Negotiations with everyday power and violence: A study of female sex workers' experiences in Eastern India

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Abstract

Studies on sex work in India have tended to portray female sex workers as either victims or empowered agents. Over the last two decades, binaries of free and forced regarding participation in sex work have been reinforced by development discourses and interventions on HIV/AIDS and human trafficking which target the sex work community in India. This choice/compulsion binary, in turn, has elicited another binary of violent/non-violent social relations, thereby exceptionalising the nature of violence within sex work.

This thesis argues against this exceptionalisation by locating an analysis of women's participation in sex work, and their experiences of power and violence, within a context of everyday social relations in Eastern India. It presents qualitative data generated from eight months of fieldwork across two prominent red-light areas in Kolkata, a shelter home for rescued female sex workers in its southern suburb, Narendrapur, and villages in the South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. Analysis shows that the research subjects' experiences of power and violence in social relations with members of the household, community, market and state (Kabeer, 1994) and experiences of deviance (Becker, 1963) in these relationships, shape pathways into, lives within and pathways out of sex work. It highlights the cyclical nature of gender-based violence and power inequalities across the lives (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005) of women formerly and currently in sex work. Struggles with power and violence prior to entering sex work continue in different forms within sex work and persist even after women leave, often leading to a return to sex work.

These findings problematize static readings of female sex workers' victimhood and agency. Instead, they present a contextually nuanced analysis of their dynamic experiences and negotiations, rooted within an understanding of wider regional,

social and cultural norms on women's sexuality, mobility and labour force participation.

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Acknowledgements

"Still I'll rise"

-Maya Angelou.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Preface

On the night of the 5th of February 2012 in Kolkata, a woman in her mid-30s was offered a lift home by a man she'd met in a nightclub on Park Street, at the centre of the city's nightlife. She was gang-raped in a moving vehicle by the man and his friends for several hours before being thrown out onto the street. The incident, which came to be known as the 'Park Street Rape Case', sparked outrage when the Chief Minister of the state of West Bengal, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, dismissed the case as *shajano ghotona* (a political conspiracy) against her government. Additionally, two colleagues from the ruling All India Trinamool Congress Party questioned why the victim, a single mother of two, was out drinking late in a nightclub, and dismissed her allegations of rape as those of a disgruntled sex worker who had not been paid by her customer (Bag, 2015). The victim eventually came forward to reveal her identity as one Suzette Jordan, challenging the widespread stigma that shrouds victims of sexual violence and forces them into anonymity. Jordan went on to become a familiar face at public rallies on sexual violence in the city, and began to work as a counsellor with victims of sexual harassment and violence, including children affected by sexual abuse. In March 2015, Jordan died of meningitis (unrelated to her experience of sexual violence), nine months before a court in Kolkata sentenced three men to 10 years in prison for their role in perpetrating violence against Jordan.

Fast-forward to January 2017, when the Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution International (CAP Int'l) and its Indian member organisation Apne Aap, organised a three-day conference titled 'Last Girl First: Second World Congress against the Sexual Exploitation of Women and Girls'. Held in New Delhi, the congress brought

together international celebrities, civil society organisations, activists, and survivors of sexual exploitation to call for an end to sexual violence worldwide. A panel called 'A global movement of survivors mobilising against sexual exploitation' highlighted 'the continuum between all forms of sexual violence, including rape, incest, sexual harassment and prostitution, and how this feeds into the normalization of sexual violence' (CAP Intl, 2017). The National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW), a '...group of sex workers, organizations and sex work support organizations' (AINSW, 2017) formally registered as the 'All India Network of Sex Workers', released an open letter challenging the abolitionist approach of the conference. Signed by over 2000 signatories, which included sex workers' collectives and NGOs working with sex workers, the statement argued that the abolitionist position '…posit(s) prostitution as violence per se, a viewpoint that forecloses any discussion over whether women actively opt for sex work as a livelihood option'. Additionally, it assumes that 'all female sex workers have been coerced into sex work'. The statement goes on to argue that when various forms of violence against women (VAW), viz. "…domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, acid attacks among other issues…is conflated with sex work, it becomes almost impossible for sex workers to voice their right to sex work" (APNSW, 2017). Citing a multi-country qualitative study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2015) on sex work, violence and HIV in Asia, the statement argues that '…research shows that most sex workers report that they experience violence and exploitation at the hands of police and petty thugs, rather than in sexual encounters with clients. Despite this evidence, violence that occurs in sex work is used to justify severe action against the sex work industry, such as closure of work places and "clean ups" which affect adults who do sex work consensually, adversely' (ibid).

1.2. Setting the context

These two seemingly disparate incidents outline the strange dichotomy that frames discussion of violence in sex work in India. On one hand, violence in sex work is denied (as Jordan's experiences show); on the other, it is entrenched in ideological polarities (abolitionist vs. pro-sex work). The ideological polarities differ in their approach to violence in sex work. While abolitionists such as CAP consider prostitution a form of violence, pro-sex work opponents such as NNSW argue that this conflation harms adults who choose to sell sex voluntarily as a form of work. In Indian feminist theorising on sex work, the two oppositional camps, abolitionists and sex-work advocates, draw from Anglo-American debates on the subject (Kotiwaran, 2014). However, significant variations exist. In India, the abolitionist stance has been interested in interrogating the role of poverty and caste-based inequality in sex work, arguing that pro-sex work advocates ignore the structural inequalities that persist in women's engagement with prostitution. However, pro-sex work proponents argue that abolitionism masks conservative and patriarchal ideas about female sexuality and women's work in India (Kapur, 2005). The focus on caste-based exploitation in prostitution has also meant that discussion of violence in sex work has not been included in mainstream considerations of gender-based violence in India. Historically, the issue of violence against women was politicised by the Indian Women's Movement (IWM) in the 1980s, which focused on highlighting forms of violence in social institutions, viz. marriage and family, and those perpetrated by state actors (e.g. police violence) (Gandhi and Shah, 1992). In the wider movement, the campaign to broaden the definition of rape 'forced activists to face the many forms of violence inside and outside the home' (p.85). This included inquiring into marital rape and considering whether a prostitute can be raped (ibid). However, discussion of violence in sex work largely

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remained in the background, reflecting the movement's ambivalence about themes of sexuality (Gangoli, 2008). Indeed, as the National Commission of Women's report, 'Societal Violence on Women and Children in Prostitution' (NCW 1996:9), argues, 'mainstream struggles of and for the emancipation of women in India has (sic) remained immune to the situations and needs' of women in prostitution.

Studies of women in sex work as 'subjects of research' have proliferated '…in the wake of HIV' (Sahni and Shankar, 2011). However, 'the research [that] has been carried out' has fulfilled 'a range of purposes beyond those of interest to sex workers and findings have not always reflected the lives of sex workers, about which there are many assumptions' (p.2). This discourse advocates for the legalisation of sex work, to end the social and legal precarity that affect those who sell sex in India. Kotiswaran (2008:589) argues that the extant anti-sex-work law, the 1986 Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA), is an anomaly: 'It does not criminalize the sale of sexual services per se, but criminalizes many of the activities necessary in order to do sex work'. The activities currently criminalised under the ITPA which affect the everyday lives of female sex workers include soliciting, maintaining a brothel or organising commercial activities around the sale of sex, profiting from earnings from the sale of sex, and the sale of sex in public places (Kotiswaran, 2008; Reddy, 2004). Additionally, 'Section 15 allows the police to conduct raids on brothels without a warrant, based on the mere belief that an offense under the ITPA is being committed on the premises' (Kotiswaran 2008:589). The ITPA merges the distinction between human trafficking and sex work in India, homogenising victimhood to violence. In 2016, the Ministry of Women and Child Development in India, in consultation with civil society organisations, released several drafts of a bill which, if passed, will go on to form a new central law on human trafficking. The government's initial attempt to repeal the ITPA and disentangle human trafficking from sex work, however, has been criticised by

abolitionist anti-trafficking NGOs (DNA, 2016;PTI, 2016). Modifications to the draft bill are ongoing, and when passed in Parliament will have legal ramifications for the lives of sex workers in India.

Over the last decade, increasing global attention to the issue of human trafficking has highlighted the plight of women who are coercively sold into sex work in India. However, by framing women's engagement with sex work as inherently exploitative (as an expression of trafficking), from which rescue by state and non-state actors is imperative, the discourse reiterates an abolitionist view of prostitution. Shah (2014:24-25) argues that development discourses about HIV and human trafficking have reinforced ideas of 'prostitution-as-risk' and 'prostitution-as-violence'. While the first implies that 'once women begin selling sexual services, they irrevocably inhabit the identity and stigma of prostitution, which is imbricated with extreme HIV risk', the second constructs a 'conceptual silo around the livelihood histories of women selling sexual services who are produced as already powerless' (p.25). These constructions reinforce the idea of violence in sex work as exceptional, connected to either disease or the very nature of selling sex, which cannot be consensual. In doing so, they deny the ways in which violence in the lives of women in sex work might be connected to experiences prior to entry into as well as after leaving sex work. The identities of women in sex work are atomised, detached from the ways in which social relations drive entry and shape experiences in sex work.

As Jordan's experiences show, the social identities of women and their (non)performance of prescriptive behaviour play a key role in the perception of women as victims of (sexual) violence in India. Jordan's experiences are an indication of cultural, patriarchal ideas of feminine behaviour and sexuality, which dismiss certain women's victimhood if they are seen to display socially inappropriate behaviour. The 'Delhi rape case' of a female student in December 2012, which sparked national outrage, witnessed a proliferation of conservative

views on women's mobility, 'appropriate' clothing and public behaviour (BBC, June 2014) in discussions on women's safety. These incidents and their aftermath highlight a strong need to analyse women's experiences of and negotiations with violence in sex work, challenging the patriarchal idea of the 'perfect victim'. However, the reinforcement of female sex workers as 'special victims' – victims of trafficking and/or vulnerable to HIV/AIDS – without considering the ways in which women's positionalities in wider social and gender relations drive entry into sex work, shape experiences of violence in sex work and continue to persist after exiting sex work, denies them inclusion in wider ongoing discussions on violence against women in India. In their summary report on the preliminary findings from the first Pan-India survey of Sex Workers, Sahni and Shankar (2011:2) argue that:

> Studies of sex workers often reduce complex lives into simplistic binaries, most commonly: an understanding of female sex workers as freely engaging in, or forced into sex work. This is both inaccurate and insufficient. Much relevant information is ignored such as family and socio-economic background, caste and religious segregations, sexual identities, marital status, not to mention work identities other than and in addition to sex work.

1.3. Research Objectives

This research challenges the reduction of complex lives into simple binaries by considering female sex workers' everyday experiences of and negotiations with violence and power inequalities. It situates these experiences and negotiations in social relations that frame their everyday lives. In this thesis, the 'everyday' extends beyond the immediate experience of violence *within* sex work, by exploring experiences *before* and *after* engagement with sex work. Through this,

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commonalities in experiences are identified, unexceptionalising experiences in sex work. These experiences emerge from this research's collection of life-histories of women formerly and currently engaged in sex work in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. Its capital city, Kolkata, is home to Sonagachi, one of Asia's largest historic red-light areas, and several smaller ones. Additionally, the state, historically known as Bengal, witnessed wide and sweeping social reforms in the 19th century which affected women's lives in the region and created social conditions that birthed the modern-day prostitute, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The sample in this research includes full-time and part-time female sex workers and madams living and working in two red-light areas in Kolkata: Sonagachi and Kalighat. Additionally, experiences of women formerly in sex work are considered. This includes female sex workers rescued through anti-trafficking interventions, living in shelter homes and women who have returned to their residential communities, after a period of engagement with sex work. Their experiences of exiting sex work through individual escape with assistance from customers, rescue through anti-trafficking interventions, and combinations of the two are explored. The sample comprises women of peri-urban and rural backgrounds from Hindu and Muslim communities in the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal and the neighbouring countries Nepal and Bangladesh, which share international borders with India through the state's eastern and northern borders.

Overall, this thesis situates itself within a broad landscape of studies on violence against women and on gender and social relations in India. These are juxtaposed with broader conceptual discussions on everyday forms of violence and power, and specific literature that explores gender-based violence and power inequalities in social relations. The latter yields frameworks such as Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) 'life-cycle' approach to identifying gender-based violence (adopted by the World Health Organisation) and Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework to map power

inequalities in gender relations. Despite the application of these frameworks in the wider literature on women's experiences of violence and power, they have not been applied to the study of the lives of women in sex work. In this research, they are drawn on to explore ways in which women's positioning in social and gender relations across (i) their life-trajectories and (ii) different institutions of household, market, community and state, affect experiences of violence and power inequalities in sex work. Pathways into and out of and experiences within sex work are analysed in a context of experiences of violence and power inequalities in social relations in women's lives that shape these various stages of their engagement with sex work.

Additionally, this thesis identifies and interrogates emerging themes from specific literature on violence in sex work, framed in the anti-trafficking and HIV/AIDS discourses. In the former, 'rescue' emerges as the only form of resolution of violence in sex work, ignoring ways in which female sex workers negotiate violence and power inequalities in sex work while choosing to remain in it. This thesis draws on Ortner (1995) and Reader's (2007) arguments on 'politics of resistance' and 'patiency' respectively to problematise binaries of victimhood and agency within the discussion of female sex workers' lives. A review of anti-trafficking literature also highlights how subsequent interventions of rehabilitation and re-integration targeting rescued female sex workers ignore previous experiences of violence (that are not directly connected to pathways into sex work) in social relations which drive entry and re-entry into sex work. In literature on violence in sex work framed by the HIV/AIDS discourse, stigma (Goffman, 1963) emerges as a form of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969; 1990) that affects women's lives in sex work and impedes their access to health services and legal recourse. However, this literature fails to connect experiences of stigma in sex work to those prior to entering and after leaving sex work. This thesis addresses that by mapping how experiences of deviance (Becker, 1963) and the accompanying stigma in women's lives are

shaped by experiences of violence within social relations, which drive pathways into sex work, affect women's negotiations within sex work, and continue to persist after they leave.

Overall, this research contributes to specific studies on the lives of women in sex work as well as to broader studies on social and gender relations and on violence against women in India, and South Asia. Through its engagement with women's negotiations with various forms of violence not restricted to sex work, it also contributes to the scholarship and discussion on agency, resistance and victimhood amongst female victims of violence in South Asia.

1.4. Research Questions

This research answers the following overarching question:

How do women formerly and currently engaged in sex work negotiate everyday power and violence?

This question is followed by three sub-questions, each of which has its own set of sub-questions. These form the research question hierarchy at the centre of this thesis.

1. *How are pathways into sex work affected by experiences of power inequalities and violence within social relations?*

   i.   How are pathways into sex work affected by experiences of power and violence within natal households?

   ii.   How are pathways into sex work affected by experiences of power and violence within marital households?

   iii. How does the process of looking for *kono kaaj* (any work) affect pathways into sex work?

2. *How do social relations in the red-light area affect female sex workers' experiences of power inequalities and violence?*

    i.   How are social relations formed across institutions in the Kalighat red-light area?

    ii.   How are social relations formed across institutions in the Sonagachi red-light area?

    iii.   How do these social relations shape female sex workers' experiences of power and violence?

3. *How do pathways out of sex work affect, and how are they affected by, social relations and experiences of power and violence within these relations?*

    i.   How do processes of escape draw from and affect social relations in the red-light area?

    ii.   How do processes of rescue and rehabilitation affect social relations within female sex workers' lives?

    iii.   How does women's return to their residential communities affect social relations?

The research questions reveal the overall aim of this thesis: to unexceptionalise the experiences of women in sex work and acknowledge how social relations in their lives shape their entry into, experiences in, and exit from sex work. Additionally, these questions strive to map experiences of and negotiations with power and violence across the lives of women in sex work, even after they leave.

1.5. A note on language

In this thesis, I use the terms 'sex work' and 'female sex workers' to dissociate this research from the historically pejorative words, 'prostitute' and 'prostitution'. The use of the former over the latter also underlines the act of selling sex and making someone sell sex as a money-making activity, either for the women themselves or for those who coercively sell them into sex work. However, these binaries do not remain watertight: many women in this research decided to continue to sell sex or returned to selling sex, despite being sold into it and managing to escape. The term 'sex work' also views selling sex as a form of 'sexual commerce' (Shah 2014:15) which includes full-time and part-time sex work, the latter carried out in addition to other forms of work in the informal labour market. Although 'sex work' is commonly used in the HIV discourse, contrasted with 'commercial sexual exploitation' in the anti-trafficking discourse, this thesis does not explicitly place itself within the former or endorse its ideology with the use of the term. Additionally, the thesis uses the term 'customer' over 'client' to refer to men who buy sex from women, due to the common usage of the term amongst the women formerly and currently engaged in sex work in this research. Female sex worker and red-light area are abbreviated to FSW and RLA across the thesis to maintain the requisite word count. Additionally, words viz. 'victim', 'rescue', 'deviant', 'rehabilitation', 'reintegration', 'prostitute', 'trafficking', 'empowerment' etc., are used in this thesis with an awareness and acknowledgement of their contested, subjective and problematic nature.

1.6. Structure

After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 sets out the regional, cultural and social context of the research. The chapter discusses patriarchy and social relations in Bengali society and how the former affects women's positionalities in their relations. Additionally, it provides an overview of the historical and contemporary setting for sex work in West Bengal and the city of Kolkata, with an eye on continuities and discontinuities between the two.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature on violence against women in sex work in India. It discusses the ways in which violence against sex workers is conceptualised and dealt with in Indian feminist thought and women's movements, and identifies commonalities between the otherwise polarised abolitionist and pro-sex work approaches to violence in sex work. A conceptual discussion on violence, power and social relations yields useful theoretical frameworks to map the experiences of violence and power inequalities for women in sex work. Finally, literature on violence in sex work framed in the anti-trafficking and HIV/AIDS discourse is critically reviewed and the gaps identified are addressed in this thesis.

Chapter 4 establishes the methodological framework of this research. An ethnographic approach combined with life-history interviewing is discussed as a suitable method for data collection. This discussion takes place against the backdrop of a discussion on some of the challenges of researching sex work. This is used as a springboard to introduce and describe the fieldwork process, site selection, data collection methods and the sample drawn from each site. Ethical concerns are addressed, and the analytical process during write-up is described for the data gathered from the fieldwork.

Chapters 5-7 comprise three data chapters that lie at the heart of this research. Each engages with a different stage of women's participation in sex work and answers the three blocks of research questions (section.1.4) respectively. Chapter 5 explores how violence and power inequalities within social relations in women's households affect their pathways into sex work. Through this exploration, a three-step pathway model is developed, which accommodates coercive and voluntary pathways into sex work and allows for heterogeneity in experiences of entry into sex work. Chapter 6 explores experiences of violence and power inequalities in brothel-based sex work. Using Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework, the chapter examines the ways in which social relations across the institutions of household, community, market and state located in red-light areas shape female sex workers' experiences of and negotiations with violence and power inequalities. Chapter 7 discusses pathways out of sex work, and how these draw on and affect social relations in the lives of female sex workers. Individual escape with the assistance of customers, rescue through anti-trafficking interventions, and a combination of escape and anti-trafficking rehabilitative processes are identified and discussed as three forms of exit from sex work.

Chapter 8 is the final analytical chapter in this research. It brings together insights from Chapters 5-7 through an analysis of 'deviant careers' (Becker, 1963) in the lives of current and former female sex workers. This conceptual framework allows for a study of the ways in which power and violence in social relations construct deviance in women's lives that propel their entry into sex work and persist after they leave.

Chapter 9 presents the concluding arguments of this research and highlights opportunities for further research.

Chapter 2. Research Context

2.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the social, cultural, legal and regional context of this research. It begins with the description of the regional location of the research, the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, and its capital city, Kolkata. After this, the specific nature of patriarchy in the state, with an eye on how it affects women's work, access to resources, mobility and sexuality, is discussed. Then the construction of personhood, gender and social relations in Bengali society is highlighted. The rest of the chapter provides a historical review of how the colonial period affected perceptions of femininity and women's work in Bengal. This shows how contemporary material conditions for sex work were affected by social, political and cultural changes that took place in 19th-century Bengal. The chapter ends with a contemporary overview of sex work in West Bengal.

2.2. Kolkata and West Bengal

West Bengal is a state in eastern India. It is geographically diverse, with the Himalayas in the north and the Bay of Bengal to the south. In the east, it borders Bangladesh, and it shares northern borders with the countries of Nepal and Bhutan. Administratively the state contains 20 districts and 3 divisions. Kolkata is the capital and the largest city in the state. Historically, the state was part of erstwhile Bengal, which included the region now known as West Bengal and modern-day Bangladesh (formerly known as East Bengal). With India's independence from the British colonial empire, Bengal was partitioned along religious lines, similar to Punjab's partition in the north-west; while one part of

Punjab became part of Pakistan, the other remained in India. The division of Bengal split the erstwhile Bengal region into Hindu-majority West Bengal, which became part of India. East Bengal came to be known as East Pakistan, with a Muslim majority. The partition led to the mass displacement of Hindu and Muslim families as they left behind belongings, homes, kin and friends of the other religion to cross borders. In subsequent years, the rise of the Bengali nationalist movement in East Pakistan led to the 'Liberation War', which formed the boundaries of modern day Bangladesh in 1971. Despite the historical fragmentation of Bengal along religious lines, commonalities of language and culture across the two regions persist.

Kolkata, as the capital city, occupied historical prominence in India's colonisation. As the first capital of the British empire in India, Calcutta (now known as Kolkata) went through several socio-economic changes which affected, among other things, women's lives and positionalities within social relations, and ideological perspectives on women's work. In a study on the changing status of women in West Bengal between 1970 and 2000, Bagchi and Dutta Gupta (2004:15) note that the demographic profile of women in the state showed 'upward trends': despite improvements in life expectancy at birth for women, the child sex-ratio, although higher than the national average, remained low. The authors attributes this to 'son preference, in its many manifestations' which 'appears to stand at the helm of many social evils' (ibid). This is elaborated on in the next section in a broader discussion of patriarchy and social relations in India, with a focus on Bengali society and how women are positioned in it.

2.3. Patriarchy and social relations in Bengal

2.3.1. Patriarchy in West Bengal

In her study of patriarchy and daughter disfavour in West Bengal, Warrier (1993:4) argues that the state provides a 'particularly interesting case of mid-level patriarchy or "attenuated" patriarchy in the South Asian context'. The term 'attenuated' she attributes to Skinner (1993) who, in his study of conjugal power in Tokugawa Japanese families, describes how men and women in villages possessed complementary and proportionate roles in the family in terms of their labour, spheres of authority and interdependence. In comparison to a persistent and thorough male bias in Chinese joint families, Skinner (1993) found that in early modern Japanese family systems, power relations in family and marriage were less biased in favour of men and women enjoyed considerable conjugal power (Yonemoto, 2016:13). Similarly, Warrier (1993) argues that compared to the 'classically' patriarchal oppressive Northwest region, the state is less 'sinister' in terms of its treatment of women, but more than the South (of India). Unlike the northern villages, which tend to be multi-caste with lower numbers of scheduled tribe communities, West Bengal exhibits a 'cross-cutting dimension of conservative upper-castes and Scheduled castes and tribes' (p.4). Drawing on Sopher (1980:289-326), the author argues that overall in a study of sociocultural dimensions across India, West Bengal provides a key regional and social pivot between North and South India: Sopher (1980) uses the boundary of the Satpura hill range, north of the Deccan plateau, to categorise his socio-cultural comparative study of peninsular and continental India.

To understand what makes West Bengal a pivot between North and South India, the social specification of patriarchal norms in West Bengal, drawing on Warrier's (1993) detailed study of patriarchy in the rural context in West Bengal, is discussed below. Within this lies a discussion of how caste is linked to patriarchy to affect

women's positionalities, control over their sexuality and access to resources, especially land. Control over women's sexuality, as a peculiar characteristic of Indian patriarchy which translates into restrictions on women's mobility and overall autonomy, is highlighted. Since my research context explores the lives of rural and peri-urban women in an urban context, I will refer to Donner's (2015) exploration of kinship, marriage and property regimes in urban Bengal, primarily the city of Kolkata. In her research, the author explores the relationship between rapid economic transformation and changing lifestyles among the middle class, juxtaposed with enduring patriarchal traditions which limit women's ability to inherit property (Donner 2015).

2.3.2. The material and the ideological: Caste, patriarchy, and women's position in the household

Miller (1986:1034) argues that 'powerful systems of gender and social inequalities affect the life chances of daughters'. Among these systems, which provide an interlocking framework from which to understand daughter disfavour, one that 'most directly affects the lives and deaths of women is that of gender inequality or patriarchy' (Warrier 1993:16). However, patriarchy, like other historical systems, differs historically, socially and geographically (Bardhan 1985; Caplan and Bujra, 1978; Mies 1986, also cited in Warrier 1993:16), and these differences shape the exact nature of the vulnerabilities and well-being of women and girls in the system.

Patriarchal norms in Bengal, as in other parts of India, are linked to and reinforce and are reinforced by the caste system. Warrier (1993:17) argues that there is a 'crucial link between the stricter control of women and the social and economic position of the caste within the caste hierarchy, i.e. observance of various elements

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of the patriarchal systems is greatest among the upper castes'. In Hindu communities in North India, upper-caste Brahminical codes draw from the *Manusamhita,* a codification of Hindu social laws which is believed to have been written by Manu around the first two centuries CE (Warrier, 1993:29). These social laws affect women's position in Hindu society, especially regarding property inheritance and marriage payments or dowry, and prescribe women's behaviour (Bardhan 1985;Mukherjee 1994; Sengupta, 1970). According to these laws, women in North Indian society are under the control of their father, then their husband, and finally their sons in old age (Jeffrey, 1979). The ascendancy of Brahminical codes in North India led to the increasing prevalence of high-caste practices viz. *kanyadan* (the gift of a virgin during marriage), marriage as an indissoluble sacrament, subcaste endogamy with clan hypergamy, a patrilineal inheritance code, and *streedharma* (codes of female propriety). Other forms of marriage viz. bride-price and matrilineal inheritance came to be viewed with derision by the upper castes (Bardhan 1985:2218, also cited in Warrier, 1993:17). A parallel caste hierarchy developed amongst Muslims in India, too: Srinivas (1986) has argued that Indian Hindus who converted to Islam brought their caste system into their new religion, whereas Dumont (1957) argues that Muslim conquerors consciously adopted the caste system (also cited in Khanam, 2013). Whatever its origin, control of women's autonomy, behaviour, sexuality and mobility also came to be associated with upper-caste and upper-class Muslim families in North India (Jeffrey, 1979). In particular, the practice of *purdah* (literally translating as curtain), i.e. the seclusion of women in the Muslim community, has been associated with wider patterns of social organisation, property arrangements, economic status and education, and its prevalence extends to Hindu upper-caste, upper-class communities. Jeffrey (1979:31) emphasises the universality of the practice by arguing that *purdah*:

…is not just a rural phenomenon. It has also been long associated with the urban elites, with the royal courts and the households of their followers, and with wealthy traders and businessmen. In stratified social systems, a common feature is the emulation of the rich by the less wealthy; and to this day, in India, *purdah* is widely – though not universally, it must be stressed – associated with respectability and family honour. *Purdah* is part and parcel of stratification in India.

Despite its spread across North India, however, the exact nature of the practice of *purdah,* along with that of other patriarchal norms, differs based on class, religious and regional grounds. Women's positionality by extension therefore differs across groups too (Warrier, 1993:19). In a primary rural society, such as India, other factors also interact to affect women's position. Agarwal (1997:1) has argued that gender relations (like all social relations) 'embody both the material and the ideological', where women's position within these relations is determined 'not only in the division of resources between men and women, but also in ideas and representations'. For example, referring to Agarwal (1988:532), Kishwar (1987,1989), and Sharma (1980), Warrier (p.18) argues that although a women's social and economic standing in rural India depends on her access to land, her ability to exercise ownership over it and contribution to household productivity are simultaneously affected by traditions, norms and practices relating to family, caste, kinship, marriage, seclusion and laws that affect all of the above.

2.3.3. Access to property

In Bengal, the inheritance of land was governed by the ancient law of the *Dayabagha,* compared to the *Mitakshara* which was prevalent across the country. Both, however, had in common their denial of women's right to immovable

property. According to the *Dayabagha,* men held complete ownership of property, which they could pass on to whomever they wished. Usually sons inherited, but widows could retain a life inheritance through their sons, conditional upon the former maintaining a chaste life (Warrier, 1993:19). In West Bengal, inheritance 'remains patrilineal with daughters and widows inheriting property under specific customs, thereby bringing West Bengal closer to the North Indian model' (ibid); scheduled castes in West Bengal seem to adhere to the same inheritance laws that affect upper castes (p.19).

Based on two decades of fieldwork with middle-class families in Kolkata, Donner (2015:6) argues that in the urban context:

> …whilst women's rights have greatly improved and property rights in particular have been included in the revised versions of the Personal Codes, women's actual access to property is more often than not still governed by older ideas about dependency, patrilineality and collective, but male controlled, ownership'.

The author refers to Uberoi's (2006:22) argument that the new 'cosmopolitan, all India middle and professional class is not conspicuously cosmopolitan in its kinship and marriage practices. This extends to women's rights to property, 'which continue to be mediated by the joint family ideology, even where nuclear families may proliferate in practice' (Donner, 2015:6). The 'joint family', 'ideally defined as a patrilineal and patrilocal kin group sharing a household' and based on the 'pillars of arranged marriage and patrilocality', serves to 'reproduce hierarchical gender and age-related rules in the home' (ibid). Additionally, as an ideology' it naturalises the 'patriline as a collective, property holding unit, enshrined in law with "customary" patriarchal values at its heart' (ibid). In a patriarchal, patrilocal system, the membership of women as sisters, daughters and wives of the Bengali patriline or *bangsha* remains precarious (Donner, 2015:14). Chapter 5, which explores

pathways into sex work, shows how this form of precarity in social relations in the household drives women from a particular socio-economic background into the informal labour market, and eventually into sex work.

2.3.4. Control over women's sexuality

Dube (1997:7) argues that South Asia, is culturally inclined towards 'strong patriliny, patrilocality, male authority and control over resources'. In this, the governance of sexuality is a peculiar characteristic of South Asian kinship rights. In Tambiah et al's (1989:415) comparative study of the position of women in Sub-Saharan Africa and North India, he comments on the difference between the management of female sexuality in the two cultures. Unlike the separation of *uxorem* (sexual rights) and *genetricem* (rights to women's procreative abilities) in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asian culture does not distinguish between reproduction and sexuality (Dube,1997:49). Moreover, the 'management of female sexuality' is not restricted to the ambit of the immediate male relatives of the women (father/brother) in the natal family and the husband in the marital family alone. Instead, kinship systems in South Asia exercise a 'special kind of male control over female sexuality, rooted in patrilineal ideology and in a consciousness of territoriality and group solidarity' (Dube 1997:51). This form of 'corporate control' (p.51) over women's domestic and sexual labour prescribes a certain kind of non-mobile, secluded existence for rural women with an emphasis on the need to guard a woman's purity, and through that, the purity of the patriline (Dube, 1997:50). Fruzzetti (1982) highlights the significance of virginity (sexual purity) in the exchange of gifts in Bengali Hindu marital rituals; Muslim contractual marriages (*nikah*) are meant to establish the husband's ownership of his wife's sexuality (Dube, 1997:50).

In West Bengal, as in the rest of the country, marriage is arranged to strengthen patrilineal kin ties, but also to transfer the governance of the woman's sexuality from the natal to the marital family. Agarwal (1988) has argued that women in India lack the autonomy to choose their own life partner, time and age of marriage, and age of remarriage if widowed or divorced. However, Warrier (1993) refers to Klass (1966) to argue that despite the prevalence of patrilocal residential arrangements in West Bengal, the shortness of marriage distances implies that the natal household is often next door, which offers newly-married women support and comfort. Chapter 5 explores how, despite this, women do not often disclose experiences of violence within their marriage with their natal family. Additionally, to return to one's natal household after the breakdown of a marriage is to be seen as a *bhaar* (burden), which drives women to look for work or build new social relations through romantic relationships with men.

2.4. Personhood and social relations in Bengali society

Personhood in Bengali society is 'inherently relational, each person functioning as a nexus within a 'net' (*jal*) of ties shared with people (especially kin), places, and things' (Lamb, 1997:283). In this, however, men and women form social ties differently in their lives. While male ties are supposed to be lifelong and enduring once made, women's relations are 'repeatedly altered – first made, then unmade and remade, then often again unmade' (p.290). This refers to the shifts between women's ties to their natal and marital households; the latter, once made, however, is expected to endure. As Chapters 5-8 explore, women's experiences of power inequalities and violence in their lives were due to men unmaking lifelong ties with women through abandonment in marriage, negligence as a father, etc., aggravated by the women's dependency on relationships with men for social and economic

security. However, as Sen (1997) argues, women's collective resistance to violence also draws on their social relations. Gulati and Bagchi's (2005) collection of twelve personal narratives by Indian women show how women from elite classes in Bengal navigate social relations and their careers in their lives, and the importance of patriarchal support within these navigations. Although this thesis deals with the lives of women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, Gulati and Bagchi's (2005) narratives highlight how the influence of women's social relations with men on women's lives and identities transcend class in Indian (and Bengali) society.

The next section continues this discussion with a historical overview of how women's positionalities in social relations affected perceptions of women's work and sexuality in 19th-century Bengal.

2.5. Women's participation in labour and sexuality: A historical overview

2.5.1. Introduction

A historical overview of women's participation in labour in the second half of the 19th century in Bengal provides insights into how perspectives and norms on women's work, femininity and sexuality overlapped. These norms continue to hold sway in contemporary times and are therefore relevant to the social and cultural context of this research. Under Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) India became part of the British Empire in 1858, with its capital in Calcutta (present-day Kolkata). The 19th and early 20th centuries were significant in the reconstruction and re-imagination of cultural and social mores in Calcutta and wider Bengal. In Bengal during that period, norms constructed as part of the nationalist response to the

colonial project of social reforms concerned themselves with an idealisation of domesticity (Sen, 1999) and reworking femininity (Chatterjee 1989), while accepting some aspects of modernity (education, social reform) espoused by the colonial regime. This new patriarchy thrust women into the resolution of what Chatterjee (1989) describes as the 'nationalist question'. Chatterjee (1992:2) has argued that in the debate between conservatives who 'advocated a return to the past' and progressive forces who 'pointed out that social practices such as *Sati* (widow burnings) or *Kulin* (polygamy) could hardly be considered civilised behaviour…women emerged…as the markers of civilisation'. The resolution of the 'nationalist question' was spearheaded by the emerging Indian middle class, who argued that there was a need to divide the material and spiritual domains of the colonised subjects to restrict the effect of colonisation on the latter's lives and avoid the loss of the native cultural identity. The new patriarchal norms that emerged in Bengal honed in on prescribing and controlling women's sexuality – connecting it to growing anxieties among the middle classes about the crumbling institution of the Bengali joint family due to migration, urbanisation and changing conjugal patterns (Sen 1999:179). On a national level, the idealisation of motherhood and the association of a reformed kind of Hindu womanhood with the Hindu nation (Sarkar, 2001) was devised to confront colonial allegations that Indian society was barbaric and oppressive (Chatterjee, 1989). British legislation on prostitution such as the Cantonment Act (to regulate access to prostitutes by soldiers living on British military bases), followed by the Contagious Diseases Act (to control, extensively survey and register women in prostitution in order to control the spread of venereal disease) in the 1860s, redirected growing concern among the middle-class about women's participation in labour and the association of sexual promiscuity with women workers, onto the ideological and sociological image of the prostitute. These regulations changed the social and historical fabric of prostitution as it had existed before the start of the colonial era, and were extremely significant in not

only determining the present-day material, sociological, geographical, legal and cultural terrain of prostitution in West Bengal and the city of Kolkata, but also women's participation in the informal labour market in the region.

To understand the processes that led to these changes, this section draws from Sen's (1999) work on the intersection of gender and class which affected the (in)visibility of women's work in 19th-century Bengal. This work shows how the nationalist, moral and cultural anxieties of the new Bengali middle class led to the association of sexual laxity with working-class women, and the prioritisation of housework over other kinds of work outside the home. Chatterjee's (1989) arguments on how a new kind of patriarchy was formulated, and what this meant for Bengali women across different classes engaged in work inside and outside the home, is also significant. Finally, the section examines the construction of the image of the prostitute in late 19th-early 20th century Bengal. Within this, the ways in which debates and concerns about women's sexuality in the maintenance of class and caste hegemony in Bengal came to manifest in corporeal and ideological concerns about the control and regulation of prostitution are explored.

2.5.2. Class, gender and women's work in 19th-century Bengal

In her book *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: Bengal's Jute Industry*, Sen (1999:2) explores the history of labouring women in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and argues that 'the way in which social constructions of gender constituted Bengal's working class has had long-term and enduring implications'. One of these implications is the way in which women's remunerative labour was rendered invisible, stripped of its economic value, in the socio-economic context of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Sen (1999:9) links this invisibility to emerging social norms during that period, emphasising how the idealisation of 'domesticity'

amongst the elite classes in Bengal and the increasing association of domestic tasks with femininity rendered elite women's work 'physically and socially invisible', which in turn 'underwrote the denigration of women's remunerated work'. Additionally, she argues that the low rate of employment of women compared to men (20 percent of the female population compared to 80 percent of the male population, according to the Census of India (1901:83), was a 'direct consequence of the intermittent nature of women's work' (p.10). Since women's entry into the labour market was influenced by household demands, e.g. 'married women undertook extra familial paid work when male earnings were inadequate or inconstant', for 'many women this meant that they worked almost all their lives' (p.10). However, despite this, women's work in the labour market was considered '"supplementary" by their employers and their families', thereby disabling women in the labour market 'at their very point of entry' (p.10).

Sen's (1999:2) work is significant to this particular chapter since she argues that '…to understand how social constructions of gender shaped the lives and work of women wage labourers, wider social anxieties about women's role and position in the home have to be taken into account'. Although her study is on working women in the jute industry in Bengal, her findings highlight the association of (immoral) sexuality with the image of the working (poor) woman in this region. Sen (1999:178-179) elaborates on this in her chapter on 'temporary marriages' amongst the working classes, a term used to describe any kind of sexual-affective relationship outside the realm of conventional marriage, i.e. those pervious to termination and change in a way that defies marriage as 'irrevocable' and as a 'sacrament' in the Brahminical view. She argues that through participation in these temporary marriages, 'jute mill women became symbols of infamy and depravation' and were designated as 'prostitutes'; this designation blurring the lines between prostitution, concubinage and marriage (p.117). Returning to the idealisation of domesticity,

Sen (1999:17) argues that the opposition in nationalist discourses between the public sphere and the home was 'defining a distance between the *bhadramahila* (gentlewoman) and the *magi* (prostitute)'. Referring to Chatterjee's (1992) work on the social construction of the prostitute in colonial India and her own work (Sen, 1984) on honour and resistance in Bengal, Sen (1999:179) argues that:

> Any public activity – public performance, freedom of movement and participation in labour outside the home – pushed women from their accepted role of mother, daughter and wife to that of the prostitute who was an outcast. The space outside of the home was the space of the *beshya.*[1]

The *bhadramahila* was re-imagined as a suitable companion to the Bengali *bhadralok,* a term popularised by Broomfield (1968). Used in everyday parlance to mean 'gentleman', of late the term and its meanings have been the focus of much debate among South Asian scholars. Amin (1996) summarises some of these debates in her discussion of the *sharif bhadralok*, i.e. the Muslim *bhadralok* in Bengal in the 19th century. She explains that 'some contend that the term *bhadralok* has been thrust forth as an "elite group" as a counter to the Marxian concept of "bourgeois" or "middle class"' (p.5). She mentions Sarkar's (1973) argument that the *bhadralok* were not authentically industrial or commercial bourgeoise but 'the educated classes, men with leisure, means of information and a position above menial dependence…professional men in town and country who very often had not severed connections with the land' (p.30). However, Amin (1996:5) stays with Mukherjee's (1977) understanding of the *bhadralok* as a 'social class (not a status group)' which, 'despite the controversy', she argues, 'serves as a useful analytical category':

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[1] In contemporary Bengali, *beshya* indicates a prostitute. It came into use in the late 19th century. (Chatterjee, 1992)

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> The new urban class used it to describe themselves separated, on the one hand, from the feudal aristocracy and the peasants of the rural areas, and on the other, from the English administration and the urban poor [of Calcutta] …The self image and the world view of the Bengali middle class were largely shaped by the idea that the society in Bengal was broadly divided between the *bhadralok* and the *abhadralok*…between the cultured rich and the middling classes and the uncultured poor. (Mukherjee, 1977:63)[2]

2.5.3. The *bhadralok,* the *bhadramahila* and social reform

The division between the private and the public as the realms of the *bhadramahila* and the *magi*, and the idealisation of 'domesticity', played into and reinforced the distinctions on which the *bhadralok* identity was constituted.[3] But this division was also strongly influenced by the broader nationalist response to the colonial project of social reform in India. Chatterjee (1989:622) has argued that apart from the 'characterization of the political condition of India preceding the British conquest as a state of anarchy, lawlessness and arbitrary despotism', social reform formed a 'central element in the ideological justification of the British rule' which comprised criticism of and change in the "degenerate and barbaric" social customs of the Indian people'. This process and the counter-reaction to it by Indian nationalists constructed what Chatterjee (ibid:623) outlines as the 'so-called women's question in the agenda of Indian social reform in the early 19th century', which was less about the specific condition of women in social relations of the time than about the

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[2] Amin (1999:5) argues that although Mukherjee (1977) insists that the *bhadralok* class comprised primarily Hindus, and Muslims were a marginal group, 'later events point to the fact that the development of an urban, middle class in the Muslim community in Bengal, saw the rise of a similar *bhadralok* category there.'

'political encounter between a colonial state and the supposed "tradition" of a conquered people'. One of the outcomes of the nationalist response was to distinguish between the material and the spiritual – allowing the colonisers to influence the material (external domain of the self) but protecting the spiritual (inner domain of the self) from colonial influence to restrict the colonial project of social reform to annihilate the cultural identity of Indians. This inner/outer distinction, Chatterjee (1989) argues, divided social space into *ghar* and *bahir,* the home and the world, where the world was the external, the material, the domain of the male, while the essence of the *antapur* – the home and the spiritual – was the woman (Chatterjee, 1992). The gendering of spaces was a result of the need felt in the nationalist struggle to 'protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the nationalist culture, its spiritualist essence' (Chatterjee, 1989:624) from intrusion by the colonisers. This, however, did not mean that Indian nationalists rejected social reform outright: 'the attempt was rather to make modernity consistent with the national project' (ibid:625). In Bengal in the latter half of the 19th century nationalist writers began to devise and define social and moral principles to locate the position of women in this modernity: the new principle was an emphasis on femininity which Sen (1999) alludes to in her work, and which allowed for the *bhadramahila* in Bengal to attain education, attend public gatherings and even take up work outside the home as long as she remained essentially feminine, the performance of which came to be associated with the increasing importance of housework. Chatterjee (1989:627) argues that this subjected women to a new form of patriarchy, 'where the social order connecting the home and the world where the nationalists placed the new woman was contrasted not only with that of the modern society; it was explicitly distinguished from the patriarchy of the indigenous tradition' which had been the subject of criticism and derision by the colonial powers. The 'new woman' under this new form of patriarchy, therefore, was different from the 'Western woman', whose spiritual/inner domain had been corroded by exposure to the

material/external realm. But more importantly, this 'new woman' was the 'reverse of the "common woman"' who was coarse, loud, vulgar, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males' (ibid). The *bhadramahila* (respectable gentlewoman) of the emerging elite classes in Bengal, therefore, was contrasted with lower-class women, among whom was the *beshya* or prostitute, along with maidservants, barbers, peddlers and a whole host of working women (ibid), highlighting once again how class and gender intermingled to construct social norms that legitimised the control of women's sexuality and women's work in certain nationalist paradigms of domesticity and femininity.

Sen (1999:10) argues that in 19th-century Bengal 'gender emerged as a key to class identity', which meant that the 'organisation of motherhood, marriage and domesticity, and the way these were defined for women became crucial, not only to the reproduction of class identity, but also to the quotidian maintenance of class barriers'. This was also invested with a rural-urban divide where migrant workers in Kolkata and other townships were termed exclusively 'migrant' or 'foreign' in contrast to the 'native' – a label that, Sen (ibid) argues, was more of an ideological than a sociological description. The distinction between the 'native' and the 'foreign' or 'migrant' carried with it implications of differences between 'high and low culture, moral purity and laxity, order and lawlessness'. Male and female migrant workers, through temporary marital arrangements, refused to adhere to the idea of the paterfamilias , a familial model that had been idealised and bestowed with authority by the middle-class nationalist discourse. Sen (1999), however, points out that this community of workers did have their own social norms, and comparisons to sexual commerce might have outraged many women who participated in temporary marital arrangements. But equally, many women took advantage of the temporary nature of their marital relationship to end it. Additionally, and significantly, 'finding

themselves subject to sexual and physical abuse in the *basti* (slums), the street and the workplace, they might have bartered sexual favours for access to employment, housing or credit' (p.179). Immoral sexual behaviour and the breakdown of the conventional family structure was linked to the poor, the rural and the migrant, which affected the ways in which working women were perceived by the elite upper classes.

The next subsection turns to an analysis of the construction of the prostitute in 19th century Bengal.

2.5.4. The new patriarchy, social reform and the prostitute

The previous subsection has discussed how gender and class in Bengal intersected to create new social norms about womanhood, domesticity and femininity in the 19th century, and how these affected perceptions of the working woman. However, caste also played a role in this process of social and cultural change. The *Brahmo Samaj*, a Hindu reform movement, was at the centre of the social reform in Bengal, spearheaded by upper-class Brahmin leaders such as Raja Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who campaigned for the abolition of *sati* (widow burning) and in favour of widow remarriage respectively. Sarkar and Sarkar (2008:2) argue that the 'exclusive focus on reformers – once they had already been installed as reformers – obscures the milieu they came from, the large, powerful context of orthodoxy they had to contend with. The focus on the specific achievements of reformers thus obscures the larger horizon of gender norms and practices'. Additionally, this focus implies that 'we rarely connect the abuses to enduring systems or traditions of gender practices and their internal variations across times, classes and castes, labour patterns and regions' (ibid).

In her critique of the social reform movement, Sen (1999:179) argues that upper-class, high-caste male social reformers 'selectively addressed issues relating to Hindu women. Supported by 'legal and institutional innovations of the colonial state', these reformers took on the mantle of speaking for (and reforming) the entire 'Hindu' community (ibid). This included communities of a lower caste and class where *sati* was not practiced, widow remarriage was often permissible, and marital relationships were not beset with the kind of rigidity that upper-caste Brahminical marriages were imbued with. However, in the process of 'reform', lower-caste workers in the urban centre of Calcutta 'were co-opted as participants in upholding the putative Hindu ideal of womanhood' (p.179). In response to the mutable marital practices of lower-caste and -class workers, 'one *bhadralok* response was to define marriage more rigidly with high-caste norms' and to attempt to contain women's sexuality in it (p.179). This led to women of lower castes and classes losing their customary rights regarding marriage. Instead, enforced widowhood became an affordable means of seeking upward caste mobility (p.183). The outcome of this was that any marital relationship outside of the sacramental, Brahminical view of marriage which allowed divorce and remarriage and was not strictly monogamous, and the women who participated in these came to considered deviant.

It is in this broad cultural caste-and-class-based definition of deviancy that the figure of the contemporary prostitute or sex worker emerged in Bengal – sociologically and ideologically. This emergence was embedded, ironically perhaps, in an atmosphere of social reform which inducted women whose sexuality was available and therefore, perceived to be a target for exploitation in its efforts. For example, widows in Bengal fell into this category of deviancy; Sen (1999) argues that it was the widows' sexual vulnerability and presumed availability, and not economic precariousness, that put her at the centre of the social reformist agenda. In the early 19th century *rarh* was a common term for both widows and

prostitutes (p.117), and the 'widows' material, emotional and sexual deprivations were seen to lead them to prefer prostitution' (Fuller,1900:192). Losing traditional livelihoods such as spinning, widows from rural areas were starting to take up domestic service and jobs in mills and Calcutta and towns – working close to men in factories and being paid poor wages went against the socially-gendered space between the sexes as well as the national segregation of the home and the world as the domain of the woman and men, discussed in the previous section. This made women working in factories inherently suspicious of committing social and sexual deviancy. Sen (1999) cites a 1923 report by Dr. Dagmar Curjel, 'The condition of employment of women before and after childbirth', which discusses this aspect of women's work in mills in Bengal:

> Imported labour usually brings its womenfolk with them into jute and cotton mills, these women work in the mills but in the majority of cases are not the wives of the men whom they live with. It is not possible for a woman worker to live or in many cases work without male protection…and practically all such Bengalees found in the mills are degraded women or prostitutes. (pp.1-2)

Sen (1999) refers to Ghosh's (1923:125) observation that women labourers in factories who worked as sweepers or *jharoonis* 'were often prostitutes at night'. Ghosh (1923) deduced this from the gold ornaments worn by these women, a deduction Sen (1999:189) calls out for its 'simple economic equation. However, this notion of deviancy was not restricted to women working in factories – similar anxieties concerned maidservants who were paid poorly and were victims of sexual violence within homes in Bengal. This included Muslim women who lived as unpaid maidservants, *bandi*, who were known to live in concubinage, stable sexual relationships outside marriage, in wealthy Muslim mansions (WBSA

Judl.Judl,1872; B252-79,[4] cited in Sen, 1999:185). Overall, female labour outside the home was criticised for its 'non-family' character (p.186).

Sen (1999) emphasises that there was a class-based criticism of women's sexuality inherent in this characterisation. Kelman (1923:39) wrote that the Bengali women in these mills were 'usually drawn from less respectable classes on the outskirts of Kolkata…whose presence in mill compounds is least desirable'.Overall, the middle classes presumed and asserted a direct correlation between lower castes, lower classes, informal labour, female rural-urban migration, poverty and sexual promiscuity amongst the urban poor. In several ways, this 'indigenous characterisation of the Bengali prostitute' which 'fixed her in a social space outside the home' (Chatterjee,1992:27) went against the pre-colonial 'complex and multilateral hierarchy' that divided prostitutes, where the 'accomplished courtesan, educated, trained in music, poetry and etiquette' who 'aesthetically represented the feudal society of which she was part' had very little in common with the 'peasant or low-caste "common" prostitutes who lived in the *bazaar* (markets) and catered to men of their own class' (Sen 1999:192).

With British interest in prostitution manifesting in the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868 (discussed later in this sub-section) ,various deviant women in Bengal came to be affected by the enforcement of the act. Chatterjee (1992:19) argues that in ancient India the prostitute was 'by tradition inseparably associated with professional entertainers and the terms *Nati, Ganika or Barangana'* (considered synonymous) were used to indicate an 'accomplished courtesan'. In Chandra's (1973:57-100) study of the 'world of courtesans', also cited by Chatterjee (1992), the author argues that the courtesan was meant to represent, and was produced by, the feudal society she lived in. What this also meant was that the hierarchy that was embedded in feudal relations impacted and framed the lives of courtesans and

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[4] West Bengal State Archives, Judicial Branch, Judicial Files. October 1872

their aristocratic clients (ibid). This, however, did not include women from the peasant class who catered to men from their own class or worked as the *dasi* (slave/servant) of the master (p.19).

Under the expanding Mughal reign in India between the 16th and early 19th century, reaching its peak in the early 18th century, Muslim courtly norms in Northern India 'confirmed the earlier position of the courtesan in Brahmanical society' (Chatterjee, 1992:19). As dancers and musicians, the *tawa'if* participated in public rituals, lived in the *zenana mahal* (women's quarters), and were often incorporated into the household through contract marriages, a practice that continued into the 18th century (Chatterjee, 1992:20). In Bengal, with support from the British East Indian company Mir Jafar, the first *Nawab* (Muslim ruler) of Bengal, reigned from 1691 to 1765, during which time he married two 'dancing girls' (known as *baijis* in Bengal) from Agra, Muni Begum and Bubbu Begum. The latter went on to produce his son and heir, while the former was appointed, by the British, as the guardian to the young *nawab* (Chakravarty, 1991:59-63).

By the middle of the 19th century, Calcutta had become an important centre of cultural activities. This was partly owing to the increasing deposition of Indian rulers by the British who settled in the city bringing with them a litany of musicians, dancers and artists. Their courtly practices added to the already pre-existing *nautch* (dance) parties which were organised at family weddings and festivals in the palatial houses of Bengali *babus* (aristocratic landowners). In Chakravarty's (1991) work on *Kolkatar Baiji Bilash* (Calcutta's courtesan culture), the author records ecstatic comments by European artists such as Belnos and Solvyn, for whom these events provided a 'colourful opportunity to look at the "native" household and its luxuries of which the dancing girls formed a part' (Chatterjee, 1992:22). Solvyn catalogued dancers based on their dresses. Three groups are mentioned: the *Ramjani,* the *Bayadari* and the *Domni*, among whom the *Domni* were lower-caste

women who were folk singers, and visited weddings to sing in groups; their songs, in contrast to those of the *baijis,* were full of bawdiness and rife with sexual humour (Chakravarty, 1991:36-40). Apart from the *baijis,* however, and in a lower class and with fewer accomplishments, the *randi* and the *thakahi* lived in the markets and catered to labourers. To this list, Chatterjee (1992:23) adds *Vaishnavis*, a group of mendicant singers in the 19th century, who were pejoratively referred to as *Neris* (shaven-headed women). This group's association with prostitution came about due to their allegiance to a popular religious order which considered the medieval saint *Sri Chaitanya* their leader or *guru*; the order sought to dispense with the rigid and rigorous rules of Hindu society, one of which entailed dispensing with the formal system of marriage. These women tried to enter the arena of social reform by teaching at schools set up for women in Bengal. However, the growing rigid morality of the late 19th century and the preoccupation with protecting the institutions of family and marriage led to their cultural marginalisation by both the British and the *bhadralok* reformers. Their charitable endeavours, which included running shelters for widows and prostitutes, were portrayed as an anomaly, and they were refused access to the homes of middle-class Bengalis (Banerjee, 1989:135-165). This diverse and heterogeneous group of deviant women also included traditional prostitutes within groups of professional dancers, actresses and mimics – the *Kheltas* and *Gandharbas* of the Bhagalpur area[5] – who were forced into prostitution by their fathers and husbands in India.

The first legislation introduced by the British centred on prostitution was the Cantonment Acts of 1864, which structured and regulated brothels known as *chaklas* on British military bases. The women in these *chaklas* primarily came from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, were meant to strictly provide sexual service to British soldiers, and had to undergo regular medical examinations in

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[5] Presently in the Indian state of Bihar, adjacent to West Bengal

hospitals near the *chaklas* to check for venereal disease. This paved the way, however, for a much stricter law, the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868, which collapsed the diverse indigenous categories of deviant women in Bengal and across the country into two labels: registered and unregistered (Sen 1999:193).

British interest in prostitution, sparked in the mid-19th century, was meant to regulate and control the spread of venereal diseases, and the deviant women who were perceived to be sources of infection and contagion, 'cut across social divisions' (ibid). Sen (1999) argues that social reforms shaped the transition of the prostitute from a criminal who required constant policing to a victim in need of help. The initial criminality was owing to anxiety about the spread of venereal disease and was foreshadowed by colonial missionaries' complaints about the sale of young women from villages to prostitutes after the 1866 famine (Chatterjee,1992). The Contagious Diseases Act, passed in 1868 and modelled on a similar law in Britain, sought to gather information about women in prostitution and in the process created a homogenous label of 'prostitution'. Discussing Dang's (1993) work on prostitutes, patrons and the State in 19th-century Awadh, Sen (1999:193) argues that:

> The efforts of surveys and censuses resulted in the hardening of the
> category [of the prostitute] and the multiple identities of performers,
> concubines, religious mendicants, and destitutes were collapsed into a
> single term, the prostitute. Under British rule, thus, prostitution was torn
> from its earlier, aesthetic, ritual and social contexts to be defined
> increasingly as a labour-oriented service--as sexual commerce.

Sen (1999) discusses in detail the problems that arose in the enforcement of the Contagious Diseases (CD) act: women refused to be admitted to and sequestered in 'lock hospitals' on military bases which were meant to treat and rehabilitate 'infected' women. Many women engaging in prostitution in different forms migrated

away from city centres to more suburban areas, but the constant flow of widows and migrant women coming into the urban centres to look for work made the separation of registered and unregistered prostitutes impossible (pp.193-194). The association of sexual promiscuity with working women also created panic about 'clandestine prostitution', which, Sen (1999:193) argues, 'defeated' the efforts of colonial administrators in their attempts to register prostitutes. Referring to 1872 reports by the Sanitary Commissioners, she argues that what was particularly difficult was identifying and registering women who were practising prostitution with the acceptance and abetment of their husbands, viz. the wives of traders, sailors, and *kulin* wives i.e. those from Brahminical polygamous marriages. Additionally, the British administrators felt that since Muslim women could divorce and remarry with much more ease than Hindu women and, unlike Brahminical Hindu women, could re-enter society after participating in extra marital affairs without fear of social sanction, many Hindu women who had had participated in extra-marital affairs entered prostitution to continue their affairs or changed their names to Muslim names. The various social sanctions that permitted women's participation in prostitution and the ways in which women manipulated them made the process of registration complex. Amidst all this confusion, the repeal agitators from Britain were starting to criticise the enforcement of the CD acts in India. As a basis of their argument they pointed to pre-colonial, indigenous forms of prostitution that had existed in India.

> The Indian prostitute is a recognised caste, or rather it would be more correct to say that India abounds in castes or sects of prostitutes with whom the calling hereditary, who are born in and bred into that profession…These women are in no sense ashamed of their calling; nor do they practice it in secret' [General Sanitary June, 1888 A124, cited in Sen, 1999:195]

The emphasis of British repeal agitators and colonial administrators on prostitution as endemic to Indian society was rejected by Indian nationalists,and the *bhadralok* class in Bengal, who reasserted the connections between the poor and sexual promiscuity. But this rejection also took on the form of specific political, cultural and media discourses which aided in the cultural, geographical and financial stigmatisation of women in different forms of prostitution and increased their social marginalisation. This project of reforming prostitution created the material conditions of life that persist in modern-day Bengal, discussed next.

2.5.5. The role of the *bhadralok* in reforming prostitution in Bengal

The profound impact of British legislation and the regulation of prostitution in Bengal does not nullify the role of the late-19th-century *bhadralok* class in setting up the social and cultural conditions surrounding prostitution today in West Bengal and the capital city Kolkata. Banerjee (1998:126) details the role within what he terms the 'peculiar ambivalence of the 19th-century *bhadralok* to prostitution and prostitutes. Some of the reasons for this ambivalence have been discussed: a renewed obsession with femininity, domesticity and marriage in response to the demand for social reforms, provoked by the colonial regime and responded to by upper-class male social reformers. This subsection discusses some specific material changes to the practice of prostitution in Calcutta and Bengal which continue to affect the lives of my research subjects: women engaged in sex work in the second decade of the 21st century in the region.

The emergence of the *beshya,* the contemporary word for the Bengali prostitute, is embedded in the larger socio-cultural transition of Bengali upper-class Hindu men from *babu* to *bhadralok*. A simplistic contrast would be between the *babus* who threw lavish *nautch* parties in their ancestral village houses, an 'aristocratic

gathering of "natives"' during Hindu festivals like the *Durga Pujo*, often attended by the *Saheb* or British administrators, which hosted dancers, courtesans and artists (Chatterjee, 1992), and the newly emerged *bhadralok* who preoccupied himself with reforming, shunning and stigmatising women who were socially perceived to be sexually deviant. However, Banerjee (1998:126) problematises this distinction by arguing that 'visiting brothels and consorting with actresses was not confined to the gauche, half-baked *babus*, but marked the life-style of even some educated *bhadraloks*' from the 'old *sambhranta* (aristocratic) feudal families'.This placed the leaders of the *bhadralok* society in an awkward predicament, where their 'Victorian English mentors harped on the evils of prostitution' and respectability became a new social norm to abide by. This meant that *bhadraloks* had to refrain from displaying their wealth and power by building permanent, often lavish residences for their mistresses in Calcutta which early 19th-century *babus* were prone to do; many of these structures have survived until the present day in RLAs across Kolkata. Instead, the *bhadralok* had to focus on a '"happy married life" based on the cultivation of genteel norms and domestic virtues by both the husband and wife' (ibid:127).

However, the reforms carried out to change the practice of prostitution were not only due to the preoccupation with the maintenance of the institution of the Brahminical marriage or the Bengali family under the colonial gaze. They were also meant to (i) check the growing financial and social power of wealthy prostitutes, and (ii) address the fear that wives from respectable families would enter prostitution to live an independent life-style. Banerjee (1998:127) argues that although socially stigmatised, wealthy prostitutes' independent lifestyles allowed some of them to 'dictate terms to sections of the *bhadralok* society'.This included:

> …hiring services of 'lawyers (to fight their cases in the courts –
> particularly after the enactment of the CD Act), builders (to construct
> houses for them), doctors (whom they could pay to buy certificates that
> exempted them from the humiliating medical examinations under the CD
> Act), gold merchants (to buy jewellery)…in the market economy of the
> colonial capitalist society, where monetary transactions were beginning
> to override social taboos, *bhadralok* professionals and traders had no
> qualms about being hired by, and depending on prostitutes for their
> income.

The 'willy-nilly' entanglement of members of the *bhadralok* society with prostitutes, Chatterjee (1992:128) argues, extended to Brahmin priests as well, who profited from the women's eagerness to 'emulate their sisters in *bhadralok* households' by adhering to religious rituals during sacred occasions. In response to this, leaders of the *bhadralok* society decided to reconfigure the prostitute, who had been constructed as a criminal under British legislation, as a victim – putting her at the centre of reform and removing her social, cultural and economic power (Chatterjee, 1992; Sen, 1999). To geographically make the practice of prostitution less visible, prostitutes were banished from *bhadra pallis* (areas inhabited by 'respectable' middle-class Bengali families). The *Vidyotsahini Sabha*, an association set up by Bengali intellectuals and headed by the famous author and scion of one of the city's best-known aristocratic families, Kaliprasanna Sinha, appealed to colonial administrators to issue an order to prostitutes to move out of cities (Banerjee 1998:130). Additionally, Bengali landlords who were known to rent property to prostitutes came in for sharp social criticism. Chatterjee (1992) refers to an editorial brought out by the *Dhaka Prakash* in East Bengal in 1865, which established a three-pronged action to reduce the economic and cultural power of prostitutes, explicitly stating that if these were carried out, '…housewives will not wish to become prostitutes after watching the hardship of the prostitutes':

First, let there be a system of exacting taxes at a higher rate from the prostitutes…so that they can just survive at a subsistence level and are denied any opportunity of enjoying any luxury. Secondly, it is necessary to put an end to the prostitute's right to dispose of her property through a will. A law should be enacted to empower the government to take away her entire property after her death. Thirdly, the prostitute should be removed from the city to its outskirts, so that the minds of ordinary men are not polluted by their allurement.

This systemic attack on women in prostitution included legal reforms: due to the efforts of a Bengali judge, Rashomoy Dutta, in 1854, women engaged in the trade could no longer challenge their customers who did not pay them. Additionally, to restrict their movement in public spaces, newspapers of the time aired warnings by *Brahmo* reformers such as Keshub Sen to organisers of events where prostitutes were invited or expected to attend:

…the prostitutes should by no means be allowed to enter the 'Mela' [fair]. If you want to do good for the country, anything that is visibly ugly must be kept out of public sight.

This 'warning', printed in the newspaper *Sulabh Samachar* in 1870, quoted in Chatterjee (1989:132) amplifies, once again, how reforms and changes to the practices of prostitution in 19th-century Bengal were framed within nationalist discourses. Additionally, it highlights how prostitution continued to exist but was simply made discreet, 'kept out of public sight' (ibid). With the increasing invisibility of prostitutes in city centres and heightened moral restrictions placed on the behaviour of middle-class Bengali woman, the working-class women of the city who continued to throng urban centres looking for work became associated with sexual immorality once more: 'the same ratiocinative logic that had linked widowhood, poverty and prostitution in the late 19th century was extended to all waged women [in the early 20th]' (Sen, 1999:197). Having checked and curtailed the power of

visible prostitutes, the *bhadralok* leaders became interested once again in clandestine prostitutes, which included a sweeping range of women workers, viz. 'domestic servants, female cooks, needlewomen, *panwallis* [female vendors selling betel leaf with tobacco and spices], laundresses (*dhopanis)* and *kaprawallis* (hawkers of cloth), factory girls, shop girls and even some of the nurses and midwives' (Sen, 1999:197). What emerged from this and the ensuing census data of 1911, which listed midwifery and prostitution as the occupations where women outnumbered men, was prioritisation of a woman's identity as a prostitute over any other work identity for women (p.198). Irrespective of any other form of labour a woman was engaged in, a working woman of a particular class and caste, with unrestricted access to public space and proximity to men not of her kin, was catalogued and considered a prostitute.

2.6. A contemporary overview of sex work in Bengal

The social and legal changes during the colonial period, catalogued in section 2.5, witnessed the transformation of the cultural and social value of prostitution in Bengal. However, some cultural traditions endure, in thought if not in practice. A significant one is the tradition of using *punya mati* or 'pure soil' from *nishiddho palli* (forbidden territories, i.e. RLAs) to build the idol of *Durga*, the ten-armed Hindu goddess whose homecoming (from her marital household in heaven) comprises the biggest cultural festival in Bengal. However, in general FSWs are ostracised, their everyday lives shrouded in social stigma and their citizenship denied by the state. An illuminating example of the dichotomy of enduring cultural traditions involving sex workers and the socially-marginalised nature of their lived experience was the failure of a prominent sex workers' collective in Kolkata to obtain permission from government authorities to host their own celebration of *Durga Pujo*

(worship of *Durga)* through the installation of a *pandal* (a decorative bamboo structure) to house the idol, in Sonagachi, the biggest RLA in Kolkata, in the autumn of 2016. (NDTV, 2016)

In the first pan-Indian survey of sex workers, which included data collection from street-based sex workers in Kolkata, Sahni and Shankar (2011:7) argue that 'sex work was found to be one among several options available to women in the labour market'. Additionally, women who engag[e] in sex work 'move quite fluidly between other occupations and sex work.' (p.3), challenging the 'differentiation of sex work as an unusual and isolated activity' (ibid). Therefore women's engagement in prostitution among other kinds of informal labour, as in 19th-century Bengal, continues today. The association of class, women's work and immoral sexuality outlined in the previous section persists in some forms. In Shah's (2014) study of day-waged female labourers in Mumbai, the author argues that by simply existing in public spaces without the supervision of male relatives, female labourers from the peri-urban and rural areas near the city of Mumbai, have come to be associated with an image of promiscuity and sexual availability. A description of the Kalighat RLA in section 6.3.1 shows how the simple act of purposeless loitering in public spaces by women in India is seen as socially (and sexually) subversive and associated with sexual availability.

Currently sex work in West Bengal exists in various forms. The most visible and researched form is brothel-based, with its complex hierarchy of labour relations, discussed in Chapter 6. Kolkata has many brothels in RLAs, as well as in regular neighbourhoods. Another form of sex work is practised by 'flying' sex workers who are 'based in nearby villages or suburbs of the city and come to the red-light area in the evening or the day' (Gangoli, 2006:218). In a study of sex work in Eastern India, Gangoli (ibid:214) argues that 'there are close connections between migration, poverty and women who enter into sex work'. However, 'with factories

and alternative means of employment decreasing in the city, middle-class housewives and students act as "flying" sex workers'. (p.218). 'Flying sex workers' from middle and upper-middle class families or white-collar groups are known as 'call-girls' who are 'non-brothel based mobile commercial FSWs who may operate independently or through a pimp, for approximate programme rate (sic) that vary between Rs. 800 and Rs. 30,000' (Majumdar and Panja, 2008:165). The location of sex work can range from hotels to resorts and private flats as well as massage parlours. The women's ability to 'fly', i.e.to be mobile, allows them to escape public scrutiny and social stigma in comparison to their brothel-based counterparts, but not being part of the institution of the brothel also renders them increasingly vulnerable to abuse and violence (Gangoli, 2006). Despite the British legislation and the interventions of the *bhadralok* reformers, the participation of women across various classes in sex work, for different reasons and in various ways, therefore, continues in the region today.

The contemporary framing of sex work in abolitionist anti-trafficking and pro-sex work HIV discourses in Bengal continues the historical production of prostitution as disease (Shah 2014), and of prostitutes as immoral and depraved. Shah (2014) argues that 'prostitution as a medicalized discourse' traces its origin to the passing of the CD act (discussed in section 2.5.4. The 'protectionist-reformist' nature of the dominant anti-trafficking discourse adopts patriarchal ideas of female sexuality to rehabilitate women in sex work (Kapur, 2005; Sanghera, 2005). Chapter 8 shows how this affects women's expression of agency and sexuality in their lives as the rehabilitative shelter home becomes a site for the transformation of 'bad girls' into 'good'. The conflation of human trafficking and sex work is amplified in West Bengal due its proximity to the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Nepal. Many women from these countries who enter sex work voluntarily in the state and in the city of Kolkata cross borders illegally and find themselves embroiled in complex

repatriation processes involving state and non-state actors across their home countries and India. This makes the state prominent in discussions on national and regional interventions on human trafficking. The anti-trafficking discourse in the state concentrates primarily on child trafficking, citing this as a reason to abolish sex work (Gangoli, 2008:27). However, the expansion of efforts to prevent the spread of HIV in the state since 1995 has birthed a strong pro-sex work movement in Kolkata, which has argued for the legalisation of sex work and recognition of sex work 'as work', as well as for an end to the social stigma that continues to frame the selling of sex in the region. Dutta and Sircar (2008) observe a shift in the pro-sex work discourse of a prominent sex-workers' organisation in Kolkata. Over the last decade, the recognition of 'sex work as work' has transitioned into a recognition of sex work as 'entertainment work'. This includes the reconstruction of the sex worker as an 'entertainment worker' which, the authors argue, has four purposes:

> First it expands the solidarity base of the sex workers' movement by allying with other performers and artistes; second, it challenges the negativity surrounding sex, which makes sex workers unequal citizens simply because of the sexual nature of their work; third it counters the essentialised understanding of women as perpetual victims of sexual danger and foregrounds a positive notion of female sexuality; and fourth, it makes political the notion of 'pleasure' by bringing it out into public space from the confines of the sanctified space of the monogamous, heterosexual marriage, and the bound pages of academic work on sexuality. (p.4)

The authors argue that this transition 'marks a departure from not only demanding labour rights from the state, but expands the debate on sex work in India beyond…the "right to work" and the "right to form trade unions" to include the "right to pleasure" as central to the understanding of sex work as work' (p.3). Additionally, this harks back to the ways in which prostitution historically was a site of cultural activities beyond the mere act of selling sex.

2.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has situated this thesis in a social, cultural and regional context. The discussion on patriarchy and social relations in the region highlights the socially embedded nature of personhood in Bengali society and how this affects gender relations. This is significant, since the dissolution of social relations in the household shapes women's pathways into sex work, as discussed in Chapter 5. The historical overview of women's work and sexuality in 19th-century Bengal shows how contemporary conditions for sex work were birthed through a history of the social reform which took place in the region in response to colonial attempts to 'civilise' Indian society. Finally, the contemporary overview of sex work in the state and the city of Kolkata shed light on visible and invisible forms of sex work, the social stigma that surrounds it, and ways in which pro-sex work and abolitionist ideologies on sex work manifest in the region.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on violence in sex work in India. It begins with an overview of the ways in which violence in sex work has been conceptualised in feminist theorising and women's movements in India in section 3.2. This discusses the similarities and points of divergence between the former and theories emanating from the West, particularly the US. Two opposing stances to sex work, abolitionist and pro-sex work, are identified and discussed with reference to the Indian context. This broadens out to a historical overview of the Indian women's movement's engagement with violence in sex work within its larger pioneering campaign to address institutional and structural violence against women in India, in section 3.3. This is followed by a conceptual discussion of structural and cultural forms of violence (Galtung, 1969;1990) in section 3.4, accompanied by a discussion of frameworks in section 3.5 which addresses the 'life-cycle nature' of gender-based violence (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005), and the role of institutions within social relations in reinforcing power inequalities (Kabeer, 1994).

Section 3.6 reviews the existing literature on violence within sex work in India, divided into literature framed within the anti-trafficking and HIV/AIDS discourse. The discussion of the first in section 3.6.1 yields a significant theme of 'rescue and rehabilitation' as a form of resolution of violence in sex work. This is critiqued through a problematisation of binary understandings of escape/stay and agency/victimhood within situations of violence, and by interrogating the 'agential bias' (Reader, 2007) within the conceptualisation of personhood. Foucauldian theories of power are introduced and contrasted with Galtung's conceptualisation of violence. In literature framed within the HIV/AIDS discourse, discussed in

section 3.6.2, the use of violence by men emerges as a main theme which includes the use of violence by customers, intimate partners and the police. Stigma and deviance due to the social and legal precarity of sex work, globally and in India, emerge as a key barrier to the resolution of violence and prevention of the transmission of HIV/AIDS. These concepts are discussed with an exploration of Goffman (1963) and Becker's (1963) seminal theories on stigma and deviance, respectively. The chapter concludes with an identification of gaps and possibilities for further research which emerge through this literature review, and which are addressed in Chapters 5-8 of this thesis.

3.2. Conceptualising violence in sex work in feminist theorising and women's movements in India

Kotiswaran (2014:87) has argued that 'Indian feminist theorizing on sex work largely mirrors the Anglo-American debates with its two major feminist camps of abolitionist and sex work advocates'. In the US, the 1970s marked the rise of debate and discussion in the second-wave feminist movement on prostitution and its relationship with violence. These discussions were part of a larger concerted effort to challenge several aspects of patriarchal culture which disadvantaged women. Within this, prostitution as an institution of exploitation and oppression of women, where men's needs are prioritised over women's, came under scrutiny. Sanders (2016:96) argues that while marriage was also considered oppressive since it involved the sanctification of power of men over women by the State (Pateman, 1988), 'prostitution…was considered the more damaging institution that was an extension of oppression within a capitalist market'. Feminist critique of sex work from the 1970s has birthed both Marxist and radical views. The former cites the 'exploitation between the wage labourer and employer relationship to argue

why prostitution [is] wrong' (Sanders, 2016:96). In the latter, however, gender and power relations are drawn upon to argue that prostitution is 'in and of itself is an abuse of a woman's body' and an expression of 'male supremacy' (Dworkin, 1993), where 'women have sex with men they would never otherwise have sex with [and where] money…acts as a form of force, not as a measure of consent. It acts like physical force does in rape' (Mackinnon, 2008). The act of prostitution is 'paradigmatic, somehow the very core of the female's condition' which reduces woman to 'cunt' (Millett, 1975:56)', and is not 'just a form of ordinary ungendered work, like domestic labour or tomato picking, but has its origin, and its counterpart, in traditional forms of exchange of girls and women for cash or goods' (Jeffreys, 2009:38). Linking prostitution with sexual slavery and its definition as sexual exploitation laid the foundation for radical feminism's abolitionist stance, where women's consent in participating in prostitution is seen as 'false consciousness' and prostitution can never be considered work or legitimatised as an expression of agency (Larson and Hernández-Truyol 2006:401; also cited in Kotiswaran, 2014:87). To put it simply, from the abolitionist stance prostitution *is* violence.

The other end of this polarised debate is the 'autonomy position' (Larson and Hernández-Truyol 2006:402), occupied by the sex radicals/positives and liberal feminists (Sanders, 2016:97) who argue that engagement in prostitution is a choice often made out of economic necessity or against a backdrop of constrained choices, but can also be an empowering one for certain women (Chapkis, 1997; Delacoste & Alexander, 1988; also cited in Sanders, 2016:97). This position argues for prostitution to be recognised as work and acknowledges the existence of violence and exploitation within it. However, the latter is comparable to structural forms of exploitation prevalent in different kinds of work and needs to be addressed accordingly without the need to abolish it entirely. As Bindman and Doezema (1997) have argued, 'we first need to identify prostitution as work, as an occupation

susceptible like the others to exploitation. Then sex workers can be included and protected under the existing instruments that aim to protect all workers from exploitation, and women from discrimination' (also cited in Larson and Hernández-Truyol, 2006:403).

Indian feminists' engagement with sex work, and their conceptualisation of violence within it, 'depart in a few significant ways from these predominantly feminist positions' (Kotiswaran, 2014:88). Instead of being a 'mere iteration of North American radical feminism', the abolitionist stance is preoccupied with interrogating the role of poverty and caste-based inequality in perpetuating women's engagement in prostitution (ibid). An example is Periyar's 1925 anti-Brahmin Self-Respect social reform movement, which sought to challenge Brahminism, i.e. upper-caste hegemony in Tamil communities in southern India, and advocated for 'self-respect' amongst the lower castes, which had been historically relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy (Pantham and Mehta, 2006). A significant aspect of this movement was its critique of the traditional *devadasi* system: *devadasi* is 'a shortened form of the Tamil *tevaradiyal* which translates (not very well) as 'slave of the god'…literally, it means 'at the feet of the god' and refers to the class of women who through various ceremonies of 'marriage' dedicated themselves to the deities of temples and other ritual objects' (Srinivasan, 1985:1869). Although the *devadasi* traditionally was not a *jati* (caste), an abolitionist critique of the system, in which young women were not allowed to marry and instead had to make themselves available for sexual liaisons with patrons, formed the hallmark of the anti-Brahmin social reform movements both in 1925 (Kannabiran and Kannabiran, 2003) and subsequently in regional anti-Brahmin political parties (Srinivasan, 1985). Recent studies by Black (2007), Chandavarkar (2008) and Rozario (2000:139) show that despite these efforts, the recruitment of lower-caste women into prostitution to serve upper-caste men has

persisted to the present day (Kotiswaran, 2014). Other studies, viz. Agarwal's (2004, 2008) research on the *Bedia* community in Northern India, show that caste continues to play a role in community and family-based prostitution practices, whether in (lower)-caste-based stigma associated with these communities or in their emulation of higher-caste practises to deal with this stigma. This emulation often results in a rigidity of social norms that affect women who don't engage with prostitution within these communities (Agarwal, 2008). The enduring association of caste in complex ways with women's participation in prostitution in India led to its framing as a 'caste issue' instead of a 'women's issue', where the exploitation within prostitution was perceived as caste-based exploitation and not as a wider issue of violence against women or sexual exploitation (Tambe, 2008). However, in Swarankar's (2008:125) study of the Nat community in Rajasthan he argues that although 'caste *panchayat*[6] is a strong and effective political institution, which governs the social-sexual behaviour of the *Nats*…*Nat* women are sex workers, not by the social sanction of the caste *panchayat* alone'. Factors such as 'society, patriarchy, freedom to the males (sic) to have sex outside the family and caste and involvement of sex traders' (ibid) need to be considered too.

Gangoli (2008:22) has argued that 'there are, essentially, three different ways in which Indian feminists have addressed the issue of prostitution – silence, as hurt and violence, and as potential choice and liberation'. Apart from its perception and categorisation as an issue of caste-based exploitation, the 'silence', Gangoli (2008) argues, is due to the narrow and rigid perception of sexuality that emerged from

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[6] Self-governing caste-specific council of village elders, meant to resolve issues within a particular caste community. Different from village panchayats which are meant to serve the wider community.

focus of the Indian women's movement[7] (IWM) on legal rights and violence against women in the 1980s. This is discussed next.

3.3. The Indian women's movement, violence against women, and sex work

Discussing the politicisation of violence within the women's movement in the 1980s in India, Gandhi and Shah (1992) argue that the IWM's collectivisation on violence against women (VAW) emerged within the milieu of political protest in the post-Emergency 1977 period which witnessed the violation of civil liberties, torture and lawlessness by state forces viz. police. During this time the issues of rape and bride-burning were protested publicly, which 'catalysed the formation of many women's organisations, alliances and the "discovery" of different forms of violence on women' (p.37). Flavia (1987) highlights that during these campaigns, the lack of data on violence against women in India led several campaigners and women's groups to conduct their own studies to compare with data generated by the state. The author discusses a report released by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) which catalogued violent acts against women between 1977 and 1979. Published in a 1983 edition of the *Free Press Journal, Mumbai*, the report lists the crimes and the percentages in the following way:

Prostitution	37.2 per cent
Kidnapping and abduction	21.7 per cent
Molestation	14.2 per cent
Rape	8.6 per cent
Chain Snatching	7.2 per cent

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[7] Sen (2000) addresses the highly contested nature of the words 'Indian' and 'women' within 'IWM', in particular how these homogenise differences in the movement, and disparities in experiences of those targeted by it.

Murder	5.1. per cent

Table.3.1. Percentage of violent acts against women (BPRD)
Source: Reproduced from Gandhi and Shah (1992:37-38).

This list highlights prostitution as an act of violence against women. Flavia (1987) argues that while the official records did show an increase in violence against women during this period, the list leaves out figures on dowry murders, sexual harassment and domestic violence – issues that were central to IWM's campaign on VAW. While prostitution was identified as constituting the highest percentage of violence against women, the IWM put 'sexual harassment' at the top of its own list, along with 'wife beatings' and 'media portrayals' (Flavia, 1987, cited in Gandhi and Shah,1992:38).

Gandhi and Shah's (1992) discussions of some monumental cases of violence against women in the late 1970s and early '80s, which galvanised action within the IWM against the police and the judiciary, draw attention to how prostitution featured tangentially in issues of rape and sexual harassment. One such case is that of one Ms. Rameeza Bee, described by the authors as a '…particularly grotesque rape: for the fantastically arrogant and cunning police cover-up, for the sexism and blindness of the court's judgment and the spontaneity of public protest.' (p.39). While returning from the cinema with her husband in Hyderabad, a city in southern India, in 1978, Rameeza Bee was arrested on charges of prostitution and raped by the police while her protesting husband was severely beaten up and subsequently died. The 'brutal gang rape and murder aroused tremendous anger among the local people who stoned the police station and set it on fire' (p.39). This was followed by large-scale protests and a chain of protest actions against police stations across Andhra Pradesh. Twenty-six people died in police firing and tear-gassing. To soothe nerves, the government appointed an enquiry commission after receiving pressure from civil groups and women's organisations. Amongst the revelations by the fact-finding *Muktadhar* committee was that the police

'had…hired pimps and prostitutes to give false evidence in court to prove that [Rameeza Bee] was a prostitute'; this was done to discredit her charges of violence. Eventually the findings of the committee that argued for her innocence and demanded the prosecution of the policeman were overturned by a sessions court in Raichur in Karnataka in 1981; the case was transferred from Hyderabad to alleviate tension in the state. All the policeman who had been found guilty by the committee were acquitted. This incident echoes the manner in which charges of sexual violence by Ms. Jordan in Kolkata, in February, 2015 (discussed in sec.1.1) were dismissed by the state government as the disgruntled claims of a sex worker and framed as a dispute over monetary matters with her customer.

Gangoli (2008:24) argues that although 'the issue of prostitution remained in the background…when the IWM emerged as an importance political force…in the 1980s', feminists raised it as an issue in the 'form of a partial critique of anti-prostitution laws and attitudes as far as they impacted non-prostituted women'. She discusses an incident highlighted by Agnes (1995) in her discussion of anti-prostitution laws in India which examines the case of an activist being harassed at a railway station by police, who charged her for soliciting at 2.30am. Although she was buying cigarettes at the time of the incident, she did not mention this in her police report. Agnes (1995:127-135) argues that this 'silence' about what was considered inappropriate behaviour for a woman in India allowed the police leeway regarding the charges. Gangoli (ibid:24) argues that this case highlights 'some of the ambivalence regarding issues of sexuality as far as Indian feminists are concerned'. It raised questions of chastity, about whether women who behave 'like prostitutes' deserve violence, and about women's access to public spaces at night (ibid). This 'ambivalence', which resulted in the dichotomy of adhering to certain patriarchal tropes of femininity while challenging social institutions, viz. marriage and family and the existence of violence in these, also framed the IWM's

engagement with the media in the way it portrayed women. In particular, the objectionable 'media portrayals' evoked in Flavia's (1987) discussion above referred to the depiction of women in a sexual and titillating manner in film posters, advertisements and films. Gangoli (ibid) discusses a campaign that was started in the 1980s by the *Chaatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini* (a female students' group) in Patna (a city in eastern India) in 1979. The campaign, which involved defacing offensive posters, was met with ridicule and the harassment of the female activists in public spaces by men. Their efforts were co-opted by right-wing conservative forces in Bombay, which shocked members of the Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) (Gangoli, ibid), one of the first autonomous women's organisations formed to galvanise public protest against rape.

Gangoli (ibid) argues that the reluctance on the part of Indian feminists to engage with violence in prostitution and their ambivalence about sexuality was reflected in their silence around illegal raids of brothels in Mumbai in 1996;although the law permits raids when children are present, adult women were detained and then forcibly repatriated (p.26). A report released by the National Commission of Women on 'societal violence on women and children in prostitution' (NCW,1996:9) argues that 'mainstream struggles of and for the emancipation of women in India have remained immune to the situations and needs' of women in prostitution. Bhave (2008:41) argues that this negligence is due to women in prostitution being constructed as 'not good' women in a society which categorises women as *pativrata* (chaste) and prostitutes; women's movements, therefore, have not naturally or organically considered women in prostitution.In light of this, Gangoli (2008) argues that recasting women in prostitution as perpetual victims of violence and approaching prostitution as 'hurt and violence' has allowed some space in the IWM's campaign against violence to accommodate them. One form of accommodation is the anti-(human) trafficking discourse, which focuses on the

linkages between prostitution and trafficking in India and aligns itself with an abolitionist stance. The perception of violence in prostitution through this lens has been criticised for infantilising (the choices of) adult women as well as implicitly protecting the institution of the family under 'threat' from prostitution. Gangoli (ibid) discusses how a debate on the Illegal Traffic in Women and Girls (Prevention) Bill in the Indian parliament in 1986 deployed feminist and traditionalist arguments. In this, prostitution was critiqued as an attack on the foundations of family, 'ignoring some trenchant critiques of the family' (p.29). While discussing the history of prostitution law reform in India, Kotiswaran (2014:87) argues that the 'state has…imbibed an ostensibly feminist logic to justify its increasing abolitionist agenda'; its proposals for legal reform have ranged between 'complete criminalization and partial decriminalization'.

The critique of prostitution as un-Indian (Patkar and Patkar, 2000:6) and as a threat to monogamy and marriage within the abolitionist stance has been challenged by pro-sex work voices situated at the opposite end of Indian feminist theorising on sex work. This has differentiated it from a focus on the theory of sexual positivity and pleasure alone, which features strongly in its Western counterpart (Kotiswaran, 2014:87). Kapur (2005:124) argues that abolitionist critiques of sex work are rooted in 'cultural nationalism', which asserts that '…although choice is possible in the West, economic oppression in Asia is so all-encompassing that the very possibility of choice or agency is negated'. In this discourse, '…Asian women are set up in opposition to Western women: the Asian woman is cast as chaste and vulnerable to exploitation, in contrast to the promiscuous Western woman who is ruled by the (im)morality of the (Western) market' (ibid). This feminist discourse of cultural nationalism '…is embedded in the idea of an authentic Indian subject and the construction of the woman in sex-work as a victim of the (Western) market' (ibid). The author argues that this approach highlights '…some postcolonial

feminist positions' where '…the victim status conferred on women…becomes almost indistinguishable from the discourse of the purity of the nation and the preservation of Indian womanhood that characterised the nationalist discourse in late-19th and early-20th centuries' (pp.124-125). Discussion of the research context in Chapter 2 has shown how these social reforms, spurred by the British colonial project and spearheaded by Indian nationalists, laid the foundations for the emergence of the modern-day Indian FSW. The reforms targeted structural and cultural forms of violence against women, which Gandhi and Shah (1992:81) acknowledge as precursors to the IWM's campaign in the 1980s. However, in doing so these reforms also reinforced a particular desirable ideal of femininity and women's work, which affected women in sex work as well as in other forms of informal labour outside the home.

To counter the abolitionist stance, Kapur (2005:91) proposes a 'sex radical theory' which, referencing Abrams (1995), creates 'a space between the victim subject and the autonomous ahistorical liberal subject'. The author acknowledges women's partial agency and subjectivity (Kotiswaran, 2014:89) and argues that '…the erotic desire of this (female) subject challenges dominant cultural and sexual norms that perpetuate the notion that sex is dirty and corrupting' and needs to be restricted or limited (Kapur, 2005:91). However, Kotiswaran (2014:89) argues that this focus does not fully consider how sex work in India is embedded in institutions such as the family and marriage, and 'does not adequately counter the economic essentialism of Indian radical feminists, in whose view Indian women enter sex work only out of poverty. Sunder Rajan (2003:144-145) cautions against celebrating sex workers' agency, which can draw attention away from a structural understanding of sex work. Instead, the author argues for a middle ground between the abolitionist critique of sex work as structure or *system*, and the pro-sex work stance on sex work as *practice* (p.144; italics in original). This, the author argues,

allows Indian feminists to critique the system while empowering the practice, however contradictory this might appear (p.146).

3.4 Conceptual commonality: Structural and cultural forms of violence

Despite the differences between the abolitionist and pro-sex work conceptualisations of violence in sex work, an overarching commonality persists. The focus within both strands of thought is on everyday forms of gendered violence and power which affect women in particular ways. The bone of contention lies in how sex work relates to these forms of violence and power that affect the women who participate in it. In India, a particular form of everyday violence and power that has been at the heart of these debates is patriarchy and the ways in which it connects to other forms of social marginalisation, viz. caste and class, and finds expression in sex work. The discussion earlier shows that while abolitionists view prostitution as a static manifestation of patriarchal violence and power which subjugates women, pro-sex work proponents argue that sex work provides women with choice and agency which helps them to navigate wider patriarchal ideas about women's work, sexuality and mobility. NCW(1996:9) outlines the 'life situations of women in sex work' with a description of how they experience violence because of their gender and caste affiliations. It argues that '…as a gender, women [in sex work] are subject to the same discriminations [as other women in India] but with greater intensity', adding that '…the intensity of domestic violence upon these women is similar to the situation among other women'. This is significant, since it resists the exceptionalisation of violence experienced by women in sex work, arguing instead that existing forms of violence against women are exacerbated due to certain conditions in sex work. This is echoed by Karandiker and Prospero (2010)'s study of male violence amongst FSWs in a RLA in Mumbai. The authors

explore the transformation of the role of men in the lives of women in sex work: 'starting as male clients, becoming intimate partners, ending up as coercive pimps' (p.257). In this process the authors refer to Dutton and Goodman's (2005) model of coercion in intimate partner violence to emphasise the significance of identifying and understanding the forms of coercion in FSWs' intimate partner relationships. The authors conclude that the intimate partner violence '…that was experienced by the study's participants was related to the patriarchal social structures that surround women in general' (p. 271).

NCW (1996) highlights difficulties faced by women in sex work to find affordable housing and secure access to schooling for their children as some examples of particularities of discrimination. In doing so, it emphasises the stigma (Goffman, 1963) experienced by women in sex work for engaging in what is considered a socially deviant occupation. However, in bringing the attention back to how gender and caste play a role in experiences of violence in sex work, the report also emphasises the role of patriarchy in it which affects women outside sex work too. Galtung's (1969, 1990) conceptualisation of structural and cultural violence offers a theoretical lens through which to understand the everyday nature of violence experienced by women in India and the role it plays in women's pathways into sex work. Ellsberg and Heise (2005)'s life-cycle approach to identifying and addressing gender-based violence (which has been adopted by the World Health Organisation) provides a tool for mapping forms of violence across the life-courses of women in sex work prior to entering as well as after exiting it. Finally, Kabeer (1994)'s social relations framework, which address the dynamics of power in gender relations and the role of institutions (household, community, state and market) in reinforcing power inequalities, enables an understanding of the role of social relations in experiences of violence in sex work. These concepts and frameworks are discussed below.

3.5 Violence, power and social relations

Galtung (1969:168) first conceptualised 'structural violence' in his seminal work 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research'. He argues that 'violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations'. Galtung (ibid) rejects the 'narrow concept of violence' which defines violence as 'somatic incapacitation, or deprivation of health alone (with killing as the extreme form), at the hands of an actor who intends this to be the consequence'. Through this, he asserts that overt, physical violence is not the only way in which violence manifests. Instead, he argues that violence is present when individuals are directly (physically) or indirectly (through systemic absence or the closing down of opportunities) prevented from fulfilling their potential as human beings (Sørensen, 2014). Galtung (1969) develops his arguments in his description of a peaceful society; the narrow focus on the negation of overt, physical violence could imply the persistence of '…highly unacceptable social orders' which would be incompatible with peace. (p.168).

In his conception of violence between persons as an 'influence relation' which increases the distance between the potential and the actual for human beings, Galtung (ibid) highlights the presence of a subject, the object and the action, but argues, nevertheless, that thinking of 'violence as a complete interpersonal influence relation' would imply, once again, a narrow definition of violence. Instead, a type of 'truncated violence' where the actor (the person who commits the act of violence) is missing, is defined by Galtung (p. 171) as 'structural or indirect' violence, compared to 'personal or direct' violence where the actor is present. This conceptualisation also reveals Galtung's (ibid) understanding of power in his

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definition of 'structural violence': 'There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' (p.171). Elaborating on the connection between power and structural violence, Galtung specifies the uneven distribution of 'power to decide over the distribution of resources' (p.171) as an expression of his conceptualisation of 'structural violence', which he uses synonymously with the term 'social injustice'. Galtung (ibid) avoids the term 'exploitation' due to its 'political and emotional overtones', but also because the word in its verb form, 'exploit', implicates a person as an actor, which in structural violence would be absent. In his exploration of the six dimensions of violence, Galtung (ibid) also distinguishes between manifest and latent violence: structural violence in its manifest form is observable; latent violence, however, refers to a 'situation of unstable equilibrium where the level of actual realization [of human potential] is not sufficiently protected against deterioration by upholding mechanisms' (p.172). In his typology of violence, which distinguishes between 'personal' and 'structural' forms, the author further distinguishes between physical and physiological violence, intended and non-intended violence, as well as these forms of violence with and without the presence of objects. Additionally, the author clarifies that violence can also be maintained through a reward system, where a 'person can be influenced not only by punishing him when he does what the influencer considers wrong, but also by rewarding him when he does what the influencer considers right…a system (which) is reward-oriented, based on promises of euphoria, but in so being also narrows down the ranges of action'. (p.171).

In 1990, Galtung added 'cultural violence' to his conceptualisation of structural violence and explained it in the following way: '…by "cultural violence" we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by

religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence' (p. 291). He established a connection between cultural, structural and personal forms of violence by arguing that '…cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong', and that 'the study of cultural violence highlights the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society' (p.292). Cultural violence, for the author, becomes the 'third corner of a (vicious) violence triangle as an image', where turning the triangle on to different points describes different relationships between these three forms of violence (p.294).

Confortini (2006) argues 'for an incorporation of feminist theories into peace theories, by analyzing what is missing by not confronting feminist contributions to a theory on violence'. The author argues that Galtung's theory needs to incorporate notions of gender as a social construct embodying relations of power. This includes an understanding of how violence produces and defines gender identities and, in turn, is produced and defined by them (p.333). A gendered form of structural and cultural violence that affects women and girls throughout their life-course in a patriarchal society is the phenomenon of 'daughter disfavour'. It accompanies son preference, a key rationale of which is the perception of daughters as a poor investment (Munro and McIntyre, 2014). In a study of patriarchy in rural Bengal, Warrier (1993:2) argues that '...the phenomena (sic) of daughter disfavour and its geographical expression is a complex one in which numerous historical, social, cultural, demographic and economic factors interact.' Similarly, Bardhan (1987:1), argues that it 'is quite unlikely that anyone can provide a fully convincing and comprehensive explanation [of daughter disfavour]'. One of its impacts is on the way that women access resources in the household and other social institutions. Kabeer (1994:283) argues that '…most households display an asymmetry in the

division of resources, labour and claims through which they secure their members' well-being'. Within this, 'the extent to which men and women engage in activities which produce the more intangible resources – autonomy, solidarity, status in the community, claims on others – will depend, in particular, on their access to social networks and extra-domestic associations, and the nature and potential of these relationships' (ibid). However, '…gender divisions within the household are obviously important in determining the terms on which women and men enter or have access to these other institutions' (p.283). Daughter disfavour is one form of gendered division in households that affects women's pathways into sex work, as discussed in section 5.3. However, daughter disfavour also affects women's lives and claim to resources in social relations with the community, the market and the state, and takes on different forms through the course of their lives; these need to be mapped. This is where Ellsberg and Heise (2005) and Kabeer's (1994) frameworks prove useful.

Ellsberg and Heise (2005) draw from Watts and Zimmerman (2002) and Shane and Ellsberg (2002) to propose a framework to examine the life-cycle of violence against women. This has been adopted by the World Health Organisation as a conceptual framework to map different forms of gender-based violence that women experience across their lives in different contexts. The authors argue that despite discrepancies in the way forms of violence are defined across various regional contexts – e.g. domestic violence implying 'family violence' in Latin America and the abuse of women by intimate partners in others – there is an 'increasing international consensus that the abuse of women and girls, regardless of where it occurs, should be considered as "gender-based violence", as it largely stems from women's subordinate status in society with regard to men' (p.11). This framework, however, has not been used to address experiences of violence among women in sex work, which has largely been atomised and exceptionalised. Its adoption

allows for a longitudinal study of daughter disfavour and how it affects pathways into sex work and continues to affect women after they leave. It is reproduced below:
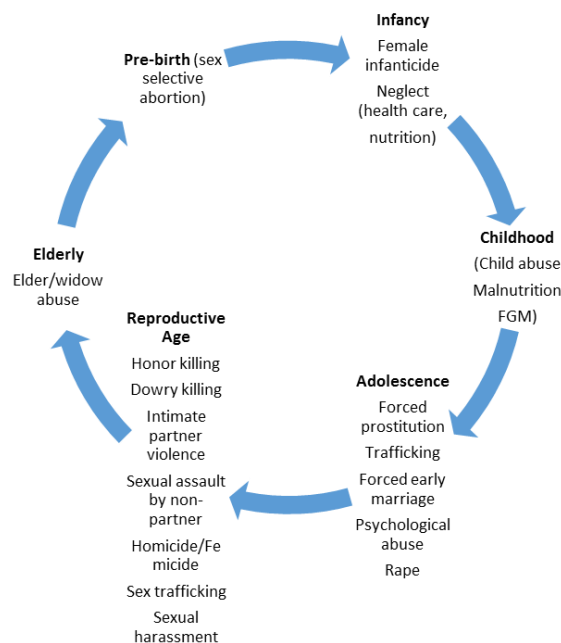
Figure 3.1. The life cycle of violence against women
Source: Ellsberg and Heise (2005:10)

While this framework maps gender-based violence across women's life-courses, Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework aims to understand existing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities and power in society, and to effectively design policies and programmes that seek to empower women. This approach explores and unpacks (i) relationships between people, (ii) people's relationships with resources and activities, and (iii) how these relationships are reworked through institutions such as the state, the market and the household (ILO, 1998). While Ellsberg and Heise (2005) identify the various forms of structural and cultural violence across women's lives longitudinally, Kabeer's (1994) framework examines ways in which multiple institutions play a role in shaping and reinforcing

the existence of structural and cultural violence. This framework is introduced below, within a broader discussion of Kabeer's (1994) thoughts on gender and power.

Kabeer (1994:299) defines gender as a 'power relation' derived from 'institutional arrangements which provide men, of a given social group, with greater capacity than women from that group to mobilize institutional rules and resources to promote and defend their own interests'. 'Gender relations' implies specific aspects of social relations 'which create and reproduce systematic differences in the positioning of women and men in relation to institutional processes and outcomes' and intersect with 'material inequalities' other than gender, e.g. class, caste, race or religion to 'structure the division of resources and responsibilities, claims and obligations between different social groups of women and men within any given society' (p.280). She refers to Young, et al (1981:viii) to argue that 'in most contexts men enjoy….greater access to food; lesser responsibility in terms of self-maintenance or of care of the young and the old; a privileged position in term of command of labour, particularly women's labour; less confined sexuality' (p.299). 'Genuine change' … [in power relations between men and women]…requires 'institutional transformation' (Kabeer, 1994:299).

Kabeer (1994) explains that men and women's attitudes to institutional transformation differ because their strategic gender interests derive from their positioning within unequal social relations. However, she outlines two important aspects of women's interests which are important to this research. First, although women have a long-term strategic gender interest in the transformation of power relations, it does not imply that those interests appear more visible to them than the needs that emerge from everyday routines and responsibilities within social relations. Second, due to the positioning of women in their societies through a range of different social relations (class, ethnicity and gender), 'the interests they

share as a gender category will also be shaped in "complex and sometimes" conflicting ways' (p.299). Conceptually, these explain power inequalities and gender-based violence between (female) madams and FSWs, and why FSWs prefer and prioritise intimate relationships with male customers (despite the threat and presence of intimate partner violence and abandonment) over more sustainable platonic relationships with madams. Chapter 6 discusses this.

Kabeer's (1994:280) framework offers an analysis of 'social relations of production within relevant institutions of family, market, state and community'. She argues that while 'these different institutions may operate with their own distinct ideologies and procedures, they also share certain common norms and assumptions which lead to the systematic creation and reinforcement of social inequalities across institutional sites':

> Despite the separation of domestic institutions from the public domains of production and exchange, familial norms and values are constantly drawn on in constructing the terms women and men enter, and participate, in public life and in the market place. At the same time, because different social institutions are organised around quite specific objectives and have their own rules and practices, gender hierarchies are not seamlessly and uniformly woven into institutional structures but produced dynamically through the interaction of familial gender ideologies and distinct institutional rules and practices (p.281).

Kabeer (1994) argues that although institutions differ across cultures, what is common to them is that 'they are 'patterned sets of activities organized around the meeting of specific needs in accordance with certain rules of conduct and practice' (Hodgson, 1988, cited in Kabeer, 1994:281). To analyse 'social analysis in general' and 'gender inequality in particular', Kabeer (1994:281) suggests five 'distinct but interrelated dimensions of social relationships in institutions': rules, resources, people, activities and power. These dimensions provide a conceptual lens through

which to analyse experiences of power and violence experienced by women in sex work, across RLAs, which is undertaken in Chapter 6.

3.6. Violence by people across the household, community, brothel and the state: A review of literature on violence in sex work in India

Violence by 'people' (Kabeer, 1994) or actors across the institutions of the household, the community, the brothel and the state is at the heart of much of the contemporary research on violence in sex work in India. Unsurprisingly, which institution and/or actor is focused on is usually influenced by the author's stance on sex work. These stances are embedded in alignment with larger development discourses surrounding the prevention of human trafficking and HIV/AIDS in India. To put it simply, the former tends to be abolitionist, focusing on coercive pathways into sex work and ensuing violence by madams, pimps and brothel owners which make rescue through anti-trafficking interventions imperative. The second tends to engage in greater detail with wider forms of violence experienced by women in sex work, including stigma as well as violence by state actors, viz. police. Violence in relationships with customers and intimate relationships is also highlighted. This literature also examines the ways in which women in sex work express agency and resistance in a constrained environment. All this, however, tends to be framed within a discussion of how it impacts vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and STDs, and access to health services. The next section examines and problematises these arguments, and discusses the concepts that emerge from them.

3.6.1. Anti-trafficking and sex work: Coercive pathways, violence in sex work and the imperative of rescue

Literature framed by the anti-trafficking discourse, which leans towards abolitionism, frames sex work as 'commercial sexual exploitation'. In this, pathways into sex work are coercive and exploitative, where traffickers prey on vulnerable women, pathways are affected by the vulnerability of women due to '…a range of inter-related economic, social, political, and familial factors (e.g., poverty, lack of sustainable livelihoods, structural inequities)' (Joffres, et al, 2008:4). Sanghera (2005:7), however, argues that '…it is critical to understand that these factors are not in themselves the causes of trafficking; they merely exacerbate the vulnerability of marginalized and disadvantaged groups and render them increasingly more susceptible to a variety of harms'. In their review of existing literature on trafficking in India, Nair and Sen (2003:9) argue that while there '…seems to be broad agreement over the factors that lead to trafficking…there is uncertainty about [the] precise role played by them'. Referring to Raymond (2002) and DePaul (2005), the authors argue that these factors can be divided into two broad categories – personal circumstances and structural forces (p.8). Discrimination and violence in households and communities often propel women into labour-led migratory journeys (including into sex work) which render them vulnerable to trafficking (Coomaraswamy, 2001; Nair and Sen, 2003). An example of a form of structural and cultural violence that produces gendered vulnerabilities for women in India, intersecting with class, caste and religion and rendering them vulnerable to coercive pathways into sex work, is the phenomenon of daughter disfavour discussed in section 3.5. As discussed in Chapter 5, this concept allows for differences in subjective experiences while acknowledging overarching commonalities in pathways into sex work.

Sanghera (2005) argues that the conflation of trafficking and prostitution among 'persistent anti-trafficking players within the dominant discourse' collapses the 'process with the purpose'. Due to this, '…the abuse and violence inherent in trafficking is mistaken for the actual site of work and form of labour' (p.11). Conflating (violence in) trafficking with migratory pathways into sex work and experiences in sex work creates erroneous data about victims of trafficking, equating this with the number who have migrated and/or are in sex work (p.12). Here, Sanghera (2005) notes a gender bias: this 'logic' among anti-trafficking practitioners primarily applies to women and not men. The gendered victimology of women in sex work as victims of trafficking also has a further dimension. Gangoli (2008:27) argues that '…in India, [where] much of the focus on prostitution has been through the entry point of harm, coercion and victimhood...activists have concentrated on child prostitution'. The author argues that NGO and state actors' focus on children's experiences of sex work as a way to delegitimise it as a form of 'work', obscures the 'distinction between violence and degradation': 'while violence is experiential and can be documented, degradation is a social construct (ibid). By focusing on sex work as an '… important if not primary site of violence, it ignores physical and sexual violence against women and girl children in the family' (p.28). Finally, the focus on children in sex work is often extended to adult women, conflating women and children and infantilising women (ibid).

Inaccurate data on women affected by human trafficking (due to its conflation with sex work) extends to information about the traffickers as perpetrators of violence along coercive pathways into sex work. However, the involvement of family and community members directly (through the manipulation of women and their forcible sale into sex work) or indirectly (through the perpetration of violence in homes and communities that pushes women into sex work) has been highlighted (ADB, 2003; Nair and Sen, 2003). Violence by actors in the sex-work market, i.e. madams,

pimps and customers, has been highlighted by anti-trafficking NGOs in India as evidence that women do not choose to remain in sex work, but often do so due to the threat and experiences of violence (Patkar and Patkar, 2000). However, data on the actual nature of these forms of violence and the circumstances in which they occur is few and far in between. As Joffres, et al (2008:5) note, data on the '…morbidity and mortality' of women engaged in 'commercial sex' is lacking. The emphasis in studies on women in 'commercial sexual exploitation' is on the imperativeness of rescue – removal from sites of sex work through anti-trafficking interventions where NGOs and state actors collaborate. While rescue processes in the form of police raids on brothels are sometimes informed by the family of women in sex work contacting community and city-based anti-trafficking NGOs, adult women who have entered sex work voluntarily are also forcibly removed in the name of rescue. As Chapter 7 shows, this and the ensuing processes of being rehabilitated in government and NGO shelter homes are perceived as violent and oppressive by FSWs

Sanghera (2005:14) critiques the framing of women in sex work as 'victims' while discussing the post-facto nature of the crime of trafficking: '...it is deemed as a crime only after it has happened'. The three 'core elements' of the operation of trafficking based on its definition (ibid) involve: (i) the movement of a person (ii) under deception or coercion (iii) into a situation of forced labour, servitude and slavery-like conditions (GAATW, 2001). Sanghera (2005:15) deconstructs the assumption of victimhood to violence, threat and coercion in these three steps by arguing that the first often begins as voluntary processes of social and economic migration, with accurate information about the destination concealed or misrepresented by the trafficker to the victim. Coercion manifests, often in 'extreme forms', at the destination, when the female migrant is subjected to oppression, violence and intimidation. The author argues that it is 'critical to grasp that the

process of trafficking, while transforming itself into a crime, simultaneously transforms the seeker of a better life into a victim' (p.15). Additionally, if her migratory journey was illegal (crossing borders without formal documents), the female migrant 'transforms paradoxically into a victim and a criminal (ibid). Further, if her journey of migration was undertaken for socially deviant reasons (eloping with a partner, migrating without parental permission), her transformation from victimhood to violence becomes precarious and contested; returning to her residential community post-rescue can lead to stigma, familial conflict and further experiences of violence (GAATW, 2001;Pandey, et al, 2013). Sanghera (2005:16) argues that a 'review of the dominant anti-trafficking paradigm and work reveals that the largest numbers of players are clustered around rescue and rehabilitation activities, primarily in the arena of prostitution'. In this, 'an assessment of rescue initiatives in Asia shows that rescues are commonly conducted in brothels of big cities' (ibid). Women trapped in other forms of sex work (against their wishes) viz. on the street, and other sites of human trafficking (forced labour, forced marriages) are often ignored. Further, rescue operations in India are not designed holistically and involve, as mentioned above, '…police-facilitated raids in which 'seemingly minor-looking girls' are picked up and consigned either to government remand homes or to shelters run by NGOs' (p.17). Emphasising police as 'rescuers' also obscures how the former and other state actors participate and perpetrate violence against women in sex work (UNDP, 2015)

Outlining rescue-and-rehabilitation interventions as the only form of solution for violence in sex work in the anti-trafficking literature is problematic due to the ways in which it homogenises victimhood, prioritises violence by some actors in the market over others in the state and families (which can continue post exiting sex work, as discussed in Chapter 7) and ignores how forcible rehabilitation in shelter homes can be perceived as violent and oppressive (Sen, 2016). Conceptually,

within this framework, violence is considered static, unchanging and constant. However, as Sanghera (2005) argues, processes of trafficking are complex, and the power of the trafficker over the victim takes different forms. A victim's experiences in sex work also change due to her position in different social and labour relations in the RLA. This is discussed in Chapter 6.

In India, anti-trafficking rescue operations are not run solely by abolitionist anti-trafficking NGOs. Over the last decade sex workers' collectives and community-based organisations, usually operating from a pro-sex work stance and offering (sexual) health services to the sex-working community, have also entered the field of rescue-and-rehabilitation. Unlike abolitionist NGOs, these organisations do not assume homogenous victimhood in sex work but work towards rescuing women under the age of 18. Magar (2012:627) highlights that unlike abolitionist anti-trafficking rescue interventions, these organisations make use of their intimate knowledge of social networks in the brothel and RLA to identify victims of trafficking. These rescue processes are discrete, unlike the high-profile, publicly visible and reported raids conducted by anti-trafficking actors and often do not involve the police or external NGOs. However, in some cases of rescue, when the madam is not willing to let go of an underage woman in her employment the police are brought in (ibid). Magar(2012:630) notes that rescue efforts by pro-sex work actors are hindered by structural aspects (power relations between the organisation and the brothel, fear of intimidation and violence by pimps and customers), and follow-up processes to prevent re-trafficking are few and far between. On rescue, the victims find themselves in government-owned shelter homes once again where the conditions are deplorable and oppressive and often render residents vulnerable to sexual assault and mistreatment. The 'tenuous link' between administrators and the heads of protective shelter homes (who tend to be

abolitionist) and sex workers' collectives also make the possibility of following up on the residents' well-being difficult (p. 632).

The idea of 'protection from violence', i.e. rescue-and-rehabilitation, as a form of violence itself which emerges from Sanghera's (2005) critique sets up an interesting opportunity to discuss Foucauldian ideas of power and contrast them with Galtung's conceptualisation of violence. In a 'Foucauldian critique of Galtung', Sorensen (2014) argues that 'Foucault's inquiry into the operations of power and domination forces us to reconsider Galtung's framework of structural violence'. Discussing 'structural violence', the author asserts that Foucault and Galtung's core definition of this form of violence appear to be similar. Sorensen (2014) argues that Galtung's (1969) characterisation of structural violence as 'truncated' is comparable to Foucault's insistence on the 'non-possessability of disciplinary power' and its characterisation as 'productive power, producing imperatives for actions'. However, in Foucauldian thought power is synonymous with knowledge and delinked from violence; in 'The Subject and Power', Foucault (1982:789) argues that:

> [W]hat defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which
> does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their
> actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which
> may arise in the present or the future. A relationship of violence acts upon
> a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys,
> or it closes the door on all possibilities.

Foucault (ibid) goes on to argue that the 'opposite pole' of violence can only be passivity, and in the face of resistance, violence needs to be minimised. However, a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements, which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: 'that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to

the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up'.

In an interview on *The Ethic of Care for Self as a Practice of Freedom*, Foucault (1984) also discussed 'violence' indirectly as 'domination', as what happens '…when an individual or a social group manages to block a field of relations of power, to render them impassive and invariable and to prevent all reversibility of movement – by means of instruments which can become economic as well as political or military – we are facing what we can call a state of domination' (also cited in Sorensen, 2014). Thus, to return to Sorensen's (2014) point, disciplinary power for Foucault works through conformity and creativity (Foucault 1982) and 'relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free one's self' (Foucault, 1984:129). Power, therefore, 'is not an evil', power is '…strategic games' (ibid). Therefore, Foucauldian scholar Heyes (2007:7, also cited in Sorensen, 2014) argues: 'One of Foucault's key insights was that disciplinary power, at the same time as it manages and constricts our somatic selves, also enhances our capacities and develops new skills. These capacities can be part of a struggle for greater freedom'. To summarise, then, '…the application and modes of power at play is what determines its possibly violent character' (Sorensen, 2014).

Therefore 'human potential', which Galtung takes as a standard for measuring violence, is not a 'given constant' that can be repressed – an idea that is emphasised in jurico-legal theorising on power. Foucault instead argues that human potential itself is under scrutiny with the purpose of optimisation (Sorensen, 2014). When demand is placed on people to maximise their human potential, this can, as Heyes (2007) argues, be liberating, but it can also create the potential for 'domination'. The conceptualisation of disciplinary power as not only restricting but also creating human potential, Sorensen (2014) argues, problematises Galtung's

(1969) theory of structural violence. He provides the example of a prison, where offenders are provided rehabilitative services to maximise their potential to re-enter society but the context also deprives them of other basic human rights; Galtung (ibid) does not consider whether such a system would reflect the absence or presence of human potential. Sorensen (2014) argues that this is especially evident in prison systems where human beings are incarcerated to help them to fulfil their potential, but it is perceived as oppressive by the inmates. Similarly, in this research context, while rescue-and-rehabilitation processes might be intended to prevent violence in (pathways into) sex work, the ways in which power inequalities continue to manifest in these processes problematise Galtung's (1969) arguments. The imperativeness of rescue from situations of violence and power inequalities as the only (and best) resolution to violence dismisses ways in which women in sex work exercise agency in the face of constraints. Chapters 5-7 show how women who leave sex work at a particular site, either through rescue or individual escape, often return on their own terms and negotiate better conditions of work for themselves at the same or a different site. There is a need therefore to think beyond exit from violent situations as the only form of agency that female victims of violence may exercise. The next section reviews existing literature that problematises escape (as a form of exit) as the only resolution to violence, as well as watertight understandings of the concepts of agency and resistance.

3.6.1.1. Escape, agency and resistance

Sen (1997:39) observes that '…literature on resistance to domestic violence has a dominant theme of women's escape': 'an abusive relationship is a situation from which a woman is expected to escape'. Walker (1979) has noted that an interest in escaping can be motivated by the realisation that the relationship cannot change, or that escape offers resolution of the violence (Russell, 1990). This, Sen

(1997) argues, posits escape as the alternative to abuse, where the choice for women in abusive relationships becomes centred on leaving/escape or staying/continued violence. This, in turn, leads to the problematic question: *Why do women stay?* (p.39). Stanko (1990:106-7) notes that when women do stay with violent men and struggle to maintain the relationship, they may be perceived as asking for or enjoying the abuse. Therefore in abusive relationships escape becomes synonymous with, and sometimes the sole means of, expressing agency as it is posited as the only alternative to victimisation (Mahoney, 1994:60). However, referring to Mahoney (p.61), Sen (1997:43) argues that the the focus on leaving 'conceals the nature of domestic violence as a struggle for control' and 'pretends away the extreme dangers of separation and hides the interaction of social structures that oppress women'.

Sen (1997:44) argues that 'leaving is a complex and difficult decision and process, complicated by the obstacles of establishing separate lives'. This argument holds true in situations of violence against women perpetrated by members of natal and marital households. In such situations 'the practical considerations of leaving are wider than purely financial', and depend on a range of factors, one of which is the ready acceptance of 'single adult females' in a particular culture (pp.44-45). Although the author sees escape as one form of resistance, she argues that 'escape should not be equated with the resolution of violence – violence is not neatly contained within the formal lifetime of a relationship, and a focus on safety rather than either a bounded relationship (in time or in location) or escape will allow women's well-being to take central place' (p.44). In her analysis of women's negotiations with patriarchy, Kandiyoti (1988:282) argues that 'despite the obstacles that classic patriarchy puts in women's way, which may far outweigh any actual economic and emotional security, women often resist the process of transition because they see the old normative order slipping away from them

without any empowering alternatives'. Thus, in situations of crisis and violence in patriarchal households, 'women may continue to use all the pressure they can muster to make men live up to their obligations and will not, except under the most extreme pressure, compromise the basis for their claims by stepping out of line and losing their respectability.' This 'passive resistance' by women, 'takes the form of claiming their half in this patriarchal bargain – protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety' (ibid).

Sen (1997) and Kandiyoti's (1988) arguments find resonance in Ortner's (1995) conceptualisation of resistance. The author argues against the conceptualisation of resistance as a 'relatively unambiguous category, half of the seemingly binary, domination versus resistance' (p.174). This is reminiscent of how static conceptions of power are questioned in Foucauldian theories which in 1978, 'drew attention to less institutionalized, more pervasive, and more everyday forms of power' (Ortner, 1995:175). Meanwhile Scott (1985) problematises narrow definitions of resistance. He argues that focusing narrowly on overt and visible acts of rebellion or collective actions makes one overlook subtle but powerful forms of 'everyday resistance'. Ortner (1995:175) argues that despite the ambiguity of the category of resistance evoked by Scott (1985), his argument is 'reasonably useful' because it 'highlights the presence and play of power in most forms of relationship and activity'. As Kandiyoti's (1988) conceptualisation of 'patriarchal bargaining' highlights, the 'dominant' in the relationship 'often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal (though always of course at the price of continuing in power' (Ortner, 1995:175). Therefore the 'subordinate…has many grounds for ambivalence about resisting the relationship'. Furthermore, 'there is never a single, unitary, subordinate…subaltern groups are internally divided by age, gender, status, and other forms of difference' (ibid.)

Ortner (1995:176) critiques studies of resistance for not 'containing enough politics'. This is because the studies limit themselves to studying only the 'politics of resistance', i.e. 'the relationship between the dominant and subordinate' (ibid). However, Ortner (ibid) argues that there is a need to study the 'own politics' of the resistors (p.178). She draws attention to the 'most glaring arena of internal political complexity glossed over by most of these studies…[as]… the arena of gender politics'. Within this, the 'lack of an adequate sense of prior and ongoing politics among subalterns must inevitably contribute to an inadequate analysis of resistance itself' (pp.178-179). Chapter 6, through a detailed exploration of social relations in women's lives in the RLAS, examines how resistance to violence by customers in sex work is curtailed by the FSWs' 'own politics', formed, affected and shaped by patriarchal bargaining in social relations prior to and within their life in sex work.

A valuable addition to the debate about expanding notions of resistance and agency is Reader's (2007) challenge of the 'agential bias' within conceptions of personhood. The author argues that the agential aspect of personhood underlines the sentiment: 'When I am an agent, I am, I count. But when I am passive, incapable, constrained, dependent, I am less a person, I count less' (p.580). This bias had led to efforts to 'enable' those that are 'passive, suffering, subject to necessities, etc. to get a bit more agency, and to become thereby, more of a person' (ibid). To challenge this, Reader (2007:580-581) proposes a broader conception of personhood which incorporates 'patiental features', where a 'patient' is a being that is acted upon, and is different from an object: 'When I am a patient, I am not thereby an object, but remain as much of a subject, a human person, as I am when I act' (p.593). In this new conceptualisation of personhood the author critically explores four fundamental tenets of agency and the agential conception of personhood: action, capability, choice and independence. The author argues

that each of these 'agential features presupposes a non-agential feature: agency presupposes patiency, capability presupposes incapability, choice presupposes necessity and independence presupposes dependency' (p.579). Through this, she argues that 'there is as much of the self, the person, in the passive aspects of personal being as in the active ones' (p.603). This, she asserts, requires researchers and scholars to study personhood with all its complexities and resist attempts to 'tidy personhood up' (p.604). Although agential aspects of personhood should still be considered, it needs to be balanced with an acknowledgement of its patential features without a bias towards agential aspects. This argument is significant to the lives of women in sex work, who adopt various ways to exercise agency and resistance in the face of violence and power inequalities across their lives, shaped by the interplay of various institutions in their lives. One such form of structural violence which affects women who participate in sex work across their lives and is reinforced by the state, community, household and market in various ways is stigma. In literature on violence in sex work framed in the HIV/AIDS discourse, the role of stigma and other structural forms of violence – e.g. violence by state actors. viz. the police and within interpersonal relationships – as structural barriers to the prevention of transmission, forms a major theme of discussion and research. This literature is reviewed next, ending with a conceptual discussion of stigma and deviance.

3.6.2 HIV/AIDS and sex work: Interpersonal violence, state actors and stigma

Research on violence in sex work framed within the HIV/AIDS discourse focuses on violence by actors across the state, community, household and market. Important and interlinked themes include: (i) violence by men, as customers, pimps and long-term intimate partners; (ii) violence by police and other state actors; and

(iii) structural forms of violence, viz. stigma and discrimination. However, all these discussions are framed in the larger context of interrogating structural barriers to HIV prevention. The linkages between sexual and physical violence in FSWs' interpersonal relationships with men, to vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is summed up by Beattie, et al (2010:2):

> Violence against sex workers can heighten their vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) through multiple mechanisms: (i) coerced sex is rarely protected; (ii) coerced sex can result in injuries that can increase the transmission of STIs, which in turn can increase the risk of HIV transmission; (iii) men who are sexually violent may be more likely to have multiple partners and be infected with HIV and/or STIs; (iv) sex work is usually illegal, and thus reporting of sexual and physical violence to the authorities is difficult meaning violence can continue unchecked; (v) the fear of violence from regular partners (husbands/lovers) resulting from inadvertent disclosure of sex work can deter sex workers from negotiating condom use with these partners and from accessing sexual health services; and (vi) mental health morbidity arising from violence can reduce the ability of sex workers to negotiate condom use and to access STI services for testing and treatment.

In a study of violence and exposure to HIV among sex workers in Phnom Penh, Jenkins (2006:43) argues that violence by police (similar to violence by other men) is an expression of the '…social construction of masculine sexuality as performance, penetration, and conquest which paves the way for sexual coercion'. UNDP (2015:7) highlights that '…sex workers experienc[e] specific types of violence because of their work, such as sexual harassment and extortion by police for carrying condoms'. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, violence by state actors, viz. the police, therefore, is also influenced by the legal precarity and social stigma attached to sex work (and to non-normative expressions of female sexuality). The

escalating calls for recognition of 'sex work as work' and its accompanying decriminalisation in sex workers' collectives in India, have been framed by a campaign to end violence against FSWs, through reduction of social stigma and legal deviance. (RUF, 2017). Additionally, stigma and deviance have been flagged as barriers to accessing health services and the development of effective interventions to tackle the spread of HIV (Basu et al 2004, Cornish 2006, O Neil et al 2004, etc.). Countering stigma as a socially-constructed and -reproduced phenomenon has been the thrust of community-based mobilising among FSWs in India. Biradavolu et al (2012) note how such 'stigma alleviation strategies' can often have contradictory effects. While 'emboldening' women to self-identify as sex workers, it can also increase the reluctance of others to access health services in clinics intended for women in sex work. Additionally, the diverse landscape of sex work in India implies that the nature of stigma can vary when sex work is undertaken under 'culturally sanctioned' traditional forms in rural India (O'Neil et al, 2004): it can take on the role of caste- or community-based stigma which continues to impair access to health services. There is a need therefore for further research to link the stigma attached to sex work with wider forms of social stigma attached to non-normative expressions of female sexuality and other forms of social marginalisation (viz. affiliation to lower castes) in India. Chapter 8 addresses this by linking deviance in the lives of women in sex work, and the accompanying stigma, with experiences of deviance and stigma due to violence within households and communities which propels women into sex work and persist after they leave.

Scambler and Paoli (2008:1849) argue that it is '…widely recognized…that the attributions of shame and blame' associated with FSWs 'enhance their vulnerability, impair their human rights' and impede health interventions to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS. The authors associate shame with 'social norms of stigma' and blame with 'deviance…and credible judgements of moral worth'. While stigma

denotes 'a form of social unacceptability for which the bearer is not personally responsible, indicating a flaw in her very constitution or make-up', deviance '…on the other hand, carries with it a charge of moral culpability' (ibid). The distinctions between these two blur in the everyday lives of women in sex work and increase the diminished sense of self, exacerbate vulnerability to violence and impede access to legal recourses against violence. The next and final section discusses these concepts in detail. It explores Goffman's (1963) seminal work on stigma and reviews more contemporary literature influenced by his work. Becker's (1963) theory of deviance and 'deviant careers' is also discussed, and is adopted as a conceptual framework in Chapter 8.

3.6.2.1. Stigma and deviance: A conceptual discussion

Goffman (1963:12-13) first defined stigma as 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting' which reduces an individual from a 'whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one'. Link and Phelan (2001:363) observe that Goffman's (1963) seminal work has 'inspired a profusion of research on the nature, sources, and consequences of stigma' which have been 'been incredibly productive, leading to elaborations, conceptual refinements, and repeated demonstrations of the negative impact of stigma on the lives of the stigmatized'. The conceptualisation of stigma in this literature takes on varying forms. Stafford and Scott (1986:80) define stigma as '… a characteristic of persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit'; in this a 'norm' is defined as a 'shared belief that a person ought to behave in a certain way at a certain time'. Crocker et al (1998:505) argue that individuals are stigmatised because they possess (or are believed to possess) an attribute that conveys a 'social identity that is devalued in a particular social context' (also cited in Link and Phelan, 2001:365). Link and Phelan (2001:365) identify Jones et al

(1984)'s definition as 'particularly influential'; the authors draw from 'Goffman's (1963:4) observation that stigma is seen as a relationship between an "attribute and a stereotype" to produce a definition of stigma as a "mark" (attribute) that links a person to undesirable characteristics (stereotypes)'.

Several challenges have been posed to theoretical conceptualisations of stigma. Oliver (1992) criticises the 'decidedly individualistic focus' (Link and Phelan, 2001:366) in studies on stigma where the 'the central thrust…has been focused on the perceptions of individuals and the consequences of such perceptions for micro-level interactions', excluding the much-needed examination of the 'sources and consequences of pervasive, socially-shaped exclusion from social and economic life' (ibid). Fiske (1998) has argued that within social psychology far greater attention has been extended to literature on stereotyping than on discrimination and addressing structural issues. Despite Goffman's (1963) insistence that studies on stigma need to formulate a 'language of relationship, not attributes', the literature on stigma has preoccupied itself with the presence of the attribute in the person (Fine and Asch 1988), instead of with the 'producers of rejection and exclusion' i.e. those who stigmatise and discriminate (Link and Phelan, 2001:366). To address this, Link and Phelan (2001:367) propose a conceptualisation of stigma as the convergence of interrelated components. First is when 'people distinguish and label human differences'. Second is when 'dominant cultural beliefs link labelled persons to undesirable characteristics – to negative stereotypes'. Third, labelled persons are 'othered' and distanced from the 'us' that is considered normal; and fourth, the 'labelled person experiences status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes'. The authors emphasise that their application of the term 'stigma' occurs when 'elements of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold' (p.377).

Link and Phelan's (2001) conceptualisation of stigma bears a close resemblance to Becker's (1963) theories on deviance. Similar to the critiques levelled at literature on and scholars of stigma who focus on the person who is stigmatised rather than on those who are discriminating based on the stigma, Becker (ibid) argues that the deviance that makes an individual an 'outsider' is created by society (p.8). The deviant person, therefore, might consider those who judge him/her to be the 'outsiders', rejecting the judgement placed on him/herself. From this point of view, 'deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender"' (p.9). The deviance in this situation, therefore, is created not by the person breaking a particular rule, but by the 'social groups' who make the rules, 'whose infractions constitute deviance' (ibid). 'Deviant behaviour', therefore, is 'behaviour that people so label' (p.9). Becker's (1963) argument is valuable, since it places the brunt of the deviance-creation on those judging, and not exhibiting deviance – on individuals and groups, but also on structures. Becker (1963) cautions against assuming homogeneity in deviance, because the 'process of labeling may not be infallible; some people may be labelled deviant who in fact have not broken a rule'. One of the ways in which this can happen is through association with someone considered deviant or stigmatised, referred to by Goffman (1963) as 'courtesy' stigma and by Mehta and Farina (1998) as 'associative' stigma.

Chapter 8 explores how deviance occurs and operates within the lives of former and current FSWs. It applies and problematises Becker (1963)'s theories of deviance in relation to the women's lived experiences of marginalisation, social exclusion and stigma within their residential communities.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on violence against women in sex work. While various studies exist on this subject, they are disconnected from one another due to polarising and oppositional stances on sex work (abolitionist vs. pro-sex work), and their framing in anti-trafficking and HIV/AIDS discourses. Additionally, the existing literature is detached from the wider landscape of conceptual discussions and theoretical frameworks which are in use to identify and address gender-based violence and power inequalities within gender relations. This has happened primarily due to the representation of violence in sex work as exceptional and inherent. To counter this, this chapter brings together a wide cross-section of feminist theorising on sex work, literature on the politicisation of violence against women in India within the women's movement and its engagement with sexuality, discussions of violence in sex work within the anti-trafficking and HIV/AIDS discourse, and theoretical frameworks and concepts that have not been applied to the study of violence in sex work, e.g. Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) life-cycle approach and Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework, which have been widely used and discussed in experiences of violence against women *outside* sex work. The prioritisation of rescue-and-rehabilitation in the anti-trafficking abolitionist literature is critiqued through a discussion of the concept of escape as the only resolution for situations of violence against women. Additionally, simplistic readings of agency and resistance which are often debated in discussions on violence against women are challenged and problematised. In studies couched in the HIV/AIDS discourse, concepts of stigma and deviance are explored. Linking experiences of stigma and deviance for women in sex work with wider cultural and structural forms (which affect women before they enter sex work and continue after they leave) is recommended. Overall, this review has highlighted the need for

further research on (i) the nature of everyday violence and power inequalities in sex work, and linkages to forms outside it; and (ii) a nuanced and contextual understanding of how women in sex work resist and negotiate with everyday power and violence. This thesis addresses these needs.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces and discusses the methodological framework of this research. The questions at the heart of this framework deal with how to (i) access a sensitive, hard-to-reach community; (ii) gather data on life-experiences; and (iii) trace the different life-stages of women from peri-urban and rural backgrounds engaging in different forms of sex work in Kolkata. Overall, this chapter discusses research collection methods, the rationale behind the site selection for the fieldwork and the description of those sites, and the adoption of an ethnographic approach interspersed with life-history interviewing to collect data for the research. This shows that the choice of fieldwork sites and methods of collecting data justify the aims of this thesis. Additionally, ethical concerns and the epistemological positioning of this research are addressed.

4.2. Methodological and research design

Qualitative research is 'grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly "interpretivist" in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced' (Mason 1996:4). Furthermore, qualitative research '…is based on data generation methods which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced (rather than rigidly standardized or structured, or removed from "real life" or "natural" social contexts, as in some forms of experimental method)' (ibid). Finally, analytical methods in qualitative research are geared towards '…explanation building which involves

understandings of complexity, detail and context' and 'aims to produce rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual and detailed data' (Mason, 1996:4).

In *Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*, published by PATH and the World Health Organisation, Ellsberg and Heise (2005) compare qualitative and quantitative approaches to researching violence. Quantitative methods are "useful for drawing conclusions that are valid are useful for broader population under study. They are particularly appropriate for measuring the frequency of a problem or condition and its distribution in a population" (p.55) On the other hand, qualitative methods are "more appropriate when the aim is to gain understanding about a process, or when an issue is being studied for the first time in a particular setting" (ibid). Results from qualitative research allow one to "understand the nuances and details of complex social phenomena from the respondents' point of view. Although the findings cannot be generalised, they "reveal multiple layers of meaning for a particular group of people. This level of understanding is particularly important when studying human behaviour and trying to discern how it interacts with people's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions" (pp.55).

In her thesis on women's resistance to domestic violence in Kolkata, Sen (1997) examines the debates between quantitative and qualitative approaches to research on violence. Citing examples of Stanko, 1985; Kelly, 1988 and Glass, 1995, Sen (1997) argues that "qualitative studies have tended to privilege women's accounts, collected through exploratory interviews with women, open questions and qualitative analysis" (p.77). Less-structured and in-depth research has been perceived to minimise the hierarchy between the researcher and researched (Oakley, 1981; also cited in Sen, 1997:77). Quantitative research on violence has been strongly associated with family violence and has used scales, indexes and interview-style questionnaires (Strauss and Gelles 1988; pp.15-16; also cited in

Sen, 1997:76). However, despite its use in research on violence by men against women (Russell, 1990; Mama, 1989; Bowker, 1988; Johnson, 1996, etc; also cited in Sen, 1997:77), quantitative methods have been criticised as contrary to the aims of feminist research (Reinharz, 1983; Graham, 1983; Pugh, 1990, etc). However, by discussing examples of two illustrative texts – (i) Kelly (1988)'s early work on sexual violence which used qualitative research methods to contribute significantly to theorising on sexual violence, and (ii) Russel (1990)'s study on marital abuse which used random sample survey methods to collect quantitative and qualitative data on rape and sexual assault, Sen (1997:78) argues that the contributions of the two studies to research on violence against women highlight the utility of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Indeed, as Jain (1992)'s reference to a sociological framework of analysis in a study of familial violence in India shows, perceptions and experiences of individuals affected by violence, and objective facts surrounding these are both meaningful within studies of violence.

Despite the utility of both approaches, a qualitative approach was selected for this research as it was better suited for its aims and purposes for the following reasons:

(i) It provides a flexible data collection methods to build a detailed understanding and interpretation of how former and current FSWs produce, interpret and experience their 'social worlds'. The flexibility of the methods is significant considering how FSWs' lives in India are socially marginalised and framed by legal precarity.

(ii) A qualitative approach also enables a comprehensive and contextual analysis of FSWs' lives with an emphasis on 'explanation building', and the production of 'complexity, detail and context'. Additionally, it helps to develop a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of FSWs' experiences which can move beyond advancing a particular pro-sex work or abolitionist approach. An interpretivist approach to the production of knowledge which requires the researcher to provide an 'interpretation

of others' interpretations' (Bryman, 2012:31) is required, which this thesis adopts. Ontologically, this approach is embedded in social constructionism, which 'invites researchers to consider the ways in which social reality is an ongoing accomplishment of social actors rather than something external to them and that totally constrains them' (p.34).

(iii) In the context of sex work and its conflation with human trafficking in India, a predominantly quantitative approach has been problematic. Sanghera (2005:12) highlights this when she argues that available data on trafficking is often based on "…. many untested assumptions…on projection and speculation…and [with] no sound methodology". She argues that "…when trafficking is equated with migration on one hand and prostitution on the other, then it logically follows that the number of victims of trafficking is equal to the number of those who have migrated or those who are engaged in prostitution" (ibid). Since this research is interested in identifying and unpacking specific and different forms of everyday violence experienced by women formerly and currently in sex work, a quantitative approach would make it hard to distinguish between experiences of migration, human trafficking and voluntary entries into sex work. Additionally, even when initial entries have been coercive, when women choose to stay on in sex work instead of leaving when options are present, their experiences would differ from those forced to stay on. Once again, a qualitative focus privileging the experiences and narratives of women in all their complexity and multi-facetedness, would do justice to the aims of this research.

Limitations of a qualitative approach include non-replicability and subjective biases of the researcher which can affect the data collected (Bryman, 2012). However, through a thorough consideration of researcher's positionality and subjectivity (sec. 4.9) and an outline of the sample (sec. 4.8; Appendix A), the thesis addresses these. Furthermore, a detailed description of the specific social, cultural and

geographical context (sec 4.4., Chapter 2) will establish a premise for the findings, thus guarding against generalisations.

Lamb (2000:244) argues that 'anthropological knowledge is always something produced in human interaction, a two-way process of constructing a particular vision of a certain set of cultural experiences and practices – a process that leaves both parties changed'. Ethnography as a methodological approach helps to develop this kind of knowledge and has been traditionally used in the study of women's lives in sex work (Sanders, 2006b). Bryman (2012:432) describes ethnography as a term that refers to a process of 'study in which "participant observation" is the prevalent research method but that also has a specific focus on the culture of the group in which the ethnographer is immersed'. However, 'ethnography' refers both to a 'research process and the written outcome of the research' (ibid). This research adopts an ethnographic element, and especially participant observation as a significant data collection method.

This is combined with life-history interviewing which "invites the subject to look back in detail across his or her entire life course" (Bryman, 2012:488). Faraday and Plummer (1979:776) describe the process as one that documents "the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them". Arnold and Blackburn (2004:2) highlight that "India provides a critical site for the discussion of life histories". However, they also point to a historical reluctance to "regard India as suitable territory for an approach that has long gained wide acceptance for many other regions and (especially with regard to autobiographical narratives) in such well-developed fields as women's studies and black studies" (ibid); the latter has been highlighted by Olney (1980: 13-17). The authors cite several reasons for this: (i) the prioritisation of a paradigm of "collectivity" within South Asian studies where the historical dominance given to caste and religion as influencers of identity, has led to the marginalisation of

"explorations of individual agency and a sense of selfhood (and hence life histories and other individualistic modes of expression)", and (ii) the reluctance to systemically engage with and analyse life-histories as a *genre*, where "…even anthropologists, who are among the primary users and theorizers [sic] of life histories" have considered the approach as "problematic, in danger of merely replicating, without duly analysing or contextualizing, personal stories in which the auditor has become too personally involved" (pp.2-4).

Despite these reservations, the authors argue in favour of the "broad appeal of life histories, to the scholars as to the wider public" (Arnold and Blackburn, 2004:4), This is owing to their ability to occupy a liminal space between "personal narrative and objective truth" (ibid). Indeed, the association of a certain degree of veracity to life-stories, which "reveal emotional and social realities which otherwise elude identification and explanation", (ibid) and the ability of life-stories to reflect "culture specific notions of the person or self" (ibid) bear significance in the context of this study. As frequent targets of development programmes, legal policies and policy-focused research, accounts of the lives and experiences of Indian women, especially from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who enter sex work in India have been framed by ideologies that encompass polarised pro-sex work and abolitionist views. This signals the need to document and develop life-histories of these women which allow for the emergence of complex 'truths' which may not be in keeping with binary-led views of empowerment and victimhood (Sahni and Shankar, 2011). Additionally, life-histories would allow for the emergence of a sense of self that isn't simply an end-product or 'subject-in-need' of development interventions, but which highlight the "constant interaction and negotiation" (Arnold and Blackburn, 2004:4-5) between adherence to socially and culturally-embedded collective notions of personhood on one hand, and a desire to retain one's individuality, on the other.

To address this need, the research combines an ethnographic approach with life-history interviewing, which Frank (2000) describe as 'cultural biography'. In-depth life stories of FSWs collected during fieldwork challenge the atomisation and fragmentation of their experiences in existing research on sex work, and move beyond binaries of victimhood or exploitation.

Adopting an ethnographic approach meant a need for reflexivity in the research process. This involves the researcher reflecting on the research and the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and an understanding of how this affects knowledge production. This is especially pertinent when the subject of the research is a marginalised community. Epistemologically, therefore, this research is located in the critical or 'emancipatory' paradigm which aims to develop 'approaches that have the potential to expose hidden power imbalances and to empower those involved to understand, as well as to transform, the world' (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005:54). Since this approach emphasises 'uncovering power relations based on class, gender and ethnicity, it is particularly well-suited for research on violence against women' (ibid). Adopting an ethnographic approach combined with elements of life-history interviewing allowed for an organic focus on women's experiences of violence in sex work without setting that as the agenda prior to the data collection. The women, while recollecting their life-stories, devoted a lot of attention to experiences of violence and abuse, especially in their lives before entering sex work. During the stage of analysis, this became a central theme and led to the formulation of the final research questions in this thesis, a process described in sec. 4.7.

4.3. Research background

The selection of Kolkata as the research location is linked to my professional background working in programmatic interventions on human trafficking as part of a technical resource organisation[8] in Kolkata between 2010 and 2012. During this time I was able to access a very specific community of at-risk youth: those vulnerable to or who had experienced human trafficking. Working on the coordination, documentation and evaluation of grass-roots interventions with young people from India, Nepal and Bangladesh allowed me an insight into how diverse the phenomenon of human trafficking is, and its connection and conflation with sex work in South Asia. Additionally, I became aware of the polarised debate between pro-sex work proponents and those that put forward an abolitionist approach. The abolitionist standpoint assumed homogenous victimhood, while the other appeared to romanticise agency and empowerment in women's lives in sex work, ignoring structural issues.Field visits to rural communities in the southern parts of West Bengal in 2012 and carrying out research with women living there who had returned after being coercively sold into sex work shed light on the complexity of victimhood, as well as the socially-embedded nature of violence in women's lives. It highlighted the need to look at experiences of sex work within a broad spectrum of experiences of violence and power inequalities that precede entry into sex work and persist after women leave.

During my PhD studies, I took this need into consideration while designing the research. The sample would be drawn from women formerly and currently engaged in sex work. This included women engaged in varying forms (full-time and part-time) of sex work across two RLAs in Kolkata, and those rescued by anti-trafficking NGOs, from sex work. My earlier experience of working with the latter

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[8] I have anonymised the names of all organisations in this chapter and across the thesis to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the women I interviewed, who are openly associated with both within their communities. Many aspects of what was shared in their interviews to me were either unknown to or not fully revealed to the organisations in question, due to which this anonymisation was necessary.

and my familiarity with NGOs working directly with current FSWs led to the decision to locate the research in the city of Kolkata. Its significance as a city and region in India in the context of sex work, social reform and human trafficking cemented the decision. This is discussed next.

4.4. Research Location

Like its metropolitan counterparts (Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai), Kolkata is home to several RLAs. Among these is Sonagachi, a historic RLA which received global attention in 2004 when the children of FSWs living and working there found themselves the subject of an Oscar-winning documentary, 'Born into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids' (Briski, 2004). The documentary became the subject of intense debate about the homogenous portrayal of FSWs and their children as helpless victims, and the wider politics of instrumentalising the experiences of others for personal and professional gain. It led to the founding of Amra Padatik (We are Footsoldiers), an organisation for and of the children of FSWs in Sonagachi in 2006. In a way, this RLA offered the perfect opportunity to discuss issues around the agency, empowerment and victimhood of women who enter sex work. Sonagachi is reported to be one of the largest RLAs in Asia, with over 80,000 FSWs living and working there (Gangoli, 2006). Growing up in a middle-class family in Kolkata, I quickly learnt that *'Sonagachi'* as a word was synonymous with something sexually taboo. A word to be said, amidst giggles, amongst friends but never in respectable company, especially around adults. Despite being a non-gated community, Sonagachi, like other RLAs in the city but more so than the others, was closed to women from 'respectable backgrounds'. These reasons led to the choice of Sonagachi as one of the field sites. The second was Kalighat, a middle-class neighbourhood nesting a RLA in it. Unlike Sonagachi, I had been to

Kalighat several times, with my parents and alone – either to visit the famous Kali temple, a popular spot for worship amongst Bengali Hindus and Hindus from Eastern India, or to visit friends in colleges in the area, use the underground metro system, etc. Kalighat, during the day, is a hub of sorts – for college students, commuters, devotees, visitors to the local market, as well as those who work and live in the area. During the evening the buzz moves away from the streets and indoors into people's homes, restaurants, etc. However, driving through Kalighat at night, especially on the Kalighat bridge and near Kalighat Road (close to the temple), one could see women dressed in blinged-out sarees, faces full of makeup, soliciting male customers. Male friends joked about their fears of being 'trapped' by these women if they were out alone, and women like myself experienced a mix of fear and curiosity whenever we drove past the RLA. One rarely walked alone through certain parts of the area at night, especially as an unaccompanied woman. The apparent contrast of the Kalighat RLA to Sonagachi seemed interesting to explore, and it became my second field site. A shelter home which housed women rescued through anti-trafficking interventions was necessary to understand the impact of these processes. This led to the selection of a home located in a southern neighbourhood of Kolkata, run by a prominent anti-trafficking NGO in Kolkata, as the third site. Finally, I decided to return to the rural communities and the women (victims of trafficking) I'd met in 2012, to see how their lives had changed over 2012-2014. They lived in the South 24 Parganas district, a region with high rates of human trafficking and crimes against women as well as female rural-urban labour-led mobility, especially to Kolkata for domestic work and sex work. The process of selecting and finalising the four field sites began during a pre-fieldwork scoping visit and ended at some point during my early fieldwork months. *The overall guiding rationale was to follow these women's lives and careers as FSWs from rural and peri-urban backgrounds, working and living in Kolkata*. I wanted to explore their lives in the RLAs and see what happens when these lives and the

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social relations in them are interrupted when they are rescued by anti-trafficking mechanisms. A large proportion of women in sex work (and other kinds of informal labour, viz. domestic work) in Kolkata come from villages in the South 24 Parganas. This is due to its proximity to Kolkata and the existence of a direct train between Canning, the biggest town in the district, and Kolkata, which carries these women back and forth.

Below is a map identifying the four fieldwork sites in this research. The rural communities near Canning are dotted around Matla River, but have not been identified to protect the anonymity of my respondents.
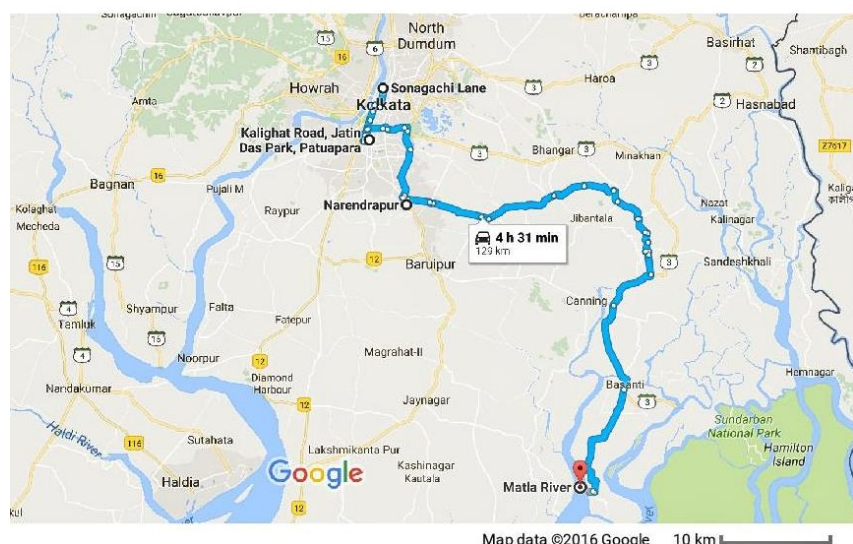
Fig.4.1. Map of fieldwork sites in and around Kolkata: Sonagachi, Kalighat, Narendrapur and villages near Matla river, South 24 Parganas

4.5. Fieldwork design

I planned a pre-fieldwork visit for 1.5 months between March and May 2014. Although I had some professional experience of working on development interventions in Kolkata, my work had been restricted to young women in West Bengal who were vulnerable to, or had experienced human trafficking. Among

these were women who had been rescued from sex work. Additionally, my access to these groups had always been embedded in my position as an employee of NGOs. Returning to the field in an academic capacity devoid of explicit NGO affiliations required a renegotiation of access.

As a site for data collection, RLAs offered an opportunity to meet women who, although they were in sex work at that time, had worked in different jobs in the informal labour market and could shed light on commonalities within such experiences, if any. Furthermore, RLAs provided access to part-time, street-based 'flying' sex workers who sold sex in addition to doing domestic work in homes across the city. Ultimately the diversity of the sample afforded by RLAs in Kolkata influenced the decision to spend the larger part of the fieldwork period in those spaces. My fieldwork lasted 9.5 months, including the 1.5 months of pre-fieldwork identifying gatekeepers and finalising the selection of field sites and sample. Four months were spent doing fieldwork in Sonagachi, and the remaining four were distributed evenly across Kalighat, the rural communities and the shelter home.

4.6. Discussion of field sites, access routes and data collection

4.6.1. Introduction

Each field site in this research was unique physically and spatially, offering new insights into the trajectory of a FSW's life. Due to this, the access routes to each site were different, and the unique sample in each meant the need to adapt my data collection methods to the immediate context. Since my data collection methods were influenced heavily by the environment in which they were situated, I first introduce and discuss the spatial context of each site and then talk about the ways the sample was drawn and the data collected. Certain challenges that arose

during the data-collection process and areas of contention are highlighted. The section ends with a tabular representation of the sample built across the four sites, and an analysis of the sample.

4.6.2. RLAs: Access, sampling and data collection

4.6.2.1. The physical and spatial setting

RLAs, or *lal bati ilakas*, are designated zones in urban areas in India where sex can be sold and purchased. The streets in RLAs are spaces where women can congregate in groups to solicit customers, an activity that carries with it the risk of arrest when performed in large groups outside the RLA. RLAs house brothels or *lainer-bari*: house of lines, in local Bengali parlance, which Sinha and Dasgupta (2009:8) suggest symbolises 'perhaps the lines sex workers form…to attract customers'. Kotiswaran (2008:586) defines a brothel as an 'institution involving a particular configuration of the organization of labor, both sexual and social, backed up by a set of living and working arrangements, practices, ideas, norms, ideologies, and consciousness that are unique to the sex industry'. Brothels in RLAs in Indian cities such as Kolkata offer both living arrangements as well as indoor spaces for the sale of sex: often the two overlap, as they did in my field sites of Kalighat and Sonagachi. In an analysis of how brothels, as a unit of the Sonagachi sex industry, lie at the crossroads of the market and the household, Kotiswaran (2008:586) argues that:

> [The] structural and cultural aspects of brothel-based sex work are fundamentally shaped by the spatial concentration of brothels in a red light area. Unlike institutions such as the school, family, church, military, or prison that can be characterized as public or private, the brothel operates

at the crossroads of the market and the family, harboring both sex workers and brothel keepers as well as their families. This permeates every aspect of institutional life in the brothel. For example, brothel rents reflect commercial levels, but the living conditions of the property do not approximate standards of commercial property since the brothel is the living space of its sex workers and brothel keepers, who are its laboring and entrepreneurial classes, respectively. Similarly, unlike the family where the wife socially reproduces her husband, in a brothel the sexual labor of several women, managed by the entrepreneurial labor of a brothel keeper (often a woman herself), socially reproduces a collectivity of male customers. At the same time, the brothel's economy, like that of the family, includes the labor invested by the brothel keeper in reproducing the sex workers as laborers as well as the reproductive labor that both sex workers and brothel keepers invest in their families who reside with them in the brothel.

In Kolkata, the RLAs offer women spaces to sell sex indoors without having to accompany the customers to a space of their own selection. 'Flying' sex workers who sell sex and solicit customers outside the RLA are often more vulnerable to situations of violence (Gangoli, 2006:218). However, for part-time FSWs who sell sex in the RLA but live elsewhere, and 'flying' sex workers, not being embedded in the RLA permanently allows them to mitigate the social stigma that shrouds life within. In an analysis of the different ways in which full and part-time sex workers approach the RLAs in Kolkata, Gangoli (2006:218) argues that 'part time prostitutes see the RLA as a space where they can practice their professions and sex work as a way to supplement their personal or family income. There is some degree of shame and secrecy associated with their work, but they have the persona of respectability to fall back on, once outside the area'. Full-time sex workers see the RLA as a space they "own" and have partial rights over. Inevitably

then, the latter resent the former for poaching on their territory and combining a 'socially respectable life with prostitution' (ibid).

Overall, my sample across the two RLAs included full- and part-time FSWs, madams and pimps. Details are provided in section 4.8. First, the methodological challenges that arose during the fieldwork in the RLAs are discussed.

4.6.2.2 Methodological and ethical challenges in the fieldwork in RLAs

Sanders (2006a:453) argues that for researchers studying sex work, 'the legal status of prostitution and the legal environment are the key considerations when planning the access route'. Often lying outside the framework of legitimacy, issues of stigma and deviancy need to be considered. Depending on the work environment – indoors or on the street – the researcher needs to carefully plan and negotiate access in a nonexploitative, non-endangering manner (p.454). Gatekeepers, therefore, are required to break through multiple layers of access (Sanders, 2006a) to gain entrance and acceptance in the sex-working community. The term 'gatekeeper' refers to individuals, participants and organisations that 'act as intermediaries between researchers and participants and have the power to grant or withhold access to the participants for study' (Clark, 2011; De Laine, 2000; Reeves, 2010). In the previous section I mentioned how despite being open communities, RLAs are closed off to certain sections of the population. While Kalighat Road, which forms the main stretch of the RLA, is accessible during the day to all members of the public, the alleyways on either side of the street that houses the one-roomed brothel homes and temporary living shelters of straw and tarpaulin sheets are strictly off-limits to anyone except potential and existing male customers. Women and men affiliated to NGOs in the area, however, can walk

through these alleyways – new visitors, were asked to explain their presence, unless in the presence of a recognisable social worker.

Sonagachi is closed to women who are not there to sell sex or engage in sexual health outreach. To gain access to both field sites without restricting myself at the outset to street-based 'flying' or indoor sex workers, I approached an NGO which calls itself a 'sex workers' organisation. The organisation grew out of a STD/HIV intervention project in 1995. The project involved female members of the sex-work community in its work on sexual health outreach, which included the distribution of free condoms and sensitisation attempts regarding HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the community. Over the years it has registered itself as a sex workers' collective and has formalised the involvement of FSWs in its daily operations – outreach, programme coordination, management, etc. Within the RLA the NGO is visible in the form of a health clinic, a two-storey office where FSWs can drop by to register as members of the collective, have blood taken to be tested for infection, and consult medical professionals about other ailments. Additionally, this was the meeting place for the collective's self-regulation board (SRB) of counsellors, FSWs, medical health professionals and representatives from local government that met once or twice every month to evaluate the circumstances surrounding the entry of new women into the RLA. Founded in 1997 and formalised over a period of two years, this board was put together to deal with issue of underage girls trafficked into sex-work sites and adult women coerced into sex work. Apart from Sonagachi, the organisation implements sexual-health outreach programmes in other RLAs in Kolkata, including Kalighat. The organisation has also founded and runs what is considered to be the first sex workers' co-operative in Asia. This co-operative allows members of the community to save and invest their money in a bank. Social stigma, low levels of literacy and lack of identification documents, the latter two prevalent across women (and men)

from rural socio-economic backgrounds in Bengal, often deny FSWs access to formal banking mechanisms. Furthermore, in an attempt to challenge the social stigma surrounding sex work the organisation organises rallies and public events to increase the community's visibility in public spaces other than RLAs. To tackle structural issues in sex work, its peer workers (employed from the sex-working community) tackle and mediate disputes between FSWs and their madams, customers, and police, which often occur in everyday life in RLAs.

4.6.2.3. Gatekeepers, and doing fieldwork in RLAs

I was already familiar with the organisation and its work prior to starting this research project. In regional and national events on anti-trafficking, the organisation occupies a unique pro-sex work space, but also works hands-on to combat trafficking. Rumours about the organisation colluding with pimps and not doing enough to prevent the coercive sale of women into sex work, however, were hard to ignore and furthered my interest in engaging with this organisation during fieldwork. While in the UK, I contacted the director of the organisation. The organisation initiated a two-month long ethical procedure by email, where I was required to send documents of institutional approval for my research project and provide evidence of supervisory support, as well as a description of my research aims. Once I arrived in Kolkata I met with the director at the organisation's head office and was asked (a) if I knew the aims and principles of the organisation, and (b) what my data collection methods would be. I explained that the methodological approach of my research was ethnographic, invested in exploring FSWs' lives without aligning itself with a particular ideology. This led to a request for a list of the questions that would be asked during data collection. I explained that the interviews would involve an exploration of life-stories, and further questions would

emerge based on respondents' responses. Additionally, I emphasised that the interviews would be preceded by a phase of rapport-building through participant observation and interaction. The meeting was successful, and I was given the green light to start fieldwork in Kalighat and then move to Sonagachi later in the year.

In both RLAs I was assigned a peer-worker with whom I spent the first few weeks exploring the area, visiting brothel households and introducing myself to women soliciting customers on the streets. This process was not without problems, one of which involved a tricky shift in power between the peer-worker and myself. In Kalighat, Bandana, a peer-worker in her mid-30s who was also a part-time sex worker in Sonagachi, was assigned to be my field guide and to introduce me to women she knew, or who were associated with the organisation in some capacity. I accompanied her during her field visits and lingered behind to introduce myself to women standing or sitting outside their houses. At certain times when she went into a household to speak to its members, usually to resolve a dispute, I waited outside, speaking to those around me. In Bandana's absence I was often asked why I was there and what I wanted; in the early weeks I had to keep explaining that I had accompanied Bandana, while asserting that I did not work for the organisation in question. To explain my research project, I would say that I was gathering *golpo* (stories), on women's lives for a book I was working on. Usually this led to a positive response, although many then asked if the book would have *chobi* (pictures). There was great wariness about being photographed, not only for confidentiality reasons but also because the community felt that such images showed them in an (often titillating) light that was different to their everyday lived experiences. : '[People who study FSWs' lives] take pictures of us bathing, or pictures of *ghaa* (wounds) on someone's legs, or pictures of a child crying, and show them to people outside to show how sad or pathetic our lives are', an older retired sex worker explained when

I asked why she was concerned about being photographed. 'Everyone bathes, has wounds and cries once in a while – we are no different', she said, laughing. Overall, across both RLAs the community was very aware of how RLAs have been misrepresented by both Indians and non-Indians to those outside the country. Much of this is due to the organisation's activism, which involves challenging the stigma and association of dirt, disease and abject victimhood with women's participation in sex work in West Bengal. However, during the fieldwork process I also noticed how the organisation's focus on sexual health made FSWs uncomfortable.

With Bengali as my mother tongue, and having been born and brought up in Kolkata, I did not require a field assistant or guide to interpret between the women I interviewed and myself. My familiarity with the Bengali culture, family structures, social relations and ways in which personhood is constituted (Lamb, 2000) was a tremendous asset in building rapport with FSWs. However, as a field guide Bandana helped me to visit and enter brothels and to spend time with the women in the privacy and comfort of their homes. Conducting interviews indoors minimised disruption and personalised their recollection of their life stories. It allowed me a glimpse into which objects held value in the spatial and physical composition of their households. For example, the ubiquity and importance of a television set in their lives came up when I noticed how every *pukka* brothel (rooms made of materials viz. cement, chalk, bricks, etc. compared to temporary or *kacha* shelters built of straw and tarpaulin sheets) had a television set. Television sets were considered a significant asset; the escape provided by television shows and films in the everyday lives of FSWs was valued. Malini, a full-time residential FSW in her late 20s[9] from Bangladesh said 'If I don't have my TV I will go mad*', as I sat in her

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[9] All ages in this thesis are self-reported. In the absence of identification documents, this was hard to verify. Youth is considered an asset in sex work, so these ages should be taken with a pinch of salt. However, I have included them to give the reader an idea of the profile of the women I discuss.

room on a hot and sultry afternoon in October, watching one of her favourite Bengali serials on television. However, many women watched television shows to feel connected to a world outside the RLA. Shilpa, a 19-year-old full-time residential sex worker, originally from Nepal, explained this:

> These women in these television shows…so much happens to them! Their lives are so complicated. Love, sadness, pain...up and down, up and down their lives are. I like the characters, their stories, I like seeing how they find happiness even when things are bad. It makes me feel that other people also go through ups and downs like us.

During interviews, women shared thick photo albums full of pictures of their children, partners and parents with me. Sometimes the interviews would take place while the women cooked meals for their children and customers at the entrance to their houses. Over a portable gas stove, the women would tell me what they were cooking and why, and often offered me food to eat. These activities provided opportunities for intimate sharing of lives – on being asked, which was often, I would show pictures of my family stored on my phone, and share food that I was carrying to eat out on the field. These experiences, as well as the ability to freely walk in and out of alleyways with Bandana, helped me become a familiar face to the community. One of the issues that arose with Bandana, though, in the first two weeks was her insistence on being physically present for all interviews. This obviously meant that the women I spoke to could not be critical of the organisation even if they wanted to. Bandana would also sometimes interrupt an interview to 'explain' what the women were saying if she felt they were not being clear enough. When I tried to address the issue with her she said she was 'responsible for my safety' and wanted to make the women feel comfortable. While I agreed to the need for her presence, I asked her to not intervene during the interviews and tried

to explain that she did not need to assume responsibility for my safety. However, she did not seem to want to let me walk around unaccompanied or visit women's households alone, even if they invited me, so I had to escalate the issue to her project manager, and eventually to the director. Through this I negotiated freedom of mobility and space in the RLA, which enhanced my connection with the women I interviewed. Bandana was briefly hurt at being reprimanded for being too meddlesome, but I spent some effort explaining to her why, despite her best intentions and care for my well-being, her actions were affecting my data-collection process. Thankfully she could understand this, and we maintained a friendly working relationship throughout the whole process.

After the resolution of the issue, Bandana accompanied me on field visits, often to engage in outreach, leaving me in brothels and heading back to the office, and I would leave when the interview was done. I also started to talk to women who squatted by the roadside on my own – many of them were older, retired sex workers who enjoyed people-watching and would give me a sense of how the street and the RLA had evolved during the years. I spoke to some women while they were soliciting customers, which often resulted in a certain amount of staring from people on the street, since I stood out in my casual, *kurta* (long tunic)-leggings combination next to the women in their blinged-out sarees and makeup. The women enjoyed having company while waiting for customers, and this allowed me to learn unspoken codes of behaviour in the soliciting process. During one such moment, a woman whom I was chatting with suddenly pointed at a man and said 'Stop staring at us: if you want me, come here and let's talk. You can't just keep staring'. This made me realise how street-soliciting for women was a vulnerable and anxiety-ridden experience, something that made them feel uncomfortable despite doing it every day. Although I'd been worried about my presence disturbing their soliciting, having a friendly face to keep them company while they waited

appeared to be comforting. The women appreciated that being publicly seen with them did not bother me. Some asked if I was worried about my reputation through stigma by association (Mehta and Farin, 1988) but when I assured them I was not, it seemed to build trust. However, both indoors and on the street, interviews and conversations would end abruptly as soon as a casual or regular customer expressed interest in the interviewee or walked into her house.

During this period of independent fieldwork in Kalighat I ran into some members of staff from another NGO with a visible presence in the area. The organisation was well-known in Kolkata for working primarily with children of women in sex work, providing them with educational and recreational opportunities. This involved running a drop-in-centre for children in the RLA; scholarships were also provided to some children to pursue education in residential schools in different parts of India. When I bumped into the staff, they asked me who I was and what I was researching – they could identify right away that I was a student or researcher of some sort. When I explained my research topic to them they asked me to come by the office and said they could help me to speak to some women whose children they'd helped. Even though I already knew of the organisation's work, I had decided to approach the sex workers' collective since they worked in the field, i.e. the RLA, and could help me navigate it. I collected data from five women connected with the second NGO in its enclosed office space. They were either part-time or retired FSWs whose children had been helped by the organisation. This provided me with a different glimpse into the lives of women in the RLA, and how their performance of motherhood involved the participation of a community-based organisation. This affected my sample, as discussed later.

In Sonagachi it was impossible to negotiate time and space with women as they stood soliciting customers on the street. The hypersexual atmosphere, frenetic pace, chaos of men driving cartloads of objects through the lines of women

standing and soliciting, the regular streetfights and arguments between drunk men, women and existing or potential customers, made 'hanging out' in the RLA impossible. The few times that I managed to find a corner to stand in I was immediately asked by the women around me why I was there. As one put it, *'Ei raasta-e jaara darae, lokeder boshai* (Women who stand on streets here, they make men sit)*'*, the Bengali term *lok boshano* (making a man sit) referring to selling sex to a customer. My field guide, Dimple, a peer worker and part-time sex worker in Sonagachi like Bandana, helped me navigate my way through the dizzying labyrinthine mazes of Sonagachi. Unlike in Kalighat, I spent the first two months getting hopelessly lost if Dimple walked too far ahead of me. However, Dimple, unlike Bandana, was quite happy early on to leave me at a brothel and continue her field visits without me. This often gave me valuable hours alone with FSWs, but when customers showed up it made for some awkwardness because I was not able to simply leave and return to the organisation's office alone. However, this gave me the time and space to talk to madams while the women in their employment were occupied with customers. One such madam, Riya, suggested that I could wear an identity card around my neck like 'government officers' to differentiate me from the FSWs and minimise moments of embarrassment. However, after suggesting it she immediately said 'But the girls won't talk to you as freely as they are now', which made evident the kind of impact wearing an identifying marker would make on my data. This echoed Sanders (2006a:457) discussion of the "sexual field" which refers to the "setting of the sex industry" which is "unique because the combination of studying sex and money in an illegal arena affects how the research is executed". The "sexual subtext" of the research environment requires researchers to explain and negotiate their presence in the field, and the adoption of multiple identities viz. counsellor, observer volunteer, peer workers, sexual health workers, etc. (pp.458)

Despite moments of awkwardness and embarrassment while navigating the 'sexual field' of the two RLAs, I decided to continue with the way I had been doing fieldwork. Throughout the entirety of my fieldwork in Kalighat and Sonagachi there were only two occasions where I felt concerned for my personal safety, which were immediately addressed by the women present. In Kalighat, while chatting with a part-time FSW seated outside the entrance to a room she rented for a few hours daily, a drunk man passed us, and on seeing me writing notes in my field diary he began swearing and cursing. The sexual overtones of his curses made me intensely uncomfortable, but the women around shouted him down and drove him away. He walked by three times after that, and each time the women yelled at him to keep moving. This made me feel safe, protected and grateful. The average age of my sample in Kalighat was the late 20s. Although I was a similar age, everyone kept telling me I looked much younger, and that this made them feel protective of me. The second instance was in Sonagachi when I was interviewing Shobha, a FSW and her partner, who worked as her pimp. After I had interviewed her, she left the small room that comprised their household to visit the toilet. Basu, her partner, had returned to the market. Earlier I had expressed a wish to interview him, and on seeing me he had decided to sit on the bed next to me, ready to be interviewed. Their room was on the terrace of a three-storey house, which usually meant one could hear the voices of people walking around outside and on the neighbourhood terraces. To lessen the disturbance, Basu closed the door and settled down to begin the interview. At that moment, alone in the room with a man I did not know very well, I felt very unsafe. Although I wanted to go over and open the door, the tiny room made it hard to navigate without asking Basu to move first – it would have made much more sense to ask him to re-open the door, but I felt that would embarrass or shame him. Over the next forty minutes of the interview Basu's jovial and friendly nature put me at ease and made me reflect on my own internalised assumptions and exaggerated fears about men in the sex industry.

Shobha returned midway through the interview and I spent the afternoon with them, eating and chatting about things.

In Sonagachi, unlike Kalighat, the average age of my FSWs' sample was between 19 and 30 and most FSWs looked much younger than that. The madams were between the ages of 30 to 60 years. Three of the five madams interviewed in this research were selling sex alongside the women in their employment. Unlike Kalighat, where interviews took place over domestic activities such as cooking, in Sonagachi I was often offered cigarettes while conducting an interview. Several times during the early phase of the fieldwork I felt I was being tested by the women I spoke to, to determine my moral compass. After introducing myself, crude sexual jokes were often cracked or references made to my body and sexuality by younger FSWs, which evoked and emphasised the 'sexual field'. Some wondered aloud how I would look in the skimpy clothes they wore (unlike the sarees and long gowns worn by the women in Kalighat); these comments and questions, I came to realise, were usually intended to shock me into moral indignation. When I laughed along, teased the women back, or seemed unfazed by the use of swear words, it seemed to break down the walls between us. After I passed these 'tests' women would often hug me, offer me cigarettes and exchange phone numbers in an act of acceptance.

Selling sex was a much busier, more commercial and less domestic activity in Sonagachi than in Kalighat. Women often left the RLA and the city for *contract-er kaaj* (sex work sold on contract at short notice). This entailed going to a destination of the customer's choice away from the RLA for an extended period of time, usually a fortnight. When women were in short supply in a particular brothel that had more than its regular share of customers, women from other brothels would go over; notification was sent by word of mouth, or more often by mobile phone. The mobile phone in Sonagachi, like the television set in Kalighat, was ubiquitous in all

households. It was a tool that helped me to keep in touch with my respondents in this highly nomadic RLA community. When I showed up for interviews arranged in person the day before, I often discovered that the FSW was at the other end of the RLA, or had left on a contract job or to visit her family in a rural area in the event of some sudden need. Having access to the women through mobile phones helped me to keep up with their chaotic and unpredictable lives. Also unlike Kalighat, the brothel households in Songachi often had more than one FSW living with a madam and often the pimp. Unless another room was available to conduct the interview in, which was rare, the interviews tended to be group-based. Inevitably this led to issues of confidentiality and privacy. During interviews some women would pause at a certain aspect of recounting their life-history and tell me to call them later so they could fill in the gaps. Being in touch with them over the mobile phone also helped them to feel they could access me and claim my time. Often during the late evening women would call to share stories of a particularly interesting customer and ask if I had time to gossip. Almost all the women used Whatsapp, a free internet-based texting service through which one can also send music, pictures, and audio messages. The women in my sample often used this to send me short messages rescheduling an interview or to share how they were feeling or the details of something they were watching or music they were listening to at that moment. Over the course of my fieldwork I received songs and pictures, often on themes of romance, friendship, loss and betrayal. Sometimes the pictures were in a darker mood depicting self-harm (an example was 'I love you' scrawled in blood along an arm), or poems about contemplating suicide or the pain of heartbreak. These pictures were usually sent to me late at night, when the women in the brothel sat around, talked about their day and played cards, often over alcohol. The pictures allowed me to explore and discuss how FSWs used acts of self-harm to cope with turbulence in their intimate relationships with their partners. Connecting with FSWs by mobile phone also made me realise the centrality of this device in

the women's attempts to manage the various, sometimes clandestine social relations in their lives, as well as the multiple identities they took on in different spaces. When the women left to visit their natal households, they changed their sim card so customers, madams and pimps could not reach them. Each number, intended for a different target audience – peers and employers, partner, family, etc., had a different ringtone Sapna, a full-time FSW and a key informant, explained this to me when she asked me to call her on different numbers; while the ring tones for family members usually comprised devotional music, partners called to hear romantic songs being played which sometimes switched to songs of sadness, heartbreak or anger when arguments had erupted between them. The mobile phone also symbolised the unpredictability and precarity of these women's lives – the phones often went missing when they returned to their village, or broke during fights with partners or peers. Once while shifting brothels after a nasty argument over money with her madam, Sapna told me how she had been unable to top up her phone balance and therefore could not access her Whatsapp or make calls. 'It's like I'm incomplete…I have become half without my phone. I don't like it, makes me feel bad', she explained. Living away from her daughter, who was being raised by her natal family, and juggling multiple customers and a long-term partner, Sapna's phone was indispensable to her ability to manage myriad social relations. Doron (2012) analyses the ways in which mobile phones are 'integrated into the daily lives of low-income people and the implications for courtship practices, marriage relations and kinship ties'. He argues that the presence of mobile phones both reinforce and undermine gender roles, and that the object provides 'insights into north Indian "personhood" as "nodal"' (p.415). The unintentional incorporation of mobile phones into my data collection methods allowed me insights into how FSWs manage social relations across their lives and assume different roles and identities (daughter, mother, lover, FSW) in different spaces and times. In several profound ways it offered insights into 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1994),

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where the mobile phone becomes embedded, while creating opportunities for both emancipation and dependence, in a wider, everyday struggle for power in the lives of FSWs.

4.6.3. Shelter homes: Access, sampling, data collection

4.6.3.1. Physical and spatial setting

Anti-trafficking shelter homes in India are closed institutions, providing custodial care to women rescued from situations considered 'exploitative'. The closed nature of these institutions is rationalised as necessary for the protection of its residents, but has increasingly come under criticism (Sen, 2016). I had to approach three different NGOs in Kolkata that ran shelter homes before being able to negotiate access to one. While the first cited logistical issues, the second organisation simply refused entry, saying it would endanger the safety of its residents. I was finally able to gain access to a shelter home in Narendrapur, a southern suburb of Kolkata, run by a Kolkata-based anti-trafficking NGO. During an interview with the organisation's founder, I learnt about the history of the organisation's involvement in 'rescue and rehabilitative' interventions. The organisation had pioneered rescue and rehabilitative interventions in Eastern India in the early 1990s: in 1993, with the help of the police, the organisation rescued a 14-year old girl from Sonagachi, thereby establishing links with the state in its work. In an interview with a late director of the organisation I was told that it had started in 1987 as a 'small group of women who wanted to work for and with women on the issue of gender insensitivity in society' (Sharma, 2015). Its work and research on the 'sexual abuse of the girl-child' led them to Kolkata's RLAs, where the women they met talked of being tricked and sold into sex work by their husbands and other family members.

The founder pointed out that the word 'trafficking' had not really made its way into discussions on women's coercive entry into sex work in the early 1990s. In many ways the organisation's metamorphosis into an anti-trafficking NGO mirrored the introduction and growth of the discourse in the country. Both centred on acts of 'rescue'-- in 1995, the organisation was involved in a large 'rescue' operation in Mumbai where over 400 girls were picked up. These girls had migrated to Mumbai from different states; amongst them some were illegal migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal. Sharma mentioned that there were women amongst this pool who were found to be above the age of 18, but the illegality of their migration journey meant they would be sent back to their own countries.

Prior to the large-scale police raid, the organisation had started a shelter home for young girls (mainly the daughters of FSWs) in its attempt to curb second-generation prostitution. After the rescue of the 400 women, 20, of which 6 were medically diagnosed as HIV-positive, were sent to the shelter home for safekeeping. Attempts to house them in other women centric shelter homes in the state had been unsuccessful: word of their engagement with sex work had caused disquiet amongst its established residents. The newer cohort had been physically and verbally abused by these residents, who questioned their victimhood and socially ostracised them for voluntarily engaging in sex work. To avoid the same situation, the organisation, in conjunction with the Social Welfare department of the government of West Bengal, started a separate shelter home to house these women as 'victims of trafficking'. In 2009, however, the organisation decided to expand its services to children rescued from exploitative situations under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme. This meant that the organisation could now access greater funds and house more in its shelter. 'We began to notice that foreign funding [for the shelter home] had started to fluctuate, and we realised we needed government funding to continue,' Sharma explained. Under this scheme,

children who have been removed from a situation of exploitation in or outside the home are handed over to the Child Welfare Commission (CWC), a state-run body, by the police. After that, they are sent for a temporary period to a shelter home of the CWC's choice; the organisation was asked if it would like to participate, and given the above-mentioned funding constraints, agreed.

However, this funding expansion brought with it many logistical difficulties and power struggles with the State. The shelter home is overcrowded with women and children, many of whom are deemed victims by the state, often against their own wishes, as I discuss later. The organisation has lost its ability to adhere to its intent to house primarily anti-trafficking victims. The state representatives who decide on residents' victimhood are often politically appointed, and according to the founder, may not have any awareness of child rights. She related stories of instances when members had sent 'victims of child marriage' to the home as a punitive measure, since most of these are teenage girls from rural and peri-urban backgrounds who have eloped with their boyfriends to escape forced marriage to someone of their parent's choice or an otherwise oppressive domestic situation. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

The shelter home is located in a fortified compound in Narendrapur, a town in the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. It falls within the area controlled by the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, and in recent years has been considered part of the ever-expanding city of Kolkata. Access to the town is provided by the Kolkata Suburban Railway System, which is meant to serve the suburbs of Kolkata, by overground and underground rail. The town can also be accessed by road, and its centre has witnessed the construction of expensive housing properties and malls which exist in conjunction with the historically-renowned Ramkrishna Mission Residential College. The latter was originally founded as a home in North Kolkata for poor and orphaned boys after the

devastation of the Bengal Famine of 1943, and relocated in 1957 to Narendrapur. It has since expanded into an educational establishment, where the medium of instruction is Bengali, and houses more than 2000 students on premises that span 150 acres. As one travels into the interior of the town, newer high-rises give way to stand-alone bungalows of differing infrastructural quality surrounded by large swathes of marshy, overgrown fields. Primarily due to the real-estate boom, the quality of the infrastructure – roads, the frequency of streetlights, availability of electricity, etc. – has improved considerably over the last five years. However, the further one travels from the town centre, the more peri-urban it seems, where auto rickshaws and handpulled rickshaws are the main modes of transport to navigate the potholed and uneven *kacha* (unfinished) roads that run through the town.

4.6.3.2. Fieldwork in the shelter home

Given the closed nature of the shelter home, I decided to stay within its confines for two weeks to collect data. This would enable me to build rapport with the residents, who were not able to leave the space as and when they wished. Outdoor field trips with residents, especially during festivals, had been discontinued after some residents had escaped during such trips. Higher walls had been added along the boundary line of the shelter home after some residents ran away. From these incidents it was evident that a sense of confinement and incarceration pervaded the environment in the home. However, I could only stay for the first week, as a security issue arose at the end of the week. This involved a sighting of the trafficker of a group of women who had recently been brought into the shelter home, outside the main entrance. The residents of the shelter home all lived in dormitories which were locked from the outside by the housemothers, women in charge of their

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overall well-being and security. My room, which was on the ground floor of one of the apartment complexes in the shelter compound, could not be locked sufficiently to guarantee my safety. Ultimately, after realising that my stay in the home would cause undue stress to its staff, I decided to spend the second week commuting to and from the shelter from my residence in South Kolkata. During my stay in the first week I had realised that I could only speak to the residents during office hours. Once the staff left at around 6 pm, my access was restricted. I did spend the evenings hanging out with and talking to women who had completed their rehabilitation at the shelter home but, in the absence of any family to go back to, had stayed on in a different complex of the home. These women could leave and enter the premises within a certain curfew period, and most were working or studying in Kolkata. However, one of the women I met was soon expelled from the home and asked to leave, since there were allegations that she was bringing marijuana onto the premises. Overall, the shelter reminded me of a residential school for young women, who were subject to strict rules and regulations. Residents undergoing rehabilitation had no access to the outside world: their phones were taken away on entry, and access to family and relatives who visited them was controlled. The effect of these protectionist measures on the residents is discussed in Chapter 7.

The home itself comprises four blocks – the largest functions as the residential quarters for over a hundred women– during the week that I was there, another 20 were added to the already overcrowded premises. I was not allowed access to these spaces and had to wait outside while the staff members sent for residents, in groups or individually. Interviews were conducted in open spaces, often in the main courtyard, which was also the site for workshops and recreational activities, viz. dancing classes, for the residents. When that area was in use I spoke to residents in office rooms in the office block, although most preferred to walk around

the complex with me during the interview. On the second floor of the office block residents were taught how to block-print using dyes and design blocks. I participated in such activities alongside them while chatting about their lives. Although my primary fieldwork aim in the shelter home had been to interview rescued former sex workers, I decided to include a group of 'child marriage victims' in my sample to explore commonalities, if any, in their experiences. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

The casework file of each respondent was made available to me. By looking at each after the interview I could gain further information about the respondents – their age, as determined by the State, which often differed from their self-reported age, and their victimhood category – as well as following the legal processing of their case. Some respondents who had been forcibly rescued often asked me to put a plea from them into their case files, suggesting that my endorsement of their voluntary engagement with sex work could sanction an early release. Although I could not do that, I did try to give these women a larger overview of how anti-trafficking legislation worked in the hope that it would create some clarity about the process. Overall the interviews were quite hard emotionally, since it was plain to see that these women, many rejected by their families, were trapped in a system that refused to recognise their agency in sex work.

4.6.4. Rural communities: Access, sampling, data collection

4.6.4.1. Physical and spatial setting

South 24 Parganas is the southernmost district of the state of West Bengal. The District Human Development Report: South 24 Parganas (HDRCC, 2009:v) describes it as 'the largest district in the state…a huge populous landmass

characterized by heterogeneity, with the teeming urban metropolis Kolkata in the northern fringes giving way to the uninhabited forested islands of the world's largest prograding delta, the Sunderbans'. The district was formed in 1986, before which it was part of the undivided 24 Parganas, bordered in the East by Bangladesh and by the Bay of Bengal in the South; owing to the large area covered by the district it had been divided into northern and southern regions primarily to reduce the administrative burden (p.1).

Since 1986, South-24 Parganas has had its district headquarters in Alipore, in Kolkata. Originally it comprised two subdivisions, which have now increased to five: Alipore (Sardar), Baruipur, Canning, Diamond Harbour and Kakdwip. Administratively these are further divided into 29 blocks which contain 312 Gram Panchayats and 7 municipalities (p.12). The heterogeneity and diversity of its geography affect the socio-economic development of its various divisions: Alipore (Sardar)'s proximity to Kolkata has ensured a well-connected network of road- and rail-based links to the city; this subdivision is the most developed region in the district. In stark contrast, in the subdivisions of Canning and Kakdwip certain blocks have ineffective transportation facilities, weak communication networks, and are not well-connected to the mainland due to their remoteness.

In recent decades the threat of climate change has loomed over the region, with the mangrove forests of the Sunderbans and the villages that lie around it (along the southernmost tip of the district) especially affected by flooding and drought. In 2009 the tropical cyclone Aila, which originated over the Bay of Bengal, devastated the region. It adversely affected lives and rendered farming land uncultivable until 2016, primarily due to government inaction. This impacted livelihoods severely in a context where 'a large section of people…still depend on agriculture for their livelihoods [which] in the post-liberalization era…has [already] become relatively unremunerative after the gradual withdrawal of farm subsidies' (HDRCC,

2009:313). The majority of land in the district is monocropped in the absence of groundwater irrigation facilities; the salinity of the land in the state of West Bengal, heightened by periodic flooding from the Bay of Bengal, has rendered groundwater irrigation, which has been successfully implemented elsewhere in the state, impossible to implement in this region. This has also had a negative influence on agro-based livelihood possibilities in the region (p.313), and has exacerbated conditions of poverty. According to the Rural Household Survey (2005), 400,000 households in South-24 Parganas have been identified as below the poverty line; poverty is at 34.11 per cent, which is above the average percentage of the state and the country (HRDCC, 2009:42). In the survey, a study of the block-wise poverty ratio (HRDCC, 2009; Table 1.3:43) shows Basanti, one of the blocks in the Canning subdivision, as the poorest block in the state and the country; 65 percent of households in this block fall below the poverty line.

It is evident, then, that a combination of geographic factors and government inaction has resulted in low levels of economic development in rural communities across the Canning subdivision of the district which formed the specific contextual backdrop of my fourth and final field site. In July 2015 late monsoons once again triggered flooding in the region, displacing people and affecting livelihoods (The Hindu, 2015). The already uneven economic development across the district has been exacerbated by erratic weather phenomena over the last two decades. As a result, labour-led migration from the underdeveloped parts of the district to urban areas in the state as well as to other parts of the country is an increasing trend, with most working in the unorganised labour market.[10] The 2003 Situational Analysis Report on women and children in West Bengal, by the National

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[10] A large proportion of female domestic workers in Kolkata come from rural communities in the Canning sub-division; several commute to and fro on the 'Canning local', a frequent, train service that runs between Canning and Kolkata, daily.

Commission of Women, India, notes an increasing rise in female migrants to the city from districts adjoining Kolkata (p.8).

Gangoli (2006:217) notes how the linkages between sex work and migration can be attributed to a number of causal factors: 'relative anonymity of the new destination, limited options for employment and the need to survive in a new location without family support'. Due to Kolkata's connectivity with Canning, a town in the Canning subdivision of the South 24 Parganas district, a substantial number of women from the district commute for work to Kolkata. While most commute for domestic labour, many also take on part-time sex work in RLAs to supplement their income. Also, as I show in Chapter 5, women with low literacy levels who have broken their ties with their natal and marital households due to experiences of power inequalities and violence enter sex work full-time in RLAs in Kolkata. This offers them residential accommodation as single women as well as a social network to build new relationships.

In the next subsection I briefly discuss how I conducted fieldwork with women who had returned to their residential communities after a brief period of engagement with sex work.

4.6.4.2. Fieldwork in rural communities

Given my previous work experience, I had pre-existing linkages with most prominent community-based organisations and social workers that were associated with post-rescue women as victims of trafficking. The community-based organisation in Canning that I had worked with in 2012 had seen some changes since then: primarily the departure of a social worker who went on to start her own organisation in Canning with similar aims and goals. This had led to a fair amount of tension between the two, with the women I had met in 2012 caught in the ensuing power struggle. Some women had shifted their affiliation from the first

organisation to the second, while others maintained cordial relations with both. Through both organisations I was able to meet women who had recently left sex work, as well as ones I had already worked with prior to this research. In both situations there were some explicit power struggles over obtaining independent access to the sample. Interviews with newly-returned (from sex work) women took place at the office premises of both organisations, often with their family members and social workers present. This obviously impacted what the respondents could say, e.g. expressing a desire to re-enter sex work was strictly frowned upon. Broadly, aspirations to re-migrate were met with admonishment by social workers and family. Unable to negotiate time alone with these women, I decided to shift my focus to interviewing women who had returned over two years ago. This shift made sense, since newly-rescued and -returned women were at the centre of community and family attention (positive and negative) and negotiating privacy with them was difficult. On the other hand, those who had returned over two years ago had re-settled into community life with varying degrees of success, and their families were much more open to allowing me access to them. Through my previous work I was already known to these women and their families.

I spent a week with each of the three women: interviews were day-long and conducted in their homes in villages scattered around the Matla river, which flows through the Canning subdivision. Every morning I caught an early train from Sealdah station in north Kolkata to Canning, a journey taking 1.15 hours. The women usually met me at the station or some designated spot in the town and we travelled together to their homes: the journey involved autorickshaws, makeshift 'vans' (wooden planks with a temporary covering on wheels attached to cycles or motorbikes) and some walking. I returned to my residence in Kolkata by 8 or 9pm every night, having spent 6-8 hours with the women. Some interviews were also conducted over meals in Canning town when the women wanted to share details that they were not comfortable sharing in their homes with family in the vicinity.

Two women expressed a desire to meet me in Kolkata. This gave them a legitimate reason to leave their village and enjoy city life for a day – something not easily sanctioned by their families. In their villages, the fieldwork was conducted while walking through fields and eating meals together in their homes; I attended one woman's brother's wedding in a village neighbouring hers, discussed in section 8.3.6. This allowed me a unique insight into young women's social relations in rural communities.

4.7. Analysis: Thematic focus on violence and power inequalities in social relations

Analysis of the collected data post-fieldwork, which comprised qualitative interviews (in audio version, and then transcribed) and field notes, revealed three distinct and interrelated thematic layers. These allowed for a systematic way to unpack the data, structure the analysis and develop the final research questions.

The *first and top-most thematic layer* dealt with social relations in the lives of women formerly and currently in sex work. This was the most common theme of discussion across the life-histories of my respondents. These social relations included familial relations with members of natal and marital households, and relations modelled on kinship with members of the community and market. The women also spoke of their relations with governmental and non-governmental institutions and institutional actors. These relations spanned women's life-courses, and various spaces that they had inhibited across their lives -- rural communities, red-light areas and standalone brothels, and shelter homes. Each space encompassed diverse relations with members of the household, market, community and state (Kabeer, 1994).

The *second* layer of analysis dealt specifically with experiences of *koshto* (emotional and physical pain) within these social relations which was another dominant theme across the life-histories. Over the course of the interviews which lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours, conducted with the same woman over a period of 2-7 days, the women described how *koshto*, which took on physical, psychological and sexual forms, had been inflicted by a wide range of people in social relations. These included members of their natal and marital families, acquaintances, partners, peers, employers, and members of NGOs and the State. The women shared how they negotiated *koshto* in their natal and marital households by searching for *kono kaaj* (any work) or by forming newer social relations with men which often ended in further exploitative situations viz. being coerced into sex work. *Koshto* arose within coercive entry into sex work, but also when long-term sexual-affective relationships with customers, formed after voluntarily entering sex work, came to an end. These discussions also shed light on how power flowed in multiple directions in the RLA and how madams, too, ended up at the receiving end of *koshto* from FSWs. At the shelter home, the perpetrators of *koshto* were identified as the police, lawmakers, NGOs and family members that refused to accept women's agency to return to sex work or accept them back into households. At this stage of analysis, I structured the analysis further to identify (i) experiences of *koshto,* and (ii) negotiations with *koshto.* This form of structuring ultimately informed the overarching research question of the thesis (sec.1.4).

The *third and final* thematic layer of analysis indicated how *koshto* (pain*)* which emerged from breakdown of and conflict within social relations was connected to women's engagement with sex work. This included details of how breakdown of social relations drove entry into sex work, shaped experiences of violence within, and affected exit from and life after leaving sex work. Looking at these three

aspects of engagement with sex work led to the emergence of the analytical chapters, 5-7, where each chapter would address how violence within social relations affected pathways into, experiences within, and pathways out of sex work. Analysing the data at this level enabled the emergence of the research sub-questions (sec.1.4)

Across the three levels of analysis, I was careful not to atomise the experiences of the women or detach experiences happening in one space or life-stage from another. Instead, the theoretical framework of the 'life-cycle of violence' (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005), discussed in sec.3.5., was applied to reflect the "continuum" (Kelly, 1988) of experiences of violence across these women's lives, spanning different spaces and sites, and perpetrated by members across different institutions.

At each stage of the analysis, I revisited my data in an iterative process which involved 'repeated returns to earlier phases of the analysis as evidence becomes more organized and ideas are clarified' (Dey,1993:239). The process of analysis stretched from May 2015 to September 2016: themes and ideas continued to diverge and emerge throughout various drafts of the chapters. My review of the literature and concepts pertinent to these themes also sparked new thinking and analysis which complimented or modified the analysis of a previous stage.

One of the challenges during the writing-up phase was the presentation and discussion of the life-histories. In my thematic data analysis, I could only refer to certain parts of a life-history with relevance to the theme at a particular point. The life-histories in this thesis are spread over different sections Chapters 5-8. I chose to remain with certain women's life-histories for all parts of the analysis to show how experiences of power inequalities and violence persisted and evolved across the same life-trajectory. I chose stories based on their complexity and on what they added to my research.These stories were shared by respondents with whom I

spent a lot of time with during the fieldwork and who became key informants at each fieldwork site. This is not to say that the other life-histories are less important or valuable. By not presenting fragments from many life-histories and deciding to elaborate on particular ones I have tried to avoid treating my respondents as atomised agents, detached from the complexity and dynamism of the social relations and experiences that frame their lives. Instead, I hope that despite the potential difficulties in reading life-histories across four chapters, readers will appreciate the depth and nuances of the experiences captured in them.

4.7.1. A note on translation

During my fieldwork my respondents spoke in Bengali and Hindi or a mix of the two, which is quite common in Kolkata. My familiarity with and proficiency in both languages made communication during the fieldwork easy, and proved a big advantage in building rapport. I carried a voice recorder in RLAs and used it to collect data initially, but concerns over confidentiality made some women wary of being recorded. There was also a concern that others not participating in the interview would be recorded simply by being present or in the vicinity of the person being interviewed. Given this, I decided to discontinue use of the recorder in RLAs, but used it in the shelter home and rural communities with my respondents' consent. The life-histories I collected were long and detailed, often confusing in their trajectories, and I kept notes in my field diary during the interviews to keep track of what was being said. At these times, and for interviews not recorded at all, I wrote my notes in Bengali and Hindi. During the writing-up phase I translated the notes and recorded interviews into English. In this process I decided to combine literal translation with translation of the essence across all the interviews, to maintain parity between those recorded and those where I had taken notes during

the interview. Across Chapters 5-8 I present these excerpts with some words in Bengali and Hindi to retain the essence of what was said, providing English translations in parentheses alongside. These words generally referred to various aspects of sex work, and social relations, especially familial and kinship relations, and to violence. Given the topic of my research project, I felt it necessary to retain these words in the original language to give the reader a sense of what they sound like in the languages spoken by my respondents.

4.8. Overview of sample

Table 4.1 provides details of my sample, drawn through a snowballing method. A detailed respondents' profile is available in Appendix A. Overall, I interviewed 52 respondents.

Table 4.1: Overview of sample across 4 field sites

Data Site	Location	Sample Group and Number	
Red Light Areas	Kalighat and Sonagachi, Kolkata	Peer workers (part-time sex workers and retired sex worker)	4
		Full-time brothel-based residential sex workers (including some who had exited and re-entered)	14
		Retired sex workers	3
		Madams (including former and current sex workers)	5
		Part-time sex workers	2
		Pimps (including partners of sex workers and madams)	2
Shelter Home	Narendrapur (Kolkata)	Rescued sex workers with varying degrees and circumstances of engagement with sex work (including women from Bangladesh who had entered sex work in India)	8
		Child marriage victims	4
Rural communities	Villages located in the Canning subdivision, South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal	Newly-returned rescued sex workers	2
		Women returned to villages from sex work	3
Across all four sites		Anti-trafficking NGO staff	4
		HIV/AIDS NGO staff	1
TOTAL			**52**

4.8.1. Sample analysis

In her identification of three "sets of challenges" which arise "in the design of ethical, nonexploitative (sic) research projects with sex workers", Shaver (2005:296) argues that procuring a representative sample is the first challenge. Since the size and boundaries of the population are not known; snowballing samples tend to favour more cooperative participants, and targeted sampling depends on the researcher's ability to penetrate the social networks of the socially stigmatized population. Within the latter, indoor sex workers tend to be undersampled due to less visibility. The use of gatekeepers during fieldwork allowed me to immerse myself in the 'social networks' across both RLAs as well as speak to indoor sex workers, who are marginalised within sex work research. Overall, my sample in the RLA was influenced by the organisations that helped me to access the field. The sex workers' collective provides membership to FSWs and madams in the form of an identity card. This requires them to show up for medical tests, but also gives them the support of the organisation in the event of conflicts and disputes with peers or the state in the RLA. Considering that the organisation is pro-sex work and invested in empowering women in sex work, its membership base comprises high-earning women who are voluntarily engaged in sex work. As Shaver (2005) notes, the use of a snowballing sample method, which I used, meant that the sample comprised cooperative participants, those who did not wish to participate or could not due to structural hierarchies of visibility and mobility in the RLAs were automatically excluded. I was unable to meet anyone in bonded labour across the two RLAs, but this does not imply that they did not exist. However, many women I interviewed, across the four sites, had past experiences of being in bonded labour, which they shared.

Shaver (2005) also notes that respondents may offer answers in keeping with stereotypical points of view, instead of sharing how they really feel. My non-affiliation with any specific NGO (and therefore, a particular approach to sex work) and insistence that I would conduct fieldwork alone (after initial introductions) allowed respondents to open up and share thoughts that might appear contrary to organisations that provide them services. This was especially true in the case of women who had returned to their villages after leaving sex work. They often shared critical opinions about the community-based organisations and stories of socially subversive behaviour which would have been frowned upon by the organisations. This is discussed in Chapters 7-8.

Accessing women in sex work through a second organisation in Kalighat allowed me a different insight into the field. The women I met through this organisation were aged from their late 30s right up to their 50s. Many of them were struggling with severe health and economic issues and were keen to show me visible signs of their ailments. With this group a strong sense of a beneficiary-benefactor relationship was established right away. This was not surprising since I was perceived to be associated in some capacity with the organisation, which positioned itself as a benefactor in these women's lives. I was asked by the organisation to reimburse the women for their time by paying them a fixed amount of money at the end of every interview. On the other hand, the women I met through the sex workers' collective refused to accept money but were happy for me to give them a small token. Perhaps influenced by the organisation's emphasis on sex-worker agency, these women took control of the interviews and dictated the terms of our relationship much more than the women I had met through the second organisation. For these reasons I returned to snowballing for my sample through the women I had met through the collective, but also based on individual and independent interactions with members of the RLAs.

4.9. Ethics and positionality

Working with respondents at different stages of engagement with sex work affected my positionality, something that I needed to reflect on constantly. After collecting data from five respondents from the second organisation in Kalighat, I decided to return to the field to keep meeting women independently instead of having them identified for me. In the field, I was treated both as a *bon* (younger sister) and asked to share information about my personal life and given advice on it, and as a *didi* (older sister) and asked for advice constantly; this depended on the age of the interviewee primarily, but also on their economic situation. In both cases my emphasis on neutrality, despite being introduced to the women by Bandana or Dimple, helped the women to raise issues that they did not feel comfortable sharing with organisational gatekeepers in question. This continued into my fieldwork in the shelter home and rural communities, where I was perceived as an aspirational role model, a problem-solver and a confidante in ways similar to how I was received by younger FSWs (in their 20s) in Kalighat and Sonagachi, but differently from those who were older than me. For the latter, I was someone to talk to, to make their minds *halka* (lighter), but not necessarily someone to seek advice from.

As a young female researcher from an upper-caste, middle-class background and with considerable social capital, compared to my research subjects and the majority of their customers, the intersection of my class, caste and gender identities also brought with it certain challenges. This led to restrictions on *when* I could carry out fieldwork in the red-light areas. During interviews with my respondents, the women mentioned that evening (5pm onwards) was 'peak business-time'. This meant that in-depth interviewing on life-histories wouldn't be possible or economically viable as it would take time away from income generation.

Furthermore, many explicitly and implicitly indicated that my presence would attract customer attention, which would also impact income generation adversely. Since this happened a few times during the day when I would be in the company of women on streets or common areas of the brothel, it became clear that I had to restrict fieldwork time during the day. Since the women were short on time during evenings, and the research did not include a focus on observing soliciting behaviour, this did not impact the data. Instead, when interviews would be collected during the day, the women often reflected on and shared experiences that occurred the evening before which shed light on relations with customers.

However, this did restrict the sample of 'flying' sex workers to only those I could meet during the daytime. Gangoli (2006) describes this category of women as 'informal' sex workers who live in towns and villages surrounding the red-light area and 'fly' to the area to sell sex at a particular time. Not being able to undertake fieldwork during the evening resulted in the exclusion of younger and single (i.e. with no marital/familial obligations) female sex workers who work during the 'peak-business time' from the sample. These women are from usually from peri-urban and urban backgrounds, compared to their day counterparts who commute to the city from villages early in the day and return before dusk sets in. Although their experiences would have provided differing insights, doing fieldwork with them would have impeded my relationship with brothel-based residential female sex workers who preferred my presence in the morning and considered these flying, younger sex workers a threat to their income.

Names of all respondents in this thesis have been changed to protect identities. The names of all the organisations that participated in this research as gatekeepers have also been omitted to protect the identities of women formerly or currently in sex work who are affiliated to these organisations. All fieldwork visits were

preceded by ethical clearance from the International Development Ethics Committee at UEA.

4.10. Limitations

The data in this research comprises the experiences of women formerly and currently engaged in sex work. It centres on the narratives of women who have experienced violence and power inequalities in various forms, but does not include the voices of their family members, customers and partners who have perpetrated violence. In a study of social relations and violence the latter can provide extremely valuable insights, but it was beyond the scope of this research to capture that. In my study of social relations in FSWs' households (see Chapter 6) I did not speak to other members of their households, viz. children and spouses/partners. Members of natal households and (previous) marital households were not included in the sample. There were several reasons for this: in the RLA the women I interviewed preferred to be left alone when their partners showed up. There was a claim to privacy in these moments which felt unethical to intrude upon. Children who lived in the RLA were often away at school when I was interviewing the women. In short, once the rest of the members of their brothel household appeared the women wanted to return to their routine of domestic chores without having to reflect on what were often very difficult memories. In households outside the RLA, the need to protect the confidentiality of my respondents took centre stage in the decision to not include other members. In her research on marriage, maternity and motherhood among middle-class women in Kolkata, Donner (2016a) explains that highlighting her interest in working on 'women's issues' meant restricting herself to the 'female sphere which is symbolically constructed as separate from that of men' (p.4). To hang out informally with women, Donner (ibid) had to choose between

speaking to men or to women. Similarly, to capture the experiences of women in this research and build the requisite trust and value, I had to prioritise them as respondents during fieldwork.

Discussing the limitations of interviewing as a research method, Bernard, (2000:217) argues that '…people are inaccurate reporters of their own behaviour'. There are many reasons for this: exaggerations and errors can be due to memory lapses, a desire to make a good impression on the interviewer, or to emphasise one's version or perception of something rather than providing a factual narration. There is a need therefore to be aware of how narratives of events can differ from the actual events, and of why a respondent might choose to alter the narrative in a particular way. This was evident especially in the case of rescued women and child marriage victims at the shelter home, who wanted my support for to secure an early release from the home. However, the ways in which their narratives differed from the details in their case files shed light on how these women tried to negotiate an external form of victimhood that had been imposed on them. Sharing experiences of violence that had occurred in the past provided emotional relief and catharsis for many women in this research, emphasising the value of interviews beyond providing factual details of events. Overall, in a context where FSWs' experiences are often dismissed, marginalised, atomised and instrumentalised, providing a space for women in sex work to share their life-histories in their own words had political, social and cultural significance.

4.11. Conclusion

This chapter discusses the methodological and practical considerations of this research. A qualitative approach to studying the social worlds of women in sex work and an ethnographic approach with life-history interviewing were identified as

suitable to meet the needs of the research. The selection and description of the field sites and details of the sample show how this research captures the heterogeneity of the lives of women who engaged in sex work in various forms. Highlighting the challenges that each site presented sheds light on the methodological and ethical challenges that arose during the fieldwork. Discussion of the analytical process emphasises the iterative process of the fieldwork, which allowed the final research questions to emerge from the data. Finally, a reflection on ethics and positionality shows that concern for the respondents' well-being was at the centre of this research.

Chapter 5: Pathways into sex work

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses pathways into sex work. It examines the role of social relations as drivers of entry and re-entry into sex work. Through this, it answers the first sub-research question: *How are pathways into sex work affected by experiences of power inequalities and violence within social relations?* It answers this question by analysing social relations in the lives of women formerly or currently engaged in sex work. Specifically, it analyses the effect of women's experiences of power inequalities and violence in their (a) natal and (b) marital households, on pathways into sex work.

The analysis in this chapter is broadly divided into two parts. The first, longer part analyses socio-economic situations within natal and marital households that had created a particular kind of gendered social stigma or deviance in the lives of the women in my study. In Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework the author argues that the 'household is a logical starting point' for an analysis of gender and other social inequalities. This is due to its 'central role in enabling, constraining and differentiating its members' participation in the economy and society at large' (p.283). Donner (2016a:4) argues that 'intra-household hierarchies are powerful determinants of women's lives'. Therefore to understand why the women in this research entered sex work, an analysis of the factors that constrained their autonomy, wellbeing and equitable participation in social relations within the household offers a strong starting point. This analysis focuses on the factors within households that created the need for *kono kaaj* (any work) that spurred the women to look for work in the informal labour market under precarious circumstances, eventually paving their entry into sex work.

The second part of the analysis elaborates on the precarious and inherently vulnerable process of looking for *kono kaaj* in these women's lives, and what this search intended to accomplish. This highlights structural constraints which hinder the ability of women from a particular socio-economic background to negotiate employment on their own terms. This, in turn, leads to their relinquishing of control to prospective employers, or to people in their social networks who help them find work.

Evidently the two broad analytical parts have one theme in common: *kono kaaj* (any work). While the first part examines circumstances in the household that push women to look for *kono kaaj*, the second looks at what happens when they do. Overall, this chapter looks at how both create pathways into sex work, and the role played by *kono kaaj* in this process. The next section, therefore, unpacks what *kono kaaj* symbolises in the lives of the women in this research and situates it in the existing literature on pathways into sex work in India.

5.2. *Kono kaaj* and a three-step pathway into sex work

5.2.1*. Kono kaaj*

In their review of 46 pieces of relevant literature on '…circumstances, experiences and processes surrounding women's entry into sex work in India', McClarty et al. (2014:150) identify 'commonly cited reasons for entry into sex work', examine 'what is known about the context and circumstances in which a woman is introduced to sex work', explore 'gaps in our understanding of this critical period of time' and identify 'key questions to highlight possible directions for future research in this field'. This review offers a good starting point for discussing how the data in this

thesis contributes to existing research in this field. In it, the authors identify financial insecurity as the most-cited reason by women in Indian who enter sex work. The authors cite studies by the DMSC (2007), Gangoli (2006) and Saggurti et al. (2011a, 2011b), to highlight specific financial reasons including 'acute poverty or crises due to the death or poor health of a husband, parents or in-laws; a lack of employment opportunities; the need to pay for a daughter's dowry; having outstanding debts; or divorce or separation from a husband or partner' (p.152).

The above examples are important to this chapter since they highlight how financial insecurity in the lives of women who enter sex work is framed by a particular kind of *gendered vulnerability in social relations*: for wives, mothers, daughters, and daughters-in-law, the financial need to enter sex work is rooted in the dissolution of financial and social stability in social relations. The authors underline this when they highlight that '…unfavourable familial or social situations are also cited as reasons for entry into sex work' and tend 'to overlap with, or result in, financial insecurity.' (McClarty, et al 2014:153). This chapter goes a step further, however, and argues that in the lives of the women in this research, financial and social insecurity were interlinked – one causing the other in a vicious cycle, exacerbating their social and financial precarity, creating circumstances that led them into sex work. The findings challenge the authors' assertion that the 'influence of the family, peers and community while entering into sex work may be more profound in the lives of traditional versus non-traditional sex workers' (p.155). All the women in this research entered commercially organised sex work, yet the role of familial involvement and community-based social relations in their entry was omnipresent.

This chapter does not argue that the women's pathways into sex work in this research were homogenous or uniform in nature. On the contrary, although there were commonalities across the respondents' experiences due to their similar socio-economic backgrounds, their pathways were riddled with disparities. The

overarching commonality, however, is that they were initiated by the need for *kono kaaj* and that my respondents expressed this need to acquaintances, family members, peers and other members of their social network. This need was primarily the result of circumstances in their households which involved power and violence. These experiences created (a) *a general need* for economic and social independence from dysfunctional social relations, and (b) *a specific need* for a residence separated from natal and marital attachment. Beyond its apparent literal meaning of 'any work', *kono kaaj*, therefore, was a phrase that encapsulated respondents' need to start over again or start out on their own – the *kono* or 'any' nature of work that was looked for underlines an absence of technical skills and a low literacy level, since the work sought could be anything as long as it fulfilled certain functions (discussed later). The ambiguity in the word *kono* or 'any' highlights a loss of control by the person to whom the request for *kono kaaj* is made. The women in this research depended on the people offering them *kaaj* (work) to determine the nature and material conditions of the work, which heightened their vulnerability to situations of violence.

Adopting the overarching analytical theme of *kono kaaj* to capture and analyse pathways into sex work fills the gap in existing research on the subject in India, which has tended to discuss 'specific social, economic and/or familial circumstances that tend to be associated with entry into sex work', instead of an 'examination of the social processes surrounding entry into sex work' (McClarty, et al 2014). The next section discusses how this analytical theme identifies and examines the social process, and develops a three-step pathway into sex work to illustrate it.

5.2.2 A three-step pathway into sex work

In their paper on the 'biosocial processes influencing women to become prostitutes in India', Chattopadhyay, et al (1994:252) argue that due to the disintegration of 'family or marital ties', women encounter 'life situations which may themselves generate a process of "anchorlessness"'. Based on data collected through 'structured questionnaires and in-depth case histories' from 33 FSWs in the Ghoshpara Block Panchayat of Domjur in the Howrah district of West Bengal, the authors argue that although there is a 'widespread belief that prostitution in India is adopted as a means of earning of living because of poverty', all 'poor women are not prostitutes' (p.254). Although they cite poverty as an important factor, they argue that women enter prostitution in India due to an 'interaction of life events and women's reactions to them' (ibid). The table below illustrates the way they map this interaction:

Fig 5.1: Conditions leading women in Ghoshpara, West Bengal, to prostitution

Types	Conditions					No. of Prostitutes
	Predisposing condition	Initiated by	Contributory Cause	Aggravating situation	Catalytic Factor	
Type I: Forced						
(a)	Sudden personal or familial crisis (e.g. becoming a widow)	Death of principal provider e.g. death of husband	Inability to support by in-laws or parental family	No economic provision for survival	Deception by a male acquaintance	17
(b)	Oppressive intra-familial environment after marriage	Recurring ill-treatment by husband and/or in laws	Refusal of parental family to take back due to poverty	Looking for a job	(1) Sexual exploitation at place of work	3
					(2) Rape	1
No.						21
Type II: Chosen						
(a)	Self-initiated uncontrolled life	Desire for easy life	Impact of local neighbourhood	None	None	3
(b)	Sexual urges	Sexual usage and curiosity	....	None	None	9
No.						12
Total no.						33

Source: Chattopadhyay, et al, 1994:255

As is evident in the table, Chattopadhyay, et al (1994) divide types of conditions that influence women's entry into prostitution in West Bengal into two categories: forced (type I) and chosen (type II). Using five steps they trace pathways into sex work in the following way (p.255):

First: a pre-existing circumstance, e.g. 'sudden personal or familial crisis';

Second: factors that initiate and contribute e.g. death of an economic provider, viz. husband, and inability to be supported by in-laws or natal family;

Third: An aggravating situation, e.g. 'no economic provision for survival';

Fourth: A catalyst e.g. deception by a male acquaintance leading to coercive entry into sex work.

Although Chattopadhyay, et al (1994) identify a process comprising predisposing conditions, contributory causes, aggravating situations and a catalytic factor that trace women's pathways into sex work, the division of the types of entry into 'forced' and 'chosen' are deeply problematic. From the table, it is evident that the authors do not afford the process of voluntary entry into sex work the same nuance and depth that they do forcible entry. Also, this categorisation evokes the simplistic binaries of 'free' and 'forced' in studies of sex work in India, which ignores the complexity of the FSWs' lives and social backgrounds that influence pathways into sex work (Sahni and Shankar, 2011). Although this chapter draws inspiration from Chattopadhyay, et al's (1994) paper, the analytical theme of *kono kaaj* helps to develop a three-step pathway which applies equally to forced and voluntary forms of entry into sex work. This pathway model focuses on social relations instead of specific events, looking at how the commonality of women's positionality in these social relations propels them into sex work, although the form of entry might differ. It adds to Chattopadhyay, et al's (ibid) argument by contextualising the process of 'anchorlessness'. It examines the effect of circumstances on pathways into sex

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work after women become anchorless, since '…not all abandoned women take up prostitution' (Gangoli, 2008:29).

The next subsections examine how anchorlessness is linked to patriarchy and the nature of women's work in the informal labour market and wider social relations in Bengali society. Through the theme of *kono kaaj*, social relations in the institutions of household, community, market and state that affect and create the need to look for a social and economic anchor to escape a specific life situation are explored.

5.2.2.1 Conceptual and contextual references

This subsection draws upon conceptual and contextual discussions in previous chapters to frame my analysis in a discussion of patriarchy, gender inequality and social relations. The first part of the analysis of experiences of power inequalities and violence in natal and marital households refers to the conceptual discussion on patriarchy (sections 2.3 and 3.4) and daughter disfavour (section 3.5). Food discrimination as a form of daughter disfavour and expression of patriarchy in the household is introduced and discussed. The analysis also draws upon the conceptual discussion of Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework and Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) life-cycle of violence (section 3.5). The second part of the analysis uses the concept of sexual commerce (Shah, 2014) to show how women's experience of (looking for) work in the unregulated labour market is framed as inherently sexual, and how the prevalence of sexual harassment in informal labour participation propels women into sex work. This draws from my contextual discussion (section 2.5) of the ways in which women's participation in informal labour have come to be associated with sexual promiscuity in Bengal (Sen, 1999).

5.3. Step 1: Daughter disfavour in natal households

5.3.1. Introduction

This first step of the pathways model explores the broad phenomenon of daughter disfavour within patriarchy and how this affected the women in this research. First, it discusses how daughter disfavour is influenced by daughters' changing positionalities in social relations in the household. Then resource allocation in the women's households and their bargaining power are discussed. Finally, a specific manifestation of daughter disfavour, food discrimination, and how this affects the need for *kono kaaj,* is identified and discussed.

5.3.2. Resource allocation in the household, daughter disfavour, and social relations

In this research, daughter disfavour in natal households is connected to:

i.   the daughter's position (and the power it carries) within a complex web of social relations within natal and marital households;

ii.   her relationship with the specific female and/or male head of the household.

Before discussing the manifestations of daughter disfavour in my respondents' lives, the household as an analytical unit is discussed below. The ways in which members of households gain or lose power, and how this affects daughter disfavour are also discussed.

5.3.3. The household, bargaining power, and daughter disfavour

Moore (1988:56) argues that 'the control and allocation of resources within the household is a complex process which has to be seen in relation to a web of rights and obligations.' Additionally, 'many of the basic allocation activities…are organized through the "intimate" relations of marriage, parenthood and kinship' (Kabeer, 1994:96). Evans (1991:54) describes households as 'shifting, flexible structures in which boundaries are difficult to discern…a diversity of family and household compositions and social relations, mediated through marriage and kinship, creating a variety of conjugal and residential arrangements'. Households, therefore, are 'internally diverse institutions, embedded within and interacting with a wider array of networks and institutions beyond their boundaries' (Friedman, 1979; cited in Kabeer, 1994:114). Their 'dual specification' (Friedman, 1979) encompasses 'internal structures of rules and resources' along with associations with 'market and non-market institutions which jointly constitute the external context in which households reproduce or transform themselves' (Kabeer, 1994:114).

To understand how daughter disfavour manifests in households, and how this affects daughters' connection to extra-domestic institutions such as the market, it is important to understand what leads to a daughter being favoured or disfavoured within her natal household. Although patriarchal systems broadly dictate a subordinate position for women in general, women's actual positionalities can often be contradictory and conflictual due to intersections of gender, ethnicity, caste, class etc. In the household, women's positions vary based on what position they occupy in the space, and this position is drawn in relation to male members of the household. As Kabeer (1994) argues, 'women's wellbeing tends to be tied to the

prosperity of the household collectively, and their long-term interests best served by subordinating their needs to those of male family members'. Women's power, similarly, derives from association with the men in the household. In situations of conflict in the household, the interests of the male members with the most bargaining power, and through association, the female members, are most likely to prevail in decision-making outcomes; this form of power 'reflects their access to resources in their own right that they could fall back on should the bargaining process break down' (Kabeer, 2009).

In theory, daughter disfavour is meant to put daughters at an inherent disadvantage in bargaining processes. However, social relations are not immutable, and the degree and form of daughter disfavour often depends on several factors within the household. For example, through association with male members who have high bargaining power, daughters can gain power to negotiate their autonomy, access to resources, etc. in the household. Bargaining power between men can shift dynamically based on their own fall-back position: older men can lose status and power in the household to younger ones with more financial power and greater access to resources. Given this, even if a daughter is favoured by her father she can still find her autonomy and bargaining power curtailed in the household if the father does not have a strong fall-back position. An example of this was evident in Mamata's experience.

I first met Mamata at the Narendrapur shelter home in October 2014. She had been forcibly rescued by representatives of an NGO from a brothel in Haldia.[11] At the time of our meeting, she had been living in the shelter home for four months.

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[11] A river-port municipality south-west of Kolkata, lying close to the mouth of the river Hooghly. Hooghly is a tributary of the Ganges, and flows through the State of West Bengal.

Originally from a village in the Shyampur *thana*[12] in the Howrah district, Mamata was born into a Muslim household where she was one of seven children: three older brothers, two younger brothers and one older sister who had died of a snakebite when Mamata was four. From a young age, Mamata was a sickly child. At the age of 3 she lost the use of both her legs. At her father's insistence, she was admitted into a rehabilitation home for children with disabilities in a town close to her village. She recovered, but retained a pronounced limp in her right leg. Since she can remember, Mamata recalled being fiercely independent and rebellious. This, she asserted, put her relationship with her mother in jeopardy. She would eventually go on to blame her mother for her entry into sex work:

> My *ammi* [mother] loved my older sister – she was fair and beautiful. From my birth, she always saw me as a problem…because of my *shastho* [health], my dark skin, but also because I always challenged her when she was unfair. But my *abba* [father], he was a good man…because of him, today I can walk. From a young age, my *ammi* would always hit me if I complained about something or wanted more than what I was given. My *abba* would also hit me, but he would later be affectionate and explain what I had done wrong. But my *ammi*, she only cares about money…she never loved me, that's why I call her my *shotho-ma* (stepmother). (Mamata,2014)

Mamata felt deeply neglected and disfavoured by her mother from a young age. Despite having her father's love and support in the household, the conflict in her relationship with her mother hindered Mamata's fall-back position in the household. As is evident in Mamata's statement, this disfavour on the part of her mother was not simply because she was a daughter but because the complexion of her skin, her ill-health, physical disability and rebellious attitude made her undesirable as a

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[12] Literally, a police station. Often used to denote the locality in rural areas.

daughter compared to her older sister, whom Mamata described as more compliant. This worsened when her father had an accident and end up bedridden; the power in the house shifted to her eldest brother who, she claimed, was her mother's *priyo* (favourite), because he earned the most in the family. His marriage and the subsequent entry of his wife into the household further affected Mamata's claim to resources within the household:

> When *borda* [older brother] got married and *boudi* [sister-in-law] came to live with us, things got very hard. By that time I was already earning my own money…through *jorir-kaaj* [embroidery] and spent it on myself and my needs. When I bought nice things like shampoo, combs, perfume for myself, my *boudi* and *ammi* would make fun of me…call me a bad girl, say I had bad intentions. That hurt me. Sometimes my *boudi* would fight with me, call me a burden on the household. She would say '*Er bhaar ke nebe? Ke biye korbe?*' [Who will assume her burden? Who will marry her?] When I would answer back and say 'This is my father's house, I have a right to be here', she would get angry and say 'Now this is your *borda*'s house' and hit me, with my *ammi* watching. It's okay when parents hit you but how can an outsider hit me and my mother allow it? After some time like this, I realised they would not let me live in peace in the house. My father was too ill to support me, so I had to leave.(Mamata, 2014)

Mamata's disability coupled with her economic independence and presumed sexual promiscuity made her a *bhaar* (burden) on the household. Unlike her older sister, who had good marital prospects, Mamata was considered a liability by her mother, older brother and sister-in law. Although she claimed a stake in the household as her father's daughter, her father's financial and physical inability affected her fall-back position. Eventually after a terrible fight Mamata left the

household to look for *kono kaaj* away from her village, which would give her a place of her own to live in. Through this process, discussed in section 5.5.3, she was sold into sex work by a male acquaintance. She returned to her natal household the first time after escaping with the help of a customer, and the second on the eve of her father's death, while secretly pregnant with her first child by a customer with whom she had become intimately involved after re-entering sex work on her terms. Each time, her presence in the house was questioned and she was driven out by what she described as *oshanti* (conflict) which included physical and verbal violence, perpetrated by her mother and sister-in-law and supported by her eldest brother. Each time she left home and re-entered sex work. After her father's death she used her earnings from sex work to build her own house on her *abba'r jomi* (father's land). She returned to embroidery work, but found it hard to look after her daughter without support from anyone in the household. Eventually her mother's mistreatment of her daughter compelled Mamata to leave her natal household for good. After she was rescued, the organisation contacted her natal household only to be turned away:

> When they went to speak to my mother, she told them I was a bad girl
> and they didn't want to take me back. She said I had chosen to enter
> sex work on my own, when if anyone is responsible for me doing this
> work it was my mother. She gave me so much *koshto* [pain] my whole
> life, so much *oshanti* [conflict]she drove me out of the house. Today I
> am here, in *bipod* [trouble] because of her. Sometimes I think I should
> make a case against her, and in a full court I would say 'My mother put
> me into sex work.' But I can't do it – she is my mother after all. But she
> never saw me as her daughter. (Mamata, 2014)

As Mamata's experiences show, the manifestation of daughter disfavour also depends on a daughter's relations with female members of the household who have greater bargaining powers and access to resources. Even though Mamata

claimed her access to property and was able to build her own home on her father's land, the death of her father and the constant atmosphere of aggression and violence in the house, along with a lack of support for the care of her daughter made her leave. Agarwal (1988:532) argues that in a complex society such as India it is difficult to separate the ideological from the material; even in the presence of material resources, viz. property, women's claims to these resources are bound by custom, norms and tradition (Warrier,1993:18). The threat or use of violence against women who make these claims while a liability to the household also affects their claim-making processes (Kabeer, 2009), as is evident in Mamata's experience.

Another example of how the relationship with the female heads of the household affects daughter's' bargaining power in the household was through the entry of a stepmother and subsequent abandonment of the first wife and children by the male head of the household (the father) in polygamous Muslim households. With the entry of a new female head, e.g. Mamata's sister-in-law above, the decision to allocate resources in the household shifted from the first wife to the second. This struggle for power manifested in the form of food discrimination, which affected the daughters of the previous marriage the most.

5.3.4. Food discrimination and familial neglect

During my fieldwork, the women in this research repeatedly talked about how they were forced to enter the informal labour market, and eventually sex work '*pete-r jalaye*'. Translated literally as 'because of the stomach', it highlights how the specific need for food and a more general need for access to a livelihood drove them into sex work. Although it would be tempting to link this need to poverty, a deeper analysis of what created the absence of food and hindered access to other

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basic resources reveals a correlation between power in social relations in the household and daughter disfavour. This manifested in the form of food discrimination, which propelled women to look for other ways to fill their stomach through *kono kaaj*. The presumed link between gender-based food-discrimination and poverty has been challenged by scholars. Miller (1997) found evidence of propertied castes and classes in North India that practised food discrimination against daughters in the household. On the other hand, a study by Munro and McIntyre (2014) of ultra-poor households in Bangladesh found that women across Muslim, Hindu and Christian female-headed households and patrilineal and matrilineal traditions rejected the idea of son preference and practised egalitarian food distribution. Purewal (2010:ix) argues that we need more nuanced explanations for the 'mundane expressions of son preference that exist in people's everyday lived realities.' This subsection highlights how daughter disfavour, expressed through food discrimination, was part of a larger process of power dynamics and shifts between female members of the household. Food discrimination and withholding food was practised to limit power to a particular member or members. In some instances, this was accompanied by the threat and use of violence against specific daughters of the household, as well as overall neglect of their wellbeing. This necessitated the search for *kono kaaj* by disfavoured daughters, which paved their eventual entry into sex work. Below are two examples which highlight this.

I met the sisters Jasmine and Sabina, originally from Bangladesh, in the RLA of Kalighat in September 2014. Aged 27 and 25 (self-reported) respectively, the two sisters lived next door to each other: their brothel rooms shared a wall. Born and raised in a Muslim household in rural Bangladesh, their father had remarried when they were around the ages of 7 and 5, and this pushed their mother into the informal labour market across the border in India:

When my sister and I were very young my father remarried. We are Muslim, so he could do that. My *shotho-ma* [stepmother] came to live with us, but couldn't tolerate our presence. She kept yelling at us even for no reason, hit us a lot if we caused trouble, and did not give us food to eat properly. We always got the worst rice with stones in it, the smallest portions of vegetables, *dal* [lentils]…and often no fish or meat. But her children always got more. My mother couldn't bear this, so she decided to leave the house with us to work and earn her own money. We moved to the town near our village, where she worked at a local eatery. But even with that income we often didn't have enough to eat. One day a neighbour asked my mother if she wanted go to India to work. Although sceptical at first, my mother told us 'I couldn't ensure you had a full stomach in your father's house – that's why we left. Now you two are not getting enough food here, either, so perhaps we should move to India after all?' We agreed, although we were very young, and moved to Bashirhat to start work at a brick kiln with my mother. (Jasmine, 2014)

Food discrimination and then food insecurity influenced the mother's entry into the labour market: she worked first as a cook at an eatery and then in construction work in West Bengal, across the border from Bangladesh. There, the sisters worked with their mother collecting sand and stones, while their mother performed arduous physical labour. Sabina's marriage was eventually arranged with a boy at the brick kiln whose family lived in the residential quarters along with Jasmine, Sabina and their mother and hailed from the same village in Bangladesh. The family returned to their village with the newlyweds. With income earned from her work at the brick kiln Jasmine's mother could negotiate her re-entry into her marital household. Once the money ran out, however, she returned to the brick kiln, but Jasmine decided to stay on in her father's house in the same village as Sabina's marital household. Ultimately though, Sabina was abandoned by her husband just

as her father had abandoned their mother, and Sabina's husband sold Jasmine into sex work in Kolkata, (see section 5.5.3). When Jasmine re-entered sex work on her own terms in a different brothel Sabina followed, since her claim to resources in the marital household was precarious due to her husband's remarriage.

> When he left, my in-laws started to taunt me. They blamed me for his leaving, saying I wasn't a good wife to him. They started to give me less food to eat and would keep saying '*Ke bhaar nebe tor?'* [Who will assume your burden?] Life inside that house was full of *koshto* [pain]. I was so often hungry, and cried at night. My sister was gone for a long time; I didn't know she had been sold into sex work by my husband! When she returned she told me she had found a place to stay and was earning good money in Kolkata, and asked me if I wanted to join her. I considered everything, and decided that it was my best option. (Sabina, 2014)

Sabina's entry into sex work mirrored her mother's entry into the informal labour force: both were propelled by a reduction in their claim to resources in the marital household due to their husbands' remarriage. Since women derive their economic and social identity from men in a patriarchal system (Koenig and Foo, 1985:5), abandonment by a male partner renders them anchorless in the household (Chattopadhyay et al, 1994) The precarity of their social position in the household, coupled with their financial insecurity, drove them to look for *kono kaaj.* Sabina's experiences show how breakdown and conflict in social relations in the marital household can follow a pre-existing precarity in natal households, forcing them to leave with their mother at a young age. In some instances, the precarity of daughter's positions in the natal household due to power struggles in social relations directly creates vulnerabilities in the marital household. An analysis of this forms the second step of the three-step pathway into sex work.

5.4. Step 2: Power inequalities and experiences of violence in marital households

5.4.1. Introduction

Section 5.3 discussed the first step of the three-step pathway model, which looks at how experiences of power inequalities and violence in natal households create daughter disfavour that affects daughters' access to resources in the household, viz. food and bargaining power. It argues that daughter disfavour is shaped and affected by power struggles in the household involving female members, and is not directly linked to poverty. This subsection discusses the second step. It continues to explore and discuss the phenomenon of daughter disfavour, looking at how it affects women's control over their sexuality and autonomy in romantic and marital relationships, and at what happens when violence in marital relations leads women to return to their natal household.

5.4.2. Absence in choice of marital partner, and marital violence

Findings from the data highlight how experiences of power inequalities and violence in the natal household affect daughters' autonomy in their marital arrangements. One such example was Sapna, a 25-year-old full-time residential sex worker in Sonagachi. Born into a Muslim family in a village near the Sunderbans mangrove forest, Sapna recounted how domestic violence between her parents,the subsequent suicide of her mother and her father's remarriage to a stepmother who resented Sapna and her brother, affected her autonomy in her marital decision:

After my mother killed herself, *abba* didn't care for us much. *Abba* got married to another woman soon after. We went to live with my *nani* [maternal grandmother] in the next village. She used to work in a house in Kolkata…cooking and cleaning and would take me along with her. I would help her, but I made many mistakes and the mistress of the house would punish me, hit me, give me a lot of *koshto*. After *nani* got ill and stopped working, we went back to live with my *abba* and *shotho-ma*. It wasn't easy at all living there with them. *Shotho-ma* would hit us, not feed us properly. I kept working here and there to get some money so I could take care of what I needed while living with them. As I grew older, people in the neighbourhood told my father to think about my marriage. On his own, he wouldn't have bothered. Even when he did start looking for someone because people told him to, he found someone for me who would make him rich. He didn't care about my happiness at all.

Sapna's experience shows how a trajectory of domestic violence in her natal household coupled with food discrimination with the entry of a new female head of household propelled her into the informal labour market. It highlights how this negligence extended to her father choosing a spouse for her without regard for her happiness. Sapna was married off at the age of 15 to a much older man in his 30s who paid her father a lot of money to marry her. Sapna refused to marry him and protested until the day of the wedding. A rushed wedding ceremony took place, despite which Sapna continued to protest, threatening at one stage to ingest poison and kill herself:

I didn't want to marry this *buro* [old man]. I was scared of what would happen once I moved into his house. I kept crying, protesting…even when I was dressed in my bridal clothes I was wailing, saying I didn't want to marry him. Somehow the wedding happened, but I didn't give up. I refused to leave my father's house and told my uncles and aunts who were present that I would kill myself, like my mother, and they would

be responsible for my death. Finally they listened, and the next day the marriage was ended.

Although Sapna was able to end her marriage straightaway, many women I spoke to tried to make their marriages work and endured frequent violence before finally taking the decision to return to their natal household. One such example was 19-year-old Mumtaz, who lived and worked in the same brothel as Sapna. Hailing from a Muslim household in a village close to Sapna's in the 24 South Parganas district, Mumtaz was married off at the age of 14 to an older man in his late 20s. He ran a garment store in her village and had approached her father seeking her hand in marriage. Within a week the marriage was fixed, and Mumtaz could not stop it even though she did not want to get married so young. As the oldest child and daughter of the family with two younger sisters and a younger brother, Mumtaz said, 'There was no one in the family to speak up for me. My father decided it and I had to follow'. In the first one-and-a-half years of marriage she was repeatedly beaten by her husband because he suspected her of flirting with other men, something she denied vehemently. Instead, she watched as he openly flirted with women in the community. During our interview in a brothel in Sonagachi where she lived and worked as a full-time sex work, Mumtaz broke down and cried:

Look at these scars on my hands, on my legs…he beat me day in and day out. He had a bad character, but he always suspected me. He went around with other women…other women in the village told me…yet he always blamed me for smiling too much at other men, including his brother who lived with us. I had no way to defend myself! Everyone watched as he gave me *koshto*. My in-laws would make me work endlessly…household jobs, do this do that…not a moment's rest. After I had a child in my belly after the first year, he hurt me even more. Four months of *koshto…*once he beat me so much I bled and ended up in hospital. It became clear I couldn't stay in the household any

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more…even my in-laws wanted me to leave. The day my *abba* came to collect me my husband, who didn't want me to go, grabbed my hair in his fist and dragged me into the house. My *abba* was furious – he had never lifted a hand to me my whole life, yet how could this man think he had the right to hit his daughter? That day my *abba* brought me back home.

I asked Mumtaz if she had tried to leave before this and she said:

I didn't tell anyone anything at [my natal] home. I didn't want them to be sad, to worry. I didn't want to give them *koshto.* I thought this is my *kopaal* [fate]…let me bear it. Also, I had developed *maya* [attachment] towards my husband. In spite of everything, I loved him. But there is only so much a person can take.

Like Sapna, Mumtaz was married to someone chosen for her by her father. Referring to Klass (1966), Warrier (1993) argues that despite the prevalence of patrilocal residential arrangements in West Bengal, the shortness of marriage distances implies that the natal household is often next door, which offers newly-married women support and comfort.However, despite this a daughter in Bengali society is socialised to absolve herself of a relationship of dependence on the natal household through marriage rituals. Dube (1988:12) points to the ritual in Bengal Hindu weddings where 'a daughter before leaving her natal home with the bridegroom…stands with her back towards the house and throws a handful of rice over her shoulder. This signifies that she has returned the rice that she has consumed until then and has absolved herself of the debt in the natal family'. This is evident in Mumtaz's case, where despite living close to her natal household and visiting it frequently, it took her two years and concern for her unborn child to confide in her natal family about the violence in her marriage. Apart from not wanting to cause them *koshto*, Mumtaz's silence was also embedded in a desire to not be a *bhaar* (burden) on her family. She highlighted this when she talked

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about her search for *kono kaaj* after returning to her natal household, discussed in the next subsection.

For some women in my sample, their marital household and violence by its members played a direct role in their entry to sex work. One such example was 22-year old Rahima, a former sex worker and victim of trafficking who, at the time of the interview in February 2015, lived in her natal household in a village in the South 24 Parganas. Rahima had been raped at the age of 11 in her house by a boy from an influential family in the neighbourhood. When her parents filed a charge of rape against the boy his family said they were willing to accept Rahima as a daughter-in-law if the charges were dropped. Unable to bear the expense of a long trial and eager for Rahima to regain her social status in the community after an incident that had caused scandal , Rahima's parents agreed. However, within a month of the withdrawal of the charge Rahima's in-laws began to physically assault her. 'They didn't want me to stay in that house as their son's wife. They didn't want to accept me into their family. My husband also kept telling me he didn't want to keep a *shongshaar* [household] with me anymore.' Eventually Rahima was coercively sold into sex work in the GB Road RLA in New Delhi by her mother-in-law, which she escaped with the help of a customer, discussed in Chapter 7.

5.4.3. *Ke bhaar nebe?* Re-negotiating entry into the natal household

Both Sabina and Mamata's experiences of power inequalities and violence (sections 5.3.4 and 5.3.3 respectively), were embedded in the patriarchally-loaded question *'Ke bhaar nebe?'* The idea of women as *bhaar* (a burden or liability) is at the heart of son preference and daughter disfavour, which view women as a poor investment (Munro and McIntyre, 2014), since through marriage women become

part of their husband's household. In the event of violence in the marriage perpetrated by their spouse and/or in-laws, or abandonment by their husband, women return to the natal household with few or no resources. Chapter 2 discussed how despite advancements in property rights, patrilineal property inheritance in rural and urban areas across different classes remains contentious for women (Warrier, 1993; Donner, 2015). Scholars such as Goody (1973) and Tambiah (1973) argue that in the absence of inheritable property, a woman's share of resources from the natal household is supposed to be given to her in the form of movable property. However, referring to Agarwal (1988) and Mies (1986), Warrier (1992:20) argues that although a daughter is expected to get all the movable goods that her parents own, the reality is often different:

> …The goods that a daughter receives are determined by the specific conditions that exist at the time of the marriage transactions. Thus, if a family has more than one daughter, then the daughters never receive identical moveable goods because the conditions prevailing at the time of marriage are not the same. Neither can the value of immovable and landed property that the sons receive be equated, since the monetary value of the land accumulates thereby generating new wealth, so that, eventually, land is worth more than all the movable goods that the parents have collected.

Many women in this research shared how their desire not to feel like a *bhaar* on their natal family had driven them into sex work. These women feared potential and actual stigmatisation by the community for their 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) which would decrease their social acceptance as returning women from failed marriages. This marked the beginning of an experience of deviance which these women continue to wrestle with through their lives, discussed in Chapter 8. *Kono kaaj* becomes a way to negotiate this stigma and loss of social status.

In this research, women's search for *kono kaaj* implied that their return to the natal household was inherently fraught with tension. In some cases, despite good relations with the natal family and being welcomed back, they still chose to look for work which would also offer them a residential arrangement independent of natal and marital household attachments. One such example was 23-year old Chumki, a full-time sex worker who lived in a shared *kacha* or temporary housing structure built of straw and tarpaulins in Kalighat. Born and raised in a Hindu household in a town north of Kolkata, Chumki had married out of love, a decision supported by her parents. However, her husband became violent and alcoholic soon after the birth of their son. After bearing his repeated physical and verbal violence for two months, Chumki returned to her natal household. Her parents were supportive and allowed her to stay in the household with her son. In spite of this, Chumki felt the need to leave and look for *kono kaaj*:

> My parents are very good. They supported me like no other girl's parents would. My father said 'Whatever we have, we will share with you'. But the world does not work like that. I knew *amake onno jayga khuje nite hobe duniya-e* [I had to make my own space in the world]. How long could I stay dependent on my parents? All the neighbourhood people would gossip about me…I know they thought I was a *bhaar* on my parents. I found out about this kind of work from a female acquaintance and discussed it with my father. He was upset at first, but agreed that he could not support me forever. Now I work and live here for two weeks at a time. My parents look after my son, and I go back to their home for some days every second weekend. I know the door to my *baba'r bari* [father's house] is always open, but this way I have my own space too.

Chumki highlights how women in patriarchal systems are socialised to consider themselves a burden on the natal household by the wider community; this feeling is exacerbated when the collapse of their marital relations requires the daughter to

return to the household. While one can argue that Chumki sought work to become economically independent, her insistence on 'finding her own space' echoes across the stories of women such as Mamata, Jasmine and Sabina, who all found their position in the household precarious. Although Chumki's claim to her father's house was not vulnerable in the way it was for the others, she still felt the need to find a residence separate from her natal household. The precarity of the claim to one's natal household post-marriage, whether overt or subtle, is a manifestation of daughter disfavour as a form of structural violence which propels women's entry into sex work. Brothel-based sex work in the RLA provided accommodation for the women to live alone or with others, as well as expression for their changing social and economic aspirations (e.g. the desire for their own space, greater mobility and a higher income).

For women who could renegotiate entry into their natal households, the re-entry usually came with conditions. Usually this entailed restricted mobility, relatively reduced (compared to pre-marriage) access to resources, and lack of autonomy in labour force participation. Although future marital arrangements were considered by the heads of the household for the returned daughter, the women who had returned were expected to stay away from men to avoid provoking gossip in the community, endangering their future marital prospects. To escape this claustrophobic environment, women often sought *kono kaaj* to get away from the confines and rules of the natal household. When this involved their entry into sex work they chose to keep it secret from their natal families, to maintain a connection to the natal household but not be subject to the patriarchal code of honour and the sexual propriety that was expected of them.

Despite having her parent's support in returning to her household, Mumtaz recounts the *oshanti* that followed on her return:

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My daughter is now three. It has been two months since I have started

this work [in the brothel]. My parents never said anything…but other

people in the house, in the community were not good. They always

complained that my daughter and I were a *bhaar* on my family. People

would say 'She couldn't make a house for herself. Now she's back

here'. I had to listen…that is my *kopaal* (fate). But it became too much,

eventually. I decided that I had to look for *kaaj* outside the village.

Like Chumki, Mumtaaz too left her natal household to counter accusations that she was a *bhaar* on her parents. As her statement shows, returning to her natal household was perceived as failure on Mumtaz's part: that she was not able to sustain her position in her marital household and a social position in marital relations. Apart from negotiating the community stigma, women's decision to enter sex work in my study also emerged as a strategy to deal with an ambivalent and liminal state of being, caught in a space between their natal and marital households, returning to one after being rejected by the other. This state of being persists when women in sex work return to their natal households after leaving such work, discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5. Step 3: Negotiating violence and power inequalities through *kono kaaj*

5.5.1. Introduction

Section 5.4 discussed how struggles with power and experiences of violence in their natal household affect women's autonomy in marital decisions. It discussed the process of returning to the natal household after experiencing of power

inequalities and violence in the marital household, which make women feel like a *bhaar*, stigmatised by the wider community.

This section discusses the third and final step of the pathways model. *Kono kaaj* is discussed as a way for women in my study to negotiate power inequalities and violence in their lives. It allows them to counter the perception of them as anchorless (Chattopadhyay et al, 1994) and as *bhaar* on their families. Within this, (i) why certain women choose sex work over other kinds of informal labour, (ii) circumstances surrounding forcible entry into sex work, and (iii) how and why women take on sex work alongside other kinds of informal labour, are discussed.

At this stage it is important to discuss the role *kaaj* or work plays in women's efforts to gain autonomy and stop violence. In a study of the influence of religion and region on women's autonomy in India and Pakistan, Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001:688) define autonomy as 'control women have over their own lives' In this, they identify six interrelated components: 'the extent to which they have an equal voice with their husbands in matters affecting themselves and their families, control over material and other resources, access to knowledge and information, the authority to make independent decisions, freedom from constraints on physical mobility, and the ability to forge equitable power relationships within families' (ibid). One way to exercise control over material and other resources is through employment; Sen (1990:26) argues that 'getting a better education, being free to work outside the home, finding more "productive" employment, etc., may all contribute not only to immediate wellbeing', but as (Rao, 2012: 28) also argues, also strengthen relative bargaining power in marriage. In this research, the women sought *kono kaaj* as a way to gain autonomy in social relations with their natal and marital households, but also to combat social stigma in their communities. Ultimately, the *kaaj* was intended to help them to build a life elsewhere, away from natal and marital attachments. In their search for work, the women relied on people

in their social networks. Alongside looking for *kono kaaj* they accepted offers of new romantic relationships with men in their new communities to regain social status. Their dependence on men and male acquaintances for new social status and/or work created situations of exploitation which led to their coercive entry into sex work. This section discusses such experiences, as well as those that led to voluntary entry into sex work.

5.5.2. Entering sex work voluntarily

Section 5.2.1. discussed how *kono kaaj* symbolised a fresh start for the women in my study. This fresh start was meant to enable them to gain spatial and economic independence from marital and natal household attachments that constrained their wellbeing and autonomy and subjected them to violence. In my sample, women who entered sex work voluntarily did so through two entry-ways:

i.   Through knowledge about the material conditions of sex work, and entry channels provided by members of social networks. Often these members facilitated women's entry into sex work directly.

ii. Through re-entry into sex work on their own terms after escaping sex work they had been coercively and deceptively sold into the first time.

This subsection discusses aspects of the first entry-way. In this, three reasons existed behind the women's choice of sex work over *onno* (any other) *kaaj*: (i) income-based reasons (ii) spatial reasons (ii) reasons of sexual autonomy.

5.5.2.1 Income-based reasons

In this research, the women who voluntarily entered sex work did so based on information from acquaintances, family members and peers. They cited their

motherhood or dependence on other family members (parents, siblings, etc.,) as reasons for entering sex work rather than other kinds of work. Since sex work was perceived to pay more than other forms of informal labour, especially domestic work, many women chose it. This is in keeping with findings from other studies of why women enter sex work in India (Karandikar, et al. 2010, Sahni and Shankar, 2011 etc), as well in other contexts such as Uganda (Zalwango, et al, 2010). It also held for the women who had entered sex work while also doing other work; the sex work was intended to supplement their regular income to meet an unexpected expense in their lives. This is exemplified by the case of 26-year old Priya, who dropped into the Kalighat RLA for four hours every day on the way back to her village near Canning) after her regular day job as an *ayah* (domestic help) in a middle-class household in Kolkata:

> A month ago my son had an accident. He fell and broke both legs and hurt his back. He has been bedridden since then. His medicines are expensive, and I have to pay for physiotherapy massage for him too. My husband does some construction work here and there – he's never had a steady income. That's why I work as an *ayah* – I look after the children of a family in a house in South Kolkata. But after this accident there was a sudden *taan* [pull] in the house over money. I knew about this kind of work, there was a woman in my village who did this, everyone knew. I discussed it with my husband and he agreed. Now I am doing this until my son gets better. (Priya, 2014)

Priya's experiences of earning more in sex work was echoed by women across this research. It was also cited as a reason for women re-entering sex work after escaping it the first time. Women often used the higher income and steady cash flow to renegotiate their claim to space in natal households. However, this process was not without conflict. In describing her relationship with her father and stepmother after entering sex work, Sapna said:

Now I have money, so my *shoto-ma* can tolerate me. Now when I go home I make sure to take gifts for everyone. I have told them I am working in a *kaajer-bari* (domestic setting) but anyone who has any intelligence will know this is not true. They happily accept my gifts, but if I tell them what I do they will spit on me. I have made my peace with it. Sometimes I feel like I have become an ATM [cash machine] for my family. As long as I keep giving them money and gifts they smile at me.

(Sapna, 2014)

As Sapna's experience shows, the prospect of gaining economic autonomy through sex work and re-forging equitable power relations with natal and marital family members often left women feeling used. Many women across both RLAs talked about how they felt immense pressure to keep sending money and gifts home to maintain a fragile link to their natal households.

The next section discusses the spatial reasons cited by women for choosing to enter full-time residential sex work.

5.5.2.2. Spatial reasons

Along with the higher income compared to *onno kaaj*, residential full-time sex work offers women a place to live on their own or with their children in a female-headed household. The RLA offers the women living in it the opportunity to build and engage in a new set of social relations (see Chapter 6). With tenuous ties with their natal family after experiences of power inequalities and violence, or in the face of community stigma despite good relations with the former, the RLAs offered the women in this research a chance to start again socially and economically. New social relations included sexual-affective relationships with men encountered through sex work which often carried the promise of new domesticity. In the brothels, the women lived with their partners and children, often from previous

sexual relationships. Given the emphasis on patrilineality in Bengali culture, this unconventional living arrangement would draw criticism, stigma and unwanted attention elsewhere. This was illuminated in the experiences of some part-time sex workers who chose to live with their unmarried partners outside the RLA; these women pretended to be married and sported visible signs of matrimony, e.g. *shindur (*vermilion powder) and *shankha-pola* (the white and red bangles worn by married women in Bengal). Mamata explained this while discussing her several re-entries into sex work at different sites: 'I would return [to sex work] because even though I was alone I had some support there to start over, *nijer jayaga ekta* [my own space]'. 'No one asked me whom I chose to live with or why'. This made it possible for her to start sexual-affective relationships with men she met through sex work and build her own households at the sex work sites without adopting the conventional route of marriage. Chapter 6 discusses this in greater detail, looking at how FSWs' households are composed across the two RLAs in this study.

The brothels also afforded the women the chance to live alone yet be attached to a community which could support them in the process of raising children. This was especially important when women such as Mamata could not get support and space in their natal or marital households to keep and raise their children while they engaged in sex work. Brothels offer informal day-care run by older, retired sex workers, and contacts with women-run boarding and residential schools for children which the women in my study availed themselves of; NGOs also ran run drop-in-centres for sex workers' children which provide educational facilities. However, many women chose to keep their children with them in the brothel, citing the supportive environment as a factor. This is exemplified in Shilpa's story. A 19-year old full-time residential sex worker, Shilpa migrated from Pokhara in Nepal to enter sex work in Kolkata. Citing her status as the oldest child in the family and her ageing parents' dependence on her, she explained that she had entered sex work

to support her younger siblings' education and look after her parents' health. After six months of living alone in a room in the Kalighat RLA she decided to bring over her young brother's second child, Rahul, to live with her:

> I felt alone here. Many women here have children. Children bring laughter and happiness to a home. My brother and his wife already have one child and are both working. So I thought, why not bring Rahul here? But I could only do that because I have help here – these women in the next rooms to me are very fond of Rahul. Most of the time he is with them, very popular! This way I can do my work but still have Rahul with me.

Despite the spatial advantages afforded by life in a RLA, the stigma of full-time residential sex work brought with it tensions in the FSWs' performance of motherhood. Their claim to their children was often contested based on their *baaje choritro* (bad character) by members of natal and marital households, the community and state. The flexibility of living arrangements with men without marriage also increased the social insecurity of FSWs' such as Mamata when unexpected circumstances, viz. pregnancy, arose. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.5.2.3. (Sexual) autonomy-based reasons

Another recurrent reason cited by women who entered sex work after undertaking *onno kaaj* was the prevalence of sexual abuse and harassment across women's experiences in the informal labour market. In her study of women in the daily-wage labour market in Mumbai, Shah (2014:15) highlights how their work is fraught with sexual connotations, even when the nature of the work may not be sexual. The author uses the term 'sexual commerce' to draw links between 'full-time sex work, sex work that is done episodically, and sexual services that are exchanged for paid work'.

This concept of 'sexual commerce' recognises that in the informal labour market, women often use sexuality as a negotiating tool while bargaining for work. Chapter 2 highlighted that women's work outside the home in Bengal has historically been associated with sexual promiscuity. Kabeer (2000) notes how women's participation in work outside the home, apart from white collar jobs, has had contradictory meanings. Additionally, Rao (2012:28) argues that "[women's work] is not included in local notions of femininity (which emphasise domesticity) … [and] is construed as a threat to male honour, causing loss of status to the household'). Consequently, when women work outside the home they are perceived to be sexually available. Women in this research recounted stories of sexual harassment and violence ranging from suggestive propositioning, groping and frisking to rape; stay-at-home domestic help were especially victimised by recurrent sexual violence. The women who recounted these incidents worked in a wide range of jobs in the informal labour force: in the construction industry, as domestic help (cooking, cleaning, child-care, caregiving), and in clerical office jobs. The latter is illustrated by the case of Jharna, a 26-year old part-time FSW from Hooghly (West Bengal), who hired a room in Kalighat during the day to supplement her income as a tutor to primary school children. Jharna had finished her schooling and had a level of education much higher than her peers. After finishing school she trained in clerical work and began to work for a lawyer in Kolkata:

> At first things were okay. But within the first month he started touching me in a bad way. When I resisted, he said if I wanted to do well in the office, rise in my career, I would have to put up with this. I stuck in the job for four months because I liked the work, but it was getting too much. I left work when I got married, but that didn't last – my husband ran away with someone else. I had to return to work to support myself and my daughter, and decided to take this [sex work] up along with teaching children from my neighbourhood in my house. Anywhere else men

would treat me like I am treated here – except here I make more money.

So why go anywhere else? (Jharna, 2014)

Like Jharna, many women emphasised how doing it on their own terms and for more money, where 'it' implied a sexual element to their job, was a big factor in their decision to enter sex work. This highlights that although *kono kaaj* for women might start out in another form of employment, structural violence in the form of sexual abuse and harassment in the informal labour market drives women into sex work. However, Jharna and Priya's experiences also underline how participation in and engagement with sex work can be fluid. Women can flit between different kinds of informal labour, supplementing their income from different kinds of *kaaj* with sex work, a finding that Sahni and Shankar (2011) also note in their survey. Despite entering sex work to regain autonomy vis-à-vis their sexuality, within this the women continued to be exploited sexually, which they accepted for several reasons. This is discussed in Chapter 6.

5.5.2.4 Conclusion

This section has identified and analysed three reasons why women choose to voluntarily enter sex work. These are (i) income-based, (ii) spatially-based and (iii) autonomy-based. In each situation, I have shown how sex work offered better prospects than *onno kaaj*. However, I have also flagged how these reasons did not necessarily have a uniformly positive effect on women's lives. A higher income allowed the women to reclaim space in their natal households but left them feeling used. Spatially, RLAs and brothels afforded women the opportunity to initiate new social relations and build new social networks, which included support with childcare as well as the potential for new domesticity. However, living in the RLA led to the performance of motherhood being stigmatised, and sexual-affective relationships with customers led to further experiences of power imbalance and

violence (discussed in Chapter 6). Finally, although the women voluntarily entered sex work to gain autonomy in the use of their sexuality in their work, situations of sexual exploitation persisted.

5.5.3. Coercive entry into sex work

In this research the women relied on male acquaintances in their communities for work. Often they entered romantic relationships with men alongside the process of looking for work. Their dependency on men without the support and protection of social structures created situations of exploitation.

Women in my study who were sold into sex work described their coerced entry by men they had relied on as the *dhoka* (betrayal) of these relationships. Jasmine was lured into Kolkata by her brother-in-law, Sabina's husband, on the pretext of her mother's ill health and *kaaj*:

> This was when I was back in our village in Bangladesh. Sabina was in her *shoshur bari* [marital household with presence of in-laws]. My *dula-bhai* [brother-in-law] had gone to India for a week. Later we found out he had visited some *lain-bari* [RLAs] during that time and had planned to make money by selling me into it. When he returned to the village, he told Sabina and me that he had travelled to Bashirhat to see my mother. He said that my *ammi* was unwell and was asking me to go and visit her with him. At first I didn't want to go, but he kept saying that she wasn't well and we got worried. So I decided to go. It was a long journey; I was asleep for most of the time. Before leaving he had given me some food, and I think he had mixed something into it, to confuse me maybe. It was night when we arrived in Kolkata. I woke up and knew right away this wasn't Bashirhat. When I asked my *dula-bhai* he said he had got me some *kaaj* but didn't want to tell me this in Bangladesh because he

thought I would say no. When I asked him what kind of work, he said 'It's good work with other women. You'll get paid between four and six thousand a month.' I thought it sounded like good money, and since we were already there, why not see what kind of work it was? I tried asking him more questions, but he said 'Don't call me *dula bhai* here. If you do they won't give you the work'. I found this strange at the time but didn't ask any more questions. We were at a building which looked dark from the outside. I later found out that area was called Park Street. A woman came out to meet us – she took me inside a room and said she wanted to talk to my brother-in-law outside. I went inside and was given some food and water by another woman. I finished everything and kept waiting for my brother-in-law to come back and explain things. After almost an hour the woman came back alone. When I asked her where he was, she said 'He has left. He said he told you what kind of work to do here, and you agreed'. I told her then that it was my brother-in-law and I didn't know much. She said I would learn in time, but before that I needed to rest after a long journey. I went to sleep without knowing what was going to happen to me in the coming days, that I would find out that the *dula bhai* I had trusted would betray me like this. (Jasmine, 2014)

As Jasmine's experience shows, coerced entry into sex work often relies on the implicit *bhorsha* (trust) that is supposed to exist in social relations with members of the household or the wider community. Vulnerability in existing social relations (e.g. worry about Jasmine's mother, fractured relations with natal household members) is exploited to sell women into sex work against their wishes. Men and women who sell women into sex work often pose, as Jasmine's experience shows, as '*dalals (agents)*, removing any familial or personal affiliation to the woman being sold. In Mamata's case, after a terrible fight with her mother and sister-in law she left home in a state of emotional distress. This vulnerability was exploited by a male acquaintance, who sold her into sex work:

I left home crying. The fight was bad. It was Eid and my *borda* (older brother) had bought gifts for everyone. My gift was something small, the worst. When I questioned this, my mother and *boudi* [sister in law] started screaming at me. I said, 'Why should I get something small or less than the others?' My *boudi* started hitting me, saying I should be grateful that they were taking care of me and letting me stay in the house. She said I was a curse on the family. My father was also there that day; he tried protesting but I felt he could have said more. I was really upset that day, seeing how no one stopped her from hitting me on a day like Eid. I packed my clothes in a small bag and left the house. No one tried to stop me. I stopped many times along the road, waiting to see if my father would send anyone. But no one came. I was very upset, I felt all alone. I took a bus to Shyampur *thana* and sat down in front of a cinema. I was crying so much. A man approached me, asked what was wrong. I realised it was a boy from my village – he was a relative of someone who ran a shop in our village. I told him my story and asked him if he could help me find *kono kaaj*. He said he could help me, but I would have trust him as a sister would trust a brother. He was kind and comforting to me at a painful time, so I trusted him with my eyes closed. He kept me at a friend's house in Shyampur for a night. Next morning he took me to a town nearby…I don't remember the name…and he said he had found *kaajer bari* (domestic work) for me. But he had lied to me and betrayed my trust, and he sold me into a brothel. (Mamata, 2014)

Like Jasmine, Mamata's sale into sex work by an acquaintance invoked the implicit trust within kinship – 'I would have to trust him as a sister would trust a brother' – but also exploited her vulnerability and emotional distress at having run away from home. These experiences highlight the importance of considering (i) how the vulnerability that leads to women being sold into sex work is affected by conflict and experiences of violence in existing social relations, and (ii) how processes of

trafficking or sale into sex work make use of the rhetoric of kinship to facilitate trust. The causes behind these women's willingness to look for *kaaj* for socio-economic reasons are connected to the breakdown of social relations, which frames their forced entry into sex work.

For women such as Rahima, marital family members were directly involved in the processes of her coercive entry into sex work. The women were forcibly sold into sex work to stop them from legally challenging experiences of violence and power inequalities in such households. Another example of this was Salma, who had returned to her village in the South 24 Parganas district after escaping from sex work in 2011. Born into a poor Muslim household, Salma had been married at the age of 17 to a man chosen for her by her father from a neighbouring village. Within the first few months of her marriage she had found out that her husband was having an affair with someone else in the village. He started to stay away from home a lot, which led to tension between Salma and her in-laws. Whenever her husband was home she tried to talk to him about how she was being treated or ask about where he had been. These conversations always led to violence:

> He would hit me so much – all the time, day and night. Once we had been to the market together and we were on the way back home. I was trying to talk to him about his family so we stopped on the road before the house, near a pond. He got angry with me and hit me so hard on the head I lost consciousness. He left me there and went away. Some people saw me and tried to revive me with water. Some of them sent word to my *abba* that this had happened to me. It was through people in the village that my natal family came to know how I was being treated by my husband and in-laws. I didn't want to say anything. My *abba* came and took me back to my natal house. I stayed there for six months. But people in our locality, they would taunt me and say things like 'You can't clap with only one hand, she must be to blame, too'. It was very

upsetting. After six months my husband came to collect me, and I persuaded everyone to let me go.

During the process of returning to her marital household Salma's husband smuggled a bottle of poison into her luggage. On her arrival Salma wanted to share the food that her family had packed for her with the household members. When the bottle was discovered she was blamed by her husband for trying to poison him and his in-laws. Salma refuted the allegation and blamed her husband outright. A *shalish* (a social system, involving community elders, to informally resolve disputes in villages) was organised to resolve the argument. Her father sent along an influential member of her village to represent her, and the conflict was resolved in her favour. The committee members asked her husband to divorce her and grant her alimony of 50,000 INR in a month. She returned to her natal household, and after six months of the alimony not being paid her parents decided to seek legal justice. Ultimately this led to her abduction by her husband and sister-in-law and coercively sold into sex work:

> I was in Kolkata one morning for a meeting with a lawyer who had been recommended to my father. In the afternoon I was waiting at the station to catch a train to go back to Canning. A woman approached me and asked if I was interested in some work. She said she was looking for women like me to put to work in people's homes…cooking, cleaning etc. The fees for the court case were increasing, so I thought why not try and get some work. It would also help me make money, get some independence, and help my family, too. I came back home and told my father about it. The woman had given me her details, so we decided to go back to Kolkata to see her. She had asked us to bring my identity card, but when we went with that to Kolkata she said I also had to bring a photograph. So the next week I went alone to see her and she told me to accompany her to the office of the agency which would give me a job.

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We boarded buses and travelled across the city for the whole day. I didn't know Kolkata well back then, but now I know she took around me in circles just to waste time. From the north of the city we travelled South, and then we went to a train station there. The sun was starting to set and I asked her when we would go to the office. She said 'It's late today, we won't go, I'll take you tomorrow. But for now let's eat something'. We ate something at an eatery nearby and I got very disoriented and sleepy after that. I don't remember much after that – but she made me board a train with her. I thought it was the train to Canning, but in the morning when I woke up and I realised we were in Delhi. The woman I was travelling with had already left the train by then, and I was scared and confused about what to do. I sat down somewhere, worried, wondering what to do when I was approached by two people. They turned out to be my husband and sister-in-law! At that point I wasn't talking to anyone in that family, but seeing them there gave me relief. I asked them to help me return to my village. They said they were on their way to Mumbai for some work, and that I could go with them. In Mumbai, someone would help me return. But when we got to Mumbai they sold me into a brothel. I didn't know it was a brothel then, but my husband handed me over to a woman and said, 'Now your [legal] case is over, your life is also over'.

(Salma, 2015)

This account of how Salma was sold coercively into a brothel emphasises some of the points made earlier about how such processes rely on women's search for *kaaj* to gain social and economic independence. Salma had hoped the earnings from her work would help her meet the cost of seeking legal justice for her husband's refusal to pay alimony. The ways in which these processes of coercive entry link to previous experiences of violence and power inequalities in these women's lives echo the 'life-cycle approach' (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005) of violence introduced in section 3.5.

What happened after Jasmine, Mamata and Salma were sold into sex work coercively is discussed in section 6.5.3. Jasmine and Mamata, along with many others in this research who had been coerced into sex work, re-entered it on their own terms after escaping or leaving, as discussed next.

5.5.4. Re-entering sex work voluntarily

After exiting specific sites of sex work in various ways discussed in Chapter 7, many women returned to their natal households. Others such as Jasmine did not know how to make the journey home, especially since it involved crossing an international border into Bangladesh. Given that their first entry into sex work, albeit coerced, had been facilitated by violence and power inequalities within their households, women who returned to their natal households found themselves looking for *kono kaaj* again. Mamata returned to her natal household with a customer who had helped her to escape but was rejected by her mother and family (section 7.3.2). She returned to sex work on her own terms the second time, through social networks in a different brothel in Haldia, left on her father's death and returned once more when she found it too difficult to live in her natal household. From this brothel she was forcibly rescued (section 7.3.1) and placed in the shelter home where I met her.

After re-entering sex work voluntarily, Mamata decided to return home when she heard that her father was very unwell. Between her re-entry and her father falling ill she had initiated a sexual-affective relationship with a customer and was pregnant by him. He had denied responsibility for the child, which had led to the termination of the relationship (section 6.4.3.4). On finding out from a younger brother with whom she had kept in touch that her father was gravely ill, she decided to pack up her belongings and return to her natal home. Given that she had

voluntary entered sex work at this brothel, the owner allowed her to leave after she had paid the rent for the room. While discussing her father's death, Mamata broke down at several points:

> The night my father died it rained so much. It was late evening, so dark, and my uncles dug his grave in the rain – it was a plot of land my father had bought so that all the members of my family and uncles' families would be buried next to their homes. They kept digging the grave and it kept filling up with water. Finally they were able to get it done. That night when I said goodbye to my dear *abba*, I swore on his dead body that I would try to live with my own family, and not run away from here any more. (Mamata, 2014)

Mamata initially began to live in the same living space as her mother and brother's family. She returned to embroidery work to sustain herself and her space in the household. However, she was worried about keeping her pregnancy a secret, and eventually confided in a cousin. The cousin told her mother and it led to a huge fight. Once again, taunts of *baaje meye* (bad girl) were directed at Mamata, who decided then to build a living shelter of her own adjacent to the main house on her father's land (discussed briefly in section 5.3.3). However, after her daughter's birth, with no childcare support she found it increasingly hard to continue:

> When I worked I kept my daughter at my older brother's house and asked my mother and sister-in-law to look after her, calm her if she cried, feed her some milk. But they didn't help. While I worked I could hear my daughter crying for attention, with my mother just a few feet away. She would refuse to pick up my daughter or play with her. Once my daughter was on the bed and was trying to roll over, and she fell over the side of the bed. My mother was right there – she could have stopped my daughter from falling but she didn't care. The way she treated me,

ignored me while I was growing up, she did the same to my daughter. I couldn't bear that. I had put my daughter in the care of the same woman who had given me so much pain my whole life. I decided then to finally leave my house and re-enter sex work. Now, I know – I will never go back.

Mamata's daughter's negligence by her mother sparked memories of her own life-cycle of violence (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005) and struggle with power inequalities in her relationship with her mother, and more broadly with her natal family. When she saw the start of a similar cycle of abuse in her daughter's life it was the final straw. During the interview she was adamant about never returning, saying she would never let what had happened to her happen to her daughter. She confessed that in moments of loneliness, when she missed her partner and some members of her natal household, she would find herself cursing her daughter.

Sometimes when I get angry I curse her and say 'Today because of you I am all alone.' But then I realise none of this is her mistake, and she is all I have in this world. So I pick her up and cuddle her and promise myself that I will always try to make her happy.

Apart from rejection by members of, or persistence of unequal power relations in natal households after exiting sex work, women also re-entered sex work due to the reasons discussed in section 5.5.2. The women tried different kinds of work, but returned to sex work on their own terms for the higher income, spatial advantages and autonomy in negotiations concerning sexuality. Others such as Jasmine decided to take up sex work willingly in a different RLA. The choice of one site of sex work over another was subjective and involved comparisons across material conditions of work, independence in life as a sex worker, etc. In the discussion of entry and re-entry into sex work it is important to highlight that experiences of power inequalities and violence vary across different spaces and sites due to social relations within them. These social relations, in turn, determine

the material conditions of sex work and affect FSWs' quality of life at a particular site. Chapter 6 discusses this in detail, comparing social relations in the Sonagachi and Kalighat RLAs.

Summarising the discussion above in sections 5.3-5.5, below is a diagrammatic representation of my three-step model of the pathway into sex work.

- **Daughter disfavour:**
- (i) embedded within social relations
- (ii) dependent on relationship with male/female head of the household
- (iii) manifesting in 'food discrimination' or withholding
- (iv) affects autonomy within marital relations
- (v) adversely impacts existent culturally precarious claim to natal household post marriage
- (vi) constructs women, especially 'returning women' from failed marriages as *bhaar* or burden
- (vii) creates the need for *kono kaaj* or any work

Step 1:Natal Household

Step 2:Marital Household

- Domestic violence by husband, in-laws, member of the marital households
- Abandonment by husband affecting claim to space within marital household
- Food discrimination
- Spurring return to natal household after dissolution of marital ties
- Reinforcing the need to look for *kono kaaj*

Return to natal household and re-entry

Directly from Step 1 to Step 3

- Voluntary entry into sex work over *onno kaaj*
- Coercive entry into sex work: exploitation feeds off dependence on male acquaintances/ new relationships with men to regain social status
- Re-entry into sex work on own terms after escaping first time:
- (i) rejection by natal households
- (ii) Preference of sex work over *onno kaaj*

Step 3: Search for *kono kaaj* leading to sex work

i. 'Re-entry' implies re-entry into sex work
ii. 'Returning women' imply women returning to natal households after failed marriages

Fig. 5.2: Three-step pathway into sex work model

5.6. Analytical conclusions

5.6.1. Summary

This chapter has introduced and discussed each step of a three-step pathway into sex work. At the centre of this pathway is the analytical theme of *kono kaaj*: the circumstances that lead to the search for *kono kaaj* and the process surrounding

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the search for it feed into and comprise pathways into sex work. The first two steps of the pathway deal with the circumstances that create the need for *kono kaaj*, and the third step outlines the process of looking for *kono kaaj*.

The first step argues that daughter disfavour in the natal household draws from and feeds upon power struggles in the household, which includes male and female members. Gender-based food discrimination as a manifestation of the above is discussed, contesting its linkages to poverty and connecting it to an overall shift in positions and bargaining power in social relations in the natal household. The second step outlines how existing power inequalities for daughters in the natal household can translate into a lack of autonomy in marital arrangements, and experiences of violence in the marital household reinforce pre-existing social and cultural precarities for new brides. On their return to the natal household after the dissolution of marital relations or to combat marital violence, the patriarchally loaded question '*Ke bhaar nebe?' (Who will assume the burden?)* arises, asked not necessarily by the parents but by other family members and the wider community. Community stigmatisation about the woman's failure to maintain a *shongshaar* (marital household) with her husband and in-laws make 'returned brides' feel like a *bhaar,* prompting her to look for *kono kaaj*. The third step shows how this process leads to sex work as a result of the advantages that it offers over *onno kaaj* for creating a fresh start in their lives, and of betrayal in social relations which lead to women being coerced into sex work. Ultimately though, for the many who escape the sex work and choose other kinds of work in the informal labour market, the former's advantages prompt their return to sex work, negotiated on their own terms.

5.6.2. Reflections on experiences of power and violence on pathways into sex work

Throughout the chapter the nature of the power inequalities and violence discussed varies. The heterogeneity of violence encompasses structural, everyday forms of violence, viz. daughter disfavour, to more overt physical, psychological and sexual violence. Power inequalities feed into women being unable to speak up about the violence or to leave an abusive situation. A common refrain across the various stories which describe differing forms of violence, is the *vocabulary* with which respondents describe violence. *Koshto*, a Bengali word for pain, appeared frequently in the interviews as a term for the different forms of violence discussed in this chapter. Women in the research used this word to describe, primarily, violence that had emerged from the breakdown of social relations, but also violence in situations of employment. Another commonality in experiences of violence was the nature of the violence and the power inequalities that they experienced, which were embedded in social relations across the household, community, and market. In her ethnography on aging and gender as dimensions of personhood in West Bengal, India, Lamb (1997:283) argues that the subjects of her study (residents of the village Mangaldihi in the state of West Bengal), felt themselves to be 'inherently relational, each person functioning as a nexus in a "net" (*jal*) of ties shared with people (especially kin), places, and things' (p.283). The word *maya*, a 'polyvalent term often translated by scholars as "illusion", but locally more often equated with affects such as attachment, affection, compassion, love' is used to describe these relations. The concept of *maya* includes material, emotional and sentimental dimensions (ibid). In section 5.4.2, Mumtaz refers to her feelings of *maya* for her violent, abusive husband as a reason for not leaving him earlier. Mumtaz's prioritisation of her attachment to her husband and desire to not confide in her natal

family about the ongoing violence is a reminder of Lamb's (1997) argument about the difference in the ways social relations are constituted for men and women in West Bengal. This chapter highlights how women's experiences of power inequalities and violence in their lives, which lead them into sex work, are located in this making and umaking of relational ties; when men unmake ties to the women in their lives that are supposed to be lifelong (fatherhood, marriage), as the men in my respondents' lives did, the women fall through the social security net and become vulnerable to financial and social exploitation.

Lamb (1997) highlights how an 'ideal' woman, according to the predominant patriarchal and patrilineal discourse in Mangaldihi, is 'malleable like clay, to be cast into a shape of his choice'. The casting of shapes for women in Bengali society as daughters, daughters-in-law, wives, mothers, etc., often includes experiences of violence and power inequalities, as it did for the women in this research. These experiences, which strengthened their pathway into sex work, were influenced strongly by the choices fathers, brothers, husbands and other men in their lives made, and by the women who drew their social identities from these men (mothers, step mothers, sisters-in-law, mothers-in law, etc.). The particularity of the experiences (and the women's responses to them) that trigger entry into sex work can vary. Dodsworth (2015) argues that along with the actual nature of violence experienced in social and situational aspects of life, the *meanings* ascribed to these experiences reveal how individuals construct their decisions and manage their identity as a sex-worker, and how much resilience they can exhibit in the management of their life in sex work. Thinking of *pathways into sex work as a process which includes the subjective meanings women assign to experiences of violence in their lives* is more useful than trying to pinpoint specific acts of violence or expressions of power inequalities which can never be generalised across all women who enter sex work.

Thinking of pathways into sex work as a process of experiencing and negotiating with violence and power inequalities which is embedded in the making and unmaking of relational ties also echoes Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) life-cycle approach to violence. This conceptual link reflects in the experiences of violence in women's lives. The making, unmaking and remaking of social ties in women's lives that create pathways into sex work continue in their lives in sex work. In the latter, experiences of everyday violence and power inequalities remain embedded in the new bonds that are created and dissolved. This is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Everyday power inequalities and violence in red-light areas

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 discussed how pathways into sex work are affected by experiences of power inequalities and violence in social relations in the household, located within the unmaking and remaking of relational ties in a patrilineal, patrivirilocal society (Lamb, 1997). This chapter discusses how the above argument extends to and continues in women's lives in the RLAs of Kalighat and Sonagachi in Kolkata. This answers my second research question: *How do social relations in the red-light area affect female sex workers' experiences of power inequalities and violence?* This is answered through a discussion and analysis of social relations stretched across institutions in the RLAs, and by locating experiences and negotiations with power and violence in these relations.

This chapter describes, discusses and analyses the nature of violence and power inequalities experienced by current FSWs in RLAs in Kolkata. Chapter 1 discussed how the association of violence within sex work with the anti-trafficking and HIV/AIDS discourses has led to the exceptionalising of FSWs' experiences. In response to that, this chapter aims to unexceptionalise the nature of violence and power inequalities in RLAs. Through the adoption and analysis of Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework, this chapter argues that institutional overlaps in social relations shape the nature of, and negotiations with, power inequalities and violence in the lives of FSWs' in RLAs.

Section 6.2 provides an overview of organisations in the RLAs in this research, and the institutions they represent. Sections 6.3 and 6.4 discusses the characteristics of these organisations within first Kalighat and then Sonagachi, looking at how

organisational characteristics overlap to affect FSWs' lives. Section 6.5 analyses what the overlaps reveal about FSWs' experiences of power and violence, and their negotiations with these experiences.

Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework has been discussed in detail in section 3.5, Kabeer (ibid) defines institutions as a framework of rules to achieve certain economic and social goals in the production, reinforcement and reproduction of social relations. Using this framework, this chapter locates and analyses experiences of power inequalities and violence in institutional overlaps in the lives of FSWs. Specifically, the analysis is concerned with how crossovers between members, rules, activities, resources and power across different organisations in the RLAs affect and shape the nature of violence and power experienced by brothel-based full-time FSWs. North (1990, quoted in Kabeer, 1994) defines organisations as the specific structural forms that institutions take.

Across the RLAs of Kalighat and Sonagachi, organisations such as the FSWs' families, the brothels, NGOs and the police are specific structural forms that the institutions of the household, market, community and state take on. The rules, members, activities and resources of these organisations cross spatial boundaries and overlap with others in many specific and particular ways, affecting the FSWs' negotiations with power and violence. This is discussed in the next section.

6.2. Social Relations within red light areas: An overview

Chapter 2 discussed how the impetus to protect British Army soldiers from the spread of venereal disease led to the zoning of RLAs in certain parts of Kolkata. RLAs in Indian cities exist as spaces where the norms on sexual and money-making behaviour are bent and subverted but also regulated, as this chapter

shows. Chapter 5 discussed how women who enter sex work usually do so because it affords them the space to live out their ambivalent, liminal social identities. RLAs offer the opportunity for women to live alone or cohabit with unmarried men and with their children from previous relationships. It offers them accommodation which is not tied to the natal and marital households, yet provides opportunities for communal childcare support. The women who live and work in RLAs are perceived as 'other', as women who have lost their place in socially-approved relationships with men and their families. Despite and because of this 'otherness', the women's social relationships in the RLAs in this research continued to draw from and model themselves on traditional, socially-desirable and normative kinship structures. The tension between the desire for normative social relationships by women within sex work, and the opportunities afforded to men in RLAs to purchase sex and break societal expectations of monogamy, sexual fidelity and financial and logistical provision for women, lies at the heart of experiences of power and violence in social relations in these spaces. Relationships *between* women in sex work, too, are affected by similar concerns. This chapter delves into a discussion of these kinds of tension in social relations across Kalighat and Sonagachi.

6.3. Kalighat: Organisational characteristics and social relations

6.3.1. Introduction

Section 4.4 highlights how the Kalighat RLA is nested in a middle-class neighbourhood (*para*), in South Kolkata. Donner (2016a) argues that '[f]or Calcuttans, *paras* are very significant spaces in the lives of women' (p.9). In her research on social relations in the lives of middle-class women in Kolkata, the author observes that 'conversations about a specific para and its role in women's

lives…are often related to behavioural codes and ideas about femininity and proper conduct'. The middle-class norms that shape the Kalighat *para* and the middle-class households within it also affect the ways in which FSW households are composed, the material conditions of sex work and the role played by the community and state in the lives of the women who live and work in the area. The norms of Bengali middle-class *bhadralok* culture, especially ideas about sexual propriety, the importance of domesticity and marriage (discussed in Chapter 2) in women's lives affects FSWs' lives, identities and social relations in the RLA, even while the nature of their work is perceived as a subversion of all of the above.

This dichotomy, and its underlying tensions, manifested during the fieldwork through repeated references to the *ghorer-bou* (housewife) in conversations with women living and working in the RLA. In interviews, group conversations and chats over tea, the *ghorer-bou* kept appearing, invoked as an ideal and an alternative, as well as a symbol of threat to the lives and identities of the FSWs. 'She', the *bou*, was ubiquitous in the neighbourhood: dressed in minimal makeup, light-coloured chiffon and *tangail* sarees (cotton sarees typically produced and worn by Bengali women in Eastern India and Bangladesh), usually accompanied by children, buying groceries or stationery supplies, always on the move. It was this appearance of constant purposeful mobility which distinguished her from her counterpart, the FSW on Kalighat Road. Sinha and Dasgupta (2009) suggest that the practice of women standing in lines in public spaces, soliciting customers, lies behind the local Bengali word for a brothel: *lainer-bari* (line-house) (p.8). Women standing or sitting around in apparently purposeless stasis, are deemed available for sexual services or simply to be stared and pointed at by men of all ages walking down the street. This binary between the perception of a good woman on the move in public spaces and a bad one hanging around, claiming public space and inviting public attention, challenges the societal perception of female mobility as always transgressive. Shah

(2014) refers to this in her study of daily wage labourers in Mumbai, where she observes that by simply inhabiting public space in the company of men not related to them, female daily wage labourers are considered sexually available. In the prologue to *Why Loiter: Women and Risk on Mumbai's streets* (2011:vii), Phadke et al. invite readers to imagine a city where street corners are full of women hanging out, engaged in discussion of a variety of topics, a 'radically different city' where there is not an 'unspoken assumption that a loitering woman is up to no good'. In the Kalighat RLA, a space fraught with the dichotomy between respectability and sexual subversion, the association of sexual availability with the act of hanging out in public space was amplified. As an unaccompanied young Bengali woman not sporting marital symbols, I too received inquiring looks from pedestrians, especially men, including police stationed at the entrance to the RLA. On a particular day, I decided to squat on a low stool on the footpath to speak to some FSWs who were sitting around chatting, some waiting for prospective clients. Two of the five women were retired sex workers aged over 60, and I was chatting with them about their life stories. During the two hours that I sat there, apparently loitering, I was stared and hooted at by groups of young men. Apart from the personal discomfort I experienced, I was concerned that my presence was impairing the business prospects of the women in the group, but was assured it was not something they had a problem with. Another time, I met a group of women on the street the day after being introduced to them by Bandana in their homes. The women were dressed in chiffon sarees and wearing heavy makeup, which distinguished them from other women in the area on a hot September afternoon, and were in the mood for a chat. As I stopped to talk to them, one of them showed me an aloe-vera stem from the tree that grew next to her house and began telling me about the benefits of its use for my skin. As I stood there facing the women with my back to the street, I started to become aware of an escalation of noise behind me. One of the women, 32-year old Rima, leaned over and murmured 'You are standing here, talking to us.

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All the housewives are staring.' I shrugged it off, saying it did not bother me but that I would move if it was making them feel uncomfortable. However, Rima's comment had touched a nerve in the group. Suddenly, the discussion turned to the hypocrisy rife in Bengali *bhadralok* society, where men and boys pay for sexual services but they, along with their female relatives continue to judge and stigmatise FSWs. This sense of anger and injustice at being alienated and stigmatised by the *ghorer-bou* and her world, however, existed simultaneously with a desire among FSWs to emulate that very world through their social relationships and identities. This was strengthened by the fact that a lot of the women in this research entered sex work after social relations in their households went awry, as discussed in Chapter 5. The desire to set up a similar, familiar social structure in the RLA, therefore, which would provide them with comfort, strength, care and a sense of belonging, could be read as yearning for what they had lost. However, the attempt to try and establish a conventional household and build social relations modelled on kinship structures in a space that subverts social norms gave rise to a fair amount of tension, experiences of violence and power struggles of its own. Sections 6.3.2–6.6 take a closer look at how this dichotomy played out in the FSWs' social relations across households, the market, and their relationships with the community and state. First, the physical nature of FSWs' households is discussed, followed by a description of the material conditions of sex work. This is followed by an analysis of how residential full-time FSWs' prioritise relationships with their children, and the establishment of long-term relationships with customers within their household composition. The final subsection explores the roles that community and state organisations, viz. NGOs and the police, play in this process.

6.3.2. Female sex workers' households

Brothel households in Kalighat are embedded in the *golis* (narrow lanes) on either side of Kalighat Road. Entry to these lanes is usually guarded by women soliciting customers, especially after 11 am every day. As a customer one can enter these passageways, since women also sit outside on the doorsteps to their households waiting for customers. As a woman, though, I was often asked where I was going or who I wanted to see, and why. Usually the peer worker, Bandana, would be a few steps ahead or behind, talking to her peers during her daily field visits, and I would gesture at her to indicate that I was not on my own. However, when I was able to strike up conversations with women after being introduced to them by Bandana I could often negotiate time alone with them, sitting at the doorsteps and chatting with them about their lives. Inevitably, this led to some uncomfortable encounters with men, but they were often shouted at or warned off by the other women around. So despite the openness of the red-light communities to the outside public, access to certain spaces within them was conditional. Similarly, there were unspoken codes in place about how FSWs could dress and how customers were expected to behave, as discussed in section 6.3.3.

Two types of accommodation are available to residential full-time FSWs. The first is the single-room *paaka* house i.e. a permanent structure built of bricks, mortar and lime. These rooms vary in length and width – of the rooms I visited, the largest was 15x6 ft, and the smallest measured 6x4 ft (approximate values). Staple furniture in these rooms was a bed and a steel wardrobe. Shelving units varied based on the space available. The décor comprised pictures of the FSWs' children as well as large posters of Hindu gods and goddesses, even in the rooms of women who identified as Muslim. Television sets were common (varying in size and quality) – their importance is discussed in section 4.6.2.3. The lighting was usually dim, and often the regular yellow bulb would be switched for green or pink in the evening, when visits from customers were more frequent. The larger rooms had ceiling fans, but the residents possessed *haat pakhas*, traditional locally-crafted hand fans made

of materials such as bamboo, cane and straw, often decorated with beads or sequins. The single rooms were joined in a row with 4-5 rooms next to it. These interconnected rooms looked out onto a common courtyard with toilets for use by everyone. This space, as well the space in front of the entryway was used to cook food and prepare tea on kerosene pressure stoves.

The second variety of accommodation available is *kaacha* houses, or temporary structures erected out of straw and clad with tarpaulins (for waterproofing). These spaces are large enough to accommodate four to six single beds and are for FSWs who use the space for work and to live in but have homes and family in and around Kolkata to return to every fortnight. In their absence, their beds and the accompanying storage tables next to each are rented out to other women. These temporary residential shelters are sparsely decorated and usually lit by a solitary bulb.

As mentioned above, a factor that influenced the choice of accommodation for the women who entered sex work in Kalighat was (i) claim to space in natal/marital households, and (ii) the availability of child support in their natal/marital households. Most women in *pakka* houses lived with their children, who were schooled in educational centres run by NGOs in the area during the day. An exception was 19-year-old Mohua, who lived on her own in a *pakka* house. Mohua was younger than most of her neighbours, who were in their late 20s/early 30s. It was hard to obtain an interview with her since she was asleep for almost the entire day, and in the evenings and at night would go to Park Street to work as a flying sex worker. One reason for this was that the Kalighat RLA was not as profitable as its bigger and more lucrative counterpart, Sonagachi. For its younger residents, more money could be made by working in hot spots around the city such as Park Street. However, despite this Kalighat was the preferred destination for young women such as Shilpa (introduced in section 5.5.2.2) and Mohua; Chapter 5 noted that RLAs offered women entering the informal labour market a place of residence unattached

to natal or marital household obligations. Additionally, it provides women with a supportive community in which to raise their children, as I noted in Shilpa's case. Despite the relatively lower income from sex work, the women I met in Kalighat remained adamant about the material conditions of work in its RLA being better in many ways than that in Sonagachi. The next subsection discusses this.

6.3.3. The market and the *bhadralok*: Material conditions of selling sex in Kalighat

One of the most significant influences of *bhadralok* culture on the material conditions of selling sex in the Kalighat RLA was on attire: women selling sex in Kalighat had to wear the *saree* while soliciting for customers. This is quite unlike the other RLA in my fieldwork or other, similar areas I had visited during my work with anti-human trafficking organisations in Bangladesh. When I brought this up with Jasmine (introduced in section 5.3.4) during our interview, she explained that it was the rule there:

> This is a *bhadralok-er para* [neighbourhood of respectable men and women]. *Kali Ma*'s temple is also nearby. Here, we have to dress respectably. We cannot wear skimpy clothes.

When I asked Jasmine what would happen if they broke this dress code, she said, '*Para-r chelera mere felbe* (the local boys will kill us)'. In several ways, then, this RLA was strictly regulated by ideas of honour, respectability and an idea of femininity that framed other Kolkata neighbourhoods (Donner, 2016a). In recent times, debate and discussion about curbing sexual violence in India have tended to focus on what women (including female tourists) should wear to avoid provocation of any sort (BBC, 2016); the FSWs in Kalighat were no exception to this rule.

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Despite what might appear as an external imposition, many women that I interviewed during my fieldwork asserted that the relative normality of life in the Kalighat RLA had influenced their decision to live and work there. Apart from the familiarity of the dress code, the visible absence of madams and pimps from everyday life was a strong factor in the women's choosing this particular RLA in the city to sell sex. Jasmine, who had been sold to a madam in a brothel on Park Street (see section 5.5.3), had escaped the brothel and re-entered sex work in Kalighat. When I asked her why, she said:

> Fate brought me here that night. I told the taxi driver to take me to a *lain-bari* [brothel] because I felt unsafe. I was wearing *chotto jama-kapor* [skimpy clothes] and was afraid that men on the streets would rape me, or that I would get arrested. He dropped me off here [Kalighat] I saw other women and girls on the street and felt safe. But I was worried about where I would go, what I would do next. I sat down in front of a *goli* (lane) and started crying loudly. An old woman came out of her house and asked me what was wrong. When I told her what I had been through and how I had nowhere to go, she said, '*Beti* [daughter], do you want to work here? You can rent your own room here, and pay rent from what you earn.' I was surprised to hear her say that – I was used to always being controlled by a madam in the previous brothel. I thought – if I can live alone, do this kind of work in my own way…then why not? I would go home once I had enough money saved and a place here of my own.

The absence of a complex hierarchy of labour relations among the madams and pimps in Kalighat allowed women such as Jasmine to start anew in sex work on their own terms. However, the absence of this infrastructure was also cited as the reason for the market being *baaje (*bad). Without the support and social network of pimps and madams, women had to solicit for customers themselves. Customers

were drawn from the immediate pool of male visitors to the RLA – most men in the area were blue collar workers, therefore sex was sold at low prices. The bad market conditions also meant that young FSWs such as Mohua had to solicit for customers elsewhere – as flying sex workers, they had to accompany customers to a venue of their choice, rendering them vulnerable to more harm and violence than in the RLA. But younger FSWs in the RLA also resorted to pickpocketing and drugging customers and stealing their valuables (wallet, watches, etc.), which caused confrontational situations with the police (see section 6.3.5). In an RLA where (respectable behaviour) is prioritised, money-making activities such as this are frowned upon, especially by residential full-time FSWs in their late 20s to late 40s. These women also complained about how their relationships with their customers were being ruined by the practice of *shoter-kaaj* (the instant sexual gratification of customers, often entailing oral sex) for quick money by younger women in the area. For FSWs in their late 20s such as Jasmine, Sabina and Manjira, and other older FSWs that I spoke to, selling sex also encompassed developing an emotional relationship with customers. This included activities such as cooking for them, eating together and chatting about their everyday lives. As Chapter 4 notes, cooking meals for customers (and the women's children) was an important activity in these women's day: it was often the activity that they started their day with, and provided opportunities for me to discuss what they were cooking and why.

During an interview with Sabina (introduced in section 5.3.4) one morning, I watched her preparing *shapla chingri ghonto*, a curry with small shrimps (*kucho chingri*) and water-lily stalks (*shapla*) in a thick mustard paste. As I watched, she explained to me the role of food (and preparing food) in relationship-building with customers:

> These men, our customers, come to us in the middle or at the end of the
>
> work day. When they pay, they want what a woman can give them – and

that isn't just sex. It's also food, conversation, just a little bit of *aaram* (pleasure), you know. I have so many customers who praise my food, and sometimes they only come to eat. Before they leave they give me money for next time and tell me what I should prepare for them. This dish I am making is a favourite of many customers – when you're poor and grow up in a village here you eat this food a lot. It must be just right, you know, otherwise the customers will not be happy with me!

Shapla (water-lily stalks) are one of the main vegetables that women in Kalighat cook with. This vegetable and its companion food items: *kucho chingri* (small shrimp), and *gugli* (small snails) are perceived as inexpensive yet good sources of protein. 'In Bengali cuisine, these three would form part of "poor people's food"' explains Poorna Banerjee, a food blogger from Kolkata. *Shapla* is a wildly-growing plant that can be foraged from nearby water bodies, e.g. ponds, riverbanks and paddy fields. Sabina described how this vegetable is freely available and that its combination with small shrimp is 'very healthy': the two certainly play a role in its ubiquity in the RLA. Since FSWs in Kalighat work through the day they often cannot visit vegetable markets at the usual times. '*Kuchochingri* has longevity and is available in large quantities, and often remains after the end of the market day, when sex workers may be able to obtain it' (Banerjee, 2016).

As a dish, *shapla chingri* is connected to the festivities surrounding *Durga Pujo*, the worship of the goddess Durga, in RLAs. In Sonagachi, in an interview with the peer worker and retired sex worker Subarna, she mentioned that she had cooked *shapla chingri* that morning. Subarna explained that although it was her favourite dish to prepare and eat, she often refrained from doing so during the period between *bisarjan* (when the Durga idol is immersed in the river Ganges to mark her return to her partner, Shiva) and the worship of Lakshmi and the Saraswati, daughters of Durga and goddesses of wealth, education and the arts.

These festivals in West Bengal take place later in winter, usually in November and February, and usually follow the Durga Pujo celebration in September/October.

> There is a story that after her *bisarjan* Durga is unable to return to Shiva right away. Instead she lives on within pollen and threads inside the *shapla* plant – that is why we don't eat that plant till some months later. (Subarna, 2014)

This dish, which is cooked for customers as a part of sexual labour in Kalighat (and Sonagachi), reveals cultural, social and economic aspects of the lives of socio-economically marginalised women in this eastern region of the subcontinent. It symbolises nostalgia for their lives before their entry into sex work; embodies cultural and religious significance for the women who cooked it, and forms part of the sexual labour performed. Furthermore, the importance of cooking, for these women and their peers, places the nature of selling sex in Kalighat in a larger environment of domesticity and housework, which reiterates how market conditions in this RLA drew on *bhadralok* attitudes towards women's work. However, it was clear during the fieldwork that in both RLAs, especially Sonagachi, which has a larger contingent of younger FSWs than Kalighat, that this influence is waning. Both Sabina and Subarna acknowledged this during their interviews:

> I see these young women: they dress up, get customers, offer oral sex and move on. Sometimes they harass their customers for more money – they do *chinn tai* [pickpocketing/snatching money and valuables] on the streets, and this angers me so much. We built relationships with our customers – we respected them and they respected us. If we agreed on an amount beforehand, there was no argument about it. All this seems to be lost on these new generations of girls, though.
> (Subarna, 2014)

In the food I cook I put a bit of myself – my sweat, my love. I share it with my customers. I also give it to my children when they visit and I eat it myself. Customers are like family to us, and this food builds bonds. I don't think the young girls cook any more – I don't think they even know how to! It's a faster kind of life, kind of work – I feel sad about it. (Sabina, 2014)

The next subsection continues to look at how the influence of *bhadralok* culture, especially the importance of domesticity, affects FSWs' household composition, especially their relationships with their customers and children.

6.3.4. *The shongshaar* and the brothel: Motherhood and relationships with customers

The importance of domesticity and middle-class morality on the material conditions of work extended to the ways in which social relations were formed and prioritised in the lives of the women who sold sex in Kalighat. I have already discussed how a domestic task such as cooking was considered an important part of the performance of sexual labour, especially by middle-aged and resident FSWs. There was also an emphasis on trying to build or create a *shongshaar* (household) in the RLA, modelling this on conventional patriarchal Bengali households. Long-term sexual-affective relationships with customers were perceived as a way to either establish a *shongshaar* in the RLA or to exit sex work and re-establish a *shongshaar* outside. Such partners started out as casual customers or men living in the RLA. On expressing their romantic feelings with an offer of marriage (a *shongshaar*), they present FSWs with the opportunity to start an intimate relationship which could lead to marriage and their eventual exit from sex work.

However, FSWs who left the RLA through this kind of relationship often returned when the relationship broke down due to violence, power struggles with in-laws, economic problems or abandonment. Most of the women I spoke to who had been in sex work for more than six months had been through this process at least once already, and preferred establishing a *shongshaar* with their children (usually from previous marriages) and a long-term customer in the RLA. Even those who had not experienced this were keener to hold on to their economic and social space and security in the RLA while initiating a *shongshaar* with long-term customers.

Jasmine and Sabina's experiences in the RLA exemplified these attitudes towards setting up a *shongshaar*. In her first two-and-a-half years of working in Kalighat Jasmine fell in love with a customer. His mother was a retired sex worker living in the area, and she approved of her son's decision to marry Jasmine and set up a household outside the RLA. However, the approval was conditional – she wanted Jasmine to help her son to establish himself financially. This sparked the eventual end of the relationship:

> She came and asked me to help my future husband economically – to give him money so he could buy a second-hand taxi. I was happy that she was willing to let her son marry me and I wanted to help. I went to the NGO bank and withdrew all my savings. *Didi* [older sister, referring to a peer worker] warned me against it. She said 'You are harming yourself'. But I was madly in love, didn't want to listen. I gave him the money, but in another two months both mother and son wanted more. Meanwhile, no talk of marriage or leaving the *lain-bari* was mentioned. I began to realise that this mother-son duo was trying to ruin me. Take all my money and leave me penniless. I didn't want to let that happen, so I ended it.

Jasmine's failed attempt at leaving sex work through the initiation of a *shongshaar* outside made her reconsider which social relations to prioritise in her household. She decided to shift her focus to mothering her twin daughter and son, conceived during her life as a sex worker:

> After that experience I was very upset. I decided then that I would stop
> trying to chase men, to fall in love, to get married. Instead I am happy
> in this four-walled room with my children. Now all I do is for them, their
> future…and for mine. Don't need a *lok* (man) or *bhalobaasha* (love)
> any more. (Jasmine, 2014)

Jasmine's prioritisation of motherhood over love and romantic/marital partnerships with men was echoed in Sabina's decision to stay in the RLA despite her partner's family's attempt to make her leave. Like Jasmine, Sabina had met her partner through sex work. Both relationships started when the men expressed romantic feelings for the women and a desire to marry them and set up a *shongshaar* outside the RLA. Having witnessed Jasmine's experience, and with memories of her own failed marriage (discussed in section 5.3.4 in the previous chapter), Sabina decided to continue selling sex in the RLA even after marrying him. Her partner's relationship with her son from her first marriage and her concerns about how the latter would be treated by her partner's family played a big role in her decision to maintain her household in the RLA:

> I've seen how he (her partner) is with my son. He treats him like he is
> of the same blood – my son idolises him and is very attached to him.
> When [the customer] asked me to marry him, I was unsure. I didn't
> want to get into a second marriage – but my son coaxed me into it. I
> know my son needs a father, and I decided to go ahead with it. But
> when his family asked me to leave sex work and move in with them, I

didn't. I knew they wouldn't accept my son as readily as my husband
did.

Sabina's decision to continue selling sex despite her marriage caused tension with her in-laws. Her decision was also influenced by her partner's economic instability.

> The day he is capable of supporting my son and me I will happily leave this place. But I have to think of our future – my son's and mine. This money from this work, it's everything we have. So I will stay as long as I need to. (Sabina, 2014)

Sabina's experiences highlight how despite the offer of marriage, a *shongshaar* and the promise of an exit from sex work, many women decide to continue living in the RLA. At the heart of this decision is the desire to not be a *bhaar* on anyone again. Having experienced social and economic insecurity in their natal and marital households, as discussed in Chapter 5, many women echoed Sabina's trepidation at leaving sex work. One of these was Chumki (introduced in section 5.4.3), who strongly rejected the idea of looking for romantic relationships with customers:

> I am here to earn money, for myself and my child. I am not here for *bhalobaasha* [love], or *biye* [marriage]. If my *kopaal* [fate] is good, I might find someone at some point. But not from men here – that will be the start of all trouble.

Despite Chumki's divorce from her first husband and refusal to initiate romantic relationships with customers, Chumki wore *shindur* (vermillion) and the *shankha pola* (marital symbols in Bengal society). When I asked her why, she said 'It's *saaj* (dressing up). A woman looks beautiful with *sindur* and *shanka pola*. This helps me

attract customers and keeps me safe, too'. Chumki's strategic deployment of marital symbols as a form of self-defence while adopting aspects of bridal beauty in Bengal society to attract customers strongly underlines how social norms are both adhered to yet bent within the space of the RLA. By adopting the image of a *ghorer-bou* in her life as an FSW, Chumki amplified the collision of two seemingly disparate yet substantively similar worlds in the space of the Kalighat RLA.

Another commonality between the world of the *ghorer-bou* and that of the FSW in Kalighat is the importance of motherhood. As Jasmine and Sabina's experiences show, children from previous marriages or conceived during life in sex work are an important part of FSW households in Kalighat. Like Chumki, some women chose to keep their children with their parents in their natal households and visited them occasionally. But these, as I have already established, were women who were not fully residential in the RLA. However, despite good relations with their natal household, some women like Shilpa brought their children from the natal household to the RLA to help ease loneliness and provide a sense of comfort and belonging. This is particularly illustrated by the case of Rima, a 22-year-old full-time residential FSW. Born into a village in the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, Rima entered sex work with her parents' knowledge after being abandoned by her husband. She left her one-year-old daughter with her parents, who agreed to raise the child and soon developed a close bond with her. Despite the childcare support she received from her parents, which was quite rare for other FSWs such as Mamata, Rima regretted her decision:

> When my husband abandoned me I decided to come to Kolkata to look
> for work. I was worried about my daughter, but my parents decided to
> formally adopt her. It would make it easier for her to have a father figure
> in the house to grow up around. I was relieved then, but it's been two
> years here and this life gets lonely. Customers come and go, and

sometimes I just wish I had a child to raise here. My parents love my daughter, they don't want to give her to me. But I too want a child. There's no meaning to this life if there isn't a child to feed, to raise, to dream for.

During the interview Rima asked me repeatedly if I could help her to adopt a child. Rima's yearning for a child 'to feed, to raise, to dream for' highlights how motherhood in the lives of FSWs is perceived to impart purpose or meaning to a life lived in subversion and framed by social marginalisation. However, FSWs' performance of motherhood is under-researched. In *Mothers for Sale*, Sinha and Dasgupta (2009:15) argue that 'among the diverse analyses of sex work and sex workers in recent years, only a few have focused on these women as mothers. Furthermore, 'when sex workers themselves have spoken as political subjects, they have underscored their rights or lack thereof as citizens in a democratic state as well as other oppressions and deprivations. Their identities as mothers and relationships with their children have generally remained private and hidden. Yet, most sex workers are also mothers' (ibid).

While agreeing on the lack of focus on FSWs as mothers in academic research, I do not agree that motherhood in the lives of FSWs has remained private. On the contrary, my fieldwork unearthed several instances of motherhood being revoked by community and state representatives in RLAs. This, and FSWs' dependence on their natal and marital households to raise their children, created experiences of power inequalities and violence. Motherhood was also deployed by FSWs to negotiate various forms of violence, viz. stigma and power struggles with the community and the state. These experiences and negotiations are analysed in the last section of this chapter. The next subsection discusses the role played by NGOs and the police in FSWs' attempts to establish a *shongshaar* in the Kalighat RLA.

6.3.5. The role of NGOs and the police: Protection and support

Chapter 4 noted the presence of two NGOs in the Kalighat RLA: a sex workers' collective and an organisation working with the children of sex workers. In addition to this, the police, were omnipresent at the entrance to the RLA due to the residence of the West Bengal Chief Minister being close by. In their interviews, most FSWs told me that they perceived the police as supportive, with some exceptions. Overall the NGOs, too, were seen as supportive: assisting FSWs with resolving conflicts in the community or helping with childcare. However, motherhood as a social relationship became a site for power struggles between the FSWs and NGOs.

The police were viewed as largely sympathetic. Bandana explained that confrontations with the police largely arose when younger women in the RLA allegedly harassed customers for more money than was agreed, or indulged in petty theft. There are rules about FSWs not soliciting in front of or near the Chief Minister's residence. However, young girls who repeatedly transgress these rules are arrested:

> These policemen…they don't like putting our girls in jail. They say, 'We
> know. The women here are doing this out of desperation. To fill their
> stomachs...*pete-r jalaye*. That's why we tell these young girls to
> respect their customers. But who will listen? They constantly get into
> trouble, soliciting in front of the Chief-Minister's house, doing *chinn-tai*
> (pickpocketing); sometimes they sell drugs to customers too. All this is
> really unnecessary. They get arrested, and we have to go get them
> out, every time. (Bandana, 2014)

Bandana's examples of confrontations with the police highlight the precarious terrain of illegality occupied by FSWs in India. Section 1.2 highlighted that while individuals' sale of sex is not criminalised within the Indian legal system, the commercial organisation of sex work, soliciting, etc., is. The spatial transgression of soliciting close to the Chief Minister's house, away from the main Kalighat Road, and harassing customers was considered worthy of penalisation by the police. However, women I spoke to also mentioned that the that the police foster sex work by sharing in the profits. On the pretext of curbing the sale and use of alcohol and drugs, policemen target younger FSWs and demand hefty bribes in exchange for letting them work. And although the madams and brothel landlords are largely inconspicuous in the public spaces in Kalighat, they allegedly pay a certain percentage of each room's rent to the police. However, despite this structural form of corruption, the women I spoke to echoed Bandana's sentiments: as long as certain unspoken respectable codes of behaviour are adhered to, confrontations with the police are avoidable.

6.3.6. Conclusion

This section has explored how FSWs' social relations in the Kalighat RLA draw from the *bhadralok* Bengali culture of the wider neighbourhood and society it is embedded in. It has discussed how this affects FSWs' attire, aspirations, and the nature of their relationships with customers and with their children. The analysis of how FSWs build their *shongshaar* in the RLA has highlighted that the Kalighat RLA exists as a space which, despite seeming socially subversive, continues to produce its own codes of morality and respectability in sexual and money-making behaviour. The next section discusses and analyses social relations in Sonagachi.

6.4. Sonagachi: Organisational characteristics and social relations

6.4.1. Introduction

Unlike Kalighat, Sonagachi is identifiable in the global imagination and perception as a RLA. A complex hierarchy of labour relations including madams, pimps, brothel owners, etc. in the RLA affects the ways in which FSWs can compose their households, and which social relations they prioritise. Despite the above and the absence of a strong middle-class *bhadralok* culture framing the lives of FSWs in Sonagachi (unlike Kalighat), FSWs' social relations continue to draw on traditional household structures.

In her discussion of the sociology and legal ethnography of sex work in Sonagachi (and broadly, Kolkata), Kotiswaran (2008:583) seeks to problematise the 'assumption in feminist theory of the monolithic character of stakeholders in the sex industry such as "the sex worker" or "the brothel keeper" or "the landlord"'. The author does this by adopting a stakeholder approach and informing this with a Foucauldian understanding of power. The stakeholder approach implies 'an approach, a tool or set of tools for generating knowledge about actors-individuals and organizations – so as to understand their behavior, intentions, interrelations and interests; for assessing the influence and resources they bring to bear on decision-making or implementation processes' (Varvasovszky and Brugha, 2000:338, cited in Kotiswaran, 2008:583).

Kotiswaran's (2008) argument offers a good framework within which to situate the discussion of social relations in Sonagachi. This analysis looks at how labour relations in Sonagachi become imbued and invested with emotional expectations

of loyalty, submission and care, and how these expectations in turn lead to experiences of violence and power struggles. The analysis is structured based on a discussion of organisational characteristics in the RLA and social relations created by overlaps between organisational members and aspects. It begins by sketching out labour relations in Sonagachi and then moves on to a description of FSW households. After that, in a discussion of the material conditions of sex work, relationships between FSWs, madams and customers are explored to show how expectations within these often overlap and conflict with each other. The analysis ends with a discussion of the role played by NGOs and police in this RLA.

6.4.2 Labour relations and social relations: An analysis of economic and social independence in the Sonagachi RLA

Kotiswaran (2008:586) outlines a triangular set of labour relations in a brothel:

(1) labour relation between the brothel owner or brothel keeper, on the one hand, and the sex worker, on the other;

(2) tenancy relation between the landlord and either (a) a lessee with no functional role in the sex industry, (b) a brothel owner or brothel keeper (where a labor relation exists) or (c) an independent self-employed sex worker (where no labor relation exists);

(3) the service relation between sex workers and a brothel (if any), on the one hand, and customers, on the other.
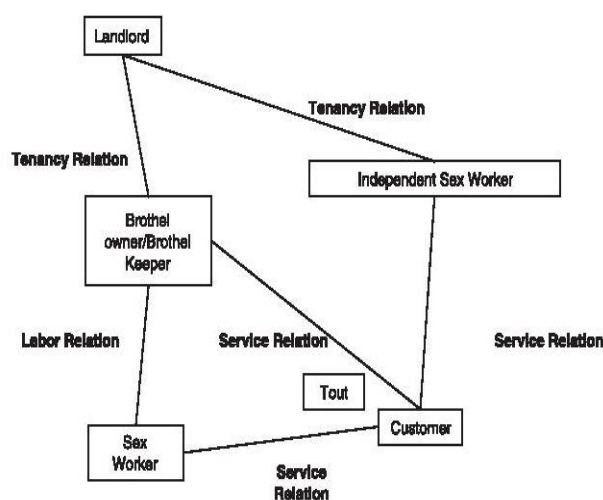
Fig.6.1. Relational dynamics of brothel-based sex work
Source: Kotiswaran, (2008:587)

A FSWs' social relationship with customer, madam, pimp (tout) and landlord is determined by her rank in the hierarchy of sex workers, based on her independence and mode of organisation of sex work. These ranks were first identified by the Sonagachi Project (Kotiswaran, 2008:585) and are meant to be a measurement of FSWs' income and material conditions of work in Sonagachi:

> In increasing order of functional independence, these modes are
> *chhukri* (involving bonded labor), *adhiya* (involving sharing the income
> from sex with a brothel-keeper), and the independent mode.

In this demarcated hierarchy, an FSW's rank increases as she moves up the ladder of labour relations: an increase in independence in labour relations is accompanied by an increase in income and improvement in the material conditions of her work. *However, this research shows that this does not have a causal effect on violence and power struggles in FSWs' lives*. While certain forms of structural violence, i.e. violence by madams to *chhukris* in bonded labour ceases, an increasingly independent FSW with greater mobility and ability to form relationships with customers, etc., can participate in and create a thicker web of social relations for

herself. When relationships formed with members of the (sex-work) market are inevitably invested with emotional expectations, the potential for violence and power inequalities arose. Additionally, with her increasing independence an FSW can become further embroiled in certain structural factors which impede conversations about violence or perpetrate power over others, including madams. Section 6.5 highlights these instances. For now, various aspects of FSWs' social relations in Sonagachi are discussed.

6.4.3. The Household and the Market

As mentioned earlier, FSWs' households in Sonagachi are not as traditional as those in Kalighat. In the latter, an FSW can establish a *shongshaar* with a long-term partner and her children while continuing to sell sex. In Sonagachi, however, FSWs' households accommodate members of the market, especially madams and pimps. Furthermore, FSWs' partners (unlike in Kalighat) often taken on the role of pimp, partnering with the women to manage the sale of sex. In some cases, children continue to stay in the household, but the hypersexual environment of the Sonagachi RLA and the frequent confrontations with NGO and police (discussed in section 6.5.2.2) make the women depend on their natal households for childcare. In other cases they place their children in residential schools outside the RLA, and often outside the city, and visit them once a month. But due to the unrestricted access to children in their natal households, FSWs prefer the former. However, this leads to conflicts, power struggles and psychological violence, as discussed later.

Households in Sonagachi are single- or double-roomed in three- or four-storied crumbling old North Kolkata houses. Architecturally these houses are similar to the aristocratic mansions built by affluent Bengali *babus* to house a large, joint family. The passageways and hallways of these houses are dimly lit, and when it rains,

often collect standing pools of water. During my fieldwork, moving through these houses and climbing up and down the stairs felt like a safety hazard, and I often had to use the light from my mobile phone to guide me. These houses have open roofs from which one can view the layout of Sonagachi. In stark contrast to the dimly-lit hallways, the FSWs' one-room households ranged from medium to very well-lit. The wealthier residents decorated their residences and furniture with satin bedspreads, curtains (usually red or pink); speakers, and fancy light fixtures, and once again the television set was ubiquitous. Newly-renovated rooms often had tiled flooring in pink or yellow, a change from the usual grey granite floor. Rooms such as those in Kalighat were also common, decorated with pictures of children and Hindu deities. Meals were cooked in either the common hallways and passageways or the rooms, which created some issues with ventilation. Many of the rooms were dotted with *paan* (betel leaf with tobacco) stains which its residents complained about, blaming each other's customers. Overall the level of hygiene varied from one room to another: mice were common in some of the rooms that were embedded deep in the houses, away from the main entrance and without an outside view.

The households could be roughly divided into four types. While the first two were very common, the last two were less so:

(i)   *Madam-headed households*: These households held two to five members. These included the madam and two or three FSWs in her employment, working as either *chhukri* or *adhiya* (see section 6.4.2). The madam relied on a pimp to bring her customers but in this scenario the pimp was a free agent, external to the household and working for more than one madam at once.

(ii)   *Madam and pimp-headed households*: The position of head of the household was shared between the madam and her partner, who

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doubled as a pimp. These households also contained two or three *adhiyas* in their employment.

(iii) *Households shared between* two or three *adhiyas*: Although uncommon, I did encounter a few households shared between FSWs of the same rank. However, one of these women usually occupied the position of informal head of the household due to a direct tenancy relationship with the landlord.

(iv) *Households of independent FSWs and their partners*: These households, which were also quite uncommon, comprised independent FSWs living with their partners, who doubled as pimps and helped to manage the procurement of customers.

3 out of 5 madams in my sample sold sex and lived with the women in their employment. Some retired madams, too, continued to live with their employees and oversaw the management of the household. However, in some instances the madam lived with her husband in a home outside the RLA. These women visited the households during the day and left in the evenings once customers started to drop in frequently. The next subsection discusses relationships between madams, FSWs and men.

6.4.3.1. A triangle of social relations: The female sex worker, the madam and men in sex work

This subsection discusses social relations between FSWs, the madams and men (including customers and pimps) in the Sonagachi RLA. *It argues that these social relations form a triangle, where power, as Foucault suggests, flows in multiple directions. However due to a structural (within sex work) and cultural (within Bengal*

society) power imbalance in favour of men, endorsed by households, communities, the market and the state, the women are victimised by power inequalities and violence. This discussion focuses primarily on relations between madams and sex workers, and looks at how their relationships with men intervene in these.

The nature of the relationships between madams and FSW and the prevalence of violence and power inequalities in these depends on three factors:

(i)   the FSW's mode of entry into sex work;

(ii)   the rank of the FSW

(iii)   FSW's relationships with customers.

When the mode of entry into sex work had been coercive, as in Jasmine and Mamata's cases (see section 5.5.3), the relationship with the madam and the male brothel owner was predominantly one of violence and oppression, as discussed in section 6.5.3. However, even when their entry was not coercive, relationships were framed within power inequalities. During a conversation at the sex-workers' collective health clinic in the Sonagachi RLA, Janaki, a 50-year old peer worker explained this:

> When young women first start working in the red-light area they don't know much – they're new to this world. The madam is the one who shows them the way – how to dress, how to win over customers. She provides the girls with a room, food and clothes, and during this time all the earnings from sex work go to the madam. A madam will try to earn as much as possible from the girls until their eyes and ears open and they are able to find a steady customer. Once that happens, the young sex worker can leave the madam's brothel household, and with financial help from the customer can rent her own room and start doing sex work independently.

This succinct summary of the power inequalities between the madam and the FSW highlights the omnipresence (actual or potential) of a third individual in this equation: the customer. As Janaki explains, establishing intimacy with a casual customer and the transformation of a casual, transactional relationship into something romantic and intimate can become a way for FSWs in the *chhukri* phase to exit sex work or gain independence from the madam. Usually customers help *chhukris* to pay off their debt (for the price of food, clothing and shelter upon entry) to the madam, rent a separate room and set up an independent sex worker-partner/pimp household. Despite being essential to their livelihood, customers therefore also pose a financial threat to madams. Due to this madams and owners of brothels (such as that of Jasmine and Mamata) restricted their contact and communication with customers until the FSWs could convince the former that they would agree to do sex work This is explored further in section 6.5.3. The power inequalities within social relations between the madam and the FSW revolving around (a) money and (b) relationships with customers are discussed below.

6.4.3.2. Power struggles over money

As 5.5.4 discussed, many *chhukris* such as Mamata, Jasmine and Sapna escaped sex work at a particular site to enter it elsewhere. They re-entered as *adhiyas* or independent FSWs. However, their increased independence, as noted, did not mean that their relationship with the madam (where there was one) was not riddled with power inequalities. This is exemplified in Sapna's example (introduced in section 5.4.2), which is discussed below.

Sapna changed madams twice in four months between 2014 and 2015. When I first met her she was in Riya and Bikram's household working as an *adhiya* with two others, one of them Riya's niece, Mumtaz. Theirs was a relatively affluent household and included two rooms on two stories. Riya hired a domestic help to

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cook and clean for the household. Within two months Riya had asked Sapna to leave, citing insufficient customers as the reason. When I asked Sapna what had happened she said that Riya would constantly bicker about Sapna 'not working hard enough' i.e. not taking enough customers. Sapna countered this and was told to leave. Furthermore, she alleged that Riya had not paid her the agreed percentage from her customers and was planning to approach the sex workers' collective to resolve this monetary conflict. Riya, on the other hand, alleged that despite good living conditions and a regular supply of food and clothes, Sapna was not able to make up for the costs she had incurred, and her unattractiveness and older age compared to Mumtaz and the third *adhiya* brought an end to their working relationship. Riya also maintained that she did not owe Sapna any money. This conflict, which was ultimately resolved by peer workers, led to Sapna returning some items purchased for her during her stay in Riya's household, in exchange for some money.

This incident, and Sapna and Riya's conflicting views on the issue, highlights how madams and FSWs' relationships continue to be riddled with disputes and disagreements despite an FSW gaining independence. Often these revolve around the issue of money. In theory, *adhiyas* are meant to have unrestricted access to their earnings and split this with the madam; in practice, however, the *adhiyas* who lived with their madam in the latter's household were given a maintenance allowance which allowed them to cover extra-household expenses such as a SIM cards for a mobile phone. Usually the madams hired domestic help to cook for the household and supervised food allocation. Vendors often dropped by with clothes, toiletries, makeup, etc., and the women would sit together, choose items and bargain with the vendor. Additionally, *adhiyas* could ask for money when they visited their natal or marital household outside the RLA. Accounts were fully settled when *adhiya* left the household, and since this usually involved a conflict or dispute

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of some sort, arguments about rightful shares were inevitable. The low level of literacy amongst the women affected their knowledge of how much money was owed to whom. Despite peer workers encouraging the use of account books, it was often hard to decipher what had been written and the accuracy of the numbers was determined by the madam. *Adhiyas* were asked to be involved in the process of jotting down daily calculation and shares, but most *adhiyas*, such as Sapna, were happy to let their madam handle it. Additionally, asking to see the daily calculations was seen to cause friction in the household and disrupt the daily harmony within relationships.

6.4.3.3.Customers as a source of power inequalities

Besides money, customers caused friction in the relationship between madams and FSWs. After leaving Riya's household, Sapna tried unsuccessfully to set up a household with two other *adhiyas*. Eventually she ended up in Khusbhoo's household with two other new entrants to the RLA. During the month she spent with Khushboo the two became very close and expressed their affection for each other. Sapna called Khushboo *didi* (older sister), something she had not called Riya. Khushboo was emotionally troubled due to a turbulent relationship with a customer, and resorted to abusing alcohol, drugs and cutting herself to cope with her relationship problems. Sapna often told me how worried she was about Khushboo and how much she wanted to be there for her. During this time Sapna became close to a customer, and the relationship became an intimate one, with the promise of marriage. Since the madam negotiate the rates with customers before they are allowed to interact with women in their employment, Sapna's partner was on friendly terms with Khushboo and they chatted with each other on the phone, which upset Sapna and made her jealous. Ultimately the tension in the relationship led to a fierce argument between Sapna and Khushboo when her partner visited the

household to give Sapna a saree on the occasion of Durga Pujo. He also brought a saree for Khushboo, which enraged Sapna. Khushboo later told me that Sapna had smashed objects in the room, cut herself on her arm with a piece of glass and drunk alcohol until she fell asleep. When I asked Sapna about this late she appeared embarrassed and uncomfortable:

> I had told him not to come here. To this area. Here the environment is not good. Girls are always trying to grab customers from each other. They are dressed a certain way. I didn't want him to come back any more. But he came back with a gift for me, but also bought Khushboo a saree. I got very jealous and upset. In anger, I did some stupid things. But I hope he doesn't do this again.

Sapna's answer highlights the complexity of the social relations between the FSWs, the customers and the madams. I have already highlighted how customers, through the development of intimate relationships with FSWs, pose a financial threat to madams. However, as Sapna's example shows, madams can also cause emotional distress to FSWs in these relationships. Towards the end of the month Sapna and Khushboo parted ways. Sapna blamed Khusbhoo for withholding money from her when she needed it to travel to her natal household in South 24 Parganas. Khusbhoo refused to meet me, and soon left for a contract job in Uttar Pradesh, a state in the north of India. During my last conversation with Sapna she told me that Khusbhoo had been arrested and was in prison, and that it would now be impossible for her to obtain what Khushboo owed her.

In these complex social relations, which seemed to repeat itself in cycles across households in the RLA, FSWs, too, caused emotional distress to madams. Madams, like Khushboo, often felt betrayed when the women in their employment, whom they believed they had treated with respect and care, prioritised sexual-affective relationships with a customer over their relationship with them. The

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collision of the emotional expectations of the madam with the social and financial aspirations of the FSW affected madams adversely. I observed this during a heated conversation that took place between 31-year-old Hemanti and 22 year-old Sneha one morning. I had been introduced to them by Dimple, a peer worker, a few days earlier, and they had invited me into their household to chat with them. Sneha worked as an *adhiya* under Hemanti, who was her madam. When I asked Sneha how long she had been in the household, Hemanti suddenly became tearful and said 'What does it matter? She's leaving me anyway'. Taken aback at this sudden burst of emotion, I waited for Sneha to explain, which she proceeded to do in a rather sheepish tone. Sneha had entered sex work voluntarily after the breakdown of her marriage, and on her arrival had been befriended by Hemanti. The two had shared an *adhiya*-madam relationship for close to two years, but at the time of our conversation Sneha was planning to leave sex work entirely. Sneha said she wanted to go back to her village and try other kinds of work for a while. However, Hemanti was adamant that Sneha was leaving her for a customer she had grown very close to over the last six months. Even though Sneha had tried to reassure her that she was not, it was evident that Hemanti did not believe her. What came across very strongly during this exchange was Hemanti's feeling of abandonment. At one point she spoke up:

> She's like my little sister, I have taken such good care of her. Last year, she had to have an emergency appendicitis operation – I rushed her to the hospital, took care of all her medical bills, brought her back here and nursed her back to health. During that time I took on double the number of customers to make enough money for us. I have given her my blood, sweat and tears, and now she's leaving me. Just like that, for another man.

Hemanti's feelings highlight the complex mix of emotional, financial and social expectations that frame the relationship between sex workers and madams in

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particular, but also between others stakeholders in RLAs. This is due to the special nature of the brothel as an institution (see section 4.6.2.1): 'unlike institutions such as the school, family, church, military, or prison that can be characterized as public or private, the brothel operates at the crossroads of the market and the family, harboring both sex workers and brothel keepers as well as their families' (Kotiswaran, 2008:586); in such a situation, sex workers and madams often become each other's family. As already highlighted, women who enter sex work often do so after the breakdown of kinship structures – relationships in the brothel with the madam and the customers fill a void for these women, and as Hemanti's experiences show, such expectations of familial loyalty and belonging extend to madams, too. FSWs in Songachi, as in Kalighat, however, tend to prioritise long-term relationships with men encountered through sex work, or the potential for such, over relationships with their madam. This prioritisation is embedded in women's socially normative ideas of desirable relationships and carries the hope of new domesticity. It leaves madams such as Hemanti feeling betrayed and abandoned: having cared for the women in their employment and formed emotional bonds with them, they feel abandoned when FSWs prioritise a traditional household with a man over a household with a madam. Younger FSWs such as Sneha view a relationship with a customer as a way to secure social and economic independence in the RLA, to exit sex work and rebuild a *shongshaar.* Madams, usually older and having experienced heartbreak in relationships with their own customers, try to sustain their households with other women, but find their aspirations thwarted by the departure of women in their employ. During our conversation on relationships between madam, FSW and customers, Janaki also said the following:

> These young girls, they come here and they start falling in love. They
> get affected by the promises of customers – 'I want to marry, I want a
> family with you', all that. They leave their madam and go away,

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depending on this promise of love. But when all that ends…when the men leave them like they always do, ultimately those same girls come back to their madam. At the end of everything, the madam is always there for them to come back to.

Janaki's words emphasise what I have highlighted above – the cycle of exit from and return into sex work for young FSWs is predicated on the success of their relationships with customers. The prioritisation of relationships with men and desire for a traditional household leaves FSWs vulnerable in these relationships. This is discussed in section 6.4.3.4.

To return to the madams, Hemanti perceived Sneha's departure as a personal rejection and was deeply affected by it. The knowledge and anticipation that FSWs will choose greener pastures when it suits them makes madams apprehensive of forming strong bonds with the women they employ. This point was illuminated during a conversation I had with 31-year old Manisha (a madam) about her interactions with 28-year old Mampi, an FSW in her employment, when I visited their household in Sonagachi for the first time. It was evident that the two were very close. Mampi was an outspoken and flamboyant sex worker who kept teasing Manisha about her makeup, hair and outfit. At one point she started to tickle Manisha, who tried unsuccessfully to pry Mampi off her while the rest of the girls in the room and I burst into laughter at this endearing display of affection. At a later point when things were calmer, Mampi told me that Manisha was 'very good', like her own 'older sister'. During a conversation with Manisha, however, she conveyed her apprehension about bonding deeply with the sex workers under her care to me; she showed me pictures of her two sons and expressed a wish for a daughter. When I gestured to Mampi and the other two girls in the room, she said:

> No, these girls are different. They are here to earn, to look after their
>
> own families, and leave. Who knows when they will leave me – I
>
> should be happy they've been with me for as long as they have, but I
>
> have no more expectations.

When I visited the same household for a second time, Manisha was not there. Mampi was unwell and said she needed to undergo surgery of some kind for a stomach pain she had been suffering from for a while. As we sat around talking she showed me a set of keys that Manisha had left behind in her possession while she was away travelling with her sons and her partner:

> These are the keys to the main wardrobe, where Manisha keeps all her
>
> money and gold. And she's given me the keys and left. She trusts me a
>
> lot, you see – I could easily take off with all of it, but she knows I won't.
>
> She knows I am loyal to people I care about.

Despite her apprehension about having too many expectations of the women working for her, this revealed that Manisha trusted Mampi enough to leave her valuables and money in her care. Despite this, Mampi told me of her plan to leave the household because she found Manisha's partner's behaviour with the women in the household objectionable. In Manisha's absence, he would sexually harass some of the women and force them to watch pornographic films with him. Mampi was afraid to tell Manisha this, as she did not want to cause trouble in her *shongshaar*. In many different ways, then, men in the lives of madams and FSWs cause friction in their relationships. The women in Manisha's employment feared for their safety and wellbeing in the presence of her partner. Implicit in this fear was the assumption and acknowledgement that Manisha would not believe them over her own husband. In the RLA, the strength of kinship ties continued to endure over ties forged of friendship, care and affection that existed between madam and FSWs: the FSWs prioritised potential kinship ties over madams, and felt that the

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madams would do the same to them. An exception was Mumtaz (introduced in section 5.4.2), whose relationship with her aunt and madam Riya, made her pause a budding romantic relationship with a customer from Pune. Mumtaz enjoyed living with Riya, and pointed to her brand new silver anklets as a sign that Riya and her partner Bikram, were emotionally and financially investing in her future. When talking about the customer, Mumtaz said:

> After our first meeting here I felt a strong connection with him. He told me to tell me about my life, and I felt like he was an old friend. He has come once every month to see me since then. He keeps telling me he loves me and wants to marry me. I too feel safe and loved around him, but I don't want to leave Riya. She has been so good to me. I want to stay here longer.

By the end of my fieldwork Mumtaz had married her boyfriend and moved to a different location in Kolkata. This happened following unexpected circumstances arising due to a police raid on the household (see section 6.4.4). Below, vulnerabilities that arise in FSWs relationships with men encountered through sex work are discussed.

6.4.3.4. Vulnerabilities in female sex workers' relationships with men encountered through sex work

During my fieldwork I observed two forms of relationships between men encountered through sex work and FSWs. The rank of the FSW determined the nature of the role played by the customer (or pimp) in the relationship. When FSWs were in the *chhukri* phase, especially in situations where their entry into sex work had been coercive, viz. Jasmine, Mamata and Sapna, customers and pimps played the role of rescuer, often offering financial help besides paying for sex, as well as

emotional and social aid to the women to help them escape. Once the women had escaped these relationships either ceased to exist or continued in some form with the customer still providing economic and social security to the FSW. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

However, relationships between men and *adhiyas*, independent FSWs and madams often involved a change in economic roles in the relationship. This created power inequalities in the relationship, with many women feeling used by their partners. Section 6.3.4 discussed how Jasmine's aspirations to a *shongshaar* outside the RLA were thwarted by her partner repeatedly demanding money from her. A lot of women I spoke to in both RLAs described how relationships with men encountered through sex work were riddled with disputes over money. A change in the terms of money exchange, in fact, was at the heart of these intimate relationships. Usually, on visiting a woman in the RLA a man is expected to pay her the decided rate at the end of the session. However, when a casual customer visits an FSW repeatedly and expresses a desire to initiate a sexual-affective relationship with her, the potential for an intimate relationship is presented. In this study, a sexual-affective relationship with a sex-work customer always began based on his desire to start it. If the FSW reciprocates his feelings, the process of the customer paying money at the end of a session stops. Instead the FSW often ends up investing money in the relationship to ensure the customer's loyalty and fidelity. This happens under two broad circumstances:

(I) When a customer seeks financial help from a woman to establish himself economically. This, as in Jasmine's case, is asked for under the pretext of establishing a strong *shongshaar* with the FSW. In these situations, the customer is usually a blue-collar worker earning low wages with low job security, or a man engaged in work in the RLA, e.g. as an assistant to a pimp.

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(II)   When the customer has his own *shongshaar* outside the RLA with a wife and children. To feel part of that household in a symbolic sense, the FSW often invests in gifts for the children, supports their education and buys objects for the household.

Mamata's intimate relationship with a customer she met through sex work at the brothel in Haldia (where she was rescued from) fell into the second category. In the absence of any emotional support or ties with her natal household, her partner became a source of social and economic security. When he told her he already had a wife and family, she started investing in it to help him out:

> We were together for almost a year. I wasn't in touch with my family any more. He became an important person in my life. If I needed anything for my household he would get it for me. If something was broken in my room, he would get *mistris* [workmen] to fix it. I also helped him out with his family matters. When he told me the children's school fees had gone up, I offered to help out. I also helped him buy new furniture for his house. In life, as a *mohila* [woman] you need an *admi* [man] to help out with day-to-day things. I started to depend on him. But then it all ended when I found out I was pregnant. When I told him, he got angry and asked how I could be sure it was his. I felt so hurt by this: he knew I used protection with others. I told him I was ready to take a blood test to find out the father of my child, but he refused to cooperate. Finally he said he would only accept it if it was a boy. At that, I decided to end the relationship. *Khoob koshto hoye bhebe* [it hurts me when I think about it]. But I had to make myself forget him. (Mamata, 2014)

Mamata highlights how men provide emotional and social security to FSWs in their life in the brothel. Through the performance of certain types of 'masculine' activities,

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viz. fixing things, and by providing emotional and social support they become part of the FSWs' everyday lives. However, the durability of these relationships is tested when circumstances require the men in their lives to commit to certain responsibilities (accepting a child) or legalise the relationship (through marriage). Another issue of contention in these relationships was the expectations of monogamy by the FSWs, which were usually not met by their partners. Khusboo, Sapna's second madam, had been in an intimate relationship with a customer spanning eight months when I first met her. However, the relationship was going through an acrimonious phase which had spurred Khusbhoo to alcohol abuse and self-harming to cope. She told me that over the course of the eight months he had continuously borrowed money from her to get out of debt and work towards starting his own business as a shopkeeper in Kolkata. However, she had discovered texts from him to other women on his phone, which made her suspect that he was not being monogamous. When she confronted him he had denied it. But after being spied with another woman in the RLA by another madam, a friend of Khusbhoo's, the two had a heated argument:

> After that fight, I told him if he could not be with only me, he should leave. And he left. Just like that. Now he is in a relationship with another woman in some houses away from here. I have told him to return my money, but he refuses. He says he has spent it all, but I know he is lying. Yesterday some girls told me that he had bought his new girlfriend some jewellery…I am sure it is with my money. I was a fool to give him my money so trustingly. I thought he was a good man, that he would stay. Now the other girl is being a fool like me. (Khusbhoo, 2014)

Relationships with customers and men encountered through sex work are intended to offer emotional and social support to FSWs. However in light of the differing

expectations and the men's refusal to take on conventional social roles, viz. those of father and husband, or adhere to conventional relationship norms, i.e. monogamy, the women end up abandoned, feeling used and betrayed. One way in which they cope with this turbulence in their relationships is through the consumption of alcohol and drugs, and self-harm, as a way to assert control and seek the attention of the men who are hurting them.

6.4.4. Rescue and healing: Police and NGOs in Sonagachi

In the physical and spatial confines of the Sonagachi RLA, the sex workers' collective is the most prominent NGO. It runs a health centre with peer workers engaged in sexual health outreach, and it resolves disputes between madams and sex workers. Overall, the women in this RLA perceived the collective as a medical organisation engaged in curing various ailments for free. While this was largely welcome, the NGOs' focus on sexual health made some FSWs feel uncomfortable. During an interview, Sapna complained about how they were constantly being 'jabbed by needles' at the health centre for their blood tests. Although this was meant to monitor the FSW's sexual health and vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, they found it unnecessary.

The RLA in Sonagachi and its residents were also affected by organisations that existed outside its physical confines. These were anti-trafficking NGOs that worked with the police to carry out rescue activities in Sonagachi. Unlike Kalighat, the police and NGOs were viewed as confrontational and disruptive, and engaged in raids and rescues which adversely affected households in the RLA.

During my fieldwork I was not able to observe a raid. However, I was told that a police presence in the brothels usually meant that anyone peripheral to the targets

of the raid would be told to leave the premises. In October 2014, while I was conducting fieldwork at the shelter home, the brothel household of Riya and Bikram (her partner and pimp for the women in their employment) was raided. By then Sapna had moved on to another household, but Mumtaz still lived there. I was able to gather information on what had happened through a lengthy phone call with Riya and data collected from peer workers, pimps who worked for other madams and FSWs who lived and worked in neighbouring households. The raid was conducted following allegations that Riya had smuggled women in from Bangladesh illegally to work as FSWs in the RLA. At the time of the raid, only Mumtaz and the third *adhiya*, 25-year-old Pinki from a village in South 24 Parganas, were present. Based on her conversations with Pinki after the raid, Bandana told me that the two were practising choreographed dance routines: interactions with customers in Songachi often included dance performances. When the police arrived they asked Pinki and Mumtaz to produce documentation to prove that they were over 18. Pinki, who had been in sex work longer than Mumtaz, produced some form of identity that showed her age to be 25; Mumtaz was unable to produce hers, and was taken into custody. Additionally Pinki, in a naive attempt to protect Riya, claimed that she was Riya herself and owned the brothel. The police immediately arrested her and put her in prison. When news of the raid spread and reached the sex workers' collective's office, peer workers rushed to the police station and tried to convince them of Pinki's innocence and mistaken identity, and of Mumtaz's adulthood. Bandana told me that the organisation was unaware of Riya's involvement with Bangladeshi women, and had provided her with membership to the sex workers' collective. The police refused to release Pinki and said that they would keep her until Riya appeared at the police station. In Riya's absence they were planning to prosecute Pinki and give her a five-year prison sentence. Mumtaz's family, meanwhile, were contacted by the police. Although they had allowed Mumtaz to work in Kolkata with Riya, they were entirely unaware that the two were involved in sex work. At the police station,

Bikram showed up and was physically assaulted by members of Mumtaz's family for corrupting their daughter. Mumtaz returned to her natal village and household with her family, who were furious with her for entering sex work without their consent. Through Sapna, who managed to find a way to contact her but was unwilling to share her contact details with me, I found out that within a month of her return Mumtaz had married her customer from Pune, who had moved to Kolkata to live with her. He forbade her to stay in touch with anyone from her previous life as a FSW, which led to Sapna being unable to contact her. Pinki, meanwhile, was released from prison and legally prohibited from selling sex in the Sonagachi RLA; her release had come about when Bikram had turned himself in to the authorities in exchange for her release.

The raid and subsequent events were discussed intensely in the weeks afterwards by residents of the RLA. Some blamed Riya for endangering the lives of the women in her employment by engaging in illegal activities. Maya, a 22-year-old FSW in a neighbouring household said: 'Serves her right. Women like her who are so greedy should be punished'. Others, such as Sneha in Hemanti's household, felt that Bikram's act of turning himself in was magnanimous. Almost everyone I spoke to sympathised with Pinki's predicament and criticised her naivety for trying to protect Riya by pretending to be her. I visited the household after the raid: it was sealed and locked from the outside. A couple of pimps that I spoke to said that Bikram should have been more careful about bringing women in from Bangladesh, something they all agreed was risky. Overall, the incident and its aftermath underlined the social and legal precarity of life in the RLA, the multiplicity of social relations within it, and perceptions of ethical and unethical activities by and amongst its residents. During an interview, Sapna praised her *kopaal* (fate) that she had left the household before the raid:

> Today, I could be in prison or prohibited from entering this area like
>
> Pinki. Where would I go, what would I do? Pinki has no family; she has
>
> a young daughter she keeps in a place nearby. She will have start all
>
> over again in some new, unfamiliar place. It will not be easy at all. I
>
> feel so bad for her, but thank my *kopaal* that it wasn't me in her place.
>
> (Sapna, 2014)

The next and final section of this chapter discusses how these legal and social complexities of life in RLA shape the FSWs' experiences and negotiations with violence.

6.5. Female sex workers' experiences and negotiations with violence

6.5.1. Introduction

This chapter has discussed social relations in FSWs' lives across two RLAs: Kalighat and Sonagachi. This included exploring the ways in which power flows across various organisations – the family, the sex-work market, NGOs and the police – to affect FSWs' lives and social relations in the RLA. Additionally, some forms of power inequalities between FSWs and other stakeholders in the RLA have been discussed.

On the next page, I use and add to Kabeer's (1994) visual representation of the unofficial picture of institutions and the gender relations across them to summarise how experiences of violence and power inequalities are embedded within institutional overlaps in RLAs. These experiences and negotiations are discussed in this section, drawing on commonalities across social relations in both RLAs. This highlights how FSWs struggle against various kinds of violence – structural, everyday violence, viz. stigma, as well as physical and sexual violence – in their

everyday lives. I have added a second household to the image to indicate how FSWs' natal and marital households beyond the RLA, and social relations within them, affect their households within the RLA. Additionally, I have identified the organisational representatives of each institution. This reiterates how the social relations that comprise FSWs' families in the RLA are drawn from people, and affected by the resources, activities and power of other institutions. This essential aspect of FSWs' lives in the RLAs underlines their experiences and negotiations with power and violence there, as discussed below:
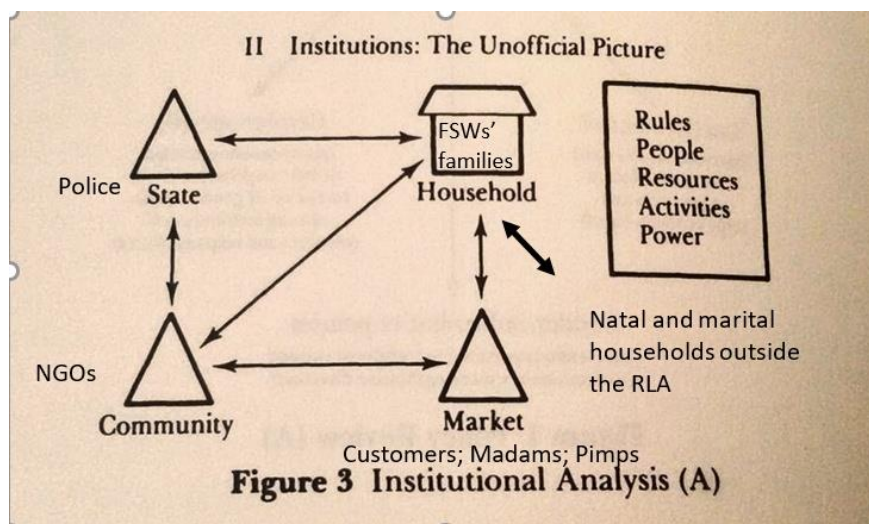
Fig.6.2. Institutional analysis of social relations in RLAs

Source:Kabeer (1994:308)

6.5.2. Stigma and motherhood

6.5.2.1. Introduction

This section explores how the performance of motherhood by FSWs in Kalighat and Sonagachi is affected by power inequalities and violence. It examines how motherhood becomes a site for contestation and claims between members of the

FSWs' natal and marital households outside the RLA, NGOs, and state actors, viz. the police. However, as Sinha and Dasgupta (2009) argue, many FSWs are mothers. Additionally, as Chapter 5 has shown, many women turn to full- or part-time sex work to supplement their income for their children's future. Yet the stigma and material conditions of sex work prevent them from claiming and performing motherhood in the way they wish to do this.

6.5.2.2. Motherhood, NGOs and the police

In Kalighat, the organisation that worked with the children of FSWs played a supportive role by helping women to drop off their children in a safe space that provided access to education, food and shelter. However, some women felt that having relegated their motherhood to it the organisation needed to do yet more, viz. take on further responsibility for the children's education and future. Also, given that children were sent to residential schools that did not allow them to keep mobile phones with them, the physical distance inevitably impacted on FSWs' ability to access their children emotionally. The principle behind sending children to residential schools away from the RLA, and often from the city, was to disconnect them from life and social relations in RLA. Jasmine, in an interview, said she was planning to send her children away when they entered their teens:

> I don't want the *chaaya* [shadow] of this kind of life to fall on my
> children. It's very easy to get stuck in this place, and all that it
> brings with it. But I want them to see a different world. This will
> help them dream of a life outside this place.

Jasmine was aware that this decision would create an emotional distance between her and her children. In sending children away, mothers often emphasised the

stigma and structural difficulties of life in sex work, while at the same time hoping that their children would not judge them for their decision to enter such work in the first place. Sabina, whose son from her first marriage was enrolled in a school nearby and lived with her, expressed her concern about how his friends would advise him about her:

> His friends will probably tell him: 'Your mother is a bad woman'. They will probably try to guide his mind away from me. But I always tell him – I am here because I want us to have a good future. I don't want us to be dependent on anyone. Hopefully, as he grows older he will realise the sacrifices I have made for his future, instead of hating me for it.

In my fieldwork I noticed how women constantly emphasised their motherhood and the sacrifices they had made for their children to deal with their internalised shame and stigma. During interviews they referred to what they did as *baaje kaaj* (bad work), but hoped that their children would see things differently. In an interview with the founder of the NGO that worked with children of FSWs in Kalighat, I asked her how the organisation prevented children from restigmatising their mothers in its emphasis on alternative lives and livelihoods for the children. She replied that the organisation encouraged children, especially those who lived away in residential schools, to visit their mothers when they were in the city for breaks. However, at such times the mothers were told to not see customers for the children's safety. This implied that the mothers had to suspend their everyday lives to protect their children from the *chaaya* of sex work. The emotional distance that was created through these educational interventions led to tension between the NGO and the parents about ownership over the future of the children. Many mothers, having sent their children away, expected the NGOs to help them to find a job and provide financial support until they were economically independent. This caused tension

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with the NGO, which expected the FSWs to take over and support their children once they had finished their schooling. During an interview with an FSW associated with the second NGO, she complained about how the organisation had not done nearly as much for her child as it had done for others:

> When I have given up my motherhood, and sent my son away, then let
> them take care of him, no? They take them away for so many years,
> and then expect us to be mothers again.

This statement highlights the dichotomy in FSWs' voluntary relegation of their motherhood to the NGO which looked after their children, and the expectations embedded in this relegation. Other women in my sample drawn through this NGO praised what the organisation had done for their children. Amina, a retired sex worker aged 65, whose son and grandson had both been availed of educational services offered by the NGO, praised it for offering an alternative life to FSWs' children. The sex workers' collective on the other hand, she argued, perpetuated life in sex work for FSW's children, something that she was deeply critical of.

Indeed, the collective adopted a different stance in its approach to the FSWs' motherhood. Peer workers such as Bandana, who are mothers themselves, asserted that FSWs do not need someone else to mother their children and are mentally and physically fit to perform the duties of motherhood themselves. The collective took a strong stance against the raids by police and anti-trafficking NGOs to rescue children from their mothers in RLAs, especially Sonagachi, to prevent second-generation prostitution. These raids were perceived as violent and stigmatising by Bandana and her peers:

> Women do this kind of work for their children. Many of us, like me, came
> here against our wishes. But we stayed on because we realised this

work gives more money for our children's future. Then you forcibly take a child away from the mother –won't it be painful? No social worker or *shonstha* (organisation) can be a better mother to these children than their own mothers. (Bandana, 2014)

However, the hypersexual environment within RLAs did pose a threat to the safety of children, especially young girls. Many FSWs therefore preferred to leave their children with their natal and marital family members. This gave rise to further power inequalities, experiences of psychological violence and *koshto (pain)* in FSWs' lives as mothers, as discussed next.

6.5.2.3. Motherhood, and natal and marital households

Apart from keeping children with them and/or relying on NGOs to perform motherhood, many women in my study kept their children in their natal or marital households. In some situations, where the women's relationship to these spaces was riddled with power inequalities or previous experiences of violence and conflict, relegating motherhood to social relations there gave rise to further such experiences. Sapna, who had married a customer after entering sex work voluntarily for the second time after her escape, had a daughter from the marriage. She had moved to a village in Haryana in northern India after her marriage, but had found the local variation of patriarchy and dietary habits difficult to deal with:

> Here in Bengal, in the villages, we village women like to talk to other women, friendly chitchat. There all day I had to stay veiled. I had to wake up in the morning, work from dawn to dusk, and couldn't talk to anyone except the women in my husband's home. Also, I am Bengali, I need fish in my food. But there they only ate vegetables all the time. I wasn't happy there, and because of that I fought with my husband, even

though he did love me a lot. I got into fights with his sister-in-law too,

who felt I didn't belong in the family. (Sapna, 2014)

Sapna returned to her natal household within a year of her marriage. Her husband built her a shop where she sold cooked food, so she did not have to rely on her natal family for financial support. However, her brother and sister-in-law wanted her to contribute a higher proportion of her earnings from the shop to the household than she thought necessary. This caused friction in the household. Sapna's husband kept visiting her, and they had a daughter together. Two years after her daughter's birth, Sapna's husband was arrested for dealing drugs – something that she blamed his brother for. She returned to sex work for the third time to try and earn his bail, which was set at 100,000 INR. She kept her daughter with her natal family and sent them money regularly to support her. However, she felt that they did not look after her well enough but refused to increase the amount she sent home. For a brief period during my fieldwork she brought her daughter to stay with her in the brothel household, but the child, used to being around a different set of family members, wanted to return. Throughout the fieldwork Sapna complained about issues that kept cropping up with members of her natal household regarding the care of her daughter.

Many married women relied on marital household members to look after their children. Shampa, a 32-year-old full-time residential sex worker in Sonagachi, had entered sex work to provide for her daughter after her husband failed to hold a steady job. Although her husband had supported the decision, he had grown increasingly disgruntled with Shampa's relationships with her customers. One of them had proposed marriage to her, and on being thwarted had attacked her husband and thrown acid at him. This had led to his hospitalisation, and Shampa had exited sex work for a while. However, once he recovered she decided to return,

much to his anger. To punish her, he and his family withheld their daughter from Shampa:

> My husband is a not an ambitious man. Before this kind of work, I
> would tell him 'Let's start a business together.' I have dreams for
> myself and my child. But he was happy with little money from small
> jobs. This work gives me a lot of money, I don't want to leave it. But to
> punish me, my in-laws and husband don't allow me to talk to or see my
> daughter. How can they do this? I am her mother. They say I am a bad
> influence and a bad mother, whereas it's for her future that I don't want
> to leave this work. It hurts me so much that I cannot see my daughter.
> It is very painful. (Shampa, 2014)

Shampa's experience shows how although women may assert that their entry into sex work is linked to their children's future, staying in sex work also allows them to gain economic independence in a way that would not be possible in other work in the informal labour market. However, this comes at a price: the stigma attached to sex work was used by Shampa's marital family to withhold her daughter from her, which caused her pain as a mother. Shampa asked me to help her to contact a lawyer who could help her; the illegality of commercially-organised sex work, however, means that lawyers are reluctant to get involved in FSWs' legal claims to motherhood. Most lawyers that she contacted had tried to convince her to leave sex work, which they claimed was incompatible with her desire to perform motherhood. Embedded in a legally precarious, socially stigmatised life, Shampa's motherhood was contested and questioned, which she perceived and experienced as violence.

6.5.3. Negotiations with violence by madams and brothel owners on coercive entry into sex work

Section 5.5.3 discussed experiences of coercive entry into sex work among the women in my study. Jasmine, Mamata and Salma's stories were highlighted. Here, I continue to discuss Jasmine and Mamata's experiences, looking at how they negotiated violence after their coercive entry into sex work.

In the sample for this research all of the women, including Jasmine and Mamata, who had been coercively sold into sex work recalled a phase of recurrent and horrific violence by madams and brothel owners. This violence happened when the women refused to have sex with customers and was meant to subdue them into submission. The types of violence included physical violence in the form of repeated *maar* (beatings) by madams and male brothel owners, psychological violence in the form of intimidation, threats and enforced isolation, and sexual violence by customers. The women at the receiving end of the violence often tried to self-harm as a way out, but were given immediate medical attention on discovery. Eventually they learnt to negotiate the violence and stop it entirely by using a strategy that I call 'exhibiting compliance'. This involved a phase of 'willingly' doing sex work while taking advantage of the unsupervised nature of their relationships with customers to plan their escape. This also involved building a relationship with the madam or brothel owner to increase trust. Jasmine and Mamata's deployments of this strategy are discussed below.

After a year of experiencing physical, sexual and psychological violence, Jasmine decided to do sex work 'willingly':

> I couldn't live like this any more. I could see no way out. Since I had already become 'bad', I decided 'Let me just do this kind of work

willingly'. So I told the madam I was willing to stay and work, and overnight my life improved. I could move around more now, still inside the brothel, but wasn't kept locked up all the time. I could speak to other women, and have time alone with customers and talk to them. All of this gave me great mental relief – I started to settle into life in the brothel.

As discussed in Chapter 7, Jasmine eventually used this increased independence in social relations in the brothel to escape. Similarly, Mamata, on advice from a peer who had also been coercively sold into sex, decided to exhibit compliance by expressing her desire to do sex work willingly. This, like Jasmine, allowed her to interact freely with customers, one of whom helped her to escape from the site of sex work. Additionally, on the customer's advice she decided to build rapport with her brothel owner to gain his trust:

Once my customer told me he would help me escape, he advised me to get the brothel owner to trust me. This way he would allow me greater freedom to move around, perhaps even leave with the customer for an evening out, and that would be my escape. I decided to start willingly sleeping with customers – once I had a steady base of men, the brothel owner started to treat me better. He gave me access to a phone, would allow me to interact with the other girls and let me refuse customers too, sometimes, if I wasn't feeling well. One time, I heard that a girl was planning to escape, and I went and told the brothel owner before she could execute her plan. After that day the brothel owner started to trust me a lot and I knew I had him in the palm of my hand. (Mamata,2014)

Mamata did not regret spoiling her peer's escape plan to gain her brothel owner's trust:

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Sometimes in this life you have to look out for yourself. Everyone

pretends to be your friend, but ultimately everyone is selfish. I had to get

out of there, so I did what I had to.

Section 7.2 discusses how Mamata and Jasmine escaped. Their pre-escape experiences, discussed here, show how FSWs in bonded labour learn to cope with physical, psychological and sexual violence by adopting strategies which, at the outset, could be mistaken for voluntary engagement with sex work. This warns against superficial readings of women's agency in sex work, and calls for deeper understanding of how women's participation in sex work needs to be read in diverse ways.

6.5.4. Negotiating sexual violence in sex work

Section 6.4.2 has outlined the different ranks of FSWs in Sonagachi. As discussed, increased independence and income do not necessarily imply that an FSW does not continue to deal with power inequalities in her life. In fact, as I have discussed, the ability to participate fully in social relations often leads to more potential for power struggles. Although an increase in rank from *chhukri* to *adhiya* can end one form of structural violence (by madams and brothel owners), sexual and physical violence continue in the lives of *adhiyas*. Moreover, their silence about violence to outsiders, including NGOs, the police, etc., amplifies due to FSWs' positionalities, roles and responsibilities within the social relations they build in the RLA. This was highlighted by Sapna during a conversation about types of customers, labour and power relations in sex work:

What types of customers do you come across in your work?

S: There are all types. There are friendly ones, who make you feel comfortable. There are ones that you can have fun with. But there are also customers who are cruel…who like giving us *koshto*. Sometimes they'll hurt us during sex, other times they'll burn us with cigarettes…

Do you talk to peer workers about this? Or the police?

S: No, we can't. I mean they want to help, but we can't. Look, I am here of my own choice. I am here to work and support my family. Other girls here are also like me. Everyone has problems…that's why they come into this kind of work. Now, see, if I complained about a customer to someone outside, they would first talk to the pimp who brought the customer. Now the pimp makes business for the madam. If the pimp is angry that his customer is being blamed, then the pimp will threaten to shut down the business. What will the madam do without customers? Other pimps won't help her if they get to know that her girls are complaining. The business and the household will shut down…and all of us living here, working together…we will lose our livelihoods. Even if a customer has hurt me, caused me pain…how can I ruin another girl's life like this?

Sapna's answers highlight how participation in social relations, building solidarity and bonds across peers in the RLA, can be considered antithetical to speaking up about violence. In her analysis of the nature of violence in sex work, Sanders (2016:100) argues that the 'environment and spaces in which sex work happen have an intrinsic bearing on the safety of those who work there' In the UK, indoor spaces offer relative protection from violence compared to street sex work. This, Sanders argues, is owing to the protection from risk on the street as well as the greater ability of FSWs to control interactions indoors (p.101). Since this research largely concentrates on residential FSWs it is not possible to comment on this comparison. However, as Sapna's experiences show, FSWs might not speak up

about violence indoors due to support for their peers as well as power imbalances in labour relations in sex work, which can lead to a brothel being shut down. What does this decision on Sapna's part tell us about her agency? When I asked Sapna if she spoke about her experiences of violence with anyone, she said:

> Yes, we girls, we talk about it. Some evenings when we have free time…when the day has been good, we take a break, sit around and play cards. Sometimes we drink, we smoke, and all the feelings come out. We share good things, bad things. Stories of bad customers, of bad boyfriends, troubles at home, everything. We cry together, we laugh together, it feels good. Our minds become unburdened.

Sapna's answer reveals that despite the silence about the violence to those considered *outsiders*, informal peer support mechanisms exist in the social networks of the RLA. As women in a precarious social position in their personal lives, FSWs cope with everyday violence by discussing it with others who share their material conditions of sex work. Indoor sex work, therefore, in comparison to street sex work where social relations and networks are weaker, does offer women such as Sapna opportunities to share their experiences and unburden their minds. Moreover, Sapna's decision to endure violence while sharing how it makes her feel with others to strengthen communal solidarity and peer support hints at an expression of patiency, as suggested by Reader (2007) and discussed in section 3.6.1.1. Sapna's decision to not speak up about the violence should not be viewed as her failure to attain full personhood. Instead, as Reader (2007:603) argues, 'there is as much of the self, the person, in the passive aspects of personal being, as in the active ones'. Moreover, the author argues that as well as the agential importance of independence in personhood, the importance of dependence on others (in this case Sapna's peers) needs to be acknowledged (p.601). This is

especially important when we recall Lamb's (1997) assertion of how personhood in Bengali society is relational, embedded in a *jal* (net) of social relations. In her analysis of women's resistance to violence by men, Sen (1997:168) argues that the role of localised knowledge, which implies spreading knowledge of violence to social networks including family, neighbours and peers is linked to 'incident resistance' which does not lead to the resolution of violence but offers a form of resistance to a specific incident of violence. By sharing their experiences in immediate peer networks, Sapna and women like her express incident resistance and draw support from their alliances and social embeddedness. This act of resistance strengthens social bonds, and acknowledging this contributes to an understanding of the politics of the resistors, i.e. the FSWs (Ortner, 1995). Sen (1997) argues that dispersing knowledge (of the violence) to the state or the community would lead to the resolution of the violence. However, as Sapna's comments highlight, this would also be perceived as threatening the very existence of the social bonds and relations which give the women comfort and a sense of belonging in their lives in the brothel. In this situation, to read Sapna's prioritisation of the emotional comfort she drew from sharing experiences of violence with her peers and prioritised over calling on the state and community to challenge the presence of the violence as an act of meek victimhood, would be to grossly deny the complex ways in which she constructs her sense of belonging, patiency and personhood.

6.6. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has un-exceptionalised the nature of violence and power inequalities in sex work by arguing that these experiences, and negotiations with them, are embedded in social relations that stretch across the institutions in RLAs. It has

discussed in detail social relations across both RLAs in this study, and shown how overlaps between members, resources and activities affect the flow of power. It has argued that structural and cultural factors which tilt power in favour of men create experiences of violence and vulnerability for women. These experiences are also shaped by FSWs' aspiration to model social relations with the RLA on conventional social norms. The tension in maintaining aspects of conventional social relationships in spaces where social rules are subverted make FSWs feel powerless and victimised. Relationships between FSWs, customers and madams have been unpacked to show how this dichotomy plays out among them. Finally, it has discussed experiences of everyday violence and power inequalities in FSWs' performance of motherhood and their relationships with customers and madams. By contextualising experiences and negotiations in social relations, the arguments in this chapter link the above with FSWs' experiences prior to entering into sex work. Some of their previous experiences of violence and power inequalities persist even after they enter sex work; the next chapter shows how these continue even after they exit sex work.

Chapter 7: Pathways out of sex work

7.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 has discussed how experiences of power and violence shape pathways into sex work. Chapter 6 has explored how these experiences are embedded in the making and unmaking of social relations in RLAs. This chapter examines the linkages between social relations in FSWs' lives and pathways out of sex work. This includes social relations prior to entering sex work, those formed while doing sex work in the RLA, and those that are newly created after exiting sex work. Three forms of exit pathways or strategies are identified in relation to the ways in which they deploy and/or affect social relations in the lives of FSWs: individual escape from sex work with the support of customers and peers; rescue by anti-trafficking interventions, which include state and non-state actors, viz. city and/or community-based anti-trafficking NGOs, and subsequent rehabilitation in shelter homes; and a combination of individual escape with rehabilitation by anti-trafficking actors. Overall, this chapter answers the third and final research question: *How do pathways out of sex work affect, and how are they affected by, social relations and experiences of power and violence within these relations?*

The analysis in this chapter draws from four key concepts outlined and discussed in Chapter 3: escape, resistance, stigma and deviance. These frame the discussion of diverse strategies of resistance to and escape from violence in sex work, including those that make use of relationships with male customers of whom the women have been the victims of forced sex or sexual violence. The discussion of stigma and deviance in the lives of women after they have exited sex work through engagement with anti-trafficking rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration processes draws from the conceptual discussion in section 3.6.2.1.

Section 7.2 explores how processes of escape make use of social relations at the site of the sex work, particularly the support of customers. Section 7.3 examines exit through the triad of anti-trafficking rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration interventions. This section examines the ways in which these interventions affect the return to their residential communities of women formerly engaged in sex work, in particular exploring experiences of stigma and deviance in their lives.

7.2. Escape and social relations in the RLA

7.2.1. Introduction.

Chapter 6 highlighted how experiences of power inequalities and violence were located in social relations in FSWs' lives in RLAs. In her study of domestic violence in Kolkata, Sen (1997:168) argues that for women, participation in social relations facilitates opportunities for greater realisation of personal autonomy, particularly through resistance to and resolution of intimate-partner violence. She outlines two forms of resistance: 'incident resistance' and 'practice resistance' (p.4). Incident resistance refers to '…actions taken in response to an assault, whether physical or sexual, which challenge the violence, such as grabbing a man's hands, pushing him away or shouting at him to stop' (ibid). Women are identified as the 'key players in incident resistance but they are not the only people to challenge assaults' (ibid). Practice resistance, on the other hand, 'involves challenging male violence at times and locations which are removed from assaults' (Sen, 1997:4). The author argues that this form of resistance generally involves '…people other than the victim' and lends itself to '…collective forms of challenge' (ibid). Practice resistance can include 'seeking help from the police, finding alternative shelter (whether temporary or long-term) and leaving the relationship' (p.4). While successful resistance

results in the end of the violence, which Sen (1997) refers to as the resolution of violence, this is not synonymous with the end of the relationship or the woman leaving.

Sen (ibid) examines how the spread of knowledge of the abuse and violence amongst social relations impacts resistance to and resolution of violence (p.168). The author identifies two ways in which knowledge spreads into the public domain. While 'localised knowledge…spreads beyond the couple to their regular relationships, such as family, friends and neighbours', 'dispersed knowledge…reaches the more formalised networks and organisations, such as the police, women's groups and lawyers' (ibid). The author argues that while the first is an expression of and is linked to incident resistance, the second is required for practice resistance and the ultimate resolution of the violence. Ultimately, the author concludes that 'knowledge has to reach the dispersed domain for collective resistance to be more likely to be effective (and to argue for policy and resource changes)' (ibid).

This section looks at how women who have been coercively sold into sex work and are in bonded (sexual) labour use the process of localising knowledge of the violence experienced in their lives to achieve both incident and practice resistance to violence in sex work. This is done by sharing their knowledge of violence in the pathways into and within sex work with customers to evoke sympathy and facilitate emotional intimacy and attachment. By sharing stories of experiences of violence, the FSWs seek to strengthen social relations with and garner support from customers to escape from the immediate site of sex work: a specific brothel or RLA. Additionally, the section highlights that while the intention to escape was framed in their desire to return to natal households, many of the FSWs in this research did not, in fact, return. The ones who did often found themselves rejected by members of the household, and sought re-entry into sex work at a different site.

The relationship between women who had escaped from sex work and the men who had helped them to escape continued, either as an intimate partnership outside the RLA or as a form of financial and emotional support. The strategy to escape through the help of customers was embedded in a particular social relationship, but was also framed within a larger desire to return to social relations prior to entry into sex work in the household and residential community.

The next subsection explores different aspects of the process of localising knowledge, primarily the ways in which it was initiated and how the subsequent escape was planned to resolve violence in sex work.

7.2.2. Escaping from sites of sex work with the help of customers

Section 6.4.3.1 discussed how establishing intimacy with customers is perceived to secure independence from (i) violence in the relationships with a FSW's madam, and (ii) the employer-employee relationship with the madam. The escape was initiated through a process of localising knowledge, sharing stories and experiences of violence with customers. It started when a customer inquired about the women's pathways into sex work: 'How did you come here?' - was the most common form of inquiry that sparked disclosure of experiences of violence. The experiences of violence that were discussed and shared by FSWs included details of their coercive pathways into sex work, the power inequalities and hardships in their lives prior to entering sex work, and physical violence by madams and brothel owners. These conversations usually took place when a FSW had been successful in negotiating a degree of freedom of movement in the brothel and increased independence in her relationships with customers by exhibiting compliance (see section 6.5.3). Although some women explicitly requested the sympathetic customer to not force them into engaging in sexual activity with them, most

continued to engage in selling sex while expressing their desire to leave and planning to escape. The desire was to escape the specific *space* or *site* at which the sex was being coercively sold, and the social relations there rather than sex work per se. Sanders (2016:100-101) argues that the safety of the sex worker and protection from violence in sex work are connected to the dynamics of the environment and space in which sex is sold, e.g. indoor spaces or streets. I extend this argument by adding that in this research, experiences of violence for women in sex work depended on *social relations in the space and their positionality in these relations*, as discussed in Chapter 6. This was highlighted when the women returned to sex work on their own terms at a different site with different sets of social relations, and therefore different material conditions of sex work (discussed in section 5.5.4)

In localising knowledge to customers, the prevalence or occurrence of customers' sexual violence in the brothel was not highlighted. It was perceived to have the potential to alienate customers who could help the women to escape. Additionally, as Sen (1997:165) notes, sexual violence, unlike physical violence, is much harder for women to articulate. This was especially so in circumstances where men who had forced themselves on unwilling women in a brothel eventually helped them to escape. Jasmine was able to escape with the help of a customer to whom she had been forced to sell sex after her coercive entry into sex work (see sections 5.5.3 and 6.5.3). Section 6.5.3 discussed how Jasmine was able to negotiate a certain degree of freedom of movement in the brothel after exhibiting compliance. Within a few months of this, her first customer returned:

> It had been a few months after I had told the madam I was willing to stay and do this kind of work willingly. Finally, I could talk to other girls, move around in the brothel…not going outside, but inside. I was allowed to interact with customers independently. Wasn't kept locked up all the

time. During this time that man who had come to me first came back. This time we could talk, so I told him everything – how I had been sold into the RLA by my brother-in-law. I told him the story of my life since childhood, about my village in Bangladesh. I talked about missing my family, my sister and mother. Last time I couldn't tell him why I was not agreeing to do this kind of work with him…he had paid for me, so he wanted what he was paying for, you know? This time, after I had told him everything he said 'If I can help you get out of here, will you be able to go home?' I said I didn't know much about the city, but I could try. I was scared that on the way to Bangladesh I could get arrested, but he told me not to worry. He said if I asked for help I could find my way. So this man helped me plan my escape.

Over the next month Jasmine continued to sell sex to the customer, and he visited her frequently. During their time, together they planned the details of how she would escape, as discussed in the next subsection.

Mamata, on the other hand, established a platonic relationship with her customer as soon as he expressed a desire to help:

One morning, the *malik* [brothel owner] brought a customer in. He was smoking, and as he sat down in front of me, he asked me if I was new and how I had arrived [in the brothel]. He said he hadn't seen me before, and wanted to know how long it'd been since I arrived. I immediately started telling him I was there against my wish. That I had been sold there and didn't want to stay there any more. I was talking so fast…my words were getting stuck together. He told me to calm down and tell him everything slowly. When I finished, I asked him, 'Today, if I was your sister, wouldn't you do everything to help her?' and I begged him to help me escape. I said to him I would do anything for him if only he would get me out of this hell. The customer was quiet for a while, and then he said that

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although he didn't have a sister of his own, he could feel my pain. He told me that he would help me. When I asked him how, he said first he would help me repay my debt to the *malik*. He would come to see me regularly and pay for visits but at these times we wouldn't do anything, we would just talk. He said he would try to bring a mobile phone for me, through which I could keep in touch with me. I had to be careful, because the owner still didn't allow me to have my own phone. He also said that I had to make the owner trust me, so I could move around more. He mentioned that the police often raid the brothel, and at one of those times he would wait for me outside and help me escape. He would tell me about it beforehand so I could stay ready. When I heard this, I immediately said 'Then I will tell the police about the owner and get him arrested'. But the customer told me not to do this. He said if I spoke directly to the police I would fall into deeper trouble. My best way out of here and to return to my home was through him. So I decided to listen to him, and go with the plan.

To gain sympathy from the customer Mamata established a sisterly relationship with him. Deploying kinship rhetoric also helped her to render the relationship platonic. Even though he visited her repeatedly on the pretext of buying sex, their sessions together involved long conversations and physical but platonic affection. She spoke to him frequently on the phone he had smuggled in for her, and they grew close emotionally. After her escape and subsequent rejection by members of her natal household she began to live with the customer, pretending they were husband and wife while still maintaining a platonic relationship (see section 7.3.2). The excerpt above also shows that Mamata wanted to disperse knowledge of her experiences of violence to a wider, public domain, i.e. the police. Seeking formal help through contact with the police, however, is noted to be among the last resorts for women who experience violence (Smith, 1989). When they do seek help

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women tend to report violence by strangers to the police more than violence in intimate relationships (Gartner and Macmillan, 1995). When I asked Mamata what she thought the customer meant by 'deeper trouble' she looked around at the shelter home where the interview was taking place and said 'This'. When I asked her to clarify, she admitted that she had thought she would be put in prison, underscoring the legal precarity of commercially-organised sex work in India. But she also said that she feared that policemen would harass her sexually. Having exited sex work twice, once escaping with the help of a customer and then through a rescue intervention conducted by the police and an NGO, Mamata's experiences show how two different pathways out of sex work impacted on the social relations in her life. This is discussed in section 7.3.

Unlike Mamata, many women established romantic relationships with men who had helped them to escape. After helping her to escape from the RLA in New Delhi in 2011 (introduced in section 5.4.2), Rahima's customer expressed a desire to marry her. While she had encouraged the romance in the RLA, she returned to her village with the assistance of a local anti-trafficking community-based organisation in South 24 Parganas, which her mother had contacted when Rahima was missing. The customer, Suraj, asked her to return to Delhi to marry him; the nature of his work apparently made it impossible for him to visit her in Kolkata. But concerned for her safety and relieved to be reunited with her family, she decided not to go. At the time of the fieldwork for this research in 2015, however, Rahima expressed regret at her decision:

> He was a good man, you know? Much older than me, but good. We kept in touch after I returned. He would call me occasionally, even wired me 5000 INR to buy a phone. He kept saying he wanted to marry me, but asked me to go to Delhi. I didn't want to go…maybe I should have. He got married a few months ago…he still calls me. Tell me he misses me. I should have gone.

Rahima's ambiguous feelings about a marital relationship with the man who had helped her to escape sex work was reflected in different ways by other women in my sample. Although both Jasmine and Mamata re-entered sex work after their escape and initiated sexual-affective relationships with customers, they chose to keep their relationships with the men who had helped them to escape platonic. During one of several interviews with Jasmine in 2014, she said 'I don't want to ruin this relationship. There is something special about this one. He is a good man, looks out for me. Don't want to ruin it through anything bad'. What Jasmine implied by 'bad' was 'sexual': platonic relationships with men that were modelled on natal kinship relations were perceived to be more enduring than sexual-affective ones. Both Jasmine and Mamata described the customers who had helped them to escape as *dada'r moto* (like brothers). Having escaped the site of sex work they saw no need to continue sexual relations with these men, choosing instead to change the nature of the relationship. Although both men, like Rahima's customer, were married to other women, they continued to financially support the FSWs periodically.

Apart from customers, women often localised knowledge of incidents of violence to other men (e.g.pimps), as well as to peers, in order to plan an escape route. After being coercively sold into sex work by a male acquaintance soon after dissolution of her marriage (section 5.4.2) when she was looking for work in Kolkata, Sapna experienced continuous physical violence at the hands of her madam, Rani, and found a source of support in the madam's partner, 'Bakshi *Da'*.[13] Sapna described him as 'kind and good'. Over the six months of her stay in the brothel, Sapna made a conscious effort to spend time building a relationship with him in Rani's absence. Ultimately he was the one who helped her to return to her family, despite Rani's disapproval: 'Sometimes when life is against you, God sends

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[13] Da is the short version of dada, meaning older brother in Bengali.

good people your way. He was like a father to me…better than my own father',
Sapna said, underlining how she perceived him as kin and contrasting it with her
tumultuous relationship with her own father (section 5.4.2.)

Women like Jasmine and Mamata could escape with their customers' help by
negotiating freedom of movement outside the brothel. Jasmine escaped while out
with a customer when they were granted permission to go to a movie together.
Mamata escaped by asking the brothel owner to let her visit the market nearby;
her customer had tipped her off by phone about a police raid. Both women escaped
after a long period of exhibiting compliance and gaining the trust of their madam
and the brothel owner respectively, a process detailed in section 6.5.3.

For some women in my study like Rahima, the pathway out of sex work combined
individual escape with help from a customer with varying forms of support from
anti-trafficking interventions. These included aspects of the rescue, rehabilitation
and reintegration triad of anti-trafficking activities which target women in sex work
in India who have been coercively sold into the trade. The next subsection explores
this.

7.3. Rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration: Anti-trafficking pathways out of sex work

Section 3.6.1 highlighted that the dominant thrust of anti-trafficking activities is
rescue and rehabilitation, with a focus on sites of sex work (Sanghera, 2005:16).
This subsection explores rescue and rehabilitative processes that affect women in
sex work. Additionally, it considers the third, often underfunded and under-
researched element, reintegration, which involves resettling groups of survivors of
trafficking in their residential, usually rural, communities. This group comprises a
steady stream of women rescued from sex work and rehabilitated in shelter homes

in urban areas. Sanghera (2005:18) argues that 'reintegration has been the most difficult stage in the anti-trafficking process especially in the case of women and girls returning from the sex industry'. The prevalence of sexual abuse and gender-based violence in families and the stigmatisation of returning women (Sanjog, 2015) make their reintegration particularly complex and challenging.

Rescue and rehabilitation activities are carried out by city-based NGOs with a strong anti-trafficking focus. These are undertaken in partnership with and with the support of the police and other state actors, viz. government shelter homes. In contrast, reintegration falls within the remit of rural community-based organisations, which work on a range of community development issues including but not limited to human trafficking. These organisations often struggle to forge links with state actors, viz. local police *thanas* (stations), and often end up confronting a strong nexus between politics and crime against women in rural communities. This subsection examines these three activities: rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration, and the various actors involved in these in the context of this research.

7.3.1. Rescue

Section 16 of the ITPA (discussed in section 1.2) details the circumstances for the 'rescue of a person [who] is living, or is carrying on, or is being made to carry on, prostitution in a brothel' (ITPA:13). The order for a rescue can be provided 'by a magistrate or even a sub divisional magistrate on receipt of information from any person or organisation, including NGOs' (Nair and Sen, 2003:81). Section 5 of the ITPA allows police officers to carry out rescue activities and, in the absence of female police officers, can call upon a 'lady member of a recognised welfare institution or organization' i.e. female staff from an NGO. 'NGOs too have a legal

right to rescue trafficked victims' (Nair and Sen, 2003:81). Nair and Sen observe that '...under the Indian legal system, even individuals have the legal authority to prevent crimes' (ibid). The authors cite Section 43 of the Criminal Penal Code, which authorises an ordinary citizen to arrest any person who commits a non-bailable and non-cognisable offence in their presence (ibid). Rescue interventions, therefore, bring together a whole gamut of state and non-state actors. Termed 'raids', these interventions target various potential sites of exploitation and trafficking. A significant number of raids target brothels in big cities (Sanghera, 2005) and receive disproportionate media coverage compared to interventions at other trafficking sites (Nair and Sen, 2003:28). Raids are conducted usually when the police or NGO receive a tip-off about the possibility of trafficking victims being held against their will at sites. These tip-offs can come from a variety of sources: from the RLA, or from the families of women and girls suspected to be at the site. However, raids target women in sex work indiscriminately, irrespective of age and consent. Sanghera (2005:17) argues that 'in police-facilitated raids, "seemingly minor-looking girls" are picked up and consigned either to government remand homes or to shelters run by NGOs'.This includes women who have entered sex work voluntarily, which makes the process of rescue and subsequent rehabilitation coercive. Sanghera (1999:20) criticises the ways in which anti-trafficking laws in India criminalise the exercise of agency and autonomy amongst adult women and children (under 18 years old) who enter sex work against a background of constraints. In particular, the 'dominant reformist-protectionist approach…has not created an expansion of opportunities and choices…for "young vulnerables"'. Instead the latter are 'criminalized for exercising autonomy in the economic and sexual spheres, stripped of all power to exercise agency and independent choices, reduced to deep vulnerability due to lack of viable alternatives, rescued and confined in dead-end remand homes, rehabilitated into abusive situations which they fled from in the first place, and above all, stigmatized' (ibid). Sanghera's (1999)

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critique is relevant to this research, since a number of the women interviewed at the anti-trafficking shelter home who had been rescued by anti-trafficking interventions said that they were over 18, whereas the state and shelter home asserted that they were not. In the absence of any formal identification documents, the age and victimhood of these rescued women were contested terrain. In essence, this means that rescue interventions impacted women in brothels differently based on their modes of entry. As already explored in section 6.4.2., modes of entry into and willingness/unwillingness to do sex work affect the material conditions of life in RLAs and brothels. Women who enter willingly form a network of social relations at these sites and become embedded in these relationships. Those who are sold into sex work against their will are isolated and denied the possibility of embedding themselves in social relations that would provide emotional comfort. In the RLAs and sites of sex work, social relations help to ameliorate FSWs' material conditions of sex work and make escape possible, as discussed in section 7.2. For women who enter sex work willingly, rescue interventions interrupt and suspend social relations constructed at sites of sex work. Women's different responses to rescue from sex work were highlighted by Salma, who had been coercively sold to a brothel in Mumbai by her husband and sister-in-law (section 5.5.3). During the week that she was there, police raids took place almost every day:

> Almost every day, there was huge commotion – lots of screaming, yelling, people running around. I could only hear what was going on outside the locked door…couldn't see anything. Whenever this happened, a woman who was in charge of all of us new girls, would tell us to get into an underground room. The entrance to the room was under one of the beds, on the side. The first time I saw it I was amazed. I didn't want to go in, but was beaten by the woman and pushed in. On the seventh day I was there the same thing happened. I was so weak from

refusing food every day and crying constantly. That day the police and social workers brought a girl with them…she used to live in this brothel, but had escaped. I found out all this from the social worker later. That girl knew there was this secret room and guided the police to it. When they opened the top door and asked us to climb out, I was so weak I could barely move. They pulled me out. later Swati *didi* [the social worker] told me she couldn't hold back her tears when she saw me, I must have looked so bad! We were taken to a shelter home, where I ate my first meal in seven days. There were other girls in the room; they were arguing with the police. They kept saying 'We are here of our own free will, we don't want to leave'. But everyone was brought to the shelter home. For the first time in seven days, I ate a proper meal. But the other girls who were angry with the police and the NGO, refused to eat! (Salma, 2015)

Salma's recollection of the rescue process highlights how these interventions are perceived differently by women at the same site of sex work. Salma, who had been refusing food to express her anger and sadness at being locked up against her will, welcomed the rescuers. On the contrary, her peers, who had entered sex work voluntarily, began to refuse food at the shelter home to express their displeasure at having been forcibly rescued.

Mamata learnt the distinction between these different experiences of rescue at her brothel during talk about a police raid. During a conversation with the brothel owner and a group of her peers, Mamata inquired about the police raid process to procure information for the process of escape she was planning with her customer (section 7.2.2). One of the women said 'During a raid, everyone runs for their lives. You have to save yourself, don't wait for someone to come get you, and don't try and take someone with you'. On hearing this Mamata's brothel owner looked at Mamata and said 'Yes, but she can't go on her own. I will take her with me. She is

a *taka'r-meye*'. This term, which literally means 'money-girl', means a woman in bonded labour at a sex-work site with a debt that she must repay to the brothel owner through sexual labour.

After her escape, Mamata re-entered sex work at a different brothel after twice failing to negotiate re-entry into her natal household (section 5.5.4). At that point she had been doing sex work voluntarily for over three years, had experienced and ended an intimate relationship with a customer, and had a daughter from that failed relationship (section 6.4.3.4). She kept her daughter for fortnights at a stretch in the care of an informal day care centre in the neighbourhood for women who worked in the brothel in Haldia. In short, she was deeply embedded in the social relations of life as a sex worker. When news of the police raid broke that morning in the brothel, Mamata and her peers decided to leave the premises and packed up some precious belongings and headed to a nearby field. There, the brothel staff set up provisions to cook for everyone while they waited out the raid. However, when the police and female staff of a local chapter of an international Christian NGO arrived they were tipped off by *para-r chele* (local boys) that the brothel residents were hiding in the field nearby. When the police arrived Mamata and her peers were caught off guard:

> We were sitting and eating lunch. Suddenly someone yelled, 'The police are coming! Run, run!' Everyone started running in different directions...leaving plates and food behind. I couldn't keep up because of my leg. I tried running, but the *didi* from the NGO and a policewoman caught up with me. I didn't want to go, I kept telling them to let me go. But they were using force, and kept saying, 'We'll only take you to the police station for a few minutes, you can leave after that'. But I didn't want to go, I knew they were trying to trap me. I had a mobile phone with me; they confiscated that and pushed me into the van. At the police station I kept saying 'Please let me go, I'm here by choice. I don't have

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a family, this place is my home'. But they refused to listen. They put me

in a police van and brought me here. And now I have been here four

months and don't have any idea when they will let me go.

(Mamata,2014)

Mamata perceived her rescue experience as coercive and violent; she described it as an 'arrest' since she was taken to the police station first. She was brought to the shelter home as she was considered a 'minor' i.e. under 18 years old. Nair and Sen (2003:85) argue that 'rescue operations, usually termed raids, are carried out on a large scale, wherein the trafficked women and children are rounded up and accused of soliciting'. This includes arrests for soliciting and women are often released through interventions by NGOs or bribes made to the police by brothel owners. Although Mamata was brought to the shelter home after her 'arrest', she described her stay as involuntary and the shelter home 'like a prison'.

The next subsection continues this discussion through a critical overview of rehabilitative processes.

7.3.2.Rehabilitation

Section 19 of the ITPA authorises magistrates to order the transfer of women rescued from sites of sex work to a protective home or corrective institution once the 'person who is carrying on with, or is being made to carry on prostitution…make(s) an application' to be kept in such a space. However, on the ground, as is evident in Mamata's experience, rescued FSWs are often brought to a shelter home against their will. The location and choice of the shelter home is usually determined by the location of the brothel or RLA which was raided, as well as the location of the rescued woman's residential community to make her return easier. The length of the stay at the shelter home depends, among other factors,

on a woman's willingness to co-operate with the state to provide details of the trafficking process, information about her family and residence (to make return possible), etc. However, given that most experiences of trafficking start out as voluntary migratory journeys and often involve an escape from situations of household violence and abuse, trafficking victims are hesitant to provide details that would make their release from the shelter home faster. Additionally, some fear repercussions from traffickers, who may harm their families if they cooperate with the state (Srikantiah, 2007). This hesitation is compounded in situations where women express a strong desire to return to commercially-organised sex work, which is criminalised by the Indian state. Further, in instances where the rescued women are citizens of countries other than India, their repatriation, involving state and non-state actors across two countries, can be a lengthy procedure and the victims may end up staying at the shelter home for more than two years at a time. However, as Nair and Sen (2003:84) argue, '…rescue homes are not, and cannot be, permanent abodes for the survivors…therefore, an unusually long stay in these homes by the survivors points to the deficiencies and loopholes in the existing system'. The authors note how prolonged stays in shelter homes often exacerbate the stress of the residents and violate their human rights (ibid).

In the context of this research, respondents with coercive pathways into sex work who had welcomed the rescue perceived the protectionist measures at the shelter home, viz. having their mobile phone taken away and not being able to meet their family straight away, as oppressive. These measures are put in place given the anticipated involvement of families in trafficking processes. Mobile phones and meetings with family are only allowed once the community-based NGO staff, liaising with the state and shelter-home NGO staff, have conducted a family assessment by visiting the family and enquiring into their role in the process of the woman's entry into sex work. Indeed, at the shelter home within this research the

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safety of the residents and protecting them from intimidation by traffickers were the priorities. One evening in October 2015 two men were observed loitering outside the main gate of the shelter home. One of them was apparently armed, and security had to be doubled that night outside the home. Details of the men were largely kept secret to avoid causing panic, but the staff suspected that the men were traffickers; some of the women they had sold into sex work in a different city had recently been transferred to the shelter home. However, due to a lack of information, the requisite levels of secrecy, and the overall uncertainty, the protectionist measures caused frustration among the residents. As discussed in section 4.6.3, a number of escapes from the shelter home had forced the organisation to increase the height of the walls surrounding the complex, rendering escape impossible. These acts were perceived to cause *koshto* and were seen as unfair and cruel. Salma, who had welcomed being rescued from the brothel, shared her frustration at not being able to meet her family straight away. After a stay in a shelter home in Mumbai, Salma was transferred to a shelter home in southern Kolkata. When her family, from a rural community in a southern part of West Bengal, visited the shelter home she was not allowed to see them. Salma recalled how she felt that day:

> The morning they came, the night before that I had a dream. In my dream I was with my family again. Things were like before. I was happy. It felt so real. In the morning I woke up and told all the girls in the room 'Today my *abba* [father] is coming to get me, I know it'. The girls didn't believe me, they said I probably wanted them to come so badly, I must have dreamt it up. But I was adamant. I kept saying 'No, they will come for me'. And they did; I knew it was them because I saw my father's left hand from the small window in our room. I would recognise that arm anywhere. All the girls were saying 'A large group has come'. I knew it was my family. Later I found out my parents had come with uncles and cousins, about 15 of them from my village. But I wasn't allowed to see

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them that day. I was so upset, I waited and waited, but no one came to get me. Later, I was sitting on my bed crying and a girl told me 'This is the *aain* [law], you can't see them on the first day'. I got very angry and said 'What kind of law is this that separates a girl from her own family? Especially when she has been away from them for such a long time? I don't accept this law. I will never accept it'.

Rehabilitative and subsequent reintegrative processes often ignore the abuse and violence in previous social relations that propel women like Mamata into sex work voluntarily. Since the nature of the violence is not connected outright to coercive pathways into sex work, attempts at reintegration are made. As Mamata's example shows, however, families are not keen to take back daughters who have been involved in sex work:

One day the social workers told me they were going to visit my family and tell them about me living here. They told me they would see if it was possible for me to return home so I could leave the shelter home. I told them 'Don't go. My mother will never take me back. I have no family, that is why I am in this kind of work'. But they went anyway. On meeting my mother and telling her everything, my mother told them she didn't want me back. She told them I was a *noshto* (rotten) and *baaje* (bad) *meye* (girl), and had run away and brought shame to the family. When they came back and told me this, I told them 'She is the one at fault, not me. If she had loved me like a true mother I would not be here today'. (Mamata, 2014)

Rejected by her natal family, Mamata's future was unsure. Due to her short stature and weak build, she claimed that the NGO officials considered her to be younger than she was. She claimed that she was 22 and should be allowed to leave, but her case reports showed her to be 17. Since her case was being processed by a different NGO that had rescued her from the NGO that ran the shelter home, the

latter was unsure about what would happen to her. The uncertainty over Mamata's case revolved around the question highlighted in section 5.4.3: *'Who will assume the burden?'.* With her natal family explicitly refusing to take her back, Mamata was caught in a system that refused to recognise her agency and willingness to do sex work. Meanwhile, the social relations she had created at the brothel lay suspended. At the shelter home she had had to give up her mobile phone and could not contact the women whom she had hired as caregivers for her daughter at the brothel. She did not want to call the women from the shelter home's phone for fear of drawing state attention to them. Additionally, she did not want her daughter to be brought over to the shelter home, which she was certain would happen if she told staff about her, and that could mean a much longer stay.

> I just want to get out, get back to my normal life the way I have built it.
> Why won't they let me out? I don't want to do any other kind of work,
> don't want to go back to my family. Just want to return to the brothel and
> see my daughter. I have struggled so much my whole life to stand on
> my own feet. And finally, when things were going okay, these people
> had to come to try to 'save' me. (Mamata, 2014)

Mamata's ordeal outlines how rescue and rehabilitative interventions treat 'anchorless' women. Not accepted by their natal and marital families, who refuse to take responsibility for them, these women stay on at the institution, encouraged to take on non-sex work livelihood options. Rescue and rehabilitative interventions ignore the complexity and multi-dimensionality of social relations in RLAs, collapsing them into homogenous relations of violence-victimhood. Finally, these interventions make voluntary re-entry into sex work difficult, especially for women of a particular socio-economic background. Prior to her rescue Mamata, who had escaped from sex work after her coercive initial entry into sex work (section 5.5.3) had tried to return to her family, but had been unsuccessful:

I had taken my customer along with me because I didn't feel brave going back alone. I also wanted him to tell my family that I had not gone into this kind of work alone, that I was forced into it. I thought 'If I take him with me, they'll believe me'. But I was wrong. My mother and sister-in-law screamed at me, said I was a bad girl, I had shamed them in front of the whole village by running off. I don't even want to think about some of the things they said…I don't want to say them. The customer, he felt so bad hearing my own family insult me like this. A huge crowd had gathered in front of our house and I felt so small. Finally I decided to leave as I realised they would never take me back. Earlier I had thought Allah was punishing me for running away, but now I think I was right to leave.

Rejected by her natal family, Mamata began to live with her customer in Howrah, the town closest to her village, in what she asserted was a platonic arrangement. However, when his family fixed his marriage he let her know that he could not support her any longer, economically or socially. Having no social relations to depend on or return to, Mamata returned to sex work, this time at a brothel in Haldia from which she was eventually rescued. After the death of her father (section 5.5.4) she exited and re-entered sex work once more; once again, this was tied to rejection by her natal family.

The homogenous victimhood imposed by rescue and rehabilitative processes which prevent women voluntarily returning to sex work was acknowledged by the late founder of the NGO that ran the shelter home:

We opened the shelter home to help real victims: women who have been forced, against their will, into prostitution. We don't support prostitution as a viable work option for women, but if adult women want to do it, who are we to stop them? But the police and

> government often use the guise of anti-trafficking to punish women. Sometimes this is even used to ethnically profile migrants – once we were called upon to transfer Bangladeshi women in sex work in cities like Mumbai to our shelter home. The police complained about an influx of migrant Bangladeshi women in Mumbai. But these are women well above the age of 18, and we are not the border police; that is not our work. (Sharma, 2015)

Apart from making it difficult for women to return to sex work voluntarily, 22-year-old Jabala's experiences revealed how the rescue process can be violent and corrupt, often endangering the women's safety due to lack of full knowledge of the social relations in a brothel. After experiencing repeated and horrific violence in her marriage which led to her hospitalisation during the later stages of her pregnancy, she had decided to leave her natal household and live with her sister, who worked in a RLA near their village. There, she helped her with domestic chores, cooking and cleaning, staying indoors and looking after her young son. She insisted that she had not engaged in sex work at all during the time before her rescue. However, when other madams found out that she was living there without selling sex, (trouble) started:

> My sister used to lock me indoors when she left to work for the day. She told me not to go out because it wasn't safe. I was happy there, my son was happy. I did all the housework, and with my sister's money, my son could eat fruit, Horlicks, etc. We didn't have all this in the village, no money to buy all this. But things changed when a Nepali madam found out I was living there. She wanted me to work for her, but my sister said no. I also didn't want to do this kind of work then. This madam then went and told the police that my sister was keeping a Bangladeshi woman in the room. That madam was powerful, had a lot of money; younger women were scared of her. She must have given some money to the police…they came and

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arrested my sister and brought my son and me here. I was crying, and told them I did not want to go, that we were sisters. But they didn't want to believe me. Now I am here, they are saying my family will collect me. But I don't want to live in the village any more. You have to listen to a lot of bad things if your marriage doesn't work. I wouldn't mind going back now, doing what my sister was doing and making my own money. Just please tell them I don't want to go back home.

Jabala's experiences highlight the role of community-based stigma (due to her failed marriage) in her decision to move to an RLA to be with her sister, and to enter about the lack of money in the household. She experienced stigmatisation from the community, a recurrent pattern in the lives of women who return to their rural community after engaging in sex work, coercively or voluntarily. The next and final section of the chapter discusses this in detail.

7.3.3. Reintegration

Sections 7.1 to 7.3.2 have discussed two different pathways out of sex work: individual escape through reliance on customers, and anti-trafficking rescue interventions. For some women in this research, their pathway combined the first with some elements of anti-trafficking rehabilitative and reintegrative processes. After her escape, with a customer's support, from a brothel in New Delhi (section 7.2.2), Rahima contacted her family. She was informed that in her absence her family had contacted a community-based organisation that works to trace missing women and reintegrate them into the community with financial and social support. When young women who have been missing for a long time without parental knowledge or supervision return to their communities, they experience stigma, a concept discussed in section 3.6.2.1. Even in the case of women who have been

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forced into hazardous labour conditions, an association with sex work and/or sexual promiscuity is anticipated by the wider community. Their return marks them out as deviants and they are often alienated by their peers (Sanjog, 2015).

For women like Rahima and Salma, who returned to their rural communities after escaping or being rescued from sex work and were accepted by their natal households, life was difficult. Salma shared how, after an initial period of welcome by people from the community and her family, things started getting difficult for her:

> When I first arrived everyone was welcoming. People in the village would ask 'What happened?' I didn't tell them everything, I made up some story about how in being abducted by my husband and sister-in-law, we were stopped by the CID.[14] They asked us questions in Hindi, but because we couldn't speak the language they took us to the police stations. I was taken to a government home where I had to stay for a while and then was released to my family. I don't know how this idea came into my head…but this is what I said! I didn't want to mention what place I had been to. But people had already started gossiping and saying bad things about me, about my character. Meanwhile things at home were hard. I wanted to make a legal case against my husband and his sister, but there was no money for it. There were fights daily about money issues and about how we could go ahead with this. I barely left the house, because I didn't want to answer more questions, listen to gossip about me. Around this time we decided to contact the *shonstha* [anti-trafficking community-based organisation) in Canning.

Salma's experience of stigma and tension in the natal household after her return was echoed by Rahima, who found herself ostracised and unable to meet other

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[14] Criminal Investigation Departments are special investigative branches within Indian State Police branches. CID officials are usually plain clothed.

women her age in the village. This was exacerbated since her deviance had started before she went missing, as a rape victim, discussed in the next chapter.

> When I returned I wanted to see all my friends. There were four or five girls like me. We would meet to chat, walk around the fields, do some work on the field together. But when I came back and tried to see them, their families told me to go away. They made up stories about how the girls were busy with work or studying, but I realised this was all lies. I think their families saw me as a bad influence, that I would affect their daughters negatively just by being around them. It was very painful and I felt very alone. Thankfully, the *shonstha* was there and I met many other young women like me there and became friends with them. (Rahima, 2015)

Due to the stigma associated with their deviant 'missing girl' status, women like Rahima and Salma found a source of social and emotional support and a way to alleviate family and community-based stigma by associating themselves publicly with a community-based NGO that implements reintegration interventions. These organisations also provide support for women to access the criminal justice system against the men and women who had forced them into sex work. However, the women also found their behaviour and subsequent desire to migrate for work policed by the NGO, which adhered to protectionist ideas about women's mobility and safety and were abolitionist in their approach to sex work. The women's families often agreed with these ideas, which caused confrontations between them and the women. In their residential communities these women were marked out as deviants and sought normalcy through work and/or social relations with men in their community. The experiences of women who have returned to their communities through reintegration interventions are shaped, therefore, by attempts to regain social normalcy in social relations which stretch across the household, the market, the community and the state.

In this research, pathways out of sex work led women directly to their natal households. As discussed in section 5.4, pathways into sex work often involved experiences of violence in the marital household. Members of the marital households of women like Rahima and Salma had been directly involved in the women's coercion into sex work. When these women returned home they found their claim to intra-household resources precarious. Salma wanted to file charges against her husband and sister-in-law, but found resistance from her family. They perceived this as a long-drawn and expensive procedure, one not worth undertaking. Additionally, her return led to arguments, once again over *'Ke bhaar nebe?'* (who will assume her burden?), underlining her financial and social precarity. Rahima's parents restricted her mobility for her safety, and she found this claustrophobic. They thought she was too restless and should be careful about who she spoke to. Both women reached out to the community-based NGO for help with alleviating these conflicts. For Rahima, visiting the organisational office close to the market and the rail station in Canning gave her the freedom to move around and talk to others. For Salma, the NGO offered her the legal support she was looking for, as the staff agreed to persuade her natal family to press charges against her marital family. So on their return, the boundary between family and community, already blurred in rural communities in India, was extended once more with the inclusion of the NGO and its staff in the lives of the returning women. At meetings held at the NGO office with other trafficking survivors present, the organisational staff insisted that these spaces and the people in them were 'like family' and that the returned women should trust and depend on them as they would their own family. Kinship rhetoric was used to build trust, and regular visits by NGO staff to the women's households helped to include the NGO in the discussion of everyday family matters. During my fieldwork I observed a particular discussion between Sondha – a recently rescued and rehabilitated 19-year-old woman who had returned to her family a month before I met her – her parents, and

a social worker from a community-based organisation which was working to reintegrate her. Sondha had left the village on her own with an acquaintance who had offered her work as a domestic help in Kolkata. As with other migratory journeys in this research, Sondha found herself coercively sold into sex work in Mumbai. During this discussion her father complained about her desire to migrate again:

> I am a simple farmer, I farm the land and live off it. I would always tell her 'Come with me and help me in my work'. But she would complain about the sun, say the work is too hard. Back then she always talked about going to the city to work there – she was attracted to that kind of life. Her mother and I had no idea she had all these plans for running away. If she had told us how badly she wanted to go, maybe we could have helped.

Sondha interrupted her father during this discussion to argue that her parents had insisted she stay in the village and halted all her aspirations to migrate for socio-economic reasons.

> I didn't tell them about this job because I knew they would stop me. For them, their life in the village is enough, but I have more dreams. I see these girls who work in the city, they come back with gifts and money. There is no opportunity for women like me in this village – you just get married and that's it. I wanted more. But they wouldn't let me go. So I had to leave on my own. (Sondha,2015)

Sondha's parents insisted that despite her negative experiences, Sondha was keen to migrate for work again. Although Sondha had been coerced into sex work, she had not tried to escape. She had worked in the brothel for six months before her rescue, resisting romantic relationships with customers and offers to escape by insisting that she just wanted to make money and build a good life for herself. Sondha's feelings about sex work were ambivalent and she had a strong desire to

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migrate again; her desire to re-enter sex work, however, was not explicit. In the discussion, the social worker from the NGO joined Sondha's father in warning her against the dangers of migration, and told her to be careful about trusting people. Despite the parents' claims of ignorance, the social worker suspected her mother's involvement in helping Sondha to migrate initially, and admonished her too. This discussion exemplifies the ways in which community members are brought into family and household discussions. Joining the market, i.e. the labour-market in the cities, which would require migration, and the sex-work market featured strongly in these discussions. Additionally, the community NGOs helped the families to seek justice in incidents of trafficking by helping them contact state actors in the residential community including the police and the district magistrate.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has identified and analysed pathways out of sex work. It has explored how FSWs use their social relations at sites of sex work to facilitate their escape from violent social relations there. These processes include localising knowledge of violence, experienced prior to entering sex work and while actively engaged in it, to men encountered through sex work. However, when the women's return to their natal household is met with rejection they seek re-entry into sex work. Unlike escaping, anti-trafficking interventions that rescue women from sex work ignore social relations formed at the site of the work, as well as experiences of violence and power inequalities (not connected directly to pathways into sex work) within natal households. These experiences, which render women's claims to household resources precarious, persist when the women return after being rescued. These interventions also usually mean that the women associate themselves with community-based organisations for help to reintegrate within their residential

communities either on their own or as a step subsequent to being rescued. This makes their return to sex work (unlike after they escape) difficult, as anti-trafficking community-based organisations tend to be abolitionist.

When I met Salma and Rahima during my fieldwork in 2015, three years after I had first met them, they were still living in their rural residential communities near Canning. However, in mid-2012 Rahima had eloped with her partner (a relationship initiated after her return) without the knowledge of her family or the NGO. She had returned, but had migrated and re-entered sex work again for a brief period of time in a city in a neighbouring state. Salma had stayed in the village and consolidated her economic and social independence. Both women experienced deviance in different ways in their lives as a result of their experiences. This is discussed further in the next and final analytical chapter of this thesis

Chapter 8: Deviant careers: An analysis of women's pathways in and out of sex work

8.1. Introduction

This chapter brings together the analytical discussions from Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to analyse the life-trajectories of women who enter sex work in Eastern India. It maps commonalities across experiences of, and negotiations with, violence and power inequalities in their pathways into, lives in, and pathways out of sex work. Commonalities in experiences are traced through the conceptual framework of deviant careers (Becker, 1963). This framework provides a theoretical tool to (i) map how deviance is constructed in women's lives in social relations across different institutions (the household, the community, the market, the state) and across their life-cycles, and (ii) connect deviance in social relations with experiences of and negotiations with violence and power inequalities which drive entry into sex work, persist in, and continue even after they leave sex work. The application of this framework draws from earlier discussions on Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework and Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) life-cycle framework.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Becker's theory of deviant careers in section 8.2. The various steps in this theoretical framework are discussed. Section 8.3 applies this theoretical framework to the lives of former and current FSWs in this research. Each of its three subsections explores various phases of deviancy in the lives of the women in their pathways into, lives in, and pathways out of sex work. Section 8.3.3.1 explores experiences of deviance in the lives of young women below the age of 18, contesting their victimhood as child marriage victims in shelter homes. Section 8.3.3.2 explores deviance in the lives of women who

have returned to their residential communities after engaging in sex work. Section 8.4 presents the concluding arguments.

8.2. Becker's theory of deviant careers: A conceptual discussion

In his theory on deviance (introduced in section 3.6.2.1), Becker (1963:22) argues that to understand how deviance develops and evolves through time, a sequential model is required. This model 'takes into account the fact that patterns of behaviour develop in orderly sequence'. It 'deals with a sequence of steps, of changes in the individual's behaviour and perspectives, in order to understand the phenomenon' of deviance (p.23). This is important since 'all causes of deviance do not operate at the same time', and each cause explains a certain phase of deviant behaviour (ibid). To trace the different operations of deviance, Becker argues that 'a useful conception in developing sequential models of various kinds of deviant behaviour is that of career' (p.24). The author defines the concept, which was originally developed in the study of occupations, as 'a sequence of movements from one position to another in an occupational system made by a person who works in that system' (p.24). In this lies the notion of 'career contingencies', which 'includes both objective facts of social structure, and changes in the perspectives, motivations and desires of the individuals' (ibid). Becker(ibid:24-25) argues that this model can 'easily be transformed…in the study of deviant careers', which includes the study of ever-increasing deviant careers, as well as those individuals that have careers that move away from deviance into more conventional ways of living.

In tracing his theory of a deviant career, Becker (1963:25) outlines three broad steps, each with sub-steps of their own. The *first step* '…in most deviant careers is the commission of a nonconforming act, an act that breaks some particular set of rules'. The nonconforming act can be intentional or unintentional; in the event of

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intentional nonconforming acts, a 'motive force' persists in its commission. To understand why people commit intentional nonconforming acts Becker refers to Merton's (1957:26) theorisation of anomie, where socially-structured sources of strain – i.e. social positions – make conflicting demands of people that propel them to act in illegitimate ways to solve the problems that they face due to these positions. However, Becker (1963) argues that this may falsely assume that people never fantasise about or experience an impulse to be deviant. A 'normal' person, who can check his deviance, becomes 'progressively involved in conventional institutions and behaviour'. However, nonconforming acts are committed by viewing oneself as a billiard ball, where the person feels that they are being helplessly propelled into certain nonconforming situations which require deviance from conventional norms without the need to assault the norms themselves (Sykes and Matza, 1957:667-669; cited in Becker 1963:28).

The *second step* in a deviant career is 'being caught and publicly labelled as a deviant' (Becker, 1963:31). This is '...one of the most crucial steps in the process of building a stable pattern of deviant behaviour' (ibid). This is significant, since when deviant acts are committed in secret, the first step might not materialise into the second. The revelation of the nonconforming act and the transition from the first step to the second depends not so much on what the individual does as on how people react to the act. 'Being caught and branded as deviant has important consequences for one's further social participation and self-image…where the most important consequence is a drastic change in the individual's public identity' (p.32). In order to analyse the consequences of being outed as deviant, Becker (1963) turns to Hughes' (1945:353-359) distinction between 'master and auxiliary status traits'. In his study of desirable social status, Hughes (ibid) notes that social status usually carries a particular master trait; e.g. a doctor is expected to have a certificate to prove his training in medical practice. However, this usually also

carries an expectation of auxiliary status traits: the doctor is also inherently expected to be male, or white, or both. The absence of the presumed auxiliary traits denies a person full entry into a particular social status in a way that someone who has both master and auxiliary traits is allowed. The deviant label gives a master status where 'one receives the status as a result of breaking a rule, and the identification proves to be more important than most others' (Becker, 1963:33). Additionally, 'possession of one deviant trait may have a generalized symbolic value so that people automatically assume its bearer possesses other undesirable traits allegedly associated with it' (p.3)

Becker (ibid:34) argues that 'treating a person as though he were generally rather than specifically deviant produces a self-fulfilling prophecy', which '…sets in motion several mechanisms which conspire to shape the person in the image people have of him'. The author argues that 'in the first place, one tends to be cut off after being identified as a deviant from participation in more conventional groups, even though the specific consequences of the particular deviant activity might never of themselves have caused the isolation had there not also been the public knowledge and reaction to it' (p.34) The deviant is denied 'ordinary means of carrying on the routines of everyday life', and 'must of necessity develop illegitimate routines'. The stigma (Goffman, 1963) experienced by the deviant because of their publicly-outed and labelled deviancy propels them towards greater deviancy. This lays the foundation for what Becker (1963) considers the *third and final step* of the deviant career. This is when the deviant moves into an 'organized deviant group' (p.37). This move, or the realisation and acceptance of this move, by the deviant has 'a powerful impact on his conception of himself' (p.37). It sharpens the deviancy because the members of the group have one thing in common: their deviancy (p.38). From this commonality of shared experience of the first two steps of the deviant career emerges a '"deviant subculture": a set of perspectives and

understandings about what the world is like and how to deal with it, and a set of routine activities based on those perspectives' (ibid). Becker argues that membership of an organised deviant group 'solidifies a deviant identity' (ibid). This membership has two significant 'consequences for the career of the deviant' (p.38). First, 'deviant groups more than deviant individuals' tend to rationalise their position, developing often 'very complicated historical, legal and psychological justification for their deviant activity' (ibid). Second, through membership of a deviant group the deviant learns to carry out their deviance without much trouble (ibid). Overall, Becker argues that the 'rationales of deviant groups' tend to repudiate 'conventional moral rules, conventional institutions, and the entire conventional world' (p.39).

The next subsection applies and problematises Becker's (1963) theory in the context of former and current FSWs in Bengali society.

8.3. The deviant careers of former and current female sex workers

In this research, I encountered women at various stages of a deviant career. These stages did not occur linearly in the lives of the former and current FSWs. This was primarily due to the circular lives of FSWs, who often returned to sex work after exiting it due to experiences of violence and abuse in social relations in their households and communities. The construction and perception of deviance across the institutions of the household, the community, the market and the state took on different forms but had overarching commonalities. Full-time residential sex workers experienced and managed deviancy differently from women who had been rescued from sex work and reintegrated into residential communities. The trajectories of their deviant careers took different forms, although the initial stage of deviance remained common. This is discussed below.

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8.3.1. The start of deviancy: Breakdown of social relations

Across different pathways into sex work in this research, commonalities persisted in the initial stage of deviance. These included coercive and voluntary forms of entry into sex work. As established in Chapter 5, this entailed a breakdown in social relations in the natal and marital households due to experiences of violence and power inequalities. The latter rendered claims to household resources precarious for the women and resulted in their stepping outside the community on their own, primarily to look for *kono kaaj*, but also to start anew and build new social relations. The violence and power inequalities that they experienced in relations with men and women, led Mamata, Jasmine, Sabina and Sapna to leave their natal household and set out on their own. As Salma, Jabala and Mumtaz's experiences show, the failure of marital relations due to the persistence of domestic violence and the women's subsequent return to their natal households, marked them out as deviants, which subjected them to community-based stigma and ostracising. The act of leaving their families and communities to look for *kono kaaj* is where the first stage of deviancy is initialised. As discussed, women's work outside the home, apart from white-collar work, is associated with sexual promiscuity, which threatens patriarchal control over and supervision of women's lives (Kabeer, 2000; Shah, 2014). This association with immorality and impropriety, discussed in Chapter 2, has a long history in Bengal (Sen, 1999). When the women in this research stepped outside their houses and communities to look for *kono kaaj,* the 'nonconforming act' (Becker, 1963:25) was initiated. The master status of deviance assigned to women who became estranged from members of their natal and marital households also imparts an auxiliary status of bad girls *[baaje meye]* when they leave home, go missing or leave their community to look for work. When the women entered sex work the nonconforming act was complete. Voluntary and

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coercive pathways into sex work can be categorised as either intentional or unintentional nonconforming acts, as Becker (1963) argues. For the women who entered sex work unintentionally, with varying degrees of coercion, their pathways hid other aspirations, viz. a desire for economic independence, class mobility, a desire to migrate – all of which would normatively be considered 'deviant impulses' (Becker, 1963:27). For women with voluntary pathways into sex work, their intentional nonconforming act was a result of 'conflicting demands' which emerged from their disadvantaged positioning within social and gender relations in households, communities and informal labour market. Women in this research who had stayed on in sex work after being coercively sold into it, or who re-entered sex work on their own terms after previously exiting it, ascribed this to their *baaje kopaal* (bad fate). Drawing from Sykes and Matza's (1957) notion of '[more] acted upon that acting', these women considered their deviance a matter of misfortune and bad luck, not a choice per se. This also explains why, despite their membership of an organised deviant group of full-time residential FSWs in a RLA, they continued to model the social relations in their lives on conventional social norms without repudiating them. This is discussed next.

8.3.2. The deviant careers of current full-time residential sex workers

For the women currently engaged in full-time sex work and living in the RLA, their deviant career had entered the final stage of membership of an organised deviant group. This meant being part of a full-time, residential sex-working community living and maintaining household relations in an RLA. This differed from the experiences of the part-time FSWs, who lingered between the second and the final stage by not living in the RLA and only using it to sell sex part-time.

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Becker (1963) argues that membership of an organised deviant group helps deviants to carry out deviant activities unencumbered. However, the full-time residential FSWs resorted to several means to manage their deviancy in their careers and lives. A recurrent and significant way that they did this was through the prioritisation of certain social relationships over others. As Chapter 6 shows, full-time residential FSWs prioritised sexual-affective relationships with men, which hold the potential for social and emotional security as well as the promise of new domesticity, over platonic relationships with madams and female peers. This prioritisation took place despite the persistence of violence and abuse in their relationships with men. This could be perceived as a strategy for managing deviance in one's life while living in an organised deviant group. Taking up residence in an RLA allowed the full-time FSWs to carry out sex work while living alone or with children from previous failed marriages and/or live-in partners – an unconventional living arrangement for women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in Indian cities. However, the desire for conventional kinship relations and socially-acceptable relationships persisted in the women in this research. As Jasmine's experiences show (section 6.3.4), the FSWs pursued sexual-affective relationships with men that would help them to leave the RLA and restart a *shongshaar* outside it. When these relationships did not work out, the full-time FSWs prioritised motherhood, a social relation in households which imparted a sense of belonging and alleviated the stigma they experienced as full-time FSWs. Sabina's poignant reminder to her son that her decision to enter sex work (and adopt a life of deviancy) so he could have a better life (in section 6.5.2.2), was reiterated across the full-time sex workers in this research. For women like Chumki, Jasmine and Sapna, arranging (or planning) for separate living arrangements for their children, either in their natal household or in a boarding school, was a strategy to manage the deviance that their children would have to deal with if they lived in an RLA. Delegating childcare to natal household members meant that relations

with their natal families continued to affect the ways in which these women were able to live out their deviant identities. As Sapna's experiences show (section 6.5.2.3), money and gifts played a big role in helping full-time FSWs to maintain a harmonious relationship with their natal family and seek their help in raising their children. Shampa's experiences (section 6.5.2.3) show how her desire to live a deviant life despite her marital family's disapproval was affected adversely by her forced separation from her daughter. Additionally, as section 6.5.2.2 shows, full-time FSWs' performance of motherhood was hindered by protectionist interventions of NGOs and police to stop second-generation prostitution.

Overall, the centrality and importance of social relations in the lives of the women in sex work, including those that stretched beyond the sex-work market and the physical boundaries of the RLA, meant that conventional social norms continued to affect their otherwise deviant lives in an organised deviant group. Social norms also featured in other ways in the residential full-time FSW's lives. The ubiquity of the saree and the *shindur* as markers of female beauty and propriety (section 6.3.4) in the way the FSWs dressed and presented themselves in Kalighat are illuminating examples.

8.3.3 The deviant careers of women formerly in sex work and other rescued women

For women formerly in sex work, currently living in the shelter home, their rescue meant that they had moved backwards from the final stage (membership of an organised deviant group) to the second stage of being publicly caught and labelled a deviant. In many instances in this research the women had entered sex work without the knowledge of their families and communities. This held true for both voluntary and coercive journeys into sex work. The act of being rescued,

rehabilitated and reintegrated into their residential communities meant their deviance was identified, and labelled. An assumption was made about the returning women and their sexual promiscuity irrespective of the actual nature of the circumstances, as Salma's experience (section 7.3.3) show. For women who had escaped on their own, their return was also marked by an increase in deviance, as Mamata's experiences show (section 7.3.2). Often rejection by their natal family on the basis of their deviant association with sex work prompted their re-entry into sex work. Being caught and labelled deviant through state interventions also impacted the women's return to family and community.

The next two sub-sections explore two particular kinds of deviancy in 'rescued women's' social relations with state and community, and how these were negotiated and managed by the victims at the receiving end. First it explores the experiences of a group of young women between the ages of 14 and 17 who were brought into the shelter home as rescued 'victims of child marriage', apprehended for eloping with partners of their choice against their families' wishes. The second examines two case studies of the deviant careers of women who had experienced anti-trafficking rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration interventions and returned to their rural residential communities.

8.3.3.1. 'We've made a mistake': The deviance of child marriage victims

In my fieldwork at the shelter home in October 2014 I met eight young women aged between fourteen and seventeen who had entered the shelter home as 'victims of child marriage'. During my two weeks of fieldwork at the shelter home several more such victims were brought in, sometimes late at night, by the police. Through conversations with staff at the shelter home and subsequent interviews with some

of them it quickly became apparent that these young women had run away from home with a male partner of their choice. Their parents had contacted the police and filed charges of child abduction and child marriage, and the police had tracked down the couples, arrested the men and brought the young women to the shelter home for their protection and rehabilitation.

During interviews with four such young women aged 14-15 they expressed remorse for their actions and admitted their mistake. One of them was 16-year old Shibani from a Hindu household in Sonarpur, a peri-urban southern suburb of Kolkata. Shibani had met her boyfriend, Ajay, at a tuition centre where she went after school to get some extra help on her schoolwork and prepare for her upcoming school exams. They had started a romantic relationship a month into their friendship, but in the second month, Shibani's parents became aware of the relationship.

> When they found out, they were so angry with me. My mother hit me and said I had cut off the family's nose [lowered its social status] in the neighbourhood. My father was also angry…said I should focus on my studies instead of all of this. But both Ajay and I were serious about our studies…he was so encouraging…I told him I had dreams of becoming a doctor, and he said he would always support me. But my parents didn't like him. He was also young, and his family wasn't very rich…but he was so hardworking. But my parents started looking for a man for me to marry. But I didn't want to marry a stranger: I loved Ajay.

Shibani went on to share the circumstances that had led her to run away from home:

> When I told my parents I didn't want to get married to whoever they chose for me, they locked me inside the house. Ajay and I didn't want to get married so early but we didn't have a choice.

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> [My parents] didn't let us talk to or see each other. My mother hit
> me daily. Finally, when Ajay got a job our friends helped us run
> away. I ran away from home in the middle of the night, jumped
> out of a window. Ajay and I went to a temple early next morning
> and got married. Despite our marriage, he wanted me to study
> and pursue my dreams, but the police caught us. Now Ajay is in
> jail and I am here. I'm so sorry; I know I made a mistake. Now my
> life is ruined, I don't even want to look at another boy any more.
> All I want to do is study and make something of myself.

Shibani was remorseful and said she'd curb her deviant desires ('I don't even want to look at another boy any more'). Unlike her, 16-year old Maitree, who also ran away with her boyfriend from school to escape a marital decision she did not agree with, expressed anger at her punishment:

> They had already thought of a match for me: he was much older than
> me – in his 30s! He was an acquaintance of my uncle's, and was
> wealthy…owned a lot of land. I knew my parents were waiting for me to
> finish school so they could marry me off. But I loved Sunny, a boy from
> my school. And he loved me. But he was a few years older than me, and
> his family wasn't very wealthy. But he supported my dreams for my
> future..that I wanted to study more – that was important to me. That's
> why I ran away with him. But now, with the police…Sunny is in jail…I
> am here…this is not fair…what did I do wrong?

The whole process of being apprehended by the police and the stay in the shelter home made Shibani and Maitree feel that they were being punished for something they had done wrong. Despite her anger, Maitree, like Shibani, later said that she would abide by her parents' decisions in the future. Also like Shibani, she said she would not engage romantically with boys any more, even though both had used marriage to exert their agency regarding romantic and educational aspirations and

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in Shibani's case, to escape physical violence. The collective expression of remorse and anger was accompanied by members of the group asking me if I could help to secure their release from the shelter home, given that they were ready to admit their mistake and be *bhalo meye* (good girls) in the future.

The staff at the shelter home that I spoke to sympathised with these young women's plight and complained about how a shelter home intended for legitimate victims of sex trafficking was being misused to house young women whose parents wanted to punish them for choosing a partner who did not contribute to the economic and social aspirations of the natal household. Based on fieldwork with middle-class families in Kolkata, Donner (2016b:1147) argues that despite what the 'ostensibly overwhelming transformations that individualism, discourses on coupledom and the public display of affection among the young may suggest, the new ways of being intimate, of choosing a spouse and of conducting conjugal relations among middle-class urbanites have to be interpreted in relation to less conspicuous discourses, which are equally powerful and significant, in particular the resilient ideology and practical implications of the joint family'.In choosing a partner who did not fit the collective aspirations of their parents and families, these young women found themselves punished for sexual deviancy.

Despite the general feeling of remorse and anger, the imposition of victimhood on the young women by their families and the state in matters of pre-marital intimacy was used as a strategy to gain early release from the shelter home. This was exemplified in what some of the young women told members of the Child Welfare Commission (CWC), a government body that is responsible for dealing with cases of children needing care and protection', and specifically with deciding when residents of the shelter home are to be released. One example is Rabia, a 15-year-old young woman who had eloped with a man 16 years her senior whom she had chosen as her partner due to his wealth and high social status, something her

lower-middle class family from Haldia had expressed a desire for while considering a marital partner for her older sister. Rabia had expressed her agency in choosing a partner in keeping with what she believed her parents would approve of; however, his earlier marriage and widowhood, and her young age, made them reject her choice. Recalling her session with representatives of the CWC, she explained that she had lied about the circumstances regarding her elopement with her partner:

> I haven't told them I am married, or that I left with him by choice. If I do, they won't let me go. I told them I was on my way to a friend's house when I was drugged and blacked out. And that when I came to, I realised I was being held captive. If they believe me they'll feel sorry for me and let me go. If they find out what really happened…they'll keep me here forever. I want to go back to my family. (Rabia, 2015)

Rabia's explanation of her decision to lie to the CWC representatives highlights how she believed that admitting that she had eloped out of choice would be more punitive than if she performed the victimhood that had been imposed on her and others in the group. Similarly, Shibani and Maitree believed that enacting the reformed and rehabilitated *bhalo meye* trope would enable them to leave the shelter home sooner. These young women's negotiations with a victimhood imposed on them by their family, the community and the state evoke Butler's (1997) theory of subjectification. Butler argues that although power may be imposed externally (through the law, the state, the community), it is never static. Instead the process of becoming a subject involves an engagement with power which is enacted on an individual level, allowing for unique expression of agency in an otherwise oppressive environment. Rabia's performance of victimhood and Shibani and Maitree's enactment of the reformed woman trope shows how these young women were able to intervene and unsettle the power imposed on them

through their families and the state through performativity of the kind of victimhood that their deviance has been framed as. In the institutional context of the shelter home and the legislative framework of child marriage, these young women are placed in discursive relations of power which constitute them sexually (Butler, 1997) as victims and as good women turned bad (through participation in pre-martial sexual relations) who are in need of reformation. In his work on the sexual subjectivication of diasporic Chinese youth, Li (2014:85) draws from Butler (1997) and argues that 'sexual subjects have the potential to appropriate or subvert what they have been recognised as, using the very terms that constitute them in realising their sexual subjecthood'. Having been apprehended as sexual deviants, as child marriage victims, Rabia, Shibani and Maitree performed the tropes of good Indian female sexuality (obedient, victimised and vulnerable) to negotiate their way out of the shelter home.

The association with victimhood amongst this group of young women as a strategy to manage deviance was also adopted by women who had formerly been in sex work and had returned to their residential communities through anti-trafficking interventions. This is discussed below.

8.3.3.2. The deviant careers of reintegrated women

As mentioned in section 8.3.1, when women fall out of favour with members of their natal and marital household, they are perceived to be deviants, which is exacerbated when they run away from home or go missing from their rural communities without their parents' knowledge or supervision. On their return, the association with sex work is assumed, regardless of the facts. As Salma's experience of being stigmatised in section 7.3.3 shows, irrespective of what she told members of her community about her time away, gossip about her 'bad

character' persisted. It is this very association of auxiliary traits with the master status of deviance that subjects these women to stigma in their communities. The deviant act of becoming estranged with their natal and marital families, leaving the community, etc. takes precedence over any other experience or act. In its study of experiences of stigma amongst 30 survivors of trafficking in the North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal who had all been coercively sold into and rescued from sex work, Sanjog (2015:4) notes three types of stigma: enacted, anticipated and internalised. In the second category, most respondents anticipated stigmatisation if they made knowledge of their engagement with sex work public, and chose to keep it secret, like Salma. However, that did not fully prevent experiences of stigmatisation by family, friends and the wider community for what was perceived to be auxiliary traits of immoral women. Rahima talked about how her neighbours were not keen for their daughters to mix with her, since there was an assumption that her 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) would somehow infect them. When I asked her what she thought this meant, she said that maybe they would 'abandon their husbands, fight with their in-laws or run away', as people in her community thought she had done. As Sen (1999) notes in her history of women's participation in the informal labour force in Colonial Bengal, once women's identities came to be associated with deviant cultural sexuality, all other work identities, viz. domestic help, factory worker, etc., ceased to matter. Through an association of auxiliary traits with the master status of deviance, the deviant identity becomes the most controlling and prominent form of identification. This is especially true when women return to their residential communities through anti-trafficking interventions, which mark them out as survivors of trafficking. The 'enacted stigma' noted in Sanjog (2015:4) includes isolation from family and abandonment by friends. All the five returned women that I interviewed in this research spoke of a period after their return when they kept to themselves and stayed indoors. This, as Becker (1963) argues, was inherently caused not by their engagement with sex work or their act

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of leaving the community without their family's knowledge, but by what was (or was anticipated to be) the public reaction to these acts. Sanjog (2015) observes how the internalised stigma amongst the respondents was due to their engagement with sex work, but not with being trafficked: There was an internal division between owning their shame at engaging with sex work, and disowning their fault in being trafficked (p.5). In this research, while all the women spoke openly about being abducted or tricked by others, details of their engagement with sex work were either kept secret from the community or divulged only to a select few. What this meant was that the women were more likely to emphasise their victimhood than talk about positive experiences in sex work, viz. friendships with other women their age and friendly relations with male customers. For Salma, rescued soon after she had been coerced into sex work, her experiences had been primarily exploitative. For Rahima and Sondha, though, after initially stressing their victimhood, when urged they opened up and shared pictures and stories of men and women they had met in their time in the RLA who had been sources of emotional comfort, friendship and excitement, in a manner different from anything they had experienced in their lives prior to entering sex work. The emphasis on victimhood and the negation of any positive experiences that had fulfilled their 'deviant impulses' was strengthened through their association with a community-based anti-trafficking NGO and membership of a group of trafficking survivors. This kind of membership, as discussed in section 7.3.3, was sought by women on their return to lessen the community stigma and for social and legal support. However, this membership can also be read as an attempt to shift deviancy into a more positive domain through an emphasis on victimhood (similar to the child marriage victims). By taking on the label of 'trafficking survivor', the deviance in the lives of the five reintegrated women decreased and altered, but still persisted. In my conversations with members of two community-based organisations working with survivors of trafficking, social workers talked about how some of the women had returned to a

life in sex work after a brief period of association with the organisations, against their family's wishes. Despite the desire and search for social normalcy through association with a community-based organisation with social status in the community, the deviance persisted, and many women preferred to return to sex work and leave the community rather than alter their existing deviance.

Becker's (1963) theory of organised deviant groups allowing deviants to carry out their deviancy unhindered is once again problematised in the context of reintegrated women and survivors of trafficking groups. This is primarily because the community-based organisations that create and manage these groups attempt to normalise deviancy of its members. In safeguarding those vulnerable in rural communities from social injustice, community-based organisations often become upholders of moral norms of right and wrong, good and bad behaviour. However, by association with such communities, and by taking on the labels 'victim' and 'survivor', women in this research continue to be considered deviant. The deviance is pronounced when development interventions, viz. awareness-raising events or livelihood initiatives, involve and target these women specifically. Often this form of deviance is welcome – three women in my study who had returned to their communities three to four years before this study took place enjoyed the attention that accompanied visits to their homes by members of community-based organisations or researchers like myself. Since anti-trafficking projects in India are often funded by foreign donors, the deviance would increase when a foreign visitor visited these women to check on how the foreign-funded interventions were impacting their lives. I was able to witness the visible deviancy that shaped these women's lives through my work with them in anti-trafficking interventions between 2011 and 2012. Membership to 'survivor groups' imbued their lives with a more positively-connoted deviancy than the deviancy that the community had associated them with on their return. The former was a deviancy that these women

stood to gain from through access to livelihood opportunities, mobilisation initiatives, and opportunities for relationships and friendships with other women like them; the latter were especially welcome, since they had experienced social isolation on their return.

When I returned to these women in 2015 during fieldwork to see how this 'positive deviancy' had evolved, the ever-growing tension between the dichotomy of existing and persisting deviance and attempts to normalise it was palpable. In trying to reintegrate trafficking victims into social relations in the community, community-based organisations strive to normalise the women's behaviour and social position; this happens explicitly and implicitly. Survivors are often advised by social workers from the organisations to forget what has happened to them and focus on the future. Events leading up to and surrounding coercive pathways into sex work – trusting strangers or acquaintances such as migration agents, engaging in romantic relationships with men who were potentially traffickers, talking to strangers on mobile phones, etc. – are construed as wrong behaviour that creates vulnerability and needs to be avoided. This often means that survivors feel that their behaviour is policed by the community-based organisations in conjunction with their families. On the other hand, the increasing deviance of being perceived as poster-women for the fight against human trafficking in their community means that a return to social normalcy is almost impossible.

For Salma and Rahima, their persisting outsider status in their communities, along with the organisation's attempt to normalise their social status (e.g. by asking them not to migrate for work) had resulted in their feeling controlled and instrumentalised and thirsting for their freedom. Both were Muslim women in their late 20s, unmarried. They ran a grocery shop with the help of their family: this initiative had come about as a result of a micro-finance rehabilitation programme in 2012. As single businesswomen in their late 20s, the women were very much outsiders in

their communities. Between 2012 and 2015, however, they had begun to accept their deviance and were challenging the organisation's attempt to return them to 'normalcy'. Salma and Rahima both flirted openly and noticeably with men in their communities. Relationships with men, often married, were carried out in secrecy. Meetings were usually arranged at night without the knowledge of family or community members; the women talked of the lengths they went to meet their paramours. Becker (1963) argues that the treatment of a deviant by the wider public increases their deviancy. By not allowing the deviant to participate in conventional institutions in a normal capacity, the deviant develops 'illegitimate routines' to carry on everyday routines, as well as to regain social status. Both of the women's previous marital relations had ended in separation and divorce amidst violence and conflict with various members of their marital households. These experiences meant that they did not receive conventional marriage offers from families in their own and neighbouring villages. However, both women enjoyed the attention of men who approached them in unconventional, clandestine ways (at the grocery shops, calling them on their mobile phones, etc.) and engaged in secretive romantic relationships with them.

For Rahima, these romantic relationships were an effort to initiate a new domesticity and start her own *shongshaar* in the village. Her 'deviance' had begun when at the age of 11, she was raped by a 17-year-old boy in her neighbourhood and eventually sold by his mother into sex work (section 5.4.2). She was able to escape with the help of a customer (section 7.2.2) and return to her village with the help of a community-based organisation in 2010. Her family, assisted by the organisation, filed legal charges against members of her marital household. In early 2012 Rahima went missing again. In 2015, during my fieldwork period, she told me that she had been in a relationship for two years (2010–2012) with a man in his late 20s from a wealthy household in the village. Her partner worked in a

store in Kolkata on bag repairs. Although his family owned a lot of land in the village and exercised social power, Rahima's partner had migrated to Kolkata to work as he wanted to live in a city. Whenever he visited his family the two would meet clandestinely. After three years he told her that he would marry her if she eloped with him to Delhi. When Rahima disappeared overnight, her family and the organisation's social workers were worried about her safety and had no inkling of where she could have gone. The immediate presumption was that she had been abducted or trafficked. However, she returned to her community after a month with her husband. On the pretext of marriage, Rahima's partner had tried to place her in a *kaajer-bari* to work as a domestic help, through an agency in Delhi. When she had refused to work and kept crying, the agency manager had asked her what was wrong. On telling him everything, the agency manager had arranged for them to get married, and Rahima had returned with her husband a month later. However, on their return Rahima's in-laws refused to accept her into their family. She continued to live with her parents while her husband worked in Kolkata and occasionally visited her. In late 2013 she became pregnant, and when I met her in March 2015 her son was about three months old. However, her relationship with her husband had become increasingly volatile and he barely visited her any more. It eventually came to her notice that he was in a relationship with a woman in Kolkata. Rahima reached out to another organisation, having cut her ties with the first one – they alleged that this was because of her unpredictable behaviour, whereas she said they were not supportive enough. The second organisation had grown out of the first, and its founder was familiar with Rahima's case history. Together they approached a lawyer about filing a case of trafficking against Rahima's husband. The case was being prepared at the time of our interview. It was clear that Rahima was struggling. Her parents were ageing and did not know how to handle their rebellious and strong-minded daughter. The grocery shop that had been opened through a micro-finance project was not doing well, money was

tight and Rahima was trying to raise her son alone. When I asked her if she was in touch with her husband, she said he sometimes called her from Kolkata and asked her to meet him when he returned to the village. However, she maintained that she had not met him in person since her return from New Delhi. She told me that she was frustrated with life in the village and that once she had weaned her son she would leave and look for work in Kolkata. In late 2014 she had migrated to re-enter sex work in a city near Mumbai, but had returned because the brothel did not have childcare facilities. When I asked her if she wanted to return to sex work again, she said she would strongly consider it. After the conclusion of my fieldwork and my return to the UK I found out through the founder of the second organisation that Rahima was pregnant for a second time. She had been meeting her husband clandestinely at night, while insisting they were not in touch. On hearing this the lawyer had refused to work on the case any longer, and the founder of the organisation said she did not know what else to do, since Rahima 'refused to help herself'.

Rahima's erratic behaviour was inexplicable to her family, the community and the organisations that she sought help from to pursue legal cases against the men in her life. However, as Becker (1963) argues, her resort to illegitimacy in intimate relationships with these men can be seen as flawed, repeated attempts to live a normal life. As a victim of rape at a young age, stigmatised by her community, rejected by the men who had romanced her and their families, Rahima was desperate to carve her own legitimate space in social relations in the community as a wife, a daughter-in-law and a mother. Her deviancy from a young age, coupled with her prioritisation of trust in intimate relationships over those with her family or community-based organisations, rendered her vulnerable to repeated exploitation. With the second pregnancy her deviancy only escalated in the rural residential community that she had hoped to leave to re-enter sex work and start over again.

Unlike Rahima, Salma's deviant career was more positive in that she was able to manipulate it to suit her needs. She enjoyed the economic independence that came with running her own store, as well as the attention. She often talked about how male customers who came to her store flirted with her or proposed marriage. However, she said she would only marry if a man was willing to let her retain her store and not demand shared ownership. In her village, Salma stood out as a socially and economically independent, business-minded and opinionated woman. Her social deviance was highlighted at her 19-year-old brother's wedding in a neighbouring village to a young woman aged 15. Salma was insistent that I accompany her to the wedding along with other social workers from Kolkata who were working on a legal justice project with her. On the day of the wedding we arrived to find a crowd of women gathered at Salma's house. Salma was excited to see us, and we were told that she had said that unless her 'friends from Kolkata' were there she would not go to the wedding. As a single unmarried woman, Salma needed a group of single women with no ties to her community with her to attend the wedding without feeling socially ostracised. For the wedding she had decided to wear her bridal saree – a decision questioned by many of the women present. As a divorced woman, wearing a bright red bridal saree to her brother's wedding in an unconventional way (i.e. without veiling her head), was certainly a strong act of deviance. But for Salma, having experienced domestic violence and trouble in her own failed marriage, this was perhaps her way of laying claim to a social space that she had lost. At the wedding all of the single women were seated at a separate table, fussed over by the bride's family at Salma's insistence. We were clearly the table of deviants at the wedding, but as working city women we were treated as valued guests, much to our embarrassment but to Salma's joy. My personal discomfort was aggravated by the fact that we were witnessing a child marriage, and when we visited the bride she was clearly upset. When we asked her sister about it, she said 'Who wants to get married at this age? Her parents have fixed it,

she has to listen to them'. When we expressed our concern to Salma, she assured us that her brother was a *bhalo chele* (good boy) and that his young bride would be cared for in Salma's house: 'I know what it's like to have *koshto* in a marriage. I will make sure she is taken good care of. My brother is a kind soul; she will be well looked after'. Salma added 'In any case, women in our village marry only at this age. This what is normal here'. For Salma, participating in a normal social function like a marriage helped her to restructure her deviancy in a way that did not lessen it but altered it in a positive way. I kept in touch with her after my return to UK, and she talked about her sister-in-law and how close they had become. 'When I look at her, sometimes I think of what I could have been', she told me once over the telephone. 'But then I think my kind of life, although twisted with ups and downs, is okay. It's alright after all', she said, affirming how she had made peace with her deviancy, despite a never-ending hope and desire for social normalcy.

8.4. Conclusion

Becker's (1963) theory of deviant careers provides a useful theoretical tool to identify commonalities across women's pathways into, lives in, and pathways out of sex work. It challenges the exceptionalising of FSWs' experiences by identifying and analysing life-cycles of deviance, connecting those currently engaged in sex work with those who have left. Additionally, it looks at how the social institutions of the household, the community, the state and the market play a role in shaping and constructing deviance in the lives of women in sex work, a commonality that persists across various stages of engagement in sex work.

As noted in section 5.2.2, Gangoli (2008:29) argues that 'not all abandoned women take up prostitution'. An analysis of deviance allows for examination of the circumstances post-abandonment (by members of marital households), when

women are rendered 'anchorless' (Chattopadhyay, et al 1994). It looks at community and household responses to the women's abandonment, which play a central role in determining why some women enter sex work and others do not. Different strategies for managing deviance yield different outcomes, and when there is a desire to escape community-based and household stigma and conflict, vulnerability to coercive pathways into sex work is heightened. Additionally, voluntary entry into sex work reveals deviant impulses (e.g. changing aspirations) and a motive force to counter power inequalities in the natal household when abandoned women are treated as a burden on their return.

The framework of deviant careers allows for an analysis of experiences of both violence and power inequalities, as well as negotiations with the former. Understanding each phase of a deviant career as a form of negotiation with experiences of violence and power inequalities allows for a broader understanding of resistance beyond the simplistic binaries of victimhood and empowerment. Cultural and social norms that construct and facilitate the perpetuation of deviance are highlighted, forcing a connection between experiences in the lives of women in sex work to lives of women outside. This underlines the importance of social relations in the lives and identities of current FSWs who, despite their deviancy, continue to draw from conventional social norms to alleviate the stigma, manage their deviancy, and seek legitimate spaces in a society which marginalises them.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

This thesis has explored everyday experiences of and negotiations with power and violence in the lives of former and current FSWs. Through description and analysis, it has examined how social relations across the different institutions of the household, the community, the market and the state shape experiences of violence and power inequalities for women along their pathways into, lives in, and pathways out of sex work.

The literature review in Chapter 3 highlighted the need for further research on (i) the nature of everyday power and violence in sex work, linking it to forms outside and (ii) a nuanced and contextual understanding of FSWs' resistance and agency. Drawing on the analysis of life-histories presented across Chapters 5-9 and discussions on research context, methodology and literature review in Chapters 2-4, this chapter presents overall conclusions and identifies opportunities for further research.

Section 9.2 explores the life cycle of everyday gender-based violence and power inequalities that affect women formerly and currently in sex work. After that, the ways in which these experiences, and negotiations with them, draw from social relations in the lives of the women is discussed in section 9.3. Section 9.4. highlights the need to acknowledge the temporal dimension of these experiences to move beyond simplistic binaries of agency and victimhood in discussions of women's lives in sex work. Section 9.5 brings together the life-cycle approach to gender-based violence (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005) and Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework in an analysis of how the experiences of the women in this

research form life cycles of deviance across social relations. Section 9.6 concludes with some recommendations for future research.

9.2. Life cycle of everyday power and violence

The overview of pathways into, lives in and pathways out of sex work across Chapters 5-8 highlight the life cycle of violence and power inequalities within lives of former and current FSWs. This starts as daughter disfavour, which in this research was connected to the physical and personality traits of the women, their positions within social relations in the household, and shifts in power within these relations, viz. the entry of a new member and/or change of head of household. Jasmine (section 5.3.4) and Sapna's (section 5.4.2) life-histories highlight the latter through the power shifts that occurred due to their father's second marriage and the entry of a *shotho-ma* (stepmother) into the household. Mamata's experiences (section 5.3.3) show how daughter disfavour began at a young age due to the perception of this daughter as a *bhaar* (burden) due to her physical disability and rebellious nature, and was exacerbated when the head of the household changed, causing the daughter in question to lose power. Disfavour was expressed as food discrimination and physical and verbal violence. Daughter disfavour was also expressed in the early marriage of daughters, who are considered a poor investment (Munro and McIntyre, 2014) compared to sons, as Mumtaz (section 5.4.2) and Salma's (section 5.5.3) experiences show. When daughters experienced domestic violence as new brides in the form of physical beatings, verbal harassment and emotional violence from their spouses and in-laws in the marital household they stayed silent due to the fear of being perceived as incapable of maintaining marital ties. Mumtaz and Salma returned to their natal households in the face of escalating levels of violence, which became known to members of

the community outside the household. However, as abandoned women, they experienced community-based stigma as a form of structural and cultural violence. This manifested in gossip with stray, hurtful comments ('you can't clap with only one hand; she must be to blame too') (section 5.5.3) which held them liable for the breakdown of their marital relations and marked them out as deviants. Additionally, on their return the women were seen as *bhaar* (burden) by their natal household members, which caused further conflict in the household.

To escape these forms of violence the women sought *kono kaaj* (any work)*,* but the prevalence of sexual harassment and low incomes in the informal labour market, as an expression of structural violence, drove them into sex work, as Jharna's experiences highlight (section 5.5.2.3). Coercive pathways into sex work involve *dhoka* (betrayal) by members of households and communities, as Jasmine and Mamata experienced (section 5.5.3). When the women's entry into sex work was coercive, violence by madams, brothel owners and customers took on physical, emotional and sexual dimensions. The threat of violence and the use of isolation as a strategy to enforce compliance with selling sex was also used, as Mamata and Jasmine's experiences (section 6.5.3) show. With voluntary entry into sex work, power inequalities with madams persisted over issues of money (section 6.4.3.2), and long-term sexual-affective relationships with customers led to the women being abandoned again by men in their lives (section 6.4.3.4). Additionally, sexual violence persisted (section 6.5.4) within the process of voluntarily selling sex.

For those with coercive pathways who escaped with the help of customers, their return to the natal household was often met with rejection and humiliation, which led to their returning to sex work. Even when their return to the natal household was possible, further experiences of violence and power inequalities drove the women back to sex work. Forcible rescue from sex work by state and community

actors was perceived as violence, and often involved elements of psychological and physical violence. Both experiences are highlighted in Mamata's life-history (sections 5.5.4 and 7.3.2). For women like Rahima, who returned to their natal households and communities after escaping from a coercive pathway into sex work, community-based stigmatisation, and the policing of their behaviour and migratory aspirations by community actors implied that the power inequalities in their lives persisted (section 8.3.3.2). New experiences of violence occurred when women formerly in sex work relied on relationships with men for social normalcy and/or economic independence.

Mamata's life-history, discussed across Chapters 5-8, highlight the cyclical nature of violence across both coercive and voluntary pathways into sex work which prompted re-entries into sex work. Violence in her natal household drove her to look for *kono kaaj*, which shaped her first coercive pathway into sex work. Victimised by sexual and physical violence by her brothel owner and customers, Mamata sought an escape. After a period of exhibiting compliance, she managed to escape with the help of a customer but on returning to her household she was rejected. She began to live with her customer, but on his marriage to another woman, re-entered sex work again, this time voluntarily. There, she initiated a sexual-affective relationship with a customer who abandoned her when she discovered that she was pregnant. On hearing news of her father's ill-health, she returned to her natal household, and after his death decided to stay on. However, her claim to space in the household was riddled with violence and power inequalities once again, this time targeted at her young daughter too. This prompted her final re-entry into sex work, and she swore never to return to her natal household. At the time of my fieldwork she had been forcibly rescued by anti-trafficking community and state actors. Attempts to reintegrate her in her natal household and community were unsuccessful when members of the former

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rejected her once again. During her interview Mamata expressed a desire to return to sex work and continue her life there with her daughter. While records at the shelter showed her age as 17, Mamata claimed to be 22. In less than two decades she had experienced a life cycle of violence and power inequalities in her social relations, marked by constant re-entry into sex work.

Drawing from Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) framework in section 3.5., the findings discussed above are summarised in the figure below:
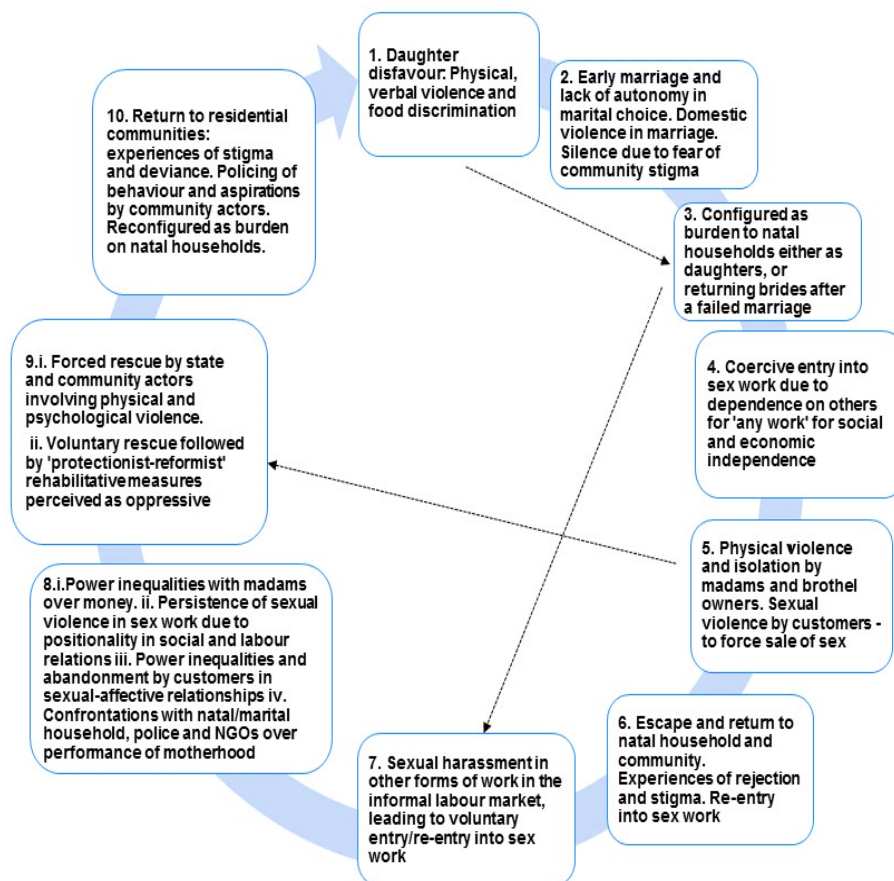
Fig. 9.1. Life-cycle of everyday power inequalities and violence in the lives of women formerly and currently in sex work

9.3. Everyday violence, power inequalities and social relations

9.3.1. Introduction

The analysis of the life-cycle of everyday power and violence in the previous section highlights how these experiences were located in a context of social relations which included members of the household, the community, the market and the state. Overall, these experiences drew from women's positionalities in social and gender relations in Bengali society, and the wider patriarchal, cultural and social norms that control female mobility, sexuality, participation in work, etc., discussed in Chapter 2. The experiences of violence and power inequalities in sex work were not exceptional, but existed in tandem with experiences prior to entry into as well as after leaving sex work located in a broader cycle of everyday struggles with violence and power in social relations across the women's lives in this research. Their negotiations with these experiences were also embedded in social relations, which created further experiences of violence and power inequalities. These findings are summarised below with an analysis of how social relations affected pathways into, lives in, and pathways out of sex work in this research.

9.3.2. Social relations and pathways into sex work

Women such as Sabina, Chumki and Mumtaz voluntarily entered sex work to stop feeling like a *bhaar* (burden) in their marital and natal households. The 'inherently relational' (Lamb, 1997) nature of personhood in Bengali society, where identities exist in a large *jal* (net) of social ties, impact men and women differently in a patriarchal society where caste, class, religion, and other social categories of being

intersect with gender to produce particular vulnerabilities. On marriage, women are expected to unmake their tie to the natal household and make new ties with the marital household which are supposed to be lifelong. In Sabina's example (section 5.3.4), her abandonment by her husband led to harassment by her in-laws, who challenged her claim to the household's resources. Mumtaz and Chumki returned to their natal households after experiencing domestic violence in their marital households. However, since on marriage the natal household is supposed to absolve itself of all responsibility for a daughter, the women's return made them feel like a burden (*bhaar*) on members of the household and/or the community. Prevalence of sexual harassment in social and labour relations in the informal labour market shaped voluntary entries into sex work. Similarly, coercive pathways into sex work such as Mamata and Salma's were the indirect outcome of looking for 'any work' (*kono kaaj)* to deal with violence and power inequalities in their natal households which marked them out as burdens*.* Women sought help from members of their community and household to look for work; however a breakdown of trust in these relations as Jasmine and Mamata's experiences highlight, led to coercive entries into sex work.

9.3.3. Social relations, violence and power inequalities in sex work

Experiences of violence and power inequalities in FSWS' lives differed based on the nature of the pathway into sex work. For those with coercive pathways, violence was perpetrated by members of the market to induce their compliance with selling sex. Forced isolation, restricted mobility, and removing the possibility of building social relations with peers and customers to enhance their personal autonomy were distinct features of this form of violence, which included physical and sexual violence. When women such as Jasmine, Mamata and Sapna, who had initially been coerced into sex work, left a particular site of sex work to re-enter elsewhere

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voluntarily, *it highlighted that the nature of their experiences was not inherent in sex work* per se *but depended on the mode of entry and social relations at a particular site*. To negotiate the violence accompanying their coercive entry into sex work, the women sought help from customers to escape. Building relationships of sympathy with customers and other men by localising knowledge (section 7.2.2.) of the violence experienced was intrinsic to planning their escape, as Jasmine, Mamata and Sapna's experiences show. These relations could only be built after the women exhibited compliance, i.e. pretended to do sex work willingly on their own (Jasmine), or on the advice of peers, (Mamata) to build and manipulate the trust of the brothel owner and/or madam (section 6.5.3). This allowed them independence and mobility in the brothel which helped them to build relationships with customers that ultimately led to their escape.

For those with voluntary pathways into sex work, the experiences of power inequalities and violence were located in their attempts to build 'relatedness' (Carsten, 2000:1) in their lives in sex work. The author argues that studies on the 'cultures of relatedness' do not take the 'content of kinship for granted [but rather] build from first principles a picture of the implications and lived experience of relatedness in local contexts'.This involves accepting and acknowledging the '…truism that people are always conscious of their connections to other people…and that some of these connections carry particular weight – socially, materially, affectively [which] can be described in genealogical words but they can also be described in other ways' (ibid). In the context of this research, this refers to the ways in which the FSWs built themselves a *shongshaar* (sections 6.3.4 and 6.4.3) in red-light areas (RLAs), drawing from members of the market and their natal household. The combination of domestic chores, viz. cooking for customers and wearing symbols of matrimony to attract them, etc., highlights how domesticity and kin relations continue to play a dominant role at sex-work sites. This implies

that despite the persistence of power inequalities and violence in long-term sexual affective relationships with men, these relationships were prioritised over the women's relationship with the madam, which had the potential for more sustainability. This was illustrated by the relationship between Sneha and Hemanti (section 6.4.3.3). FSWs such as Jasmine (section 6.3.4), Khushboo and Mamata (section 6.4.3.3) experienced abandonment by their partners after investing financially and emotionally in their relationships in the hope of domesticity in the RLA or outside. The prioritisation of motherhood was also a site for such experiences, since widespread stigma about sex work, the hypersexual nature of RLAs and the disapproval of natal and marital household members meant that its performance by FSWs was inhibited by members of the state and the community (i.e. the police, to stop second-generation prostitution), and natal and marital households (by withholding children or demanding money to provide childcare), as highlighted in Bandana's comments and Sapna and Shampa's experiences (section 6.5.2). The desire for a relationship which provided emotional and social security, a sense of belonging and comfort, however, was balanced by a desire for social and economic independence, which meant that the women stayed on in sex work despite offers of a new domesticity outside the RLA, and the persistence of violence and power inequalities in maintaining these relationships while continuing to sell sex. This is illustrated by Sabina (section 6.3.4) and Shampa's experiences (section 6.5.2.) Additionally, persistence of structural power imbalances within labour relations, and solidarity with peers in social relations in RLAs combined with a desire for a higher income and a better life for themselves and their children meant that even when sexual violence occurred within their sex work, FSWs such as Sapna rarely dispersed knowledge of this to members of the community or the state (section 6.5.4).

9.3.4. Social relations and pathways out of sex work

As mentioned above, pathways out of sex work made use of social relations built at the sites of sex work. However, experiences of the violence and power inequalities that had existed prior to sex work and which had prompted entry into sex work persisted after exiting. Mamata's experiences highlight this (section 9.2). Her experiences also highlight how the involvement of community and state members in pathways out of sex work through anti-trafficking interventions impacted social relations in the present lives of FSWs. Rescue processes ignored both the ways in which women who voluntarily sold sex were embedded within and dependent on social relations at sites of sex work, and that their experience of power inequalities and violence in their natal households made it impossible for them to return. Protectionist measures in rehabilitative processes made re-entry into sex work difficult, even when the women expressed a desire to return. These processes were perceived as violent by women who wanted to return to sex work, since their initial entry has been a form of negotiation with previous experiences of violence and power inequalities in social relations in their natal and marital households. Mamata and Jabala's experiences highlight this; the latter (section 7.3.2) was rescued from her own sister, whom she was living with after the end of her marriage, due to collusion between a madam in the RLA (who wanted to hire her to sell sex) and the police, highlighting how rescue processes can feed off corruption and power imbalances at sites of sex work. For women like Rahima, who could return to their natal household and community through the involvement of state actors, reintegrating themselves into previously turbulent social relations was a process riddled with difficulties due to past experiences of violence and power inequalities. This meant that women who returned to their rural residential communities often tried to leave again, although this was disapproved of by

community and household members. This included re-entry into sex work, as Rahima's experiences show (section 8.3.3.2).

9.4. The temporal dimension of women's agency and victimhood in sex work

The thesis highlights the importance of the social and cultural context to former and current FSWs' experiences of violence and power inequalities. It also highlights the importance of time. Although power inequalities and the potential for violence were found to persist in this research, the data analysis shows that social relations are not immutable. This meant that the women's engagement with members of the household, the community, the market and the state did not remain static. This had a profound impact on the expression of agency and victimhood through the life trajectories of the women's lives, discussed in this section.

Through its adoption of the life-history interviewing method, this research invited respondents to reflect on their lived experiences, past and present. Respondents were interviewed at different stages of their engagement with sex work. Women currently engaged in sex work reflected on their experiences of violence and power inequalities in their life prior to entry, alongside present experiences. Women rescued from sex work recalled their lives in sex work, as well as experiences that had shaped their pathway into sex work. Both were shared alongside experiences of rescue and concerns about the future. Finally, women who had returned to their residential communities shared the experiences and circumstances that had led them to enter sex work and to be rescued from it, and the impact these had had on their current lives and future aspirations. Overall, this research has documented and analysed the life trajectories of women in sex work without focusing solely on

their present experience as if in a vacuum. Within this, their reflections on their future in the form of anxieties, fears, dreams and aspirations were also captured.

Most research on women in sex work in India focuses on a particular time in their lives. Often a particular identity that is being lived at the time of the research is carved out as a permanent, static identity. This could be that of a victim recently rescued from sex work and living in a shelter home or an empowered FSW with a voluntary pathway into sex work. When women currently engaged in sex work are asked to reflect on the past in studies on pathways into it, this is not juxtaposed with current experience to understand how circumstances and social relations have changed. However, as the analysis in Chapters 5-8 shows, women's engagement with sex work takes on different dimensions over the course of time, which alters their identity. Women ascend the social ranks in the hierarchy of labour relations in the RLA, from *chhukri* to *adhiya* to independent FSW and/or madam, as discussed in Chapter 6. It also includes experiences outside sex work, e.g. when pathways out of sex work are followed by re-entry due to experiences of violence and power inequalities in households and communities. Thus, rescued victims and escaped former sex workers whose initial pathway into sex work was coercive, voluntarily become FSWs anew. Similarly, women who may have appeared to willingly engage in sex work in the past revealed at the time of my fieldwork that they had been exhibiting compliance (section 6.5.3) to negotiate the violence within their coercive entry into sex work and plan their exit.

Acknowledging the passage of time in women's engagement in sex work challenges notions of absolute victimhood or agency. Overall, these findings caution against making snapshot deductions of women's experiences and lives in sex work. This research shows that victims of coercive pathways into sex work became agents when they negotiated re-entry into sex work on their own terms. However, this expression of agency hid victimhood from other forms of violence,

namely rejection and community-based stigmatisation in households and communities and sexual harassment in the informal labour market, which preceded their voluntary return to sex work. When victimhood demarcated by state and community organisations was contested by rescued and former FSWs based the circumstances that shaped their pathway into and lives in sex work, it highlighted victims' agency and autonomy. The temporal dimension of women's experiences of violence and power inequalities in this research, therefore, disrupts the static and simplistic binaries of victimhood and agency. Instead, it enables an understanding of how victimhood and agency can coexist and change over time, underlining the fluidity and dynamism of the women's relationships, lives and experiences. This highlights the 'politics of resistance' (Ortner, 1985), and expressions of patiency (Reader, 2007) in the lives of women in sex work.

This temporal dimension also extends to members of the institutions of the household, the community, the state and the market and their social relations with women formerly and actively in sex work. Customers drawn from the market became members of FSW's households through sexual-affective relationships but, often abandoned the women causing them *koshto* (pain). As Jasmine and Mamata's experiences show, the women were able to gain the sympathy of customers, who had been or were potential perpetrators of sexual violence, to escape sites of sex work. Madams who started out as employers took on a care-giving role for the women in their employment, as Hemanti's experiences show. FSWs as employees, too, provided emotional support to their madams. However, the friendship often ended when money and relationships with men became a source of power inequalities, which Sapna and Khusbhoo's experiences highlight (section 6.4.3.3). In pathways out of sex work, Rahima and Salma's experiences show how social relations with members of community-based organisations, who had initially supported their return and helped them to deal with the stigma and

power inequalities in their households, turned into power struggles when the latter started to police the women's behaviour and future social and economic aspirations.These changing social relations, and roles of actors within them, emphasise the dynamic nature of everyday power and violence for former and current FSWs.

Finally, the temporality of these women's experiences and journeys within and through sex work connect with and respond to the broader context of contemporary female social and economic migration. When journeys are made by women from marginalised communities e.g. refugee women, their experiences of migration across different spaces and times are often framed within negotiations with direct and structural forms of violence (Gerard, 2014). These journeys are non-linear and circular, and involve varying strategies of coping with these experiences. As Milivojeciv (2014:296) points out in her analysis of the linkages between gender, asylum seeking and anti-trafficking interventions in the lives of refugee women in Serbia, and confirming findings by other scholars (Pickering, 2010, Weber and Pickering, 2011, etc), women's migratory journeys are "more likely to be intercepted" and involve temporary setbacks which render them non-linear. To acknowledge and understand the temporality and non-linearity of women's experiences of migration and mobility in sex work is, therefore, crucial to addressing the nature and manifestation of everyday violence and power inequalities across their life-courses.

9.5. Life cycles of deviance across social relations

Chapter 8 applied the theoretical framework of deviance to the experiences of respondents to identify commonalities across pathways into, lives in and pathways out of sex work. This highlighted how the breakdown of social relations due to

experiences of violence and power inequalities can construct social deviance, which itself changes and evolves over time. The latter was mapped through Becker's (1963) theory of deviant careers. The study of deviance in this research unites Kabeer's (1994) social relations framework with Ellsberg and Heise's (2005) life-cycle approach to gender-based violence, to map a life cycle of deviance across social relations in the experiences and lives of former and active FSWs. This encompasses both experiences and negotiations, as each stage in the deviant career includes negotiations with a chronologically-increasing progression of deviance. In this research, deviance is constructed and perceived as both a consequence and response to experiences of violence and power inequalities in social relations in the lives of women, intersecting with class, religion and other material inequalities.However, deviance too becomes a form of structural violence and power inequalities which needs to be constantly managed and negotiated.

The figure of the female deviant and the ways in which it is constructed in social relations across different institutions of the household, the community, the state and the market highlights how these institutions maintain and reinforce patriarchal notions about women's sexuality, work and position in society. To borrow from and extend Kabeer (1994)'s argument (section 3.5), *genuine change in power relations between men and women requires a transformation in the ways institutions construct, maintain, perpetuate and punish women for social and gendered deviance.*

In this research, sex work was used as a way to negotiate deviance since it provided residential arrangements and a community, where the absence of patrilineality and failure to abide by social norms is not judged by members within the market, but is judged by members of the community, the state, and the natal and marital household. Given this dichotomy, FSWs' desire to manage the deviance of sex work is taken advantage of by members of the market, e.g. men

encountered through sex work, who initiate sexual-affective relationships with FSWs and later abandon them. Women enter the sex-work market bearing previous labels of deviancy as anchorless women, as victims of sexual harassment in the informal labour market, as victims of coercive pathways perpetuated by men who should not have been trusted, as young women with migratory aspirations disapproved of by their parents, and so on. The experiences of child marriage victims in the shelter home (Chapter 8) show how deviance in sex work exists alongside other forms of cultural and social deviance – e.g. young women eloping with a partner of their choice against their family's wishes. This allows future structural and cultural violence to persist even when sex work is engaged in voluntarily. For those who leave sex work, the deviance persists and changes to forms that attach themselves to women irrespective of their coercive or voluntary pathway into sex work. For women like Mamata, rejection by the natal household due to deviance in running away or being associated with sex work only serves to increase deviance. Additionally, when women like Rahima search for social normalcy through unsanctioned and unsuccessful relationships with men which carry the potential for a new domesticity, their deviance only increases and return to sex work becomes the default choice.

Rahima's experiences (section 8.3.3.2) provide an illuminating case study of the life cycle of deviance across social relations. As a young victim of sexual violence in her village, Rahima's deviance started when knowledge of this act of violence became public knowledge. Recommended to marry her rapist as a form of social justice by the *panchayat* (the village self-governing council), i.e. members of the community and the state, deviance increased when she was rejected by members of her marital household, who subsequently sold her into sex work. On her return, her subsequent participation in a premarital relationship, going missing for the second time and being sold into forced labour amplified it. Although she was

married to her partner, his family's refusal to accept her, her first pregnancy, and her return to sex work highlight how the deviance in her life escalated progressively. This adversely affected her relationship with members of community-based organisations who tried to normalise her deviance in the community by controlling her deviant aspirations, i.e. to migrate, to return to sex work and to engage in unmarried relationships with men in the community. On the discovery of her second pregnancy, conceived in a clandestine manner with her partner, her lawyer (a member of the state) refused to work towards securing justice against her partner for selling her coercively into forced labour. This only served to multiply Rahima's deviance in her community and household, bearing the potential for future and further experiences of power inequalities and violence in her life.

9.6. Conclusion, further research, and implications for interventions targeting women in sex work

This research addresses gaps in studies of the lives of women in sex work in India, by documenting and analysing everyday experiences of and negotiations with power inequalities and violence. The primary aim of this research has been to acknowledge the importance of social relations in the lives of women in sex work. This has been done by going beyond an exclusive focus on sex work: by examining pathways into and out of sex work in conjunction with lives within it. What has emerged is a complex and dynamic picture of what constitutes vulnerability to violence and power inequalities in the lives of women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who enter sex work in Eastern India, and how these are negotiated. In its study of how gender relations produce vulnerability, the research has examined relationships between women and other women, and

women and men across the institutions of the household, the community, the market and the state. Experiences of and negotiations with violence and power inequalities have been unexceptionalised and heterogenised to show how these depend on women's changing positionalities in social relations within sites of sex work, just as they do within other forms of work in the labour market, within households and communities and in relations with the state.

9.6.1. Avenues for further research

The findings of this research highlight the need for further study of social relations in the lives of women in sex work. In particular, more studies of the ways in which FSWs build 'cultures of relatedness' (Carsten, 2000) across non brothel-based (which would include women across different classes) and traditional forms of sex work and in other social and cultural contexts in India would add nuance to the discussion of their lives. Extending this to include studies of how violence is located within women's attempts to build 'relatedness' outside sex work, and outside normative kin relations would help to further unexceptionalise experiences within sex work. This would entail a study of how various forms of gendered deviance are constituted and managed in Indian women's lives outside sex work, and how this compares to female sex workers' experiences. Finally, studies on social relations and experiences of violence in other forms of work in the informal labour market would be useful to place the experiences of women in sex work in a broader context of gendered struggles with power and violence within women's work in India.

9.6.2. Implications for abolitionist and pro-sex work approaches and interventions

Through an exploration of the life-histories of women formerly and currently in sex work in Eastern India, this thesis has highlighted how development interventions targeting sex workers affect these women's experiences and negotiations with everyday violence and power inequalities. Abolitionist and pro-sex work approaches to sex work play out through the anti- human trafficking and HIV/AIDS discourses, which interventions adopt and draw from in varying forms and degrees. The critique of these approaches and interventions outlined below should not be read as a criticism of a particular organisation, but rather of the larger power structures within which these organisations and their interventions are implicated.

Chapters 5-8 highlight how anti-human trafficking interventions which adopt a strong abolitionist approach affect women's negotiations with their life-cycle of violence and power inequalities. First, the refusal to accept women's agency in sex work contributes to their experiences of violence, highlighted in the experiences of Mamata and Jabala who were forced to stay on in the shelter home despite their desire to return to sex work in the absence of non-viable alternatives. Insisting on Mamata's return to her natal family as the only legitimate form of release from the shelter home (despite her family's unwillingness to take her back) highlighted how abolitionist perspectives fail to acknowledge forms of violence within social relations that may not be directly connected to coercive entries into sex work but which still have an influence on women's engagement with sex work. Jabala's experience (sec.7.3.2.) shows how abolitionist approaches ignore covert manifestations of structural violence in sex work in favour of overt forms – in 'rescuing' her from her allegedly coercive entry into sex work by her sister, the intervention overlooked the ways in which this allegation made by a madam of

considerable social and economic influence in the red-light area, in collusion with the police, was a direct outcome of everyday but inconspicuous forms of violence and power inequalities at the site, and the role of several institutional actors in perpetuating these inequalities.

The refusal to accept women's agency in sex work within abolitionist perspectives stems from a homogenization of violence in sex work, which as Jasmine and Mamata's experiences show, does not relate to lived experiences. These experiences highlight how violence at a particular site of sex work depends on women's specific positionalities within social and labour relations at that site, which also changes over time. By not acknowledging this, the abolitionist approach within rehabilitative interventions adversely impact women's negotiations with violence in their residential communities as Rahima's experiences underline. By sending women back to communities and households where violence within social relations sparked early vulnerabilities which indirectly paved coercive entries into sex work, these interventions inadvertently end up contributing to and exacerbating life-cycles of violence and power inequalities in these women's lives.

On the other hand, the pro-sex work approach with its homogenised view of agency in sex work can also be detrimental to women's negotiations with violence. As Jasmine, Mamata and others' experiences of 'exhibiting compliance' (sec.6.5.3) show, appearances of agency and willingness to do sex work can often result from a desperation to ameliorate material conditions of work. Once again, if the conceptualisation and perception of agency within these interventions fail to consider women's positionalities within social relations at the site of sex work, inconspicuous experiences of violence can be overlooked. Additionally, Shampa's struggles (sec.6.5.2.3) with her husband and in-laws over custody of her child, and Mamata, Khushboo (sec.6.4.3.3) and others' experiences of feeling instrumentalised by their partners over monetary issues stress the need for a

broadening of the focus of 'harm reduction' elements within pro-sex work interventions. These experiences reveal a different understanding of how violence is identified and perceived by women within sex work, which are often not accommodated within harm reduction initiatives which focus on 'standard' forms of physical and sexual violence within sex work. Finally, Sapna's experiences (sec.6.5.4) show that there is a need to acknowledge that voluntary engagement with sex work does not equate to absence of violence within it. This requires pro-sex work interventions to work towards facilitating a platform and environment where speaking out against violence will not be (perceived as) detrimental to social and economic relations formed within sites of sex work by women who, despite many constraints, have chosen this as a way of income generation, and negotiation with forms of everyday violence and power inequalities across their lives.

Appendix A: Table of Respondents

No.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
A. BROTHEL-BASED FULL-TIME FEMALE SEX WORKERS							
1	Chumki	23	Hindu	Town, Barackpore North 24 Parganas (WB)	Kalighat	Till S. 7	Separated from husband after domestic violence in marital household. Single mother to a boy who lives in a residential school outside RLA. Natal household in Barackpore, which she occasionally visits.
2	Jasmine	27	Muslim	Village, Jessore, Bangladesh	Kalighat	No formal schooling	Single mother of two children (conceived through sex work) in brothel household. Natal household in Bangladesh with father and step-mother (second wife). Mother lives in North Bengal.
3	Malini	28	Muslim	Village, Tangail, Bangladesh	Kalighat	Till S. 2	Single mother of one daughter (conceived through sex work) in brothel household. Occasionally visited by long-term male partner, who has a marital household outside the RLA.
4	Mampi	28	Muslim	Village, South 24 Parganas (WB)	Sonagachi	Till S. 5	Estranged from natal household in village in South-24 Parganas. Lives within brothel household with two *adhiyas*, occasionally visited by madam and pimp (madam's partner) who live outside the RLA.
5	Maya	22	Hindu	Town, Narendrapur South 24 Parganas (WB)	Sonagachi	Till S. 7	Natal household in Narendrapur. Lives within two-member *adhiya* brothel household
6	Mumtaz	19	Muslim	Village, South-24 Parganas (WB)	Sonagachi	Till S. 6	Separated from husband after domestic violence in marital household. Single mother to daughter in natal household in a village in South 24 Parganas. Lives within a brothel household with three *adhiyas,* a madam (Riya,her biological aunt) and pimp (madam's partner)
7	Neha	32	Hindu	Village, Agra, Uttar Pradesh	Sonagachi	No schooling	Natal household in village near Agra. Separated from husband after his infidelity, Lives within a brothel household of 4 *adhiyas.*

No.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
8	Rima	32	Hindu	Village, Howrah, (WB),	Kalighat	Till S. 4	Single mother of a daughter, now adopted by parents in natal household in Howrah. Adoption after separation from husband due to domestic violence in marriage, and subsequent abandonment
9	Sabina	25	Muslim	Village, Jessore, Bangladesh	Kalighat	No schooling	Separated from husband after his second marriage and subsequent harassment by in-laws within marital household. Natal household with father and step-mother (second wife) in Bangladesh. Mother lives and works in North Bengal. Son from first marriage living with her in brothel household. Occasionally visited by second husband, a long-term customer recently married to who lives outside the RLA.
10	Sapna	25	Muslim	Village, South-24 Parganas, (WB)	Sonagachi	No schooling	Mother deceased through suicide. Marital household in Haryana, estranged from in-laws. Husband in prison due to drug peddling charges. Single mother to daughter in care of natal household, with father and step-mother (second wife) in village in S.Parganas
11	Shampa	32	Hindu	Town, Durgapur, Paschim Bardhaman (WB)	Sonagachi	Till S. 9	Natal and marital households in Durgapur. Mother to one daughter, in custody of estranged husband and in-laws. Lives within a brothel household of 4 adhiyas.
12	Shobha	32	Hindu	Narendrapur South 24 Parganas (WB)	Sonagachi	Till S.4.	Single mother of married, adult daughter living outside Kolkata. Separated from husband who was alcoholic. Lives with partner/pimp in two-member brothel household and works as an independent sex worker
13	Shilpa	19	Hindu	Pokhara, Nepal	Kalighat	Till S. 3	Natal household of parents, a younger brother, sister-in-law and second nephew, and younger sister in Pokhara. Guardian to first nephew within brothel household.

No.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
1 4	Sneha	22	Hindu	Town, Sonarpur, South 24 Parganas (WB)	Sonagachi	Till S. 5	Natal household in Sonarpur. Lives within a two member madam-*adhiya* brothel household with Hemanti. Planning to leave sex work.
				B.PART-TIME FEMALE SEX WORKERS			
1 5	Priya	26	Hindu	Village, South 24 Parganas (WB)		Till S. 6	Marital household in village near Canning, ailing son, and husband who does not work.
1 6	Jharna	26	Hindu	Town, Hooghly, (WB)	Kalighat	Schooling complete	Lives with daughter from first marriage (ended in divorce) and live-in partner in household in town north of Kolkata
				C.MADAMS			
1 7	Hemanti	31	Muslim	Village, South-24 Parganas, (WB)		Till S. 6	Lives in a two-member brothel household with an *adhiya*, Sneha; both do sex work. Divorced from husband after domestic violence. Estranged from natal household.
1 8	Kharu	32	Muslim	Declined to say		Till S. 5	Lives in brothel household with three *adhiyas*;does sex work. Single mother to a daughter, conceived through sex work, who lives in a residential school in North Kolkata.
1 9	Khushboo	33	Muslim	Bhowanipore,Kolkata		Till S. 5	Divorced from husband who is now married to her younger sister. Entered sex work after experience of rape by acquaintance who promised her work as a domestic help in a different city. Does sex work along with three *adhiyas* including Sapna.
2 0	Manisha	31	Muslim	City,North Kolkata		Till S. 3	Lives with husband in non-brothel household in Songachi. Employs 3 *adhiyas* who live and work in a different brothel household. Mother to two sons. Former sex worker, married her customer who now works as a pimp.
2 1	Riya	32	Muslim	Village, South-24 Parganas, (WB)	Sonagachi	Till S. 4	Lived in household with partner Bikram (former customer) and three *adhiyas*. Aunt to Mumtaz, one of the *adhiyas*. Worked as madam-pimp with Bikram. Household raided by police during fieldwork.

No.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
				D. PEER SEX WORKERS (PART OF THE SEX WORKERS' COLLECTIVE)			
22	Bandana	34	Hindu	Village, South 24 Parganas (WB)		Till S. 5	Lives with young daughter (conceived through sex work) in a brothel household. Natal household in village near Canning. Supports ageing parents financially.
23	Dimple	35	Hindu	Town, Sonarpur, South 24 Parganas (WB)		Till S. 3	Lives with teenage son (conceived through sex work) and long-term partner (fixed customer) in a brothel household. Natal household in peri-urban town in Sonarpur. Father passed away, mother ailing, lives with Dimple's brother and sister-in-law.
24	Janaki	50	Hindu	Village, South 24 Parganas (WB)		No schooling	Lives alone in non-brothel household with long-term partner (former customer). Two grown children married and live in different parts of the city.
25	Subarna	52	Hindu	Village, South 24 Parganas (WB)	Sonagachi	No schooling	Lives alone in non-brothel household, works as a cook within some brothel households in the neighbourhood.
				E. RETIRED SEX WORKERS			
26	Amina	65	Muslim			No schooling	Lives with son, daughter-in-law and grandson in non-brothel household. Son runs a food shop in the locality.
27	Binita	51	Hindu	Declined to say		No schooling	Lives alone in non-brothel household, occasionally visited by long-term partner. Works occasionally in a nearby eatery.Two adult daughters who live in marital households away from the RLA
28	Kajol	45	Hindu	Village, Haldia, (WB)	Kalighat	Till S. 4	Lives in brothel household. Adult son working outside the city, sends money home.
				F. WOMEN RESCUED FROM SEX WORK			
29	Mamata	22	Muslim	Village, Howrah, (WB)		No schooling	Single mother of daughter conceived through sex work. Estranged from natal household in village in Howrah.
30	Jabala	22	Hindu	Village, South 24 Parganas, (WB)	Shelter Home	Till S. 4	Single mother of two children. Older daughter (6) raised by parents in natal household. Divorced from husband after

No.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
							domestic violence. Infant son with her in shelter home.
31	Panchi	19	Muslim	Khulna, Bangladesh		Till S. 6	Youngest of three siblings, older male and female sibling married. Eloped with boyfriend who sold her into sex work in India
32	Poornima	19	Muslim	Dhaka, Bangladesh		No schooling	Worked and lived in a garment factory in Bangladesh with mother. Estranged from father. Coercively sold into sex work through migration agent promising work in India.
33	Rehana	19	Muslim	Sonarpur, South 24 Parganas, (WB)		Schooling till S. 5	Mother to two children, husband ailing. Estranged from natal household who did not approve of interreligious marriage.
34	Sushila	19	Hindu	Village, South 24 Parganas		Schooling till S. 4	Single mother to two, entered sex work after estrangement from husband. Children raised by natal household members.
35	Shaoli	19	Hindu	Town, Rajpur, South 24 Parganas (WB)		Schooling complete.	Rescued from a dance bar. Entered sex work voluntarily to fulfill career aspirations of working in the entertainment industry. Only child. Both parents work in public service.
36	Tanya	19	Hindu	Town, Narendrapur South 24 Parganas (WB)		Schooling till S. 9	Single mother to daughter raised by natal household members. Estranged from husband after domestic violence and his infidelity.

G. CHILD MARRIAGE VICTIMS

No.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
37	Maitree	16	Muslim			Schooling till S. 9	Youngest daughter of three. Eloped with classmate when parents were fixing marriage to a 30 year old relative, which would take place on her 18th birthday.
38	Nadia	16	Muslim	Narendrapur West Bengal,		Schooling till S. 9	Adopted daughter, biological parents died in car accident when respondent was a child. Adopted by parents' friends. Eloped with boyfriend after fight with mother.
39	Rabia	15	Muslim	Sonarpur, West Bengal		Schooling till S. 9	Youngest daughter of two. Older sister married. Eloped with relative of sister's husband. Father works as a clerk; mother is a housewife.

No.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
40	Shibani	16	Hindu		Shelter Home	Schooling till S. 9	Youngest child of three, one older male sibling who works outside Kolkata. Mother is a school teacher; father works within public service. Eloped with classmate from school.
H. WOMEN FORMERLY IN SEX WORK, RETURNED TO RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES							
41	Anjum	27	Muslim			Till S. 3	Household with ageing parents, two married older male and female siblings and one unmarried younger sibling (female). Sold into sex work by her husband, after domestic violence and conflict in marriage. Newly returned.
42	Sondha	19	Hindu			Till S. 5	Younger daughter of two. Father is a middle-aged farmer, mother is housewife. Coercively sold into sex work within voluntary rural-urban migration by an acquaintance. Newly returned.
43	Sadia	21	Muslim			Till S. 7	Youngest of three older male siblings. Lives with parents, and runs a grocery shop. Coercively sold into sex work through acquaintance within voluntary migration for work. Returned in 2011.
44	Salma	26	Muslim			Till S. 6	Middle child among three siblings, one older brother and one younger. Father has chronic illness. Sold coercively into sex work after domestic violence in marriage. Currently runs a grocery shop in her neighbourhood. Returned in 2011.
45	Rahima	22	Muslim	Village, South 24 Parganas, (WB)	Villages near Matla river	Till S. 2	Younger daughter of two. Sister married, works in Delhi as domestic help. Ailing, ageing parents. Coercively sold into sex work by first husband who raped her when she was 11. Single mother of one male child (6 months) and at the end of fieldwork, pregnant with another. Estranged from second husband and family. Returned in 2011.

N o.	Name	A.	Religion	Place of Origin	Field Site	Ed.	Profile
					I. PIMPS		
4 6	Basu	37	Hindu	Narendrapur ,South 24 Parganas (WB)		Till S. 8	Lives with partner Shobha, full-time independent FSW in two-member household. Works as her pimp.
4 7	Bikram	38	Muslim	Belgachia North Kolkata	Sonagach i	Schoo ling compl ete	Lived in household with partner Riya (a madam) and three *adhiyas* (including Mumtaz). Household raided by police and broken up during fieldwork

s.= Standard
A= Age (self-reported)
Ed.= Education
WB=West Bengal

NGO Staff working with women formerly and currently in sex work

No.	Name	Location	Organisational Affiliations
48	I.Sharma	Kolkata	Heads of city-based NGOs working directly or indirectly on anti-trafficking interventions
49	R.Dasgupta	Kolkata	
50	Dr.Dey	Kolkata	Head of HIV/AIDS NGO which houses a sex workers' collective
51	N.Gupta	Canning	Heads of community-based NGO working on anti-trafficking interventions
52	A.Khatoon	Canning	

Glossary

Aain	Law
Abba	Father
Adhiya	Female sex worker who splits her income in half with her madam or brothel owner
Admi	Man (Hindi)
Ammi	Mother
Ayah	Domestic Help
Baaje	Bad
Babu	Aristocratic Bengali land-owners
Beti	Daughter
Bhaar	Burden/Liability
Bhadralok	Gentleman (middle or upper-class)
Bhadramahila	Gentlewoman (middle or upper-class)
Bhalobaasha	Love
Bhorsha	Trust
Bipod	Trouble
Biye	Marriage
Borda	Older brother
Boudi	Sister-in-law (older in family hierarchy, not necessarily in age)
Buro	Old man
Chhukri	Female sex worker in bonded labour
Chingri	Shrimp
Choritro	Character
Chotto	Small
Dalal	Agent/middleman
Dhoka	Betrayal
Didi	Older sister
Dula-Bhai	Brother-in-law (common use in Bangladesh)
Ghonto	Curry
Ghorer-bou	Housewife

Goli	Lane
Jal	Net
Jama Kapor	Clothes
Jomi	Land/Property
Jorir-kaaj	Embroidery work
Kaaj	Work
Kaajer-bari	Site for domestic work
Kono	Any
Kopaal	Fate
Koshto	Pain (physical, emotional, sexual)
Kucho	Small
Lain-bari	Brothel (House of lines)
Lal Bati Ilaka	Red-Light Area
Lok	Man (Bengali)
Maya	Attachment
Meye	Girl
Mohila	Woman
Nani	Maternal grandmother
Onno	Other
Oshanti	Conflict/ disagreements
Para	Locality/neighbourhood
Priyo	Favourite
Shalish	A social system, involving community elders, to informally resolve disputes in villages
Shankha-pola	Red and white bangles worn by married Bengali Hindu women
Shapla	Water-lily plant
Shastho	Health
Shindur	Vermillion powder worn by married Bengali Hindu women
Shongshaar	Household/Domesticity
Shonstha	Organisation, usually NGO
Shotho-Ma	Step-mother

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