

Marriage, Work and Education among Domestic Workers in Kolkata

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This paper analyses the findings of a research project undertaken by the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University on questions of marriage and related issues in the context of paid domestic work among the working women from two squatter colonies in Kolkata. The respondents are seen to be caught between the imperatives of early marriage and girlhood employment, but they insist upon the value of education for their daughters. Many of them have experienced and suffered early marriage and childbirth and are vehement in their rejection of such a trajectory for their daughters, even though not all of them are able to carry through such decisions. Parents from urban working-class neighbourhoods are not obsessed with sexual chastity of their daughters; they accept courtships and elopements, sometimes hailing the latter with some relief. What these mothers share with their middle class counterparts is an interest in tremendous investment in their children's education, which is in both cases accompanied by great expectations for the future.

In south Asia, marriage patterns hold the key to the gendering of the workforce. So far we have three significant insights into this process. We know that early capitalist industry factorised adult men rather than, as in many other parts of the world, women and children. The "factory girl" was not a social possibility given early marriage and childbearing customs.¹ We also know that, as a result, the woman worker is typically a married mother. The family's needs rather than the imperatives of the market determine women's labour choices and decisions.² Uniquely, in south Asia, women's labour market participation peaks late and then plateaus, signalling that women enter the labour market after marriage and childbearing and that once they enter, they tend to remain.³ Some change was noted in India in the 1970s, when there was an increase in unmarried women in the workforce but this was a very limited phenomenon.⁴ Much greater change has been noticed in Bangladesh, where the garment industry is credited with having significantly pushed up the age of marriage.⁵ In India, despite periodic shifts and changes, the low age of marriage persists and women's share now hovers at about 5% of the formal and about a quarter of the informal employment in the country.⁶ Feminist researchers argue that the two, age of marriage and women's employment, are linked, though there is considerable disagreement regarding the causal relationships underlying this linkage. This paper cannot resolve such debates, which have to be considered in their wider dimensions. It seeks rather to show how this relationship plays out in the sector of paid domestic work.

In the domestic work sector, despite the persistence of early marriage, young girls work before marriage. This is possible by pushing down the age of entry into the labour market to even as low as five years. This may be possible because domestic work is not only seen as unskilled but, in a kind of paradoxical way, as a skill inherent in femininity. The gender ideology which underlies early marriage and young girls' early induction into housework (at home) also enables and justifies their early induction into paid domestic work. Very young girls may work for nothing more than bed, board and a pittance.⁷ It follows that, in the paid domestic work sector, the pattern of women's workforce follows not the usual south Asian pattern, but a rather different trajectory – of a period of employment followed by withdrawal for marriage and childbirth and then re-entry into employment. Notably, however, the two phases of employment constitute, typically, two different segments within the sector young girls tend to work as full-time residential workers

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while married mothers tend to work part-time in one or more jobs. That this form of employment is home-based (albeit in homes other than one's own) and reinforces values of control, supervision, docility and domesticity, render it suitable for women's pre-marital employment. Thus, paid domestic work is, perhaps uniquely, in fit with the Indian marriage system and this may explain in part its growing significance as an avenue of employment for poor urban women.

Given the overwhelming importance of marriage and associated feminine domesticity in circumscribing lives and livelihoods of women, the paper explores a number of issues related to practices of marriage. The question of early marriage is, for instance, linked to the forms and modes of marriages. Elopements by young school-going girls seem to be an accepted and common form of marriage which often spares parents from payment of dowry. This may mean less preoccupation with saving for dowry, enabling domestic workers to spend on children's education. Further, even in cases of marriages involving dowry, exorbitant or non-negotiable dowry payments do not seem to be the order of the day. Contrarily, steady earnings from domestic service may also create new claims and new responsibilities towards conjugal families of married daughters.

In the case of young girls, the fit between work and marriage may potentially be disrupted by a third factor – education. There can be no doubt that there is a growing demand for education among the urban poor, for girls as well as boys. How is this compatible with early marriage and early employment for girls? This paper will show a dissonance between two kinds of evidence. On the one hand, there appears to be a strong persistence of early marriage and intergenerational employment in domestic work; on the other, a stated preference for daughters to be educated, to not be employed as domestic workers and to not marry young. It may well be that such parental preferences will result in change and that a few years down the road, we will see the emergence of girlhood among the urban poor, circumscribed neither by early marriage nor by child labour. There are, however, strong structural pulls against change the poor quality of state education disenchant the children; the lack of social security means that the slightest of misfortunes drag the young out of school and into unskilled employment; and, the lack of opportunities of educated employment is a major disincentive for many. Education for daughters is emerging as a significant preference among the urban poor, but education is more often disrupted by early marriage and employment rather than successfully deferring such options. The interplay of marriage, employment and education continues to strongly affect the configuration of women's life cycles the rigidities of residential and the flexibilities of part-time domestic work adapt well to these configurations, contributing to combined processes of juvenilisation and feminisation of domestic work in Indian cities.

The paper is drawn from a research project undertaken by the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, in 2006-09. The project was conceived in the context of the growing importance of domestic work as a source of employment for poor

urban women. The expansion in this area of employment has attracted the attention of policymakers and researchers in recent years. In West Bengal, the processes of feminisation and juvenilisation mentioned above have been higher than the all-India average and especially noticeable. The project addressed a number of questions of contemporary interest, such as new trends in gender patterns in migration, new legislation, the importance of social security, problems of political organisation and so on. This paper focuses narrowly on questions of marriage and related issues in the context of paid domestic work but below we discuss in brief the design and some of the general methodological concerns of the project.

Research and Methodology

The research was undertaken in two "colonies" as squatter settlements are sometimes called and was conducted in three stages. Netaji Nagar and Babubagan Railway Colonies are situated in south Kolkata, contiguous to Jadavpur University, alongside the suburban railway tracks and a few hundred yards from the new shining South City housing and mall complex. First, we conducted a census of the 242 households in the two settlements to gather basic information about the composition of the household and their economic condition. Women domestic workers proved to be nearly 90% of the adult female population, numbering 164. At the second stage, fieldworkers spoke to the women domestic workers at some length. They recorded the interviews, which were kept open-ended. In cases where the respondents refused to allow the recording machine, the fieldworkers took notes by hand. The respondents were invited to speak much as they wished, with a checklist of a small number of questions which they were requested to address. At the third stage a more structured schedule was administered to a smaller number of the women.

We have used both qualitative and quantitative analysis, drawing variously on the data produced in the three stages of the research. For the quantitative analysis, we have 242 respondents for the first phase, 154 from the second (due to missing data or unavailable respondents). In the third phase 62 structured schedules were administered to collect, primarily, missing data. The qualitative analysis is based on the 154 narratives collected, but they vary enormously in length, detail and focus.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was guided by an overall similarity of purpose, but the processes were different. The first two phases of the study covered all domestic workers in the two colonies as far as was practicable; in the third phase, missing information was collected from some of the respondents of the earlier phases and some new questions were administered to 62 respondents, both old and new.⁸ It must be noted that despite the three rounds of surveys, some (though not much) missing data persists. In the analysis, however, only valid percentages (i.e., percentage calculated after excluding the cases with missing response and the cases for which the question was not applicable) have been used. The statistical findings used in this paper (or indeed the entire study) cannot be generalised for all domestic

workers in the city. However, these statistics do provide a general picture of certain common issues in workers' lives in the population under study.

The first, second and third phases differ methodologically on several counts. The second phase involved narrative interviews while the first and third were conducted with structured schedules. As a result the data classification from the second survey had to be somewhat innovative, informed by insights from ethnographic readings. This project thus involved some methodological experimentation. For example, depending on the types of responses to the question of why they joined domestic work, certain classifications were derived post interview and percentage of responses falling within each classification recorded. In the first and third survey, the classifications were given a priori and responses had to fall within one of them. Each round of survey involved smaller numbers of respondents.

The narrative interviews taken at the second phase followed a common feminist methodology – allowing an active engagement of the respondents in the construction of the data about their lives.⁹ For instance, we attempted to address the issue of mediation and disparate class standpoints by encouraging contact beyond mere data-gathering, as in meetings and workshops, legal literacy camps and relatively unstructured social gatherings. We hoped thus to achieve a greater consciousness of the research exercise, among the researchers as well as the respondents. The thrust in this part of the research was on an interpretative approach, with a feminist claim on “knowledge”, which relies on self-awareness and trust.¹⁰ Rather than imagining respondents as passive sources of information, the focus was on the voice and visibility of the women respondents. Many of our respondents expressed surprise that their words were of sufficient importance to anyone to be recorded; notably, very few women referred us to male members of the family, though in some cases the men did break into the interviews; in some cases, relatively older children did the same. In a few cases, the women were either too busy or too shy to speak at any length, but many others spoke at length; some established a friendly rapport with the fieldworker; recourse to a mechanical question-answer mode was rarely necessary. The emphasis on reflexivity shaped both the research and the nature of the data collected.¹¹

The decision to use masters' level students (there were 11 students as fieldworkers from our school, other humanities and social science departments of the university and even a few from other universities) had more complex consequences than we had envisaged. At one level, despite our pedagogical efforts, issues of class (and, therefore, cultural) differences could not be gainsaid altogether. At another level, however, especially with the older women, the young women elicited a specific kind of response. The older women felt a certain degree of comfort talking to unjudgmental youngsters about their difficulties and frustrations. However, they were unwilling to share more intimate details. With younger respondents, a somewhat reverse process took place. They were willing to share their hopes and aspirations, speak about their marriage

(whether in positive or negative terms) to the fieldworkers rather than to us, the supervisors. We realised that apart from class, the age/generation hierarchy, so deeply embedded in the texture of Indian social relationships, played a major role.

All the researchers contributed critical observations from the field in this project. They made important observations, particularly about housing, sanitation and related matters and about the interactions among members of the household. The students (who were fieldworkers) interacted with domestic workers in their own homes as surrogate employers. The shift in the locus of interaction from their own home to the homes of the domestic workers radically altered the nature and texture of their interactions. Most researchers noted with some surprise that they saw less discrimination between daughters and sons than they expected. One was very positive, arguing that mothers took special care of their daughters to ensure for them an escape from the daily grind to which the mothers themselves were subject. Other researchers noted more ambiguities: the daughters helped the mothers with household chores; there was a high dropout rate among girl children, many of the older girls were already working part-time as domestic servants. Many of the researchers perceived in strong negative terms the incidence of drunkenness among the men, the high rate of desertion of wives and children and domestic violence. Despite their intellectual preparedness, some of the students saw these as social characteristics of the poor (in contrast to the middle classes) rather than shared social problems across classes. Though we did not interview employers, the question of class perceptions did impinge in major ways in the conduct, analysis and writing of this research.

Early Marriage, Early Work

This section will show that while on the one hand, patterns of early marriage persist, on the other, there is also a strong trend of premarital employment in domestic service. The question of the average low age of marriage in India has been much in the public eye in recent years. There can be little doubt that these averages hide major disparities of rural/urban, class and regional variations. It has been noted, for instance, that these trends are much higher than the national average in West Bengal. This is a trend that coincides with both higher levels of feminisation and juvenilisation of domestic work within West Bengal but also increasing presence of women domestic workers from this state in other metropolitan cities of the country. Let us look briefly at some of the available figures first.

The 205th Law Commission Report cites from a study carried out in 1998 to 1999 that 33.8% of women between 15 and 19 years were married or in a union.¹² In 2000, the UN Population Division recorded that 9.5% of boys and 35.7% of girls aged between 15 and 19 years were married. The National Family Health Survey of 2005-06 (NFHS-3) carried out in 29 states confirmed that 45% of women currently aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18 years, with 58.5% in rural areas and 27.9% in urban areas and exceeded 50% in eight states.¹³ A Unicef Report prepared for a state consultation on child marriage in West Bengal in November 2009 states that the

state has the seventh highest percentage of underage marriages amongst all states, where one in every two girls are married during childhood. In West Bengal 56% of girls are married by the age of 18 according to NFHS-3. According to the Unicef report, even relatively affluent residents of the city of Kolkata, marry off a quarter of their girls in childhood. In West Bengal, more than 25% girls are married to men who are 10 years older or more. About 7% of girls begin childbearing by the time they are 15; 34.8% by the age of 18; and almost 50% of girls are pregnant by the age of 19 years.¹⁴ In this context, it is hardly surprising that the survey found a persistent pattern of early marriage among the respondents of the two squatter colonies.

What is more surprising is the gulf between perception and what the numbers show. Though almost all respondents speak of a desire for a later age of marriage for their daughters, the low age of marriage persists. Table 1 illustrates the age at which the respondents were married.

Table 1: Age at Marriage

Age of Domestic Worker	Age at Marriage (% of Population)					Valid N
	Up to 10 Years	11 to 15 Years	16-17 Years	18 Years and Above	Mean Age at Marriage	
Up to 20 years	22.2	66.7	11.1	0	12.8	9
21 to 30 years	0	50	25	25	15.7	44
31 to 40 years	7.1	35.7	26.8	30.4	16.2	56
41 to 50 years	7.1	50	14.3	28.6	15.1	14
50 years and above	23.1	30.8	30.8	15.4	14.2	13
All	7.4	43.4	24.3	25	15.5	136

Total number of valid observations (N): 136.
Source: Primary data: surveys and interviews.

A little less than half the population married below the age of 16 years. The mean (average) age at marriage for the whole population turns out to be 15.5 years. Has there been any change in the trend of marrying below the legal minimum age between older and younger women in the sample? Table 1 shows that for all age groups of women, the most common age at marriage is between 11 and 15 years. Interestingly, for the youngest generation, that is, for workers up to 20 years of age, the mean age at marriage is lowest (12.8 years). However, since the number of observations in this category is very less, we cannot generalise this trend. The Pearson correlation coefficient for age of marriage and age of domestic worker is found to be .022, which is very low. Thus age at marriage does not seem to have changed much over time and continues to be below the legal minimum.

Among the respondents, about 12 reported their age of marriage as 10 years or below. One says she was married before the onset of menstruation, but is unable to give us a precise age. Another gives us a range of six-nine years as her age of marriage. The lowest definitive age we were given is seven years. Not all the women married young were married a long time ago (as Table 1 shows): the woman who was married between six and nine years age was 20 when she spoke to us. The oldest woman who reported an early marriage was 50 years old at the time of the survey. One woman, who was married at the age of 11 years, says that many of her peers were married much younger, at even five or seven years of age. All these marriages were arranged ones and most involved some transaction of dowry.

There is a strong pattern of intergenerational engagement with domestic work. About 40 respondents speak of either mother or daughter or both being in domestic service at some stage. Among these, the majority report their mothers having been domestic workers. Many speak of having worked since a very young age, as low as five in one case. The more common age band of induction into domestic work seems to be between seven and 12 years age. There are not so many, but some cases where the daughters have been inducted into domestic work. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient information for tabulation of data regarding occupations of three generations: respondents, their mothers and their daughters. It is possible, however, to represent the occupations of daughters of domestic workers (Table 2). Due to missing information, not too many cases could be recorded; however, a pattern does emerge. Of those who are earning, maximum are domestic workers, the rest in petty business such as vegetable vending, stationary/grocery shops, tea stalls, etc.¹⁵

Table 2: Occupations of Daughters of Domestic Workers

Daughter's Occupation	Per Cent
Petty business	1.9
Unemployed	14.2
Domestic worker	13.2
Student	70.8
All	100.0

Source: Primary data: surveys and interviews, Valid cases = 106.

We have a few stories of three generations of domestic workers – the respondent, her mother and her daughter. Some of these are cases of very young daughters being included in the mother's job or working separately and some are of older married daughters, forced into work by adverse circumstances. Most mothers (though not all) in our study reject the idea of their girl children taking to domestic work, but many have inducted unmarried daughters into full-time or part-time work. There does not appear to be much relationship between early working age and early marriage: Some of those who reported as having begun work in domestic service between the ages, five and 10 years, worked as long as 10 years before marriage. Some were married relatively early, between 13 and 16 years. Notably, some of these women married of their own choice, even though most of them worked within strict familial control, their parents taking the major part of their wages. The usual pattern is for young girls to work as full-time residential domestic workers; after marriage, they shift to part-time work.

Table 3 illustrates some of this discussion.

Table 3: Stage at Which the Respondent Became a Domestic Worker

Stage	Frequency	Per Cent
Pre-marriage	48	32.9
Post-marriage	43	29.5
Post-childbirth	50	34.2
Long after childbirth	5	3.4
Valid N	146	100

Source: Primary data: surveys and interviews, N stands for valid number of observations.

Women were found to have joined the profession at all three stages of their life cycle (pre-marriage, post-marriage and post-childbirth) in roughly the same proportion. In some cases, women falling within the classifications of post-marriage or post-childbirth had actually started working before marriage but interrupted their work for marriage and childbirth. Some of the interviews do clearly indicate a pattern of young girls working as full-time residential domestic workers, getting married (by choice or arrangement), moving

to working class settlements and then rejoining work as part-time domestic servants, pre- or post-childbirth. This is different from what we had thought of as the dominant life cycle pattern of Indian women's workforce participation as discussed in the introductory section of this paper.

Love in the Time of Dowry

Marriages in south Asia have been related inextricably with the phenomenon and problem of dowry. In the standard literature on the subject, two broad strands of discussion are discernible. First, the understanding of marriage as an exchange of women between families is linked to that of dowry as a parallel transaction. Second, both these are premised upon women as dependents. Women are constituted either as non-productive or being under familial control both in terms of the returns of their labour (productive and reproductive) and their access to resources. It has been noted, in many and varied contexts, that working women, even when they contribute substantially to household sustenance, are not exempt from these deeply embedded social relationships. Our study shows that domestic workers are significant economic players – their earnings are in some cases the primary and in many cases the most stable components in the income of poor urban households. In this section of the paper we revisit some of the issues raised by the “autonomy” debates of the 1980s. Does their position as wage workers affect marriage and dowry? Do they have greater say in the timing of their marriage and their choice of partners? Does their status as earners reduce the significance of dowry? Do young girls' earnings go towards their own dowry as was once believed? Do domestic workers approach these questions differently when it comes to their daughters' marriages?

Dowry marriages carry heavy connotations of parental decision-making and responsibilities. They may thus be linked to questions of choice, which in popular common sense is expressed as a dichotomy between “arranged” and “love” marriages. In the communities we surveyed, these were described most commonly as *nije biye kora* (self-arranged) or *dekhe shune biye deoa* (given in marriage to a selected bride/groom). Needless to say, this distinction applies both to women (daughters) and men (sons). Much has been written in recent years regarding how misplaced is the stark opposition between love and arranged marriages and how the lines between the two are getting increasingly blurred. Researchers have found the emergence of hybrid forms of “love arranged” or “arranged love” marriages. Most of these discussions have taken place in the context of the middle classes and assume a high degree of parental involvement and desire for control over marriage choice, wedding celebrations and household arrangements on the part of parents. A recent survey conducted in Kolkata suggests some common trends between the middle and the working classes. For instance, among men, the working class respondents gave by a slightly greater margin “arranged by parents, chosen by self” option while slightly larger proportions of middle class respondents gave the options “arranged by self, not approved by parents”, “arranged by parents” and “arranged

by self”. Notably the largest proportion of respondents across classes chose the first option. Among women, the largest proportion was in the category, “arranged by parents” and here there is more response from the working class than the middle class. The options, “arranged by parents chosen by self” and “arranged by self, not approved by parents” show relatively low response in both classes of women. Interestingly, the real contrast by class is in the categories, “arranged by self, approved by parents”, where we have a higher response from middle class women and “arranged by self”, where we have a higher response from working class women.¹⁶ This last is strongly borne out in the findings of the survey under discussion here. Self-arranged marriages seem acceptable in the working class family and community. Equally, the transgressional “love” marriage, not approved by parents, invokes weak response among middle and working classes, and, interestingly, weakest among working class men, strongest among working class women. These trends and choices intersect with dowry calculations.

In this survey, we found a very high proportion of “love marriages”, which represent a wide variety of arrangements. The runaway Kalighat marriage¹⁷ makes an appearance in a few cases. Most of these marriages seem to be successful or at least subsistent at the time of the survey. In some cases parents have granted approval of a courtship and agreed to arrange the marriage in proper ritual form. Such marriages often involve the usual transactions, including dowry.¹⁸ The traditional arranged marriage remains the most common, but parents do not appear to be emotionally invested in the superiority of arranged marriages. On the whole, there seems to be a wide variation in modes of marriage. The formal registration of marriages is neither well known nor commonly practised.¹⁹

The form of marriage appears to have a significant relationship with the payment of dowry though, this is not an invariable relationship, i.e., large dowry payments are not always made in cases of arranged marriages even if such is a general expectation and not all love marriages are non-transactional. About 2% of our respondents reported “dowry” as an item of expenditure (Table 5, p 74). We do not rush to conclude, however, that this indicates a low prevalence of dowry. It may well be that only parents currently paying (or paying off debts related to) dowry mention this item. We found it impossible to capture the dowry question in quantitative terms for three reasons. First, not everybody answered the question in any detail. Second, some of the responses were contradictory. Many replied in the negative to the direct question but further into the interview, they mention dowry payments, sometimes small amounts, sometimes even quite large amounts. Third, many spoke of dowry in terms of future expectations (of giving or receiving) while others of actual payments (and even then at different periods of time) and this combination was difficult to express in terms of numbers. It is the narrative interviews which yielded sensitive and complex arguments about giving and receiving dowry, and these have been presented inasmuch detail as feasible. We need also to highlight two remarkable aspects of these narratives. First, while many parents speak of taking or giving dowry, there are very few examples of exorbitant or crippling dowry

transactions. In many cases, especially in so-called "love marriages", no dowry is paid at all. There are a few cases, where the expenses have been borne and gifts given by the groom's parents. Second, many of the older women have spoken of bride price as something practised in their marriage. Thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, dowry does not seem to be a major concern for parents, except in a few cases. Moreover, very few parents seem to be preoccupied with the compulsion of the daughter's marriage. The few exceptions, however, who talked about the imperative of marriage and the problem of dowry, registered their views very strongly.

Different Stories

Some respondents reported substantial dowry payments for their own or their children's marriages. Suchandra Sardar had an arranged marriage at the age of 18 years. Her parents provided Rs 6,000 as dowry and earrings for her and a ring for the groom. Dayamayee Mondol was married only a few years ago. She is now 22 years old. Her parents arranged her marriage and paid Rs 5,000 as dowry. Some reported much higher dowry amounts. Basabi Adhikari was married recently – an arranged marriage. Her father paid her in-laws Rs 30,000 as dowry. Sarbari Naskar's father gave not only cash and ornaments, but also bought a rickshaw for the groom. After marriage, whatever they need comes from her family not his. So is the case with Jamuna's daughters. Jamuna's is a tragic story. She is the only full-time residential domestic worker among the respondents. She has three daughters, two are married. The third daughter stays with the second daughter, but Jamuna pays the expenses. She paid dowries of Rs 6,000 and Rs 8,000 respectively for her two daughters, both by borrowing. She has paid off the loans with great difficulty. She now finds that she has to give both the daughters money regularly. "Yes, every now and then." The eldest daughter's husband beats her up and throws her out of the house on a regular basis, asking her to get money from her mother since she works in Kolkata. Every time the mother has to give some money to enable the daughter to return to her conjugal home. "I have not been able to protest", she says. A mother working in the city is seen as a source of continual support in the daughters' conjugal families.

Hefty dowry payments at marriage or as in some of the above cases, on a regular basis after marriage, are a serious burden on poor families. In families headed by women, struggling on monthly incomes as low as Rs 800 to Rs 1,000 per month, such savings are impossible. How do our respondents who are mothers of daughters perceive this problem? Ganga Naskar knows she will have to pay dowry for her daughter, otherwise the groom's family will not accept a marriage proposal. She is the family's chief earner but she has no money for dowry. She plans to borrow from relatives when the time comes. The daughter, however, wants to study and does not want to marry until she is 22 or 23. We were somewhat surprised to find, however, that arranged marriages did not always involve dowry payments. In conditions of extreme poverty, marriages were arranged without dowry or in some cases dowry demands were reduced by negotiation. Malini Halder had an arranged

marriage. Her mother was very poor and could not pay a dowry. Asked whether it led to any trouble for her, she said, "my husband is very good", there was no trouble. In another case, the dowry was scaled down. Manju Sardar's mother worked as an ayah. When she got married, some 10 years ago, her in-laws asked for Rs 20,000. Manju's parents were not able to afford it, so they paid Rs 10,000. This payment satisfied the groom and his family and she has not had any trouble because of her parent's failure to pay the whole amount demanded.

Many mothers expect to have to pay some dowry for their daughters but do not seem to be preoccupied with the problem. Nasima Bibi is burdened by the responsibility of getting her daughter married "*kanyadaya ekta boro daya*". Sipra Naskar also feels that girls have to be married. She is not concerned about her son, because he can live alone if he does not marry. However, in common with many others, she would prefer that the daughter finishes her school education before marrying. Neither mother appeared very concerned about dowry, at present they are preoccupied with providing money for the education of the children. Their lack of concern may have to do with increasing incidences of elopements which tend to reduce the importance of dowry. Manju Sardar spoke of this at some length. She has only one child, a daughter. She is still very young and going to school. Manju looks forward to her daughter's marriage. She thinks dowry is a custom (*niyam*) and would like to follow it given that she has only one child. But she will give dowry only if the daughter agrees to an arranged marriage. These days, arranged marriages are becoming rare, she says. According to her, "Everybody elopes. They say they are going to school and run away." Apart from the anxiety expressed in such statements, they also highlight an important distinction – dowry is a custom to be followed in case of conventional marriages, i.e., marriages arranged by parents. Thus, mothers of sons observe the increase in elopements with some regret. Asha Mondol's parents arranged her marriage and paid a dowry of Rs 6,000. In her son's case, she does not expect dowry because she says, nowadays the young men choose their own partners. In case of "love marriages" dowry exchanges are often rendered irrelevant, especially if they are runaway marriages conducted without knowledge and consent of parents and without the customary rites and ceremonies.

Manju's and Anima's disapproval on this count is not however shared by all parents, especially by mothers of daughters. Shaktidasi Sardar is quite pleased that both her daughters married for love and she did not have to spend anything. Durga Halder did not have to pay dowry when her daughter had a love marriage. Rachana Halder started working at age seven as a full-time domestic worker. She arranged her own marriage and no dowry was involved. Not all "love marriages" are runaway marriages or quite so informal as these four.

Indeed, we found no general resistance to the idea of "love marriages", as long as the parents approve of the partner in question. Some "love marriages" are celebrated with the same wedding rituals as conventional arranged marriages, and in such cases may include some dowry. Chameli Gayen affirms that her parents had to pay dowry even though she had a love

marriage. She is sure that she will have to pay at her daughter's marriage even if she chooses her own partner. Sonali Haldar married a man of her own choice five years ago. Her parents had to pay some dowry, including the cost of a vehicle. However, most love marriages seem to not involve mandatory or heavy dowry payments.

Sumitra Roy was married at 13 to her brother's friend, who "chose" her. Though not quite a "love marriage", everybody was pleased and no demands were made. Her family was very poor, but they gave brass utensils, earrings for the girl and a ring for the groom. He died. She is bringing up the children from her earnings. In her daughter's case, she says if it is a good match and the groom's family makes a demand, she will give whatever is required. In her son's case she does not want money. It "is not good" she says, "nowadays girls are becoming educated, so what is the difference between a boy and a girl?"

Sumitra's testimony expresses a consciousness of changing times. Even though the "difference between a boy and a girl" is far from being obliterated, two major changes are visible: first, mothers want to postpone the marriage of daughters to adulthood; and, second, they want some education for their daughters, even if this leads to marriage and not educated employment, which is the aspiration in case of sons. It is significant that they perceive this as a change from their own life-choices. In case of both sons and daughters, education is valued as socially empowering and an escape route from dependence on manual labour. Juli Naskar was married at the age of eight or nine years. Asked about her daughter's marriage, she says, "Marriage, what? So early? Earlier people made that mistake. Will we also repeat the same mistake?" She wants her children to study. In her time she said, there was not such a demand for education; they did not understand its value. Now they do, but it is too late for her. She wants all her children to avail the advantages of education. Razia Bibi articulates this as a very recent change. Her two elder daughters were married when one was 13 years old and another one was 14 years. The son is the youngest and studying in class VII. Her youngest daughter was taken out of school, when Razia fell sick and needed help with her work. The daughter is very enthusiastic about her studies but Razia cannot afford it any more. The girl is now studying Arabic in order to read the Koran. Asked about her marriage, Razia says, "I will not arrange it now. When she is 18, I will arrange it." According to her, "I did not know anything so I arranged early marriage (for two elder daughters). I did not know anything at that time. In our village early marriage was prevalent. Now I know everything – I will not give her in early marriage. When my daughter will be adult, I will arrange her marriage." Whether the postponement of the daughter's marriage is related to Razia's dependence on the daughter's earnings is not very clear from her testimony.

Ambiguities and Change

Even if Razia is committed to adult marriage, she is, like many of her neighbours, ambiguous about giving and taking of dowry. Early in the interview, Razia Bibi says, "Will I take money? I hope to give money." This is possibly a reference to

brideprice and signals a shift to dowry. However, further into the interview she says about giving dowry at her daughter's marriage, "I will not give it now. I gave it previously because I did not know anything about it. I will arrange her marriage without giving any money". She is talking about an earning daughter. Sabitri Naskar had an arranged marriage and her father had to pay Rs 500 as dowry. This appears to have been too low an amount to count. "My father could not give any dowry", she says later in her interview. As a mother of sons, however, she does not want to demand money: "I am working hard for my sons and I do not want to sell my sons." She wants to educate her children properly. She is providing money for private tuitions and trying to pay for computer classes. Ashalata Mondol says about taking dowry in her sons' marriages, "They also come from poor families; how can they give money?"

Alapana Mondol adopts the similar position as a mother of daughters. One of her three daughters is already married. Asked about dowry for the other two, she says that she will not pay dowry if it is demanded. She will pay what she can of her own free will. She says further that those who ask for dowry are usually "rascals". This is her experience in recent years. She says,

Even if I have to beg or borrow, I will give something, whether it is money or ornaments. But those who ask are greedy and more evil... Everybody wants that they will give their daughter in good hands, and will give her something.... We are working hard to educate them, so we all want to marry them off in some style.

Our respondents perceive a link between education and a "good" marriage. Does education help young working class women to "marry up"? The narratives do not suggest any clear answer but dowry marriages and happy domesticity are ambitions mothers have for educated daughters.²⁰ Most mothers mentioned that they did not wish their daughters to work in domestic service, but as the earlier section has shown, neither education nor dowry marriages guarantee such an outcome, since daughters of domestic workers often take to the same occupation after marriage and childbirth. Whatever the motivation, giving a daughter in a dowry marriage sometimes justifies taking dowry for a son.

It needs to be emphasised that Sumitra's consciousness of changing times is at odds with an opposite perception of change. Some of the interviews suggest the experience of dowry as a change, either from non-transactional marriages or from bride price marriages. Among the respondents, 11 make explicit mention of brideprice: the amounts vary from Rs 12 to Rs 150. Swarna Mondol's mother-in-law gave her father Rs 150 in addition to jewellery: "It was a lot of money at that time", she says. Some marriages involved small gifts but no exchange of money. For instance, no dowry was paid during Gayatri Parbat's marriage. She has two sons and says if they marry on their own, she will not ask for dowry, but if she arranges the marriages, she will ask for something to at least defray the costs of the wedding. Rajani Sardar is originally from South 24 Parganas and was given in an arranged marriage to a man from Bihar. Their own marriage was without dowry and all their childrens' too. No dowry was given at

the marriage of their daughter or taken for their son. "We are poor. This is how we live and work together." The husband talks about bride price, saying that earlier in Bihar, the groom's family had to pay a price to bring a bride home. They echo the words of Sabitri Naskar, "We do not put up our sons for sale". There appears to be a rejection of transactions in marriage. Others seem less resistant to this change. Bolon Mallik was married without dowry. But she knows that dowry will have to be paid for her daughter, whether the marriage is arranged or by choice. "The times have changed", she says. In case of Dolon Naskar, who was married without dowry, her husband made it clear that the situation will be rectified, "we will take dowry". They had married for love and informed their families afterwards. They were reprimanded by their parents, but there were no major problems. Her mother-in-law wanted "a bed, a table, a watch, a necklace and Rs 25". Dolon says that she gave the same at her daughter's marriage. According to their calculation, however, they spent Rs 80,000 for their eldest daughter's marriage! Dolon's husband needs to recoup the cost by marrying his son for a handsome dowry.

The above discussion shows that the response to dowry and love/arranged marriages were rather mixed. It needs to be reiterated, however, that these narratives bring into sharp question the common sense about parental obsession with daughters' marriages, the prioritisation of arranged marriages by parents and the spiralling significance of dowry. Clearly, much of such theories are formulated in the context either of the middle classes or rural communities.²¹ In these communities of the urban poor, heavily reliant on the wages of domestic workers, a much more flexible and pragmatic approach to marriage and sexuality is in evidence. Poor parents are sometimes happy to see their children elope, because it solves a problem. Moreover, while there are incidences of high dowry payments, there is equally strong evidence of successful negotiation on amounts. There are obvious strategies of giving and taking dowries if there are sons and daughters. Parents spend considerable amounts on their children's marriages and on dowry, often with borrowed money, but no one spoke of such debts as long-term or crippling. There appears to be considerable pull and strain between traditional norms and what is perceived to be social change. One group views dowry as a change from non-transactional marriages while another views self-arranged marriages without dowry as a change from their own times. This is not a generational change since respondents on both sides are of varied ages. What these differences may reflect are longer historical trajectories in societies from which our respondents have migrated, which this brief survey was unable to capture.

There appears to be little ambiguity, however, in the rejection of early marriage. This provides an interesting contrast between perception and facts in their own lives at least. The statistical evidence points to a continuing pattern of early marriages. This pattern has been captured for the workers but no systematic data could be collated for the workers' children. So we cannot corroborate or contradict the assertion of the workers regarding pushing up of the age of marriage for their children.

Based on narratives, parents who are unequivocally rejecting early marriage for their children, especially daughters, are pioneering a new attitude to the question. The most common reason given for delaying the daughters' marriage is education. Not dowry. Dowry was not mentioned in the decisions either of early or late marriage for daughters. Several of the respondents, however, give evidence of girls dropping out early, in some cases for joining their mother's profession. Education seems to have emerged as a site for contesting desires, claims and aspirations, but schooling is not yet established as a fixed specific in the life cycle or an insuperable bar to marriage or employment, particularly in the case of girls. These issues are discussed in more detail in the later section.

Education and Generational Mobility

The hopes, desires and investment in education in these poor settlements are astounding. Almost all the adult women we spoke to foregrounded education of their children as their first priority, many saying that this was the primary reason for their remaining in domestic work. Even among those in acute financial difficulties, there was an attempt to keep some (or at least one) child in school. Among the better off, there is a growing expectation that more and better education will facilitate upward mobility. In these attitudes, there does not seem to be much difference between mothers and fathers, though women-headed households often find it more difficult to keep children in school. We found some instances of daughters being taken out of school to do paid or unpaid domestic work, but not a very large number. It is also significant that aspirations from education are not always just about better jobs, but about a better quality of life. It is this latter perception that drives the education of daughters, even if mothers envisage happy domesticity rather than educated employment for them. Sipra Naskar (44 years) says,

We are struggling so hard so that we can educate them. We are blind despite possessing eyes. We are struggling hard so that they can see, so that they don't suffer like us. They should be able to eat and if they study they will come to know all the ways of the world. There is no point denying this.

Parents feel that their children will be better equipped to cope with their world if they are educated; also, education is associated with status and a means out of dependence on manual labour. It is seen as the only means of upward social mobility. This is probably why 62.8% of the workers report spending all or part of their wages on children's education, the second most important head after food. Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate the different heads of expenditure.

Table 4: For Whom They Spend

Expenditure - For Whom (% of DW)	
Family	85.2
Children	68.4
Self	7.7
Valid N	155

Not mutually exclusive.
Source: Primary data: surveys and interviews.

Table 5: On What They Spend

Expenditure - On What (% of DW)	
Food	86.5
Education	62.8
Health	10.8
Dowry	2.0
Rent	7.4
Miscellaneous	4.1
Valid N	148

Not mutually exclusive.
Source: Primary data: surveys and interviews.

Gargi Sardar is very keen on her children's education, much more than they are. She has four children. The middle one left studies after he failed an examination. All the children are average students. "I am forcing and dragging them to school. What to do? None of them is good in studies. I am doing this so that they can improve their future, so that they don't remain unlettered and ignorant."

Younger children say by and large that they want to study but many older children appear to have abandoned education against their parents' wishes. In some cases the decision appears to be taken on the basis of their assessment of long-term job opportunities. In this, they may be more realistic than their parents. The quality of education being poor, many find it uninspiring and are led by more immediate calculations like their inability to cope with curricula and examinations, or their sense of the enormous sacrifices the parents are making to fund their education. Tables 6 and 7 depict the educational status of children of domestic workers.

Table 6: Educational Status of Sons

Age of Son (in Years)	Education Level of Domestic Workers' Sons (%)				Valid N
	No Schooling	Up to 7th Standard	8th-10th Standard	Above 10th Standard	
6 to 10	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	26
11 to 13	10.5	84.2	5.3	0.0	19
14 to 18	8.5	53.2	38.3	0.0	47
19 to 25	14.6	56.1	24.4	4.9	41
26 and above	42.9	57.1	0.0	0.0	21
All	13.6	66.2	18.8	1.3	154

Valid cases = 154.

Source: Primary data: surveys and interviews.

Table 7: Educational Status of Daughters

Age of Daughter (in years)	Education Level of Domestic Workers' Daughters (%)				Valid N
	No Schooling	Up to 7th Standard	8th-10th Standard	Above 10th Standard	
6 to 10	3.9	92.3	3.9	0.0	26
11 to 13	4.8	81.0	14.3	0.0	21
14 to 18	14.6	46.3	39.0	0.0	41
19 to 25	30.8	38.5	23.1	7.7	13
26 and above	37.5	50.0	12.5	0.0	8
All	13.8	63.3	22.0	0.9	109

Valid cases = 109.

Source: Same as Table 6.

From Tables 6 and 7, two conclusions emerge. First, there are very few cases of children pursuing studies beyond the xth standard. Second, there is a greater focus now on children's education than say a decade ago, which is borne out by the data that the incidence of no schooling is much more prevalent in the older age groups than in the younger ones, for both sons and daughters. As far as gender discrimination is concerned, it is difficult to give a definitive answer. The narratives illustrate that often discrimination occurs more at the level of quality and purpose of education rather than education itself. However, even in case of no discrimination, equality is achieved at very low levels of attainment. Very few children, irrespective of gender, cross the level of secondary education.

The question of education seems to be a focus of familial, particularly generational, tension. Take the case of Shukti Gayen. She wanted her son to pass the madhyamik (secondary)²² but he did not want to appear for it. Instead, he learned driving and

when he was 18 years and could get a licence, he started taking part-time driving jobs. Champa Haldar was unhappy with her son because he left school in Class x. The parents wanted him to pass the school-leaving madhyamik examination but "he did not study because he did not wish to do it". Asked further what the son does, she replied, "What will he do? What will he do without passing any examination? He cannot do anything except pull rickshaws. What will he do?" It is not clear what better prospects open up for the young if they pass madhyamik. Alo Haldar has one son who has passed madhyamik but has found no work. She does not appear to be disillusioned with education because of her elder son's unemployment. The younger son continues to study and she pays Rs 150 per month for private tuition. Her one daughter, already married, has taken up domestic work.

Sons and Daughters

The narratives have thrown up a few cases of overt discrimination between sons and daughters in terms of quality of education or add-ons to regular school education. We have seen earlier that Razia Bibi took her daughter away from school to help her out with the jobs while the son continues to study. In some cases, such as that of Debala Haldar, the daughters go to corporation school while the son goes to a private school. In most cases, however, they all get as much of the extras as the parents can afford, the most common being some form of private tuition to compensate for the poor quality of teaching at school. Increasingly, there are demands for other extra-curricular activities, which these parents find difficult to meet. The most popular is computer classes. Manju Sardar's daughter wants to learn dancing but she cannot afford it. Sonali Haldar works in order to educate her daughter, an only child, and wants her daughter to learn dancing.

Even though there appears to be little stated discrimination, very rarely do daughters actually pass madhyamik. The reasons are not very clear. It may be that they are pulled out before reaching the examination stage, either to work or to get married. Jyotsna Sardar is now 13 years old. She wanted to study but her mother said that she will be better off in an employer's house so she now works as a full-time residential domestic worker. She is allowed to study for a brief while in the evening where she works. The "grandfather" helps her. There is an older girl, a didi who also helps her. In some cases, the girls themselves drop out or so they say. Sumita Mondol has three daughters, the eldest is married, the youngest is studying, the middle one, Ratna Mondol, has begun in domestic service. The elder two girls stopped studying after their father's death because they did not like studying, she said, only the youngest one continued. Ratna, when asked, admitted that she liked studying but felt that her mother could not afford it. But she is quite positive about her work too. Manju Sardar studied till Class v and then discontinued because she was not interested and she did not want to study. But she now regrets it. Her parents wanted her to study. They even beat her to try and keep her in school. But she played truant, visiting a friend's house instead of going to school. Jui Haldar has three children, two of the children have dropped out of school, one continues.

The daughter studied till Class ix but did not like it; she took up a job as a domestic worker instead. Anjana Das studied till Class VIII then dropped out two years ago because she did not enjoy going to school. Her mother was deserted by her father when the children were very young; her mother and elder sister are domestic workers; she also began work as a part-time domestic worker. She feels that she needs to earn because the mother cannot bear the burden of the family any more. Her aspirations lie elsewhere: Rather than go back to school, she wants to find the money to train to work in a beauty parlour.

The research does not definitively answer the question of why there is so much difference between parents' aspirations and the actual educational attainments of children in the colonies. The focus of our study was more on domestic workers' lives as a whole rather than the specific dimension of children's education. It was as part of our journey through their lives, that we understood the paramount importance of education as an aspiration, desire and value both in itself and for what it offers. Education is not only a means of breaking away from existing lives and livelihoods but also a way of understanding and negotiating the worlds we inhabit. What then disrupts the achievement of this cherished dream? As we have discussed earlier, sometimes it is the exigencies of economic vulnerability (more so for girl children), at other times the uninspiring state education system, or the desire to unburden parents, and sometimes the bleakness of the employment horizon for those who achieve some level of education. In the context of employability, the crucial question is what level, nature and quality of education informs their choices and perception? A madhyamik certificate hardly makes any difference in terms of employability. There was not a single case in our survey of anyone having made it to a quality institution of higher education or having gone for specific technical education that could open up new doors of opportunity. The whole discourse and experience of studying or not studying revolves around primary and secondary level education in poorly run schools which very rarely allow anyone to achieve the social mobility that parents so keenly aspire for the next generation. The insistence on computer training is a recognition of the parameters of employability but inconsonant with the general state of education which dampens every possibility of different and particularly white-collar employment for the next generation. Finally, for the children, the value of "now" or present consumption through familiar modes of labour (in which parents are engaged) is preferred to a distant "then" or future consumption shrouded in uncertainty and scepticism.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on some striking aspects of the negotiation of gender roles and ideologies evident from the narratives collected in the survey. The evidence is unambiguously in the direction of change; but the changes suggested are not indicative of any drastic alteration of social practices. The contradictions, particularly in relation to early marriage and employment of girls, seemed to us to be enormously productive. Why on such issues is there such a gulf between rhetoric

and reality? These subtle shifts and contradictions indicate an urgent need to shift questions of "culture" and ideology away from the context of the middle class and rural communities to the urban poor. We should not assume an easy hegemony of dominant gender ideologies across class and location. The working women who have spoken through these pages have been caught between the imperatives of early marriage and girlhood employment but insist upon the value of education for their daughters. Many of them have experienced (and suffered) early marriage and childbirth and have been vehement in their rejection of such a trajectory for their daughters, even though not all of them are able to carry through such decisions. Parents from urban working-class neighbourhoods are not obsessed with sexual chastity of their daughters; they accept courtships and elopements, sometimes hailing the latter with some relief. An elopement obviates often though not always the need for dowry and a big wedding! Even though very few parents imagine daughters accessing employment through education, they are nevertheless placing more emphasis on sending daughters to school than ever before. This is partly from an intrinsic faith in education as socially empowering, but is also accompanied by openness to a success story of a daughter finding educated employment.

What these mothers share with their middle class counterparts is a tremendous investment in the children's education, which is in both cases accompanied by great expectations for the future. In the case of these poor families, the parents' dreams are not always shared by the children, who in turn have a pragmatic view of the dividends to be had from bad schooling and a tight employment situation. Thus, despite some changes in attitudes, through the optimism of the narratives peeps the reality of class reproduction. The young girls who drop out of school often marry young and in most cases take up the same work their mothers do; adolescent boys who are unable or unwilling to negotiate school follow in their fathers' footsteps. And yet, the optimism is itself its own story and sustained against the most tremendous odds.

The practices around marriage, work and education are varied and rich in their complexity. No one picture, causative relation or direction of change can be identified. Lived experiences are in flux, not stagnant or standardised. There is continuous negotiation between aspirations and actual needs, between hopes and realities. Contradictions abound in perceptions of failed patriarchies, notions of empowerment and everyday practices of work across the axes of class and gender. If education is socially empowering, even if it does not lead to white-collar employment, do the "educated" women live their girlhood and married lives differently from their mothers? Is the yearning for feminine domesticity only a hankering for some utopian past (that is actually replete with stories of exploitation) rather than an actual assessment of well-being? Or is it a rejection of back-breaking hardship without any transformative possibilities? When marriages happen, whether through elopement or arrangement, do they entail different possibilities of life, love and livelihood? In the end, we find ourselves with more questions than definitive answers.

NOTES

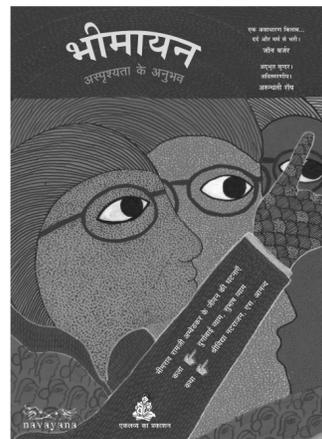
- 1 Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999.
- 2 Nirmala Banerjee, *Indian Women in a Changing Industrial Scenario* (New Delhi: Sage), 1990.
- 3 Susan Horton, *Women and Industrialisation in Asia* (London: Routledge), 1996.
- 4 Banerjee, *Indian Women in a Changing Industrial Scenario*.
- 5 Debapriya Bhattacharya, *Women and Industrial Employment in Bangladesh: Challenges and Opportunities in the Era of New Technologies*, A Research Report, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1997; Debapriya Bhattacharya and Mustafizur Rahaman, *Female Employment under Export-propelled Industrialisation: Prospect for Internalising Global Opportunities in Bangladesh Apparel Sector*, 1998; Pratima Paul Majumdar and Anwara Begum, "The Gender Impacts of Growth of Export Oriented Manufacturing: A Case Study of the Ready Made Garment Industry in Bangladesh", Workshop on Policy Research Report on Gender and Development, World Bank, Oslo, 23-25 June 1999.
- 6 The workforce participation rates are rough approximate figures. See, for instance, Jeemol Unni, "Gender and Informality in the Labour Market in South Asia" (EPW, 36, 26, 2001, pp 2360-77) and Lourdes Beneria, "Shifting the Risk: New Employment Patterns, Informalisation, and Women's Work", *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol 15, No 1, September 2001. Low age of marriage is discussed later in the paper.
- 7 The fact that young girls work for almost a pittance is aided not only by the gender ideology but also by distressing economic conditions that make the upkeep of several children difficult for parents. Even if the girl's job is giving her nothing but a place and means to survive, it is better than keeping her at home. The work, obedience and docility she learns are additional benefits.
- 8 The squatter colonies under consideration were under the threat of demolition. As a result, many people had moved out of the area between the second and third phases of the study. Also, some new people had settled in that area, despite the insecurity. The third phase meant to cover earlier respondents and collect missing information. But some of the earlier people were not found or refused to give a further interview. As a result, missing information continues to remain a problem. The researchers of the third phase also stumbled upon some new respondents. In this paper, we use information collected during the first two phases, as a result of which the number of respondents total 154. Few of our respondents gave definitive answers to the question of whether we should change their names for the purpose of publication. We have nevertheless changed all first names.
- 9 H Graham, "Surveying through Stories" in C Bell and H Roberts (ed.), *Social Researching Politics, Problems, Practice* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1984; Anne Oakley, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms" in H Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (London: Routledge), 1981.
- 10 The question of feminist ethnography and the ways in which we diverged (or not) have been discussed in the full report, as yet unpublished. It is not possible to undertake this discussion in the brief space of this paper. We have merely summarised a few of the most striking issues here.

- 11 P Abbott and C Wallace, *An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Routledge), 1990.
- 12 Law Commission of India, Proposal to Amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006, and Other Allied Laws, Report No 205, February 2008.
- 13 National Family Health Survey 3, available at <http://www.nfhsindia.org/nfhs3.html>, see also 205th Law Commission Report.
- 14 State Consultation on Child Marriages in West Bengal, Background Note, Unicef, November 2009.
- 15 Most of the valid responses turn out to be students because during the interviews, more information was given about unmarried girl children who stay with the mothers. Most of the adult daughters were married off and less information was available about them.
- 16 The categories are somewhat self-explanatory. "Arranged by parents" is the traditional "arranged marriage"; "arranged by self" is the usual "love marriage"; "arranged by self, not approved by parents" refers mostly to runaway marriages, though in some cases reluctant parents do organise the wedding; "arranged by parents, chosen by self" refer to marriages where parents take the first initiative but a period of courtship is allowed and the bride/groom is allowed final say; "arranged by self, approved by parents" refers to those marriages where sons/daughters make the primary selection but parents approve. For a more detailed discussion see Madhurima Mukhopadhyay, "Choice and Agency in Marital Decisions: A Study among Hindu Bengalis across Class in Kolkata" in Samita Sen, Ranjita Biswas and Nandita Dhawan (ed.), *Intimate Others. Marriage and Sexualities in India*, Stree, Kolkata 2010. The essay also sets out the results of a large survey undertaken by the School of Women's

- 17 This is considered to be virtually synonymous with marriages involving elopements but in fact has wider currency. The couple visit the Kalighat temple and the groom applies vermilion powder on the forehead of the bride. The usual payments for puja are made. This completes the marriage. Since the marriage takes place before the deity, it is considered to be a sacrament and has social legitimacy.
- 18 The absence of references to caste in discussions of love and arranged marriage in the narratives of respondents is striking. This is in consonance with findings in other big cities among poor communities. See Meena Dhanda, "Runaway Marriages: A Silent Revolution?" in this issue for more detail.
- 19 These findings are corroborated by another research project. Nandita Dhawan, "The Married 'New Indian Woman': Hegemonic Aspirations in New Middle Class Politics?" *South African Review of Sociology*, 41, 3, 2010.
- 20 For an earlier period, see Samita Sen, "Gendered Exclusion: Domesticity and Dependence in Bengal", *International Review of Social History*, 42, 1997.
- 21 The middle classes perceive a strong contrast between their own social and marital practices and those of the urban poor. In this respect, gender relations and everyday marital practices constitute a major determinant of class difference in the perception of middle class women. Dhawan, "The Married 'New Indian Woman': Hegemonic Aspirations in New Middle-Class Politics?"
- 22 Madhyamik refers to the examination conducted by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education at the completion of Class X in school.

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