous reproduction of the labour force.

It is crucial to understand the importance of the mother-daughter bond for women's work-life trajectories. Although I did not initially look for workers from different generations in the same family, my decision to interview both daughters and mothers turned out to be a fortunate one. There is an implicit intergenerational contract in working class families between daughters and their parents regarding the girls' economic support to the family income provision. Although the contract benefits the whole family, mothers and daughters are left to carry out the deal, which is manifested in a mother to daughter transmission of work. Previously, the significance of this contract for poor

families and for the girls has not been recognised or well analysed. The contract is different in character from the explicit intergenerational contract between sons and parents regarding support for the latter in their old age. (See Croll 2006; Das 1979).

In Jaipur, female domestic workers, especially girls, are typically the main income providers in their destitute families. Paradoxically, although the girls often have the highest income in their families, they worried about their fathers' negative reaction to their employment. The girls' income went largely to family expenses and to saving for their own dowry. My study reiterates earlier notions on the detrimental effects of the dowry (Kapadia 1995; Lindberg 2001). Not only the mothers, but also daughters themselves, spend a considerable part of their income on dowry payments. This demonstrates that even should the ideal that the daughter ultimately benefits from a better standard of living in the in-law family be fulfilled, which it rarely is, the necessity to save for the dowry makes girls in poor families drop out of school and instead enter into wage work. This effectively contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

While mothers have an important role in the entry of daughters into wage work, girls were not passive in these decisions. Their main motive to drop out of school and commit more time to work was economic, but they were also inspired by their peers and siblings who worked. However, it is very difficult to separate the girls' agency totally from that of their mothers in regard the question of entry into wage work. Inevitably, early entry into wage work and dropping out of school severely limits the girls' future options. In general, children who are located in employers' homes as live-in workers have much less opportunity to influence their position.

10.3 Towards contractual labour relations?

In Jaipur, domestic workers try to push terms of employment such as wages and amount of leave onto the agenda, whereas employers hold to notions about humanity and workings conditions mainly as an individual, moral choice. One key issue in the way of improved working conditions is the employers' systematic denial of their role as employers and their reluctance to perceive the workers as employees. This is where the struggle over the labour process is primarily situated. Most employers maintained a morally pious stance regarding their role towards the workers. Many presented themselves as good employers who treat workers respectfully, whilst claiming that other employers were exploitative and inconsiderate, failing to see their workers as 'human beings'.

Usually the workers' resistance is of a subtle nature, if crucial for their self-esteem. To harness these everyday forms of resistance – ranging from refusing to drink tea in a separate cup to threatening to quit a job – into more collective action requires a collective awareness among workers that they are employees with rights and common goals. In Ray and Qayum's (2009) study in Kolkata, domestic workers in large apartment buildings seemed to have more potential to cooperate than workers in single- houses. In Jaipur it remains to be seen whether the rapid increase of apartment buildings will have an impact on workers' organisation or bargaining power.

The combination of the societal stigma attached to paid domestic work and husbands' negative approach to women's labour market participation may present a considerable obstacle on the way to collective action for workers' rights. In order to improve their rights, the workers must professionalise and, to start with, have an identity as worker. On a policy level, those who aim to organise female domestic workers should understand the interplay of these pressures. For male workers, performing work that does not fit the idea of hegemonic masculinity may make any effort for their collective action difficult,

a question which to my understanding has not so far received much attention given the female-centredness of the sector.

Workers differ considerably in their potential to fight for their rights. Their emerging efforts to push for improved terms of employment have not gone unnoticed by the employers, who resist them in various ways. A major hindrance to improving working conditions in Indian homes is, as noted above, related to the employers' reluctance to recognise themselves as employers. Maternalist practices remain an essential cornerstone of labour relations, notwithstanding part-time workers' attempts to reject them.

Employers' use of the terms 'human treatment' and 'human beings' illustrates their attitude, that workers' rights and terms of employment are an individual choice based on morality, rather than something that should be agreed by contract. In Jaipur, collective efforts to push for domestic work regulations have recently emerged within the civil society. The state is not unaware of successful demands for state level regulation in other states of India. Even if the State of Rajasthan does establish the domestic workers' bill which is under discussion at the time of the writing, it is difficult to estimate its potential impact. This regulation would be the minimum requirement for any effort to seriously improve domestic workers' situation, a long way from actually implementing workers' rights. Comparing the impact of existing legislation on domestic workers' rights in other states should be an important research area in the coming years.

10.4 Significance of the study

On a theoretical level, I have contributed to the discussion on commodification versus traditional labour arrangements in paid domestic work in India. In addition, I have contributed to the debates on existing hierarchies in India, on the caste-class nexus, and on middle class

domesticities. My notion of continuum of vulnerability has allowed for an analysis of the variety of arrangements in paid domestic work. Another central contribution relates to bringing age and life-course into the gendered analysis of paid domestic work. I have showed how age and life-stage affect recruitment, working conditions, and workers' work-life trajectories. I have indicated the existence of an implicit intergenerational contract between parents and children, especially mothers and the daughters, and shown how paid domestic work is transmitted within the family. Finally, through studying female life courses in the context of wage work, the notion of precarious girlhood relates to discussions on children's work and its potential impact on the girls' lives.

Methodologically, my study has taken into account the voices and perspectives of the two sides of the labour relation, two parties in opposing positions. I consider this a major strength of this study. Here it is in line with the studies of Dickey (2000a); Ray and Qayum (2009); and Tolen (2000), but differs from Raghuram (1999); Neetha (2002); and Froystad (2003), who focused mainly on either workers or employers. In some way this has also limited my data, since concentrating on only employers or workers would have enabled me to present a more detailed exploration of one of these groups. In retrospect, my decision not to interview employers and workers from the same locations was proved right. In my understanding, it meant that both sides were able to talk about the other relatively freely. I hope that reasonable geographical coverage of different neighbourhoods, together with careful comparison with other studies, has allowed my generalisations on terms of employment and working conditions.

Instead of speaking too generally about 'domestic workers', a drawback in several previous studies, my choice was to focus on two groups – part-time maids and generic live-in workers – and be explicit about which group I referred to. This has obviously meant leaving out other groups, as well as focusing largely on female workers.

I hope that by sharing my findings not only with the scientific

community but also widely with workers' rights and children's organisations in India and elsewhere, this book will contribute to the ongoing discussions on domestic workers' rights in South Asia. Any efforts to improve working conditions in this sector should be based on an understanding of the perspectives of both sides of the labour relation, and take into account the workers' lives as a whole. Policy aimed at improving the situation of domestic workers needs to recognise the intergenerational contracts in poor families, and especially the mother-daughter linkages, which appear to be more relevant than hitherto acknowledged. Another pertinent question for those working in the fields of human rights, gender policies, and child labour, is to focus on the detrimental short-term and long-term impact of the dowry on individuals and their families. For those concerned with children's work and its implications, I find it important to stress the diversity among, and the different vulnerabilities of, child workers. Implementation of the Indian legislation which prohibits employment of those below fourteen years old is clearly important. However, for those who are above fourteen, a distinction should be made between live-out and live-in workers.

10.5 Emerging questions and future research

During this research, it has become evident that there are both similarities and differences between the Bengali and Rajasthani workers. Since my emphasis was on worker-employer relationships, I did not focus on the migration processes or the migrants' social networks. Both issues are reasonably well documented in Delhi (Neetha 2003; Raghuram 1999), but they deserve further exploration in other cities as well as in the context of Jaipur where the existence of a large Bangladeshi migrant community has created some tensions.

Areas worth further study include the implementation of state-

level regulation on domestic work, and the impact of fear of crime on these relations. Since paid domestic work has such tremendous scope in India, more basic research is needed on those occupational groups not covered in detail in this study such as washerwomen/men, and drivers. With the notable exception of Raghuram's study on sweepers in Delhi, the relationships such different groups have with their employers and their specific challenges should be better understood. In fact, the existence of these diverse groups is one of the important factors inhibiting the organisation of workers and establishment of their rights. It would also be interesting to study the intergenerational economic situation of Bengali (or other) migrants who have already been in Jaipur for a long time: for example, whether there is an educational impact or whether the intergenerational gendered transmission of work continues. While hoping that other researchers will pick up on some of these questions, I personally hope to be able to follow the work-life trajectories of some of the girls and women whom I met in Jaipur in order to get a picture of long-term patterns and possible transformations.

When presenting parts of this study at academic conferences, people from different countries have noted that the caste system makes domestic labour relations in India more exploitative than elsewhere. Some Indians, on the other hand, have argued that domestic labour relations in Rajasthan are more exploitative than elsewhere in India. I disagree with these claims. While caste adds special ingredients to other existing interrelated hierarchies, the relationships between employers and workers are not necessarily so different from those in other countries. In fact, when reading accounts from other countries, I have often pondered upon how similar, sometimes with quasi-identical citations, the relationships appear in as diverse contexts as Hong Kong, India, Italy or the United States. I therefore find Rhacel Parreñas (2010) notion of a continued culture of maternalism around the globe relevant and timely.

Comparing the citizenship of migrant domestic workers in Den-

mark, the United Arab Emirates and the United States, Parreñas showed that in these diverse countries domestic work is unprotected by labour laws and foreign domestic workers are also legally constructed as “one of the family”, rather than conceived of as a worker, which is reminiscent of the employers’ denial of their employer position in Jaipur. She argues that similar policies on foreign domestic workers across welfare regimes suggest that their experiences could be an instructive springboard to the continued culture of maternalism around the globe. In addition, I would emphasise that in southern countries, where the majority of the world’s population live, domestic service has continued all along, but with contextualised analysis we may be able to gradually understand the scale and persistence of these domestic practices.

Practices within paid domestic work seem to travel across the world, sometimes in surprising directions. For example, some of the practices that have prevailed in India and other parts of the global south since colonial times and even long before, such as those related to body politics and hygiene, seem to be extending to the countries of the northern hemisphere. Increasing labour migration is not the only reason for the spread, or should we say return, of more exploitative practices across the globe, but it is a question that definitely merits further exploration. This dissertation is my contribution to discussions on labour relations, and thus to workers and their rights. Through this study I hope to stimulate debate on who performs ‘the work that is never done’ and under what conditions.

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Appendix 1. Map of India



Appendix 2. List of persons interviewed and their employer/worker status

Employers	Sex	Caste and/or religion	Employment status	Nr of part-time workers	Nr of live-in workers
E1 Shanti	F	Brahmin Hindu	Wage work	4	nil
E2 Shuliba	F	Rajput Hindu	Housewife	3	nil
E3 Arti	M	Brahmin Hindu	Retired	1	2
E4 Hari	M	Brahmin Hindu	Wage work	1	2
E5 Harvendra	F	Sikh	Housewife	2	nil
E6 Mala	F	Rajput Hindu	Housewife	3	nil
E7 Kripa	F	Brahmin Hindu	Housewife	5	nil
E8 Susheela	F	Arya Samaj	Wage work	3	nil
E9 Malti	F	Brahmin Hindu	Wage work (home-based business)	2	1
E10 Sheha	F	Brahmin Hindu	Wage work (home-based)	1	1
E11 Sujata	F	Rajput Hindu	Wage work (home-based business)	2	1
E12 Randeep	F	Sikh	Housewife	3	nil
E13 Gauri	F	unknown, Hindu	Housewife	4	nil
E14 Rajni	F	Sikh	Housewife	4	nil
E 15 Meetu	F	Brahmin Hindu	Wage work (home-based business)	2	2
E 16 Prema	F	Brahmin Hindu	Housewife	1	1
E 17 Swati	F	Brahmin Hindu	Housewife	3	nil

Workers	Sex	Caste and/or religion	Task	Place of origin	Nr of houses
W1 Surindra	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	3
W2 Namita	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	1
W3 Punam	F	Sikh	Maid + ex live-in worker	Jaipur	4
W4 Gurmeet	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	3
W5 Radha	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	2
W6 Kamala	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	2
W7 Lali	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	4
W8 Aasdeep	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	3
W9 Sukhmeet	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	Home-based work
W10 Preet	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	4
W11 Jagdeep	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	3
W12 Achint	F	Sikh	Maid	Jaipur	3
W13 Shivali	F	Brahmin Hindu	Maid + ex live-in worker	West-Bengal	2
W14 Sandhya	F	Brahmin Hindu	Maid + ex live-in worker	West-Bengal	3
W15 Meera	F	Brahmin Hindu	Maid + ex live-in worker	West-Bengal	3
W16 Deepti	F	Brahmin Hindu	Maid + ex live-in worker	West-Bengal	4
W17 Kajal	F	Brahmin Hindu	Maid + ex live-in worker	West-Bengal	3
W18 Mahi	F	Sikh	Maid	West-Bengal	1
W19 Vibha	F	Brahmin Hindu	Maid	West-Bengal	4
W20 Rekha	F	Low-caste Hindu	Ex live-in worker	Bihar	1 (live-in)
W21 Rani	F	Low-caste Hindu	Ex live-in worker	Bihar	1 (live-in)

Appendix 3. Interviews with organisations and officials

- Mewa Bharati and Pushpa Sharma, The Rajasthan Mahila Kaamgaar Union, Jaipur, 5.5.2007
- Subhash Bhatnagar, Subhash Bhatnagar, Nirmala Niketan, Delhi, 22.5.2004,
- Dharmendra Chatturvedi and Ms. Smriti, Coordinators, 'Hum Bhi Bacche Hain' -project, CUTS, Jaipur, 27.2.2006
- Subir Dey, General Secretary and Pratibha Vaidya, Project Coordinator, Paschim Banga Yuba Kalyan Manch, Kolkata, 22.6.2004
- Jeanne Devos, National Coordinator, Anjali Shukla, Coordinator, National Domestic Workers Movement, Mumbai, 31.5.2004
- Abha and Prabhakar Goswami, Founders, I-India, Jaipur, 2.7.2004
- Dipanwita Ghosh, Right Track, Kolkata, 23.6.2004
- Alka Kala, Chief Secretary, Women Empowerment & Welfare, Govt. of Rajasthan, Jaipur, 15.5.2007
- Mukesh Lath, Programme Manager, Save the Children/Finland, Jaipur, 22.5.2007
- Bijli Malli, Director, IPER, Kolkata, 22.6.2004
- Dr. Lakshmi Rana, Project Manager, Save the Children/UK, New Delhi, 20.5.2004
- Manab Ray, Programme Coordinator, Save the Children/UK, Kolkata, 14. and 18.6.2004
- Pradnya Sawargaonkar, Project Coordinator, Save the Children/UK, Mumbai, 3.6.2004
- Neetu Shahi, Coordinator, Save the Children/UK, Jaipur, 24.2.2006
- Jivraj Singh, Project Director, National Child Labour Project, Labour Department, Govt. of Rajasthan, Jaipur, 15.2.2006
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