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Making the 'Other' Visible in Ethnographic Research: Reflections through the Lens of Caste and Gender, from a Non-Metropolitan City in West Bengal, India

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Ekata Bakshi is a final year PhD candidate at the Centre for Women's Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. As a member of the third generation of a refugee family, she has focused on the topic of the Partition since the beginning of her academic career. However, rather than the immediate aftermath of the Partition and its exceptionality, she has eventually come to focus on the long-durée of the Partition. The questions she is particularly interested in asking are: How does the Partition refugee live today, seventy-two years after the initial displacement began and how has their location, both in terms of physical location and structural location (in the caste and gender hierarchies), come to bear upon the trajectories they have been able to trace for themselves?

Keywords

ethnography, visibilizing the Other, privilege, self-reflexivity, relational methodology

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_Abstract

This paper is an attempt to reflect on my academic journey with regard to the ethico-political and methodological challenges in researching the 'Other(s).' The scholarship on the memories of Partition from West Bengal, India (1947) in particular and South Asia in general show that so far the dominant narrative erased markers such as caste, gender and so on in order to foreground a homogenous refugee identity. Thus, I took the hitherto 'invisibilized' lower-caste/outcaste (Dalit/Bahujan) women situated in Asansol—a non-metropolitan city in Bengal, where erstwhile rural, Partition-migrants from government camps were rehabilitated to support its industrial development by providing cheap labor—as my protagonists, to rethink the Partition.

However, for such an exercise, the question that became ethically and methodologically crucial was how an academic enterprise by an upper-caste woman, enabled by the consumption of devalued, feminized labor of mostly women from lower-caste/outcaste (Dalit/Bahujan) groups, can seek to ethically understand such lives. Subsequently, in tracing some of the possible answers, in this paper, I argue against a simplistic deployment of self-reflexivity as a method. I propose taking a relational approach that posits not only the upper-caste and lower/outcaste femininity as co-constituted but also the researcher–researched relationship as an extension of that co-constitution. Taking research work as labor that is enabled by other kinds of (in)visible, (un)paid, (de)valued, caste-based labor as an entry point, I seek to further unpack such co-constitution.

1_ Introduction

This paper is an attempt to find some possible contextual answers to the ethico-political concerns that surround the question of methodology in feminist ethnography. My larger research project sought to understand the forced migration induced by the Partition of British India (1947) in my hometown, Asansol in West Bengal, India.[1] In doing so, I took as my protagonists women from the Dalit/Bahujan families,[2] who had hitherto been invisibilized in the narrativization of the Partition. I understand *invisibilization* as a political act through which dominant groups reduce heterogenous experiences of an event, such as that of the Partition, to a homogenous 'master narrative.' This master narrative in the case of the Partition in India, and in West Bengal specifically, was told largely from an upper-caste point of view and comprised of multiple cultural productions—films, autobiographies, memoirs—and was crucial for the ways in which the upper-caste population negotiated with state in seeking and achieving rehabilitation. In the process, the differential experiences of the Partition and rehabilitation as well as the caste-based injustices therein were erased.

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Consequently, both in its academic and popular culture versions, Dalit/Bahujan women and their specific experiences were not thematized. Even the feminist counter-narratives had erased the specificities of caste and its impact on the experiences of refugeehood.[3] In contrast, my doctoral research aimed to understand through an ethnographic approach how Dalit/Bahujan women experienced the Partition and its aftermath, especially in the long-durée, in the context of Asansol, a non-metropolitan city in West Bengal, where the refugees from government camps, largely from Dalit/Bahujan backgrounds had been rehabilitated to provide cheap labor for the industrial development in the area.

I began my doctoral research in 2017, seeking to rethink the Partition-migration in West Bengal India, through the intersecting frameworks of caste, gender and region. In the process of this ethnographic research, as a cis-het, upper-caste woman and a third-generation member of a Partition-migrant family, my established notions of 'feminist' ethics and politics were continuously put to test. I constantly battled the insider and outsider status throughout the course of my research: Being part of a migrant family on my mother's side, I had been exposed to milieus similar to the research context since my birth.[4] In fact, some of the respondents of the study were acquaintances of my mother's whom she had lived and grown up with. Her class background was similar to that of my respondents in many instances. Yet, her marriage to an upper-caste professional, working in the lower rungs of a government bureaucracy, had significantly altered my life chances. The cultural, social and economic capital I gained through my father had helped me chart a life course which was inaccessible to most of the respondents.

When I sought to understand these women's work experience—work which has been systematically devalued—the question that loomed large was how an academic enterprise that is enabled by the consumption of caste-based devalued labor, especially in the form of domestic labor, can try to ethically narrate such lives? What could provide for an ethical methodology that does not make invisible the researcher's privilege and complicity in the structures of oppression, while 'making visible' hitherto invisibilized categories of women?

Following certain strands of feminist thought, I argue that neither a perfunctory acknowledgement of privilege nor a complete disengagement from studying the less-privileged 'other' is an adequate way to answer such ethical dilemmas. While ac-

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knowledging that any such attempt is bound to remain partial and incomplete (and ethically flawed) at best, I argue that adopting a relational approach as a methodological tool rather than restricting 'self-reflexivity' to an acknowledgement of difference can prove to be productive for such an enterprise.[5] *Relationality* as a framework, adopted in the case of a *savarna* (upper-caste) woman researcher researching a Dalit/Bahujan woman, sees not only the Dalit/Bahujan and upper-caste femininity as co-constituted but also the researcher–researched relationship as an extension of that co-constitution. In doing so, relationality as a framework tries to 'make visible' not the differential experiences of pre-defined intersectional categories (in this case of Dalit/Bahujan women) but the processes and conditions of oppression that co-constitute the 'normative' (here, upper-caste) and the 'other.' It is precisely this co-constitution of two sets of subjectivities—the relationality between the conditions of the production of the two that is rendered invisible when self-reflexivity is limited to an acknowledgement of difference. When 'seen' through the conceptual apparatus of the privileged, the experience of the marginalized is likely to be marked by a lack. Therefore, it is not sufficient to self-reflexively argue that the researcher's differential experience and the categories derived from such experience are products of privilege.[6] It is important for ethical feminist research to make visible the relations of oppression through which privilege and dis-privilege are co-constituted.

In this piece, through an analysis of an interview excerpt I try to understand how caste and class as systems lead to potentially differential experiences of labor within marriage for women, i.e., for 'me'—the privileged upper-caste researcher—and for the daughter of my dis-privileged Bahujan respondent. In doing so, however, I attempt to read the experiences in a way that 'makes visible' the processes through which my privilege directly derives from her dis-privilege.

In the following paragraphs I seek to lay out in detail the debates about making the other visible in feminist ethnography. Then I move on to situating these debates historically within the context of Indian feminism. The next section provides a brief introduction to the context of the study. The final section delves deep into my argument through a discussion of an interview excerpt.

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2_Feminist Politics and Ethnography: Situating the Vexed Relationship

Both feminism and ethnography have long engaged in the problematic of (in)visibility and sought to grapple with it in myriad ways. There are different strands of both that are contextually defined and deployed. A minimum working definition of *feminism* can be, however, that it is concerned with power, its workings and the possibilities of challenging it. Moreover, a focus on understanding the gendered aspect of the workings of power is central to feminist politics and academics. *Ethnography*, on the other hand, can be understood as both a method (i.e., collection of techniques of doing research) and a theory of what doing research should be.[7] According to feminist ethnographer-sociologist Beverley Skeggs, feminism and ethnography "both have experience, participants, definitions, meanings and sometimes subjectivity as a focus" and they both "do not lose sight of the context."[8] This is what makes feminism and ethnography a close fit. Ethnography also potentially offers the respondents a greater say in how they are being studied in consonance with feminist aims. At the same time the history of ethnography, especially its colonial origin, reveals that it has been associated with maintaining and re-inscribing power relations rather than challenging them. Thus, ethnography as a method is not inherently liberating or progressive. How the ethnographic method is re-deployed and used for feminist ends depends on how we define what feminist politics of knowledge production is.

In its early stages, the primary aim of feminist research was to contribute towards alleviating the conditions of gendered oppression: "The initial impetus behind the claims of feminist research was for visibility. Such studies tried to break down traditional male-centered research agendas which made women invisible and normalized the male gender."[9] Different debates converged to produce the idea that 'making visible' women's lives in research produced 'new knowledge' for resisting oppression.[10] In the absence of traditional sources, making women visible meant documenting and analyzing women's *experiences*. Ethnography then became a suitable tool for feminist research for its focus on lived experiences. This is where, however, things began to get complicated. Feminist sociologists from the Global North, like Dorothy Smith, took the category 'women' as given and argued for visibilizing and theorizing women's experiences.[11] Others, especially since the 1990s, pointed out to the multiple differences within the category: Gender[12] is only one system of stratification, other axes of stratification, such as class, race, caste, and region, interact with this axis to

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complicate the category 'women.' African American feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argued that a feminist standpoint was a group production and a result of multiple positionalities located at the interlacing of multiple structures of oppression.[13] Therefore, because of their location at the intersection of multiple structures, certain groups have an epistemic advantage over others in understanding oppression. However, even in this formulation the processes of categorization were relatively taken to be self-explanatory.

Others, like historian Joan W. Scott, argued that neither experience nor categories were given and produced through the process of documentation. Thus, research had both the capacity to reinforce or challenge categories; categorization being intimately related to processes of oppression.[14] Nancy C. M. Hartsock and Alison M. Jagger argued that it was not simply ontology but political opposition to power that produced feminist standpoints. It was political engagement then that allowed experience to be re-formulated as a perspective for knowledge production.[15] In this way experience was no longer understood as self-evident. The way in which experiences were narrated could be seen as deeply political, narrating the experiences of oppressed groups could either reinforce or challenge oppression, depending on how it was being done. This simultaneously broadened and complicated the task of feminist knowledge production in general and feminist ethnography in particular. It also complicated the question of researching across groups belonging to differential levels of privilege. While it is possible to politicize one's own experiences, how does one do so for groups other than one's own; especially when the group in question experiences greater marginalization than the researcher? Moreover, how does the researcher attain this politically liberatory standpoint when her own existence and privileges are contingent upon continuation of certain structures of exploitation? Does the feminist researcher then end up reinforcing oppressive stereotypes, while researching groups lower in the hierarchical power structure by viewing their lives through her privileged frames? At the same time, completely disengaging from the experiences of the 'others' is also not an option, because focusing only on one's in-group experience can seriously impair and limit the possibilities of feminist politics.

The case of ethnography as a feminist research method is the most complicated in this regard. It is not simply a question of critically engaging with or listening to the narratives of 'others' already available as cultural texts. Feminist ethnographic narra-

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tives unlike testimonial narratives, are not always a product of political imperatives of oppressed groups, i.e., not written by oppressed groups directly to document their oppression and struggle as a part of their resistance.[16] In feminist ethnography documenting and structuring of the narratives of oppressed groups happen through the distinct mediation of the feminist interlocutor, with her own set of concerns and politics. This brings us to the question that looms large in feminist theorizations, especially feminist ethnography: how to 'see' and 'hear' 'experiences' that are not our own and how to represent them?[17] Often, in such circumstances of representations across positions of privilege, *self-reflexivity* has been presented as an effective tool: If research itself, especially feminist research, is a political act, 'self-reflexivity' is seen as the praxis that allows the researcher to reformulate her own experiences to achieve a politically progressive standpoint.[18]

Following feminist ethnographers Beverley Skeggs[19] and Marilyn Strathern,[20] however, I argue in favor of taking a more critical approach to self-reflexivity. I argue that the idea of self-reflexivity can ultimately end up privileging the self that 'is' capable of reflexivity. It obscures the material relations of oppression that enable research and knowledge production and affirm the intellectual property rights of the researcher-self. Especially, in the context of caste, which could be described above all as a moral order that assigns differential values to closed working groups, such obsession with self-reflexivity can perversely reaffirm the caste differences. By celebrating self-reflexivity as a politico-moral act—which the upper-caste researcher is capable of, unlike her not-so-reflexive lower-caste respondents, it can (and often does) reinforce the devaluation of the Dalit/Bahujan respondents.

Borrowing from Linda Alcoff,[21] Beverley Skeggs,[22] Marilyn Starthern,[23] Sen Chaudhuri,[24] Kanchana Mahadevan[25] and Jenny Rowena,[26] I argue that the focus on how experiences and categories are relationally constituted, in a given socio-political context and specifically in the concrete context of the research, might be a more politically effective tool. Ethnographic research in such a formulation is not a straightforward act of challenging oppression that seeks to 'make visible' oppressed lives and experiences to uncover 'resistive' knowledges. Just as everyday life, research can rather be understood to be enabled by 'infrastructures'—both cognitive and material—that are products of structures of oppression. The ethico-political imperative of feminist ethnographic research then begins to 'make visible' the work of such infra-

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structures and their relationship to research as a process and question them, even when it might not be possible to undo them.

In such a process then, the political-moral authority of the researcher, i.e., her authority to produce knowledge is brought to question through the very act of researching. It calls upon the researcher to have greater political accountability, while acknowledging that such a process will be inherently incomplete and partial. To present my arguments better, I shall, in the following sections, draw upon my field work experiences from, Asansol, a non-metropolitan town in West Bengal India.

3_Theorizing Caste and Gender

Analyzing the intersecting realities of caste and gender has been a persistent feature of modern socio-political thought of the oppressed in India, beginning in the early nineteenth century, as evident in the writings of Indian political thinkers and socio-political activists, such as Ambedkar,[27] Periyar,[28] Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule.[29] However, it was the assertions of Dalit/Bahujan women which have, especially since the 1990s, successfully dismantled the homogenous category of 'Indian women' and brought forth the contestations and differences that constitute the category. Such theorizations, beginning in the works of Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Bama and Ruth Manorama, among others, established the impossibility of theorizing gender in the Indian context without a robust framework for understanding caste. The most comprehensive framework for theorizing caste and gender as interlocking systems was provided by the eminent anti-caste philosopher and socio-legal theorist Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.[30] He has since been the greatest inspiration behind all theorizations on caste and gender.

Caste can be broadly defined as a religiously ordained system that divides the society into hierarchically arranged, endogamous groups.[31] It is evident that this hereditary, unequal, hierarchically graded system of distribution of economic and social rights can be enforced and maintained only if movement of women across groups can be controlled. Thus, to quote Ambedkar, "the superimposition of endogamy on exogamy means the creation of caste."[32] Such formulations, however, were interpreted in an inadequate manner by the upper-caste feminist theorizations to argue that caste-patriarchy disadvantaged all women by establishing control over their bodies and their sexuality. It was only through the struggles of Dalit/Bahujan feminists, including

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those mentioned above, that it came to be highlighted how differently caste structured lives of women across groups. In other words, even though caste-patriarchy necessitated the establishment of gendered control, it did not disadvantage all women equally. Upper-caste women were complicit in and benefited from the exploitation of both Dalit/Bahujan men and women.[33]

The sustained assertions of Dalit/Bahujan women have, in the contemporary moment, forced upper-caste feminism to recognize the interlocked realities of caste and gender. 'Indian feminist scholarship' had been more cognizant of class differences among women, but the current political scenario has made it important for any feminist theorizing from India to take account of casted-based differences within the category women. Yet, I argue that, in upper-caste feminist theorizations, Dalit/Bahujan women are often 'made visible' simply through the lens of difference, which renders them a self-contained category whose experience needs to be understood and theorized differently.[34] While the argument is tenable that Dalit/Bahujan women's agency, resistance and oppression had to be differently understood than those of upper-caste women, what simultaneously needs to be 'made visible' are the exact mechanisms that produce these differences in concrete contexts. Moreover, if, as argued above, difference is not simply given but actively produced in and through research as much as in everyday life, then it also becomes important to locate if, how and to what ends caste is reproduced through research, including feminist research.

I argue that upper-caste feminist research has often re-inscribed caste oppression in two distinct ways by an exclusive focus on difference. On the one hand, in such research caste difference has been essentialized in terms of experiences of exceptional violence, overt discrimination and so on. In doing so, any absence of such conditions has been pronounced as declining importance of caste as a system in determining the lives of Dalit/Bahujan women. Such theorizations have then ignored how caste as a system has been transforming itself. Furthermore, it has often produced an additive model of understanding the oppression produced at the intersections of caste and gender. It has been argued that while upper-caste women are oppressed by upper-caste men, Dalit/Bahujan women are oppressed by Dalit/Bahujan men, thus creating an equivalence of patriarchal oppression in the lives of both categories of women. Additionally, it is recognized that Dalit women are also oppressed by caste. But while the workings of patriarchy are understood vis-à-vis concrete actors, upper-caste women

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are not understood to be actively contributing to or benefitting from the caste-based oppression of Dalit/Bahujan women.[35] The difference between Dalit/Bahujan women and upper-caste women in such a formulation is only posited as incidental, thus obfuscating the complex relationality between the two.

4_Researching the Partition: Narrating the Field

The Partition of British India (1947) along communal lines to create the independent dominions of India and Pakistan (later also Bangladesh) is an important signpost of South Asian history. It led to the force-displacement of thousands of people across the border of India and Pakistan to 'match' people with their religiously ordained dominions.[36] Feminist interventions in South Asian studies since the 1990s have largely sought to revisit this moment and its aftermath to understand the relationship between nation, community, region and gender. The Partition is seen as an immense moment of rupture because it has been argued that the Partition, especially in West Bengal, did away with the traditional feudal structures of caste and gender by rendering everyone equally displaced.[37] It thus led the way for a more progressive secular, class-based politics, spear-headed by the refugees. It was only in recent years that such narrativizing of the Partition has come to be challenged through the political assertions and self-writing of Dalit refugees. They have focused on how caste-location determined and continues to determine life chances of the refugees even after 75 years of the Partition. Despite the publication of seminal autobiographies by Dalit women such as Kalyani Thakur Chanral,[38] the specificities of the Dalit/Bahujan women's experience of the Partition, however, has remained largely invisible in academic and popular theorizing, even of the feminist kind.

The economic exigencies of the Partition-induced forced migration in the immediate post-Partition years made it imperative for women to engage in paid labor to sustain the families. By the norms of caste-patriarchy, upper-caste women had so far been prohibited from taking up public roles, so that their sexuality could be safely guarded. Only Dalit/Bahujan women, especially the former, worked outside their homes. Given their public roles the caste system marked them as morally lose and allowed upper-caste men to violate their bodies without their consent, even though marriage between the two groups was ritually prohibited. While the nationalist movement had begun legitimizing upper-caste women's public presence, it was the post-Partition

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conditions that gave their public presence in paid labor an in politics an unequivocal legitimacy. Even though their public presence had initially been bemoaned by upper-caste male refugee narratives as a loss of long-held traditions, it soon came to be accepted and celebrated. Gendered rewriting of the history of post-Partition refugeehood in West Bengal, largely by upper-caste women, thus claimed the Partition to be a watershed moment in the gendered history of Bengal. They argued that the age-old hold of caste-patriarchy over the lives of women came to an end with the Partition.[39] Women's association with paid labor was then theorized to be inherently progressive.

However, what such theorizations invisibilized was the fact that not all women had been confined to their homes by caste-patriarchy; some had been forced into lives of extremely exploited paid labor by the same. At the same time, it failed to acknowledge that even though the Partition had forced all refugee women to work, not all of them received equal remuneration for their labor.[40] Caste informed what value was inscribed to the labor of upper-caste women and that of non-upper-caste women and it was this differential value that allowed upper-caste women to be engaged in paid labor in the first place. Rather than considering contentious linkages between caste, gender, labor and their ramifications in the context of refugeehood as given, I sought to explore their contingent dynamics through the category of space, i.e., by locating them in the historical and spatial context of the non-metropolitan, non-border town of Asansol from 1956 to 2018. By collecting life histories of women from refugee families of Dalit/Bahujan castes in Asansol, I intended to understand the afterlife of refuge and rehabilitation across generations.

An emerging industrial zone in the post-Partition period, Asansol needed a huge labor force to support its industrial development. It therefore became the site for rehabilitation of a significant number of refugees, who, it was believed, could contribute to the industrial development by providing cheap labor. From the 1990s onwards, however, the introduction of liberalization and privatization policies combined with clashes between labor unions and factory-owner led to the closure of numerous industries. A large number of laborers were retrenched, employment generation came almost to a standstill and even the prospects in the informal sector dipped with the general decline of the town's economic prospects. The immediate benefits of joining the labor force, howsoever few and partial, were overturned in subsequent years and generations.

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Most of my women respondents who were first-generation migrants mentioned that they were not engaged in paid labor outside their homes in their native place in erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh). On coming to Asansol, they were, however, once again forced to seek employment outside their homes because of economic precarity, later aggravated by factory closures. The only work available to women was in the informal sector, i.e., domestic help, as 'unskilled' caregivers in the health sector or in household industries involved in making household savories and so on. These professions closely mirrored the traditional caste-based professions of Dalit/Bahujan women. They also became complimentary laborers in their husband's enterprises whenever a labor shortage occurred. Alternatively, they took up paid part-time, home-based work like making household savories, paper bags, wrapping food items or stitching bags until their economic necessities made it absolutely imperative for them to take up work outside their homes. In continuation of the colonial norms of gendered labor engagement in this industrial zone, they were considered unfit for such 'dirty' menial formal industrial labor, given their role as mothers. Thus, they were left out of the scope of such formal employment.[41] Entry into paid labor then did not offer them any possibility of gendered emancipation, but only augmented their vulnerability and exploitation. It also added to their burden of work. Moreover, unlike the upper-caste women they could not outsource the burden of domestic work to hired labor.

It is evident from the ethnographic work I conducted that in the initial period of resettlement (mid-1950s to early 1970s) extreme poverty and concerns about their sexual violation forced these families to marry their daughters off at an extremely early age. Such trends continued during the time of the research (2017–2019) as well, but the age of marriage had increased from 13/14 years to 17/18 years on an average. Spending on the education of their children was often beyond the means of a family whose immediate need was survival. What this meant was until the family was experiencing significant economic stability, they were forced to marry their daughters off at an early age. Marriages were no guarantee of economic stability and often in the face of economic vulnerability daughters and daughters-in-law had to take up similar jobs as their mothers or mothers-in-law. Yet, the families, especially the parents, strived to ensure that their daughters and daughters-in-law could upon marriage enjoy the gendered privilege of being provided for by their male partners. The aspiration of

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the older generations was to prevent the younger generations of women from taking up the devalued, underpaid, stigmatized and extremely exploitative work that women in their generation had to take up because of their economic necessities. Given the general absence of access to meaningful education and employment opportunities, marrying daughters 'well' was the only way to secure such ends. A significant number of women in the youngest generations of these families were, in fact, at the time of the field work able to escape the double burden of taking up domestic and non-domestic (usually for pay) work upon marriage. However, they still had to shoulder the entire burden of unpaid care work in their homes.[42]

5_'Making Visible' the Bahujan Women's Experiences through Upper-Caste Feminist Categories: The Pitfalls

Having elaborated this background, I now reproduce below a rather long extract of a discussion about marriage I had with two of my respondents—S.D. and M.P. The former, S.D., was a single mother of two daughters—the eldest of whom had married by the time of the research and the youngest was in the tenth grade of elementary school. This interview was a part of the life-history interviews I had been conducting to understand Dalit/Bahujan women's experience of life and labor—both domestic and non-domestic in post-Partition Asansol, over generations. I chose this excerpt in particular because here the respondent S.D. herself alludes not only to the differences between the experiences of upper-caste, middle-class women and working-class Bahujan women but to the factors which constitute these differences. S.D. was a Bahujan woman, who had been married off at a young age, after her father lost his job due to a factory closure.[43] Soon after, she became a widow. At the time of the interview, she worked as an informal, domestic worker with a monthly income of around Rs. 6000 [$78]. M.P. was Dalit man, who had been previously employed as a skilled blue-collar laborer in a factory in another state. He had quit his job because of the distance and the labor involved and had come back to his hometown. He worked as an e-rickshaw driver and was the one who had driven me to the place of interview on that day. He had two children—a son and a daughter. His daughter was enrolled at a college in Asansol, pursuing an undergraduate degree in mathematics at the time of the interview.

The exchanges mentioned below took place when I asked S.D. why she got her daughter married at the early age of 18, soon after she had completed her higher-sec-

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ondary (school) education. As I sat there with S.D. and M.P taking turns at conversations about marriage, I became a reference point for gesturing towards 'difference' in their conversation. Though never explicitly stated but only implied, I stood for upper-caste, middle-class women, who were comparatively economically well-off and enjoyed the possibility of a lucrative career ahead of them by virtue of their educational achievements. As the conversation progressed, it began to unfold interesting possibilities of thinking about experiences of marriage and the significance of caste therein. While I sat mumbling half-responses, trying to figure out whether I agreed to what was being said, and slowly relenting under the force of S.D.'s arguments, it became clear that my stance vis-à-vis marriage, was not as much a product of my feminist sensibilities, as much as my privileged location. But this privilege was directly related to the devaluation of S.D.'s and M.P.'s labor. It was after all by consuming domestic labor of the kind that S.D. performed, and by availing the ride in M.P.'s e-rickshaw that I had been able to turn up for field work that day. How then despite being complicit in their oppression (even in the very act of researching) was I to make sense of the experiences of women like S.D. and M.P. and S.D.'s daughters?

S.D. argued that both her daughter and I [the researcher, E.B.] will be forced by gendered ideologies prevalent in our context to marry. Furthermore, once married both of us would feel the pressure to continue in the marriage for the sake of our families, our reputation and social acceptability. What would be different for us, however, was the kind of marriage we had/would have access to and the amount of time we could wait before getting married, both being related. S.D. thus essentially dismissed any exceptional claims of gendered emancipation on my part compared to her daughter.[44] What she rather indicated in her comparison was that gendered compulsions to continue a marriage existed for both of us, but it had very different ramifications for the two of us—women belonging to different castes and classes.

Let me reproduce below what S.D. and M.P. had to say, before taking my analysis further.

> S.D.: See, if one wants something then one has to adjust a little… there has to be some adjustment… what can be done… it's not possible to get everything one desires… women do have to make some adjustments [after marriage]… Now, even you [referring to me, E.B.] are working, you're doing so much...

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but once you go to somebody else's house [upon marriage], even you have to adjust.

M.P.: Their [of the likes of me, E.B.] social equations are different from ours… they don't match with ours

S.D.: No, women are women, they will have to adjust a little… Do you know why? [addressing M.P.] ? When you [addressing me, E.B.] reach that stage you'll get it… [if you were to ever think of ending a marriage, once you've gotten married] you will think that your father will be hurt… "My parents got me married with such hardship… let me adjust a little" − you will feel this yourself… as of now you are single you will not get it… once you are married for the sake of your parents… after the ceremony of marriage, even now, if the daughter comes back home, parents don't have that much respect in the society… everybody lives in an environment… and every environment has a culture to a greater or lesser extent… [addressing M.P.] then she [referring to me, E.B.] will think 'If I go back my father will feel bad'… no matter how much money or education she has… Inevitably, questions about parents and their upbringing will be raised… we have, as a society, not learnt to accept such things yet… Then the change comes… God gives us such strength… she has to accept… let alone society… her extended family… will they let her parents be if she makes a mistake… won't they taunt… this is the kind of daughter they have raised… this is the education they have given her… one has to adjust (*maniye-guchiye nite hoye*) and stay… but yes, among them [referring to me, E.B.] they can choose their own partners after considering carefully… they have the sense to distinguish between what is good and what is bad for them… our daughters do not have that sense...

M.P.: Let me tell you something whether it is your daughter or mine, or even my wife, they are dependent on somebody, they [indicating me] will not be so.

S.D.: It is not about being dependent.

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M.P.: They [referring to me, E.B.] will not be like that… Because whatever she will earn her husband will probably earn more than her—their equations,[45] therefore, will be altogether different…

S.D.: I am not talking about that… I am talking about adjustment…

M.P.: That is 'automatic' for women… once married one has to adjust… don't they know that… but what you are saying is about the situation of poorer households… adjustments one has to make… they [the likes of me, E.B.] are not brutes they are educated… their environment is completely different… there is a lot of 'difference' between us and them… whoever comes in their lives, they will not be uneducated… one does not have to ask them to adjust they will adjust on their own.

S.D.: That strength, God only provides… You know what the case is with them [the likes of me, E.B.]… Now I cook in a house… So that Auntie's son works in Kharagpur… he gets a salary of 80,000… They will never get married to a 'critical' [46] family like ours… I have brought my son up… why will I not enjoy his salary… why will I not be able to enjoy having a daughter-in-law… my daughter-in-law will massage my feet… this is how badly people in our kind of families think… Now Auntie got her son married and within eight days [after the *ashtamangala*[47]] she sent her daughter-in-law to live with her son… she has done everything according to conventions… I told her 'Auntie, why don't you keep her with you for ten-fifteen days… teach her a few things around the house… she is young, educated'… she told me 'No, nobody is young these days… if she can't cook she will buy food from the restaurant… they will figure it out'… They stay in Kharagpur and earn about 80,000… the bride does not work… her father owns a lot of property… now even her husband is earning 80,000… but not near his home… now Auntie's maturity saved the marriage… the bride could leave and be with her husband… she respects Auntie a lot… they come home on vacations… she also visits her parents… but in our kind of households they don't want to allow daughters-in-law to leave, even the husbands don't want to take them along… I was really happy with what Auntie did… I really liked

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> the way she handled the situation... even the daughter-in-law's room is locked… nobody enters that room… her father has given her a bed worth 90,000… [*translation mine*].

A close reading of this excerpt reveals that, even though the lives of both upper-caste and Dalit/Bahujan women were structured by gendered norms around marriage, the upper-caste women had far more negotiating power vis-à-vis such norms. The upper-caste feminist subjectivity was built upon successfully utilizing these spaces but such negotiating power precisely derived from their caste location, i.e., by directly participating in and reinforcing exploitation of Dalit/Bahujan women. Even though at a cursory glance S.D.'s response seems to indicate that Dalit/Bahujan homes have stricter patriarchal arrangements than upper-caste homes—with more progressive attitudes, she is actually hinting towards a more insidious working of structures. Her observations point out that the difference between my [in the future] and her daughter's experience of marriage are [would be] a product of our social location. In her earlier observations, S.D. had pointed out that it was possible for me to not get married till my late twenties because of my father's economic stability.[48] Being a single mother working as a domestic worker, S.D. did not have the financial capacity to wait it out, unlike my father, who had a stable income from being a government employee. Our later conversations also indicated that waiting was not one of S.D.'s options as higher education was unlikely to lead to better employment opportunities for her daughters, unlike it had for me. It was the combination of these factors that would allow me, the upper-caste middle-class woman, to find a 'better' match in terms of a husband.

My socio-economic status would also allow me to marry a man who probably earned more than me, allowing for even more economic affluence. Families, such as the ones S.D. and M.P. imagined I belonged to [upper-caste, middle-class] and was also likely to be married into, were, therefore, less dependent on the physical labor of the family's women. In such contexts, it was possible to outsource domestic labor to hired domestic workers, without conflicts over domestic and care-giving labor arising in the family. It was less likely then, according to S.D., that demands of physical labor to run the family would be made on me, in the way they would be made on her daughter.[49] Finally, as pointed out by S.D. and M.P., the fact that I was likely to have an income would not make me dependent on anyone for my survival. Similarly, Aun-

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tie's daughter-in-law had a father who owned a lot of property. Our economic status was then what gave 'us' far more negotiating power in the marriage than most of the daughters of my respondents could enjoy. The role of caste and class in shaping decisions regarding marriage thus becomes prominent when one explores how choices regarding marriage are circumscribed by a lack of economic and social security and a lack of access to an education which can guarantee some form of secure employment. Furthermore, the experience of marriage itself is not homogenous across social locations, and the possession of economic and educational capital has direct implications for how one experiences marriage itself.

At this point, I will get back to my initial set of concerns about self-reflexivity. Deployment of self-reflexivity as an acknowledgement of privilege and difference, by the researcher, would at this point call for recognizing that Dalit/Bahujan women are likely to experience marriage *differently*. It would also lead to the recognition that the difference exists because they have differential levels of privilege and access. It would also lead us to a nuanced understanding of how marriages represent both agency and continued oppression for Dalit/Bahujan women. Such a standpoint would argue that, on one hand, marriages offered them respite and protection from taking up exploited, devalued paid labor [often coupled with threats of sexual harassment]; on the other hand, it burdened them with unpaid care work and made them economically dependent on their spouses and their families, hence tightening patriarchal control.

Thus, caste and gender emancipation arise as two competing systems, within which Dalit/Bahujan women can be found bargaining, inevitably losing in the bargain, from one side or the other. But I argue such a formulation even though tenable is incomplete. By positing the difference in experiences to be almost accidental and diffused, what is ignored is how upper-caste women can afford to express a kind of feminist subjectivity precisely by benefitting from Dalit/Bahujan women's exploitation, hence denying them the access to such subjectivity. It also obscures the fact that the researcher, an upper-caste feminist, enjoys the possibility of exercising such 'self-reflexivity' and displaying an intrinsic subjectivity in her research, only by being able to benefit from the exploitation of Dalit/Bahujan communities' labor. On the other hand, the subjectivities of her respondents seem to be primarily dialogic or in negotiation with the conditions and representations they find themselves because of the conditions of exploitation that structure their lives.

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Such an accidental model of caste-exploitation then serves to solidify the political righteousness of the upper-caste researcher, adding further value to the upper-caste self, which is capable of reflexively looking at her own experience from an objective position. This would sanction her moral claims of ownership over the knowledge produced; because it is she who can through her detachment and self-reflexivity look at and theorize the two sets of experiences from an objective position, unlike her respondents—even when such knowledge is sourced from the experience of the others. It would then establish the academic endeavor as an unmistakably politically progressive act. Such an act, it would imply, 'makes visible' the continued disadvantageous position of Dalit/Bahujan women in marriages, as compared to upper-caste women's gender 'progressive' experiences [requiring them to not perform much unpaid care work in their homes] of marriage in contemporary Asansol.

Such a deployment of self-reflexivity however misses a larger point. It is the differential material conditions and differential values of labor enjoyed by the two groups of women that were likely to produce their differential experience of marriage. But these two differential values are inter-connected. It is only by maintaining their distinctness from Dalit/Bahujan women and participating in their devaluation could upper-caste women claim better exchange values for their labor. As implied by S.D., upper-caste, middle-class women could abstain from paid labor only by substituting their own labor with the devalued labor of Dalit/Bahujan women. If the labor was not devalued the question of substitution would not arise. It is after all that by consuming such labor, in terms of the cleaning, cooking etc., that I could sit in front of my laptop and type out this essay. Thus, I actively benefit from a system that is responsible for the continued devaluation of the labor of Dalit/Bahujan women by providing them with unequal opportunities.

It must be emphasized here that women, though disadvantaged by caste-patriarchy in general, are not disadvantaged equally. Such a relational understanding of women's experiences across castes, by focusing on 'visibilizing' 'infrastructures' that enable research, then stops us from fetishizing differences, while 'invisibilizing' their construction. Feminist research in such a formulation—even when seeking to visibilize hitherto invisibilized, marginalized women—being enabled by the consumption of their devalued labor, is no longer an unambiguously politically righteous act. The act of doing research becomes complicit in the oppression of Dalit/Bahujan women even

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when seeking to visibilize their experiences. Furthermore, the very frameworks of the researcher being a product of privilege, makes the imposition of *a-priori* 'feminist' categorization [a cognitive infrastructure] upon the experiences of Dalit/Bahujan women, in this case of marriage, inadequate and unethical. The only possibility of ethical research can then be located not merely in making visible 'differential-experiences' but the *relations* that constitute such difference. Such a visibilization of relations then allows us to question the processes by which certain experiences come to be understood as feminist, while certain others are always found to be lacking. In doing so, it allows for the emergence of a more radical feminist praxis that aims at challenging all forms of systemic oppression, not just gender.

_Endnotes

1 It is difficult to limit this migration within a particular timeframe. The migration started as a result of attempts to partition British India and carved out new independent dominions in a way that nation-states matched the religious-communal identity of their inhabitants. It led to the death of millions, and millions of others undertook the journey of crossing the borders to reach their ordained nation-state. The exodus was the heaviest along the two borders between India and Pakistan, i.e., along the Punjab border and along the Bengal border. The migration processes started immediately before the formal enactment of the Partition in 1947 and has continued in varying intensities along the eastern border (largely, the Bengal border) till the present. After the initial surge in migration for about a decade from 1946, it ebbed for a short while. But the flow picked up in the wake of Bangladesh's liberation war against Pakistan from the early 1960s to 1971. Since then it ebbed again but continues to exist in many forms, including cyclical migration around the border areas and more uni-directional migration away from the borders. While in the initial years, from 1946 to 1949–50, most migrants were upper-caste Hindus, the migrants of the latter years have largely been lower-castes/outcastes.

2 *Dalit/Bahujan* are the terms used by lower-caste (*shudras*) and outcaste groups in political attempts to reclaim a history of marginalization and humiliation and re-signify themselves. They correspond to the constitutional categories of Scheduled Castes and Other Backward castes in India. In the context of my research the respondents used the constitutional categories to identify themselves.

3 Jasodhara Bagchi, "Introduction," in *The Trauma and the Triumph—Gender and Partition in Eastern India* Vol. 1, eds. Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (Kolkata: Stree, 2007), 1–14; Gargi Chakravartty, *Coming Out of Partition: Refugee Women in Bengal* (New Delhi: Bluejay Books, 2005).

4 The research was mainly conducted in a refugee colony and in a part of the colony which housed largely working-class households. My mother too had grown up in a working-class neighborhood mostly populated by Partition migrants.

5 See for details Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, eds., *Race and the Epistemologies of Ignorance* (New York: State University Press of New York Press, 2007).

6 Sullivan and Tuana, *Race and the Epistemologies of Ignorance*.

7 Beverley Skeggs, "Feminist Ethnography," in *Handbook of Ethnography*, eds. Paul Atkinson et. al. (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 426–442.

8 Skeggs, "Feminist Ethnography," 427.

9 Skeggs, "Feminist Ethnography," 429.

10 Such a conception of feminist standpoint directly draws from the Marxist assumption that "each oppressed group will have its own critical insights about nature and the larger social order to contribute to the collection of human knowledge. Because different groups are oppressed in different ways, each has the possibility (not the certainty) of developing different insights about systems of social relations in general in which their oppression is a feature." For details see Sandra Harding, ed., *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

11 Dorothy Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21–34.

12 While queer theorists have pointed out that 'men' and 'women' are not the only coordinates of doing gender, I use the term gender, while primarily referring to women, following Joan Wallach Scott's formulation in the essay "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075. Doi: <10.2307/1864376>. If gender is understood as the social organization of the relationship between sexes, then I argue that it can be used to explore how that relationship is organized in conjunction with other structures, and how such organization impacts the relationship between different groups of women.

13 Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 103–126.

14 Joan Wallach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–797.

15 Nancy Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 35–54; Alison Jagger, "Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies,* ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 55–66.

16 Even when testimonies are provided by oppressed groups themselves, Ahmed and Stacey have argued that they do not automatically imply the possibilities of progressive politics because testimonial cultures often erroneously assume that the "position of the witness and the position of the victim […] (is) aligned." But the task of feminist ethnography is even more complex because, here, life-histories are elicited for the purpose of the research alone. See for details Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, "Testimonial Cultures: An Introduction," *Cultural Values* 5, no. 1 (2001): 1–6, here: 2.

17 Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique*, no. 20 (1991–92): 5–32.

18 See for example Joan Sangster, "Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 1 (1994): 5–28; Kathrine Boreland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 320–332.

19 Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 119–133.

20 Marilyn Strathern, "Infrastructures in and of Ethnography," *ANUAC* 7, no. 2 (2018): 49–69.

21 Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 5–32.

22 Skegss, *Class, Self, Culture,* 119–133.

23 Strathern, "Infrastructures in and of Ethnography," 49–69.

24 Ritu Sen Chaudhuri, *The Caste Gender System: A Necessary Analytic of Experience?* (Mumbai: TISS Working Paper no. 9, 2016).

25 Kanchana Mahadevan, "Dalit Women's Experience: Towards a Dalit Feminist Theory," in *Dalit Feminist Theory: A Reader*, eds. Sunaina Arya and Akash Singh Rathore (New York: Routledge, 2020), 223–236.

26 Jenny Rowena, "The 'Dirt' in the Dirty Picture: Caste, Gender and Silk Smitha: Part 1," *Savari,* June 17, 2012, <http://www.dalitweb.org/?p=736>; Jenny Rowena, "The 'Dirt' in the Dirty Picture: Caste, Gender and Silk, Part 2," *Savari,* October 12, 2012, <https://www.dalitweb.org/?p=1064>.

27 Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, "Castes in India—Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development," in *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1916/2004), 241–262; Sharmila Rege, ed., *Against the Madness of Manu: B. R. Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2013).

28 E. V. Ramaswamy, Periyar, transl. G. Aloysisus *Women Enslaved* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2009).

29 Jyotiba Phule, transl. P. G., *Slavery: In the Civilised British Government under the Cloak of Brahminism* Patil (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1991); Savitribai Phule, *Samagra Wangmay* (Kohlapur: Government Central Press, 2011).

30 Ambedkar, "Castes in India," 241–262.

31 Marriages across caste-groups are ritually and legally proscribed. There is hierarchical assignment of civil, cultural, educational and economic rights for each group and they are to continue hereditarily, without change. The Brahman at the apex has the most rights and the Dalit outside the system has technically no rights. Occupations of each group are also given and imbued with an ascending order of purity and morality from the Dalit to the Brahmin. In cases of violation the system enforces itself through social and economic penalties ranging from physical torture to socio-economic boycott. Finally, the system is legitimized by Hindu religious philosophy, making it a sacred inviolable order.

32 Ambedkar, "Castes in India," 246.

33 For a detailed history of such assertions see Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2013); Shailaja Paik, *Dalit Women's Education in Modern India: Double Discrimination* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Shailaja Paik, "The Rise of *New* Dalit Women in Indian Historiography," *History Compass* 16, no. 10 (2018). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12491>; Lata Pratibha Madhukar, "Silenced by Manu and 'Mainstream' Feminism: Dalit-Bahujan Women and Their History," *Savari*, May 7, 2015, <https://www.dalitweb.org/?p=2805>.

34 Rowena, "The 'Dirt' in the Dirty Picture: Caste, Gender and Silk Smitha: Part 1"; Rowena, "The 'Dirt' in the Dirty Picture: Caste, Gender and Silk Smitha: Part 2"; Ritu Sen Chaudhuri, *The Caste Gender System;* Mahadevan, "Dalit Women's Experience," 223–236.

35 See for details Sruthi Herbert, "The Violence of Dalit Feminist Standpoint and Dalit Patriarchy," online talk, *Round Table India*, July 13, 2020, <https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/the-violence-of-dalit-feminist-standpoint-and-dalit-patriarchy/>; Bishaldeb Halder, "Dalit Masculinity/Patriarchy: The Latest Brahman Feminist Gripe," online talk, *Round Table India*, May 19, 2020,

<https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/dalit-masculinity-patriarchy-the-latest-brahman-feminist-gripe/>.

[36] See for details endnote 1.

[37] See for details Prafulla Chakrabarti, *Marginal Men: Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal* (Kalyani: Lumiere Books, 1990); Uditi Sen, "The Myths Refugees Live By: Memory and History in the Making of Bengali Refugee Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 37–76; Sarbani Banerje, "Different Identity Formations in Bengali Partition Narratives by Dalit Refugees," *Interventions* 19, no. 4 (2017): 550–565.

[38] Kalyani Thakur Chanral, *Ami Kyano Chanral Likhi* (Kolkata: Chaturtha Duniya, 2016); Kalyani Thakur Chanral, *Chandalinir Bibriti* (Kolkata: Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha, 2012).

[39] See for details Jashodhara Bagchi, "Introduction," in *The Trauma and the Triumph—Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, vol. 1, eds. Jashodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta (Kolkata: Stree, 2003), 1–14; Gargi Chakravartty. *Coming out of Partition: Refugee Women of Bengal* (New Delhi: Bluejay Books, 2005). This process was however, critiqued as internally conflicted. See for details Archit Basu Guha Choudhury, "Engendered Freedom: Partition and East Bengali Migrant Women," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 49 (2009): 66–69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25663863>; Rachel Weber, "Re(creating) the Home: Women's Role in the Development of Refugee Colonies in South Calcutta," in *The Trauma and Triumph*, vol. 1, eds. Jashodhara Bagchi and Subharanjan Dasgupta (Kolkata: Stree, 2003), 59–79.

[40] See for details Uditi Sen, *Spinster, Prostitute or Pioneer? Images of Refugee Women in Post-Partition Calcutta* (EUI Working Papers, 2011), <http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/19216/MWP_Sen_2011_34.pdf?sequence=1>; Panchali Ray, "Caring or Whoring? Nurses and the Politics of Representation: Colonial to Contemporary Calcutta," in *Kolkata in Space, Time and Imagination*, vol. 2, eds. Anuradha Roy and Melitta Waligora (Kolkata: Primus Books, 2020), 89–112; Tanika Sarkar, "Politics and Women in Bengal: The Condition and Meaning of Participation," in *Women in Colonial India,* ed. Jiddu Krishnamurty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 231–241; Samita Sen, *Women and Labor in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–53.

[41] For details see Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, "From Gin Girls to Scavengers: Women in Raniganj Collieries," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 44 (2001): 4213–4221.

[42] Their situation was distinctly different from the middle-class, part-upper-caste researcher, who had turned up in their homes. The researcher was 28 years old at the time of the interview and was not married. She had enjoyed financial support from her family to complete her education and had received government scholarships as well.

[43] She identified herself as Other Backward Caste, following the constitutional category.

[44] By using the term *gendered emancipation*, I am here referring to the popular feminist idea of the likes of me being able to understand the oppression inherent in marriages through education, and especially feminist education, and being able to contest such oppression within marriage, to a greater or lesser degree, thanks to such understanding.

[45] Here, what is being referred to by the term *equation* are probably the social and economic calculations that different social groups make in conducting their everyday lives given their differential material contexts. Here the explicit reference is being made to the calculations and the negotiations informed by such calculations around marriage.

[46] By 'critical' here she indicated a difficult economic condition—that which is near a crisis.

[47] A Hindu marriage ritual where the bride and groom go back to the bride's house on the eighth day of their marriage.

[48] I was 28 years old at the time of the interview.

[49] It is understandable that, in the studied context, women were forced to undertake long hours of arduous physical labor in both domestic and non-domestic settings. The only hope for respite lay in being able to transfer the burden of this work later on in their lives to their daughters-in-law, whenever they came to have one. In the absence of any financial or social security earned in lieu of their years of labor, it was probably the moral claims of being taken care of by their children, especially their sons and their families, in their old age, that was their only security. Under these circumstances it was not possible for these women to behave in a way the S.D.'s 'Auntie' did and or how my prospective mother-in-law, in her imagination, was likely to behave.