

CLT/DEC/CP/007

**WOMEN LABOURERS
AND THEIR STRUGGLE TO WIN A SPACE FOR LIVING**

**Socio-cultural innovation among
the women porters of the central fruit
and vegetable market of Gultekadi,
PUNE (Maharashtra), INDIA**

by

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This study was prepared by Hema RAIRKAR and Guy POITEVIN at the request of UNESCO. The opinions expressed are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Organization.

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INTRODUCTION

Women porters

This study represents a point or phase in a project that has been going on for some years to investigate the migratory processes on the periphery of the urban centre of Pune (Maharashtra, India). The project is not a statistical survey, nor is it a socio-economic or demographic analysis similar to the many excellent studies already available on population flows from the countryside to the cities in India¹ and the concomitant employment and urban management problems. Our specific aim is to investigate the marginalized groups that migrated 20 or 30 years ago and are still migrating today from the countryside, with its socio-cultural environment and family economy, to an urban setting, or at least a setting subject to socio-cultural influences from towns.

Looking into and behind population movements and mobility at the way people roam about and finally settle in an outer city area, our research is primarily an analysis of the social mechanisms governing these phenomena. It is aimed at identifying the social, economic and cultural structures and relational systems that these migrations both bring to light and make manifest. A previous UNESCO report² brought out five years ago focused on some aspects of this first set of topics, the relational systems underlying the processes of migration, i.e. the nature of the basic social relationships that subtend those processes or, in other words, constitute the framework of migratory movements to and from rural and urban areas.

The second set of topics concern the cultural forces that these migrations release. By this we mean the migrants' life-experience, their individual and collective socio-cultural responses, the practices which enable them to face risks and to react positively to the challenges of everyday life, the emergence of new sources of energy and ways of rebuilding a new cultural identity, the redefinition of values, the assertion of aspirations or authentically personal expectations. Migrants are not torn between two worlds but reveal different facets of themselves in the context of the major changes in social relationships and practices that migration implies.

This study is a continuation of the previously mentioned study submitted to UNESCO in 1986. It stems from a need that was felt at the time, firstly to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes, motivations and inner reasons for migrants' behaviour, and secondly to concentrate research on working-class women, whose way of life is most vulnerable to disruption by migratory processes. It is based on an in-depth qualitative analysis of the reactions and behaviour of peasant women migrating towards Pune from the surrounding areas in search of a new life and new space for living, entering into relationships which were previously forbidden or unconventional, and in general moving in socio-cultural areas different from those to which they were accustomed.

This report concentrates, therefore, on the second set of topics in our project. It aims to assess the challenges facing women from peasant backgrounds who, for various reasons, have

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1. Banerjee, B., *Rural to Urban Migration and the Urban Labour Market*, Himalaya Publishing House, 1986. Oberai, A.S. and Singh, H.K.M., *Causes and Consequences of Internal Migration, A study in the Indian Punjab*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983. Raju, B.R.K., *Development Migration: A Processual Analysis of Inter-State Rural-Rural Migration*, 1989.
 2. Systems of Relationships and Socio-Cultural Dynamics in Migration, on the periphery of the Urban Centre of Pune (India) (Maharashtra), 1987, UNESCO, Division of Cultural Studies and Policies.

had to migrate to the town, in this case especially from the country areas that, to the west of Pune, have been affected by the building of dams and flooding of the land, and to the east by endemic drought. In cultural terms, who are these women? What difficulties do they face on arrival in the urban areas, and how do they find the energy to respond to them? What are the subjective reasons for their migration, apart from the objective causes of mass population movements? At what price do they succeed in adapting to a new, socio-culturally different environment? What compromises do they find? What social or cultural strategies do they adopt? What changes take place in their way of life? What combination of tradition and modernity takes place in their everyday life and what form does it take? What becomes of them and how do they assert their own identity in daily life?

Since thousands of peasant women have been migrating for years towards Pune, there was no question of approaching such a population with sampling techniques, still less of getting to meet each one of them. We therefore decided to select a specific, small and localized group but to establish personal relationships with the members of this group over a long period, sustained and motivated also by intentions and networks of relationships, if possible going beyond the strict framework of the research itself. Several possibilities were open to us: e.g. to take all the women living in the same shanty-town, or all women of the same caste, or all women who had migrated from the same village or the same valley. Other approaches could also have been envisaged. We opted for a different solution: to study a group of women employed in the same place, who shared a certain feeling of collective unity. We chose a group of women working as porters in the central vegetable and fruit market of Pune in Gultekadi, on the Satara road.

There were 604 of these women in 1988 when we began our study. They work from 4 a.m. generally until noon, but sometimes until 4 p.m., for three kinds of jobs: transporting on their heads the sacks or crates of vegetables and fruit, which may weigh up to 50 or sometimes 75 kilos, from the trucks that deliver them to the market to the merchants' or commission agents' warehouses and from there to the vehicles belonging to the retailers or other transporters; sorting the merchandise and putting it into sacks; and manhandling the sacks and crates to be weighed.

The central market is not merely the 66-hectare area (known as the 'market yard') built, equipped and used since 1976 as a centre for the wholesale trade. between the country and an urban area of nearly 2 million inhabitants, for vegetables, fruit, grain, animals and spices. More than just a market area rationally planned to ease the congestion caused by the street trading that goes on in Pune, the market is an institution with its own history, laws and power relationships, reflecting the importance of the interests involved. It is important to know something of the market in order to understand the scope and significance of the social processes and cultural forces we are about to consider.

It was in the nineteenth century - more precisely after 1871, when the opening of the Suez Canal brought about a considerable increase in commercial activity in India by establishing closer links between that country and the West - that the markets began to take the form we know today, with their management committees. The British badly needed India's raw materials and promoted the establishment of central markets where they could find the various commodities they required together in the same place. Market-places and the merchant class developed in parallel. Market committees were set up to see to the installation and

management of these trade centres.¹ Middlemen (*dalâl*) or commission agents (*adté*) proliferated around the merchant classes. *Hamal* (labourers) were taken on to load and unload the merchandise.

The merchants were soon able to turn the trade in agricultural produce to their own advantage, since they generally held the peasantry in their power. The peasant farmers had two ways of selling their product, but in both cases the merchants took care to see that the peasants remained at their mercy, either by going to the producer and buying his crop before it was harvested, or, any other product ready to be sold and removed, or by having the peasant bring his produce to the merchant, in return for whatever sum the latter was prepared to give him. The merchant buyers never took production costs into account. Furthermore, they resorted to various stratagems, misrepresentation of the rates, short weight, delays in payment, non-existent sales charges, discounts for quantity, etc. - even today the market committees are hard put to it to prevent such practices. Under these conditions, many peasants in desperation had to leave the land and take jobs as day labourers in the towns in order to survive.

Another determining factor which must be noted here is that, basically, the trade in agricultural produce took an institutional form that gave a crucial role to the commission agent or middleman, the *adté*. Whether one looks today at sales by co-operatives themselves, the sale of processed produce or the various plans implemented by the administration (purchasing monopoly, purchasing by bodies operating on behalf of the administration, etc.), the middleman has never yet been ousted from his central role.

The British realized the extent to which the marketing system was prejudicial to the interests of the peasant producer, and there was considerable public debate on ways of remedying the situation. In 1928 a Royal Commission on Agriculture was appointed to find a solution. The Commission surveyed the whole country and observed that in the markets the merchant class operated as if they were its own property. The Commission suggested radical reforms. It formulated recommendations based on the 1897 law on the cotton and grain trade at Berar, in the Presidency of Bombay (a law that was aimed at controlling both the grain and the cotton trade, but was mainly applied to cotton). Wherever market committees existed, they were in the hands of elected members. One important recommendation made by the Commission on the basis of the Berar law was to extend the law on market committees to the whole of India and to introduce a statutory ban on any commission agent, *adté* or *dalâl*, being elected to a market committee.

These recommendations were taken seriously and heeded. They were to make headway after 1937 when the Congress Party formed a government for the first time, and especially after independence in 1947. The Bombay Agricultural Produce Marketing (Regulation) Act came into force in 1939 in the State of Bombay. Under that law, three committees, one for each of the State's three regions Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnatak, controlled market trading, under the name of Regional Central Advisory Committee for Regulated Markets. When Maharashtra became a State in 1960, a similar committee was set up for the whole of the new State. A law passed in 1963, the Maharashtra Agricultural Produce Marketing (Regulation) Act, defined the role and authority of the market committees.

Today Maharashtra has 250 market committees which control 450 secondary markets. According to the law which governs them and defines their statutes, the market committees

1. See *Les Comités de marché au Maharashtra, leur statut et leur fonction*, edited by J.K. Shinde, Maharashtra Government publication, Market Committees' Co-operative Union, Pune, 1977.

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have two main functions: to put an end to unacceptable trade practices, and to set up central markets or 'market yards'.

These measures were intended to ensure that the regulations were applied in the market-place, in such matters as the reduction of sales charges, the public fixing of the price of agricultural produce (to combat the middlemen's and dealers' traditional practice of fixing the price of goods by using, with hands concealed under a cloth, a secret sign language known to the dealers and merchants but not to the peasant producers), the weighing of merchandise by weights-and-measures controllers with official authorization from the Committee, the handing over to suppliers of agricultural produce of documents indicating the price of the goods and the quantity purchased by the middleman, the establishment of different levels of quality control for agricultural produce, and the distribution to the administration and the peasants of information concerning the market price of commodities.

The establishment of new markets is a more sensitive function, as it means that sites have to be found or made available in urban areas, funds raised for the building operations, and traditional markets transferred to a new location. Despite all these difficulties, 217 market yards have now been set up in Maharashtra. The 1963 Act gives a list, in clause 21(a), of agricultural produce to be regulated. The concept of agricultural produce covers all agricultural products whether processed or not (fibres, cereals, lentils, oil seeds, tobacco, sugar cane), horticultural products (fruit, spices, vegetables), livestock products (eggs, chicken, cattle, sheep, goats, wool, butter, milk, curds, skins, forage, cattle-feed, grass), and the products of fish-farming and forestry.

The Pune Market Committee was established in 1959 and its market yard opened in 1976. This covers the territory of the municipality of Pune and the rural development block of Pune (Haveli), with smaller market places in Khadki, Hadapsar, Pimpri-Chinchvad, Monday-Phule, Mangalvar Peth and Karve Road. The following table lists the produce for which it has succeeded in regulating trade. It is clear that the Committee is far from controlling trade in all goods (metals, building materials, wood, and even grain and sugar cane, among other goods, are still sold in Bhavanipeth, Nanapeth, Ganjpeth, Gurvarpeth, Juni Shikravar and other quarters of the town).

Produce	Date of its regulation	Date of its transfer to the market yard
Sugar cane	3 April 1959	31 March 1976
Condiments, curcuma, spices, peppers	25 April 1967	31 March 1976
Cereals, lentils	1 January 1972	26 January 1981
Forage	15 August 1972	
Fruit, vegetables, onions, potatoes	9 February 1976	16 April 1979

The Pune Agricultural Produce Market Committee has 16 members. Three are appointed and 13 are elected for a five-year term of office. The Mayor of Pune, the Director of the Agricultural Services of the District Council and a member of the Council of the Development

Block of Pune are appointed members. Three members are elected by all the town councillors of all the communes of the block. Seven members are elected by the members of the cantonal credit societies and agricultural marketing co-operative societies. Three representatives are elected by the merchants, whose operations are subject to control by the Committee. Recently, the workers' organizations succeeded in getting one out of 16 members to be a representative chosen from among the porters, a place on the Committee being made available by reducing the number of merchants' representatives from three to two.

The market has a substantial turnover, and enormous quantities of goods are transferred between country and town and between district and State. The market committee thus becomes politicized, a target for socio-political power struggles that create agitation among the peasant classes. Elections to the Committee are an important event in local political life, So far it is the Congress Party that has succeeded in maintaining undisputed control over the district's market committees and the secondary committees, as well as over the network of village credit co-operatives. In these circumstances it is inevitable that merchants, middlemen, commission agents, transporters and accountants should have close, self-seeking and dubious relations with those representing the political interests of Congress.

The legislation relating to the agricultural produce market committee was established to protect the peasants' production by releasing it, at least partially, from the grasp of the middlemen, but it never took account of the market labourers. The Shops and Establishment Act of 1945 stipulates, among other provisions, that each shopkeeper should make a list of those whom he employs and display it in his shop. When the law was voted, the commission agents and middlemen went with their lawyers to the Minister of Supply (then Yeshvantrao Chavan), and got him to acknowledge that the market labourers could in no way be considered as their employees, nor could they themselves be regarded as their employers. This left the labourers with absolutely no legal protection. It required a long protest campaign on their part to obtain the adoption in 1969 of the *Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamal and other Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare) Act*, which was a frost step towards the recognition of their rights. The commission agents then tried everything to prevent the law being applied, and it is still not applicable in all the markets in Pune nor for all commodities. In particular it does not cover the porters, men or women, of the fruit and vegetable market of the Gultekadi market yard.

The porters' main union organization, the *Chatrapati Shivaji Market Yard Union*, is under the control of the Congress Party and of the interests to which it defers or which it protects, directly or indirectly, in particular those of the *dalâl*. Although this union is affiliated to the council responsible for the implementation of the 1969 Act, it has not yet been able, or even tried, to obtain the advantages to which the labourers are entitled. According to its president, the union has 504 paid-up women members, all employed in the fruit and vegetable market. This is also the case for the small rival union, *Bhurnata Sanghatna*, which has about 100 members among the women labourers from the same market. On the other hand, the *Hamal Panchayat* labourers' union, which represents the interests of the grain-market labourers in the market yard and other market centres established in the town (including Bhavanipeth, where its head office and social welfare office have always been situated) and which is socialist-controlled, is the only union that has succeeded in obtaining for the grain-market labourers (including 35 women) the advantages of the 1969 Act, which was passed largely as a result of its campaign. Tine president of *Hamal Panchayat*, Baba Adhav, happens also to be the chairman of the council responsible for the application of the 1969 Act to the whole of the State of Maharashtra.

Working methods

The first problem which arose was that of making contact with the women labourers (*harévalé*) in the fruit and vegetable market: who to meet, where and how to meet them, so that the first contact would inspire confidence and lay the foundations for regular visits in order to obtain free and spontaneous exchanges as rapidly as possible. It was in this way that I wanted to collect useful and relevant information at first hand. The women workers would welcome me in the market as a customer and as such I, a woman from the urban middle class, could establish friendly relations with them, but such a relationship would exclude the kind of open, ongoing and in-depth exchange of views I was after. A meeting in the market could, moreover, only take place under the inquiring or even hostile eye of the *dalâl*, and the time taken up by discussion would interfere with the women's work. I decided therefore to meet them in their own homes, in the shanty-towns where they lived, outside market working hours. Only in this way could I hope to have an open and deeper personal relationship with them.

However, this approach raised several problems. I would have to be introduced or at least accompanied by someone they trusted and who could act as an assistant. I needed women assistants who would act as intermediaries between myself and the women porters and who would be near enough to them, in one way or another, to be listened to and understood, but who would also have enough understanding of, and interest in, the situation to participate in my research work.

A satisfactory solution to these initial problems was found through collaboration with the women rural social workers who met in the *Stri Shakti Mandal* groups (Women's Power) belonging to the socio-cultural activities organization known under the name of *Garib Dongari Sanghatna* (Organization for Indigent Mountain Populations - GDS), with whom I had co-operated in various ways for some years.¹ Most of them worked in the villages to the west of Pune from where many of the women I wished to meet had come.

Long before the market yard was established, constant migration had begun to bring men and women from the Mawal area to the west of Pune to work as unskilled labour in the markets. From the years 1924-1929 onwards, the building of the Mulshi dam had forced the peasant populations who had lost their land to migrate; other dams, Panshet in the 1960s, then Warasgaon in the 1980s, increased this migratory movement. The movement continued, on account of the relations thus established between many of the Mawal villages and the markets in the Pune urban area: for example 60-70 per cent of the inhabitants of the village of Nandivli are working in the market today. Recruitment into the work force follows as the natural outcome of previously established relations.

It so happened that most of the GDS social workers lived and worked in the villages of the Mawal, Mulshi and **Velhé** areas, which enabled me to benefit from the links of kinship and proximity between their families and those of the women workers in the market yard, with whom, because of these long-standing relationships, it was easy for them to put me in contact - some even had close relatives among them. Thanks to this introduction into their world, I was soon able to setup relations of trust, friendship and mutual assistance.

The social workers were not only familiar with consciousness-raising methods, but also had the attitudes, perceptions and motivations required for involving themselves readily in qualitative research of a socio-cultural nature based on in-depth exchanges. Their participation

1. In particular in research on the traditional songs of the millstone sung by peasant women in former times and participation in some of their cultural action programmed.

in the research was a natural extension of their own contacts in the villages and their efforts to analyse the processes and changes affecting the rural world in general, and it could only increase their competence and skills, in line with the goals of the GDS itself.

The interviews were sometimes carried out with one woman at a time, sometimes with two, three, four or even more together, according to circumstances. Others were gradually drawn into the conversations. One woman showed us to the house of another or took us to see a friend or acquaintance. In all, 166 women out of the 604 employed in the market, i.e. about 28 per cent, were interviewed personally, each for at least two or three hours, representing about 200 visits in all. Sometimes two or three interviews were conducted during a single visit to the women's homes. In addition to these individual home interviews, many visits were made to the workplace, the market itself. Several women became personal friends who invited me to join in family events, weddings in particular.

The factor that gave richness and relevance to the research was the increasing familiarity that was gradually built up between the women interviewed and myself, through the *Stri Shakti Mandal social* workers. Inevitably, I had an acute sensation of difference, distance, and alienation from the women interviewed, which called for a corresponding degree of effort to establish, sustain and deepen my contacts with them. As a foreigner, I was surprised to be able to establish close relations, with some of the women in particular. A growing sense of trust developed as this familiarity increased. But in fact this special relationship came about thanks to the co-operation of the social workers, who were familiar with such an approach, in a survey aimed both at research and at providing an opportunity for the market workers, and perhaps also their neighbors, to express their views and increase their self-awareness.

Here we may highlight the factors that made it possible to establish such a relationship and gave the survey a special dimension, that of research with objectives of a different order, and whose specific characteristics provided the inquiry with a general framework having the following qualitative connotations:

The interviews were conducted by women (by myself as an outside interviewer and by the collaborators from the GDS) who, both in and outside of the interview context, had interests in common other than those created by the survey.

The meetings were arranged by women who were able to understand the non-academic nature of the research project, since it corresponded, in the way it was conducted and in its questions and aims, to their own goals in organizing socio-cultural action in rural areas, among people familiar to those interviewed.

The discussions took place in an atmosphere of full co-operation, in which all the women participated according to their own abilities and personalities, on an equal footing with their interlocutors.

The operation was also inspired by another objective, more distant but essential in the long term: the possible forming of a group of women organized into a union for reasons other than those which motivate the existing unions, at present manipulated by the Congress Party. This specific goal changed shape somewhat along the way, but the ultimate aim of setting up a union which would be of advantage to the women labourers was always present and did in fact materialize, as described below.

The exchanges were also sometimes conducted with another, complementary aim in view, that of enhancing the traditional cultural heritage of these women who came from

the country, the heritage of the 'millstone songs' that had been passed down to them by the older women and that they had brought with them, in a recess of their memory, when they moved to the towns; as traces of this heritage were often just below the surface of their consciousness, some interviews benefited by this collective memory.

A few remarks will suffice to show the relaxed atmosphere in which most of the meetings took place. Once we had been invited into the house of one of the women workers, the welcome was unfailingly cordial, as traditional peasant hospitality requires not merely an offer of tea but a pressing invitation to share a meal and to come again. This absence of formality meant that the research took place in a spirit of collective participation in a process of inquiry sometimes amounting to a kind of self-assertion. The women often gave more than the minimum information required by the survey and expressed more personal or intimate thoughts and concerns: the problems of village land, savings and how to make them, their efforts to set money aside and invest it. Some of them even wept as they confided their troubles to me. I was often called to witness by the women interviewed, and I felt involved in their lives.

The survey began on 6 March 1988. It covered eight shantytowns on the outskirts of Pune that were gradually being absorbed into the expanding urban area; four rehabilitation centres, and various other teeming and particularly insalubrious parts of the old town of Pune, where the first migrants had settled. A glance at the map of the districts where the female labourers were interviewed shows that they lived either in the eastern part of the town in the crowded old quarters next to the former market sites (Bhavanipeth, Ravivarpeth, Gurvarpeth and Shukravarpeth), or in the shantytowns of Pune and its surroundings (Janata vasahat, Dhankavdi, Saibaba, Ambedkar, Prem nagar, Dandekar pul, Dattavadi, etc.). Some women living in these slums have now found a place to live in a rehabilitation area under the municipal slum clearance projects (Bibvevadi, Dhankavdi, Gotavle nagar, etc.). This shows how far apart from each other the women workers lived - going to meet them at home meant covering considerable distances in the slum areas of the town, and the far-flung shantytowns in Pune and its outskirts - and how far they had to travel to work and back.

Saturday is a day to avoid for visits, as it is their day off. Housewives are taken up with shopping or visits to friends, or even an outing to their native village or a pilgrimage or visit to the temple of their god. Sunday is the day when more merchandise is delivered than on the other days of the week, and the women therefore returned home later. Generally each evening at home the housewives are taken up with domestic chores, mainly cooking and looking after the children; they have little time to concentrate on interviews, especially as the husbands, who are by then back home, tend to be the only ones who reply to the questions and to take over the conversation. The women merely listen and acquiesce, so as not to upset or contradict them. Some husbands may also return drunk, and if there are other men there they may inhibit any relaxed exchange of views by their comments and their presence. Meetings therefore normally take place in the afternoon. The women who work in the onion market are not generally free at home before four in the afternoon. During the dry seasons, deliveries of vegetables and fruit are smaller and the women return home earlier.

The first visits and first contacts are generally met with a refusal to receive people from outside the shantytown. It is frequently difficult to locate the women's houses in a shantytown or an over-populated slum district. Doubts or suspicions concerning the intentions of unknown visitors who come repeatedly looking for individual people have to be cleared up by the social workers. Sometimes it is only after several fruitless attempts, asking from house to house in an atmosphere of mistrust, that it is possible to track down the hovels where the women live. It is

important to be assisted or even guided, as far as possible, by someone familiar with the neighbourhood and its inhabitants or with the block of houses or slums concerned.

Most of the 170 women whom we interviewed were Marathis; some were Deshmukhs. The Dhangar women belonged to groups who had migrated from the Sangli and Sholapur districts. The women of the Vanjari caste, who had mainly migrated from villages in the Pune district, had been working as labourers since the old market was set up. As some people in their families had held important jobs there as middlemen, this made it easier for them to find employment and accounts for the numbers of them working in Gultekadi today. Some women came from the untouchable Chambhar, Mahar and Mang castes. They are usually employed in the market as sweepers, a lowlier job than that of the women labourers, and one that corresponds to their ancestral employment in the village. Some women still belong to the lower nomad castes or tribal communities.

The approach

The investigation focuses on the following subjects:

It concentrates on the dynamic aspect of women's relationship to the 'spaces' around them - home, workplace, everyday environment and the area of social relations. This relationship is seen as an imprinting upon space of social relations, which thus become symbolized and materialized spatially. It is possible to distinguish as many spatialities (i.e. symbolic materializations in space) as there are different modes of symbolic materialization into appropriate spaces of a number of different systems of social relations.

This perception of the dynamics of space as the localized imprinting of systems of social relations is aimed at exploring the use of two conflicting strategies: on the one hand, those of exclusion, segregation or exploitation to which the women whom we studied were subjected; on the other hand those of the claiming and appropriation by the women of their own space for living, or of involvement in spheres of life from which they had hitherto been excluded.

This dynamized space is also a vector for a new type of culture, of which we explore the forms and modes of emergence. Space in this sense is a sphere for self-expression, for self-assertion through one's very presence, where one can lay claim to a place for oneself either by right or by will, in other words, where one may pass from the position of an inert object manipulated by social forces of all kinds, to the position of a fully-fledged active subject.

We focus on the processes which provide a response and a challenge to the mechanisms whereby women's self-expression is stifled and women's activities confined to certain recognized spheres, perpetuated by hegemonic, patronizing and moralizing attitudes towards women. The women's descriptions of their daily experience, reflecting a growing collective self-awareness, thus provides a particularly significant means of understanding the emergence of the individual actor, through the specificity of a voice that is again being heard, proclaiming new aspirations, approaches and decisions. The modalities and motivations of this self-expression, within the context of a changing society and at the heart of a struggle for survival, are the subject of our analysis.

This analysis of the dynamics of space as strategies of social relations is based on the premises that the unequal relationship between the sexes has a finally determining function. Each of the spaces analysed highlights, reveals and strengthens in its own way this basic segregation that determines their structure.

We shall therefore examine:

the processes whereby space has a segregating effect and the strategies whereby it becomes an extension of a situation of dominance or a means of projecting a hegemonic ideology;

the way in which women experience this dividing-up of space between the sexes by means of impassable boundaries that compartmentalize and instrumentalize the female social universe, and their attempts to impose new types of social relations in new or transformed spaces for living;

the processes by which they act upon the 'space provided': projection, transformation, appropriation, occupation, redefinition, conquest, imaginary modification, etc., and the conflictual aspects of these processes;

the way in which women build up, in this confrontation between conflicting strategies, their individual and collective identity, marking or reshaping their space by inhabiting it in a different way (by 'inhabiting' we refer to any act that generates feelings, words or practices, in which they take the initiative);

the way in which individual strategies when added together become a collective strategy, i.e. the transition from a cultural dynamic to a social dynamic.

Our method consists of more than mere participatory observation, in that it is intended to lead to action. The project is motivated by the desire to establish with the women, as the basic framework for research, a type of contact and relationship that contrasts with the constraints and inhibitions to which they are subjected: feelings of fear and dependence towards the dealers, subjection to middlemen of various kinds, the cultural and linguistic gap between the interviewer and the women workers, control by men and pressure from husbands, caste discrimination, isolation and internal divisions, etc.

By encouraging frankness and freedom of expression, in a situation which was already conducive to spontaneity, the research sought to stimulate self-analysis and introspection among the interviewees and to encourage them to speak out.

Through the interviewer's open-ended and gradual probing, the research tended to become a co-operative self-analysis, and often a collective one, since the interviews were rarely conducted in private.

The linkage between the questions and the self-analysis on the day-to-day problems and the experience and actual living conditions of the women interviewed transformed the research into a kind of applied anthropological investigation, directed towards changes in the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of the interviewees. The establishment by the latter of a new relationship with their environment or even a more active influence upon it, was one of the ultimate aims of the research and was seen as its natural extension or outcome.

The knowledge of the female condition that is generated and built up through this research depends on the extent to which it is self-knowledge that comes from within, originating in the words of the women themselves about themselves. This knowledge is particularly revealing as to how the women workers apprehend the place assigned to them by society. The object of the research is the subject itself. The research proves all the more valid and legitimate, in our view, in as much as its procedures facilitate exploration of the subject.

Our methodology is, to that extent, entirely contained within our subject. In other words, we must recognize the dimension of objectivity in the very subjectivity that is our object and the given theme of the investigation. This is none other than the subject itself in context. The research and its findings will be all the more authentic and useful in as much as the approaches adopted encourage deeper study of the subjectivity of the subject by the subject itself, not for its own sake and in isolation but with reference to its context. The scientific and practical relevance of the research is based on this introspective reciprocity between the subject and the object of research.

The investigation uses all relevant methods of analysing the psycho-sociological processes, the values conveyed, the power relationships, representations, aspirations, social conduct and conduct relations, and practices. The research was carried out by an all-woman team.

The method of presentation distinguishes five thematic fields of exploration.

Concepts

Situations of crisis, impoverishment and marginalization linked to socio-economic changes have confronted these women since they migrated to take up labouring jobs. These situations forced them to leave the domestic spheres¹ in which the rural order of peasantry and patriarchy had placed and confined them, defining these spheres in terms of the recognized roles attributed to or imposed upon women. These roles, which were always secondary as regards status and instrumental as regards functions, created territories within a vast social universe that was not open to them in its entirety, and assigned them to women.

The term or rather concept of space underlying this vocabulary is in this case neither a mathematical concept nor an *a priori* philosophical category postulated as a framework for any representation. It is in no way an abstract and homogeneous space. We see it here as an object of representation and not a form, and hence an object that is no longer all-embracing, univocal, homogeneous, singular or infinite. The language of space always refers here to specific 'frameworks of action and human behaviour'² dictated by values, motivations, aspirations or particular representations. All space here is an anthropological fact, qualitatively, functionally, semantically and affectively, neither divisible nor artificially comparable with another, nor measurable by reference to a unit of which it would be a multiple or sub-multiple. Whatever it is designating (the fruit market, the vegetable store, the kitchen, the family house, the whole shantytown, the city outskirts, etc.), space is understood here as a global, social and anthropological fact, whose content is analysed and not measured physically or architecturally. It is a complex combination of action, meanings, representations and application of forces, a field of forces whose perimeter is identical to that of the deployment of its energies and their mutual relations. Each spatial unit must thus be conceived not so much by an effect of denotation as by connotations 'operating in the mode of opposition and interference of binomials'.³ The first spatial binomial postulated here as being evident is a good example of this false definition by oppositional connotation: the distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' only makes sense, and then only maybe, by virtue of an opposition that, although clear in the

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1. See *Inde, Village au féminin*, G. Poitevin, H. Rairkar, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1985, p. 173.
 2. In *Espaces des autres*, Les Editions de la Villette, 1987, pp. 208 and 209. Cf. *Anthropologie de l'espace*, M. Ségaud and F. Paul-Lévy, C.C.I., 1983.
 3. In *Espaces des autres*, Les Editions de la Villette, 1987, pp. 208 and 209. Cf. *Anthropologie de l'espace*, M. Ségaud and F. Paul-Lévy, C.C.I., 1983.

abstract, eludes analysis. Our previous study had emphasized this absence of discontinuity between town and country in the case of migrants¹ of the lower social strata.

If we have to give a definition of our concept of space, we would accept as our own that given by C. Jacob:²

‘As a working hypothesis, we shall define the representation of space as what an individual or collective actor constructs on the basis of a discourse (verbal, iconic, etc.), or of a programme of actions (travel, trade, habitat, walking, war, hunting, etc.)’.

The work in the market yard forms the public space that, in socio-economic terms, structures of the human relations that are imposed from the start, on all those involved, as a theatre of action, with its interplay of established discourses and roles. Our question is precisely how and to what extent the women labourers live, accept and play their role as actors, i.e. how they behave in the theatre (which is at one and the same time the stage and the play) of their everyday working life. The fact of living in a neighborhood and as a housewife determines the private space of the family habitat. The ways of inhabiting that space are socially and culturally predetermined as ways of using places in which all women are supposed to be familiar with the habits, values and conduct expected of them. Here again, the discourses and the interplay of action are defined in advance. These are the two main spatial systems we are considering here. Space as a system is a set of actions, meanings, values, behaviour and representations attached to a geographical place, or rather constituting that place. Without all these, the place would be no more than a mathematical unit, divisible, homogeneous and without contours: a void.

A space is formed on two levels: the discourse and the action of a living agent. The two need not necessarily corroborate each other in the same actor. Various actors may have different or even opposing representations of and designs upon the environment, and these interweave to form their systems of communication. These systems are made up of confrontations, co-operation, relationships and exchanges, whether it is a question of occupying and arranging the places in question or of the interplay of the respective roles the actors assume in the same territory, or which they intend to create, by choice or by necessity. In short, socio-anthropological space is constructed of practices, the desire to occupy a territory, gestures and behaviour, words and plans for organizing the space, organizational forms of community life or work, forms of relationship, and images and dreams that brighten the space or present it differently to the mind’s eye.

Socio-economic needs, the spreading of new cultural models by the media, the pressure of crisis situations and the survival strategies to which they give rise tend to make women move into and occupy spaces which previously were not theirs. New practices of sociability on their part open up breaches in the walls of the established, compartmentalized social structures, or at least push the walls back. Our survey here is motivated by the search for those identifiable areas where new cultural dynamics sparked off by women from the working classes find a place and take root.

The definition of space as the localization of social relations and, consequently, the definition of our research as a quest for spatial landmarks symbolizing the cultural and social dynamics that aim to reconstruct space differently on the initiative of the women labourers, leads us to establish a topological vocabulary corresponding to this analytical approach.

1. *Systems of Relationships ...*, op. cit., p. 128.
2. *Espaces des autres ...*, op. cit., p. 213.

By projected space is meant a space on to which are projected values of domination, discrimination and compartmentalization of spheres - the delimitation of social compartments. This projection serves the purposes of the will towards segregation and hierarchical organization.

By space provided is meant the framework accepted as being normal, reflecting the accepted representations of the established hegemonic order.

By appropriated space is meant the 'space provided' as transformed by a process effected gradually through day-to-day experience.

By transformed space is meant the framework for living as reorganized on the initiative of a culturally innovative logic that transforms the structure of residential or social space.

By occupied space is meant space occupied as a result of new practices dictated by necessity under the pressure of survival strategies, for example, or the inexorable force of crisis situations such as the promiscuity of the slum districts, hunger, or the solitude of widows and abandoned women.

By conquered space is meant space characterized by the new sociability that, following conflicts between protagonists in a provided or established space, emerges from a break with the past, a change or an improvement, i.e. something new in the relations previously established in a given spatial framework.

Space is visualized in a representation, imagined in a dream, or desired in a collective manifestation, yet it is 'that which is not yet spatialized' that gives dynamic force to daily practices or collective actions aiming to fit it into the spatial framework of daily living and social relationships. The idea of 'elsewhere' manifests itself above all in areas of imaginative, architectural, artistic, dramatic or conflictual expression, defining itself as the basis for an innovative culture and the point around which a different social life crystallizes.

A context

This survey is situated in a context of which the scope delimits and motivates the whole.

As a research project, it has three aspects to be noted. Firstly, the contact established and maintained with the women labourers was from the outset regarded by the market authorities and high-ups as an intrusion that might encourage contestation. This made the research rather difficult but also more relevant, the difficulty being in itself a source of knowledge in that it reveals socially sensitive areas. Secondly, the present survey follows on from three studies carried out over approximately five years, one on the cultural dynamics emerging from oppressed social categories, in particular peasant women,¹ one on the conditions and forms of processes of cultural development among marginalized women,² and one on socio-cultural dynamics in migrations.³ Thirdly, this study endeavors to provide an Indian counterpart to a

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1. *Dissent and Cultural Dynamics: Three Voices from Among the Oppressed*, UNESCO Report, November 1984. G. Poitevin and H. Rairkar, Division of Cultural Studies and Policies. *Inde, Village au féminin*, G. Poitevin, H. Rairkar, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1985.
 2. *Conditions and Forms of Processes of Cultural Development Among Marginalized Rural and Urban Women in India*, Research report, UNESCO, 1988, Division of Cultural Studies and Policies.
 3. *Systems of Relationships and Socio-Cultural Dynamics in Migrations on the Periphery of the Urban Centre of Pune*, (India) (Maharashtra), UNESCO research report, 1987, Division of Cultural Studies and Policies.

similar survey conducted in a Muslim country, with a view to making a comparative study of the patriarchal ethos. Looking beyond, and indeed because of, the differences of cultures, attention will be drawn to the specificity of the different logics of patriarchal social relations, on the hypothesis that the anthropological shifts that influence their structure cannot be reduced to the separate components of the socio-economic and socio-cultural systems prevailing in each of the societies under consideration. The patriarchal ethos forms a kind of constellation that we attempt to explore through a comparative approach to two different socio-cultural areas. That ethos obviously uses the component parts of the social and cultural systems of these two specific areas to justify and impose itself, and even shape them to its own ends, but it is its own specific logic that we are endeavoring to explain by comparative analysis. This is why we envisage a comparative study conducted in two countries that are so far apart in many ways.

As for methodology, we adopted a phenomenological approach, focusing on what people say, what they recount of their lives, the daily life and experience of the women labourers as they describe it, whence the need to create a research situation based as far as possible on personal contact and a certain involvement on the part of the interviewer. In setting out the results, wide use will therefore be made of concrete examples selected both for their values as examples or symbols, at the micro-social level, of macro-social trends, and because they seem essential if an adequate account is to be given of the personal approaches and energies whose qualitative substance would be lost in a general or theoretical statement.

From the point of view of real social dynamics and the action of human agents, the research contributes in its own way to liberating and motivating practical approaches on two levels linked in with the survey interviews: that of union action and that of programmed cultural action. As research, it constitutes only one of the two components of a form of intervention that is situated on two levels and assumes two different roles - that of investigation and that of active commitment. This differentiation does not mean that the intervention is schizophrenic. Its unity lies in a decision which linked neither to research nor to operational necessity. Research as a method and discipline of knowledge is an instrument for achieving goals and performing operations of a different order. Knowledge is not the sole purpose of research, but defines its value in terms of its own constituent criteria, not of the need to act, which nevertheless activates it significantly and forces it to make even more judicious use of its means of operating.

From the point of view of the overall approach, we kept to the specific characteristics of the chosen field of observation, focusing on motives and paths of action in everyday life. As this action is governed at times - indeed more often than not - by the conventions of the established order, and at others by the injunctions of those who establish it, it is upon these and upon their modalities and effects that attention is deliberately focused here.

I

A PLACE TO LIVE

FROM A TEMPORARY ABODE TO A HOME

Addressing the question

The place of residence is, by the very fact that one resides there, the link to the soil and to the land. This link has two components. The first is the connection to a place that is defined as one's own domain, not necessarily or primarily in the sense of possession or exclusive ownership of a plot of land, as in the sense of a patch of ground that is marked out, reserved and enclosed for oneself, and hence closed to others as a residence. Home is, first and foremost, the particular and exclusive space occupied by the residence, a place of one's own, where a foothold is taken. Its second role is to be a shelter and a dwelling.

This relationship to the dwelling as a place and as a house takes a wide variety of forms, depending on the objective conditions of the physical and social environment and on the subjective conditions of the systems of representation and of values that are peculiar to any given human community. The way that people inhabit places is a cultural fact of prime importance. It is both a strongly determining and a significant factor in defining the place of women in any given community, especially in societies that are more traditionally tied to a rural life-style. We have therefore also analysed dwelling habits in the peasant community which is the background of the women who work in the markets.¹

In leaving their villages, these coolie women also give up a freed and stable home which their in-laws provided, and which was therefore not a matter of concern to them. Access to a place of their own, a temporary abode and dwelling, is one of the first concerns of the migrant women. That place must be found, built and freed up to live in. It becomes the objective of a victory that is usually risky to achieve. The events surrounding the effort to obtain a space to live in represent the women's first clash with the often hostile world that they are entering. They have to elbow their way in so as to make a niche there for themselves and to hold on to it. Wandering and changes of place, precarious conditions, insecurity, worries and striving are all characteristic of their entry into urban areas.

During this struggle for a place of one's own, the migrants win, slowly and with difficulty, a dwelling that they are proud to live in, as they gradually take undisputed long-term possession of it and as they succeed in fitting it out and fixing it up according to their needs and their purse.

Three types of consideration are of importance here.

The first has to do with the crisis conditions with which the migrant women are confronted in urban areas. There is a radical contrast between this situation and the peaceful residence in the house that their in-laws provided in the village. In the often inhospitable urban environment, the search for a place of one's own becomes the overriding concern of the migrant women who, wandering from one dwelling to another on the city outskirts, must test their own strength. A first set of questions relates to the spirit of initiative that the women must

1. See *Inde, Village au féminin [Indian Village Women]*, op. cit., pp. 237-244: the village house. Cf. *Espaces des autres*, op. cit., pp. 101-110, 155-176, 177-188.

show in this respect from their very first encounter with the urban area. A crisis situation calls forth new behaviour, practices and values, whose extent the migrant women may not be able to measure by introspection because their basic preoccupation is the satisfaction of their primary needs.¹

The second type of consideration has to do with perennial concerns about finding a reliable and permanent home. In the countryside, no woman had formal ownership rights to her home. Her status and her loyalty as a wife and daughter-in-law determined and safeguarded her place in the house and in the village, within the setting of the kinship and value systems of the patriarchal rural society. Once she has left this habitat and the socio-cultural setting that ensures its legitimacy, she must fight to find and obtain a permanent and indisputable space in which to live.

The third set of questions concerns the way in which they live in the dwelling, both as a place and as a home, in surface area and in volume. This way of living, of fixing up and even of imagining and dreaming about domestic space once it has been obtained reveals another distinctive and significant characteristic of the identity of these peasant women who have become coolies. If here we take the home to be a structure that, from an architectural point of view, gives material form to a culture and symbolizes it, and if we regard it as a way of occupying a place according to how it is fitted out and how the space is divided up within it, and how the available volumes are used to comply with varying needs and established practices according to specific standards and goals, then our question here arises in two forms, one more personal, the other more collective. The detailed description of the models, the values, the representations and the sentiments with which the coolie women relate to and establish their residence, refers us back to two levels of socio-cultural determination.

The home in these peripheral and insanitary areas where the coolie women live will be analysed first as a projection of the systems of relationships and in particular as a division of roles between men and women that the dominant culture imposes, generally and collectively. The analysis will focus in particular on the nature and breadth of the variations that are due to the divide between city and country.

At the personal level, the analysis will deal with the desires and actions of the coolie women themselves. They show presence of mind and a clear ability to adapt, taking advantage, within the very narrow limits imposed by all sorts of constraints that weigh on them and on their homes, of the opportunities that arise to fix up their dwellings, even to fit them out to their tastes. We shall even see at times how women take advantage of the chances that a society based on the market economy offers them to treat their houses and their land as assets at their disposal. Such a practice is a measure of the radical differences that now set apart the urban house from the family residence in the village.

The departure

Various reasons have led the working women in the market to cross the frontiers of their rural world and migrate to the outskirts of Pune. Their accounts lead us to stress in the first place, very significantly, the importance and the nature of the psycho-sociological motives that influenced many of them to seek their fortune elsewhere.

1. Our analyses here are aimed at developing one of the conclusions of the 1986 report, *Systems of relationships*, op. cit., pp. 53-54, 79-89.

Dvarka bai¹ KANDHARE, of the Maratha caste, living in Dhankvadui shanty town, comes from Akole (Mulshi development block). She travelled to Pune with her husband, six years ago, in 1982, after eight years with her in-laws. Because she was childless, her mother-in-law harassed her. For the first two years of their marriage, her husband joined in. He listened only to his mother, and beat his wife; once in broad daylight, he beat her up in the middle of the fields. Her mother-in-law did not give her enough to eat and did not dress her properly. Although she worked as hard as she could, they kept telling her that she had done nothing. One day, it was all too much: she and her husband left for Pune, taking with them only the clothes they stood up in, even though in their village the soil is good and there is enough to eat.

Gjara bai OMBASE, from the shanty town of Dandekar pul, of the Vanjari caste, came to Pune 13 years ago; she is a native of Nira (Satara district), and her in-laws are from Gardavney (Mulshi block). 'Many local people come and go between the village and Pune, or they even live there. Going there was never hard for meat all.' Her husband went to Pune first; she joined him a month later. 'At first I stayed in the shanty town opposite Dandekar pul. When I came here about ten years ago, they did not have the facilities they have today: there was very little water, and you had to go a long way to get it. No streets - it was all mud. Why did I come here? Things were too bad at home. My mother-in-law mistreated me in every way. She beat me. She made me work like a slave and gave me bran chapatis (made from the crudest part of the bran which is usually fed to chickens), but when you are hungry, you will eat anything. My son fell ill. I had to walk from Gardavney to Paud to the government dispensary to get medicine. I did not have the 25 pice that I needed to take the bus. The women from the little village of Sutarvadi fed me sorghum chapatis. My husband was a drinker. He beat me up whenever he felt like it. And so one day, I went to live with my mother. That was 15 years ago (1973). My husband today has sworn off drink.' The husband and wife are coolies in the market yard, having worked previously in the old Phule market.

These two accounts convey a general picture of the conditions of most coolie women and the steps they have taken. Sakhu bai JORI (Maratha) did not get along with her husband or with anyone else in the house. That was her reason for leaving. GHODKE bai (Khatik) fought with her brother-in-law. A woman in the neighboring village told her: 'Come with me, I'll take you to Pune. I'll find you work there'. She left with this neighbour. Gita bai POLEKAR (Maratha) lost her land which was submerged by the Panshet dam. She came to Pune in 1961: she could not get along with her husband's brother's wife. 'What could I do? I came here, to the market.' Rahi bai Tukaram DALVI, of the **Cambhar** caste, says that in her village near Daund, her family had 16 acres, but that the husband's brother's wife, who is older than she, cast evil spells on her. She had no choice, she says: she had to leave. She set off for Pune. Shanta bai MARNE (Maratha) could not get along with a bad tempered brother-in-law. How much longer could they continue to quarrel? Shanta bai BHEGADE (Maratha) was thrown out by her mother-in-law because she had a skin disease. How many others are there like that, like Kala bai, Bhana bai, Phula bai, Sonavne bai, Mukta bai, etc., whose husbands died of alcoholism? With children to take care of, a belligerent mother-in-law, an uncaring brother-in-law from whom they could not expect any help - they all left for Pune. The husband of HONMANE bai, of the Dhangar caste, was not on good terms with her half-brother; she followed her husband to Pune. Tara bai KUDITKAR (Maratha) came to Pune as a babe-in-arms with her widowed mother. The husband of DARVATKAR bai (Maratha) was mentally ill. She was unhappy at her brothers' home where she had gone back to live. She went to the city.

1. *bai* means woman in general, the suffix usually goes with a woman's last or first name; on this subject, see Inde, *Village au féminin*, op. cit., p. 129.

Fewer are those working women who mention only poverty as a reason for leaving. Dagada bai ABNABE, **Cambhar**, had no land; how could she live? Rangu bai DIGHE, Maratha, had a brother-in-law whose behaviour was always impossible. He had sold some land without asking anyone's advice. What was left was not enough to feed everyone. Her husband started a buffalo business in the village but it was unsuccessful. She had to leave for Pune with her two sons. The Panshet darn's reservoir was going to flood Hausa bai's land. She did not wait. She went to Pune the very year that they built the foundations of the darn, in 1955.

As can be seen, the reasons for leaving have to do with crisis situations. The decision to leave the village, to change one's living space, is taken out of necessity, prompted by the need for physical and psychological survival. Three kinds of reasons can be distinguished overall. But these different reasons are not isolated. They are intertwined and interdependent, so that one cannot imagine any one of them operating alone.

The first one, which concerns us less here, but which is the most basic because it constitutes the background for these departures, is poverty and destitution. The land no longer provides enough to live on. A tragic economic situation forces them to look elsewhere for a better chance of survival. Our last study on the causes of migration on the outskirts of Pune stressed that necessity by portraying the migration process mainly as a flight from hunger.¹ Some of the accounts cited here refer to it. Women have followed their husbands in the search for the means of subsistence.

In the more specific setting of this study on the ways in which lower-class women gain living spaces for themselves and their motives in doing so, we must stress the importance of an action that the coolie women describe as a personal decision taken on their own initiative. They wanted to leave a socio-cultural context which made life too difficult, both physically and mentally.

The reason most often given, and the most strongly influential, is harassment and humiliation by the mother-in-law with generally, by extension, the tension of family crises and dissension within the extended family. Women married off very young, by adults, without their consent and handed over to their in-laws when they are still only in their early teens, suffer from conflicts that tear them apart. Many of the coolie women are those who had the courage to leave a situation where they felt they were being crushed. They had to escape. They bravely left an environment which oppressed them in order to breathe more freely in another setting, elsewhere.

We can say, in more general terms, that the joint family system, the direct and immediate pressure of the family clan in the context of the caste system, the strict and absolute control of kinship systems by the elders, and a repressive patriarchal ethos shared by the village community, are all structural elements of the oppressive environment which the coolie women wanted to leave, with the mother-in-law's behaviour towards the young daughter-in-law underwriting all these constraints and carrying them into effect. Although many women have accepted these pressures and harassments silently, the coolie market women are among those who have had the courage to reject what they considered to be a suffocating and deadly oppression. They were so stifled in the rural patriarchal environment that they found within themselves the bravery to break away and seek a more convivial environment. The coolie women's accounts confirm that this was a specifically female process of self-assertion in the face of a structural environment whose forms and ethos do not give any weight to the needs

1. See *Systems of relationships*,..., op. cit., pp. 9-53.

and expectations of the individual. Disagreements, discord and the daughter-in-law's irremediable failure to adapt impel the young woman to seek a less submissive and more autonomous life of her own.

A third reason, relatively common, although not structural, is the husband's inability to support the family. Drunkenness is the most common reason. Mental deficiency and instability of character lead the women to face the challenge that threatens their lives and their families. This threat also appears in the form of aggressive magical practices. Fear of danger is what drives them out.

Access to the city

Once the decision to migrate has been taken, there is however no question, except in particularly serious crises, of departing alone, immediately, in order to live in the city. For both men and women, the decision to migrate needs support from someone. It is very rare to see a woman take to the road alone, except in case of unusual emergency.

The example of Nila Gorak KAMBLE is an exception in this respect. It demonstrates the almost insurmountable difficulties that a woman alone faces.

A woman of the Mahar caste from a village in the Sholapur area, Nila G. KAMBLE, lost her mother when she was one month old. As the first child, she had neither brothers nor sisters. She was married very young and lost her husband after one month of marriage. She has no children. She went back to live with her father. He died shortly afterwards. Her half-brother immediately threw her out of her father's house, which had 13 adjoining acres of land. She was forced to leave at once with only the clothes she was wearing at the time. She knew only one thing that she had heard people say: people from her village went to Pune, a city, in order to find food. But she did not know where it was, nor how far away, nor in which direction, nor where to get a bus to go there. She had never left the house. She took the bus to Pune and made the trip without buying a ticket. She alighted at Pune. That was in 1982. She began to beg in the streets for a few days. Wandering from street to street, she reached the shanty town of Talajai, on the slopes of a rocky hill. Since the land did not belong to anyone, except perhaps the State, she could live there as others did without anyone asking her to pay rent. With the money she had begged, she bought three old saris at a flea market. She draped them over stakes to make a tent to shelter her. She found a job working for a mason, and also washed dishes and did laundry at private homes.

One day, at a mason's, she was talking during the lunch break to a man who had been hired as she was, and they introduced themselves. When she told him the name of her village near Sholapur, he, in surprise, told her that his own sister had been given in marriage there but that she had died just after giving birth to a daughter and, because of this, neither he nor his family had kept in contact with this far-away village. 'What for?' 'Who did you give her in marriage to?' Nila asked. The man remembered the name of his sister's husband: it was Nila's father.

Nila sometimes went to visit her maternal uncle. But he cheated her, borrowing money that he never paid back. Since then, she has been angry with him and does not want to visit him any more, even though her aunt has always welcomed her and invites her at festival time. To get her own back, she took from her uncle's house a copper jar worth 300 rupees which she keeps with her, filled with drinking water, at the construction site and at work. 'I will give it back to you when I get my money back!' she told her uncle.

With the money she saved by doing without food, she bought used metal containers, 2 feet square. She cut them up and assembled them to build herself a shack. In 1989, she had at home only what was strictly necessary, namely, a spirit burner to cook the food, three aluminium utensils (of the poorest quality metal, of the kind that the Mahar have always used, copper being reserved for higher castes than theirs), three jars for condiments and other supplies, two trays of the same aluminium used for plates, a water pail, a little mirror, two saris, two blankets, a little metal trunk to put everything in and a photograph of the *devi* to which Nila makes *puja*. She has no board to knead her chapatis. She kneads them on the stone floor and insists that her two visitors share her meal. 'You are like my mother! You have eaten at my house! Come back again,' she says, with tears in her eyes.

She started work as a coolie in the market in 1986. She fell ill later and spent three months at the city's public hospital. She paid for her food with the savings that she had made previously and had deposited in a bank before her illness, and also by borrowing. When she returned to her job in the market, they did not want to take her back. A friend, of the Kumghar caste, intervened to have her taken back. This friend was a member of the Bhumata Sanghatna union.

Clearly, in these circumstances, no woman, unless forced, would try to break out of the rural peasant environment and take a sudden leap into a vacuum of social relations and human contacts. Before arriving on the urban periphery, it is necessary, at the very least, to have found a place to stay and a lodging in which to gather strength for the next step. Having made an emergency escape, the migrant woman naturally thinks first of all about how to approach the urban area. The migrant woman must make her own arrangements for her arrival on the outskirts of the city, unless she is simply accompanying her husband and he is able to cope with the situation (which is often not true of coolie women), in which case access to the city is certainly a shared concern but one that does not primarily fall upon her (only about 38 per cent of the women interviewed are in that situation). How does she deal with managing this change in her living space?

The migrant woman turns essentially to suggestions from people in her family and people she knows in the village. She is helped, in particular, by the fact that she has, so to speak, two families and two sets of neighbors, her own family and the people of the village where she was born, and also her in-laws and the people she knows in the village where she was 'given in marriage'. She will sometimes have had an opportunity to visit the peripheral areas beforehand, where she naturally would expect to look for an initial temporary lodging. She turns most of all, for opinions and advice, to migrants of her acquaintance who are aware of the possible solutions and are willing to give her their help in overcoming at least the initial difficulties.

Several networks can be approximately distinguished, for the purposes of analysis, although the distinctions between them may appear somewhat artificial. These various networks often overlap in such a way as to make it progressively easier to deal with the new way of life, and above all, to find a place to live during the first few weeks or months.

The first network, the most significant and the most common, is that of family relationships. Access to the city nearly always follows the road taken by members of the family and by those linked by marriage ties among families. These usually offer the most reliable support. They correspond to what is meant by the marathi terms *kutumba* (the family in the strict sense), *nâtagota* (*nâta* relates to blood and marriage ties, *nâtagota* to all forms of relationships in a very broad sense), *pâhuné* (literally visitor or guest, but in this case the

members of the in-law family), *bhâûkî*¹ (the circle of the *bhâû*, siblings, in the broadest sense, including cousins by blood or marriage, and all the associates, schoolmates or people of the same religion, and people of the same community with whom they maintain intimate relations comparable to those within the family).

The second network of relations is composed of ties that unite people from the same village, the *gâukî*. They naturally support one another once they are faced with the same difficulties outside the village. Village neighbors help one another when they are far from home.

A third set of relations, looser but still real, is the sense of geographical belonging felt by people from the same area, valley or group of villages, when they meet far from home in an unfamiliar place. Migrants from the same region are glad to come together far from home, so as to give one another support. This happens even more readily if these migrants are from the same caste, and especially so if they are from a minority caste. But it equally often happens that mutual support relations are established among migrants of different castes on the basis of a sense of belonging to the same remote region.

Some examples chosen among the most significant make it possible to understand the workings of these relationship networks in the midst of life's hazards.

Sindhu BHOINE comes from Savargao and her current in-laws are from Vithalvadi (near Paud, in the Mulshi development block). She was previously married to Calei, and her mother-in-law abused her to excess. She had no clothes, no food, no oil for her hair and a husband under his mother's thumb. The latter arranged to send her son to work in Pune, but he turned out to be incapable of earning a living. He returned home. He is an idler. The sisters-in-law and the brother-in-law took Sindhu's side. But the ill-treatment continued as before. Sindhu sued her husband for divorce, when her son was two years old. 'I knew the law. I went to court myself, and I got the divorce. I had suffered for too many years. After all that, why should I let my husband reject me and get away with it?'

Sindhu's father and mother had lived in Pune before, at Narayan peth. Her mother worked in the market and her father in a paper factory at Mhasoba gate. After they had returned to their village, Sindhu joined them. That was when she obtained a divorce. But there was not enough to eat for her at Savargao. Her mother then took her to Pune and found her a job in the market. Sindhu has worked there ever since. Her son, who at first stayed with her mother-in-law, joined her when he was about 12, and lived with her from then on. He went to school for seven years and then dropped out. He found a job in a public canteen. While working, he learned to pull a rickshaw. He is now a rickshaw driver. He drives the vehicle in shifts, as a partner in a team hired by the owner of the rickshaw.

Sindhu obtained an identity card with a photograph as a resident of the shanty town located on the slope of the Parvati hill. That made her eligible for rehousing in a house in Bibvevadi Appar, under a rehabilitation plan for slum residents. She lives there now.

Malan Harischandra PATIL, of the Dhangar caste, from the shanty town located opposite Sai baba, on the Satara road, came from the Sholapur region. Her brother-in-law had arrived there before her. He had found a slum dwelling in this shanty town. She joined him there in 1961. Her husband has worked in an oil mill since that date. She started out by doing

1. Cf. *Systems of relationships ...*, op. cit., pp. 125, 126-127, 134-135.

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laundry and washing dishes at private homes before being hired as a coolie around 1978. Her mother came to join her with a brother who subsequently died. She has two sisters.

Janabai NIVANGUNE, of the Maratha caste, from the Dhankavdi shanty town, comes from Ambegao and is married to Ambi (Velhe block). She has been in Pune for 28 years. She could not get along with her mother-in-law, who threw her out. She went to Pune. Her father had gone ahead five months earlier. He helped her and her two children to get established. Her husband joined her later. In due course she had three daughters.

Hira bai BHOKAR, of the Maratha caste, came from Osmanabad to join her husband who had gone ahead to Pune. They had little land, and the drought of 1962 had driven him from his home. He has been a coolie in the market since that date. He had had two daughters by his first wife, but no son. Hira bai was given in marriage to this middle-aged man by her brother as a second wife, to bear him a son. Hira bai has never forgiven her brother for having ruined her life by marrying her off in that way. For 20 years, she refused to speak to her brother.

Once she arrived in Pune, she followed her husband to the market, but he was mistrustful of a second wife younger than himself and did not allow her to go with him. He abused her, did not allow her to eat the food that she had cooked, made her stay sitting in the corner, and beat her.

Hira bai went to the market on certain days. She sold vegetables in town with her husband, from a cart, or else she carried them in a basket on her head from street to street after picking them up at the market. She lives in Dandekarpul. Neighbour women found her a job in the fruit and vegetable market.

Bhim bai CORGE, of the Maratha caste, from Gokhale nagar, the sister of SONDKAR bai, from Nive (Velhe block), was suddenly widowed while she was still quite young, with four young children, and suffered the loss of status that is associated with widowhood, *râmdâv* as it is known. She went to Pune with the help of people in her village. She lived in Nava peth. They found her work in a public canteen, on Tilak Road, before getting her a job in the market. She could not afford to send her children to school. She arranged the marriage of her two daughters. The elder son, who worked as a carpenter in a factory, died young before he could be married. She is convinced that he was poisoned. He had an abscess and was operated on, and then treated by several dispensaries, but in vain. The second son, who is married, does the same work as his brother. He is a drinker. But Bhim bai has a daughter-in-law, who is employed preparing spices at home for a producers' co-operative in Pune. She produces six kilos daily. She has four sons. Bhim bai has a widowed daughter for whom she has obtained work as a coolie in the market with her. After her neighborhood was flooded, in 1961, she was rehoused in Bokhale nagar by the government. She was given two rooms.

Kala bai LOKHARE, a Maratha, a resident of Appar Indira nagar, at Bibvevadi, was born and married at Khecare (Mulshi development block). She had a husband who was working in Bombay in a business that produced and sold chicken feed for the chicken farming industry. Her husband travelled from place to place delivering it. He was a drinker and a womaniser who did not allow her to leave the house to go anywhere. He contracted tuberculosis and went back to the village. He then had to let his wife go out, as he had no choice. In Bombay, when he went away on trips, he ate at the fro's expense. His wife deposited the resulting savings in the bank. Kala bai took out 5,000 rupees when her husband fell ill in order to take care of him, but he died of tuberculosis. After his death, Kala bai did not

stay with her in-laws. She returned to her parents' home for eight months, but did not wish to stay any longer at her brother's expense. She came to Pune eight years ago, in 1980. Her sister's daughter's brother-in-law, Dhavne, from the village of Darivli, took her there. He found her a job in the market. The Dhavne family was living in the shanty town of Dandekarpul. They took her in for three months. During that time, she had left her three children in her mother's care. She built a shack next door to the Dhavnes and moved in with her three children after three months.

Lakshmi bai Maruti BHAME, a resident of Appar Indira nagar, of the Maratha caste, a native of Khecarei, married in Kondavle (Mulshi canton), had five daughters, two of whom died, and two sons. She also had four sisters but no brothers. Her husband died of tuberculosis. He was working in a textile factory at Pune. 'From childhood, he did nothing but slave and toil!' There was no one to support her. She came to Pune nine years ago, in 1979. Just one man from Kondavle, whom she looked on as her own brother, helped her a little. He had a livestock business, dealing in buffaloes. He took her in for a few days in a stable that he owned near Ambil creek, at the foot of Parvati hill. Then he built a shack for her in the Dandekarpul shanty town nearby.

Hausa bai KADU, Maratha, a resident of Supper Bibvevadi, who left her mountain home before her land could be submerged by the waters of the Panshat dam, came to Pune with a son and a daughter (she now has four daughters and two sons). Her husband was bitten by a snake, after eight years of marriage. People she knew in the village had helped her to travel to Pune. She was able to find a place to live at the foot of Parvati hill, next to a brick kiln. She later left that place, but the patil (village headman) intervened with a Muslim landowner to rent her a little land at the foot of the hill. She was hired in the Phule market. At that time, the workers were paid in the form of handfuls of food, taken from the baskets or bags carried on their heads. The agent bought the food back from the workers and paid them the corresponding amount. The first mayor of Pune, Baburao Sansani, put an end to this practice. She was able to bring her younger brother to live with her. She sent him to school; she signed with her thumbprint as head of the household. After her brother's arrival, she brought her sister, too. The latter lived with her at the foot of Parvati, and was able to get her hired in the market with her.

A home

The first place to live is often a temporary and uncertain refuge. At least it is a means of asserting that one has broken with the past. Earlier tensions are no longer present. But new difficulties arise which must be faced. The woman has, in some sense, to start from scratch and create a new life. But this new life must now be constructed by her efforts alone and with her energy alone. The most fundamental tasks are overwhelming to contemplate: to find a permanent shelter and turn it into a home in which to raise children and care for a family, even when there are too many people for the space available. It is a question not so much of housing them, strictly speaking, as of anchoring them somewhere on the urban periphery. The first necessity is to establish herself, to put down roots for herself and her family. Her first obligation and challenge is to obtain a place for herself, no matter how small and unattractive, because it gives her a definite foothold in the city. First of all she must have a place of her own, to hold and to occupy. The first requirement is to acquire some land and lodging as a permanent, regular shelter: a fixed abode.

Random search

On the one hand, some examples of wandering about in search of a home are the best means of understanding the social chaos that faces the migrant women - they encounter good and bad luck at random. On the other hand, in the face of this confusion, only life stories can testify to the personal resources on which the coolie women must rely.

Narmada SONDKAR, Maratha caste, a resident of the shanty town opposite the Saibaba temple, is a native of Nivi-Sarole and is married to Valne (Mulshi block). Her husband is mentally ill. How could she count on his help to defend her from the sexual harassment of her brother-in-law? It was better to leave. She left with her only son, who was nearly three years old, in 1959. She first went to take shelter at her sister's, at Navi Peth. But after three weeks, trouble started. Her sister would not give her water for bathing and washing herself. Since she had no spare sari, she would go to the river, under the town bridge, to wash. She took her bath in two stages. First she would wet a part of her sari and dry it in the sun, and then she went on to wash herself by wetting the second part of her sari. With a neighbour's help, she built a separate shack on the same land. But her sister would not let her live in peace. Her neighbour took her in. With the help of a maternal aunt, she went back to live in the village for a while.

Navi Peth was flooded in 1961. Narmada bai's sister was able to find other accommodation at Gokhale nagar. But where could she find the money needed to make the move? All she could afford to buy was a slum dwelling for 275 rupees in the shanty town opposite Saibaba. A boy from the town gave her a spirit burner and four dishes. She still lives there. As her son was still very young, she used to take him to the market with her. Later, he attended school for seven years. She arranged his marriage. As the dwelling was becoming too small, she bought a place with three rooms in Janata Colony, but continued to live in the same place herself.

Goja bai PAWAR is a resident of Appar Bibvevadi. She has two sons and a daughter. At first she lived in Bombay with her husband. He worked in a textile factory, but his health was very bad and he had to leave his job and return to the country. He went to Pune where he found work as a watchman of a private bungalow. He lived with his wife in one of the outbuildings. He lost that job and went to live in a slum in the Vadarvadi shanty town. Goja bai began going every day to Phule market to work as a coolie. She has been a coolie for 15 years, since 1973. Her husband was hired by a group that sets up tents and platforms for public meetings. But he suffers from constant stomach pain. In Bombay he was a member of a communist union. He later joined a Congress party union. Goja bai now works in the market yard. She brought two maternal cousins to Pune and had them hired. At Vadarvadi, there is constant quarreling. Furthermore, Vadarvadi is far away from the market yard, which is at the other end of the city. People from the village helped Goja bai get into the shanty town of Janata Colony. Once there, she obtained an identity card with a photograph which enabled her to be rehoused in Appar Bibvevadi.

Thaka JADHAV lives in Appar Bibvevadi; she is from Khamgao, 25 kilometres west of Pune, where she was married. She has two sons and two daughters. One daughter is married. Her husband has ten years of schooling and is employed as a bicycle repairman, as is one of her sons. She has two grandchildren. One of her granddaughters is disabled. Thaka bai's father-in-law was the first to migrate. He worked as a gardener in a Marwadi's bungalow. This allowed her husband to have five years of education in comfortable circumstances, because the family was housed in the bungalow's outbuilding. But the owner sold his house and they had to move to a slum in Vadarvadi. That was the end of school! The son learned to repair bicycles in a

bicycle repair workshop. After a few years, he set up for himself repairing bicycles and spirit burners in the street. Later he opened a shop near Hirabag Ganpati. The room in Vadarvadi was now much too small for an extended family where all the brothers were living together. They moved to Janata Colony. For ten years, Thaka bai worked as a cook, making the chapatis sold in the Hamal Panchayat canteen. Because she remained sitting down all day in front of her stove, her health deteriorated. Furthermore, it is a long way from the canteen to Janata Colony. Her commuting costs were high. Thaka bai went back to her village for a year. Towards the end of 1988, after the Diwali festival, she went to work as a market coolie.

BHUMBE bai, of the Maratha caste, is from Vadgao Chery on the outskirts of Pune. She now lives in Appar. She had two sons and two daughters (one daughter died of burns from her stove; the other is married). One married son went to live with his wife's family, while the other found a job in a Bombay hotel with the help of some acquaintances of the people for whom she did housework. Earlier she lived in Pul vadi. Her husband was a coolie in Bhavani peth, but he was a drinker. They could no longer pay the rent. The owner sued them and had them evicted. They were forced to leave. Some neighbors helped them to find a room in Janata Colony. For the first year, she washed clothes and did dishes in private homes. Then some people she knew found her a job in the market. She could expect no support from her family or her in-laws. There was not enough land in Bavdhan where she was married. Her uncle and her brother-in-law farmed it and lived there. She had a house in the village, but a Marwadi businessman took it over by fraud and built a big house there. She had practically no more ties with her village. Her residence permit for the Janata Colony enabled her to be rehoused in Appar.

Sita Ramchandra DIGHE, of the Maratha caste, lives in Appar. She is from Kondur and was married in Nandivli (Mulshi development block). She had two sons and three daughters. One of the daughters died and the other two are married. The eldest son is married, and the daughter-in-law lives at home and keeps house. She has been living in Pune for 40 years, since about 1949, with her husband who has been a coolie since then. They lived at first in a room in Khadakmal street, then in Kacei street. The rooms there were very small and the neighbourhood was dirty and unhealthy, very much like an insanitary shanty town. Her husband's family's plot of land was flooded by the Mulshi dam reservoir. One brother lives on the remaining land. Her husband had to leave for Pune, where he was immediately hired as a coolie. Almost all the people from Nandivli have worked in the market since the dam was built, and to this day most of them are market yard coolies. When Sita bai came to Pune, she worked hard at tiring jobs: making confectionery (3 rupees a day, around 1975) and hand-grinding tobacco for snuff. Since the end of 1988, she has been working as a coolie in the market. She is paying by monthly installments for a house to be built in Appar. Her husband drinks and tends to start fights. It is a difficult situation for her. She has to work to pay for the house, but, at her age, it is hard to lift such heavy loads. Sita bai's mother lived in Janata Colony, and Sita joined her there. Her mother had a shack, with a little space next to it. That is how she obtained a permit to be rehoused in Appar. Her young daughter-in-law does all the housework while she toils in the market.

Shanta MARNE came to Pune with her husband 15 years ago, in about 1974. Relations were strained with the brother-in-law, who stayed in the village. She came to stay in Pune with her other brother-in-law, who lived in Gurvar peth. The room was very small: she lived in one corner of the room and the brother-in-law in the other. The owner said that it was too small for two households, and she was obliged to leave. She took another room nearby. This one was no larger and just as uncomfortable, with a steep and shaky staircase and a room that was only 10 feet square. Shanta bai had four daughters; three of them are now married. The marriage expenses and debts have shattered her hopes for better housing, all the more so because the

husband of one of her daughters is an alcoholic. One daughter came back to live with her for a year. Shanta bai's husband works in a factory that makes kitchen utensils. He used to earn 5 rupees a day; now he earns 400 rupees a month. For a long time Shanta bai did laundry and dishes at private homes, but she did not earn enough to meet her needs. She had to go to work as a coolie in the market. There were no savings left to deposit in the bank. Shanta bai had a brother in her village, Pirangut, whose land was mortgaged. She paid off the debts. That brother died, and her sister-in-law claimed the right to the land. There is no hope on the horizon.

Paru Mahipati MANKAR, Maratha, has been in Pune for 35 years. She has two sons and three daughters. Her eldest son went to school for seven years. He is now a metal worker for the public transport system. He is a drinker. She is a widow, and relatives of hers evicted her by force from the room in which she was living. Some village leaders living in Pune helped her by finding her a place to live in Ghorpade peth. It is a tiny room, 10 feet square, housing 15 people.

Kamala bai MALEKAR, Maratha, has been working for seven years as a coolie. Her situation was not always as bad as it is now. She had three sons and a daughter. She built herself a house in the shanty town at the foot of Parvati, under the programme of assistance to shanty towns. But her son became a drug addict. Forty thousand rupees were squandered. Kamala bai had to rent out the house that she had built and went to live near her mother in Ravivar peth. She lives there in a tiny garret of 40 square feet, 5 feet high, at the top of a narrow shaky ladder. Mice, rats and darkness are her companions. There is a fetid smell.

The migrant women who arrived first, 30 to 35 years ago, and were hired to work as coolies in the old central market, Phule market, were often able to find a place to live near the market in parts of the old city that have become increasingly dilapidated and overpopulated. Today these places are dark, cramped and damp and the buildings are becoming more and more rickety. But their inhabitants have no intention whatsoever of leaving them. Friends and relatives live in the neighbourhood. That is what helps them to put up with the discomfort.

Migrant women arriving in the last tenor 15 years had no choice but to live in the shanty towns on the periphery. Some of them, more recently, have been able to take advantage of the rehousing or slum clearance schemes that the authorities have undertaken. These schemes are of two kinds. On the one hand, there is the improvement of living conditions in the shanty towns by building latrines and laying stone slabs to drain the areas around the sewers and cover them, bringing in piped water, issuing permits to build solid houses, etc. The shanty towns of Dandekarpul, Dattavadi, some areas of Saibaba, Bhavani nagar and Kelevadi have been improved in that way. A second project, more ambitious, is one whereby the government and the municipality of Pune bought vacant land at Bibvevadi Appar and Super, building platforms on which small houses with a floor area of 120 square feet are built, neatly lined up. Behind each house, a vacant area of 80 to 100 square feet with a water tap and a toilet is provided, together with the house, to the tenant, allowing him or her to construct a second room there if desired, or even another room above it. Some of the little houses are roofed with a cement slab, others with sheet metal.

To take advantage of these rehousing facilities, one has to live in a shanty town or rent a room there and be in possession of a certificate with a passport photograph issued by the municipality. So far, it is mainly inhabitants of Janata Colony who have benefited from this scheme. The newcomer must pay a modest monthly fee which gives him or her the right to a title deed after a number of years.

The shanty towns' inhabitants, whose living conditions have been upgraded, do not usually refuse to move to Bibvevadi. If they do not go there, it is, they say, because 'here, we have the facilities we need. All our family and friends live in the neighbourhood, together. We are not too badly off here'. The Bibvevadi project does not fill them with dreams of another place to rush off to. It is also true that the project provides them with brick and stone housing but not with security. Bibvevadi is less safe than shanty towns - fights, thefts and gangs of youths terrorizing others are phenomena that occur there more than elsewhere.

In addition to these efforts, the market coolies' union has prepared a plan for construction of workers' housing for the market employees on land available next to the market. The coolies who want to have housing there must contribute 10,000 rupees. The proposed housing project will include schools and hospitals. 'Today, the coolies are scattered', says Dvarka bai, 'in Dhankavdi, Kelevadi, Dandekarpu, Bhavani nagar, etc. Here they will be together. It will be easier for them to go to work, too.' Bhoinei bai sold her television set to pay for her contribution. Yamuna bai is more cautious. We paid the 10,000 rupees,' Yamuna bai and her husband told us. 'But we are going to take them back. Nobody knows when the project will begin. This means that a lot of money is tied up. Our room at Dattavadi is not too bad. The neighbors are nice.' The project has not won everyone over. Some of them believe that it will never happen. Many of them cannot pay the necessary amount.

Five steps

Having entered the market economy, the coolie women could hardly fail to gain some awareness of the existence of rights. This, however, is not the same thing as exercising them. They must also have the will to put them into practice, find ways and means of achieving them and gain their objectives. From this point of view, we can distinguish, in matters relating to the dwelling, whether as a place and a piece of land or as a shelter and a home, five types of perceptions that motivate their respective actions. Five words can be used to describe these processes: family, security, acquisition, law and social pressures.

We have already stressed so often the role of mutual aid that family relationships play at the time of entering the city and seeking shelter, that we will not mention it again except to specify which actual practices they support. The following examples call attention to their methods of operation, which consist essentially of an effort of collaboration among relatives brought together by personal individual needs and difficulties.

Ratna PAWAR previously had a place in Janata Colony. She has three daughters and two sons. Her husband had left his village in the canton of Parner (Ahmednagar district) because he was on bad terms with his brother. He died when his youngest son was a month old. Ratna bai took in her elder brother and his wife to live with her. When she found that she could get a place at Bibvevadi after obtaining a residence certificate and an identity photograph, she arranged for her brother to live elsewhere, in a different place, but inside her own home so that he could obtain a residence certificate with a photograph and a ration card, independently in his own name. Thus she and her brother each obtained their own house at Bibvevadi.

Hausa KADU generously gave shelter to many relatives. She was able to obtain a place next to her house, at the foot of Parvati, for her brother. Her sister, Anu SALEKAR, immediately after her marriage 25 years ago (1965), came to join her and went to the market with her shortly afterwards. Anu bai's husband was an only child and he had been taken care of by an aunt before coming to Pune, as a boy, to work in a kitchen utensil factory. His daughter

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Mathura lives nearby, as does her daughter SHELAR bai's mother-in-law. SHELAR bai came to Pune with her husband, from Mahad development block (Taygad district). Her husband was on poor terms with his brothers. At first they lived in Deccan **Gymkhana**, in a shack built on to a bungalow. He worked in the kitchen utensil factory where he met Hausa bai's husband; she invited him to settle near her at Parvati, Hausa bai had also found Shelar's wife a job as a coolie in the market.

Sakhu SALEKAR came to Pune six years ago (1982). Her husband arrived first and found a room; then two brothers-in-law came to join him. All three of them lived in adjacent rooms in Janata Colony. Her husband went back and he is still a farmer in Padalghar (Mulshi block). But she stayed on for the children's schooling. When she reached Pune, Sakhu bai stayed at the house of one of her sister's neighbors, Hausa BAMGUDE. She lived in a room belonging to Salekar bai's brother-in-law that she rented for 50 rupees a month. KHAMKAR bai came to Pune six years ago, in 1982. Her husband is an alcoholic who remained in the village. She had no means of support at all. She lived in Janata Colony. She arranged for the wife of her elder brother, SHINDE bai, to come to Pune, and was able to obtain a room for her next to her own and found her a job in the market. Shinde's husband was working in Bombay in a factory, but he lost his job because of drunkenness. He returned to the village and continued to drink. It was for that reason that Khamkar bai summoned her sister-in-law and gave her a room. Shinde bai arrived in Pune only two months ago. Her sisters-in-law helped her to leave for Pune.

Shanta KINARE and her sister POL have a similar story. Shanta bai followed her husband to Bombay, She was cook to a dozen migrants at her home, and fed them. But her husband drank and lost his job. He went back to the village. From there, Shanta bai took the initiative of going to Pune. People from the village helped her to find a room in Janata Colony. Her sister POL was in the same sad situation - her husband worked in a textile factory in Bombay and lost his job because of drunkenness. He returned to the village and stayed there idle, getting drunk. Shanta bai, through her own energetic decisiveness, showed the way to POL, who travelled to Pune and came to work in the market.

Haru SULE, Dhangar, came from Atpadi development block (Sangli district) with her in-laws. She was living in Khadakmal Street when the 1961 flood occurred. As a victim of the disaster, she found housing in Bibvevadi. She was actually able to obtain two places: she lives in one, and the other is inhabited by her son and her daughter-in-law, Laxmi SULE. She arranged for them to come and settled them next door to her. She also had her daughter-in-law employed as a coolie. Laxmi bai, who also came from Atpadi region, Dhangar, had travelled to Pune with her parents. Her mother was a market coolie. Laxmi bai went to school for four years. After her marriage, she moved into her in-laws' home. She lived in Vithalvadi. For 12 years, she worked for a wealthy Marwadi family, keeping house, washing clothes and dishes and taking the children to school. In 1989, when her mother-in-law obtained a second place to live for her family, she joined her in Bibvevadi. Her husband, a welder, works in Bhavani peth. He has just installed a welding machine at home. He is not yet ready to begin working at home, but is preparing to do so.

Jija UTTEKAR came to Bibvevadi when she arrived in Pune. Her daughter had then come to live with her. Her son-in-law was in Bombay, where he had a costermonger's handcart. He had come back to his wife's place in Pune, but the house was now too small for nine people. Jija bai had gone to Dhankavdi shanty town near Shankar Maharaj ashram. She obtained two adjacent shacks: she lives in one of them and her daughter, Mangal BERGE, lives in the other.

Malan KARANJKAR, a widow, came directly to live in Dhankavdi. It is a particularly insanitary shanty town and brawls make it unsafe. Malan bai was very frightened. She called her relative, Sindhu CHAVAN, to come and join her with her husband. She built her a shack right next door. Shindhu bai used to live with her son-in-law in the Dandekarpul shanty town, but she wanted to live separately. The two women found the solution to be the most satisfactory in their eyes. The shanty town is not as unhealthy as it used to be. Furthermore, there are rumours that slum improvements will begin in Dhankavdi as they have done elsewhere. Consequently, they do not want to pass up this opportunity. The two women remain strongly attached to the place where they live, despite the climate of insecurity and insanitary conditions.

Phula bai PAWAR, who was in Bombay with her husband, a worker in the textile industry, was brought back to Pune by her sister Hirabai who lived in Dattavadi before her. She found her a room next to her own in order to have her as a neighbour, and obtained a job for her in the market. Phula bai, in turn, helped her sister-in-law, Shaku PAWAR, to come to Pune. She built her a shack next door and found her a job in the market.

Security, or the assurance of a safe place to live, is what equally often motivates behaviour. Yamuna PAWAR, for example, took the money that she had previously invested in the housing complex planned for the coolies near the market yard. This was partly because her money was frozen, but, in particular, she lives in a place that she considers safe and where she herself feels safe. What is the point of looking for something else?' All her family came to live in Dattavadi near her. Some people from her village are neighbors. In Bibvevadi, fights are always breaking out: she has two young sons. Why go over there? Here she is not afraid of anything. Phula bai feels the same way, as does Renu BHEGADE. They all give the same answer when asked why they did not take the new housing that had been offered them: 'We don't feel safe over there. There is always fighting. We are women alone with two young sons and we don't see ourselves living there'. Shakuntala PAWAR and Kala LOKHARE built a house for themselves in Appar Bibvevadi, but people gossiped about them a great deal. Shakuntala left her husband and took another man in; Kala bai is a widow. She also has a relationship with another man. For them, there is no other solution to the problem that concerns them most, namely, their security. Nevertheless, some widows do live in Bibvevadi.

A third set of practices corresponds to *acquisition*. The desire to have land of one's own is nothing new. Clearly there is no desire older than that. But the novelty of the life that the coolie women are now experiencing is that land has become simply merchandise, the object of commercial transactions. Such business deals have two characteristics: everyone, rich and poor, is possessed irresistibly by the desire to have his or her own piece of land, even 'if it is only a tiny patch, and the trade in this urban land deals in plots that can be measured out by the square foot and whose prices may be exorbitant. Everyone, within the limits of their resources, is in the race to acquire a piece of urban land.

The example of Bhim bai CORGE shows how the occupation of land desired for house-building purposes, followed by the effort required to expand the built-on area to its utmost, represents an initial acquisition tactic.

Declared a disaster victim as a consequence of the flood that resulted from the breach of the Panshet dam in 1961, Bhim bai was rehoused in two rooms in Gokhale nagar. She used the vacant space that separated her two rooms, on one side, from the foot of the neighboring hill, to build four more small rooms. She rented three of the six rooms that she then had, lived in one of them and gave the remaining two to her son and daughter-in-law, to live in by

themselves. By this means, she receives 300 rupees a month in rent (at 1990 prices). She has also built, outside, a little platform on which, after coming back from the market in the evening, she sells a few vegetables that she has brought back with her.

Another very common practice, and one of the most reliable, is to obtain administrative documents proving that a place is occupied as a residence.

Narmada SONDKAR, Bhim bai's sister, obtained a residence certificate with an identity photograph in Janata Colony, where she had three rooms. She was also entitled to housing in Appar Bibvevadi. There she built her house. However, she also built a shack in the shanty town across from Saibaba where she really lives, and she let the three rooms in Janata Colony. She plans to sell the slum across from Saibaba and take up residence in Appar.

Housing has become a commodity. Its importance makes it an investment asset.

Sindhu BHOINE obtained a house at Bibvevadi. She has only one son but has made a payment to a joint fund for the proposed housing complex. She sold her television set in order to contribute to this fund since, she says, 'you don't lose money invested that way'.

Housing is the most coveted asset. The first place lived in becomes a kind of bridgehead for the family that wants to live in the urban area. This is why such an effort is made to occupy the desired locations and to gain control of the use to which they are put.

Jija SHELKE and Mathu RAKHA each have two places of their own or are trying to secure them. Thanks to the rehousing schemes, Mathu bai obtained a house at Bibvevadi. She, like Sinshu bai, nevertheless contributed to the union fund. Jija bai will own the room where she lives now, but she has also contributed to the fund. In addition, she has rented rooms in Janata Colony. She did so for one reason only: she has two sons and wants them to live in two different units. Even if one cannot own two places at once, it is still necessary to make sure of living space for the two or three sons whom one wants to have living in town.

Paru SUDARIK rented a room in Ganjpath, where her eldest son lives. When she came here five years ago, she bought a piece of land in Dattavadi where she built a room 10 feet square. Later, across the way, she built two more 10 foot square rooms. She now lives in one of them and her two sons live in the other two.

In cases of utter poverty and extreme emergency, physical occupation of a site is the only possible line of conduct left.

Hira GIRE, of the Maratha caste, built a shack out of pieces of old iron and boards in the shanty town of Ambedkar nagar. She became friends with some untouchables. She goes to meetings led by an influential Mahar leader. She succeeded in obtaining a second room, even shabbier, in Aranyeshwar. She does not own either of these rooms. She does not pay rent for the land in Ambedkar nagar, but makes a point of sleeping in each place in turn, every other day. Her slum in Aranyeshwar is on the edge of a creek which overflows in the rainy season to the level of her slum dwelling. One day, the police, when the rains were very heavy, came to warn her of the danger and ordered her not to stay in her shack at night for her own safety. But Hira bai did not want to give up her dwelling. That very night, she slept in her shack, in danger of being carried away by a sudden flood from the creek. She did not want to lose her place. She wants to keep a grip on both places. She could not stand her first husband. She ran away from her in-laws. Her second husband is now dead. Neither her parents nor her in-laws want to

see her again. She had a son who was raised by her brother. Her two daughters were placed in a Christian orphanage. Society rejected her completely.

BARDE bai has worked in the market since childhood; she is now over seventy. She left her in-laws 40 years ago because they did not see eye to eye. She rented a 10 by 20 foot room in Pune, in Rameshwar chowk, for 1 rupee a month. She now pays 10 rupees. The room is in a large dwelling, a *vâdâ*, inhabited entirely by Marwaris and Gujaratis, which makes it a pleasant environment. Furthermore, it is located in the centre of the old city, right next to Phule market.

People from Cimbai, Khalad and Carade also live there, all of them from her canton of Purandar. We always feel we are still in our village, here.'

She invested 7,000 rupees in improvements to the room. She also contributed to the coolies' union housing fund. 'A lot of people pester me to give them this room. They are willing to give me 100,000 rupees. That is how tight housing is. But I tell them that even for 200,000 rupees, I would not give it to them. In a place like this! With such a pleasant atmosphere' Barde bai had two daughters and a son. The latter died of alcoholism, leaving five daughters of his own. two of whom work as coolies.

Knowledge of the law is very important here if one is to be sure of acquiring a dwelling place and permanent control over that property. It implies a knowledge of rights and the perception of oneself as having rights. It becomes the basis for initiatives to satisfy needs that one considers legitimate. It motivates the pursuit of interests that one knows are both acknowledged and defended by administrative regulations. It can even become a weapon that one learns to manipulate to one's own advantage, aggressively and selfishly.

Jija SHELKE lives where a group of houses are about to be demolished. Apartments owned by the residents will be built there. Many of them are seeking apartments and the landowner is, of course, trying to take maximum advantage of his legal rights and of his position to make a maximum profit. But the tenants are also aware of the law and the rights to which it entitles them. They are on the alert. They consult their lawyer and go to court, There are also differences among them. Some sign up to obtain ownership of apartments, while others do not want to sign up. Jija bai is very much involved in these debates and these actions, which are of the greatest interest to her. She herself goes to meet the lawyer. 'If the tenants are united', she says, 'the owner can't do anything.' In fact, she owns a room in Janata Colony, which she rents out at the high rate of 500 rupees a month. She rents it to new tenants every ten months. What laws they make nowadays!' she complains. 'I don't give tenants any second chances. If just one of them stays too long, that's it!' she explains.

Narmada Bai also has rooms in Janata Colony. She is very well-informed about the advantages that the law grants to tenants. She does not take any for more than a few days. She changes them as often as possible. Sakhu BAMGUDE is from the same village as Narmada bai. For that reason, Narmada has let her a room for which she pays her rent regularly every month. For her son's wedding, she applied for a loan of 800 rupees from Sakhu bai, but after four months Narmada wanted to change tenants again. She notified the newcomer to throw out Sakhu bai's belongings and to take her room, but Sakhu bai had obtained help from the neighbors. She did not leave the room until she had been issued with a residence certificate and an identity photograph for housing in Bibvevadi.

Lila DIGHE, from the same shanty town, obtained certificates and a photograph, and was housed in Bibvevadi. But once she was there, she did not want to give up the room in Dandekarpul which she rented out. She is ingenious enough to collect the rent every month

and to change tenants every ten months. Naturally, none of the women we are speaking of ever issues a receipt for payment of the rent. They know very well that the law is on the tenant's side. When they give receipts, they will lose control of their room.

Jayshri BHOSLE is from the shanty town next to Shankar Maharak's ashram. The alleyways in the settlement were too narrow. They are being widened. Some of the housing will have to be demolished to make way for streets. Jayshri bai's neighbors tried to take over the area around her dwelling in order to get rid of her. Jayshri bai went to the city authorities with all the receipts and papers that she had in her name: the ration card, the tax receipts paid at city hall, the electricity bill and the electricity meter readings. With these documents to support her, she refused to leave her dwelling. She does not want to lose the rights that this gives her over the space she lives in.

SHELAR, MORE and SALEKAR, together with other residents of the shanty town at the foot of Parvati, went to the city authorities with the same documents as Jayshri to fight the attempt of a Brahman woman to evict them from their homes. They also gave the city hall copies of requests that they had submitted for running water, as well as documents showing that the city had actually installed these facilities. They were all well able to make out a case in their own defence.

The step taken by Revu bai was different. Her mother-in-law threw her out because she had a skin disease, but she knew that she had claims on her husband's house, at Pashan, because she has two sons. After the elder son had married, she arranged for her daughter-in-law to come with her belongings and the kitchen utensils that she had received. She took her to Pashan to her husband's house.

Sindhu BHOINE says that she will never turn over her house at Bibvevadi to her son, nor the contribution that she paid to the union for the housing complex. 'I have legal rights to all that. Why should I give them up? If tomorrow, for example, my son does not want to acknowledge me any more, what will I do?'

Anusuya TANDALE has become keenly aware of her rights since arriving in Pune. She does not allow the land that she has in the village to be cultivated by anyone else. Her in-laws are in the house. She goes there herself at the busy season (planting and harvesting) because, says she, 'the way the law stands, the land is soon turned over to whoever farms it',

What can be done if it is impossible to acquire a place of one's own or to secure a permanent residence by any means at all, whether physical or administrative? The remedy left is collective *social pressure* and protection from influential leaders with whom relations of protégé to protector, client to patron, can be established.

Ambu KOKARE, Sakhu SARGE and Suman KOKARE are all women from the Dhargar caste who live in Appar Bibvevadi in one of the city's most insanitary shanty towns. 'What would you do if this shanty town was razed?' I asked them. They smiled at my question and answered me immediately: 'Oh! Does it concern only three or four families? Between 1,000 and 1,500 people live here. How can that many people be evicted? Don't we have our own leaders? They can't do without us. Every single one of our votes is worth a lot to them. If the authorities think of evacuating this place, they will use their influence right away.' 'But there are no utilities in this shanty town, no light, no running water. It is very damp. How long will it stay this way?' 'One of these days, if the government doesn't do it, then the city authorities will give us a decent place to live. They'll have to. We're hearing now that they're going to rehouse the people here somewhere nearby, in Padmavti. Isn't that right? And even

supposing that they don't give us another place to live, we have our leaders, don't we? They'll get us improvements here, won't they? We'll have to put up with conditions here for a few days. If not, how will we ever see better days?'

Shaku KORPE, Mohit SUTAR and Shashikala bai live in Prem nagar shanty town. They belong to the Indira Gandhi women's cultural circle, which is a creature of the Congress Party. These women succeeded in acquiring land in the shanty town and a permit from Delhi to build their houses on this land. They say that they are free of worries. 'Nobody can evict us now', they affirm with confidence and obvious pride. These women go once a month to Congress Party meetings at Congress House in the city. When there is a special party programme, they all put on their best white saris to go to it. They have travelled to Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi for the party and at the party's expense. Supporting the party in power is the most important thing in their eyes.

Kala SHELAR, Laxmi MORE and Anu SALEKAR live at the foot of Parvati hill. They have built their house on a plot that belongs to a Muslim, to whom they pay rent. They have acquired running water and ration cards. Kala bai is the daughter of Hausa KADU and Anu bai her sister. Laxmi bai was married off to an invalid. Her parents make sure that she does not return to their home. 'If you come, we'll tie your feet and your hands and throw you in the Khadakwasla reservoir.' She stayed with her husband out of fear. He lived in Khadakmal Street, at Ghorpade peth. He works in a snuff factory. He is a drinker who, besides, makes a habit of insulting people in their neighborhood. It was for that reason that the owner evicted him with his family. Hausa bai's husband had become friendly with Laxmi bai's husband, who worked with him in the same factory. He arranged for him to come with his family to Parvati so that they could be neighbors. Laxmi bai laid bricks with her own hands to build a house. She collected a large number of stones for the floor and bought sheet metal for the roof. But there were new difficulties awaiting the three women. A Brahman woman, a neighbour, had built a school. Using her influence, she tried to have the inhabitants of a group of 60 houses in the shanty town evicted. The people concerned began to organize and to hold demonstrations. They contacted the city council members from their area, telling them that the dwellings belonged to them and that they had documents to prove it. Thereupon, they began to put a file together. The case has been widely reported. The women are absolutely convinced that they will win. But right now, they have to expend considerable efforts. Laxmi MORE was previously alone. Now, 60 families are united. Together they oppose the challenge that threatens them, They are 100 per cent sure of success.

Janata Colony stretches along the canal that brings drinking water to Pune, on the Parvati side. The city authorities and the government decided to rehouse the shanty town residents in order to stop the pollution of the drinking water. With certificates and identity photographs, the residents were rehoused in Bibvevadi. But that did not mean the disappearance of the shanty town. On the contrary, it is growing. Even though they have obtained housing in Bibvevadi, many women, like Namada bai, did not want to give up their rights to the places they occupied in Janata Colony. Chabu SHINDE, for example, having moved from one shanty town to another, built her shack in Janata Colony four years ago. Today she is building a solid house there. The reason is that the leaders of the neighbourhood have decided that the shanty town will continue to exist. Chabu bai has no fears of ever being evicted.

A dwelling

Whether or not they build a house, the coolie women are motivated from this viewpoint by two strong and irresistible pressures, one of them very traditional, the other very modern, which in practice are inseparable.

The first relates to their basic self-image as heads of the household, which leads them to consider that role as the outstanding feature of their position as householders. Therefore, the house is for these migrant women who have left their homes in the village, the goal of an overwhelming longing. It is desired and gradually appropriated as the basic and direct symbol of their success as women, the visible and undeniable criterion of an authentic existence as a woman. The house is the crucial, central reference point which projects a socio-cultural identity, that of the woman in her world. The house is the image of her *samsâra*.

This image also has characteristics that reflect a second appeal, a certain idea of the house in the suburbs. Its equipment with modern amenities becomes, together with the idealized shape of its architecture, the basis of a quest for prestige and social recognition, the symbol of a status won by the sweat of their brow. The target of this longing is built at further expense in the new context of the urban periphery. This reconstruction indicates and underpins a new world, coinciding with integration in the urban area.

Not all the coolie women are able to acquire the coveted object as householders, because housing is not given away but must be won by exhausting labour or by some other means. This effort becomes the costly but indubitable test of their ability to establish themselves, physically and socially, in the urban area, that is, to show themselves worthy of it. The house is the essential asset in their conquest of a new living space.

Those among them who have been able to acquire the desired object and thereby to fulfil their dreams, at least in part, display in the dwelling that they have built and furnished the concept that all of them have of their homes.

This modern object of desire is not, of course, imagined in the abstract. It takes shape in the mind on the basis of houses that the coolie women see around them and from which they borrow the chief characteristics of their own dwelling. They imagine it on the model of the urban apartments near their shanty town or the old run-down neighbourhoods where they live. It is hard to see how this could be otherwise. These apartments convey an idea of the new facilities open to them and their wherewithal to improve their slum dwellings more attractively. These improvements testify not only to the material improvements in conditions of domestic life, but also communicate systems of representation and of values that, by determining the model of the ideal house, reflect the role and the place that women see themselves occupying in the new society, and which that society has assigned to them.

The modern object of desire

Rangu DIGHE was rehoused in Bibvevadi in a two-roomed house. She built another one behind it. Her house has two storeys and she is very proud of it. 'It's easy to see my house in the neighbourhood, it's the only one with two storeys. You can see it from a long way off.' She is very proud of having invested 73,000 rupees in it (in 1988). 'Inside we have everything. It is like in the bungalows: inside toilet, bathroom and a draining-board made of a big stone slab so that you can cook standing up. A little terrace on the roof - we sleep there in summer.' She insists on showing us around her house. 'Once we got to Pune, we showed that we had what it takes.' BHOINE bai claims with conviction: 'Why shouldn't we have everything that's in the

bungalows?' She had everything put in: a draining-board with a stone slab from Kadappa and ceramic tiles on the wall behind it, latrines and an indoor bathroom. In the village, previously, her husband abused her. 'Here, in Pune, I've shown that I can succeed.' PAWAR bai built herself a house in the same circumstances. She keeps a man in the house and he supports her. Her husband left her and lives with another woman. He comes back to the market to beat her up. Despite that, with the help of her companion, she built herself a new house. It is her pride and joy. Kala LOKHARE also built herself a two-storey house in Bibvevadi on the plot that was allocated to her. She is all the more proud of her success in that she is a widow without outside support. Her house gives her a sense of security. No doubt she has relations with other men who help her. Her fellow workers and neighbors gossip about her. They say that she has given herself to men to get the money she needs to build her house. But she has a model house, like other women. Her house cost her 37,500 rupees. She hired her brother to do the building work. TANDALE bai deliberately invites the visitor into her house. 'Look at what I've been able to do!', she says. 'A draining-board with a stone slab from Kadappa. We made a shelf next to it out of the same slab.' Everything is well arranged. Her husband does not drink and she has contacts only with people who are beyond reproach. 'Shouldn't you have a house that's in good shape, so as to welcome people who come and go?'. Why did you have a draining-board made so that you could do the cooking standing up? Doesn't it make your feet tired?', the visitor asks Sita DIGHE. 'I can easily make the chapatis sitting on the floor, but shouldn't we have a modern home?' KHENGARE bai obtained a room in Indira nagar. She will add another room at the back and build an upper storey, because everything should be done properly. 'Don't we have to have a house like those that we see around us, in these apartment buildings?' she says to the visitor, 'With what we earn, shouldn't we have a nice house?', asks Shakuntala SHINDE. She built herself a large house with the money from the sale of her land in the village. She plans to add an extension. BHOINE bai knows that industrial firms are moving to the village, where they are buying land. She will sell some land and invest the money in the union housing project.

It is understandable that widows who have been able to build houses in Bibvevadi are particularly proud of their success. This may even lead at times to tension with brothers-in-law, whose prestige is at stake when, besides, these women have shown unexpected independence in deciding to invest in their own homes in the city rather than in the family expenditure expected of them by the in-laws' family. BHAME bai, for example, did not help her brother-in-law financially when he married off his daughters. He wanted her to sell her house to pay the expenses of his daughters' weddings. Ratna PAWAR, too, is a widow. Her husband, who was also a coolie, died of a heart attack. Ratna bai's brother-in-law held a grudge against her. He wanted his sister-in-law to obey him. But his elder brother's widow stood up to him and did what she wanted to do. Ratna bai inherited a little land. He demanded that she sell it and use the money to cover his daughter's wedding expenses. Ratna bai refused. 'He told me to sell my land and my rooms and to come back to the village to work at his house.' Ratna bai is not prepared to do this. She will sell her patch of land when the time comes to pay for the wedding expenses of her own daughter and to improve her house by putting in a draining-board and by plastering the walls.

The women who live in the insanitary shanty towns have the same dreams of an ideal home as the women who have been rehoused in Bibvevadi. Rakha bai said: 'Look. I have done everything inside. I have made a place for water. I have put up a partition. My house is lovely. '

The working women who were able to get a place in Bibvevadi to build their own houses, under the rehousing project, did not of course all succeed in realizing their dreams and building the houses that they wanted. In any event, those houses can be built and furnished only gradually. Some coolies, like Rangu bai and Kala bai, add to their houses by building an

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upper storey and a terrace, under the building permits granted by the city. Others build an additional room at the back as permanent structures and install latrines and a bathroom. Others put up a sheet metal roof, sometimes using the sheet metal from their former slum homes, and build real walls. Some women have not yet been able to build a room at the back but are thinking about it. Others plan initially to put in doors or to do plastering. Still others have finished the back room and are planning to put in draining-boards and shelves.

If the work of building the back room has not yet begun, or has not been done properly, they speak of it guiltily. They find reasons to account for this: not enough money, 'But we'll build well as soon as we have it, and we'll fix it up properly, with a draining-board made of Kadappa slabs, ceramic tiles, shelves, and so on.' Step-by-step construction usually reflects the availability of funds. Women whose husbands do not drink or who have a little land in the village are some of those who can most easily dream of investing in building their home. One way of saving money is to receive help from relatives.

The women who have been able to take advantage of the slum improvement plan to build a better shelter in the shanty town itself have often adopted Dvarka bai's solution. Apart from her outlay on rental expenses and purchasing the land, Dvarka bai saved regularly for more than nine years to improve her home. In the last three years, she has spent between 3,000 and 4,000 rupees on her house. But her slum dwelling is still made of sheet metal and she has to get light from the neighbour. As far as outside amenities are concerned, such as communal latrines, sewers, etc., what can she do about it?

The working women who have lived for a long time in the old quarters of the old city have no chance at all to improve their dwellings. Their rooms are generally part of an old tenement where 20, 30 or 40 families live. The rent is 4 or 5 rupees. The owner carries out no repairs at all and the tenants cannot agree on repairs that they could do themselves. Some of the coolie women who live in such buildings have contributed to the coolies' union housing project, but they are nervous, as are the others about a project which is not certain to be carried out. Their money is frozen and the work has not begun.

A useful and profitable asset

To tell the truth, before building a house or while building one, some women are also thinking of making a profit from it, since a house is a useful asset which can bring monetary returns. Even the worst of these tiny slums, 10 feet by 12, can be a profitable asset. There are several ways to use it and turn it to account.

It may initially be necessity that forces someone to let part of a room, as happened to Chandrabhaga TEMGARE.

TEMKAR bai lives in Premnagar, one of the dirtiest slums with the fewest facilities. Chandrabhaga, who is from Velhe, married in Ghodnadi, has a daughter aged five. Her husband took a second wife because she did not give him a son. Her mother works, as she does, in the market, and often takes care of the little daughter. Before working as a coolie, Chandrabhaga at first washed dishes and laundry in private homes while working from time to time as a coolie. She has just started working there as a regular labourer. She has built a partition out of pieces of cardboard in her dark 10 by 12 foot slum dwelling. This gives her two rooms, and she lets one.

Other women act on the basis of a financial calculation and with the aim of additional profit, even when they do not face such hardship. Bhim CORGE, Yashoda RANJNE and Hira

DALVI, all residents of Gokhale nagar, have built additional rooms, enlarged their houses or fitted out a separate room inside their house, in order to let them and secure an income.

Another comparable practice is becoming more and more common among coolie women, namely, to live in a slum and take in tenants in another room purchased for that purpose in the same shanty town or in another. The most typical example is that of SONDKAR bai. She bought two rooms in Bibvevadi which at present do not have an upper floor. Instead of living there herself, she has lodged her son and daughter-in-law there. She still lives in the shanty town across from Saibaba. She has let the rooms that she built in Janata Colony. She now plans to sell the room that she inhabits in Saibaba for 15,000 or 20,000 rupees and use this money to build a back room in Bibvevadi and to move to Janata Colony. As she did when she lived there before, she will take a goat with her, which is very profitable.

Kala AMBADE, in Dattavadi, is of the Cambhar untouchable caste. She is from Mancar (Mahalunga) and was married in Otur (Nasik district); she has two sons and a daughter. The latter was married in Karmala (Sholapur district): her son-in-law has a store there. She built four rooms in the shanty town, using advance rental payments from future tenants. She took 35,000 rupees (in 1984) from one tenant, which counted towards rent payments. She now receives 200 rupees a month in rent on two rooms. Her two sons have left their traditional work as shoe repairmen. They are now carpenters. Her husband died in an accident. The elder son drinks; he was married to a Maratha girl who left him. The two sons live separately in the same slum. Kala bai puts all her money into the house. She has nothing left to put in the bank.

Another way of making a profit from one's home is by taking in lodgers or short-term tenants. This always means relatives, people from the village or from that area, 'from my part of the world'. These lodgers are young people who are not yet married and who have found work in Pune, or else newly-married couples who have not yet found a place to live in the city, or even married men who, for various reasons, have left their wives in the village. These newcomers need a room and board. Women take them in on a temporary basis and serve meals in return for payment. Some of these are only temporary boarders and live elsewhere. However, they do not take in just anyone, but always young people who are known to them: their own family, relatives by marriage, or friends and acquaintances from the village. The example of Chaya BAGAL, among others, will show the reasons that lead to this practice in a context which is not one of extreme poverty but part of a pattern of industrious efforts.

Chaya BAGAL lives in Appar. She is from Narayangao (Shirur taluka) and was married in Parner; she is Ratna bai's sister-in-law. She was married in 1981 and has a daughter and two sons. She had herself sterilized. Her husband did not get along with her brother, nor did she with her sister-in-law, for which reason they moved to Pune. They arrived in 1984. At first, they lived in Janata Colony with a sister-in-law before coming to Appar. Her husband works in construction and makes casings. We have the same views. He gives me money to run the house.' She herself has a brother and six sisters (three of whom are doing well). 'My destiny was to work hard.' Her brother and his wife both work in a bank. She did not go to school. She puts about 10 rupees in the bank every day. Her sister-in-law's son and a cousin live with her. She does their cooking and is paid for bed and board. The nephew also makes casings. Sometimes sacks of grain come from the village when there is some to spare. The day we visited, a sack sent by the family had just arrived. In addition, between 15 and 20 other sacks had been sent to be sold.

Jana NITVANGUNE built three good rooms in Dhankavdi. She built a sort of an attic in one of them to provide temporary accommodation for a nephew and her daughter-in-law. We do not know in such cases if the room is provided free of charge or for payment.

A third way of making the house pay is to setup a shop in it and sell small items: sweets, biscuits and ordinary groceries as well as vegetables sneaked back from the market. Sometimes they even buy a sort of stall which they set up next to the house to run a little business, as KHENGARE bai did. Her husband gets behind the counter as soon as he comes home from work.

Keeping the place tidy

The slums are so small for the number of people they house that everything is done in the same place: cooking, eating, living and sleeping. Despite the cramped quarters and the crowded conditions, a semblance of order must be imposed. Some rules enforce, more or less, a basic ordering of the occupation and use of the home. The following examples indicate some rules that no one has forgotten, those that are the most urgently required and that people try to maintain as far as possible, because they reflect the most important values. There are five principal values in everyday behaviour, illustrated by the following examples.

The purity of the place where food is prepared is the first order of business. For that reason, the hearth is set at some distance from the door in order to avoid pollution from outside. The kitchen is thus 'the inside' of the house, the rest of it being the 'outside'. This place is always found in the corner furthest from the doorway.

The same applies to the gods and their images, 'their photos'. They are also located far from the entrance to protect them from being touched, which would pollute them, from evil influences from outside, and from dark shadows which would defile them from outside. The god therefore naturally lives by the hearth or near it. Only the festival of Gauri, celebrated for three days with extensive rites and food laid out on an altar, facing the goddess, permits her to occupy all of the house. It is impossible to keep her in one place far from the door, especially since there must be many guests. The residents of the house turn it over to Gauri during those days and live wherever they can.

Women's menstruation is a polluting event. During these periods they must stay 'outside', away from the others, at a distance from the hearth and the kitchen.

When an iron bedstead is brought in, the head of the house and the other men in the house naturally use it, while the women and children sleep on the floor, as usual,

We noted a tendency to give young couples at least some privacy by providing them, when possible, with a place of their own, even, as mentioned, a separate room.

The example of Ahila bai shows that the strongest influence on everyone, with greater or lesser effect, is the norms and values of a patriarchal society, and men's presence recalls the injunctions that they have internalized from childhood.

Ahila HARANAVLE is a member of the Dhangar caste. She lives in the shanty town opposite Sai Baba. She has two sons and a daughter. She is from Paranda, near Pandharpur. Her in-laws stayed there; they farm a patch of land there. But the droughts have left it barren. Her husband had a wholesale store in Barshi. But someone cast an evil spell, the shop went bankrupt, and poverty was the result. Ahila's brother-in-law was the first to leave for Pune.

Ahila and her husband joined him there. Ahila's husband worked in the shop for a few days, keeping the books. But the shock of his failure was so great that he could not go on. Since then, he has stayed at home doing nothing, unable to get over his ordeal. Ahila bai's slum dwelling is tiny: 3 feet by 10. As the brother-in-law lives alone in the room next door, Ahila and her daughter go there often and sleep there. Ahila makes her brother-in-law's meals. She and her husband have maintained close ties with the village, and consequently there are always visitors passing through. Ahila herself goes back to the village every three or four months, particularly during the village festivals. The men of her caste are strict about keeping up traditions. She and her daughters cannot stay in the house during their menstrual periods. They have to stay away, 'sit outside'. The men would not permit them to cook or handle food at such times. Ahila is incapable of such reprehensible conduct. She is terribly embarrassed if her period comes at a time when the house is full of people. She has to seek refuge outside, beyond the threshold, in a corner of the alley. There are also many Muslims in her shanty town, who come to her house to buy vegetables that she has brought from the market. She has practically no dealings with the Muslim women beyond these business matters. Ahila shares with the men of her community their strong sense of caste; she makes a point of maintaining it and affirming the special pride and honour of her caste.

Ranghu DIGHE has freed herself from a burden that tormented her secretly while she was building her two rooms. One of them will be set aside for the kitchen and the other will be a living area. The cooking will be done in a separate area where she is in her own place, far from everyone's comings and goings and from all danger of pollution. Her last slum dwelling was a shambles. Everything had to be done in the same place: cooking, eating, sleeping, etc. Even if many facilities are lacking, at least cooking must be done in a separate place.

Thaku NANGARE is of the Vanjari caste. She is probably about 65 years old. From childhood she has worked in the market. She was a coolie there even before puberty. She is in remarkably good health. She still has the strength to carry her loads. Her daughter has joined her there. She makes sure that when her daughter has her period, she stays 'outside'. As the dwelling is tiny, she has to seek refuge in a corner of the alleyway. She comes back in at night, spreads out a jute sack in the corner of the doorway, just outside the threshold, and lies down on it to sleep.

Jayashri BHOSALE has three daughters and a son. She has a 10 foot by 15 foot room in Dhankvadi. She is untidy: everything is strewn about. She cooks in a corner of the room. In another corner she has placed a large statue of the goddess Kalubai which takes up the entire corner. Kalubai comes to possess Jayashri, who is very devoted to her. Two of her daughters who are still in their teens live with her. When they have their periods, they lie down on a sack in the doorway to sleep together. They are squeezed together so closely 'that you can't tell whose arms and legs are whose', she says.

Ambu KOKARE and Saru SARGARE are both of the Dhangar caste from the Aptadi and Sangli region. They live in the shanty town near Appar Bibvevadi. It and Ambedkar are the most insanitary of the shanty towns. Their dwellings are tiny cubbyholes. They are too poor to buy a gas cylinder for cooking or even a kerosene stove. They go to gather wood in the countryside nearby, where they also graze their goats. A corner of their dwelling is kept for wood, because it has to be stored inside. Because they cannot cook near the door where people pass by, the hearth is in the corner opposite the door, a less inauspicious place. Between the door and the hearth, in order to separate the hearth from the doorway, they have piled up their pitchers to form a protective wall.

Shakuntala KORAPE is Lingayat-Vani. She keeps strictly to the customary rules of purity. In one of the two rooms of her house, she has setup a shop that is open to the street. In the other, in the corner opposite the doorway, she has located the kitchen, so that the shadows of visitors and passers-by will not fall upon the food she prepares and defile it.

Revu BHEGADE has a room measuring 5 feet by 5. She had a daughter and two sons; the elder son is married. For the couple, she put up three boards in the wall, at a man's height, so that they could stand up without hitting their heads, and made it into a bedroom for her son and daughter-in-law.

BHAME bai has a room which she has furnished with an iron bedstead. Whenever her son-in-law came to stay, he slept on the bed and everyone else on the floor.

Sona MARATHE has two rooms (Gokhale nagar and Mavi peth). She has put a widowed daughter-in-law in one of the two while she, her husband and another widowed daughter-in-law stay in the other. There is only one iron bedstead, on which her husband sleeps; the others sleep on the floor.

Bayda PILANE has one room, where she lives with her son. Her husband threw her out. She bought an iron bedstead, and put a cupboard in the corner. The son sleeps on the bed, and she sleeps on the floor. The cupboard holds the clothes and books belonging to the son, who attends a technology institute. His dream is to be an engineer.

These accounts enable us to gauge to what extent their great pride in the installation of latrines and a bathroom inside the house (and therefore near the kitchen and the hearth) symbolizes, in their representations and customs, a very important change in attitude and perception. The prestige thereby gained is such a great social advance that the status it confers immediately sweeps aside the reluctance inevitably engendered by the representational system relative to pollution which, as we have just observed is still alive and influential.

Essential features of such a system are refusing to receive another women of the untouchable Mahar caste inside the home, locating the hearth far from the doorway to ensure that not even the shadow of someone from an impure caste defiles the food, and staying 'outside' during menstrual periods. These are the most important customs of the traditional system of untouchability as a discriminatory setting for social relations and occupation of space which affects relations among given social categories, the pure and the impure (untouchables) on the one hand and men and women (impure because of menstrual blood) on the other, and among spaces that are differentiated qualitatively as 'the inside', where food is prepared and eaten, and 'the outside', seen as the source of evil influences.

The old custom of ablutions far off in the countryside before daybreak and of performing one's toilet outside the house in the open air has given way to the final ascendancy of the new value system that goes with the urban habitat, whose model includes latrines and bathrooms inside the dwelling. However, when the latrines and the bathroom are inside the dwelling, the former custom of ablutions in the open air still makes itself felt in the fact that often none of these new interior areas is closed off by a door or completely isolated from the rest of the space. The modern homemakers do not feel embarrassed or disturbed by this detail. The importance of these changes in perception and in custom that this architectural transformation implies can be measured by listening to what ONDKAR bai. has to say. When she goes to Bibvevadi, to her son and daughter-in-law's house, whom she has set up in the modern style with latrines and washing facilities indoors, she does not use these facilities herself. She goes out in the neighboring countryside, as far away as possible, to a piece of waste ground. 'I have

known dire poverty', she says. But because the goddess of prosperity, Lakshmi, has taken pity on her and she is overwhelmingly grateful to her, 'I am not going to dishonour Lakshmi', she says. 'I've got to remember the bad old days, from which she rescued me. How could I be insolent towards her?'

Feeling at home

'To you it may look like a slum dwelling, but it's our home', people say, from bravado, even if the dwelling is among the poorest. Even a tiny space without any modern conveniences becomes a home, a place of one's own where one can welcome guests with respect and hospitality.

GIRE bai, from the shanty town of Ambedkar nagar, lives in a shelter which has no facilities at all. It is literally built on the bare earth. Around it, there are sewers, rubbish, mud and detritus. That is her kingdom. No less surprising are the materials used for her shelter: cardboard, paper, bits of sheet metal, plastic sheets. The hut is about 4 feet high and 6 feet wide. No window. One door made of planks, broken and tacked together. The dwelling is so full of holes that it does not matter much that there is no window. But for GIRE bai, it is a lodging, a house that protects her and where she feels at home. 'All of you come to my house', she said, with friendly insistence. She brought all eight of us along. She insisted that we eat at her home. Each one of us had a little chapati and a vegetable. Everything was put in a common dish. Even in these conditions, for her, it was a shelter where she could rest and feel safe. That was its value in her eyes. She could regard it as her home.

When there are large holes in the roof or the walls of the shack, people say guiltily: Well repair it before the next rainy season. You know, we can't afford it'.

GIRE bai, with old 2 foot-square sacks, has fixed up a cubbyhole in her dwelling. She tells me as she shows me the place: 'This is the bathing area. I never take my bath outside in the open'. Three other women who are present at the conversation, including Bayda PILANE and Chandrabhaga TEMKAR from Premnagar, a shanty town quite comparable to Ambedkar Nagar, have also fixed up a special place for bathing as well as a draining-board and a partition of sheet metal GIRE bai has another slum dwelling in Padmavti, 10 by 8 feet, without any facilities at all and very shaky. But she likes it. She sleeps one night in Ambedkar nagar and one night in Padmavti. She has just bought about 15 bronze utensils at the flea market. She is happy to have. obtained them very cheaply.

Tara KUDITKAR's slum dwelling, in the shanty town opposite Sai baba, has a big gap in a corner of the wall. Tara bai covers it with plastic sheeting. When the rainy season comes, Ill cover it properly', she kept telling me.

All the working women who have freed up a little cubbyhole for bathing and washing showed it to me proudly. We don't take our baths in the open air, outside', they added. KONDALKAR bai keeps saying deliberately: 'My house is no better than Sita's in exile [that is, extremely crude]. But look, I've built a little place for the bathing area', she insists.

Lila KAMBLE lives in the shanty town at the foot of Taljai hill. Her slum dwelling is made of sheet metal from cans measuring 2 feet by 2 and assembled into a wall. Nila bai is really proud of it, since she built her dwelling by saving regularly from her wages. Right now, she is painting the metal sheets. She keeps asking me: 'Do you like it? How do you like my house?'

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In seeking to define what makes a home, we can perhaps explain it as the reassuring sense of intimacy in a place where one feels happy and sure of being alone with oneself, with no risk of being bothered, challenged or evicted.

The ambition to have a home

In each slum dwelling and each house, the working women, as heads of household, have set up and arranged, according to their needs and tastes, their kitchen utensils, their sâmsâra, all of it, with eagerness and enthusiasm. This enthusiasm goes back to the earliest times, as indicated by the songs sung at the millstone by the peasant women, as they so recently were, and which no doubt they sang themselves:

Five pyramids of five rows of jars
Sita, wife of Ram, tell me, who piled them up'?

All their life as homemakers is, one might say, invested in these pyramidal stacks of jars holding stores of water and grains, a symbol of their competence as head of the household.

Five jars piled up, the sixth is crooked.
Sita, wife of Ram, went yesterday into exile.

Leaving one's home and one's household is the most painful experience of all. To set up one's own household is both the obsession and the ambition of every housewife, the focus of her duty, her role and her very being.

Shaku PAWAR, when she arrived in Pune, lived in Dattavadi in a sheet metal dwelling. She borrowed 1,000 rupees, because she had nothing, not even a burner for cooking. Little by little, she spent as much as 10,000 rupees on enlarging her house, building walls, putting in doors, installing a draining-board, laying on gas, buying a pressure cooker, a cupboard and a fan, acquiring an iron bedstead and finally buying a television set. She also has a tape recorder. Whenever she heard her neighbour's pressure cooker whistling, she grumbled to herself and wondered when she could have one too. She was still doing her cooking on a kerosene stove when her neighbors had a gas cylinder. She had to have gas, too, and she got it. She did not have a copper boiler either. Now she has it all. But she was able to accumulate it only slowly.

Hira DALVI has built up a store of four pairs of containers. 'In case I need money, I can sell them.' A door-to-door salesman came to her house to sell her some. She could not resist them and bought them on credit, paying in monthly installments. She gradually provided kitchen utensils for her two daughters' homes. Did not the women at the millstone long ago sing:

I long for a set of pots by my side.
Ragunath, my darling, is taking his bath.

TANDALE bai said: 'I had nothing at all when I came here from Chiplun. I started right away by doing laundry and dishwashing. Then I was hired at the market. I earned all my household goods by the sweat of my brow.' The only thing she does not have is television.

BHAME bai tells how she came to Pune with her four children, a couple of aluminium billy-cans and some metal pots. She had nothing else at that time. Since then, little by little, she has set up her entire household.

KONDKAR bai also bought two aluminium pots, a burner and some metal pots from the man who sold her her dwelling. Now that she has a house in Bibvevadi, she has a whole set of kitchen utensils: jars, dishes, buckets, glasses, pots, a metal cabinet and a fan. She, too, lacks only television.

KALE bai has an even greater reputation for being ambitious. In a room 10 foot by 10, she has an iron bedstead, a table so that she can cook standing up, the television, a tape recorder and many cassettes. Her husband and four children live in this room, in addition to all these furnishings. When I left her room, she called to her daughter right away: 'Put on a cassette, put on a song for the sister', the usual term to indicate a woman visitor.

Dvarka KANDHARE tells how her mother-in-law did not allow her to take any utensils when she left her in-laws' home. She reached Pune with only the clothing she stood up in. Today she displays everything she has in her house: a big container for water, dishes, buckets, jars, etc. 'Now it is the other way around: when my mother-in-law needs utensils, it is I who lend them to her.'

When Jana NIVANGUNE came to Pune, she brought nothing with her. Her mother-in-law showed her no kindness and ignored her. Jana bai came to Pune with her two children. She had no hope that her mother-in-law would let her take any luggage, precisely because she wanted to get rid of her. Her father took her in at Pune but could give her hardly any help. When Pune was flooded, she followed her father and many other disaster victims to Gokhale nagar. From there she did laundry and dishes in private homes until Paru bai arranged for her to be hired at the market as a coolie. As she could not afford to pay rent or buy a house in Gokhale nagar, although she was one of the disaster victims to whom housing was granted, she had to go to Dandekarpul shanty town and then to Janata Colony from where she was sent to Dhankavdi; there, once issued with a card and an identity photograph, she was given a plot of ground where she built a room under the government's rehousing plan (she has to pay for this house in monthly installments of 110 rupees); she built two other rooms behind that one. Her work and her tenacity enabled her to have her own house with a draining-board and all the utensils she had wanted. Her house is well maintained. Her youngest son wants her to buy a television. She borrows from relatives only very rarely and repays them promptly. She cannot deposit money in banks or in credit unions. She is satisfied, however, because she has gradually been able to setup house.

BHEGADE bai from Dandekarpul took advantage of her brother's hospitality when she came all alone to Pune. With his agreement, she installed a partition in the room where he had taken her in and made a little cubbyhole in his house. However, she did not try to collect an impressive set of utensils. She has no gas, no draining-board, no metal cabinet. She decided to do things differently: to make sure that her son married well and to set him up comfortably. In order to do that she had to build up her savings patiently. But her husband is a drinker who wants nothing to do with her. Despite that, she decided to arrange for her son and daughter-in-law to live in Pashan, with her in-laws' family. She has just married him off. She went to her son's in-laws, her daughter-in-laws family, to collect the utensils that were given to him as wedding gifts. She collected them in a bag that she tied up and deposited in Pashan with her in-laws' family, awaiting the day when her son would go to live there. When my son has a child, he will go to Pashan, to your house, and live there', she told her husband, to whom she refuses to return. 'My son will come and live there.' She had suffered too much in the past to lower herself by going back to her in-laws. Her ambition is completely transferred to her son and daughter-in-law's household.

Anusuya KUMBHAR has worked in the market for 35 years, following-in her mother-in-law's footsteps. Her husband has been a coolie there, too, for 16 years. After leaving the market, she still does dishes and laundry in private homes or sorts grains at a grocer's. She has always worked hard. Her house is not among the best furnished. She did not put money into the union's housing project, but into her village's mutual assistance fund which guarantees payment of 2,500 rupees every two years. Once, she used this money to expand her house; another time she bought a water heater and other items. 'I have plenty of utensils', she says. 'But with my daughter, my husband and me, there isn't much room for them. I've filled a bag with them and I keep them in the village.'

These success stories should not lead us to overlook the setbacks due to various kinds of tragedies. MALEKAR bai, for example, is in great poverty now, after building a fine house. She had to sell the house to pay her son's debts, but she filled a bag with utensils which she took to her sister's, where she went to live.

At Yamuna PAWAR's place in Dattavadi, in an attractive, spacious room, there is a large area for the bath, a draining-board with a slab from Kadappa, many solid accessories, a jar for storing water, a metal cabinet, an iron bedstead, a pressure cooker, a television, etc. 'I have everything I wanted', she says.

'You have to deposit money in the bank and buy something with that money every year', says Phula PAWAR. Pots, jars, a cupboard, a copper boiler for the bath, etc.: she has them all. She has stored as many possessions again in the village. Since she goes there from time to time, 'shouldn't there be a household there, too?'

Paru INGULKAR came to Pune because her husband did not get along with her uncle; shortly afterwards, her husband died of alcoholism. She was living at the foot of Parvati. She was evicted from her shanty town by the building of the flyover to the hill. As a result, she was able to be rehoused in Gokhale nagar. She built four rooms there, paying 121 rupees a month for them. She has been paying this rent for 20 years, and is now the owner of her home. She has many facilities there: a draining-board, gas, etc. She has had a tank installed so that she can have water all day in the house. When her husband died, her father-in-law came to her house to take all the utensils away to the village, Nasrapur, near Vaneshvar. She asked some of her own relatives living nearby for help, and, by means of some pretext was able to get her belongings back. Her house is impeccably maintained and contains, of course, latrines and washing facilities inside. She prides herself on the fact that, although she is a widow, her house has all the desired facilities.

Devotees of Lakshmi

No housewife looks on her house as a storage area or as just a place to stock household goods, Each of them wants to be skilful with her hands and to be the perfect hard-working housewife, a true follower of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, whom she knows she must represent and manifest by her actions.¹ She has a duty to pass on her blessings. The order that she maintains inside and the well-being of the family members that she feeds and serves, the welcome given to visitors who cross her threshold, all of this must show that she is good at her job, that is, that she is capable of running her house and caring for her household.

'Everything has always been in order and in its place, always, in our house, in the village as well as here. You can look, everything is here. You came into my house. My house is well

1. See *Inde, Village au féminin*, op. cit., pp. 146-147,188-190,204.

maintained. If the utensils were not arranged properly, if there weren't all these jars and pots, in Phula bai's house, with cups for the tea, people would straight away call me all kinds of names. Any visitor who came in would laugh at me. People would make fun of the housewife. If there weren't all the right containers, the men of the household would be laughed at by everyone. We are the Lakshmis of the hearth. That's how one should behave.' This is what Phula PAWAR, in Dattavadi, had to say. She is happy to have everything, a draining-board, a cupboard, a boiler, a television, and all the utensils she wants. She has two rooms in the shanty town. As she owns land in the village and farms half of it, while another person farms the other half, she goes to attend to her land from time to time, particularly at peak seasons. She has therefore made the same arrangements at the farm, hoping that her son will go back there one day.

Hira bai is Phula bai's sister. Her husband is a drinker who works as a mason but gives her hardly any money for the housekeeping. Hira Bai has three sons who go to school. She had herself sterilized, and every day she deposits a little money in the bank. Her husband has always been a drinker, and when he drinks, he always abuses her, not allowing her even to sleep in peace at night. She sometimes goes to sleep at the neighbour's house. The neighbors are a great help. Her great concern is to keep the house clean and tidy. She has many things there: a draining-board, a bathroom, a Kadappa slab on the draining-board, a cupboard, a television, a boiler and many containers and utensils. She puts all her energy into maintaining her house. She gets up at half past two in the morning to do the cooking and fill the water pitchers. She hardly sleeps at all, but 'what can you do about it? You have to live with it', she says. Everything must be in order before she goes to the market. The pots and water pitchers are scoured and polished every two days. Her sister thinks that she does too much. 'You're going to kill yourself, working like that', she tells her. 'The house must shine, everything has to shine. Otherwise, what satisfaction is there? There would be no point in it. We are women, we are made for the house. You have to have everything necessary in the house. Forget the rest, let's not discuss it', she replies.

Kala KARLE came from the Velhe region 25 years ago (1965) to provide for her children's education. Since then, she has lived near Tilak Road. People she knew lived there previously; her husband bought a piece of land and built a shack on it. She went to the market and her husband also worked as a coolie. She works to earn her living; she has no friends at the market and does not try to establish relations with other women. She also has little contact with the neighbors. She had a daughter and three sons, before having herself sterilized. She deposits her money in the bank, at the market and in Tilak Road. She took out 5,000 rupees to obtain a job for her eldest son, who has a degree in business studies (a bribe of 10,000 rupees was demanded); the second son is a driver for a dairy and lives in Dandekarpul shanty town; the third works in public transport. The in-laws farm land in the village and sometimes send sacks of rice. She has everything she needs in the house: television, draining-board, cupboard. Last year, they spent 16,000 rupees to raise the roof of the house and make a terrace. Kala bai is a Lakshmi and all her energy is devoted to the home and the hearth. Her only other dream is to make a pilgrimage. She has never had to borrow.

When I go home on Fridays, I clean everything up: everything must be in its place. I have to clean the water containers and do the grinding. We would never borrow', says KONDAVALKAR bai.

'You also have to keep the yard outside looking neat. That's where the housewife's inspection begins', says Paru INGULKAR. She prepared condiments until around five o'clock when she comes back from the market and then devotes her evening to housekeeping. 'Even if you work hard in the market, you must put the house in order.'

Lila bai and Sita bai, like so many others who take on other work after the market, clean the house thoroughly when they go home. This is their common obsession which does not leave them for a moment. If a woman does not take enough care of her house, another one will notice it right away. 'Look! Go and look at her place; see what it looks like! it's a shambles! she's at home all day doing nothing and she doesn't even start her grinding until after sunset! What a slut!' 'A woman who isn't a good cook - how can you still say she's a woman?' Hira bai asks. When you go home, you have to know how to mash the lentils in order to make the sauce properly', Goja bai says. 'My husband died. As a widow, I had to work very hard, but I never let the children go hungry. At three in the morning, I was up to make their meals. They never had to make do with leftovers', says Hira bai. 'I will not use a refrigerator. We always eat fresh food', says Shaku bai. When a woman forgets her duty as a *samsâr* housewife, is she still a woman?' Jana bai also asks.

It is clear that the stereotypes prevail as strongly and clearly in the urban area as they used to do in the village where the woman's role in the house is concerned. She is an industrious Lakshmi who is forgetful of self and devotes all her energies to serving the members of her household, however they may behave towards her. As a housewife, tidiness and order, cleanliness and housekeeping are what distinguish her and entitle her to be regarded as a woman worthy of the name. Nourishing them all, she makes sure that everyone, particularly the children, eat well and at the proper times.

Neighbour women

Sisterly and friendly relations develop among the neighbour women in the village. These ties are broken when the migrant women leave. When they do maintain relations with their village, they become less strong in proportion to the distance in time and space from former near neighbors. But such ties remain as a trait which is as characteristic of the migrant women in their new home as it was formerly in the village, if we are to believe their songs, once sung by peasants at the millstone:

Neighbour Shalu, what a good neighbour you are
This has made me forget my mother's house, these past twelve years.
I have bound myself in friendship with a sister from the lane on the hill
I tell you, woman, she has put on her dark saffron bodice.
The ties that bind us, you and me, can never break
Knots of silken thread cannot be untied.

The same little islands of friendship are created on the outskirts of the city.

Konda bai, Sam bai and Lakshmi bai live in the same alley of a poor neighborhood right next door to one another. They were coolies together in the old market and they now work together in the market yard. A second generation has been born since they arrived and it populates their alley. But they have not made any new friends in the market. They are so attached to one another that they are always together. They go as a group on pilgrimages or to the village. A mutual friend, Sindhu, has joined their group; she lives a little farther away, about 500 metres down the same alley. Although they deposit money in a *bhishî* mutual aid credit union, they do not do it with the coolie women from the market but with neighbour women in their street.

The two sisters-in-law KAMTE live near each other in the same old building in Ravivar peth. Other sisters-in-law live across the way. They help each other out and do each other favours. They travel together on pilgrimages to Alandi and to Pandharpur and go together to

the festivals, ceremonies and other occasions of that kind. They have their *bhishî* group together. They have been living in Pune for 50 years. They all come from the Saswad area, so it is easy for them to keep up the old family connections in Pune itself. People of their caste live in the same neighbourhood and have lived there, like themselves, for many years, so that the ties that bound them in their village community have easily been formed again here in the city.

The same is true of **Yamuna bai** in the Nanapeth neighborhood. Her sister-in-law lives opposite her (her husband's sister); other sisters-in-law (the wives of her brothers-in-law) live in the adjoining neighborhood. She has not had to look outside her family circle for other relationships.

At Dattavadi, Yamuna PAWAR is happy with her neighbors. 'They are all our people (of our Maratha caste). You can leave the house without locking it up. We really support one another.' She took back the 10,000 rupees that she had paid out for the union's housing project, because 'our room here is fine and the neighbors are nice'. Shaku PAWAR, Phula PAWAR, and Hira bai agree with her. They say that they are satisfied with their neighbors. 'They are all our people.' This, finally, is their principal reason. 'There are no Mahars or other untouchables. Everyone helps everyone else.'

All the families of the old Kaparevada building in Ghorpade peth are of the Dhangar caste, from the Sangli area, so that everyone maintains good neighborly relations. Women have to take their baths outside, in the open air, but they don't worry about it because they are all 'our people', says Maya KALE. The building on the opposite side of the street also houses many Dhangars with whom they have excellent relations. There are Muslims in the neighborhood. The Muslim women and the Dhangar women may not have much to do with one another, but the young people visit one another without any hesitation. DOMBALE bai has a son who celebrates Ramadan, fasting with the Muslims. They are invited to eat in one another's houses. However, marriages between Muslims and Dhangars are completely unknown. The Christian mission at Panchaud is very close. Maya KALE's son and daughter go to the mission school. 'But they don't try to make Christians of them', their mother is careful to state. There is no shadow of suspicion or hatred towards Muslims in this part of Ghorpade peth or in Bhavani peth. When we visited Sindhu SHELAR, a Maratha, we met a Muslim neighbour who had come with an invitation to an evening meal during Ramadan, quite deliberately and with much urging. We were at the house of CHEJAVAI bai, a Maratha, in Kacei street, when riots between Hindus and Muslims broke out in the evening, and a curfew was declared. Relations among neighbors there were not at all affected.

The shanty town opposite Sai baba is very cosmopolitan, in the sense that there are migrants of different castes and different geographical origins. Five coolie women make up a group of neighbors brought together by the closeness of their dwellings, without any other particularly close ties of friendship. Only the fact of being neighbors has brought them together. They organize their relatives' weddings together and join together in the *cuma* rites of curcuma and grinding; they go together to visit holy men and to consult them, and on pilgrimages to the holy places of Maharashtra. They are: Hira Dondakar, Maratha, from Shirur development block; Subhardra DARVATKAR, from Velhei block, a widow with five children; Hira bai, who was widowed very young and had no children (they have been coolies for 25 years); Rakhama TANPURE, from the Mancar area, Khed block, a Maratha; Ahilya HARANAVLE, a Dhangar from Purandar; and Tara KUDITKAR, a Maratha, from Velhei block.

Jija UTEKAR lives in Dhankavdi with Mangala BORGE, Kalpana UTEKAR, Kamala KALE, Malan KARANJKAR and UBHE bai. They are neighbors. Jija bai considers their closeness to be a guarantee of support. They are all Maratha, except KALE bai who is Mang, an untouchable (she married an untouchable of the Mang caste). Jija bai would not drink a glass of water at her home. Malan bai's husband is a drinker. Many of the men in this shanty town drink. The neighbourhood is considered particularly unsafe. The atmosphere there is reserved and tense. The coolie women live there is more fear than elsewhere. There is a fear of fights and people try to prevent them from breaking out. The women are reluctant to visit one another and to make new friends or even to try to do so. It is better to keep out of trouble! Relations are confined to people from one's own area of origin, family and caste. Jija UTEKAR is the eldest of the women mentioned above: 'We feel secure with her', her neighbors say. Furthermore, they all have family ties.

Ratna PAWAR, Lakshmi BHAME, Lila KARALE and Tana DHAVNE live in the same slum where the government rehuses people from elsewhere, in Appar Bibvevadi. They go to the market yard in the same lorry. They work near one another in the market. 'But we don't know one another's houses' they acknowledge. I said to Ratna bai: 'You know what kind of research I'm doing. Do you like that and do you agree with it?' 'Yes, I'm ready to help you. What can I do?' 'Can you point out the houses of those other women who are coolies like you in the market yard and live in this shanty town? You know them all, don't you?' 'Yes, I know them all, but I don't know where their houses are here. I've never been to their houses.' They are all of the same Maratha caste. Yamuna SHIRKE, of the same shanty town and the same caste, gave us the key to this behaviour: 'There are people from all kinds of castes around here. I don't have any dealings except with the people in two houses, the one opposite and the one next door.' Appar is famous for its fights.

Shakuntala KORPE is of the Lingayat-Vani caste, in Premnagar. She lives there with a number of people from her area, Latur and Bhid. All of them are on excellent terms 'because we come from the same area'. Her sister lives near by. In the shanty town, there is a group of people who get together for mutual defence. The chairman is a Muslim 'but it makes no difference, because we come from the same area' she says.

It is clear that small groups of neighbors are formed, limited in size and created on the basis of family ties and favoured neighborhood ties. For example, Anu SALEKAR and Hausa KADU, who live at the foot of Parvati, are two sisters. Their brother lives nearby. Kala SHELAR is Hausa bai's daughter. Lakshmi MORE's husband and Hausa bai's work together in the same workshop: they have become friends and neighbors. Mathura bai is Hausa bai's daughter: she lives nearby and belongs to the same group of neighbors. Although its members live in close comradeship and co-operate in answering the questions I ask them, nevertheless, another person, Shila RANJNE, does not like me to come and interview other women in the shanty town. The others call her 'president' of the Chatrapati Shivaji union. She is considered authoritarian and dominating by the other women in the shanty town, who are afraid of her. Her husband has a shop, and she does not let the other coolie women bring back vegetables from the market for resale, as she herself does. She doesn't want any competition. Vimal YADAV and Kamal MALEKAR have children who take drugs: they accuse RANJNE bai of encouraging them in this habit.

GIRE bai lost her first husband, and married again. Her parents did not accept this, and she had no means of livelihood. She put her two daughters into a Christian institution. She is on good terms with the Mahar people, who make up a majority of the residents in the slums of Ambedkar nagar, although she herself is Maratha. Once or twice a month the neo-Buddhists

hold meetings in the shanty town, and she goes to hear their leaders. Her neighbors are of different castes, different geographical backgrounds and difference languages. Like everyone else, she mixes Hindi with her native Marathi, as do the Mahars, Lamans and the people who speak Telegu, Kanadi, etc. GIRE bai gets along well with everyone. Ranjana NAGARE, of Bhavani peth, also rejected and without support, put her son in a Christian orphanage. She left him there until he was five years old, but then she took him out because they said that they would not keep him there unless she agree to his becoming a Christian.

Conclusion

We shall try hereto give general answers to the queries we initially formulated as a guide for observing behaviour, assessing habits, understanding states of awareness and interpreting the accounts and life stories that we have gathered concerning housing and living conditions.

Individual life stories in an open world

Life for women in the village used to be enclosed, even isolated, in a residential and working space that was set aside for them, specifically female, safe, protected, stable and permanent. Physically and socially, peasant women were settled in a territory defined by the established framework and institutions of the rural patriarchal order. The physical space where they moved between the house and the fields reflected a pre-established and familiar organization of human relations within the system of family agricultural production. Their work, their activities and their habits were not under their control or left to their discretion, their whims or their inventiveness. A peasant woman belonged to a community, even if she was stigmatized as a black sheep, *râmdâv*. As a villager, that is, given to a village through marriage and placed in a household of that village, she had inalienable residential rights that no one denied and she had a recognized place in society. The geographical and social territory of the village was her guaranteed domain, a world in which she had rights and duties.

A situation of crisis leading to a breakdown is the factor that forces her to break out of the physical and social precincts of the village community. The crisis may take a variety of forms. It forces her to leave the territory of the village. Whatever it is called, it implies on the part of migrant men and women a determination to look elsewhere for the means of support.

Although this exodus is forced upon them, it is not a passive step. Because their survival is at stake, they must have the will to strike out on a new path, one that is not indicated or traced out for them beforehand. They must find their own way or, rather, make their way by showing initiative.

We specifically stress the psycho-sociological dimensions of this crisis for many of the coolie women that we interviewed. The tensions and the psychological oppression that many of the young daughters-in-law endure in the traditional rural family system are one of the main reasons motivating or justifying the migrant woman's decision to leave. The crisis forces her to make a personal decision. Harassment by the mother-in-law and the husband's alcoholism are the two most dramatic reasons for these psychological tensions. These are, from the point of view of the psycho-cultural processes that they induce or catalyse, the basic factors determining the phenomena that we observed.

The crisis leads to a burst of self-assertion that culminates in a break with the village. In other words, migration is pregnant with the desire for individual autonomy, whose form and content vary according to the persons concerned and the particular conditions of their crisis.

This self-assertion, in the form of an abandonment of established ways of life, plunges them into a dangerously open space, because this opening not only means the complete disappearance of systems of protective relationships, but for some of them it means being thrown out, and, as most of the others pointed out, a substantial loosening of ties. In the words of the Marathi saying: 'If there is a master (a husband), then there is a world (a socio-cultural domain to which one belongs) otherwise you are open to the four winds'. In this sense, most of the coolie women who migrate to get away from their in-laws face untrodden paths. They free themselves from old ties only to find themselves nowhere, in a no-man's land, devoid of any natural bonds. They have to start over again, to establish themselves by finding the basic things: a place to settle down, a house to live in, a job for survival. Housing is the first victory. For the coolie women, thrown into a wide-open world, this initial search for living space has been, and continues long to be, for most of them, the most significant vector of their personal histories.

Socio-culturally speaking, the construction of a new place to settle and of attachment to a place comes into being, where housing is concerned, by recourse to 'landmarks' pointing the way to a new awareness of rights and the discovery of the great advantages of collective pressure.

From the psycho-sociological viewpoint, attitudes of self-confidence and combative behaviour draw out the best in people's personal resources. The former innate feeling of security stemming from belonging by birth to a familiar world gives way to a firm conviction of one's ability to invest in a place to live, fighting to acquire the means to satisfy one's most basic needs. The new living space is no longer something given: it must be won.

The emergency situation in which the coolie women find themselves accounts for their enthusiasm and combativeness, their spirit of initiative, and their unfailing hopefulness in the midst of the worst reversals of fortune.

Where uncertainty and disorder bring people face to face with unwelcoming chaos, only a will to win can be equal to the challenges. A protective all-encompassing system gives way to social chaos which of necessity leads to the emergence of more personal destinies. A place of residence that is passively accepted and imposed gives way to a home that is won and built.

Home: one's own space and a proof of success

The relationship to the home, the special subject of this chapter, shifts in this respect from a situation of physical and social hopelessness to the physical, legal and official appropriation of a dwelling. The longed-for goal of winning a place to live is the ownership of a duly authenticated home. Not everyone achieves it.

The arrival on the urban periphery is a time of uncertainty and instability. Many coolie women have moved house and are prepared to move again if it suits them. This transitory arrangement here is in contrast to the stability of the in-laws' house, a predestined dwelling. The ties of reciprocal belonging that characterized the relationship of the daughter-in-law to the village have vanished: in the peripheral area she can move as often as she likes. Entry into the social system no longer necessarily takes place by moving into one place, already existing and established, namely, the in-laws' home. Instead it is the slow process of acquiring a secure dwelling and fixing it up as a home of one's own.

Housing has therefore basically changed its role. It has become an object of aspiration and desire, and is the material expression, the guarantee and the symbol, through its

appropriation and construction, of the migrant's prestige and status. It is no longer the pre-ordained and compulsory sphere of a social role that depends on the will of others (the in-laws). The status of the coolie woman is no longer assigned to her or established in advance. It is a social asset to be won or to be built up as the result of effort, a success, a recognized victory. Many coolie women, when they left their in-laws, left behind a home which gave them an automatic pre-ordained status. Now they have to struggle by any means at their disposal, to use all their resources to acquire status and to win recognition as being able to create and maintain a household. That status is not conferred by simply joining one's in-laws' family, but by acquiring a place to live, and setting up house. In place of the takeover of the daughter-in-law by an unknown household, the migrant woman builds her own domicile into a dwelling of her own. The in-law family provided a definite place to live, with a name of its own: the new residence is unstable, shifting and uncertain. This loosening of the freed status of the new dwelling (compared to the domestic production unit in the family setting of the in-laws' family) corresponds to its exchange value and its possible commercial value. That is what confers on it the role of a social symbol of the migrant woman's success in a sphere where various types of exchange systems coexist.

The relationship of the migrant coolie woman to her residence therefore becomes an aggressive one. The home is a place to appropriate. It is a threatened and precarious asset, one that is coveted and sought after.

It thereby becomes an indicator of a socialization process among migrant women. That socialization is itself also uncertain. It is never taken for granted, as it was before. Instead it is willed. They seek to improve their dwelling, to acquire one in a more prestigious location, and to make sure of uncontested ownership. It is one of the best possible investments.

There is a surprising contrast between the situations and attitudes that existed on their arrival on the outskirts of the city and their later rental practices when the house becomes an object of commercial exchange, a subject for calculations and the attainment of financial gain. The distress of the early days is followed by the avid pursuit of quick and easy income, taking advantage of the difficulties of new arrivals. Some coolie women have learned quickly to excel in the behaviour that they see practised regularly around them: leases of less than 11 months, strict and prompt payment of rent, the exacting of key money, continual changing of tenants, and building improvements financed by rent advances. They seek to gain maximum advantage from the circumstances by appropriating several dwellings that they do not need for themselves, while fighting as tenants against other owners. The contradictions of a generalized system of capitalist exchange do not bother them - on the contrary, they are their trump card. The rule is that when someone obtains a new dwelling provided by the slum clearance plan, this entails giving up the prior residence which then becomes the property of the city. Some women, however, succeed not only in holding on to that first residence but also in acquiring a second home in another shanty town, which they let to temporary tenants. Some coolie women who are now well informed about all these practices easily forget in these circumstances what their former situation was and where they came from. Now they are no longer concerned about other people's search for a place to stay, but focus on the fact that the house can be a way to make money, a means to profit and success. The dwelling is the object of a self-seeking activity in the context of a system of liberal capitalist relationships and exchanges that cashes in on the extreme housing shortage of the urban periphery.

The importance and the value of housing as a proof of success can also be seen in the fact that the coolie women are very familiar with the union's housing project. They exchange

ideas and discuss it, with the facts at their fingertips. They make inquiries of its officials and know about its regulations and its possible advantages.

Old benchmarks for new activities

Chaos and crisis are not met without turning to certain fixed sources of temporary help, reliable assistance or permanent support, according to the circumstances. The escape from the protective systems of domestic relationships, the loosening of imperative family constraints, even the breaking of ties of belonging and dependence, may indeed, considering where they live, place migrant women in situations that are often uncertain and hazardous, yet the systems of fundamental values and traditional relationships still provide them with their basic frame of reference for setting up house, their life-style in the new context (the kitchen is, for example, qualitatively different from the rest), the architecture and furniture, a woman's place in the home, etc. Instability, wandering and insecurity characterize the marginal existence of the migrant woman, but she relies on certain sure, firm values in order to overcome the uncertainty and to find her bearings. These values help her to make her way in the modern setting and overcome obstacles. In particular, she builds her home with reference to benchmarks inherited from the past.

Among these systems there is, first of all, the kinship system, with the importance of ties of blood and marriage as the main sources of the aid and support required. The crucial caste system and the family clans within it are particularly decisive in restructuring a way of life and ties of belonging in the absence of the village community. The resumption of neighborly relations, the last item of residential life to be rebuilt, is based primarily on caste. The same is true of mutual aid and trade networks that extend their ties as far as the urban periphery. Old relationships among neighbors and with patrons are very valuable.

The system of values relating to the role and status of women defines them essentially as housewives, today just as in the past. The most important symbols of the relationship between the sexes (for example, the iron bedstead for the head of the household) and the most basic representations of women remain intact as socio-cultural markers. Three representations are particularly important: the housewife as Lakshmi, devoted body and soul to her household in all circumstances, particularly the most dangerous and desperate ones (a drunken and irresponsible husband, one who is sick or absent, unemployed or impotent, etc.); the impurity of the menstrual period, with the domestic custom of isolation, which is symbolic of the social segregation of wives and women; lastly, the woman of the house as destined for 'the inside' (kitchen, children, housework, maintenance of the dwelling and general home-making for the household and its guests).

We see no contradiction here between the modernity of the house that the migrant seeks, as a housewife in an urban area, and the other age-old values and customs, despite the apparent contrast between some features of the architecture, the furnishing and the occupation of the place of residence. A woman's status has always been tied to her duties as a housewife. Her 'interior' dwelling is her lot, to the point of becoming a part of her identity. It is therefore quite natural that migrant women in search of social status in the undefined sphere into which the crisis has thrown them, make their own dwelling the essential asset and symbol of their personal success and their social recognition. The modern architecture of the house indicates and advertises their irrefutable arrival in the new environment of the urban periphery. This place of their own, the primary objective of their search for a place in the city, becomes, since it is a hard won space, the proof that they have successfully won a place of their own and the guarantee of an assured status in the modern city. With a modern kitchen and a spick and span

household, the housewife shows that she is equal to performing her lifelong vocation - in the city, this time.

From the viewpoint of the overall socio-cultural dynamics that enable migrant women to cope with the crisis in their lives, our study of the steps they take to find a place to settle and a dwelling (whether these are steps to acquire, build or furnish, representations of the roles and status of the woman of the house or values that determine the components, division and use of the property) led us to observe that there is a symbiosis between traditional socio-cultural reference systems and the messages, desires, expectations and aspirations that are implicit in, and natural consequences of, their existence in a modern setting, which is suddenly very different from their peasant world. The processes of change and development of relationships, values and representations are carried out in a dialectic between tradition and modernity. There is never either straightforward continuity or a clean break. The symbiosis is itself never uniform. The relationship between the past and the present is not linear or one-to-one, still less one-dimensional. Nor is it purely discontinuous or clearly antinomic. It is usually multiform without being ambiguous.

The detailed individual analyses show that the present, the past, tradition and the future follow many kinds of logic which must accordingly be made explicit in each case, although it is not possible to draw with certainty a single curve to describe their overall movement. An equation to find a common denominator might be misleading. Individual responses are bound to be motivated by diverse and contrasting ways of thinking. For example, we have seen how the traditional background becomes the basis for adaptation to the present, or at least makes it easier: kinship and caste pave the way for access to housing and work. At other times, it gives direction to that adaptation or assimilates it and is reinforced by it: the architecture of the long-desired house provides a modern object for a traditional longing, familiar to every housewife, to make her own dwelling place the main asset and confirmation of her personal identity and her social persona. That identity and persona redefine only the substance of that desire, but not its form or its goals. On the contrary, at other times, the past is denied and forgotten in the name of new imperatives: abused young women leave their in-laws' family in the name of affronted dignity, and they rebel against oppressive structures. Awareness of interests and rights, needs and aspirations, culminates in autonomous behaviour. The individual asserts herself and discovers herself as a subject. In the midst of the chaos governing land-ownership and housing, the migrant women discover the uses of laws and regulations, government plans and community pressure. When the old, protective order breaks down and there is a serious danger of sliding into destitution, resourcefulness and survival strategies can rely on] y on innate stores of energy. The latter are derived from no rules or traditions but stem from common sense and individual virtues. The door opens to the hitherto unheard-of: widows without means of support form bonds with neighbors which overcome barriers of caste; Hindus and Muslims in poor neighborhoods fraternize spontaneously; physical proximity results in the breaking of the taboos of ritual purity; people engage in trials of strength and harness the law to their own ends. Fate no longer has the last word.

II

DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORK, AND THE PLACE WHERE IT IS DONE

Addressing the question

On their arrival in the peripheral area, and after finding somewhere to stay, the second crucial need is a job. Once the women have a roof over their heads, they must think about food. The two needs are equally immediate and urgent. They go hand in hand. Neither will find a solution on its own; action has to be taken. The help given in the first few days of welcome cannot provide a job or subsistence for any length of time. Friends and relations can only make suggestions or give advice.

Earning their living is different from their former rural work in two essential respects. Hard work in the country did not have, at least subjectively in peasant women's minds the dimension of daily urgency for individual survival that it takes on once the migrants arrive in the city, leaving the farm and farm work behind them. Their work in the fields was an integral part of their overall status. Its function and value were determined by its relationship to the other activities and roles assigned to the peasant woman and mistress of the household in the patriarchal style of the domestic rural production unit. Work in an urban area takes place in a context that makes it lose most of the connotations and values that characterized its integration with the other structuring dimensions of the agricultural production unit. Urban labour is directly linked to the need to ensure the daily means of survival. The painful and sustained physical activity involved becomes a vital necessity. Of course, this was true in the country too, but in a very particular and immediate way. This necessity was then mediated by the co-operative relationships which linked together the peasant farmers in a domestic production unit. It is now mediated on an ad hoc basis, day by day and specified by the wages earned. In the village, work was only occasionally remunerated. Work was not a structuring aspect of the system of productive relationships in the rural domestic production unit, at least if we exclude the landless peasants who live only from their paid work. For the coolie women, the wage becomes the determining dimension of work activities. It is the means of obtaining the pay that is required every day in order to survive. That is what characterizes it, what isolates it as a social entity of its own and instrumentalizes it, that is, gives it a secondary function.

A second group of characteristics is associated with this function. The peasant's work required experience and proven skills. The skills of the peasant women in the past are not relevant in the city. The only thing that counts is their brute force. Their traditional habits and their manual skills, their ingenuity, and their ancestral know-how are purely and simply left aside. The only things that count now are their physical strength, their endurance at work, and their ability to withstand hard work and the task required of them. This is the only capital that they bring into the world of paid work in the urban periphery.

These different elements mark the entry of the migrant women into the economic sphere. By this we mean the field that is defined by a system of relationships based on the three following constituent elements. First of all, there is the field opened up by active intervention in respect of an object or specified environment in order to model it, modify it, use it for desired ends, in a word 'work' according to specified aims and objectives: this is carried out by applying and using the forces of the body and the mind. Second, the goods that are created, whether they are manufactured products or services that are provided, are intended to become

objects of exchange in the light of their usefulness to others. Third, the use of the forces of mind and body in order to produce goods or provide services also has a market exchange value which is determined by the effect of labour and the importance of what it can achieve. This market value is mediated by the remuneration, which is assumed to correspond to the utility of the product that is supplied and to the quantity of energy expended to produce it.

The peasant women used to work in the house and the fields, but their work did not lead them into the economic sphere, for three reasons. First, although they were productive, the aims and objectives of their labour were not determined by them. They were not economic subjects. Second, the goods that their work as peasants produced were of course, to a certain extent, traded, but these exchange relationships were not their responsibility. Third, in their poor families, very few goods were traded in this way, in the strict sense of the word. In particular, their physical energy was not an object of exchange, since it was entirely used to serve the production unit of which each woman was an inseparable part.

In the light of these perspectives, the analyses of this chapter attempt to answer three questions about the coolies' manual labour.

The first relates to the work that the migrant women do when they arrive in the area of the urban periphery. They sell their physical labour in performing the tasks that are assigned to them by the economic agents who hire them. Our observation will be about the forms, methods, and conditions of this new paid labour which takes them into the economic sphere.

The second question relates to their experience as working women, what we shall term their work culture, that is, the way they see themselves as paid working women and devote themselves to their work, as well as their concerns in this new life and type of work. The way they see the work they do, the relative value of different occupations, the desire for advancement through work are also aspects of this work culture.

The third question relates to the place that is made, imposed on or denied to coolie women, or on the contrary, taken and conquered by them, considering the new economic sphere that they are entering and with reference with the skills and roles that were theirs as peasant women. Their present work of physical labour is inevitably important from the very fact of the meaning and value set on it, and of the status given to or won by coolie women.

First experiences of casual labour

The skills and experience that were acquired in the village and in the fields are of no value or use on the urban labour market, which only provides migrant women with manual jobs requiring no level of professional qualification and therefore cannot bring them the happiness of agreeable or creative tasks. These are all jobs that are considered as lowly and servile. They are also inadequately paid, and the working woman starting from scratch has no recourse or defense in this respect. It is therefore an uncertain race from one job to another. There are a variety of casual jobs, insecurity, a search that is often renewed, running from one odd job to another, being turned down, receiving inadequate pay which forces them to find something else, their health impaired, long and expensive travel, dismissal without notice, work that is hard but ill-paid, etc., in a word, uncertainty and worry are their daily and permanent lot.

Subhadra HONMANE lost her husband shortly after she arrived in Pune. She sorted wheat for sale in a shop, and did the washing-up and laundry. She went to the *market yard* to buy vegetables to resell. There she met coolie women to whom she told her troubles. They took pity on her, seeing how much she was overworked, on several jobs at once. Anusuya

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KUMBHAR got her employment at the market; but even so, when she goes home after the market, she must still go out to private homes to do laundry and dish-washing.

Revue BHEGADE started out working in a brick yard. She mixed the clay that she filled the brick moulds with; she climbed into vans loaded with bricks to unload them, etc. Later, she was hired for excavation work on the canal at the foot of Parvati. With an old woman, her neighbour in Dandekarpul shanty town, she went to the *market yard*, where she found a job 20 years ago.

Sakhu JORI first worked on excavation jobs at the Ayurvedic pharmaceutical factory on Karvei Road. When this work was finished, I started selling watermelons and vegetables on the sidewalk, but I didn't make enough money,' she says. 'I went out doing dishes and laundry. But I earned very little and I had to go there twice a day. The woman who employed me was bloody-minded. Since the market work pays better, I got a job here.'

Bhim GORGE had to leave her work in a public canteen when, after many years, it closed down. That is what forced her to take a job at the market.

'My husband was a drunkard,' Hira DALVI confided. 'He didn't earn anything at all and he beat me.' She took refuge at her mother's. But her mother did not like the idea of her daughter going out to do laundry and dishes. 'I will never agree to anyone in our house spending her life emptying garbage and doing other people's rough work,' she told her. Since some neighbors worked at the market yard, Hira bai accompanied them and was hired there.

Gajara OMBASE easily got a job as a coolie, because many people of her Vajari caste were already working at the market. It was the same for Chandra UBHE from Nandivli, a village where for 40 or 50 years most of the men had come to work as coolies.

Saru AINPURE did laundry and dishes for many years, but she could not make both ends meet with what she was earning. She had problems with her employers, and changed them several times. Each time she had to adapt to their moods without saying anything, while submitting to their will. She went back to her home and rolled condiments there for six months. Then she got a job in a public canteen, where she earned 60 rupees a month making flat bread (*chapati*); but it was not enough. Her husband was a layabout. A sister-in-law got her a job as a coolie at the market. Anusuya TANDALE relates the same experience. Doing laundry and dishes at private homes she did not earn enough, and she also had to follow the employer's orders without saying anything. 'Employers are always getting at you. It's better to work at the market than at an employer's orders,' she concludes.

GHODKE bai also did dishes and laundry before getting hired in a bar that sold sugarcane juice, on the street.

Ahilya HARANAVLE cooked and served guests in a canteen that specialized in organizing wedding banquets for large numbers of guests. She sometimes recruited up to 40 women to work as waitresses: she earned a 1 rupee commission for each recruit. It was in fact not easy to find staff at short notice. She also worked in a flour mill packing flour in bags, at the rate of 10 rupees for 100 bags. She made 3 to 350 paise a day. She also sorted peanuts there. But the work was not steady. How could she eat on the days she wasn't working? She then got a job as a coolie.

Sita DIGHE's husband started as a coolie when he arrived in Pune 40 years ago, but he was a drinker who kept getting into fights. She spent several years making candy and grinding

tobacco, because he would not allow his wife to work as a coolie. At that time she was living in Kacei Street. She left the tobacco business when her mother got an attic in a room in Janata Colony where she went to live. She is now rehoused at Bibvevadi but despite her age she still has to work as a coolie to pay for the house she has built at Appar under the government's rehousing plan.

Kala SHELAR went with her mother to work in the market before her marriage. She had a rickshaw accident several years ago, since when she has had foot trouble. This forced her to stop working in the market to do laundry and dishes. She was doing it at 17 private houses for 300 rupees a month. In 1989, she had to go back to the market. It's painful for her to lift the sacks of vegetables but she has to because she has to earn the money.

Tara KAMTE has been a coolie for 35 years. Before that she worked in the wood market, where she carried heavy boards.

Tara JADHAV was recently hired as a coolie. Now she is going to live at Appar. Bahavani peth, where she worked at the union canteen, is too far away; furthermore, the cooker where she cooked the flat bread for many years was undermining her health.

Gavu BHAREKAR was a coolie. She opened a boarding house in her home, which was a success. But her husband began drinking: it was impossible for her to continue, boarders did not come any more. This forced her to work as a coolie.

Yamuna JADHAV has been a coolie for a long time. Her husband was so suspicious that she had to leave her job at the market. She got a job as a cleaner in a hospital. But since she was not earning enough, she had to go back to the market.

Rangu DIGHE carried bundles of sugar cane to a shop that sold sugar-cane juice when she first came to Pune, then she got a job in a hospital before being hired as a coolie.

Suman KOKARI earned her living cutting grass. She went long distances to cut the grass, towards Hadapsar and Manjari, then brought back the loads on her head to sell. She also got seasonal jobs weeding farmers' fields.

Gita POLEKAR could not take any utensils with her when she arrived at Pune. She was nearly destitute when she arrived in Pune, at the foot of Parvati, where by renting a little piece of land for 10 rupees, she built herself a shack. The neighbour women helped her greatly. She went to the central market to buy vegetables in order to resell them. One of her customers, a Brahman woman, gave her two billy-cans. She bought two pitchers, paying for them little by little at the rate of 1 rupee a day. Her unremitting work has earned her today television, straw matting and a sewing machine. Her parents-in-law worked in Bombay where her husband was a coolie who had learned the metal worker's trade. He had come back to the village in 1961, at the time when the Agrarian reform law gave the land to the cultivators, in order not to lose the family land. He is now a metal worker in Pune, and has worked for the Lal Nishan, H.M.S. and Congress unions. His brother found a job with the irrigation service. One of the sons-in-law is a drinker, who has repudiated his wife, who has returned home. Gita bai is learning to sew, and sews sacks because she thinks that it is not right to send a young woman to work in the market. Her husband rules her with a firm hand.

Many extra jobs

Anusuya KUMBHAR's husband has two wives; the other lives in the village where she works her in-laws' patch of land. Anusuya is now well past working age. She has been a coolie for 35 years, and her husband also works at the market. She lives in a tiny room in Shukravarpeth. She was operated on for cataract a few years ago, but has recovered only a little of her sight. She cannot cross the street alone. Yet as soon as she comes back from the market she continues to go to private homes to do laundry and dishes. Before her sight was impaired she also used to go to a shop to sort grains. She has only one daughter, who has had eight years of schooling but stays at home. She worries about getting her daughter married, and the expense involved.

Para INGULKAR has built herself a fine four-room house, but her son is running wild. He is married and has had two children but drinks to excess, and started taking drugs ten months ago. When Pam bai gets home in the afternoon, she prepares condiment for a women's co-operative that pays her by weight for her flat condiment cakes. She has been widowed for a long time.

Hira DALVI also kneads and flattens into cake shapes the condiment flour that she brings from the co-operative when she returns from the market in the afternoon. Her husband is an alcoholic who is often away from home. Her two young children are still in school. The marriages of the two older sons were expensive. She lives in a tiny room next to her mother's room that costs her 150 rupees a month.

Kusum THOPAT also has recourse to this type of extra work. Her husband has a good job in a factory that manufactures kitchen utensils, but is an inveterate drinker who does not bring any money home and beats his wife. She hurries home from the market, 'eating out of her hand' the millet bread that she has taken with her in the morning, and then goes to private homes to do laundry and dishes. With her mother dead and her father remarried, she cannot expect any help from her own family. Her in-laws have a little land, but the brother-in-law who cultivates it barely makes a living from it.

Tara KAMTE is a widow and no longer young. She had five daughters and two sons. The older boy is married; he has four daughters and a son himself, and began to drink when he lost his job at the Raja Bahadur textile factory when it closed in 1987. The younger boy earns his living, but his salary is not enough to support all these people. Tara must keep on working. When she gets back home in the afternoon, she helps her daughter-in-law to fold papers that she brought from a printer's

Revu BHEGADE also does the same type of work. Her daughter-in-law is alone in the house: she helps her fold the papers that she brings her.

Indu PANSARE is in a very critical situation. Despite her advanced age, she cannot stop working even though she has been a coolie since childhood, since before having had her first menstruation. She had a daughter who went to school for ten years and is now married with three sons. The oldest boy also went up as far as the tenth grade, but it wasn't enough to get him a job and he is unemployed, although he is married with two children. The second boy went to Bombay to become a flower seller, but without success. He came back to his mother's, but the setback so discouraged him that he began to drink in order to forget. The youngest boy works in a shop that recycles used paper. The oldest sells kerosene on his bicycle from a jerry-can tied to the back of it. As recently as two years ago, when Indu bai came back from the market, she unloaded vans of coconuts.

Many Dhangar women live in the Kaprea building at a place called Ghorpade peth and in the neighboring buildings. Girja DOMBALE, Anjana YAMGAR and Suman KOKARE are of that caste. In the afternoons, they go as far as Hadapsar to cut grass and to bring the heavy loads back on their heads. In the houses of the old Ghorpade peth buildings, the residents raise goats and buffalo cows to sell the milk, and they need fresh grass. Hadapsar is about 8 kilometres away. After working as coolies in the morning, the Dhangar women take a van to go to Hadapsar, or go there on foot if they cannot find one. They cannot do this work all year long; however, they devote themselves to it for nine or ten months. Other women, like SONDKAR bai, raise goats as a supplementary income source. Jana NIVANGUNE is not in a situation of great poverty, however she likes raising a cow at her home; she takes her out to graze when she comes home from the market.

Lila KARALE now lives at Apar. She has been working as a coolie in the market for 25 years. She has been widowed since 1985. Her husband never stopped drinking and getting drunk, and drank himself to death. He used to work as a foreman in the shop owned by Lila bai's paternal uncle. She is left with two sons and two daughters. When she first came to Pune, Lila bai lived near Jigamata garden where she found a tiny room. It was too small: she went to live in Dondekarapul shanty town. She moved to Janata Colony from where, with a photograph and identity card, she obtained a place in Appar. Her own family gives her support. Her maternal uncle also helped her to get a house at Appar. She added a room on to the back of the house. Her mother-in-law could not stand her; she put her land in the name of the other sister-in-law but gave nothing to Lila bai. Since Lila bai's husband drank and squandered everything, she had to work hard and without respite. While she was a market coolie, she also worked preparing and selling fritters and doughnuts on the street; or she would crush pimentos to sell them as powder; she went to help housewives prepare their supply of household condiments for the year; she crushed tamarinds for a grocery store; she also sewed for the neighbourhood. She was always obliged to have a job to do. Her brother bought her a sewing machine, and she still sews patchwork quilts. She also makes little items of clothing on her machine. She sent her children to school. The oldest daughter who was recently married, went to school for ten years and learned sewing. One son is now in the tenth year of school, the second girl is in the eighth, and the youngest boy is in the sixth. Earlier, when she was living in Janata Colony, she took on all the sewing jobs for a school master who lived in the same shanty town, and washed his blankets in exchange for the private lessons that he gave to her son, free of charge. 'You should never just do nothing,' she says, 'you should always keep working.'

While Chaya BAGAL takes young people to board with her, several other women have opened a canteen at her home where they serve meals to the boarders as a supplementary income source. Gavu BHAREKAR and others do this.

Kale DAMALE has three children. Her husband is a coolie, but a bad worker. He is a drinker who gets so drunk that he wets his bed. He is always picking fights with his wife and with the neighbors, whom he is always shouting at. When we went to his house, he shouted at us. Kala bai had to go to another room and forced him to stay in the kitchen while she made tea for us; she talked with us after having brought in the kerosene stove so as to make our tea elsewhere than in the kitchen. Kala bai's parents support her and help her, but when they come to see her, they are not able to bear her husband's behaviour; they are surprised that she can continue to put up with him when he beats her and the children and continually creates scenes. Kala bai has opened a small grocery store in her house. She gets behind her counter when she comes back from the market in the afternoon.

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Hire GIRE takes out her pushcart in the street, several days in the week to prepare doughnuts that she sells. Her husband used to do that before he died, She has a second pushcart that she rents out for the same purpose.

Thaka NANGARE, a Vanjari, who is a widow, is approaching 70 years of age but still goes to the market to work. She used to go to work in the *Dallas* fields in Alandi and to bring back sacks of onions, potatoes, seeds, etc.

Hira BHOKAR takes a basket of vegetables on her head in the afternoon, after the market, and sells them door to door. Tara MANKAR deposits vegetables at her house where people come to buy them from her. Subhadra HONMANE sells hers on a pushcart at Dondekarapul. The sale of vegetables, either pilfered or bought from the market, is a secondary activity that many of the coolie women do at home, on the sidewalk, from door to door, or from a pushcart.

A spirit of enterprise to hold on to a place in life

The coolie women face their lifelong daily challenges with tenacity and a spirit of enterprise, reflecting the truth of what they used to sing at the millstone: 'Without work, a woman has no part to play,'; in other words, they cannot have and hold any role whatsoever, anywhere at all. This is dramatically true when there is the kind of crisis that many coolie women experience. It is only to their energy as workers that they owe their existence, their personal survival and that of their families with which they identify their destiny as women, in short their place as human beings in this world. Only work can ensure them a place somewhere, both physically and morally, as their old song expressed it:

I went to work, labour never killed anyone
I am unworthy of my illustrious father.

The following cases have been selected to show the spirit of determination shown by so many women among the tragic hazards of their life as coolies, which allows them to hold on to a place in life.

Poverty forced Rangu DIGHE to leave the village and the farm. She had already sold her 360 grams of gold, and her husband's brother had preceded her to Pune where he found work with the city government. He had also sold a bit of land to pay for his sons schooling. Rangu bai now lives in Apar. 'I've never been afraid of work,' she says. She has two sons and a daughter. She likes the city. She came there, 15 years ago, with two children and only 13 rupees. At first she lived in Janata Colony and worked in a clinic as a cleaner. There were endless quarrels. One day a municipal inspector came to interview the staff. She stated that she earned 60 rupees. The doctor had ordered her to say that she earned 170 rupees. As she had not obeyed him, she was dismissed. She joined her husband in carrying bundles of sugar cane for a sugar cane business. 'The longest canes were twice as long as I am tall, but when you have to put food in your stomach, you can't weaken.' She is proud of being able to lift all alone sacks of mangoes at the market weighing 125 to 150 kilos, 'My friend, even though she is bigger than I, couldn't do it, but me, I did it. A 50 to 60 kilo sack, what's that? Not worth mentioning!'

Maya KALE is a member of one of the 15 Dhangar families that live in the old Kaprevada building. They came from Atpadi long ago, and are now the second generation, Maya bai had five years of schooling. Before working as a coolie, she wheeled a pushcart full of vegetables. 'You have to work. Does doing that work made me feel inferior? What do you

mean?' she asks, astounded by the question. Her husband used to sell vegetables from his bicycle. He had driven a bus in the village, but lost his job because he drank. He then got a job as a rickshaw driver, working for the owner of the vehicle. Using a bank loan, Maya bai and her husband bought a little three-wheeled vehicle (which her husband drove) to transport their goods in the city and a rickshaw that they rented out to someone else to drive.

Revu BEGHADÉ and Tara DHANVE were busy unloading crates of tomatoes. Surprised I asked 'How long will it take you to load this van?'. 'Ten, 15 minutes - no problem' and off they went.

Hira DONDKAR and Subhadra DARVATKAR are confident that they will survive by their manual labour. They now have a house with a sheet metal roof. 'One day we'll build a cement house. If you're not afraid of work you have nothing to fear.' They are both widows; Hira bai is childless, her friend has five children.

GIRE bai and PILANE bai, whom we met at work in the warehouse, told us 'Wait, look at the big sacks we can lift!'

Shaku KORPE has had two daughters and four sons. One son died when she moved to Pune, a second one ran away to Bombay on impulse and has not returned, and only one of the others goes to school. During the 1972-1975 droughts, the fields produced nothing at all. Her brother took her to Pune. Her husband looked for work as a night watchman and other minor jobs. 'He had lost the habit of working,' Shaku bai says. She had seven years of schooling herself, with good results, and wanted to become a teacher like her sister, but her in-laws' family did not allow it. Marathvada, where she came from, is backward. Her parents always said: 'You have to die where you're born'. She specially envies her sister who is retired now, a widow, but has been able to buy a van that she rents to a driver, while receiving at the same time a teacher's pension. When she came to Pune, Shaku bai worked at first for a mason. As she was then living in Bibvevadi, she sometimes took work as a farm worker in the fields at Dhankvadi. She also worked on a stone grinding machine producing a powder used for making household decorations at the *rangoli* festivals; she earned a rupee and a half a day, that was in 1978. The owner of her room at Bibvevadi did not want to keep her, and she went to live at Premnagar. She became a cook in a private home. She sorted and cleaned grains in a grocery store. As that was not sufficient for her needs, she took a job as a coolie.

In addition to the difficulties that everyone has, the situation of a widow is even more of a challenge. One has to know how to make the most of all one's resources of ingenuity and of all one's energy to deal with it, especially in view of the scorn or at least the indifference in which society holds widows. Not all of them are in such a desperate situation as Lila KAMBLE, whom we have already spoken of, or Thaku HAZARE, but these women are widows without children. Thaku bai was born in Pune where her parents had always lived. She ran away from her in-laws' house at Bhedsei (Mawal development block), rejecting the husband she has been given, to marry someone else. Her second husband died soon after. He too was from Bhedsei. Thaku bai went back to Pune where she did laundry and dishes to earn a living. The work was at a Brahman's home; 'these are good people', she said. She was not earning enough, so she went to the market as a coolie, at Sindhu SHELAR's suggestion. She now lives at Nanapeth, in a slum dwelling covered with sheet metal. She spent 3,000 rupees to improve her room with sheet metal walls. Her widowed mother now lives with her. 'Nobody helps the poor', she says, particularly in a situation like hers. 'You have to earn your bread yourself and live on what you earn.'

When a husband dies and the widow's relations with her own family are, if not broken off, at least less frequent and less cordial (a stigma marks a widow, even in the view of her own parents); and where there are several children to raise the situation is not promising, even if the family sometimes helps out by pity more than affection. **This** is the case for Lakshmi BHAME, **Bhim** GORGE, Kala LOKHARE, Hira DALVI and several others. The foundations of hope and courage are one's own physical resistance, capacity to work without sparing oneself, as well as assistance or occasional gifts, and sometimes even relationships maintained openly with men friends who sympathize and are ready to help. When the children are young, they have to be left at the house, with worries about what is happening to them, unless the mother takes her baby to the market with her. You have to hurry to get back to the house to put it in order after work and even to devote yourself to other additional tasks.

The women whose husbands are out of work and are supported by them need the same kind of courage. This is the case for, among others, SHINDE bai, KHAMKAR bai, KINARE bai, POL bai and KONDALKAR bai. Their husbands had decent jobs but lost them for different reasons, including as a result of strikes in Bombay textile factories. They had to go back to the village, where forced inactivity led to drunkenness and other bad habits. The wives had to go to Pune with the help of sisters-in-law, sisters or other people. They were hired as coolies, and when they had earned a little money, the husbands followed them to Pune. But their permanent idleness brings nothing to the household. The husbands then shuttle between Pune and the village while their wives have to exert themselves and slave away in order to raise the family with their work alone and their energy alone, taking the place of men who are failures, as the words of a song at the millstone which showed them the way:

I went to work without sparing my forces
Without sparing my forces, I feel the energy of a man.

Shile RAJNE has two sons and two daughters. Her husband lost his job at the Raja Bahadur textile factory when it closed two years ago. Those were hard days. Shile bai comes and goes between Pune, the market and the village. Her in-laws own fields: she supervises their working. The land has been divided between her husband and her brother-in-law. She has rented a room in her house to a teacher in the village. Her husband sells vegetables on the sidewalk.

The challenge becomes an even greater burden when the husband, whether he stays in the village or lives in the city, starts to drink to excess and becomes incapable of doing any work. When his wife comes home she has to look after him, possible even nurse him. One husband becomes tuberculous, another has indigestion and another falls ill. It is up to the wives to find the solution. Drunken husbands often beat their wives and their children and create unbearable scenes all the time. That is the situation that Shaku SHINDE, SABLE bai and many others find themselves in.

To tell the truth, the husbands maybe drinkers, but at least they are there, masters of the house, and the wife has a lord and master whose presence gives her respectability and security in a certain sense, no matter how weak and poor he may be. But when alcohol kills them the widow is then exposed defenseless to a society that gives her no consideration. This is the case for Ratna PAWAR, Lila KARALE and others. They knew, as well as their husbands, that solitude means abandonment. They strove to keep their husbands alive like gods, despite their faults. Their lonely widowhood was foreseeable. And once they were widowed, all the responsibility for their families fell on their shoulders.

Hausa KADU is in a similar situation, although her husband is handicapped for a reason that is beyond his control. She now has four daughters and two sons at Super Bibvevadi. She had a son and a daughter in 1959 when she came to Pune, foreseeing the flooding of her land. Hausa bai summoned all her courage, and when the last girl, Sassoon, was born, at the Pune public hospital, she had herself sterilized. When the nurse asked her if her husband would be coming to sign the request, she answered, 'No, he's a coward'. 'How will you sign?', they asked her. 'In my childhood, I watched over buffalo cows. Who was there to teach me anything else?' Eight years after her marriage, her husband was bitten by a snake and has suffered from pain in his foot ever since. Once, for a whole month, the foot swelled up again. Hausa bai took the initiative to have her husband's foot operated on, taking him to the hospital herself. She married her children off as cheaply as possible. All her daughters-in-law work at the market. She has excellent relations with them. She has had them all sterilized. She seeks no help from the gods. Once, 12 days after one of her childbirths, she went back to the market. It was winter. The *dalal* advised her to rest a few days at home because of the cold, but she did not listen to him.

Revu BHEGADE gave this description of her courage in the past: 'I came to Pune alone, sent away by my mother-in-law who threw me out of the house. I had a skin disease. I was young and pretty to look at. It was really hard for a young woman who attracted men's glances being alone like that. The coolie men and friends put all kinds of pressure on me but I came out unscathed from the ordeal'.

'Yesterday, a coolie threw tomatoes at a coolie woman. I came by and I took the man by the collar. I insulted him. Why should we be dishonored? It was in the newspaper', Lila NANGARE tells us. KHUMBAR bai, who is almost 70 years old now, also cannot tolerate people who are unkind to young women, When she sees such an occurrence, she intervenes herself and goes after the men. At her age, she can say anything she wants. People will listen to her meekly.

Working like a slave

Work at the market starts at five in the morning, with the sound of a siren that opens the market. You have to be there before the opening. That means getting up at three o'clock, because you have to take a bath, do the cooking and make sure of the water supply for the day, before going to the market. You get into the first *tempo* which shows up (a private vehicle, a small van or a three-wheeler fitted out for carrying merchandise in urban areas). You cannot be late. If you are, you have to take the *dalal's* insults. The working women of the market had certainly no say in setting the opening time at five o'clock. Neither the *dalals* nor the market committee asked their advice.

The coolie women are employed on the following jobs.

The most important is working with the sacks. They fill them with vegetables, put them on the scales for weighing and transport them from one place to another on their heads. Filling the sacks requires them to bend down to the ground to pick up the goods from a container or a basket, then straighten up to pour the contents into the sack. For weighing, they have to lift the sack by hand and walk to place it on the scales, then they lift it again to take it off the scale and place it on their heads to transport it to some other place. Transport of goods in sacks or crates is usually done on one's head, from the van or the *tempo* to the warehouse, or from there to the vehicle. Sometimes they unload and sometimes they load from the warehouse to the vehicles or from one vehicle to another. The vans and the *tempos* do not always park along the warehouse

platform. In this case, you have to walk a distance of 2 or 3 feet with the load on your head, going down two or three steps of the warehouse, then arrive at the loading ramp or the *tempo* where the sack or the crate must be lifted off the head and loaded on. There is often some distance between the warehouses and the vehicles, which makes all that many more steps to go up and down, and more loads to lift and put down again. These gestures are sometimes performed even more frequently, and the fatigue and working time are increased when a customer's vehicle arrives late.

Lifting the loads, loading them and unloading them, going up and down the steps are not operations that are easily carried out. On one hand, the floor of the warehouse is strewn with goods and waste. The vegetables have spattered the floor and made it slippery. On the dirt road below the warehouse platform, disorder is ever more striking: refuse, rotten merchandise thrown out or crushed, strewing the ground everywhere, or else picked up in little piles by women who are specially hired to sweep and clean up once the day's sales operations are done. You always have to watch out, even in summer, where to put your feet and find your way, so as not to slip, twist your ankle or lose your balance. In fact, because of the mud, the puddles and the rotted refuse, it is hard to work with *chapals* on your feet (thongs without straps). It is almost an obstacle course. Naked feet on the other hand, are easily hurt (insect bites, cuts, infections, etc.).

A *second operation* that coolies have to do is sorting the vegetables that arrive at the market after the suppliers' sacks have been unloaded. The women even come to the market at night when the goods arrive in order to sort them as soon as possible.

Gita GHULE lives in Bibvevadi. She had four sons and two daughters. Two of the sons died. They were market coolies. Of the other two, one is a woodworker, and the other works in a garage. They live near her. She could not send them to school. At first she lived in a village; she has only been in Pune for ten years. The wife of one of her sons is Gita bai's niece (her brother's daughter). Gita bai's husband was a drunkard who died of alcoholism. She went to the city with her six children because she could not find means of subsistence in the village. Her husband's oldest brother went there before her with his wife and both of them were already working as coolies. Her youngest brother-in-law's wife also came there to work as a coolie. As her in-laws have a small plot of land she goes there often to work on it. When she came to the city with her six children, her situation was so bad that she could not send any of her children to school. She worked at night and waited for the arrival of the first vans to do the sorting as soon as the goods were unloaded. She went home about noon and slept in the afternoon, getting back to the market at about six o'clock in the evening to spend the night there. Taking care of the house and the younger children took all the rest of her time. She did this work for many years for the same *dalal*, whom she never changed. She developed such good relations with her *dalal* that he now gives her 20 rupees a day, even if she occasionally does not come to work. He also has so much confidence in her that he has assigned her to supervise the operations of his warehouse. Meanwhile she has become owner of her house at Binvevado. Gita bai is a strong personality. The situation in the village has also improved. She was able to build a house there for 50,000 rupees. It is at Nandu, near Khadakvasla, about ten kilometres from Pune. She goes there every day after working at the market, and then comes back to the market at night to await the suppliers' arrival. She has also maintained close relations with her village. On the other hand, she has nothing to do with her two widowed daughters-in-law, whose husbands died of alcoholism. She could not, in the past, give her children the necessary attention, and they turned out badly. She despises her daughters-in-law, she calls them 'white legs' (a degrading insult). 'I can't even stand the sight of them.' This is strange behaviour on her part, considering her own previous situation.

The work in the onion and potato warehouses is an operation with somewhat different aspects. The vegetables first have to be sorted by hand into two piles according to size, the smaller ones on one side and the larger ones on the other; then the sacks, once filled, are sewn up and placed in order. The work lasts longer. These coolies usually do not return home until four or five o'clock in the afternoon, following a 12-hour work shift. We could only meet Sakhu SALEKAR, Vimal YADAV, Yashoda RANJNE and Tai MANKAR at home in the evening, because they arrived home late.

Many of the *dalals* have two warehouses to supervise with their coolie women. The women responsible for carrying out all the necessary operations, on schedule in both places at once, spend their time dashing from one place to the other. Nanda GARAD and Hira BHOKAR, who work in two warehouses, face the same situation, one of them working with vegetables and the other with potatoes and onions, where all the work is done by four women who shuttle from one to the other.

The women who work in the fruit market do not work just in the warehouse. They have to carry the cases and crates of fruit from the place where the vans stop to the warehouse and vice versa. These vans often park far away from the warehouse platform, and the coolies then have to carry the goods for some distance. Some of them also spend the night at the market, waiting for the vans to arrive so that they can unload the cases. They usually do not return home until early afternoon. Then they take their baths and their meal, and prepare the evening meal that they take with them when they go back to the market for the night, to await the arrival of the fruit vans. Anusuya BARDE and Cabu VADKAR, a mother and daughter, have been doing this for several years. Anusuya bai has been living in Pune since childhood, when she came with her mother-in-law. At the age of 14, she went out selling vegetables with her. Her husband worked in a sawmill. Her in-laws lived in Bhavani peth. She has been living for 40 years in a room in Rameshwar chowk that she rented when she left her in-laws' home because she could not get along with them. Despite her advanced age and her inability to lift the cases of fruit, she provides minor services for a small wage. She is one of the women who still spend all their time, day and night at the market. She does not go home until noon or one o'clock and is back at the market around six o'clock, after bathing, eating, resting a while and preparing her evening's dinner which she takes with her. Chabu bai, her daughter, had no children. Her husband took a second wife. Then she had a daughter, but she left her husband and came to live with her mother because she could not stay with her husband's second wife. Her daughter has just taken the tenth year examination at school. Chabu bai is anxious to put her in an occupational course, because her grades are not good enough to become a teacher. She spends the night at the market with her mother. Anusuya's son died of alcoholism.. He left five daughters and a son with their mother. Anusuya does not want this daughter-in-law because 'the market is not a desirable place' she says. Mangal BORKAR also left her in-laws near Baramati because of disagreements. Her father went to Pune as a child; his brother had mortgaged their land to a Marwadi who cheated them, and they had to leave. Her father had rented a room in Ravivar peth, and worked in a sawmill at Bhaveni peth. Her mother had always been a coolie, as has Mangal bai. Once her father found work at Lonand for two years. He took his family to live there, leaving his room at Ravivar peth to his brother. But the brother did not pay the rent for those years, and the owner took the dwelling back. Mangal bai's parents had to build a shack near the Laxmi Narayan cinema. Mangal bai lost her father in 1982. She now lives at Balaji nagar near Katraj, far away from the market. She has built a fine house. But in fact she spends all her time at the market. She does not return home except for a few hours in the afternoon. She spends her nights at the market, working in a fruit warehouse. One of her brothers is a rickshaw driver, and another died in an accident. His widow and two children live with Mangal bai. Her sister-in-law is also a close relative. As her own family is

very poor, she cannot expect any help from them. Mangal bai is strong-willed. She is now comfortably off. People gossip about her a lot: where does she get her money from? Mangal is going to build a little shop for her sister-in-law behind her house, where the sister-in-law will sell vegetables that Mangal bai brings back from the market. The sister-in-law has seven years of schooling.

In addition to the operations described above, the women have to comply with the *dalal's* demands for more personal services. The *dalal* often asks them to do errands: go get some tea, bring back some doughnuts. There are many chores that are not paid for, over and above the paid duties. Another operation is never paid for: the coolies put that day's unsold vegetables in sacks and take them upstairs to a furnished room above the warehouse which belongs to the *dalal* as a living room and office. In the morning they bring them down again. This service has to be done willingly and spontaneously with no payment. Every day they also have to pick up the leftovers and clean up the warehouse. In general it must be said that the *dalals* and the coolies are not like an employer and his employees in their relationship to each other. The *dalals* have always refused to consider their coolie women as salaried workers. They absolutely refuse to acknowledge the business law, *Shop and Establishment Act* of 1948 as applying to the relationship between them and their coolies. They deny having special relationships with them.

Among the heavy work activities besides those of the market, there are those that are very tiring that should be emphasized and which are in addition to those of the work at the market. The work of preparing condiments, for example, requires remaining seated for four or five hours in the same place to knead and roll the dough in the form of flat cakes. Each one has to have exactly the same round shape and the same weight. If not it will not be accepted by the co-operative company that handles the sales. This work also means additional movements to get the flour every morning at the co-operative centre and to deliver the finished dried products that are put in a sack the evening before. To dry the condiments, they have to be spread out on paper outside in full sunshine after they have been kneaded and rolled. This requires leaning over and bending down to the ground. It is necessary to go and turn them over from time to time. They have to be watched so that nothing gets them dirty and that nothing falls on them and spoils them. At night they have to be picked up and put into a sack for delivery the next morning, when more flour is picked up.

Laundry and dish washing require going from house to house on foot, and climbing staircases in the buildings. Obviously, one has one's hands in water. If the employer gives good soap, the work is more agreeable, otherwise the handling of chemical detergents damages one's hands. Sweeping and cleaning up in private homes also gives rise to problems.

Only one job is easy, selling the vegetables they bring back from the market. This is why most of the coolies do it without hesitation. No extra effort is required to bring the vegetables back home; there is no need for another errand to put them in the house and sell them to neighbour women who come to buy them while the coolie is attending to her domestic duties. Nor is it unpleasant either to sit on the street for an hour or two and sell them to passers-by.

Three obsessive concerns

Three major concerns plague the coolie women while they are at work, even more painfully than the physical fatigue, which is also a source of pride. Three anxieties are ever on their minds: children to care for and raise, protection in their old age, and keeping their health.

The children

'The eagle soars into the sky thinking only of his children,' according to a saying. The bird can at least direct his piercing glances on his eaglets' nest. The coolie women must very often leave their children behind them, leaving the house early in the morning without being able to watch after them or give them into someone's care during their absence. It is not enough to commend them to their god. Children need the presence and affection of another human being, without which they cannot grow up properly. But caring for them, the first imperative, requires the young coolie mothers to leave them to themselves in the shanty town when they have grown too big to be taken to the market in a basket or a blanket.

'I had just given birth,' Hausa KADU explains. 'It was about a week afterwards. I was still recovering. I went to the market anyway. It was in the days when coolies were paid by the purchase of handfuls of vegetables by the *dalal*. 'Women, you are not going to be able to do it. Do you want to die?' the *dalal* said to me. He gave me a cup of hot tea and told me to wait a few days before coming back to the market. But what could I do? Two babies to nurse and a sick husband. How could I stay home doing nothing? Where would I find food?' 'I put my 12-day old baby in a basket and I went to the market,' Gajara OMBASE explains. 'I put everything down somewhere nearby and I picked it up again going home when the work was done. That's how I did it. Whether it rained or the wind blew or it was cold, from the twelfth or thirteenth day I took the baby from the warmth of the cradle and we went to work in the market.' Hira BOKAR relates the same experience: 'He was my youngest, 12 days old. I put him in a basket and I went to the market invoking the name of the god. The people around me looked at the baby with wide open eyes'. Mangal ROKADE still brings her baby with her when she goes to work. When the baby cries and his mother has gone out to load a sack, another woman goes over to the baby and gives him a nice little smile to reassure him and console him by talking to him. Ratna PAWAR relates that when she became a widow she had to take her three daughters out of school, because who could now pay the school fees and take care of the house? Her daughters were in the ninth, seventh and fifth years. However she did not lock them up in the kitchen. Laxmi BHAME also had three daughters, but she had another worry; what was the use of keeping them idle in the house, particularly because they were pretty and easy prey in their mother's absence. She looked for a respectable family to take them as servants, which would look after them and give them food and lodging. She put her daughters in families where they spent 24 hours a day. They were Brahman families. 'Giving birth to children and then putting them into another home is as bad as being sterile,' she says. Paru INGULKAR had only one boy when she was widowed. Who could keep an eye on him when she was at the market? He played truant. He ran around in bad company. He had no schooling and got into a lot of trouble. He is married now; he drinks, beats his wife and harasses her. Paru bai supports her daughter-in-law, but it is too late to reform the husband. He sells vegetables on a pushcart in Sahakar nagar. Paru bai is very much afraid of him: 'I will kill you one day,' he told his mother. She spends a great deal of money on religious rites and practices praying that her son will stop drinking. He has a son that Paru bai wants to put in an English school. She speaks a little English to him, but the future is gloomy.

Shakuntala PAWAR followed her husband to Pune. He drank and beat her, and didn't work much. She left him. What could she do? She had a boy. As she lived in Janata Colony, with a card and an identity photograph, she obtained a house in Bibvevadi where she now lives. She took in another man with her as a companion. These events disturbed her son who is now fifteen. He is not learning anything in class. He is angry and is always away from the house. The first husband comes to the market to see Shakuntala and beats her.

Ambu KOKARE is a Dhangar. She has a son and a daughter. Her slum dwelling in Appar Bibvevadi is a shack five feet high, built with pieces of sheet metal and plastic, with no foundations. It is damp and has no electricity. Ambu bai went to school for six years but her husband is illiterate. She came to Pune six years ago from Atpadi. She first lived in Ghorpade at the home of some other Dhangars, but how long can you take advantage of other families' hospitality? She has two children, 'It is enough, to tell the truth,' she says, but she has not yet been sterilized. 'I will have to have an operation now.' Her husband picks up leaves from trees that he sells to feed goats. Ambu bai has been a coolie for four years. She raises goats for sale, with her husband. The husband and wife work at this job. When she was seven months pregnant, she stopped working at the market. Her husband earned a little money and she did not go back to work until six or seven months later, being unable to leave the baby alone in the slum dwelling. But it was that much less wages and that much less food for the children, the mother, and the babies.

Child care is one of the basic concerns. Rakhma TANPURE, Ahilya HARANAVLE and Hira DALVI took their children out of school because 'Who will take care of the house? Who will take care of the youngest ones?' when they have gone to the market, 'And if they do not go to the market, who will feed them?'

Children can provide reasons for hope, but there is no certainty that these reasons will last. Shaku PAWAR's son, for example, has a temporary job. Once he has the status of permanent employee, he will take his mother into his home and have his sister go to school until the tenth year. He has decided not to get married before achieving this. Such expectations are always uncertain, because three questions remain without any absolute assurance of a solution. The first is the son's access to a job that is well enough paid. The second is how permanent this job is, which depends on the employer, the nature of the job, and the boy's qualifications as well as his good behaviour. No woman can be sure that her son will not start drinking and squandering his mother's wages. The third concern is finding a husband for the daughter, or more specifically, the way that the young married daughter, between 14 and 16 years old, will become accustomed to her in-laws. Nothing is assured in this respect, and the same questions apply about this husband as about her own son. There are few women who, like Revu BHEGADE or Rakhma TANPURE can congratulate themselves for having married their daughters well.

Old age

Old age is like a second childhood, says romantic literature. Middle-class readers think this idea charming. The coolie women are very concerned about their old age; the thought of it disturbs them greatly, particularly when they are childless widows.

Hausa BATGE had two sons. She had inherited a bit of land from her parents, but her husband sold it and gradually squandered the money. Soon afterwards she was widowed. After that her two sons died. She has been a coolie for more than 40 years. She has never been able to count on anyone for support in all her life. The *dalal* sometimes gives her two or five rupees if she asks him to. She has lived in different places, at Jondhale chowk, Nanapeth, Mitha Ganj. She is absolutely all alone now. She bathes in cold water every day of the year. She sometimes seeks money from different people. The *dalal* interceded to have her receive the allowance that the government grants to old people who are alone and have no source of support. The money comes to her addressed to a *dalal* at the market, as if she did not even have a name of her own any more. She now lives at the market yard. It is said that she is 78 or 79 years old. Years of

labour have shrivelled her and furrowed her with wrinkles. The *dalal* gives her a sari every year. She is waiting for death.

For many other women the constraints and hazards of their past and present lives have not and still do not allow them to hope for help from their children, husband, relatives or friends. The market remains a faint hope of a pittance, a very slight one. There are several reasons that account for the lack of real support from their sons in their old age.

Sona MARATHE is 70 years old. She had three sons, but two died of tuberculosis; one was a chauffeur, and the other worked in a flour mill. They were married; one of the two widowed young daughters-in-law lives with Sona at Navi peth, the other at Ghokale nagar in one of the rooms she obtained there. Both of them have children. They both work at home preparing condiments, but the work pays very little. Sona bai's husband has always lived in Pune. His father had migrated earlier because the land did not produce enough to feed his family. He worked for the municipality, and receives a pension of 100 rupees a month, which is totally inadequate. He works by the roadside repairing bicycles all day long. Sona bai has always been a coolie, she has been going to the market every morning for 40 or 50 years. She has always worked in the same warehouse for the same *dalal*. She lived at Navi peth; as a victim of the Pune flood, she obtained a place at Ghokale nagar. She has very little to do with the village of her birth, and only goes there occasionally for the annual village assembly. She raised three daughters who are married now. One left her husband and lives with a police inspector of the untouchable Mahar caste, who has a good job. The other two went to live with their in-laws, but one of them is widowed, and returned to her mother who gave her a room at Ghokale nagar. Sona bai feels forced to go to the market when their needs are urgent, She cannot lift heavy loads any more. She does small jobs though, carrying light loads of 5 or 10 kilos. The *dalal* gives her 4 or 5 rupees from time to time. She keeps going to the market despite her age so that she can bring back vegetables. She goes there in the morning with everyone else by *tempo*, and comes back by bus. Her old age would be less difficult if her husband could sell the bit of land he has at Akolei. 'Up to now we have been able, one way or another, to avoid losing the land (because of the agrarian reform that gives land to those who cultivate it), even though we live in the city. We saved it by having it worked, but we only got a few sacks of grain from it. We can't count on it any more. I have two brothers who also live in Pune. We all want to sell the land and live off the money from the sale. But some uncles of ours who have the adjoining land won't let anyone buy it. They want us to give it to them at a very low price.'

Bhim GORGE and **Narmada SONDKAR** came to Pune with their sons, whom they hoped would support them in later years. But one of GORGE bai's sons died and the other is a drunkard. SONDKAR bai's only son does not have much education; he only learned to sew. He sews at home on a machine he bought, and tries to earn a living from this work. He makes no effort to help his mother the more so because he is a drinker. Bhim bai and Narmada bai live alone now, with no support. They have to keep on going to the market for a pittance and to invent any kind of expedient to survive.

Shaku AINPURE, Hausa KHILARE and Paru KOTKAR have the same trials to relate. They still have to earn a living, because the younger generation that they reared cannot or will not give them support. Too many different disabilities have accumulated that have harmed them and finally condemned them to helplessness.

Paru KOTKAR came from the Ahmednagar region. Her husband left home and the village over disagreements with his family 40 or 50 years ago. How could his people help him

out after that? Yet he owned some fields. Paru bai and her husband have been coolies since then. They lived in Navipeth, and as flood victims they were assigned three rooms in Gokhale nagar. Paru bai has three sons and two daughters. One boy is a rickshaw driver, and another one has a job. But the generation gap is so great that Paru bai cannot get along with her daughters-in-law, nor with the daughter of her brother, who also migrated to Pune earlier on. She could not provide sufficient education for her sons, nor supervise their education, because she has always left for the market at four in the morning. The sons have become vagabonds and even criminals.

Even when sons remain devoted to their mother, they are still totally unskilled, because their level of education gives them no access to any kind of vocational training. Their coolie mothers have to keep going to the market at an age where they could have expected to benefit from a well-earned rest.

Sakhu AINPURE lives in Shukrawar peth, in Shinde Street. She has had four sons. Since her marriage she has lived in Pune, where her husband already worked for the municipality. She was very young when she lost her father. Her mother came to Pune to join her. She has a brother who also came to live in Pune and succeeded in finding a job in a Vanaz factory. Sakhu bai lives with him. Her eldest son, a poorly educated house-painter, lives in a room nearby. He earns only a little money and drinks a lot. Two other sons are married. Sakhu's husband died of alcoholism. She raised her four sons. One is an electrician (wireman) in the public transport system, and the youngest has just been hired for the same work. Although they were both born in Pune, neither of them received an education. They played truant while their mother slaved away at the market. Now that she is very old, she earns very little money at the market because she does not have the strength to do the work. Everything she earns goes for that day's expenses; it is not possible for her to save.

After 40 or 50 years of working at the market, age and fatigue wear down one's strength. When, as in the case of Anusuya BARDE or Donde BORADE, it is necessary to keep on going to the market because of the absence of support or just to meet at least some of their small daily needs, then their earnings are very small and they must also suffer the *dalal's* sarcasm, ridiculing the old women who are incapable of lifting sacks and crates.

Dhonda BORADE is not really in such need as the others. She has been working at the market for 40 years, but she has three sons. One of them has a job in Pune, the second is a farmer in the village and the third is a rickshaw driver. Dhonda bai had to leave the village with her husband because her father-in-law was harassing her. Both of them have always worked as coolies. They now have a comfortable house at Bhavani peth. 'But what is the use of staying at home idle?' Therefore she goes to the market, but the *dalals* and the other coolies, both men and women, cannot stand having old women at the market - it is not their place. 'They insult us. Old women are good for nothing! We have to suffer it in silence.' Her son is building a house in the village, and she goes there often.

Some old women, like Dhonda bai, want to keep working despite their advanced age, because they do not want to stay at home and be dependent on their children, at least for small needs like tobacco, a betel leaf, etc. All their lives they have fought to be independent and self-sufficient. They have made a habit of relying on their own strength. They have a sense of autonomy and dignity. How can they beg their children for their small needs? We are ashamed to hold out a hand all the time, especially for such things.' They want to earn a little change at the market so that they can pay for these small pleasures.

Anyway, whether driven to the market by a sense of independence or the need to survive, they are not greeted warmly there. Only physical strength provides rights of entry. The market is not concerned about its former workers' problems in their old age, as the situations of Laxmi MORE and Saru BARAL can testify.

Saru BARAL was born at Shirur. Her father was a policeman who died of alcoholism. Her widowed mother was left with six children. She took refuge with her father in Pune, but the room was too small. She went to live in a shack at the foot of Parvati. She was given in marriage to a coolie, an inveterate drunkard too, who lived in Shukravar peth. The owner evicted them for security reasons, and also because the rent was paid irregularly. Saru bai went to the shanty town at the foot of Parvati. Her coolie husband had her hired as a coolie also. She has two sons and a daughter. She cannot ensure their education. The older one is a coolie, just as heavy a drinker as his father. The daughter-in-law does laundry and dishes. Sar bai is old now but must continue going to the market, where the other coolies, both men and women, urge her not to come back. 'Stay at home now, you can't lift anything any more.' She went to seek help and advice from the president of the union, to whom she confided. When I go home, there's nothing to eat. It's a shambles. My husband and my son are drunk and start fights. They want me to give them money for drink. I've had it up to here. I don't want ever to go back home.' Her daughter-in-law has two children and has to put up with the same difficulties. Her brother cannot help at all. He is as destitute as she is. 'For the weak, a brother's help, at least for one night,' she says quoting an old song at the millstone. According to a Marathi expression, 'life is ever fire and ashes'. Only the market could be a place of relative rest and calm for Sam bai, but old age is not respected or desired there.

Two statements from women who, on the other hand, were able to secure an old age without anguish lead us to a final observation on this subject. The profiles of Gita GHULE and Dagada LONDE show that the uncertainties and hazards of life are not overcome without a combination of unremitting work, skill, the ability to seize opportunities, even the chance of being insensitive to one's needy close relations, or resorting to hidden craftiness and expediency. Just as disabilities reinforce their efforts to plunge the weakest people into helplessness and degradation, strokes of good fortune combined with worldly wisdom and shrewdness reinforce their efforts in an opposite direction. But in any case, however different the behaviour and results may be, it all comes back for everyone, each in her own way, the same general context of insecurity, lack of protection, in a word, a context of lawlessness or of a social jungle. The statements below show how certain women know how to take advantage of the adverse circumstances, in which so many others are also struggling, to use their personal strengths, in this case the maintenance of close and self-interested relations with the *dalal*. Dagada bai's associates are suspicious of her for having succeeded in life, despite the handicaps her family suffered, by serving as an intermediary for the *dalal*, recruiting women to work, and even acting as a pimp for him. The reasons Dagada gives for continuing to work at the market are surprising, in view of her situation in general.

Dagada Londe lives in Shahu chowk. She has lived in Pune since childhood. Her husband used to work for a Marwari businessman, but a scooter accident left him physically handicapped. He became a flower seller, opening a small private shop. Dagada bai had two sons who died in childhood, and two daughters. She very much wanted a boy; she had many rites performed and made many pilgrimages, but in vain. She finally gave it up and contented herself with her two daughters. They grew up, and they now have boys with degrees in letters and business, who have assured jobs. Dagada bai has been a coolie for 35 years. Her *dalal* is a god to her. She has always maintained a close relationship with him. In addition to her 12 pilgrimages to Pandharpur, as well as Alandi, Vai, Panchgani, Tuljapur, etc., she goes to the

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village to help out in the fields, and receives grain in return. Her situation is good and she has nothing to worry about. Why does she keep on working at the market despite her age? We always need a little money. What's the use of loafing around the house?

Health

There are limits to heavy labour and overwork. When you deploy your energies unsparingly, fatigue soon takes hold of the body. You soon feel exhaustion. As a result of lifting the loads, back pain, fatigue and even accidents are inevitable.

Phula PAWAR has obtained a sort of 'ornament' around her neck. Carrying loads on her head has seriously weakened her neck, and she suffers from spondylosis. There is no way out except for a collar brace supporting her neck. Lila KARLE will soon have to wear the same ornament. But for these two women who will wear this collar, how many more are there who suffer in silence without a support or remedy for their difficulty? They cannot go to consult a doctor, and still less can they follow his advice, as they do not have the money to pay the necessary care. Lila KARLE not only has spondylosis, she has also just had a heart attack. The doctors have advised her to work slowly and very moderately, avoiding any fatigue as much as possible. But what does that mean? How can she work without much effort if she has to earn a living for her family? The solution to the coolie women's illnesses is beyond their reach.

Pains in their legs, feet, heels, knees and the backs of their legs are aches that affect them every day. They are porters, and they have to carry and walk, on their feet all day, going up and down, lifting and loading. All the weight bears on their feet and legs, with the pins and needles and trembling that result. Rebu bai spent 250 rupees in vain trying to get rid of these pains. A doctor told her to go to the hospital to have a perfusion. It did not help, but she thought that she really felt better. Anusuya BARDE has terrible pains in her knees, which are swollen. She has to wrap them in bandages to be able to work.

Health problems particularly affecting women are both common and ignored. Anyway, they never talk about them openly, only whispering among themselves. The weight of the loads, the overwork and the variety of tasks, all of which demand a bodily effort, lead to pains in the stomach, hips and lower back, in addition to gynecological trouble. But the coolie women do not willingly agree that these troubles can be due to work. Are they also aware that this would not be much use to them: what could they change in order to prevent their illnesses?

Accidents are of course a terrible disaster.

MARNE bai fell while she was carrying sacks, and broke the neck of her thighbone. She has been at home for six months. She has four daughters, and the youngest is still at home; she will soon have to be married. The other three have gone to live with their in-laws, but one has just come home with her baby, rejected by her husband. She will also work as a coolie. MARNE bai's husband works in a kitchen utensil factory, for 400 rupees a month (in 1989). Her parents had land that was mortgaged; she paid off the debts and recovered the land. Now the sister-in-law refuses to recognize that she has any right to this land.

Indu PAWAR had a lump on her neck. She had it cauterized with a hot iron and tattooed, according to the traditional ritual practices but it was still there. She knows that there are doctors at the public hospital who give free consultations, but she also knows that they will advise her to stop lifting loads and to take four months' rest. Who will provide for the family during that time? Her two married daughters live with their in-laws and her husband is mentally handicapped. In any case, he has returned to the village, where he makes his sisters-in-law

work in the fields. One can only say that the good days are over now, and bear the others in silence.

In these circumstances, how much attention can be given to minor everyday pains that occur at work: injuries, scratches due to the corners of crates, etc. ? If a scratch bleeds, a green leaf taken from a vegetable that has fallen on the ground will stop the blood and a couple of minutes' pause are enough time to think of it before going back to work. Anyway, where do you find a first-aid kit in the market or how would you bring it from home? 'Is that our house?' Were the corners rusty? No doubt the question crosses their minds immediately as one more concern to be quickly rejected, because if they stop any longer to check it and look for the desired treatment they would have to leave work; and work waits for no one. The *dalal* and the other coolies would quickly call out for her to come back to work. The van drivers do not have the time to wait for such minor occurrence.

Tuberculosis, pleurisy and conditions brought about by poor diet are also troubles that are related to the coolies' working conditions. Falls sometimes lead to breaking and losing teeth.

The market committee has never considered providing the slightest help or establishing the slightest medical protection for the workers at the workplace itself. It is up to the coolies to take care not to expose themselves to any health problems or, if that should happen, to bear it with endurance as Gita bai did.

Gita YEVALE came to Pune when she got married. Her in-laws lived there and owned an oil mill. They died shortly afterwards. She had a son and a daughter. Her husband drank himself to death. Right away, one of her husband's sisters took 15 grammes of gold and 7,000 rupees that she owned and threw her out of the room that she had already paid rent for. She worked as a coolie but left that work for a job as a cleaner in a clinic. She had pleurisy and the new job allowed her to get treatment and medication. After she was cured, dissatisfied with the clinic job which she considered dirty, she went back to the market. She had a fall there and broke some teeth. She had to do extra work in the afternoon as a worker in a nursery school, then going on to wash dishes before going home, Her husband's brother sold the land in the village, but kept the 70,000 rupees he collected refusing to give any of it to his sister-in-law. The owner of the room that she rented after being expelled from the other one, and has occupied since then, wanted to evict her and made things as difficult as possible (cutting off the electricity, etc.). Her brother lives near her but is completely uninterested in his sister. Her son has just got a job as an electrician (wireman). It is her best hope.

Pride or shame?

Of course one does not ask coolie women what services they are able or willing to provide, or how they would consider doing them, and still less what they think about the organization, division of labour and working conditions at the market yard. They can at least apprehend their duties with feelings and judgments that reflect the relevant systems of representation and value current in their community, in describing the way they perceive themselves as coolies in the Pune central market.

Broadly speaking, by comparison with the job of a coolie, domestic tasks at private homes, basically laundry and dish washing are considered as tiresome and degrading.

All the coolies agree with TANDALE bai, JORI bai or Hira DALVI that household employees' duties are a source of all kinds of trouble. It means putting up with the caprices,

whims, reprimands and remarks of the employers. In addition to these irritating nuisances, they are dirty jobs - they all mean working with rubbish and trash. The leftovers from the meals are, culturally speaking, held in the disrepute which is attached to their aspect as remains that are defiling. Their baseness inevitably soils the women whose function is to rid the homes of them. The same is true of dirty clothing. The coolie women naturally perceive these service tasks as socially demeaning. These feelings are no doubt less strong among women who only do them occasionally, for some extra income. Nevertheless, they are in a sense sources of humiliation for peasant women who are used to more dignified work. Gita YEVALE feels the same way about her work as a cleaner in a clinic. By comparison, work in the market yard is less servile and less degrading, 'cleaner' and less 'shameful'. The first time we met her at the market, Anusuya KUMBHAR hid from us the fact that she washed dishes in the afternoon. We had to go to her house in order to become aware of it.

The second negative aspect of domestic work is that it is in no way permanent or clearly defined. This is even more true of other extra work, like sorting grains and dried vegetables at a grocer's, kitchen work in a public canteen that serves banquets, or preparing condiments, etc. Third, these jobs present their own difficulties which are often more disastrous for physical and mental health than the market jobs, which despite their difficulty are not as debilitating as sorting grains, preparing condiments, cooking *chapatis*, etc., all of which are done sitting down and bent over, which is bad for the spine. Market work provides a more balanced form of exercise.

A coolie's work, despite the absence of protective laws, is in fact a permanent job, unless the worker herself decides to leave it. Once she is hired, she need have no fears of being dismissed. She need not, as is the case for the other jobs, keep on looking for them and making sure that she gets them. This assurance of a job that will last provides a strong sense of security, which is reinforced by the assurance of a specified salary. At least, the money needed for daily needs is assured. This removes immediate worries.

For example, Chaya TANGE is a young woman who has been married for two years, and has a one-year-old son. Her in-laws have land in the village. She and her husband could live there with no fear of going hungry. But they came to Pune because, she says, 'new money gives pleasure'. These various aspects explain the feeling of pride that is sometimes prompted by the thought of being a coolie woman working in the market: the stability of the work, the assurance of a daily wage, independence and self-confidence of drawing pay, an end to wandering around, the search for temporary jobs and the distress of the past. A coolie's job gives one a position in life, a sense of belonging. Shaku SHINDE was doing her laundry when we came to meet her at her house. 'I have to wash my sari, because I go to the market yard. You have to look right when you go there,' she explains. 'There is no reason to go there looking like a mess. We are women who work in the market yard.'

Despite everything, for the majority of the coolies their dominant feeling and basic perception are that coolie work is forced labour, imposed on them through poverty, and devoid of the dignity and respect that came with being a peasant and working the land. The work isn't hard, but it isn't honorable,' says SHELKE bai. Many coolies testify to this, often adding: 'Is work at the market a job for young girls?' Rakhama Tanpure took in one of her daughters who had been recently married but was rejected by her husband. When asked why she did not bring her along with her to the market she answers at once 'What take my little damsel to the market! Do you know what you are saying? Is that the kind of atmosphere where we can take girls with us?' 'Explain it to us tell us why you can't bring them here,' I asked. 'what good is it to explain it to you? What good would it do? Would it change anything? After all, why should I keep it

from you?' In her opinion, there is no hope that the atmosphere of the market will ever change. Rakhama bai sent her daughter to do dishes. 'It's a nasty job, no doubt about it. But at least they don't make filthy remarks.' Gita POLEKAR and her husband feel the same way. Their daughter cannot stay with her husband, who does not want her any more. They placed her in private service making *chapati* bread. They had her take sewing courses and bought her a sewing machine. '*Dalal* and the coolies may use vulgar language and show uncalled-for behaviour we don't care any more, we're used to it.'

For many of the coolie women, this work, whose immediate environment discredits it is a last resort imposed on them by their husband's drinking. Malan KARANJKAR says 'if not I would never have come to work at the market'. 'First, it is true that the market is not a place for girls. But sometimes there isn't any choice; in that case you have to know how to look after yourself. Despite that, Jiji UTEKAR found jobs there for her daughter-in-law, Kalpana UTEKAR and her daughter, Mangal BORGE. But she is careful to add: 'I go there myself and my son-in-law is a coolie too. With the two of us, it means that there are two members of the family to watch over them. There is no danger. In these conditions the kids can safely work at the market'. Shashikala takes her two daughters-in-law with her. There is nothing else she can do because at the house there is the bleakest poverty; even though one of her sons is a chauffeur and the other is a builder, it is clear that their fatal weakness and incompetence have left the home in dire straits. 'In our warehouse no one speaks rudely,' she says. 'In the others people are vulgar and licentious. But in ours, the *dalal* and the coolies behave properly.' That is clearly an evasive and equivocal answer.

Kala AMBADE lives in Dattavadi. She has built a four-room house there. But her sons are inveterate drinkers, idlers and good-for-nothings. Her only choice is" to take her daughter-in-law with her; if not there would be nothing to eat at home. Kamala MALEKAR says disdainfully that a coolie's job at the market is equivalent to prostitution. 'Nobody respects the coolie women who work at the market. The only advantage is that you make a little money.' This explained Anasuya BARDE's behaviour when she first worked at the market. When she came and left, she hid on her back the basket she used to carry vegetables or fill the sacks.

Many coolie women are aware of the shame and dishonour that are attached to their work as coolies and debase their social status. During the discussion, as she was going back and forth, Indu PANSARE told us We are women who work in the market! Any time an argument starts anywhere, in one place or another, right away people say 'Ah! those are the market coolies'. Who will listen to them? Who will let them speak? We have to put up with anything patiently in order to put something in our stomachs. The actresses in the popular theatre put up with everything for a pittance. They can't answer back to a man at all. They can't contradict him. If some fellow wants to sit her on his lap, she has to let him. Her family depends on her work. What is there to criticize? Is it her fault? We are actresses too, it's our job'.

Conclusion

'Liberated' work

Devaluated goods

The coolie women have indeed entered into an economic sphere by exploiting their work in exchange for pay. Formerly peasant women, they have joined the ranks of the gainfully employed. But at the same time, because of that, their work has acquired the status of goods whose exchange, as an asset needed for survival, gives the coolie women a certain role and a place as economic agents. At the same time, this role is devoid of any other consideration, and in particular devoid of the connotations and aspects inherent in their previous role and function as peasant producers within a domestic production unit.

The coolie women do not come into the market as economic subjects. They are even less so than they were before on the farm. Admittedly they were not economic subjects there either, since decisions about the production and sale of agricultural goods were not their responsibility. However their integration, even in a subordinate capacity, in the network of agricultural operations, on the basis of various systems of social and human relations that linked all members of the domestic production unit gave them, in return for a variety of services, the assurance of a decent and protected life, even if it was not on the same basis or to the same extent as that of the male members of the family production unit. The fact that they did not have recognized authority did not prevent them from stating their opinions, even though they did not have the final word. The particular nature and isolation of paid work which, in the urban periphery, is simply a means of earning a wage to survive on, gives it the status of nothing more than an object of free trade, with no other description and no relational significance. It thus takes away from the coolie woman all the protection and prestige conferred by the network of relationships of which the peasant woman's labour constituted one link. As a result, the coolie woman loses every opportunity, every inherent right to act or to speak her mind about the processes of the production, distribution and exchange of agricultural products which she does no more than handle. All she is now is a porter. Her relationship to the products is only physical, instrumental and mechanical. Nothing links the coolie woman any more to goods that she merely carried from one place to another. The only remaining link, and the only asset of a new social relationship that she can use to affirm herself as a person is her energy as a worker, for sale on the labour market. But to what extent can this sale be used as an asset that is within her power, and to what extent does the use of her energy as a worker remain at her own discretion without risk of alienation? This question is the subject of the next chapter.

Structurally speaking, the outstanding fact of decisive importance for the nature of the work is that it becomes purely and simply physical labour. Freed from all the ties that gave it value, status, and inalienable functions in the structure of domestic agricultural production, it is now reduced to a marketable commodity, the only one that the migrant women have to barter to ensure their survival. their physical labour is no longer tied to any compulsion. It has been freed, and they are free also. The environment of the urban periphery expects nothing from them and asks nothing from them. It is up to them to offer their energy as workers and to find a job for a pitiful salary which allows them to survive. They now have to look for work. The value of work has changed. Before, it was expected and required of them, too much so according to the peasant women's complaint. They now seek it and must ensure it for themselves without ever being sure of finding enough to survive.

The energy to work

The only guarantee of a job

The liberation of work by its reduction to the condition of an object of exchange bartered for a pittance is for the migrant coolie women the beginning of a long succession of attempts to find a place in life which they and their families now lack. In finding a job, in selling their work because of the need to survive, the coolie women begin to enter the economic sphere. They are of course far from having conquered it. However, they have taken a first step. The services they provide give them a real advantage, almost a bridgehead for future advancement. Once the migrant women become coolies they are no longer just domestic servants to private people (as washerwomen and dishwashers), grocers (sorting grains) or restaurant owners (cooking *chapatis* and serving meals). Coolie work is a promotion in the sense that it marks access to something new. It gives a person a place, it means belonging. They don't go to work in rags. It provides an insurance, admittedly limited in nature and unstable, but not temporary (as long as one keeps one's health). It takes one into a network of rights and duties, with very little protection, to be sure at the *dalal's* discretion, and into relationships that have to be maintained willy-nilly with him (and which remain to be analysed); but despite everything the performance of paid work really sets one on one's feet. Dvarka KANDHARNE says that after giving birth 'You can stay two months, six months, or even a year at home to recover strength, they'll still take you back at the market right away without any problem.' The coolie women are 'on their mark', on the starting-line of a long march to recover a social status for their work and recognition of a new social situation for themselves. To this end their initial assets and resources consist only of their physical energy, which is weak and threatened; their situation is manifestly one of total exclusion from a peripheral capitalist society. This society is not however totally lawless.

Here it should be stressed that the reduction of the coolie women's work to a state of pure physical labour, which only exists on the labour market because of its exchange value as a source of human energy, which is sold at the lowest price for immediate survival needs, and is begged for rather than negotiated, can nevertheless be viewed objectively, and is experienced subjectively, as a first step towards entering a new economic per-urban life. The exchange value of their labour, though very low, does have its significance. It is the qualitative and quantitative measure of real access for the women to a new area of social relations even if it is as the slaves of an order and a system of relationships over which they have no control.

It should also be stressed that, on the fringes of and parallel with their work in the market, the women are on the lookout, depending on their ingenuity and any other resources available to them, for any other means of survival and of improving their situation. Being hired at the *market yard* is one chance among others, an important but not the only or always the best way to achieve a new material and social life. The study of strategies relating to housing has already demonstrated many other avenues towards this goal. The following chapters will show how still others open up. From the viewpoint of physical labour as a means of survival as a salaried worker, a similar range of efforts should, in fact, also be stressed. In leaving the work on the farm that ensured the security of the peasant working woman and her children and also gave them security, the migrant woman comes into an uncertain and unprotected world, which is open to any risk, but also to the experience of other customs and to the utilization of her energy as a worker. Salaried work, through the theoretically possible variety which it offers the migrant woman (even if it is in reality both relative and limited) to sell her energy as a worker and to use it for remuneration or profit, also frees a potential of one's own energy and an ability to take the initiative. Even under the tragic pressure of need, the women we

interviewed gave witness of the extent to which they must always show their spirit of invention, autonomy, and independence. They are naturally led to prove and show what they are capable of themselves in a hostile setting, and with still greater energy the more hostile, uncertain and anomie the setting is. The loosening of values and norms, the loss of protective status, the degradation of conditions of life challenge them, to deploy own resources for physical, moral, and psychological innovation. Their shrewdness to take advantage of circumstances, their skill and intelligence lead to industrious attitudes and behaviour which are unforeseen but spontaneous. Their work is a trial of force where the women take the measures of themselves and at the same time, by their efforts and their energy, succeed in holding to something and making a place for themselves. Success is varied and always limited by the extent of their energy but it is due to their own energy alone.

Working to survive

Female slavery

If we consider the coolie women's work in its phenomenological aspects that characterize it, it symbolizes and reveals the condition of women and the place that is assigned to them in the urban periphery.

The purely physical performance of services by migrant women and coolies degrades those who were previously skilled workers to a state of servility without any special kind of skill. The work, purely a means of survival, has no value itself, because it is only the source of a wage that keeps the worker alive. Her entry into economic activity is made at the cost of the degradation of the working peasant women she was before. The jobs of the urban working women have lost the aspects that gave human substance to their work as peasants.

The labour of the migrant coolie is of many kinds and oppressive in that its daily necessity is so imperious, even for old women, that it leaves hardly any possibility for respite, leisure, and a real social or cultural life, to say nothing of child care, rest in old age, and the attention that members of the family require. Work is their only lot. The woman is defined as a creature who performs physical labour. There is no other alternative for her if she wants to make a place for herself in men's society.

Work is neither given or assured. It has to be found by luck. The means of survival are risky. The migrant woman has possibilities neither for decision nor choice with respect to the work that she will do. She takes what she finds in a social jungle that prepares no place for her, gives her no training, and retains for her only the lowest and most servile jobs in the market as elsewhere. Migration and insecurity, not own tastes, desires or abilities, mark the search for work in order to survive in a peri-urban environment. As the saying goes: 'We are vagabonds throughout the world everywhere for a pittance'. One has to be able to adapt and be satisfied with any job that requires no qualifications nor apprenticeship, and can be learned immediately.

By losing the dimensions that made peasant labour a human activity through the knowledge it required and the relationships that it implied, the coolie's work is reified into stereotyped jobs. Its form, its use and the conditions under which it is carried out are independent of her will. It is alienated work that its author does not control. This is still more true from the viewpoint of the security rules of the job or of protection against accidents, working hours, and the limitation of operations. The coolie's work obeys the arbitrariness of the situation, of people and of circumstances. The coolies are employees without authority.

This coolie labour is a test that is the more crucial for them because it is often the only hope of their families. In the end, the responsibility for the family falls on the mother if the husband cannot provide, because of unemployment, underemployment low wages, physical or mental incapacity, idleness, drunkenness, incompetence, etc. She is expected to meet all challenges by endless work, like Lakshmi - with whom she identifies herself.

III

THE WORLD OF WORK

A SCENE OF CONFLICTING SOCIAL ISSUES

Addressing the question

Wage labour means more than ensuring survival. It is also instrumental in the development of social relations. The work environment provides the opportunities and means whereby relations are forged between individual actors in the social and economic sphere. It extends the social environment of men and women alike, who, during their working hours within the area of the market, become part of a system of clearly defined, specific relations.

Initially, and in general terms, the nature of these relationships is characterized, in the case of women porters, by the absence from the market place of various factors, including domestic relationships, involvement in the production process and kin-based ties together with the lack of opportunities for relations based on generalized commercial exchange.

By signing on as paid employees, by exchanging their labour power for wages paid in cash, the women porters have moved away from their homes and communities, the centre of all their domestic relationships. They become part of a specifically socio-economic system based on commercial transaction, offering their labour in exchange for financial remuneration. This process takes place in an urban area, far-removed from the family unit of agricultural production, left behind when they moved to the city periphery. Subject to a patriarchal system of production, particularly with regard to their labour, which has prompted their sisters and female kin and friends to describe their role as no more than that of a beast of burden,¹ their work in the fields, viewed objectively, granted them the status of producers of agricultural goods. Working in the market, they have relinquished this role, which bound them closely to these products, physically, emotionally and psychologically; henceforth, the goods they handle are merely the produce of others. They understood and fulfilled the role of agricultural producer within the framework of a kin-based patriarchal system which allocated them these tasks as a matter of course.² Their employers in the market do not assign them such roles and their paid labour removes them from the domain of kin-based relations which offered no remuneration for their work in the fields. They are ignorant of the whole process of commercial interaction, of which market trading is but a mere link. As dumb and blind instruments, such matters are of no concern to them. It has nothing to do with them. They are only porters.

The special structure of the market as a source of paid labour is already in place, prior to the arrival of the women porters. They are confronted with a socio-cultural and socio-economic microcosm already regulated by a finely tuned system of internal relations which from the outset allocates to those who become part of it a definite role and position. The market is a closed environment. The women who are allowed access to it must scrupulously observe its customs. As well as providing a source of income, employment in the market integrates the women into an organized microsystem of clearly defined social structures, standards, values, behaviour and language. They become part of this system, with no intention of undermining or changing it, but with the idea of conforming with its rules and remaining

1. See *Inde, Village au féminin*, op. cit. pp. 175-177.
2. op. cit. pp. 203-215,

within its confines without compromising their position. These characteristics do not suggest a self-contained world, cut off from reality, but represent instead an entity patterned by extensive networks of production, commerce and social, economic and political power.

Accordingly, in view of the aims of this study of the socio-cultural dynamics involved in the process of self-affirmation on the part of underprivileged women, three types of question are addressed in the following analysis, for purposes of clarity and comprehension.

The first question addresses the issue of the work environment as a social influence. The question is posed as to what extent women market porters accept their position within the system of labour relations offered to, or rather imposed upon them. To what lengths will they go to penetrate and occupy a social sphere which corresponds to their own desires and interests, through their position as paid employees in the main fruit and vegetable market?

The second question concerns the relational dimension generated by working in the market, i.e. the network of human relations. There must be full understanding of the importance and function of relationships, such as those forged within trade union organizations, socio-cultural associations as well as the whole range of spontaneous personal relationships which exist between women, etc.: in short, all the human and collective relationships which develop through contacts made at work, either as a result of shared problems, difficulties faced or action undertaken outside the work-place but readily accepted by all. To what extent do these relationships generate independence of thought and action, new levels of consciousness and a change in habits?

How are these relations motivated?

The third question concerns the various relational networks which exist outside the work-place and the domain of formal employment. It will be important to consider the influence on their work-place relations, of the networks of social communication which encompass the women porters in general, mainly those of caste, kinship and gender. In other words, do their status and experience cause them to aspire towards bringing about changes in the mechanisms of the major systems of social relations which influence them most, or on the contrary, are these systems merely applied to the whole new social sphere of labour relations? Reference has already been made to the characteristics of this social environment in terms of domestic relationships, agricultural production, kinship and generalized commerce, a procedure which is methodologically sound with regard to defining the subject under consideration without in any way prejudging the reality of the impact on the social structures of the work-place.

In short, as a specific link in a comprehensive chain of socio-economic relations and systems of social communication, does the market place, with all its social structures, merely confirm the women porters and sweepers as additional strands in these networks and systems? Do they seek their place and status in society by accepting that these networks and systems manipulate them to their own ends, like the closely meshed fabric of their loading nets, or, on the contrary, like tiny, breaking threads, do they attempt to loosen the bonds of their subordination to a system which overwhelms them? Does their insertion into the social sphere offered by their employment challenge to some extent the interests to which they are subject?

Recruitment

Recruitment is the first step into the world of the market and its network of communications. Access is gained through traditional networks, on the recommendation of the

close or extended family, obliging neighbors, both men and women, fellow villagers or other acquaintances, rather in the way a mother points her children in the direction of the school gate. To the migrant peasant women, this transition represents a whole new way of life. The first crucial determining factor in gaining access to this new world is that it is acquired through the same channels as those already identified with regard to migration to the city. If the same problems are involved in the search for employment, it is also true that the same traditional networks help obtain access to paid labour, particularly to the position of porter in the *market yard*. The second factor, peculiar to their arrival on the job market, is the fact that a high proportion of women are obliged to make do, initially, with domestic labour of various kinds, unstable, casual and quite irregular. Drifting from job to job, all of them temporary and insufficiently paid to support a family, they end up at the market with some relief, since work as a fruit and vegetable porter is relatively well paid and, most importantly, secure and stable, *de facto*, if not *de jure*. When I arrived here, I took whatever was going, just to keep alive' says **Shashikala** bai. Many others describe similar experiences including Sutar bai: We took whatever jobs we could find before signing on as porters at the market where the work is guaranteed'. However, even in the case of domestic labour, jobs in canteens, helping in the preparation of condiments, the help of a friend, relative or neighbour is always required in finding such job opportunities. Only exceptionally and intermittently, jobs such as labouring on a building site become available without personal recommendation. However, such casual labour will be considered only as a stop-gap measure until more secure employment is found through personal contacts.

Take the example of SHAKU PAWAR who, with friends, found work in the market through a sister-in-law who already worked there (the wife of her husband's brother, Phula PAWAR). AINPURE bai accompanied one of her husband's sisters where they were both offered work. Goja PAWAR was able to find work for two sisters, Jai AINPURE/13/ and Tai MANKAR. Hausa KADU/63/ did the same for her two sisters, Anu SALEKAR and Jija UTTEKAR/96/ as well as her three daughters, Kala SHELAR/64/, Sula SONDKAR/89/ and Mathura. Similarly, Jija UTTEKAR/60/ helped her daughter-in-law, Kalpana UTTEKAR and her daughter, Mangala BERGE/97/ find work. BHAME bai took the initiative of bringing her two neighbors, SABLE bai/41/ and BHUMBE bai/21/, insisting authoritatively, 'Come along! I'll find you work at the market'. Hira BHOKAR also brought her neighbour SHIRKE bai. The neighbour brought by Rangu DIGHE to the market did not belong to her caste; she was a Mahar, an untouchable, who has since died. Rangu would have accepted neither food nor drink from her neighbour, but when it was a question of employment, all problems of caste were forgotten.

The following diagram shows the various channels of recruitment, based on replies given by the women interviewed to the question: 'Who recommended you the job of porter?'

	A female neighbour	People of her caste	Mother-in-law	Wife of husband's brother	Husband	Husband's sister	Mother
No.	68	17	15	2	11	9	17
%	41	10	9	1	7	5	10

	Sister	Other relatives	Own initiative	Friend or acquaintance	Total
No.	11	5	6	6	166
%	7	3	3.5	3.5	100

The above diagram highlights yet another factor in what could be described as the market porter recruitment network; it is important to note the relationships which are revealed and exploited in the process of seeking employment and the considerable importance assumed by neighbourhood relations. Having arrived in the city and settled in to the best of their ability, migrant women are quick to lend each other a helping hand. When faced with the need to find paid labour, such neighborly mutual aid may even disregard cast barriers. In general terms, the fourth factor to emerge in access to employment is the virtual absence of relations with women of a different caste. With very few exceptions, channels of recruitment are always centred within the framework of the caste system, a comprehensive system of communication and social relations. It has already been stressed that neighbors usually belong to the same caste, as do, of course, kin and in-laws, giving rise to worthwhile contacts and social ties. Only four women were brought to the market by neighbors of a different caste. Apart from DIGHE bai, we have also Ahilya HARANAVLE/49/ and Malan PATIL/92/, both Dhangar, who accompanied Rakhma TANPURE/50/, a Marath, Mohit SUTAR/137/, a Muslim brought along by a Maratha neighbour. Two other women were also brought to the market by fellow porters of their acquaintance, belonging to a different caste without being neighbors - Lila KAMBLE, a Mahar, came with Anusuya KUMBHAR who met her by chance while she was looking for work in the vicinity of the *market yard*; and Sudhadra HONMANE, a Dhangar, an itinerant vegetable vendor, turned up at the market at the suggestion of KUMBAR bai and gave up street-trading on the advice of Anusuya bai.

The fifth factor to be noted is that the women who applied for work in the market on their own initiative are now all elderly. They began working in the market 40 or 50 years ago when it was situated 'down below', in the old town at *Phule market* which was less important than it is today, and where the need for cheap labour provided abundant job opportunities.

Human relations

The women having successfully found work as porters, different patterns of normal, everyday relations are reinvented within the context of the market, depending on the various actors in the sphere of commercial interaction to which they now belong

General characteristics

Firstly, women porters have no direct contact with any of the authorities responsible for running the market complex, particularly the Market Committee. Their contacts are limited to those necessitated by their physical presence in the *market yard* and the performance of their tasks as market porters.

Secondly, these relations vary in importance and kind depending on the role of the particular actors engaged in the process of production and transaction with whom they come into contact in the course of their work. These can be divided into two categories. There are the relations established with the four financial agents, the most important and influential actors in the commercial micro-system in which they are involved - the *dalâl*, the *dîvânjî*, the suppliers and the customers. Then there are the relations in respect of other less important

actors, their fellow porters, both men and women, whose role, like theirs, is limited to one of physical toil.

Thirdly, these new relationships, peculiar to the market-trading subsystem, with the *market yard* as its epicentre, form part of a whole process which at a later stage is of no concern whatever to the women porters, while its earlier stages can only be understood in terms of the relations which existed throughout the entire social network of village life, before their migration and subsequent employment. Obviously, these relations were bound to continue simultaneously with, and outside the systems and subsystems of relations into which they are directly and immediately drawn by the market. This section will therefore consider the long-term impact of these former social relations on the new relationships experienced by women porters, and will also assess the changes brought about by their relations with the main actors in their new work environment.

Fourthly, the relations established by porters in the course of their work in the *market yard* are at two different levels. On the one hand, there are work-place relations, based on what happens at work, and on the other hand, relationships between individuals, men and women, relationships which are of a personal nature, independent of the class and community interests of social groups constituted to fulfil a precise function in the production and distribution process. Either level can predominate, according to time or place. It is important to note, however, that there is a constant interlocking of these relationships, to varying degrees, a characteristic which was probably inevitable, in view of the subject here under consideration and the methodology adopted. In this respect, both forms of relationship must be treated as a whole and their respective socio-cultural implications closely linked. It therefore comes as no surprise that our survey reveals the complexity and variety of the relationships which regulate the bonds between individuals or that they should be, simultaneously or successively, relations of oppression and domination, friendship and co-operation, subordination and independence, association and discrimination, respect and contempt.

Relations with employers

The most important relationship is that established with the *dalâl*. It is the most encompassing, most frequent and most significant. In his capacity as owner of the depot where the produce is sold, the role of the *dalâl* is to supervise all commercial dealings and to determine conditions of sale between suppliers (peasant farmers who supply the market) and wholesalers, tradesmen/shopkeepers who buy their supplies at the market. Like the women porters hired by him, the *dalâl* comes from a rural area. He belongs to the upper ranks of the well-to-do peasant classes whose economic prosperity places them in a position of social domination. In this respect the *dalâls* work hand in glove with the local authorities, with a view to defending and promoting their financial interests. With very few exceptions, they belong to the majority Maratha caste which represents, in the *market yard*, the predominantly ruling social class, combining all the advantages of economic superiority, social domination and political control. It is therefore understandable that this class should define the socio-cultural pattern of relations established, through its *dalâl*, with the women porters and male coolies in the market, in the same way as they do in village communities. These relations are understandably complex and involved.

‘The *dalâl* comes from our village’ explains Chabu NANGARE Vanjari. We feel close to him. Before, the *dalâl* we worked for exploited us all the time. Now we don’t have that worry’. Ahilya HARANAVLE is of the same opinion. ‘The *dalâl* belongs to our caste’, she says. She therefore trusts him implicitly. As he lives near the *market yard* and since she is a good cook,

having previously worked in a canteen, she occasionally cooks for him in his own home. Gita GHULE, a Maratha, recalls a similar experience of sympathy and co-operation. Her relations with her *dalâl* were built up over a period of years, working as she did in the same market for the same employer. This led to her *dalâl* entrusting her with certain administrative tasks and relying on her services regularly. It is for this reason that neither she nor Chabu bai takes any part in trade-union activities. As Chabu bai puts it 'Why go to union meetings? What's the point?'

Some *dalâls* even go so far as to create a certain awareness amongst their female employees of their rights, or at least introduce them to this idea. The *dalâl* Bhoslé helped his women porters to form their own trade union. Another *dalâl*, Darshané, a socialist, arranges for me to meet his women porters, insisting that they pay attention to me. 'There is no harm in listening to what she has to say. It will give you something to think about.' He explains the reason for my visit to the market and my interest in them and even invites me to his home. Hausa KADU recalls that when she returned to the market a week after the birth of her child, her *dalâl* insisted that she take more time off work to recover.

In fact, however, according to the women porters, relations between the *dalâl* and their employees are not what they were 30 years ago. They were then more human and personal, even paternal. Now they are increasingly on a business footing.

Jija SHELKE was a porter in the old market. She worked in the same warehouse for 16 years. Now that she is a union official and has learned to speak in public, delivering fiery speeches and proclaiming slogans, her *dalâl*, to spite her, pours scorn on her role as leader. 'You're a woman who can read and write. What are you doing, working in the market? Why are you still a porter?' Jija bai moved to another warehouse to work for a different *dalâl* but the fact remains that, as a general rule, *dalâls* behave aggressively and often discourteously towards the porters. The twenty-year old son of her former *dalâl* has no hesitation in insulting and humiliating Jija bai. 'It's difficult to put up with. It's very wounding', she says. 'We work hard here but we get no credit for it. What hurts is the fact that they have no respect for us.'

A *dalâl* will often add insult to injury. If a woman is late for work in the morning, she may be sent home out of hand (thus losing her day's wages), with insults ringing in her ears. 'Hey, woman! Leave the basket alone. Get lost! Get your mother on the job!' (a double meaning, implying something like 'Put your mother on the street'). *Dalâls* are often to be heard muttering 'Women! What are the good for?', implying that women are incapable of performing any kind of task at all. This is the kind of insult and abuse to which women porters are constantly exposed. According to Anjana YAMGHAR, when an outsider comes to the market to organize a special meeting, women going to attend it are immediately harangued in terms such as 'Where are you off to now? What's got into you?'

In this situation, there is exactly the same attitude in the market as there was and still is in rural communities when women decide to attend meetings, which, in the eyes of the village dignitaries, are none of their business. One day I asked the *dalâl*, who was in the warehouse, that day 'Where is Yamuna bai?' 'Those union leaders are always off somewhere or other', he snapped. Those present guffawed knowingly. When Yamuna arrived, having completed the task in hand, everyone repeated the remark so that she was in no doubt as to its meaning. '*Dalâls* are pimps', says Hira DONDKAR. 'They are swine; Not one of them looks after us or does anything for us'.

As GHODKE bai observes, no woman porter ever borrows money from the *dalâl* even when in dire need.

Whether it be Tara bai, Ratne bai or Shashikala bai, they all seek to reassure each other by constantly repeating 'We've done nothing wrong. What have we got to be frightened of?'; but fear is their constant companion, as witnessed by their excessive denials and attempts to exorcise it. They are all haunted by conflicting emotions of fear, submission, inhibition and a poor opinion of themselves. Take the example of Hira bai. She is convinced, like many other women porters, that they should not answer back or show signs of dissatisfaction: 'If we make a mistake at work, of course we're going to hear about it. Is it wrong for the *dalâl* to criticize? We have to do as he says. We can't complain if he rants and raves at us. It's up to us to do our work properly.' Exactly the same silent, submissive resignation, unwavering and unchallenged, was expressed in the traditional songs of the village women as they worked at the millstone.

I walk the straight and narrow path, my anklets silent.
So that my brother is not troubled by the reproaches of others.
I walk carefully without displacing a stone.
Mawal's wife is like a quiet jasmine frond.

As a general rule, relations between the *dalâl* and his female employees are of an ambivalent nature, as a direct consequence of the very different social relations which usually characterize relationships between men and women in rural communities. These links are often personal and friendly, caste- or community-based, founded on allegiances reinforced by years of contact, loyalty and long-established dependency. In some cases, such close relationships have even prompted enlightened elements of the male population to promote women's rights by creating an awareness of them and the means of acquiring them.

More usually, however, the *dalâl's* behaviour is more typical of archetypal male domination, with its ancestral attributes - compulsory supervised labour, intimidation, not to mention verbal repression and humiliation. In these conditions, it is understandable that women porters almost never borrow money from their *dalâl*, who, in any case, are not the least concerned for the well-being of their employees, refusing them all forms of voluntary assistance. For their part, the women avoid becoming beholden to their *dalâl*. Their sense of pride refuses to accept, symbolically at least, the burden of indebtedness, which might be too easily exploited.

The second most important focal point, in relational terms, is the *divânjî*, the book-keeper, one of the main actors used by the *dalâl* in the interplay of work relations. He is an educated man, a clerk, who can read and write and keeps the accounts. He has to be handled with great care. One foot wrong and relations with him can easily deteriorate, to the detriment of the women who are all too aware of their illiterate state and often have to sign with their thumb-mark. The *divânjî* is certainly not the big boss; he, too, is an employee in the service of the *dalâl*, but he is at a different level from the market porters. The equivalent of the traditional *kulkarni*, the village treasurer of pre-Independence days, he carries on the tradition, albeit in different circumstances. He has inherited the prestige attached to the powers and authority of the old-fashioned *kulkarni-appâ*, whose mystique continues to surround the *divânjî* in the eyes of the often illiterate women. Without admitting it or even being consciously aware of it, the women porters are still haunted by the fear and terror inspired back in their villages by the three local figures whose power and knowledge were beyond dispute. As the well-known saying goes: 'Bâppa, don't keep company with the goldsmith, the tailor or the *kulkarni appâ*' (*appâ* and *bâppâ* are suffixes denoting special respect and social distancing).

The suppliers are peasants, who bring their home-grown produce to the market in the hope of selling it. They come either from the same villages and rural areas as the women or from much further afield. Although the porters' task is limited to unloading these market supplies, they nevertheless develop contacts with suppliers who come, if not actually from their own village, at least from 'their part of the world'. 'Has Anusuya had her baby? My brother was going to organize a religious ceremony (pujâ). Didn't he give you a message for me?' News and messages are exchanged. The slightest delay on the part of women in offloading their produce, and the suppliers complain to the *dalâl* who will then vent his anger on them.

Customers include all those who come to buy supplies at the *dalâl's* warehouse. There are wholesalers and retailers who distribute goods to consumers at numerous sale points throughout the city; there are also itinerant vendors who do not operate from one location, shop or registered stall on the street, but sell their wares from a mobile push-cart which they trundle from street to street, sometimes right up to the customer's doorstep. Finally, there are also those who come from outside Pune, in a truck or *tempo* which they load up with fruit and vegetables for sale to retailers and consumers who live outside the city.

Relations between porter and customer are based not so much on the task performed, as on the exchange of cash offered by the customer to the porters who load the sacks of vegetables on to their trucks, *tempos* or push-carts. These are not regular fixed amounts, but there is no haggling on the customers' part. None of them resent paying a quarter or half-rupee more to have their goods loaded quickly by a specially obliging porter. However, the same porter might just as easily refuse to load a vehicle if the customer behaves overbearingly or irritably, and will keep him waiting. Regular, long-standing customers will sometimes invite the women to drink a cup of tea with them. An elderly woman porter might well be heard haranguing younger women on their way to drink tea with one of the customers, 'What's the hurry? He's only buying you a cup of tea!' a comment which can be taken as a joke, banter or an outburst of ill humour; it can also be meant derisively, degenerating into a spiral of never-ending altercations, bickering and wrangling. Depending on the circumstances, all kinds of variations are possible. The truck and *tempo* drivers may occasionally develop casual friendships with some of the women.

Relations between workers

The closest and most personal relations in the *market yard* are those established between men and women porters. On the one hand, they are all part of the same work-force. On the other, most of them are interrelated, come from the same village or belong to the same local subcaste. Some of the women are brought to the *market yard* by their husbands when they first arrive in the city area, others by relatives, while some women recommend a brother, nephew or other kin. Without family ties or contacts, there are very few who find work in the market on their own initiative, unless they come from the same village or rural areas as those already employed there. Human relations, as they exist between market porters, are thus similar to those which prevail between individuals of the same caste, village and kinship grouping, outside the market, with all the strains, affection, affinities, mutual dependence and co-operation habitually found in other places and under different circumstances.

For instance, the sister of a young porter who works in the same warehouse as Tara bai and Révu bai, has married into a family who treat her badly. They live in Akolé, a village where the organizers of the cultural association, *Women together*, happen to live. Tara bai and Révu bai offer to visit these women organizers and, with their help, discuss the situation with the young woman's parents-in-law. As they say, Who else will help the young chap? He's still very

young!' On the other hand, Jija bai had to put her sons out to work when they were still very young. They had to put up with the taunts of the adults. What does it matter, as long as they were able to earn a living without going hungry. Life is hard.'

'The *dalâl* is very aggressive', says Ratna bai. 'He has moved to another warehouse and now everything is all right', she continues, referring to a porter she knows, who just could not get on with the *dalâl*. By contrast, another woman porter is pleased that her *dalâl*, *himself* a former porter, 'still treats us very well'. Some of them think very highly of this particular *dalâl*. There is obviously a certain feeling of pride when a worker from the same background does well for himself, without forgetting his fellow-workers or his origins. The men porters have a similar attitude of solidarity and mutual aid towards the women who have successfully set up their own independent trade union. Why should we make trouble for them? We'll give them our support if necessary. If the occasion arises, and there is a cause to be fought for, we'll stand by them. Yes, we'll be there! We're going to stick up for each other', says M. Kumbhar, a porter who works with his wife in the same warehouse. One day, Lila bai leapt to the defence of a woman worker who had been handled roughly by a male porter: Who do you think you are, pelting her with tomatoes? I'll teach you a thing or two . . . you'd better look out! Don't be a fool', adding We have to stick up for ourselves. Even if it was Rajiv Gandhi and someone in his family was hassling us we'd fight back'. Wrangling of this kind erupts whenever a male porter gets too close, is over-familiar or disparaging, or hurls abuse or insults.

There are several levels in relations between porters. Firstly, there is the generation gap - the old and the young. 'Do the young of today work as hard as we did?' is a comment one hears, spoken in tones of friendly provocation which occasionally betray feelings of resentment: We've got no say any more. Nobody listens to us'. Relations between old-timers and more recent arrivals sometimes develop in quite the opposite direction. Some of the old hands impose on the more recently arrived workers the very job they themselves were hired to perform and for which they get paid. They give their 'stand-in' a small percentage of their wages, like famous actors whose understudy stands in for them. Of course, the stand-ins have no work permit for the market (they are not even registered as porters) and none of the regulations concerning porters apply to them. There are cases, for example, where an older porter hired to unload a vehicle at an agreed rate, is paid the whole amount and, in turn, hires the services of several young workers to perform the whole task for 15 rupees. It should of course be noted that the practice of subcontracting a job is not restricted to the fruit and vegetable market. It is widely practised in the building industry. A new breed of profiteers and speculators emerges spontaneously in each case.

N. Bhégadé refers to another problem which causes him concern, revealing as it does another form of discrimination, based on socio-cultural differences. 'As I see it, there are already so many women here from the Mawal area. Is there any need for women from Sholapur to be taken on at the market? It's not their place here. It'll be a shambles here if they are'. The fact is that women porters have so far mostly come from the area of Mawal (Vadgaon, Paud and Velhe) and from the region of Purandar and Bhor, and consider the market as their 'mother and father' *mâybâp*, their own exclusive, providential, official source of income. Any new arrival from some totally different area is very soon perceived as an intruder, thief and aggressor. This attitude may not be explicitly stated but it is nevertheless latent at some level in the minds of the earliest occupants, who tend to consider their employment in the market as a sort of hereditary privilege, an opportunity tacitly reserved on a first come, first served basis; any encroachment on the part of a newcomer is perceived as an unfair intrusion.

M. Dahibhaté expresses a widely held point of view, one which refers to another general characteristic of work-place relations. The atmosphere is tense. I can talk to you quite freely at home but here, in the market, it's more difficult'. He feels inhibited and unable to introduce me to the women or put them in touch with me. He also thinks one should attend the meetings of the independent and highly respected trade union leader, Baba Adhav, 'But how can we go there alone?' he wonders. KHANDARE, Dvarka's husband, agrees. What can a few of us do or say? Baba Adhav will have to organize it for us. 'But they dare not attend his meetings alone. They know perfectly well that for their gesture to be meaningful in any way, there will have to be a sufficiently large number of people. This idea terrifies them even more, since they will be accused of forming and organizing a splinter group. If this were the case, there would have to be a leader. Who could be that leader? How could they accept the leadership of someone other than the *dalâl*, without undermining his authority and that of the union leaders under the *dalâl's* control? The porters will not run the risk of playing a joint visit to Baba Adhav, since their *dalâl* would object or regard the initiative with suspicion, detecting in it an act of potential insubordination or even rebellion on their part. The porters, men and women alike, dare not take this independent initiative. Even if M. KUMBHAR and other coolies declare their willingness to support group action, when the time comes, doubts will inevitably arise: What will the *dalâl* say? Shouldn't we ask his advice first? Ask his permission?' The porters feel neither bold enough nor capable of real independence. 'Independent, us?' With neither independence of action nor belief in their convictions What's the point in saying we must take the initiative and do something?' They are all well aware of the need for unity and organization, but their fear of authority and of the *dalâls'* reactions inhibits and isolates them. They are immobilized by feelings of solitude and impotence. By way of explanation or perhaps justification, one of the porters introduces another aspect of the situation: 'Even although we work as porters in the market, when all is said and done, we are still peasants. What we earn as porters is guaranteed by the peasant market gardeners. It's not the *dalâl* who pays us. It's the peasants who guarantee our livelihood.'

Basically, the older porters like M. Kumbhar are doubtful that the situation can really change; as they put it, all the traditions observed 'for so long' go back to the beginning of time, and condition their relationships and associations, their behaviour and daily habits in the market of today as they did years ago, back in the villages. Younger coolies like M. Dehibhaté and Kandharé are similarly convinced and share the beliefs of their elders. They realize that times have changed. So what? This is the market here. We have to live with our fear. This is where we work and where we must stay. There's nowhere else for us to go. We'd be like fish out of water. The bosses, that's another matter. We can't possibly stand up to them or antagonize them. This is our life here.' As well as an awareness that times have changed, there is also a feeling of frustrated impotence. Their minds are trapped in a universe of restrictions and limitations.

Relations between women porters are worthy of particular attention. They are coloured by all sorts of conflicting emotions - camaraderie and superiority, comradeship and hatred, sympathy and jealousy, exploitation and solidarity, suspicion and trust. Already in the past, the traditional mill songs of the village women spoke of the warp and the weft of the fabric of their lives: they are women, and as such perform tasks which are specifically allotted to them and which bring them together in a pattern of everyday relations. These tasks do not however act as a catalyst producing feelings of belonging to the same social category. Their relations are not based decisively on an awareness that they are all sisters participating in a shared task. They fluctuate between friendship and hatred, with many ups and downs that dull their perception of being subject to the same fate, In the words of the traditional village song:

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I've already had enough of her bickering!
Then I have to meet her on the way to fetch water!
She was my closest friend, although of another caste!
She would come to my side whenever I needed her, even in the middle of the night.
She cast me aside, that guttersnipe!
Guttersnipe, dust under my feet!

Today, the same threads form the fabric of their relations in the market.

According to Kale bai, the need to earn a living is the only determining factor in relations established between women porters in the market: any ties extending beyond this necessity are completely irrelevant. 'I never stop for anyone on the way to work in my *tempo*. I have no friends once I'm at the market. It's strictly everyone for herself'. Gita GHULE has worked at the market for ten years. 'You must have helped several other women find jobs here', I said. 'What! I have no women friends', she replied.

Saru bai, Gavu bai and Sindhu bai have worked together as porters since the days of the old market and continue in the same job in the new *market yard*: 'But we don't have anything to do with the other women porters here. No *bhishi*, not even the odd contact when we're at the bank together, we don't worship the same gods or celebrate in the same way. What's the point in getting to know those women? We've made several friends but only where we live.' The two KAMTE sisters-in-law have been close neighbors for the last 30 or 40 years. They go everywhere together but have never tried to establish other relationships with their fellow-porters in the market. They are content with the companionship of their neighborhood friends.

This isolation within circles of kinship and neighborhood friends is not the only pattern of behaviour or relationship sought by women porters. On the contrary, Lila bai believes that all women porters should get together in an effort of solidarity. Similarly, Paru bai thinks that 'they should sing their hearts out together and sit down together side by side'. Some of them form such close friendships that when one is seen without the other, there is always a jocular inquiry as to the whereabouts of the other. They go to work together, meeting as early as 4 a.m. They must not be late. It's dark, they hurry along together, on the same road or taking the same *tempo*, sharing the travel costs, paying for each other. Laxmi bai sings mill songs from her youth on her way to work - everyone listens, fascinated.

In some cases, traveling to work together every morning over many years encourages and strengthens ties of friendship. 'CAVHAN bai belongs to a different trade union but we are good friends', says Kamala bai. Laxmi bai agrees: 'Kamala is definitely one of us, she thinks and feels like us. There are four or five of us who are really close'.

The most significant and decisive trend in relational networks is the priority given to kin-based relationships. Ties of camaraderie in the work-place have much less importance in determining the kind of relationships the women are keen to maintain or initiate. It was to her family that Hausa KADU turned in her hour of greatest need. 'I am destitute, I have four daughters. They are all good-looking but are completely uneducated. They began working in the market when they were very young. My sister can keep an eye on them all.' This certainly put her mind at rest, but she was also able to reinforce this kin-based support through ties of marriage. The sister in question is now her daughter's mother-in-law (the two sisters arranged a marriage between their son and daughter respectively, according to a custom much practised in the state of Maharashtra). Hausa bai based her action on two types of relation, thus strengthening them both at once - ties both of work-place solidarity, and of kinship. However,

it is the kin-based relations which provide the basis and structure for the mutual aid she seeks in her destitute state. To resume, it is the network of the wider kin group which is the most significant and important. Work-place relations in no way change either the form of traditional kin-based relationships, nor their habitual pattern.

Laxmi bai and Haru bai are mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and both work as porters, but there is not the slightest indication that their traditional pattern of behaviour has changed in any way as a result of working in the market, Their relations at work remain as they are at home and in the family. The same is true for those who are sisters-in-law, and for countless other examples. None of the women can possibly detach themselves from the kind of relations which prevail at home.

The variety and complexity of relations based on kinship and mutual aid are only paralleled by the variety and complexity of the underlying sources of friction. Tension and suspicion, slander and insult, argument and hostility are thus all represented. When asked about a colleague at work, two or three will chorus in unison, with a knowing laugh: 'Her? Just look behind the truck! That's where you'll find her!' Insinuations are made regarding another woman porter: 'She doesn't get home until 5 o'clock. She doesn't go straight home. She stops off on the way.' As a result of the constant interchange of gibes and insinuation, feelings begin to run high and tension mounts.

As Tara bai and Révu bai were chatting, I asked them: 'Why don't you all confide in each other?' 'We're not in the habit of confiding in each other. There's always something to prevent you. In the old days, at least, we could talk to the women at the millstone at daybreak. The mill has disappeared. Nowadays, there's nobody to listen to your problems.' In reality, today's world is no different from yesterday's - even the traditional mill songs lamented the absence of a kindred spirit:

Where is the friend whose heartbeats with mine,
The friend who drinks water from the same jug?
I wanted to see if her heart beat as mine
The necklace was broken, its beads scattered and lost.

This is not to say that women porters working in the market never succeed in making friends. When overwhelmed by domestic worries or problems at work, some of them do visit each other's homes for moral support. When invited to weddings, they lend each other saris and, at the end of the year, a group photograph with seven or eight of them is taken. In the case of a dispute with a male colleague or customer, the women will go as a group to the home of the person involved, in the hope of smoothing things over.

Admittedly, the whole domain of relations between women porters is so intricate that it defies any attempt at establishing an accurate typology. Despite evidence of close friendships and mutual invitations, it cannot for example be inferred that there will never be a break or subsequent drifting apart. Though women may work in the same warehouse, come from the same shantytown, travel to work on the same *tempo*, belong to the same caste or district, be related through family ties or marriage, it is difficult to represent these relations in a regular continuous curve or to draw a diagram uniting all these variables in a single unbroken line, without being forced to exclude a particular element or elements. Something will always be missing from an outline which claims to cover the whole field. One or other factor will assume such importance that it outweighs all the rest. As Lila DIGHE told me 'Widows who work in the market behave shamelessly, and we are all considered to be at fault'. When speaking of

women who belong to a different caste, some women porters remark: 'Her? She's not one of us.'

Caste is the key factor in the development of relations, For instance, when I asked Tara bai to introduce me to some of the women sweepers in the market, she pointed them out, whispering confidentially in my ear, 'Sister, those women are very low caste. Why on earth do you want to speak to them? We have nothing to do with them!' What do you mean, their caste?' I asked. Her pained expression instantly revealed her feelings as she explained: 'They are untouchables'. The sweepers are nearly all Mahars, untouchables and neo-buddhists.

The most senior women porters, usually Marathas, are even more disgusted when these Mahar/neo-buddhists, not content with their position as sweepers, become porters, thereby rising to the same level as them through their work in the warehouse. As Jija bai exclaimed: 'Did you hear that? What bad language she used!' In the old days, the *dalâl* would never have dreamed of hiring one of them. Now the place is full of them! Those *râmdâ* whores would fill baskets with muck if they were asked to! They would do anything for 100 rupees!

Evidence to the contrary does exist, but cases are rare and in no way counter-balance the examples given above. Jana bai is undoubtedly most attached to the time-honoured customs, yet she has no hesitation in helping, not only Kamal, a Mahar who works at the market, but also a neighbour, likewise a Mahar, in whose home she readily accepts a glass of water and cradles the baby. KUMBHAR bai, a grandmother herself, found work for Nila bai, a Mahar orphan, so moved was she by the hardship endured by the young girl. But examples such as these are the exception. One day, I was casually telling Kamala MALEKAR about my visit to Appar Bibvevadi and mentioned the large number of particularly sordid dwellings being built there. While I was there, I had paid a visit to Ambu KOKARE. Kamala MALEKAR exclaimed: 'Sister, what were you doing there? Ambu bai is not one of us? She is a Dhangar'. In turn, Dhangar women use the same expression: 'Laxmi? She is one of us'. By contrast Vanjari women, who are relatively numerous in the market, have close ties with the Maratha women. As a rule, caste discrimination, though far from negligible, is not always sustained.

Human relations are further conditioned by a secondary form of discrimination, namely the area of origin. Women from the Mawal region, a mountainous area, include those who come not only from the district of Mawal, but also those from the areas of Mulshi, Velha, Bhor and Purandar, as distinct from those who come from the plains to the east of the town, the lowlands of Purandar, the district of Shirur and other lowland areas. The Sholapur porters come from the area around the town of Sholapur but also from Bhid, Osmanabad, etc. On one occasion, Hira bai, who comes from the plains of Shirur, lashed out aggressively against the women from Sholapur, considered by her to be utterly disreputable. 'The market is overrun by these *râmdâ* sluts from Kargote.' Women from Sholapur dress slightly differently. They wear a silver belt round the waist, in accordance with their own local tradition; and a nine-yard long sari draped around them which falls straight to the ground. They pay a great deal of attention to such details. The real reason for the anger against them is that 'they have come to steal the bread from our mouths'. For their part, women from Sholapur do not have a high opinion of the Mawal women, from the mountainous region to the west of Pune. Shaku has tried to set up a project to provide the women from her shantytown with employment but she has been unable to persuade the other women to take part. This is precisely the reason for the resentment felt towards women from Mawal: 'They're illiterate and can't even look after their own interests! They're always quarreling amongst themselves for no reason'.

The women who are most eager to adapt and conform are those who have come to Pune from other districts. For example, at work, Hira bai and DOMBALE wear their saris in the same way as working women do. Her sister had worn her sari in the style of the Sholapur women on the day we met her on our way to Hira bai's home, whereas Hira bai had draped hers in the style of women field workers. As she put it 'I dress like the people around me'.

One day I was speaking to a group of sweeper women. They were eager to talk and wanted to hold a meeting there and then. Some live in the shantytown of Lohia nagar and invite me to visit them there. They all work as porters, having been recruited by the Market Committee: they are all employed in the strict sense of the word and therefore protected by wage labour legislation, but, despite this, they have no contact with the other women porters.

Finally, mention must be made of another group of women who, as is generally agreed, are 'complete outsiders'. They are women who sift through the piles of discarded vegetables which are damaged and rotten, in the hope of finding something relatively unspoilt and fresh. These women are totally destitute and socially the most deprived, in that they are despised by all the other women. To survive, they have to endure the indignity of the other women's pity. Without exception, all the other women, porters and sweepers alike, have the lowest possible opinion of these scavenging women. They are regarded with contempt and seen as an ill omen. They are abused, insulted and thrown out of the market if they dare to show their faces there in search of the less rotten, decomposed vegetables in the piles of produce discarded as substandard. Their rejection is an everyday occurrence, with no sense or restraint or shame on the part of the women porters. The beggar women are used to it - they have no choice, they are resigned to their fate.

An organizational experience

Reference has already been made to the two workers' organizations active in the fruit and vegetable market, *Chatrapati Shivaji Market Yard Union* and *Bhumata Sanghatna*. Both enjoy close relations with the *dalâl* and with the Congress Party which has been in power in Maharashtra since independence, as well as with the other organizations controlled by it. It may seem strange that there are two similar trade union organizations. The reason for this is that not all the *dalâl* were keen to leave the old market square down in the old town at *Phule Market* for its new modern location at Gultekadi on the Satara road, known as the *market yard*. Disputes and arguments broke out between those who were the first to move and late arrivals - in fact, many of them returned to *Phule Market* for a time, before finally setting up shop, further 'up' in the modern market in the warehouses allocated to them. It is for this reason that there are two *dalâl* factions and two trade unions, the first, *Chatrapati Shivaji* being by far the most important. Recently, the second trade union, *Bhumata*, also split in two. This union, which originated in the old market, included men and women porters in its membership. The women complained that at the general assembly their opinions were completely ignored. Their role was limited to ensuring the basic organization of the meeting and the general assembly and they were generally treated with disdain. An overall feeling of being laughed at and scorned by the men porters intensified, erupting in arguments between the men and women present. 'How much longer must we put up with their insults?' One of the *dalâl*, M. Bhoslé, helped them to form their own independent organization of 100 women workers. The national trade union, the left-wing *Hind Mazdur Sabha*, assisted them with various administrative formalities necessary in establishing official recognition of their organization, which subsequently became an associate member of the national movement.

Although M. Bhoslé's help was decisive for the formation of their modest trade union, the women porters themselves played a major role in the administrative registration formalities. Several of them were assigned the task of consulting a lawyer. They visited the offices of *Hind Mazdur Sabha* where they met its leaders. Many showed great courage. Those who could read and write kept the register of members, collected subscriptions and carried out other necessary tasks. Another positive factor to emerge is that their union's affiliation with a national women's organization has meant that they have attended, however sporadically and in a junior capacity, political meetings and social gatherings which have introduced them to a wider world beyond the confines of work-place relations and market matters.

Rangu DIGHE, Paru INGULKAR, Shaku PAVAR and Kamala MALEKAR were responsible for organizing these initiatives. 'It was we, the women, who went to the union headquarters and the State Registration Department. We went everywhere. Who says we don't understand? We showed them what we could do', says Rangu bai.

In the biggest trade union *Chatrapati Shivaji*, men and women work side by side, particularly on the management committee composed of 15 'representatives' or 'stewards' of the organization. In *Bhumata* there are no regular weekly meetings, but meetings are called as problems arise. *Chatrapati Shivaji* meets every Monday on a regular basis. In addition to these regular meetings, a steward or committee member can always be contacted at the union offices. Although both unions are officially registered and subject to legislation and regulations covering labour organizations, neither functions in a truly democratic fashion, since they are entirely controlled by the *dalâl*. They are trade unions in name and formal status only. Another significant factor is the way in which the workers perceive the role and character of their organization. It is important to understand the image they have of it, what they expect of it and how they are motivated by their perception and expectations of it.

'Of course, there is the trade union and its meetings', says Dvarka bai; 'but we don't usually go, except when disputes break out between the women or between women and men porters. That's the only time we go to the meeting. We have no other reason for attending. Otherwise, you have to pay your dues once a year. Once we're back at home, we have nothing to do with the union. We are all free agents again.'

Saru AINPURE and Sindhu SHELAR are two close friends. They never go to any union meetings. The question only arises in the case of a dispute, but the matter can equally well be settled by one of the women officials known to them without going to the union office or one of the meetings.

Hira DONDKAR expresses the generally held opinion that: 'The *dalâl* and the union are hand in glove. They're both bastards. Neither looks after us. Do they ever show any concern for us? There's only one solution - we must look to the government for help. Thaka JADHAV agrees: 'The union does nothing for the poor'. Thaka bai and Phula MALUSARE used to belong to the *Hamal Panchayat* movement. They worked in the union canteen before finding work as porters in the market yard. We have nothing against *Hard Panchayat*, but since we moved, it's too far to go there. We recognized you at once - you used to go there often. Here, in the market yard, there's no time to attend union meetings. When disputes arise, we have to go. Otherwise, we just get on with our work - it's better that way. Anyway, the *dalâl* wouldn't like it if we stayed in *Hard Panchayat*. It's better we don't go'.

Anusuya TANDALE and one of the older porters. Thaku NANGARE, both agree: 'Sometimes we have to finish our work at the warehouse, sometimes we just want to get home

as quickly as possible. Who wants to stay at the market once work is over to attend a union meeting? It's only when there's a dispute to settle with someone that you really have to go and see one of the officials'.

Laxmi BHANE used to belong to the *Bhumata* union. She did not get on with a fellow-worker at the warehouse. The steward refused to let her change warehouses. She solved the problem by changing unions. 'You can't change your warehouse without the steward's permission, whatever the reason - because you want to or because you don't get on with someone.' In all respects the steward's decision is final, backed by the authority conferred by the union. On one occasion, a steward sent Ratna Pawar to work in another warehouse on her return to the market after four days' leave back in her village. She complained about the move. There was less work in the new warehouse. 'Why do I, a widow, have to change around?' 'You must change - and that's final', replied the steward. 'At your age, the work-load varies. You can't expect to earn as much.'

Jija SHELKE's experience raises the question of the status of women within the framework of the union itself. The *dalâl's* son is very rude to me, a woman of my age! I'm actually a deputy steward, but the steward herself will not stand up for me. What good is a committee like that? To hell with the steward! We never complain when we have to work hard. Don't we women deserve some respect? The *dalâl* is not pleased when I speak my mind at one of our big union meetings. What about the union members? Do they agree? I'm going to speak out again today - there's a meeting by the temple. I'm going to have my say. But shouldn't the others in the audience be prepared to speak up? I'm totally disillusioned. From now on, I shall give up going to meetings.'

Ambu KOKARE and Shaku SARGARE are young Dhangar women. We sometimes go to large meetings held by the temple. It gives us something to think about, but we don't often go.' Chabu SHINDE is more enthusiastic and determined: 'I go to all the union meetings. I also attend meetings in the Porters' House. We need to be informed, don't we?'

Yamuna PAWAR is a member of *Chatrapati Shivaji*. She asked BHEGADE bai: Why are you a member of *Bhumata*? You shouldn't stay in such a small union. You should join a big union.' 'What's the point of belonging to a big union?' asks BHEGADE bai. 'It's hard to say, but I tell myself that it's better to belong to a big union.'

The older women porters complain that nobody wants them. The *dalâl* and other porters constantly tell Saru VARAL and Indu PANSARE that there is no work for them in the market and that it would be better if they stayed at home. They often turn for help to women stewards, who are sometimes able to solve their immediate problem and sometimes turn a deaf ear. What can the union do for us?', wonders Indu bai. Sona bai is always following the steward around: 'To earn four or five rupees, you can put up with insults'.

Paru INGULKAR tells me: 'At home my son causes me a lot of worry. It's a real problem. Here, in the market, I've been elected as a steward I've been given a position of responsibility in the union. It helps me to know that despite all my worries at home, at least at work, I am doing something of importance'.

Such comments do much to explain the two most important functions fulfilled by these market workers' organizations. Without exception, all those interviewed quite clearly considered their trade union as the rightful and obvious forum for the amicable settlement of personal disputes which arise in the course of work-place relations or related matters. Secondly, the union is also perceived as the authority which is responsible for ensuring that

work practices are observed without tension or disturbance, ranging from the actual organization of work to be done and the transfer from one warehouse to another, at the request of the women porters, to relations between employees, male and female. The union's main concern is therefore to keep an eye on the relations which develop in the work-place, at the level of both interpersonal relations and the allocation of tasks. It fulfils one of the most elementary functions in a work-place seen as a locus of human relations which end up by defining new social configurations based on the country of origin.

The performance of these functions confers special status on the women stewards, who carry out on behalf of the union the tasks unhesitatingly recognized as its responsibility. Having discussed the case under review, they reach a friendly solution to the problems raised, to disputes between individuals and minor issues concerning the organization of labour in the warehouse. Their undisputed legal standing confers on them special status and importance. In some cases, the *dalâl* may also rule on disputes and quarrels, since, as noted above, his status as warehouse owner places him in a position of authority.

The importance of women stewards can be understood with reference to the models of normal social relationships which prevail in many other spheres of daily life. There is usually an independent authority to which members of different basic social groups have recourse. Within a family, this would be the oldest member or, more often, one elderly relative in particular; in a village community, it would be the village elders and often, in the last resort, one local sage in particular. Within a cast, this authority is represented by the judges or wise men of the caste council. In the market, the union confers similar status on its stewards, men and women alike, among the porters by whom they have been elected. In fact it is no accident that they have been chosen to assume various responsibilities in the everyday life of the market, similar to those of village patriarchs and local dignitaries. Backed by the same authority, the *dalâl* is called upon in the first instance to resolve disputes. Since he controls the union whose dues he collects, the workers are also entitled to look on him as their chief magistrate. This ascribes to the union a role similar to that of a caste council, a group of elders in a family, or in a wider context, of the managers of a co-operative who are likewise democratically elected members of a management board. In the same way as in the election of the members of a co-operative board, women stewards in the trade-union movement are co-opted by representatives of all the major interests concerned. Women stewards are not regularly elected or re-elected every year or every three years. Once elected, they remain in office for many years.. Their authority is inalienable.

The status conferred on women stewards, and accepted by them without question, can be compared even more realistically to the role, image and authority of a mother-in-law in a family context. They undertake their duties in the union in the same way as a mother-in-law, as mature matriarchs whose main role is to guarantee, through their arbitration and decision-taking, the efficient management of the group over which they have been appointed to preside. They are spontaneously and unhesitatingly invested with this key responsibility in the interests of all the members of the group, who have no right to leave the group or opt out from it. You cannot change your woman steward any more than your mother-in-law or social group. Only the passage of time, and changing circumstances, can produce a change.

The comparison may be carried still further by observing that women stewards are granted their authority by an organization controlled by men, just as a patriarchal society admits the authority of a mother-in-law over her young daughters-in-law.

The pleasure and satisfaction of porters such as Shile RANJANE or Chandra UBHE, busily occupied in the union office, is self-evident. They shout, raise their voices and vociferate as they solve disputes in keeping with the role assigned them by the union and acknowledged by their fellow-workers. They consider as a special honour their responsibility for solving personal disputes. 'Do you see all the work we have? It's real headache! There's no end to the disputes and quarrels. No sooner has one dispute been settled in one warehouse, when another flares up elsewhere. There's not a moment's peace.' These complaints are a pretence. They are proof of the importance of their acknowledged role and their awareness of their position of authority over the others. As Gajra OMBASE explains confidently and authoritatively 'Our main role as stewards is to put an end to disputes between women'.

It is also most informative and revealing to observe the attitude of women porters towards their stewards. On the one hand, the fact that the committee member, one of their own group, is in a position of authority over them, is seen by some as a source of irritation. However, when there is no alternative, it is to them that they turn. When disputes break out, when the *dalâl* sends them home if they arrive late, if a colleague picks a quarrel with another porter, if the wages are not fairly distributed, if a coolie is troublesome, it is then that the woman steward plays a vitally necessary role.

There is no difficulty in identifying these two conflicting aspects of the relationship between women porters and their union officials. Other aspects are less obvious and less openly acknowledged. A steward is entitled to enlist new members, who are always given a written receipt for the amount of the subscription paid. However, women sometimes complain that a small additional payment must be made to the steward. This is not an openly admitted practice, but indirectly the sarcastic remarks of the women porters against those who indulge in such dishonest practices raise doubts on the subject and point to behind-the-scenes dealings. 'In a short time, the steward has certainly done well for herself!' The women members of *Bhumata* constantly discuss union accounts with the stewards (the total amount raised by subscriptions, interest on deposits, etc.). Personal animosity prompts the stewards to get their own back on members who criticize them. It is undeniable that once appointed, some of them throw their weight around and exploit the situation to their own ends. Take the example of Shila bai. She set her husband up in a shop in her own neighbourhood, selling vegetables she brings back from the market. She refuses to allow any other women porter to do likewise or even to take vegetables home to sell, thus avoiding any competition with her husband and his shop. Hausa bai, Kala bai, Mathura and Laxmi bai, who all live in her neighbourhood, are particularly targeted in this respect.

It must be admitted that there is some basis to the complaints and accusations against the officials. How could they possibly resist the sudden advantages their position affords them when their needs and desires are so immediate, and when everyone does it at all levels of society? How could women, for so long deprived and subordinated, resist the facile temptation of enjoying their power and using it to their own ends?

It would be wrong to imagine that the union fails to address a variety of other problems, even if most of its time and energies are devoted to settling disputes. A group of porters recently took part in a demonstration to obtain a small wage increase. Some of them also attended a demonstration and a meeting organized with a view to bringing their sector under the regulations laid down in the 1969 legislation. Peasant women, members of *Stri Shakti Mandal*, arranged joint meetings with *Bhumata* members. Some of them accepted an invitation from rural activists to attend a joint action day in Paud, the main town of the canton of Mulshi, to celebrate International Women's Day (8 March 1989). Their participation was the first action

of this kind outside the routine of usual union activities. Some women members of the union affiliated with *Hind Mazdur Sabha* attended a lecture on social equality organized in Pune. For the first time, they were present at street theatre productions staged by other sections of the union. Several women are also actively involved in a building project to provide accommodation for market workers: they contribute enthusiastically either by working on the site, or by raising problems of practical concern.

However, it would never occur to these women porters that their union might undertake other welfare projects or, more importantly, organize meetings and debates on wider social issues, aimed at arousing greater critical awareness. I asked Dvarka bai: 'Has the union provided a health centre here for the workers? They would have access to medical care and low-cost medication'. 'I should think not! That's not a union's job! Anyway, we'd never go near the place. We go to good doctors.' A good doctor, in her view, is one who has a good reputation and always has a crowd in his waiting room. Saru bai, whom I met one day, asked me: 'Try and find a job for my eldest boy. He's been out of work for days. There's no work to be had anywhere. What will become of young people today?' Why don't you call a union meeting to discuss the problem and see what can be done by the union?' 'Oh, sister!' she replied in astonishment, 'youth employment is no concern of the union. It doesn't get involved. Those men and women have no idea about such problems. It was just a personal question I asked you - nothing to do with the union'.

On the other hand, the union plays an active role in organizing the celebration of religious festivals, be it *Nag Pancmi* or *Gauri*. We all get together in the *market yard*. We have a great time singing and dancing. On such occasions, nobody bothers us' says Dvarka bai. Gajra OMBASE told me 'We look forward impatiently to *Nag Pancmi*'. Kamala MALKAR and Paru INGULKAR were very keen that the activist women workers from *Stri Shakti Mandal* join in the festivities in the *market yard* in celebration of *Nag Pancmi* in 1990. The festival of *Navratra* is another occasion when everybody likes to get together. On this particular day, a *toran* is prepared (a garland of five coconuts strung together) and a pilgrimage is made to the shrines of Taljât (a goddess who lives on Dhankavdi hill) and Caturshringi (another important Pune shrine, on Senapati Bopat Road, near the University). The women porters form a procession, solemnly baring the *toran*. On the way, some of the women feel themselves possessed by the goddess and fall into a trance. The procession lasts a very long time, but none of the women drop out, considering it to be of great significance. This celebration is considered to be so important that nobody stays at home that day. Men and women porters all join in. The men get drunk and dance around, but nobody objects.

The fact that the union exists, that one is a member and takes part even minimally in its activities, must inevitably lead to changes, however minor, in the attitudes and perceptions of the women porters. Contact with people outside the everyday work and relational environment, and the efforts of these people to transform society, are bound to provoke a reaction of some sort. The fact of joining the union as a market employee may also awaken and revive memories of earlier experiences in different circumstances of exposure to social organization, or even simply recall recently received messages. Even a vague awareness is slow to form. For example, in the course of a discussion, Mr PANGARE, President of *Chatrapati Shivaji*, was given a new insight by a question from one of the women: 'I don't want to work in an onion warehouse' she said. We get home late. Who'll look after the children?' Taking advantage of the opportunity, I pointed out to the union officials, both men and women who were present at the time, that this was not only one woman's problem but that of many of them were in the same situation. I suggested that the more elderly women might look after the younger women's children, thereby solving two problems at once; on the one hand, the older

women porters who were no longer able to lift heavy loads would be given a task more suited to their capabilities while at the same time, the children would be cared for, relieving their mothers of this concern. Although the union leaders were probably unable to entertain such an idea and had no intention of acting on it, the question had been raised and the ground prepared for the future. Mr PANGARE congratulated me on the concern I had shown. 'I wish you every success in your work with these women' he concluded. One way or another, questions are raised to which the union will one day have to give explicit consideration.

Mr SHIRKE, from the district of Mulshi (Gonvadi), who was recently elected President of Bhumata, said that he would like to meet me. He is greatly respected by the women porters. 'My mother used to go to *Stri Shakti Mandal* meetings. She never missed one. She is dead now. So I no longer have any contact with S. S. M.' However, S.S.M. had made a deep impression on the new President. Several male porters described similar experiences. I met at least 15 who told me they had attended meetings of S.S.M. and of *Garib Dongari Sanghatna*, a larger organization, and had also taken part in various activities organized by these activist peasant organisations, such as for example the demonstrations held in Paud, the main town. They recalled these past experiences in the course of our conversation and were glad to relive them.

Whether or not there has earlier been a link with the S.S.M. or some such social organization, a slow but discernible change has taken place in the men's attitude towards me, not only a woman but also an outsider, since I first came to the market. Having seen me so often, visiting the women, a male coolie said recently 'Give the sister a cup of tea. She comes here so often on our behalf. 'We're just going to off-load this sack' said the women, 'and then we'll come back'. 'I'll do that but you must give her tea first. ' He was rather ashamed of drinking tea with me and the other woman, but his reaction was important, in view of the fact that my main concern had been the women and their problems.

Here one should emphasize the particular importance attached to the image of Baba ADHAV, in the minds of all the market porters, especially since it became widely known that I was associated with him. Although somewhat ill-defined in terms of social aspirations and people's imagination, it is interesting to note that the moral authority of an honest man like Baba ADHAV is universally acknowledged. There are several reasons for this: Baba ADHAV, a socio-cultural activist, does not belong to any political party in power, especially not to the Congress Party, which has always been in power in Maharashtra. He has no function or position in the political hierarchy of the State and is keen to dissociate and distance himself from all political allegiance. He is well known for his outspoken attacks against the socio-cultural domination of the high-ranking Brahmin castes and is the leading defender of the tradition of cultural rebellion begun in Maharashtra by Jyotirao Mahatma PHULE in the nineteenth century. He has therefore won the total confidence of the Maratha and lower castes, who harbour feelings of anger, if not hatred, towards the Brahmin castes, feelings which prevail throughout the State. Baba ADHAV is known as the main leader of manual workers in the outer suburbs employed in the informal sector, particularly the market porters among whom he lives in Bhavani peth. However, his calls for changes in society focus equally on social, cultural and economic issues. His main theme is the struggle against inequality, generated by a hierarchical society whose values, standards and structures are established and sustained by the domination of the Brahmin caste and the other high-ranking castes who follow their example with the aim of imposing their authority and social control based on traditional cultural parameters. It is these parameters which Baba ADHAV attacks in word and deed, while also continuing his demands for job opportunities, increased wages, the protection of workers in the non-organized or informal sectors, the provision of aid, welfare and benefits for

the most disadvantaged members of society, whom the system has hitherto marginalized with little regard for the consequences. Baba ADHAV is one of the few leaders to have consistently advocated the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. Public opinion is not yet ready to accept the changes involved by these issues and objectives, either socially or culturally, as regards outlooks and patterns of social relationships. The most important feature of Baba ADHAV's image is that, despite numerous reservations and difficulties, his moral and social leadership is universally accepted by all the porters, both men and women, by the *dalâl* and political leaders, even if very few people actually heed his words and even though his objectives are attainable only through continuing militancy.

Awareness of rights

As noted above, it will take a difficult and sustained campaign on the part of Baba ADHAV and *Hamal Panchayat* to extend the 1969 Act, which as yet makes no provision for women fruit and vegetable porters. The 1963 law on agricultural produce defends producers but is not concerned with market porters. The *dalâls* refused to admit that the 1948 legislation applied to their relations with their employees. Since then, market porters have been unclear as to who their real employer is. *Hamal Panchayat*, the only official trade union to defend *market yard* porters, has always campaigned and continues to do so, to obtain regulations and legislation providing effective protection for central market workers. The basic demand of these workers is that the State be considered as their employer, thereby solving all their problems, since the *dalâls* refuse any form of employer/employee relations, either with men *hamâl* or women *harevâle*. After years of campaigning, debate, discussion, demonstrations and collective action, the 1969 Act was passed: the same struggle still continues, to ensure its effective application in all State markets, particularly in Pune. To this end, a corporate body was created known as *Maharashtra Rajya Hamal Mapadi Mahmandal*, a vast network of 70 local organizations of porters employed in different markets throughout the State of Maharashtra. Baba ADHAV, President of *Hamal Panchayat*, is also President of this State-wide organization. *Hamal Mahamandal* is thus the joint association of coolie trade unions, formed to campaign more effectively on a much larger scale. The law makes provision for a *Mathadi Board*, i.e. a coolie *Council*, to be set up, in the light of the different categories and locations of informal labour. The law stipulates that the Council to be composed of government representatives and an equal number of employers and workers from sectors still not protected; those representing the government must not exceed a third of the total membership. The Council is empowered to decide on measures it deems conducive to promoting the interests of the workers concerned, in respect of working conditions, employment, remuneration, welfare, etc.

Under the 1969 Act, the *dalâl adte* are required to remit to the Council a sum equalling a third of the wages paid to their employees, to be raised in the form of taxes on transactions carried out with the producers/suppliers and customer/retailers, and intended for the provision of paid leave, a provident fund, a bonus scheme and welfare projects. The town of Pune has its own Council, known as *Pune Mathadi Hamal and Other Manual Workers Mandal*, which has extended the application of the 1969 Act since 1980 to cover all central market transactions with the exception of the fruit and vegetable sector. This percentage of taxes is used as follows:

3%	administrative costs	1.5% holidays with pay
1%	reserve fund	2% bonus scheme

11.5%	Diwali bonus scheme	1% compensation
2%	paid leave	8% provident fund

At this point we should consider the extent to which women porters are familiar with the law and are aware of their rights and claims.

From the outset, Rangu DIGHE has been acutely aware of her rights. In the clinic where she used to work, she already denounced her exploitation by the doctors by openly stating her true earnings. On one occasion, she went to a union meeting at the *Hamal Bhuvan or Coolie House* (premises belonging to Hamal *Panchayat*) to attend an explanatory lecture on the 1969 Act. She particularly remembers a call for the creation of a pension fund. Dvarka KANDHARE and her husband are also in favour of a pension fund, as is Sona MARATHE, who attended the same meeting and considers that it should be provided for by law. Sona's husband used to work for the municipality and is now in receipt of a pension. She recalls the day when she realized that she too needed an old-age pension, and was discussing it with her husband. He remarked at once 'If you're going to have a pension, you need a proper job, working eight hours a day. Do women porters put in eight hours a day? What kind of pension should they be entitled to?' In her husband's view, women would become equal to men if they also were granted a pension. And so he did not approve.

As Hire KHENGARE put it: 'I attend meetings. The law is explained to us'. She had been at Baba ADHAV's meetings at the *Hamal Bhavan*. Voluntary workers from the Congress Party had launched a community project in her shantytown for the production of condiments. She had taken part in it but had never been paid and the project had been closed down. Since then, she regularly visits Congress House, the party headquarters, to request payment. 'Why shouldn't we fight for our rights?' In the gas company where A. YAMGHAR's husband works, a dispute broke out. The employees' union has become involved, and Anjana bai also goes along to speak in her husband's defence. She consults a lawyer and is informed as to the provisions of the law. 'The law must also be applied in our work-place. We need all these things too - paid leave, old-age pension.'

Tara KAMTE is a simple unassuming woman of about 70 years of age. She still occasionally attends union meetings, though the intricacies of the law mean little to her. 'But the law has its uses.' As Indu TAGULE explains, 'We know nothing about the law concerning porters. We don't know anything. How can we understand? The women stewards are stuck-up. They don't tell us anything. Only those who wait hand and foot on them are told anything'. A group of 15 women, all neighbors of Indu bai, some of whom still work at the market, got together to tell me most emphatically, 'We don't know the first thing about the law. If you will come and talk to us about it, we'll get other women to come and we'll listen to what you say. Do come'.

Obviously, all the older women formerly employed in the market emphatically demand some kind of retirement pension. 'We should get paid something when we are too old to work' is the opinion of Thaku NANGARE, GHODKE bai, Paru SUDARIK, Gita YEVALE and Indu PANSARE.

Shakuntala KORPE is more than merely familiar with the law. Aware of her rights, she is also convinced that the only way to win on this issue is to fight for them, and she is ready to do so. She takes steps to organize the women porters. She both instigates and organizes demonstrations. She knows exactly who to contact to achieve her objectives. 'Give me Baba ADHAV's phone number' she said to me 'I want to arrange to meet him'. Ambu KOKARE and

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Sakhu SARGARE have probably less fighting spirit but they are equally prepared to stand up for their rights. 'I am willing to attend any meeting. If there's to be a demonstration, we'll be there.' Hira DONDKAR and Subhadra DARVATKAR also declare their whole-hearted support for demonstrations. Hira bai's nephew and Subhadra's grandsons, who are sitting nearby, overhear our conversation. When we are about to leave, they invite us to go back with them to their shantytown and hold a meeting there. They are prepared to organize a demonstration.

Yesterday, after finishing work in the *market* yard, Indu PANSARE went, as usual, to Bhavani peth to off-load coconuts. 'That's how I became a member of *Hamal Panchayat*. She takes part in all their demonstrations.

Haru SULE told me with great pride: 'My boyfriend is a *Hamal Panchayat* activist'. It was raining very heavily the day we went to visit her. 'When it stops raining, we'll get all the women in the neighbourhood together. You'll come and tell us all about the law', she said. 'When they get back from the market, the women go cutting grass which they then sell, or they work in the market gardens not far from their homes. These jobs are very badly paid. One day, all we women, and the men too, went on strike, but nothing came of it. Tell us what to do and how to do it.'

The view is sometimes expressed in the fruit and vegetable market that the 1969 Act should be extended and enforced there too. In fact, this idea is gradually taking the form of collective action. Women porters, members of the two unions active in this sector of the market, attended a symposium organized by *S.S.M.* activists during the course of 1990. It was decided to hold an informal discussion group, to be attended by all the women porters, at which Baba ADHAV would be invited to give a talk on the law and coolies' rights. It turned out to be a very large gathering, attended by the leader of the coolie movement and also by large numbers of men and women from different sectors of the *market yard*. It was in fact the beginning of collective action to have the law extended to include all sectors of the market. It was the first time that a meeting had been held in the Coolie House or *Hamal Bhuvan*. It was attended by between 2,500 and 3,000 coolies, and 90 per cent of the women porters. A procession was formed as they made their way towards the meeting place, shouting slogans as they went. When the meeting began, the women were invited to speak on their own behalf. The men sneered and made fun of their inability to speak in public. Baba Adhav insisted that the women stand up and address the meeting. I also insisted. Some of them plucked up their courage and came forward to the microphone. Not one of them was used to speaking in public, and they stumbled over their words. The audience laughed. In my own speech, I pointed out that the women were actively involved in the present campaign and that it was wrong to make fun of them. Besides, although it was important to campaign for the 1969 Act, there were other issues, particularly those concerning women, which should also be addressed. Quoting two verses from a traditional mill song, according to which one should keep one's troubles to oneself, I went on to say that, on the contrary, it was important to make the most of such meetings to express and exteriorize one's feelings and concerns.

A worm has got into the trunk of the tamarind
Should we get rid of it? What shall we say to people?

The women were greatly impressed by my appeal not to make fun of them when they spoke up in public. When I visited the market several days later, they said: 'You were right to say what you did. Why should the men laugh at us?' It was as if I had soothed their wounded pride.

Some days later, on 13 October 1990, the Minister of Labour was due to chair a meeting in Pune. It was decided to present him with a petition asking for the Act to be enforced. The *dalâls* who were members of the Congress Party, the same political party as the Minister, urged him to do nothing about it and ignore it altogether. The porters decided to close the market that day so as to attend the meeting at which the Minister was to be present. The *dalâls* objected that the merchandise would rot and the peasant producers lose out, but the Minister ignored their pleas and the coolies turned up in a big procession to submit their demands. He promised that the law would be enforced after Diwali (November), but nothing came of it, The fight was not yet over.

The *Mathadi Board* is not empowered to decide that the law should be enforced as long as any of its members raise unsolved objections. The *dalâls* and the market committee had previously maintained their objections. At the date of writing, early in 1991, the *dalâls* claim to have withdrawn their objections and all opposition. It remains for the market committee to admit that its objections are unfounded. It goes without saying that the *dalâls* are quite capable of going back on their given, agreed word and their declarations of non-objection.

Since 13 October 1990, an action group has held a meeting every two weeks in the *market yard*, attended by representatives from all the workers' organizations, under the chairmanship of Baba ADHAV himself. On 12 and 13 January 1991, this committee organized a demonstration of porters outside the local authority offices. On 20 March, two months later, another demonstration with participants from all over Maharashtra took place outside the Parliament while it was in session, with the co-operation of many other organizations and action groups (including *Garib Dongari Sanghatna*) demonstrating on behalf of unprotected workers, a category which includes the women fruit and vegetable porters. On 20 March 1928 Babasaheb Ambedkar organized the satyagraha of Mahad. On that day, in Bombay, there was a workers' demonstration on the same lines. The date of 20 March 1991, the centenary of the birth of the leader of the untouchables, was chosen with a view to continuing the struggle in a historical context which would widen the impact and future prospects by uniting in a common cause all urban and rural workers without any kind of protection. On 20 and 21 March 1991, 32 women (of the 750 employed in the *market yard* since January 1991) took part in the collective action organized in Bombay. Of the 2,200 male employees (700 weight inspectors and 1,500 porters), 93 took part, representing a percentage of 4 per cent in both cases. For two days, they all demonstrated in the streets of the capital of Maharashtra. Kamala MALEKAR described how they were all impressed by the singing and the energy of the *G.D.S.* and *S.S.M.* representatives who were also present. 'Come and teach us these songs. Help us to write songs about our life here' she said. Both union leaders invited me to return to the market with the *S.S.M.* activists to note down the songs. They proved to be one of the most effective means of communicating messages on the subject of social change. 'The next time', says MALEKAR bai, 'more of us will try to go'.

Wages and how to manage money

Entry into the world of paid labour also means an introduction to managing one's own money. Wages must cover current and future needs and pay off debts and financial commitments already undertaken. Accounts must be kept balanced to be able to meet current financial responsibilities. According to the women, 'You have to rack your brains to find a solution'. Their accounts never match up, income and expenditure are never balanced. When planning and budgeting, allowance must be made for basic needs, emergencies, the odd whim, children's longings and desires and many other contingencies.

Wages

Wages have one common factor: wherever porters are employed to perform physical tasks, the wages paid to women are lower than those paid to men. There is no exception to this rule throughout the entire market. On average, men earn three times more than women: women's anger at this situation, although real, is bottled up and has never been explicitly, let alone collectively, expressed. They are certainly not psychologically prepared to speak out.

Levels of remuneration obviously vary according to the tasks performed. Let us consider the job description of the women porters. Among the male porters, a difference is drawn between those who off-load the produce from the suppliers' trucks and those who do the weighing. Most of them begin work at 9 p.m. The wage paid by the suppliers to the off-loaders (known as *bârât*) is 2 rupees per 100 kg. The women porters work inside the warehouses. Their job consists of laying the produce out on the platform, filling the sacks with the fruit and vegetables and loading them on to the customers' trucks, tempos, rickshaws or handcarts. The rate is 60 paise (a paise is one hundredth of a rupee) per 100 kg, for falling sacks, carrying them on their heads to be weighed and loaded on to the trucks. It is the *dalâl* who is paid the money and redistributes it to the women porters when a task has been performed for the suppliers. Where produce is carried to the customer's vehicle, it is the customer who pays the women directly at a rate which varies between 50 paise and 1 rupee, depending on the weight of the goods and the speed and dexterity with which the task is performed at the request of a customer in a hurry.

The women are paid nothing for stacking the off-loaded produce in the warehouse, for storing unsold goods in an upper room (access to which is by means of a steep, steel ladder) for sweeping the warehouse and the upstairs room and for installing the scales for weighing the goods. They are allowed to go home only when the goods purchased by customers have all been removed and loaded, even if it means waiting until 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. This inactive overtime is never remunerated. 'Our job is to work in the warehouse. Isn't it normal for us to do it thoroughly and properly?' This being the case, if the women have to stay on, doing overtime in the market, albeit without pay and without the right to retire upstairs to rest (because there is a photograph of a god in the room), it is the women's duty to devote all their energy to their allotted tasks. This is supposedly no concern of the *dalâl*.

The coolies whose job it is to off-load the trucks during the evening and night shift work at the market throughout the night. Another shift arrives in the morning. The sacks they carry are heavy, but once they have been deposited in the warehouse, it is not the job of the male porters to lift them or to carry them to the customers' trucks. It is the women who carry them to be weighed, at the rate of 2 rupees per 100 kg. The men never sweep or clean the warehouse.

Women sweepers, on the contrary, are employed by the market committee, which pay them on a regular basis. They are protected by labour laws.

The weight and measure inspectors, or *tolâri mâpâdi*, are not considered to be part of the coolie work-force. They start work very early in the morning. Their job is to record in triplicate the following transactions at the moment of weighing the suppliers' produce - weight and description, the price agreed by the suppliers and the *dalâl*, the *dalâl's* commission, their own wages, *tolâi* and those of the coolies, *hamâlî*. One copy remains in the warehouse, another is given to the supplier and the third to the market committee. Inspectors are usually educated young men who are paid by the market committee.

The porters' wages vary slightly, depending on whether they are handling fruit, onions, potatoes or other vegetables. For handling onions and potatoes, the women are paid 60 paisa for every 100 kg and the men, 1 rupee; the rate for other vegetables is only half as much.

Paru KOTKAR remembers what the rates were as far back as 1950, and Hausa KADU in 1955. 'In those days, instead of 45 *sher we* had one *dhabû* paisa (a copper coin); later we had the pierced paisa coin. In the last 35 or 40 years, we got 60 paisa per 100 kg. The rate has been 60 since 1988; previously it was 40. The women porters protested and organized small meetings and demonstrations, and there was a 20 paisa increase.' It is obvious that if this increase is compared over several decades with the prevailing rates of inflation over the same period, the wages paid to coolies, male and female alike, have failed significantly to keep in line with the cost of living and the index-linked rate of inflation.

However, these levels of pay are not indicative of the full amount actually earned by a woman porter on a daily or weekly basis, whichever is adopted by the *dalâl*. The full daily wage varies enormously. The reason for these huge variations are obvious, and neither men or women porters have any control over them. They are all resigned to thinking that the amount they receive each day is an inevitability beyond their control and that they have no choice but to go home, satisfied or otherwise with their earnings, depending on how fate decides. The main point is that nobody, whether a male or female porter or a steward, has the slightest idea that things might be different and that possible solutions to this problem could be envisaged. This is yet another feature of the attitude towards wages. What can we do about it?' is the reaction of union officials.

As SATPUTE put it, 'Where I work, there's not much produce arriving in the warehouse. In the whole year, there's not a single day when I can say that I'll be able to earn more than 20 rupees and it's often as little as 2 rupees per day. How can we live on that? I'm hoping to move to a different warehouse'. Where Malan PATIL works, wages are generally between 10 and 15 rupees per day, rising to a maximum of between 60 or 70 rupees during one month in the year, but they can fall to 4 rupees, which does not even cover travel expenses. The day I visited the warehouse where RévU BHEGADE and Kamala MALEKAR work, there had been very little business for six months. On a good day, they were earning 4 or 5 rupees. 'How do you manage to run a home?' I asked RévU bai. 'My son gives me part of his earnings. I have some savings but there's almost nothing left. Things are bad.'

Yamuna JADHAV's situation is quite different: as the warehouse where she works is very busy, she earns 40 to 50 rupees per day for nine to ten months in the year. During the quieter months, the basic wage is between 15 and 20 rupees per day. Yamuna bai's basic wage is the same as SATPUTE's highest earnings.

According to one woman porter, even on good days, she never earned more than 40 rupees. 'This year, in February, for four days running, I earned 1 rupee. The average is between 10 and 15 rupees.' She works in a vegetable depot but sometimes they handle onions. On those days, the pay is better. Hira GIRE moved from handling vegetables to onions. 'March and April are the busiest months for onions. I get between 75 and 80 rupees a day but sometimes I have to make do with only 2 or 4 rupees.' At the height of the mango, apple or grape season, Gajra OMBASE earns between 80 and 90 rupees. But during the rainy season, wages tumble.

Chabu VADKAR used to work in a mango depot. They had a good season and she was able to pay off all her debts.

These variations depend on the size of the depot: the bigger it is, the more merchandise it handles. Business is seasonal, depending on the produce handled. Moving from one depot to another is not left to the initiative of the individual worker: it is the union steward who decides and his decision is final. The authority of the union officials, union leaders and stewards is absolute. If a porter, man or woman, answers back or objects, he or she is instantly transferred to a warehouse where the pay is bad; there is a price to be paid for access to a depot where wages are higher.

Managing one's money

Bhim CORGE makes a daily deposit of 10 rupees. 'If you break an arm or a leg, if things get difficult in your old age, you need to have money at your disposal', she says. Her sister, Narmada SONDKAR is of the same opinion. Dvarka KANDHARE has no children, but she too pays her savings into a bank account to cover household expenditure and to provide for her husband's needs. The money is deposited with a woman bank clerk who comes to the market to receive it. Dvarka bai has opened another account with the Bank of Maharashtra: when she has saved a sufficient amount, she intends to invest in a rickshaw which she and her husband will hire out for use by a driver on the basis of two shifts per day. 'Another advantage of my job', explains Sakhu JORI, 'is that a bank employee comes to the *market yard every day* to collect our cash deposits, These savings will come in handy when my daughters get married'. Suman SONAVNE is a widow, with one daughter. 'My brother will provide for her wedding, but I need a little money.' Her savings are intended to meet these needs. Ahilya HARANAVLE, Rakhma TANPURE, Yamuna JADHAV, Shaku PAWAR and Kala AMBADE are just some of the many women porters who have recourse to saving schemes organized by the bank already represented in the market or by other institutions.

All nationalized banks run saving schemes. A female bank clerk goes daily to collect deposits from workers at establishments with large numbers of employees. Funds are usually reimbursed after a year, but may also be reinvested.

'Before I worked in the market, I deposited 10 rupees a day in a local bank. My husband still sends me along to pay money into the bank every day. We have to be careful', says Matha POLEKAR. 'I have two bank accounts - one with the bank whose clerk comes to the market every day and another in a bank in Tilak Road', says Kala KARLE who has just returned from a pilgrimage to Kedarnath in the Himalayas, paid for out of her 5,500 rupees savings. 'Since I opened a bank account' she adds, 'I have no problems with money'. The day I went to visit Hira BHOKAR, it was raining. Her roof was leaking and tiles needed replacing. 'I will have it repaired this year' she said. 'How will you pay for it?' I asked. We don't live from hand to mouth, you know! We think ahead. I pay small amounts into my bank account'. Phula PAWAR has a savings bank book. Every year, depending on her needs, she withdraws a certain sum. One year, she bought a television set, another year she had her house plastered or bought a water heater. Things were different for KONDAVALKAR: the bank clerk made a mistake in the balance of her account and there was less money than she had expected. 'I don't trust them any more. I have closed my account.' Yashoda disagrees: 'The bank is better than the *bhishi* groups in the market, where there are often problems'. 'In *bhishi* groups, there are often disagreements' remarks Girja DOMBALE.

Bhishi groups represent one of the most popular forms of saving spare cash, and are favoured by all levels of society. They are formed by a freed number of individuals and every month, every member of the group deposits a similar amount. The total amount of these deposits is paid out every month to one of the group, so that they all in turn recuperate their

deposit. If, for example, the monthly payment is 10 rupees and if there are 12 members in the group, once a year, they will all, in turn, receive the same amount, Konda SHEJAVAL, Saru AINPURE, Laxmi KUDALE, Sindhu SHELAR, Gau BHAREKAR and Thaku HAZARE are all neighbors and have formed a *bhishi* together. They never go to the bank. They have all been neighbors for a very long time and form a group of reliable friends who can be depended on when times are hard.

Ahilya HARANAVLE, Rakhma TANPURE, Tara KUDITKAR and DARVATKAR live in the same shantytown and have also formed a *bhishi* group. DARVATKAR cannot afford to open a savings account and pay in a sum of 5 rupees per day, since she pays all the household bills. In Shukravarpath, Anusuya KUMBHAR, Sakhu AINPURE, Hausa KHILARE have formed a *bhishi* with other women in their neighbourhood: every two years, they are all in receipt of 2,500 rupees. KUMBHAR bai has thus been able one year to install a small bathroom in her home, another year a water heater, and another year she bought a ring for her daughter, etc. One year, AINPURE bai bought a kitchen table, another a fan, another a metal-framed cupboard. Kamal KALE put her *bhishi* money towards *Gauri* celebrations which involve considerable expense for the installation of *Gauri*, the preparation of special food etc. Indu TAGULE is very poor, with a good-for-nothing husband who contributes nothing at all. The *bhishi* group makes her an annual payment of 130 rupees. She uses each payment to pay off earlier debts; however, on this occasion, she put the money towards bracelets for her daughter and a length of fabric to make bodices for them. She had never before been able to offer them such gifts. 'Just once, however poor you are, you have to do something for your daughters.'

Tara DHAVNE belongs to two different *bhishi* groups, one in the market, the other in Appar Bibv, where she lives. Her husband and his other wife know about the second group, but not about the first. She decided not to tell them about it. With the money from the market *bhishi* she had a back room built and paid for medical care for her husband when he was sick. If he got to know about the other *bhishi*, he would immediately claim all the money and spend it on drink. Tara bai also plans to open a small confectionery shop in her home.

Hira GIRE, Talsa PAWAR, Babda PILANE, Chandrabhaga TEMKAR, Chabu SHINDE and Mathura bai all work in the same warehouse and are all in the same situation, in the sense that they have nobody to look after them. They all belong to two *bhishi* groups and also pay money into bank accounts. Where all the money comes from remains a mystery.

Gajra OMBASE neither has a bank account nor belongs to a *bhishi*. In Dandekarpul where she lives, people deposit money with a *bâbâ* (an elderly man, trusted by all) who will release funds as required in the same way as banks. Gajra bai needs money during the rainy season, since there is much less work in the market at that time and wages are correspondingly lower.

The sums of money deposited with banks and *bhishi* are limited to the modest amounts at the disposal of low-paid workers. Neither bank nor *bhishi* provides the necessary kind of financial help in the case of serious difficulty. In such cases, money is borrowed either privately in the form of a loan from moneylenders or as loans at interest. Where to borrow from? Certainly not from the *dalâl*, as it would mean falling into his clutches. 'You would constantly be at his beck and call and be completely at his mercy' says GHODKE bai. Thaku NANGARE is also against the idea of borrowing money from the *dalâl*, but to whom can they turn? Fellow workers at the market, however good friends, could not be of much help. Kala LOKHARE tells me about a woman porter who borrowed money from another woman porter at a monthly

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rate of 5 per cent. Tara DHAVNE points out that the usual monthly rate is 10 per cent and is sometimes even higher. Girja DOMBALE lives a miserable life; her husband is an alcoholic who beats her. She has to cope somehow. So she borrows from other women in the market at interest rates between 5 and 12 per cent. Gira KHATAR is in the same situation.

Tara KUDITKAR's husband and son both lost their jobs at the Rajabahadur factory. Her son has gone from bad to worse. Tara bai can see only one solution - by borrowing large sums of money to appease the god whose protection she seeks. She borrows from a Moré moneylender from the Mutha area who used to work at the same textile factory as her husband. When you pay back the money on time, there are immediately new problems to be solved.' To pay back the loan on time, the women have to borrow from other sources.

When weddings take place, the costs of the festivities, the hiring of a suitable venue, the religious expenses, presents, etc., inevitably involve borrowing money at high rates of interest. Large sums of money are thrown away on weddings but there is no alternative to securing a loan.

DARVATKAR's husband is mentally defective. She had to move to Pune with her two children. She had to cope on all fronts, from finding a room in the shantytown to moving in with all her possessions. She has added an extension to her room, has a television set, a mattress and a cupboard. She has borrowed 6,000 rupees to install gas in her home. She is thus caught up in a vicious circle of ever-repeated loans to pay back earlier loans. She has to pay out between 4 and 5,000 rupees every year on interest alone. Her *bhishi* group in the market helps her with some of these repayments. There is no *dalâl*, neighbour, bank or colleague who can help her. She has therefore no alternative but to turn to an outside moneylender. Despite this, DARVATKAR bai has the necessary psychological strength to borrow money and pay the interest.

Loans are also sought to pay for luxuries and entertainment. Malam PATIL wants a television set for her own personal pleasure. Although she already has many other loans to cover, she nevertheless intends to take out another one to make this purchase. As she says, 'How else can we afford these luxuries?'

Sometimes there are ways of avoiding loans at exorbitant interest. To cover the cost of her daughter's wedding, Subhadra HONMANE borrowed money from the family for whom she works. The loan was interest-free, repayable by regular deductions from her wages. For her daughter's wedding, Lila KARALE was able to arrange an interest-free loan of 1,000 rupees from a colleague at work and another 1,000 rupees from a tamarisk seller. She had paid 12.5 per cent monthly interest on a previous loan. For a loan of 1,000 rupees, she had paid out over 3,000.

Mathura RAKHA's husband is an alcoholic and a womanizer. He borrowed money at 12.5 per cent interest from a small vendor near the market. Mathura bai refused to let him come home until he had paid it all back.

Many women deposit money with both a bank and a *bhishi*, which means that they are often short of money for everyday household expenses. 'How can we make ends meet? How can we withdraw money from the *bhishi* or the bank?' The repayment of debts is a constant worry for the market porters. It is one of their main concerns,

Things are easier for Sakhu BAMGUDE now, but she voices the concern of all the women: We have to help our children set up their own homes. A mother is always anxious to

do something for her children and grandchildren. How can we possibly save anything to pay into a bank account or a *bhishi*? It's better to avoid withdrawing money. Yet I don't know if we're doing our children a favour by saving money. What's the point? If we deprive them today, we can put something aside for them tomorrow. Is that a reason for making them less happy today?'

Conclusion

New assets in fighting discrimination

Going from the general to the particular as regards networks of social relations, let us start by addressing the third question we posed, on the type and impact of the social relations and communication networks which form the general pattern of human relations in society as a whole, and on the issues involved in working relations in the market. In the framework of this study of the cultural influences and the spheres they carve out for themselves, on the initiative of the social actors here concerned, this question means gauging the areas of independence sought by these women, which may in fact be within their reach if they instigate the necessary changes in the relational spheres pre-determined from the outset by the social communication systems which, from outside the work-place, condition their situation as coolie women.

Although close neighbors help greatly in the search for employment, they are simply an inner circle within the traditional relationships of extended family, kin and caste, where they build up important contacts for job-seekers. Any deviations by women from these traditional ties are rare exceptions which prove the rule.

However, the rarity of these exceptions does not belie the reality, both symbolic and indicative, of two patterns of behaviour: that of neighborhood groups on the one hand and on the other, of relationships based on links of mutual help and friendship which extend beyond caste and kinship. Both are the result of life in shantytowns where insecurity and the fact of living huddled together at close quarters bring people together and promote mutual aid. While contacts are mainly between neighbors within pre-determined networks such as those of caste and kinship, they also establish special relationships between women inside these networks.

The innovative nature of these special links should not be underestimated. In these difficult living conditions, the struggle to survive engenders closer relationships than usual, reinforced by traditional bonds of caste and kinship. The closeness and intimacy observed in the market yard between relations and friends grouped together in networks of mutual help reveal the emergence of deeply felt interpersonal relations. They are based on decisions taken by individuals who feel sufficiently at one with each other to form a special group of their own to cope with the difficulties of everyday life. This does not undermine in any way the fabric of caste and kin-based relationships, but reflects instead the hitherto unfamiliar experience of a relationship between individuals who sympathize with each other and decide to form a separate group for themselves and between themselves. Neighborhood support groups to cope with everyday necessities such as the search for work extend far beyond the patterns of behaviour engendered by systems of caste and kinship.

The ease with which these ties are established, irrespective of caste, can be understood in the context of this new interpersonal dimension generated by neighborhood contacts and cramped living conditions. In tolerating these deviations, the caste gives way before pressure from the need to earn one's living and also the need for a purely human rapport which ignores the dictates of castes, though without seriously challenging them. Such behaviour does

however affect the caste system by raising the tolerance threshold and revealing different values of a universal nature.

Work-place relations based on the sale of physical labour to those in authority in the economic sphere are also determined by the relational networks prevailing throughout society as instituted by the communication systems which govern relations between castes, between men and women within and outside the caste system, and between socio-economic groupings and the peasant classes.

The *dalâl* is the agent and most important representative of the authority of the powerful Maratha caste, and more specifically of the socio-economic categories or leading caste subgroups which have assumed dominant roles.

Usually, relations between women porters and the *dalâl* are similar to those found in rural areas between peasant women and village dignitaries who represent within their caste the highest socio-economic rank.

The *porter/dalâl* relationship exists at two different levels. Firstly, there is the employer/employee relationship. The *dalâl* is above all the boss who provides employment and takes all the decisions in his depot, The opinions of the women porters are never asked for. They are there to perform the tasks assigned to them. As far as the *dalâl* is concerned, their status is similar to that of a work tool. Their physical labour places them in the same category as means of production, no more than that.

The threefold domination of the caste system in general, economic control in particular and the male authority peculiar to a patriarchal society is powerfully reinforced in the *market yard* by the instrumentalization of female labour. Peasant women have become unskilled workers without legal protection of any kind. Their only asset is their physical labour. The *dalâl* has no interest in their role as mothers, their age, their living conditions or their needs, now or in the future. Only their role as market porters gives them any identity and status in the eyes of the various economic agents in the market they serve. The instrumentalization of their role only serves to reinforce their subordination to their *dalâl*, who is at one and the same time their boss-employer (who refuses to consider himself as such, in order to avoid any responsibility, and who ignores the rights of his women employees whom he does not acknowledge as his), a caste dignitary (whose authority and power cannot be challenged without undermining the caste-based ties they dare not loosen) and a man of substance who controls the means of their material survival by giving work only to those who do not arouse his displeasure.

The *dalâl's* influence can also be seen in the control he exerts over the union, by inhibiting the slightest tendency on the part of male or female porters towards independent organization.

The *dalâl's* power is still further demonstrated in the diversity of relationships between men and women noted above. Like their employers, most of the women are Maratha or Vanjari. Thus, within the caste itself, there is evidence of the whole spectrum of relationships which exist between the higher echelons of social and economic and political life, on the one hand, and the female population of the same castes on the other. In the market place as in the villages, these relationships oscillate between the most intimate familiarity and the fiercest aggressivity. *Dalâls* are at times open and understanding, at others patronizing and possessive, openly and unashamedly exploitative, both macho and disdainful. For their part, the women display the corresponding traditional attitudes of dependence and gratitude, loyal service and

affection, acquiescent subordination and eagerness to please, albeit coloured by internalized feelings of dissatisfaction or even of repressed anger which are stifled or quickly forgotten. Briefly, *dalâls* have to deal with nothing more than submission or inhibition or, if necessary, they are capable of silencing any inclination to answer back. Men and women alike are well aware that any display of insubordination would lead eventually to their dismissal. Accepting the situation, whatever the cost, becomes a compulsory virtue.

Lastly, female subordination is reinforced by the attitudes of respect and fear inspired by the *divânji*, endowed by his position with undisputed authority.

The supremacy of habitual systems of social communication is also clearly demonstrated by various processes which follow an identical pattern of reinforcing common origins. One of these processes involves the formation of support groups, consisting of people from the same kin group, the same caste, or the same village, to defend and protect their own interests against those who seem to threaten them or are perceived as so doing. For example, the women protect their jobs in the market against competition from Mahar women who overstep their position as sweepers, from new arrivals of unknown origin, from younger women who might take the place of the more elderly . . . Affiliations based on collective identity and community allegiances are formed and reinforced in the face of impending danger. Everyone in the group is united against outside intrusions in an effort to conserve the group's specific image and status, a means of survival which is exercised as a prerogative and which, when threatened, engenders fear of the outsider. This is especially true in the case of women union officials, who exploit their position of authority as a way of countering action by other members or at least emphasizing their superiority and power.

These phenomena may be indicative of social communication systems based on difference as an attribute of identity, but in which, when circumstances change, identity becomes socially divisive through discrimination and opposition to the 'other' perceived no longer as merely different but also as an enemy; self-assertion, identity, status and survival then become a cause of envy or rivalry on the part of those who previously had no such privileges. The unions themselves become a valuable power base and thereby an advantage to be coveted. It is hardly surprising therefore if they increase in number despite the absence of any internal, functional reason connected with their aims. Any excuse for fragmentation is valid. In view of the scarcity of material assets (in this case, decent employment and wages) and social advantages (the status and authority of women stewards, the supremacy of union leaders); and given women's limited cultural influence (male domination, the authority of women union officials over other women, a worthwhile job) and the political implications (the *dalâl's* control over the unions), the advantages offered by a progressive work environment become issues on which clashes arise. These clashes revive traditional long-standing forms of social division, legitimized by kin-, caste- and gender-based systems of communication; and they transform the advantages offered by the work-place into a source of even more pronounced discrimination than before. In the main, therefore, patterns of traditional relationships tend to prevent any extension of social networks and associations based on a new perception of the identity of common interests.

The persistence of patterns of traditional relationships considerably heightens the relevance of the perceived need for collective organization under the market porters' own leadership, independent of the *dalâl*, for the promotion of their own interests. It is however significant that this perception belongs more to the realms of fantasy and daydreams than to the world of experience or of a sustained determination to initiate independent collective action. At best, action amounts to no more than the commitment and efforts of a very small number of

more socially aware women porters. What is at issue here is the perception and experience of an alternative structure to existing patterns of social communication and the desire for a different level of communication based on elements relevant to the work environment as well as for the development of neighborhood relations, experienced personally by some of the women interviewed. In both cases, these behavioral patterns and aspirations are limited to a few women porters and in no way undermine the influence of the prevailing systems of communication in the minds of most of the women. The new relationships, as experienced by some of the women, are not on the same scale as the more traditional networks. Yet these new perceptions of solidarity, which go beyond traditional forms of association (even if they are purely personal) represent a new departure and reflect aspirations which must inevitably impair the influence of prevailing systems based on kinship, caste and gender.

Manual labour

Self-awareness as an issue

As noted above, female labour is devalued when cut off from the functional, organic connections and socio-cultural connotations which provided its structure in rural areas. It is profoundly affected by three processes: its reduction to the level of pure physical labour expended in the execution of extremely basic tasks requiring only brute force; its instrumentalization at the service of the authorities; and its reification as an object of commerce. This gives women porters the status of paid workers and submits their labour as a commodity to the law of supply and demand, which is henceforth the only determining factor in establishing their value in the labour market. Peasant labour, devalued by its reduction to the level of a mere commodity, when put on the market as a product for sale, is still further devalued as cheap merchandise which is little in demand and could if necessary be dispensed with.

This situation is obviously paradoxical. In rural areas, when she complained that she was treated like a beast of burden, the peasant woman was making a statement that her labour, which she well knew to be vital in various ways to the family agricultural production unit, was not in fact given full recognition. Her value and importance were socially invisible, never spoken of, clouded in obscurity. She compared herself with a dumb animal: her contribution was immense and inalienable, but like the silent ox, a peasant woman was expected to toil without protest, while no voice was seriously raised in her defence. Her efforts were called into play at all levels of the family unit but her value was never explicitly acknowledged or openly recognized. All her energies were devoted in silent resignation towards the care of her family. Their joint prosperity was her only reward.

Employment in the market represents a labour situation which is recognized, visible, calculated, valued, exhibited and sold, but by the same token it loses its implicit, all-pervasive importance. Working in the market is not an allocated, specific task. As soon as labour assumes a market value, it enters the capitalist system of communication as a commodity at the lowest possible value. It is henceforth up to the women porters to sell it where they can, however cheaply, even if it proves difficult to negotiate its cost. Selling one's physical labour power at least guarantees it the status of a saleable product and confers upon the vendor the status of worker. Wage labour, however ill paid, ensures access to a network of relationships which confer both role and status. The only alternative is for both the commodity and the worker to disappear. Hence the pride and feeling of security afforded by a job in a market warehouse, even if necessary at 4 rupees a day. Paid employment, however ill paid and insecure, represents an important step forward. It gives access to a system of relations which

sets the bounds of a social sphere within which remuneration ensures, even minimally, the woman's livelihood and the recognition of her status as a market porter. Domestic labour does not provide access to this kind of network.

An awareness of their rights, however precarious and limited, and a knowledge of the law, albeit often in the form of vague notions in the case of most women porters, are key new developments in the widened perception the women have of the world opened to them by their employment in the market. The social 'invisibility' of peasant labour has probably been replaced by a reprehensible, deliberate disregard for the value of female labour on the part of employers, the administration and the socio-political authorities who exploit their physical labour to their own ends, within a framework of capitalist relations. All these agents naturally do all they can to maintain the material, social and cultural under-evaluation of female labour. As already noted, they are well versed in turning to their advantage the communication systems and relational networks established by the traditional patriarchal order.

However, the releasing of physical labour as a product to be bought and sold, however undervalued, by forcing women to offer their labour for sale on the market, with a view to making money through its sale and at the same time gaining recognition by acceding to a place in society in peripheral urban areas, leads inevitably to a series of perceptions and views based on a growing awareness of social rights which should be protected by law. Wage labour as a social stake in the capitalist system, while still largely dominated by work-place relations and the social communication system as a whole, nevertheless represents for women porters a key asset in their growing awareness of their inalienable individual rights. This awareness is admittedly embryonic, and subject to all the pressures of global communication, which act as a continual constraint on their behaviour, attitudes and values. Even the limited experience of organization acquired by many of them at least shows the path to future achievements and the realms to be conquered in the near future. The individual and collective force required for these conquests, whether social (job security, old-age pensions, family benefits, etc.), legal (application of the law), cultural (women's status in the work-place, decent job opportunities, equal pay), organizational (status of women within the trade-union movement and other forms of collective action, the structure and aims of unions) or economic (decent wages), must be further strengthened and suitably organized. There is still a long way to go, but there are many who have taken the first step towards a new objective, that of a legally established place in society instead of an inferior position of subservience.

The transition now taking place from one sphere to another, with reference to the women's perception of wage labour as a strategic element in the process, can be described by defining the women's aims as follows. Passing from a social environment where they formerly perceived work as being on behalf of someone else (with all its implied associations and the secure relational network it provided for peasant women) to another environment in which they are forced, if they are to survive, to sell their physical labour in peripheral urban areas, women market workers experience work as a thing-in-itself, suddenly stripped of all status and value other than commercial, in an environment dominated by systems of capitalist relationships. This reification leads on slowly but surely to the irreversible perception of work as a means of access to 'a place of one's own' giving one a stake in inalienable rights.

Obviously this perception will take a long time to develop and will rarely occur spontaneously. It needs guidance and catalysts. In particular, it needs to mobilize psychologically the full strength of its convictions and to acquire the organizational and institutional means to achieve its own growth, so as to be able to counteract the individual pressures and collective constraints which exist within the long-established systems of relations

and communication. At present, these relations are by far the strongest and most influential. In particular, it is obvious that the experience and type of union organization generated and sustained by these systems (at least in the fruit and vegetable market) is scarcely more effective for enlightening their thoughts and actions than is an indirect light which is diffracted and filtered - in a word, what we call twilight.

Interpersonal relationships on the road from dependence to autonomy

The absence of collective, if not class consciousness, as regards both organizational representations and structures, as well as the functioning of unions, means, conversely, that interpersonal relationships assume great importance. This subject has already been covered comprehensively, underlining the overpowering influence of traditional networks. It is important not to misjudge the significance and importance of different forms of interpersonal relations developed possibly to the detriment of traditional relationships and extending beyond the family, clan, caste and village hierarchies. These grass-roots relationships imply no desire whatever for personal affirmation nor the recognition of the central value of the individual and his/her aspirations as the basis of social relations. On the contrary, they are important only in terms of the influence exercised by networks and allegiances centred on kinship, marriage, social links, religion, local groupings and hierarchies and also on the inequality between men and women, as noted above. They do not usually encourage independence of thought or behaviour. Nor do they generate innovative and autonomous practices. They promote neither inventiveness nor the quest for wider options, representing instead a primary, origin-based allegiance which must be respected, not violated.

However, extending beyond the limits of these basic allegiances, the need for survival and encounters in the *market yard* between women of different origins foster ties of a different kind from those based on kinship, marriage and caste. The relative lawlessness of their new environment releases an upsurge of autonomy and encourages the affiliation of individual potential. There is evidence, at the level of interpersonal relationships established between fellow-workers, of what we have observed when migrant workers first move to a town. Ties based on family and caste are far from satisfying all needs or providing guidelines for all circumstances. Initiative has to be taken. Reference has already been made to the significance of neighborhood groups who provide mutual aid and confide in each other. Most attitudes with regard to money management, particularly in the case of bank accounts and *bhishi* groups, are important developments which demonstrate a capacity for autonomy and even a desire for independence on the part of the women porters. Personal friendships between some of the women are another example of this. There are many instances of such qualitatively unprecedented relationships, increasingly brought about by mobility, cramped living conditions and the hazards and necessities of daily life.

IV

URBAN AREAS

A PLACE FOR WIDER RELATIONS

Addressing the question

Previous chapters show the extent to which the home, labour and work are permeated and marked by systems of community relations, interpersonal relations and relations based on consanguinity, clan, marriage and caste. Traditional relations of kindred or of alliance also continue to define basically the sphere of social interaction which, outside the coolie women's places of work and abode constitutes the area of their interpersonal relations.

Within the limits of the caste system, these relations constitute a world of distinctive social belonging and recognition. Below we describe their forms in time and place, and show how they continue to exist, providing the basis for the coolie women's individual and collective identity. Their communication networks produce the most decisive and symbolic interpersonal relations at various levels. Our observation will take account of caste, kinship, alliance, rites, religious observance, and the women's links with the village, its dignitaries and assemblies.

However, these networks operate in an extended town setting which overwhelms it, opens it up and also modifies it. This setting has certainly not the same role as the village community. It is not a community frame of reference providing the coolie women with individual and social standing. It does nevertheless, impinge on the systems that make up this social standing. New urban communication networks project their representations and values, leading to a new kind of behaviour previously unknown or impossible in villages. The language spoken in towns carries not only new words but also invitations to new likings or suggestions for new outlooks and behaviour. An individual wage makes it possible to buy goods of one's choice. Means of transport facilitate movement or even enable people to make longed-for trips. The numerous doctors practicing in the town offer their much sought-after services. Schools make it possible to envisage the future of children differently. Crowded accommodation constitutes a challenge to control by families. New patterns of consumption emerge. Small dwellings mean that the life of the patriarchal unit takes place virtually in the street.

This widening of relational and communication systems leads to the abandonment of old practices and the emergence of new modes of behaviour and attitudes in public fields hitherto unknown to women or avoided, prohibited or simply left unexplored as men's territory. Women are entering these new fields driven by necessity, new aspirations, survival strategies and a desire to transgress or the will to assert themselves. At times, because of this, they find themselves in a hostile environment where they are without any of the old reference points. Women's intrusion is in fact a way of finding place and conquering new areas.

Our study is guided by three kinds of questions.

The first concerns the new modes of behaviour which go beyond the limits of old customs or break with them, thus bringing into being a new field of relations. The nature, extent, motives and forms of these new modes of behaviour are the subject of this analysis. The aim is to measure the extent of this growing new field, with the paths followed and the attempts to gain new ground. One case may be the links established in the socialization process with the school, or public authorities or bodies; other examples are collective or organized

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efforts born of a desire to meet the needs of everyday life; solidarity or mutual assistance networks, or neighborhood relations; the pressures exerted on the territorial limits set by kinship or caste systems, which seek to extend the perimeter or even transgress boundary codes in order to achieve more open conviviality and human relations that are different from those laid down by the established order, In general, the key question is: how far can they go, or do they really desire to go, in acceding to social spheres in the wide sense of the term? What can convey such desires or even initiatives?

The second question concerns the extent of the socio-cultural forces which these new practices bring about or reveal. Is it a desire to create new networks of relations? spontaneous initiatives on the part of women who seek to venture into hitherto unknown relational spheres? a deviation caused by constraints which compel them to explore new kinds of social involvement and relations? Is this behaviour deliberately innovative? Whatever the case may be, the study will attempt to identify the relational cleavages or pressures created in a given sphere in respect of systems of value, power, prestige or social authority, revealing the extent of the social spheres which the women seek to occupy if possible.

The third, more general and global question deals, like the preceding analyses, with the relation between tradition and modernity now at work in the driving forces behind these communication and relationship systems.

Kinship and affinity

The circle of relatives

When Dvrarka KANDHARE is asked how she spends Saturdays, when the market is closed, and whom she visits, her answer gives an overall picture of her customary relational sphere: 'There are only two of us. In the morning we do the housework and the laundry. We go to the cinema once every six or seven months. Most Saturdays we visit my brother in Bhavani peth. At times I go to see my mother who lives in Akluj'.

As soon as she comes home from the market Yanume JADHAV takes a bath and then goes straight on to her sister-in-law's (her husband's brother's wife). Her sister-in-law lives in the next room, and she takes a full tray so that they can eat together. A sister of her husband's lives opposite and another in a road nearby, while a niece lives two lanes away. All these women visit each other continually, since they need each other's help, and this is how she spends all her free time. Should one of the sisters-in-law fall sick, she will go to her even if it is a moonless night (a very inauspicious date): she takes a bhakri (a pancake made of millet) which she shakes over her and then throws away (a rite of exorcism). When her niece's husband suffered from the evil eye, she went to the home of a *bhagat* (holy man, fortune-teller and healer) to find out how to ward off the spell. This is her work, and her duty. When someone from the village comes to stay with her, she goes with her guest to visit all the relatives she wants to see and to the market to do all the necessary shopping. It is her duty and pleasure to help, accompany and advise people. The needs of all her relatives are her most important concern in such circumstances. She cannot, and does not want to, free herself from these pressing responsibilities. 'If I did not do this, the family would call me all sorts of names.'

Goja PAWAR found work for two cousins in the market, and therefore has no lack of people to visit. In addition, a cousin lives at Appar Bibrevadi and several people from her village are settled nearby. AU her free time is devoted to visiting them. Lila KARALE is a widow living alone with her children. Her brother cheers up her solitude by coming to stay with her from time to time. As her mother-in-law has completely broken off relations with her,

she needs the support of her own family. 'Even if my mother-in-law insults us, our *rnarathi dharma* (our duty as Indian women) obliges us to respect relatives and in-laws.' This is one conviction that is so deeply rooted in Lila bai's mind. 'Being widowed young is no reason to become defiant or proud. According to the *marathi dharma*, a woman must not talk back or stand up to anybody. She must show respect towards every one.' It was her brother who alone took all the necessary steps to find a husband for her daughter. 'I didn't utter a single word. Under no condition or pretext should women interfere.' Lila bai is always paying visits to one or other member of her family. Close relations must be maintained with all the members of the family, including the family back in the village, so as to be in a position, when the time comes, to make the best possible marriages for one's children. It is important to go to the village and attend the annual meeting and ceremonies held on the day *urus*, *jatra*.

Eighty per cent to 90 per cent of women strictly maintain these practices. Any break in relations makes it very difficult to resume them. Sula SONDKAR doesn't go back to the village to stay with her mother-in-law, Narmada bai, and has also broken with her husband, but her daughter-in-law has re-established links with the village. She goes back there for the yearly *jatra* and for marriages, and particularly makes sure she takes her children with her to these events. Sindhu BHOINE has taken another husband while keeping with her the son she had with her first husband, who is still alive, but with whom she has no relations at all. The son, however, goes back to his father any time he feels like it. 'All the family will have to be there when time for him to get married comes. If not, how will he find a girl to marry?' His mother got him married in her first husband's village after doing everything to obtain the family's co-operation.

Marthura bai was cast off by her husband, who lives separately in Pune. Her mother-in-law is very submissive to her son, but Mathura bai nevertheless maintains very good relations with her. She has even left one of her sons with her mother-in-law in the village. The mother-in-law is elderly, but with occasional help she cultivates a small plot of land. 'In the village are one's god, land, brothers and sisters. How could anyone go away from them?' In Phula PAWAR's house she receives a continuous flow of village people and relatives. 'I've got many relatives. They are always coming and going. Some of them live here. I am a woman who sticks by my relatives.' Laxmi MORE is a widow and lives alone. Her children live in Pune, but far from each other. She visits each one of them in turn on Saturdays. 'I have many relatives', says Lila BHEGADE. My house is always packed with them. Some of them live in Pune, and I visit them frequently.' Indu TAGULE has eight daughters, seven of whom are married. She lives in extreme poverty in a tumble-down house, and her husband is a drunkard. Yet for her it is a blessing to visit other people and receive visitors. Haru SULE managed to save money to buy a piece of land near Atpadi (Sangli District), her country of origin, by working as a labourer in Pune and being thrifty. She is often away traveling between Pune and the village when there is a marriage, a pilgrimage or a local assembly. She can also supervise work in the fields.

Haru bai is not the only one to shuttle between Pune and the village fields. One could cite many others such as Saru ANPURE, Hira CORGE, Martha NIMBALKAR, Hira DONDKAR, Anusuya TANDALE, Sukhu SAEKAR, Lila DIGHE, Jana KHENGARE, Paru INGULKAR, Shile BANJNE, Phula PAWAR, Bhim CORGE, Anu SALEKAR, Tai MANKAR, Indu UBHE, etc.

Links with the village, relatives and acquaintances can be as tight as a Gordian knot on a silk rope, but the threads can be loosened. Relations gradually develop outside circles of kinship.

Hira DALVI and Shakuntala SHINDE come from villages which are very distant from each other and live far apart in Pune. Their friendship is however very close and strong. Wherever they go, they go together: for instance they'll certainly buy saris of the same colour, same cloth and same design. They stay at each other's home in turns and visit each others' villages together. When there is a marriage they naturally go there together or not at all. This friendship has developed since they began working in the market. Kamala MALEKAR knows what misfortune is. Her father died very early on and her mother outlived him by only a few days. She was raised by an aunt. Her only sister is equally destitute. The worst that can happen to one is the absence of any close relations. Her husband was a profligate who drank himself to death and left her with five children. Nevertheless she set out to do everything in order to establish relations with the people she considered and respected as if they were real relatives. The chairman of the district council of Mulshi, Mr Raut became a brother to her; a woman from Karnataka her mother, another family her own family. She moved in with another man. In the meantime she took a trip to Baroda with another companion to visit people who she also considered as relatives. All these travels have broadened her education and experience. Now a second hurdle awaits her: getting her daughters married. The woman she regards as a mother seems to be a *devdasi* (a woman dedicated to a goddess and unmarried, since she is regarded as being the god's wife). She has arranged the marriage of one of MARNE bai's daughters with her son. It is unbelievable how MARNE got herself cheated in the affair, but it would seem quite certain that Kamala bai got substantial material gain from it.

Shaku PAWAR's brother-in-law went to work in Sudan. He is now back after spending ten years there. In the factory where he used to work before, he had proved to be such a competent technician that his employers sent him to Sudan. He used to go back home every two years. He amassed a small fortune but it goes without saying that on returning he soon spent it on drink. However he acquired land from his wife's family, and his sons are employed. He is therefore comfortably off. The stay abroad made him become more broad-minded. Shaku bai's sister's husband also lives in Bombay, where he received a good education. This brother-in-law greatly helps Shaku bai. She herself had six years of school and learned sewing.

Women such as Kamal POTDAR, Hira GIRE, Talsa PAWAR, Bayda PILANE and Chabu SHINDE have even gone beyond the frontiers of the circle of relatives to break the bonds of kinship. They thus naturally entered a larger sphere of social relations. They had no alternative, indeed, what can one do when one's own relatives break the family ties? Though their own families had withdrawn their support, these women nevertheless took great pains trying to repair the broken links with their original relatives, showing a tenacity that makes one feel sorry for them. Yet what are the links that always remain firm? At least they were establishing other new, wider relations. Sindhu SHELAR lives in Bhavani peth, a populous and cosmopolitan district. A dozen Muslim families live near her home. She is invited by the Muslim women to the Ramadan feast in their houses. She in turn invites them to come to her home for the *Divali* and *Gauri* celebrations with food they have cooked in their homes. I observed these signs of friendship and kindness in Konda SHEJAVAL's house at the very time when elsewhere riots were breaking out between Hindus and Muslims. Here they were offering one another traditional sweet pastries prepared at home.

Anjana YAMGHAR's son even observes the Ramadan fast along with his new Muslim friends.

It is not only in cosmopolitan Pune, but also outside it, that these wider relationships are being formed. We went to Dagada ABNABE's house with some of the *Stri Shakti Mandal* cultural organizers from Mulshi. 'I too frequently go there', she said, 'because I've got someone

there whom I regard as a *gurubhau*, a big brother.' Dagada bai is a Cambhar untouchable. She did not hesitate to establish intimate links with a Marathe man. She regularly goes to his home. Traditional mill songs already celebrate such great friendships:

I make myself friends from any caste
Oh Saravan, my daughter, tender budding flower.

KUMBHAR bai from Bhor, AINPURE bai from Mawal and KHILAR bai from Mulshi - all three live in Shukrawar peth. They do everything together: going to the market, attending marriages, changing blouses and saris; sharing joy and sorrow. Paru INGULKAR and Shaku PAWAR live far from each other in Pune, but are both stewards of their union, so that they meet often. One day when her son was intoxicated and had run wild, Paru bai went and stayed for four days with her friend. It is possible that their close friendship is partly due to their sharing the same position of authority in the union, and the way they similarly use or misuse their authority for personal ends. Lila NANAGARE came to live in Appar Bibvevadi, far away from her family village of Shahu chowk. But her former neighbors also came to live near Appar. The mothers-in-law of Lila bai and Shaku Shinde also live near each other, and both work in the market. The friendship between the two daughters led to that between the mothers-in-law. Although they have moved house, they still remain neighbors.

The customary basic social relations network is built on caste, neighbourhood, kinship and alliance, i.e. friendship between people within a close circle, respect for family values and supportiveness between members of the family. However, the society now entered by these women workers extends these networks as the women gain assurance and take initiatives under the pressures of daily life and the need to assert themselves. Managal BORKAR, for instance, is not only active in her union but has also acquired skills that enable her to intervene with acknowledged authority in other fields. She has proved that she can manage and supervise the running of a rations shop. A large delivery of *dhoti* and of saris took place recently. There were so many customers that both items quickly disappeared a few days later. There were none left on the day Mangal bai met the *Stri Shakti Mandal* organizers. 'If poor women of your organization want these saris at low prices, do not hesitate, let me know, I'll see with the shop manager.' The manager has promised me: 'Although there are no more saris for sale in the shop, if any woman really needs one, I'll definitely manage to get it for you. Just let me know'.

Obviously, not all the women workers have such qualities of leadership and the ability to handle people. Some of them, however, with their experience of town life and the workings of administrative offices, have definitely acquired real competence to embark on new tasks. Laxmi SULE for instance had seven years of schooling. 'When I was a child I worked in a doctor's home. I lived there on a 24-hour basis, I met many educated people. This means that I know my way about.' Her husband learnt how to weld. He works independently at home. When he needed to obtain an electricity meter from the city council, it was Laxmi bai who took the necessary steps with the town council offices to see the application successfully through.

Matrimonial alliances

Relations of affinity start from marriages, which in turn produce lasting kinship networks. Matrimonial alliances are of vital importance in determining social interaction and communication networks. The questions arising, of when, where and whom to marry, are settled by strict rules. The first is to ensure the 'matching of ties' - *dhâgâdirâ julne*, that is contracting a marriage only between families which already have existing ties of alliance. This precludes any family with which no relations of affinity have ever been established. The next

rule is to 'keep one's status' - in other words to maintain one's prestige and standing in the eyes of all. The elders' consent must be given. one must not go against the wishes of the village - of its chiefs and dignitaries. Again, a marriage must be arranged in time, before a girl gets out of her parents' control. All these customs and rules inevitably come into play, constituting the set framework of systems of kinship and affinity. The table below shows the percentages of women porters interviewed who respect them.

Matrimonial alliances entered into in accordance with traditional rules	Attempts to avoid customs or rules	Women whose young children are still unmarried
No. 71	32	63 (166)
% 42	19	39 (100)

Out of the 71 women who insisted on respecting traditional rules - i.e. the large majority - 17 even managed to gain added credit by respecting one highly appreciated custom - that of the mother who has her brother's daughter in her home as daughter-in-law. Traditional mill songs celebrated this honour and pleasure:

My brother becomes my *yâhi* in the presence of my *dîr*
Little bells hang from the shawl of my daughter-in-law - my little sparrow.

The *yâhi*, a deformation of the Sanskrit word *vyâhi*, denotes the brother who is the father-in-law of his sister's son; the *dîr* is the witness to the contracted alliance.

The father and the son in the same family of in-laws,
My lad has made his choice: his *mâmâ*'s (i.e. uncle's) daughter.

Under a patrilinear kinship system the bride lives in her husband's home, i.e. with her in-laws. In this alliance between cousins, her husband takes her to live in his father's home. The boy's mother expresses her happiness on seeing her son take his maternal uncle's daughter for wife, thus maintaining the tradition which consists of making his father's house a family of in-laws for both his wife and for himself.

One fifth of the women, however, show a bit of courage and distance themselves from the traditional networks. A detailed practical case-study is necessary to appreciate this.

Yashoda KAMTE comes from Khalad, a district of Purandar. All the alliances she has arranged have been within a group of villages less than 15 kilometres from each other. The same applies to Tara KAMTE, wife of her husband's brother. 'The Kamtés', she says, 'came down from their hills of Dive Ghat four generations ago in search of food, but they are not prepared to come down from there to marry'. Pula PAWAR had two of her daughters married in the Velhe region. For her son, a girl was suggested in the area of Saswad by friends in Pune. 'But I don't want to take a daughter-in-law from such a distant part of the country, Aren't there any more girls in our region before we go so far away to look for them?' (Saswad, Pune and Velhé are approximately at equal distances - 60 kilometres from each other). KUMBHAR bai is firmly determined to marry her only daughter to a young man in her village. Relations must 'be made to match' and bonds of alliance must not be established far away from the village of origin. More important still, the marriage must be celebrated in the village, not in Pune. Bhim CORGE gave her daughters in marriage in villages near her own, Nivhé, very far away in the

hinterland of the Mulshi dam. On the other hand, she took a daughter-in-law from Ukhed (Ambegas district) quite on the other side. In fact, the inhabitants of this village are migrants from the Mulshi region who settled to the east of Pune when their land was flooded. The geographical distance has not broken the unity of the village.

Yamuna PAWAR comes from Narayangao (Ambegao district). She repudiated her first husband, who was from this district, and took a second one from Bhor district. But she made sure she married her first daughter in Nayarangao, and her son is now looking for a girl there. It is the same with Sindhu BHOINE: she is formally divorced from her first husband but her son lives with her. She had him married in Calé, where his father, her first husband, lives. She has her eyes on a boy from the same area for her daughter. Shanta BHAGADE, who was sent away from her in-laws' home on account of a skin disease, had problems getting her daughter married in her husband's region. The husband's brother and sisters were against it and prevented it. As a result, Shanta bai had to go very far from the established family relations and marry her daughter to a boy from a very distant region. She had the same problems with her elder son. For her youngest son, she insisted that he be married to her brother's daughter. Her brother and she live under the same roof, separated by merely a thin wall. Living so close together, the young people fell in love with each other, with the inevitable result. Was it not better to get them married, rather than wait for the worst to happen? Shanta bai was inevitably driven by circumstances to infringe tradition in the first case, but to respect it in the second.

Paru SUDARIK has three sons. She married them to her three nieces. What was the point of going to search far away when my brother's daughters were so pretty?' Yamuna JADHAV's husband is suspicious, alcoholic and idle. Yamuna bai is supported by her own family: 'My brother takes care of everything'. Whatever happens, this brother has never left her unaided when she was in need, and has also showed himself a faithful guardian to her children. In the end 'he took her niece for a daughter-in-law and strengthened our relations'. Anu SALEKAR has a similar experience to narrate. Her brother lives near her. He earns his living comfortably, and can therefore help his sister. Anu bai's children have a better education than those of other people, and are employed. These ideal relations between brother and sister ended up in a marriage between cousins: the brother became his sister's *vyâhî* and the sister her brother's *vihin*. *The same thing* happened in Shashikala's case, except that this time the alliance was reversed. Normally it is the brother's daughter who is given to the sister's son. In this case the sister was so poor that she decided to give her daughter to her brother's son.

Rakhma TANPURE, from Khed district, gave her daughters to Dighes and Gaykvads from Mutha and Kondur of Mulshi district, who are all *gharânî kadvî* - i.e. families or houses with bad luck. Her network of alliances was already established with other *kadvî*. The word *kadu*, used as an adjective, describes a hurtful experience such as an enemy's aggressive behaviour, a past event which is a permanent source of grief or bitterness, the sour taste of a plant or fruit, a plant which is tough or coarse as compared with others which are tender and sweet, and land which is too salt or otherwise unsuitable for cultivation. As a noun it means descent from a slave mother as opposed to descent from the first or second wife, who is 'sweet' (god). This explains the opposition of the two commonly used terms *godvâ* and *kadvâ*. In current language the word *kadvâ* is frequently used to describe *gharanî* families of a given caste which contract marriages beneath them. 'Sour' families are therefore those which are regarded by their caste as having entered into alliances unworthy of the status and honour of the caste, and contrary to the rules of strict endogamy which protect that status and honour. For the other members of the group these families remain for ever a thorn in their flesh. This is what forced Rhakhma bai to seek alliances far from her own village, where the members of her own caste will only accept alliances with 'tender' families. When one of her daughters became a

widow, the question arose of her marrying again, or rather it did not arise, 'since for us in our caste' she said, 'a widow must not get married again'. Widows remarry in the caste of 'sour' families without any objections or loss of social status though such families prefer to avoid remarriage. The rule against remarrying which is observed by higher Brahman and Desmukh castes has in fact spread among other castes as a practice that gives social prestige, honour and a superior status. Its adoption by 'sour' families may pave the way upward socially and help regain lost esteem. Meanwhile, like Rakhma bai, Sita DIGHE as a member of a 'sour' family had to look for alliances far away from her home.

Subhadra HONMANE is a widow. She married her two daughters near her village of origin, Solhapur, though her brother-in-law with his two wives ignores her existence. She moreover made sure that the marriage was celebrated in her own village, where she travelled to attend it. The same strategy was adopted by other Dhangar women such as Malan PATIL and Ahilya HARAVANLE among others. Women from other communities such as the Khatik or Bhoi also rigorously observe the conditions, rules and traditions governing matrimonial alliances.

It is true that living in Pune has widened the circle of acquaintances and thus extended the network of matrimonial alliances and ties of affinity. We should however note the conditions under which this is taking place. Shakuntala SHINDE comes from the district of Dhirur to the east of Pune. Her father got to know her future father-in-law (a native of Sutarvadi, Mulshi) in the market, where the latter worked as a coolie, unloading goods which her father regularly delivered there. As a result of their frequent meetings the two men became fast friends. The father thus married his daughter in Satarvadi, to the west of Pune. Hira DALVI's parents came to Pune from the district of Raygad in the Sahyadri mountains. Her mother worked in Navi peth in a dairy, where a man from Ambavne (Mulshi) was also employed. It was he who arranged Hira bai's marriage to a boy from his village. Jana NIVANGUNE is a woman who has courage for anything. She migrated first on her own, leaving her husband to join her later. She goes alone to Pandhapur, Alandi, etc. It is no surprise therefore that again, on her own, she managed to enter into an alliance with people she got to know in Pune. Although SHINALKAR bai is a native of Ambegao, she has extended her network of alliances to the districts of Shirur and Havéli. KARLE bai, BHEGADE bai and BEIAREKAR bai have all wholeheartedly welcomed relations of affinity with the people they have come to know in Pune.

Other women have been forced by extreme poverty into matrimonial alliances far away from their homes. LOKHARE bai came to Pune once she became a widow. People gossip a lot about her loose manners, This was what made her feel free to marry her daughter to a boy from a very distant region. BHAME bai acted in the same way: a widow, her in-laws give her no help at all and her brother behaves improperly towards her. Nevertheless she got her eldest daughter married to someone from the village of her in-laws. For the others, however, she looked beyond affinity networks. Her parents have four daughters and no son; among her in-laws there is a brother-in-law from whom she can't expect any help. While refusing to help, he has at least the merit of not putting obstacles in the way of the marriages she decides. Under these conditions she has no choice but to free herself from the rules concerning affinities. The same goes for Ratna PAWAR. Her brother-in-law systematically blocked all her plans. Her brother, who lives in Pune, helped her in these plans. She married her daughter to a boy who lives in a house next to her brother. Sona MARATHE, KADU bai and Normada SONDKAR, for quite different reasons but also driven by circumstances and necessity, had to accept similar compromises.

Indu TAGULE has eight daughters and an idle alcoholic husband. In the words of the old mill song, she has to marry her daughters as best she can. Tradition goes by the board. Kala AMBADE is a Cambhar. Few families in her caste of untouchable craftsmen still live in the villages of her native region today. They are all looking for alliances increasingly further away. Kala bai has done more than anyone else to extend her horizons. Dagada ABNABE, also a Cambhar, has done the same thing. Contacts made in Pune show them the path and give them the courage. Naturally one must still make sure that the new marriage meets the basic requirements of existing affinities. Even enlarged, the new alliance must mesh in with previously established affinities.

Relations decided upon by young people on their own are rare. Yet they are predictable in an urban context where young people are often left to themselves, to pass time at the cinema while their mothers are out at work.

Sakhu JORI and her husband have been in Pune for 25 years. Her husband didn't get on well with anybody in the village or in the family. How could his wife have been able to get on with anybody when her husband himself couldn't stand his own people? She hardly ever goes back to the village. Her daughter got married to a boy who lived next to her home. The boy's father has quite a comfortable situation, but he repudiated his first wife in order to bring in a second one from Konkan. It is not surprising that in such conditions young people decide for themselves about their marriage, and that parents naturally agree. Chabu NANGARE's daughter definitely did not marry out of love. She was given a husband from her caste, but her in-laws were destitute and starving. She fled. Today she lives in Pune with a young man who had always been her mother's neighbour. It is said that she loved him before she got married. The young man was Mahar, while she was Vanjari. Chabu bai has cut off relations with her daughter because of this difference in caste.

Kamal KALE now has a Mang husband, but keeps with her a daughter from her first marriage, who goes along with her to the market. The daughter fell in love with a boy working in one of the market's cheap eating-houses. The boy's mother, MOHOL bai, is also a market coolie. Her husband gets drunk a lot and stays idle at home. She is totally neglected by her brother-in-law and father-in-law, and has no support at all. Her cousins seized the land which belonged to her husband. How can one claim to have a place in society when one is so destitute? The marriage between the young people wasn't possible. Kala AMBADE let her son marry a Marathe girl of his choice who lived in Dattavadi, but the marriage was short-lived. BHUDE bai's husband was carried off by drink, and nobody cares about her, whether in her own family or that of her in-laws. The little land that remains in the village is in the hands of a cousin who cannot even gain his own subsistence from it. She had a house in the village, but a Marvadi shopkeeper appropriated it. That was the end of her links with the village. Her son married out of love and had to go and live in his wife's home with his in-laws, contrary to custom. She regretted it very much but had to accept it quietly. Shanta SHELAR's son also married out of love. He is an electrician. He used to go to work in Rasta peth, where he met a girl with whom he independently arranged his marriage; he also decided to live with her in the home of his in-laws. His wife is well off and does not want to go to live with her mother-in-law, who is poor. He has had to give into his wife's wish, much to his mother's grief.

Caste

We have already seen several examples of the extent to which the caste system defines the basic framework of social relations operating at various levels, such as the paths people follow in migrating, choosing places where to live, where to work, choosing whom to marry

and with whom to have working relations with etc. Caste is the vital area of life which is both comprehensive and exclusive. We shall consider it here in its own right as a system of representation and of value, i.e. as a basic philosophy of life. In everyday language the following themes recur as leitmotifs which refer equally to practices, values and representations: We don't do such or such a thing . . . As far as we are concerned it's different (literally, 'ours is entirely different'). Our duty as a caste, *jâti dharma*, is not the same as that of other castes ...'.

Lila KARALE is inordinately proud of belonging to her Marathe caste and of its *marathi dharma*. 'In our caste one must conduct oneself very strictly. If we do not, people call us all sorts of names.' These words occur repeatedly throughout her speech like a refrain at the end of each verse . . . Yamuna SHIRK explains: 'You know what the *marathi dharma* says about it. The sari shawl has to be brought over the head and not left to fall back on the shoulders. That's how one must conduct oneself. 'The *marathi dharma* is very strict,' confirms Matha PLOEKAR, 'we must not treat it as we like'. Shaku Pawar is very keen to setup an exemplary home. 'Will you buy a fridge too?' I asked. 'Oh no! We don't like eating stale stuff. In our caste the *kâlvan* must be prepared on a daily basis. It wouldn't be appropriate to eat things from the fridge.' (The *kâlvan* is a liquid preparation. The word comes from the verb *kâlvine*, which means to mix. The *kâlvan* is either a boiled vegetable or legume, served with a seasoned sauce, or the sauce itself, a mixture which includes condiments that have been crushed using two special stones to be found in every home. Condiments such as spices, hot pepper, coconuts, etc. are mixed with millet bread or rice, which absorbs them. *Kâlvan* contrasts with *korde*, a vegetable preparation without liquid or sauce, or unseasoned legumes themselves - *varan*.) Sindhu BHOINE invited us into her house to see a kitchen that is equipped with everything, including gas and a pressure cooker. 'But we haven't changed our method of preparing the *kâlvan* or the way we cook the millet cake bread. It is the traditional method in our caste, and we attach importance to it.' Hira KHENGARE told me that a few smokeless fireplaces had been installed in the village. When we are there, we have to cook on an earth stove. Of course we must do everything according to the tradition handed down to us. 'Phula PAWAR confirms this: naturally, when I am in the village I cook on the earth stove.' When Saru AINPURE, Tai MANKAR and Kamal MALEKAR were serving us a meal they were worried whether I would like Marathe food. 'As for us, *Kâlvan* is prepared by crushing condiments on the stone. We never eat stale food. Even when we come home tired from the market, we prepare a cooked meal'. These are all chance examples taken from among many others. Almost all the women reply in exactly the same words.

In the expression *marathi dharma*, the word *dharma* refers to the customs, values, behaviour and duties imposed by tradition on one's immediate group, i.e. the caste or subcaste. The word *marathi* (which usually means the spoken language) refers to the cultural domain to which one belongs, in this case the historical and political-cultural entity of Maharashtra. The expression *marathi dharma* indirectly connotes a socio-cultural identity historically acquired.

Mathura RAKHA Vanjari, from the Osmanabad district, said to me that in her view: 'Half of the people in the market are our people, that's to say from our Vanjari community'. Cheba NANGARA, from Mulshi, shares this view, Garja OMBASE concurs: 'Don't imagine that we, the Vanjari, are lost in the market. With so many of us already here, we have no problem joining it. We have been here ever since the time when the market opened down in Pune. We continuously visit each other and keep in touch. Thaku NANGARE's brother lives in Shukravar peth. He is one of the managers of *Phule market*. He is well off. Thaku bai is proud of her brother and his leading role. However, her own situation being mediocre by comparison with his, she usually avoids visiting him except for a feast, a marriage or a death. Jana

THORVE and her daughter Ranjana NANGARA live together in Bhavani peth surrounded by people of many different castes. As the mother is a widow and her daughter has been rejected, they specially need to have recourse to help from people of their caste.

We were seated in Gajra OMBASE's home when her sister-in-law came in to ask her if she had brought back any *kârli* from the market (a vegetable - momordica charantia). 'Prepare some of it very carefully, as we do, and serve it to them. Our method of cooking is outstanding - the dishes are delicious.' Serving us, Ambu KOKARE says: 'Please note that we Dhangar drink goat's milk. It's better than any other milk, since goats eat a great variety of leaves. All these leaves' juice is in the milk'. Dagada ABNABE, a Cambhar, also explained her caste's cooking methods.

A discussion took place on the marriage of Malan PATIL's daughter. 'Although Subhadra HONMANE is one of us, a Dhangar, she does not belong to our alliance network. Besides the main castes, which are the KHUTKAR, HATKAR etc. there are many subcastes in our community. There are no inter-marriages between them.' 'There are many Marathes around us where we live. Despite our being Vangari, we can't avoid visiting them and mixing with them' said Gajra OMBASE. 'Would you marry your daughter to a Marathe boy?' I asked. 'Good heavens! How could that be possible?' they all cried out in unison. 'One can only marry inside the caste.' There was no dissentient voice.

Mukta JADHAV is glad that there is not a single Mahar or Mang untouchable in Dattavadi in her neighbourhood. We have relations only with Marathes. There is no problem in having to mix with them.' Yamuna PAWAR is Mukta bai's neighbour, and like her, cannot bear the thought of being defiled by untouchables. Yamuna bai repudiated her first husband and took as her second husband a man from Bhor whom she had known in Pune. However, she cannot get used to the idea of having untouchables for neighbors and mixing with them. Hira BHOKAR is in constant contact with Mahars and Mangs in Appar Bibv, where she lives. 'They defile us, but what can one do about it? All that we can do is make sure that these *vitâl câmdâla* (untouchables) do not cross our threshold. In one's own home, one has to be strict.' SHIRKE bai says the same. We can no longer choose our neighbors here in Appar Bibv. At least the two houses next to ours are occupied by Marathes, also the one opposite, by a family from near our home in Purandar. The solution is to limit our contacts only to these people, and try not to go anywhere else. But today we have to go for marriages to halls which are open to everyone ! We simply must not mix with others.'

Jija UTTEKAR has Kama KALE for her neighbour, who left her first husband and took a second one who is a Mang. Jija bai won't even go and take a glass of water at her neighbour's house. The front doors of the two houses are literally opposite each other but Jija takes great care to make sure that she is never 'downwind' from the Mang opposite. The same behaviour is true of the two sisters, Jayeshri BHOSLE and Kamal RANE. 'This shanty town of Dhankavdi is invaded by all sorts of castes,' they said to me. 'As for us, we have nothing to do with anybody. We do not eat with the Mahar-Mangs.' Rangu DIGHE, in Janata Colony, lived side by side with Mahar-Mangs. They shared the same water spring. We used to fill their jugs with water from ours. Drops of water splashed from their pots on to ours. We felt soiled.' Now in Appar Bibv, she has built herself a large bungalow. She says: '... no more question of being defiled'. Despite this, she acknowledges that she owed her job in the market yard to her neighbour from Janata Colony, who was a Mahar. Though in the market people of all the different castes work together without distinction, the caste mentality is very deeply rooted. According to DINGHE bai, 'I went to the market committee office yesterday'. Mr Kale, whom I met, said that 'today one sees Mahar women applying for jobs as coolies (up to now these

women were tolerated only as sweepers)’. What has got into them, to want to be coolies?’ Jija SHELKE stormed out angrily after hearing Mr Kale. ‘The whole market is now filled with these sluts (*râmda*). Before this, in Thorat’s time, Mahar women were never hired in the market.’

Haru SULE, a Dhangar, lives in a shack in Bibv. ‘There are Mahars all over the shanty town. We have to attend their marriages. How can we avoid it? Just see what is happening today! We have to take tea or a meal: however, they are prepared by Brahman cooks, so there is no problem.’

Shaku KORPE is a Lingayat-Vani. ‘As for us, we don’t respect caste rules. We do not believe that a person can be defiled by others. Nevertheless, we do not get married to them.’ Jana NINVANGUNE has Kamal POTDAR for her neighbour, a Mahar by birth, who now has relations with a Sonar man. Jana bai calls on her, takes a drink or a meal and lets her children enter the house. She was very helpful during her last confinement. Shaku PAWAR made us go into the home of Kale AMBADE, a Cambhar, where we had tea and other refreshments. When it comes to food I make no distinction of caste’, she said. Panu INGULKAR said the same thing: ‘I don’t mind drinking a cup of tea in a Mahar’s house’. Hira GIRE is on very good terms with all - Mahars, Mang, Cambhar, Vanjari, etc. Paru bai’s neighbour is Sona Marathe, whose daughter left her husband and went to live with a rich Mahara. Sona bai keeps in contact with her, but her daughters-in-law disapprove. ‘How are we going to get our children married in future under such conditions?’ Chabu NANGARE has a daughter who ran away from her in-laws’ home to live with a Mahar. Chabu bai broke off all relations with her.

Jana MORE is a Mahar. Her daughter went up to the 12th year of school and now works at Sassoon Hospital. ‘Is she a midwife there?’, I asked. ‘Oh no, no, we aren’t Mang!’ (The work of delivering babies was a hereditary profession of low social classes - the untouchables.) Gita YELVE had to accept work as a midwife out of economic necessity, absolutely against her will. Yamuna JADHAV is in the same situation. Her husband was suspicious. He forced her to leave the market and become a midwife. Moreover, she made less money from this work besides the fact that she didn’t like it because it degraded her. She went back to the market to be hired. Kala AMBADE’s husband is Cambhar . . . Her son-in-law runs a sandal shop, but two boys have left it to become carpenters, the job of a shoemaker being traditionally looked down upon by the Cambhar.

The gods

Going to temples and worshipping gods involves a range of conduct, practices, and representations which take on very particular significance in the lives of women porters. The liturgy (*pujâ - arcâ*), pilgrimages (*yatrâ*); yearly village gatherings around the local god (*jatrà*); generally speaking practices (*âcâr*) and particularly the personage of the *bhagat*, and trances or states of possession, are realities which permanently occupy the minds and conversations of coolie women. They talk at length about religious ceremonies and rites that must not be missed; the rules for fulfilling rituals, the meticulous care to be paid to certain aspects of worship, new practices that are spreading or new religions growing up. They exchange ideas, gather information, evaluate the outcome, tell each other about newly-discovered holy men *bhagat* and *devrishi*, and note what money has been spent or put aside for such purposes.

Village gods and their gatherings

Even those who have migrated are careful to maintain links with their village, especially through the gods and annual gatherings (*jatrà*). All the women testify to this: ‘At least once a

year we return to the village to attend its assembly and to prostrate ourselves at the god's feet.' There are very few people like SONDKAR bai who do not do so.

BHUNDE bai's relations with her village have been severed. Her cousin farms her land, while a Marwari businessman has taken over her house. In spite of this, '... my son, or I myself, or anybody else - we go to the village assembly to offer a coconut to the god'. Whether it be Dhangar women from Atpadi (Sangli), May KALE, DOMBALE, Ambu KOKARE, Haru SULE etc., from Solapur, Malan PATIL and SUBHADRA HONMANE, or Vanjari women, Mathu PAKHA or Marathes, Hira BHOKAR, from Osmanabad, the Marathes from Amednagar, Paru SUDARIK . . . all of them, however far away from their village of origin, go back to attend the annual assembly. 'The coach fare is getting dearer and dearer, but it makes no difference. Once a year we must go to the village and prostrate ourselves before the god. If the family as a whole cannot go, at least one person must be there.' Those who come from villages near Pune can easily go there every month or every two months, to touch the feet of their village god with their forehead. Field gods are also far from being neglected. Many women pay visits to them or revere them according to their needs. Generally these gods have a day each year when people like Gita GHULE offer a kid to them and organize a sacrificial meal, with many guests.

Worship and home fasting

It is not possible to go to the village daily to worship one's god. People worship him in their homes. The god's presence is usually symbolized by a photograph or a statue. Women much prefer photographs to idols, regardless of the type of god. The Marathes recognize chiefly Bahiri, Kalubai, Wagjai, Maruti and the Dhangar Biroba and Masoba. One is not restricted to one's village god, so everyone displays the god of her choice, putting up photographs from places visited on pilgrimage. Mostly they are photos of the Guljapur or Gangpur *devi*, or of Vithoba and Rakhumai, etc. A woman will bring back a photograph of Donje to stop her husband drinking. Depending on individual taste, all kinds of photos are brought back and are then covered with sacred sweet-smelling or coloured powder. Sticks of incense or perfumed powder are burnt before them; one woman offers a flower, prepares the *pujâ*. Morning and evening, an oil lamp will be lit before the god and a bow will be made. Women will make the *puja* themselves, except when they are menstruating, when their husband or son takes their place. Nothing must prevent the ceremony being held daily. One look at the photographs displayed indicates the pilgrimages made by the mistress of the house. In some homes a larger idol - such as that of Kalu bai for instance - which will be found displayed for a particular reason.

The practice of fasting is also common on Saturdays, Mondays, Fridays and Thursdays. Some women will occasionally fast 12 consecutive Tuesdays or eight successive Thursdays on someone else's recommendation. Others prefer to fast on the days of pilgrimage to Alandi and Pandharpur, on the eleventh day of the lunar month and during the four holy months of Shravan. There is no limit to fasting. There is also the nine days fasting for *navaratra*. *There are very many kinds of fasting. There are very few women like KONDAVALKAR or BHEGADE who claim that they don't fast. 'If one has to work one must eat to have strength.'*

Only KORPE bai daily prepares the *pujâ* for the *linga* of Shiva, the god of her Lingayat-Vani caste. She is probably the only one from her caste in the market. In addition to the *pujâ* and regular or perpetual fasts, some feasts and rituals are also observed everywhere. The ceremonies of *Adhiti*, *Pitar*, *Dasara*, *Diwali*, *Sanskrant*, *Gauri* and *Ganpati* are maintained by everyone. Gauri is the most important. It is celebrated both through public rites in the market

place and privately at home. The large majority of women celebrate Gauri at home. On this day, however poor one may be, a feast has to be offered to the goddess Gauri, comprising several trays of food, sweets, fruits, vegetables, etc. which are put before her. On that day one must prepare wheat pancakes stuffed with cane sugar and chick-peas. Nothing must be left out. Kamala MALEKAR rents out one of her rooms in order to raise money with which to pay back her son's debts but on that day, although the room is occupied by her tenants she goes back in and sets up Gauri. A striking new practice is gaining ground, that of decorating Gauri with a garland of electric bulbs and flickering lights installed by an electrician. A tape-recorder is added with cassettes playing the latest music, generally that popularized by commercial Hindi cinemas. The rhythms are taken from modern western rock-and-roll dances. Women also get together that day to do physical exercises and dance to traditional songs. The fact is that there is no room in shanty towns for these festivities. For those who really want to play and dance in a circle, the place to go to is the market; otherwise dancing is a forlorn hope.

The second important feast is *navarâtra*. For nine consecutive nights a *ghat* (a water pot) must be installed and lights arranged, and people must fast for those nine days. This is a feast which all women observe.

As part of the regular *pujâ-arcâ* worship, the most important prayer service, *Satyanârâyan*, now takes place in almost all families, usually in the month of *shrâvan*, unless when it enhances the Gauri celebrations or is motivated by another specific event such as marriage, moving house, a special fast, etc. The old custom of forming a vow to obtain a wish still exists with the same frequency: *vrat-vaikalya*, including *vrat paurimâ* and *rishi pancmi*, which are observed by all women. New ones are even beginning to take on, such as *santoshi mâtâ* which is quite recent and mainly popularized by commercial cinemas. Chandra UBHE one day began to observe it herself, followed by MARNE bai. Jai AINPURE scrupulously made a vow which she saw being performed in Goja PAWAR, that of 16 consecutive Mondays. A totally new type of fast is beginning to spread, that of white Wednesdays, when all food eaten, whether raw or cooked, must be white. A habit is also catching on of offering a coconut to Ganpatti and preparing *modak* (pastries and sweets associated with this god's liturgy) on the day of *samkashtha câturthî*. This practice, little known in the villages, is spreading as people settle in the town of Pune, of which Ganpatti is one of the main gods.

A new custom hitherto unknown has been spreading for the last two years: a brother's wife gives a water pitcher to her sister-in-law (the husband's sister) who in turn gives a sari. There is a story behind this custom, derived from extraordinary old mythological and moralizing legends whose relevance has only recently become clear to women. We do not know where these legends come from, but it may have been from soothsayers, and it has got into their heads. It is a kind of vow that is spreading suddenly at extraordinary speed, and increases shopkeepers' sales.

Pilgrimages

The tradition of going on pilgrimage to Pandharpur and Jejuri is admittedly age-old; migrating to town has not caused or inaugurated it. However, by providing people with spare cash, life in town has encouraged it, Transport firms take advantage of this windfall, and their publicity impresses all the coolie women, Going on pilgrimage is of greater popular importance as a practical observance of one's faith.

Gajra OMBASE each year visits Tuljapur, Pandharpur and Alandi. She is not the only one that considers this as an obligation. Among others, one can cite at random Sindu SHELAR, Goja PAWAR, GHODKE, Thaku NANGARE, Jana THORVE, Ranjana

NANGARE, Dagade LONDE, Dagada ABNABE, HARANAVLE, TANPURE, Shaku PAWAR, INGULKAR, KARLE, Hira GIRE, Paru SUDARIK, Angusuya BARDE, Sakhu BAMGUDE, etc.

The following suggestion is now being made. Unions have been collecting membership fees from their members for years; the money is deposited in a bank and yields interest. Why shouldn't a union use the interest to organize pilgrimages to Alandi, Pandharpur, Tuljapur, Gangpur for its members?

Countless women have put on the necklace of those devoted to Vithoba (symbol of the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra) and go each eleventh day of the lunar month to Alandi, and once a year to Pandharpur, following the example of Gire Nivangune, and the two KAMTE sisters-in-law. Gire bai also sings hymns for hours on end. Haru Sule, a Dhangar, and her husband go to Pandharpur each year with all kinds of pilgrims from all over the State.

Her husband organizes seven-day meetings for the reading of sacred books. These include 'The God Hari's Victory', 'The Heroic Deeds of the Pandava' and others. Gita GHULE goes every year to visit Pandharpur and Gangpur. In this connection she has made friends with women from Padmavti where she lives. Anu SALEKAR's son works for the State Public Transport Company. Every six months he gets a free travel permit. Anu bai has thus been able to travel with her husband to Pandharpur, Gangpur, Tuljapur, Somai Karanje and other places.

Pilgrimage companies organize trips to places of worship which are more remote and dispersed throughout India. All one has to do is pay the sum required. In 1990, SHELKE bai went to the north of India. Kala KARLE explained to me: 'For pilgrimages to Kashi (Benares) and Kedarnath, a company charges 5,500 rupees. Money is not a problem for me, and I can pay. What I want, however, is to find two women to accompany me'. Mangal BORKAR took the initiative of renting a small 12-seater van for a 15-day pilgrimage to several holy places in the north. She took provisions of flour, rice, etc., plus the utensils she needed to do her own cooking while staying at *dharmashala* (inns for pilgrims). Dhonda BORADE was with her. This is how Shile RANJNE made the pilgrimage to Cârî Dhâm four shrines situated at 'the four corners of the country'. She also goes to Alandi and Pandharpur every year. Mangal bai and Shile bai are also both union stewards.

Chabu SHINDE was admitted to the *acukpanth* group, a strict subgroup of the old Mahanubhav sect. She wears the necklace of the *bhakti* devotees. Once a year she goes to Phaltan, the headquarters of the sect. She meets its holy men and gurus, to whom she makes offerings totalling some 100 to 200 rupees. The sect demands that she give up eating meat in honour of the gods. She hopes to retire to Phaltan in her old age, where her meals will be served by people of her sect. Earlier in her life she left her husband in order to keep house for and take care of her parents. Her brothers and sisters have now forgotten her. She came to live on her own in Pune, in a succession of shanty-towns. Rumour has it that she maintains a *divanji*. She probably joined the sectarian community so as to help finance it.

Trances or states of possession

While the motives for entering into a trance as a way of communicating with the god are the same as those underlying the practices already described, a state of possession is a specific kind of relationship with the god which should be considered separately. Such states are the work of holy men called *bhagat* and *devrishi*, and holy women called *bhaktin*.

Sindhu SHELAR consults a *bhagat* from her village Valen, who is received in all houses although he is Mahar. Even more than that, he is honoured and served food. As an itinerant he travels from one village to another in the countryside between Pune and Bombay. He is given free food and accommodation by the inhabitants and also paid generously. He boasts everywhere of his powers and exploits, claiming to be able to cause someone in, say, Bombay, to drop dead immediately. His death-dealing art consists in modifying the positions of cereal grains on a small plank. Naturally he also claims to be able to reverse any evil spell cast on one of his devotees or customers, however powerful it may be. His audience listens to him with intense religious fervour, with some women even asking him to use his powers on their behalf.

Bhagat and the gods are sometimes the cause of transgression of caste or village frontiers. Mukta NANGARE has been in Pune for 30 years, during which her countless misfortunes included an alcoholic husband, a profligate son, and being beaten by thugs in her Denkéarpul slum. What can she do? 'I've worn out my feet visiting so many gods.' For ten years now she has been regularly going to a Muslim place of worship. Hira DALVI's daughter suffered from a tumour in the head. The doctor recommended an operation, but her grandmother said it couldn't be done, since it was '*mothî bâî*, the Great Lady. Don't have the operation! The *devi* (goddess) would be angry'. Her daughter had always been possessed by the *devi*, who said: 'I am Punjabi, do not importune me!' The grandmother replied: 'I shall build a shrine for you (an altar set up for a god's worship and for the ceremonies), if only you will go away!' The *devi* obeyed and went away. The daughter recovered and is now married, but the shrine *mâmd bharne* is yet to be set up. It means an outlay of 500 rupees, which is always being postponed.

We are in a difficult situation. We shall go and see the *bhagat*' is the reason given by many women for having recourse to a *bhagat*: PAWAR, DOMBALE, UTTEKAR, MALEKAR, VARAL, HARANAVLE, and others. 'Now, next time I go to the village, I'm going to consult the *bhagat*' says Subhadra HONMANE. She is a widow, her alcoholic husband died of cancer, and went with other women. 'Did you consult the *bhagat* when your husband had cancer?' I asked. What can a *bhagat* do for that kind of disease?' was her instant reply, and that of her son. Girja DOMBALE is beaten by her alcoholic husband. 'I'm going to see the *bhagat* but I shan't pay him until I've seen the result.' Revu BHEGADE was infatuated with a *bhagat* who had taken possession of Kalu bai. He made out a long list of things to do, that cost her 2,000 rupees. This made her lose trust in him. She no longer trusts any *bhagat*. PANAR has a husband who does not live with her. She is in great pain from a tumour in the throat. 'Why don't you consult a *bhagat*?' 'Today, are there any real ones left? They are all out to make money.' This is not however the usual reaction. All women rush to consult a *bhagat* when they are childless, have lost a child, or have a husband who drinks, etc.

Another solution frequently sought to such problems is the ceremony called *jâgaran gomdhal*, which is carried out in the house by people who are specialists in it (these are people of the *gomdhal* and *devdâsi castes*). Tara DHANVE explains: 'I had the ceremony performed because at home we have nothing but continual failures and problems'. The fact is that Tara's husband has a second wife. In what way could the ceremony make any difference?

A third practice is for the women themselves to fall into a trance, possessed by a *devi* or other divinity. Gajara OMBASE has been possessed by *Mothî Baî* for nine years. 'Four years ago, just back from Tuljapur, I was offering a meal to Brahman married women (whose husbands were living, a meritorious ritual). 'All of a sudden, the *devi* entered me.' For 12 years now Gajra bai has been living in Pune and is mistreated by her in-law's family. Saru AINPURE, of intermediate age, is possessed by a goddess. Hira CORGE is in her twenties, and is

possessed by Mothî Baî. Jana MORE's daughter is possessed by Kalu bai. She is pretty, has been to school and works in Sassoon. She must do whatever Kaly bai tells her. Each year she goes on pilgrimage to the *devi* of Mandar. She is not married, but her mother's two sisters-in-law have been widows since their childhood and do all the housework for Jana bai and her husband. One of them is also possessed by the *devi*. The husband of Shila RANJNE, who is possessed by Kalu bai, lost his job in the textile factory in Pune when it closed down. Shila bai is a union steward but looks down upon the other women whom she treats arrogantly and unjustly. The workers are angry with her for the way she does things, but Shila bai is proud of the post she holds, though well aware of the suppressed bitterness of her colleagues. Other women stewards also fall into trances. Kalu bai likewise possesses Kala AMBADE, a Cambhar and a widow whose oldest son drinks heavily, beats his wife and doesn't earn any money. This son first married a Maratha girl, who quickly fled back to her mother. He then got remarried to a Cambhar girl.

The two KAMTE sisters-in-law offer special worship in their home to Kalu bai. Their mother-in-law's children all died young. She made a vow to Kalu bai. Ever since then, it is the sisters-in-law who continue: each year they go to see the *devi in* Mandar. Yashoda's husband is also possessed by Kalu bai. During the full moons of Paush and Ashad, married Brahman women must be offered a banquet and at least once a year a kid must be sacrificed to the god of Mandar. Lila KARALE is possessed by *Mothî bâi*, and her daughter by the *devi* of Tuljapur. The daughter is ten years old and goes to school, yet money has to be spent on the *devi* too. Every year a trip must be made to Taljapur to make the offering of both vegetarian and meat dishes. Jana NIVANGUNE is possessed by *satî asarâ*. The maharaj whom she took for her guru said she should not eat meat. She made it a rule to wear the *bhakti* necklace. At first it was the *maulâyâ* who were giving her trouble; she wasn't treating them with the care they expected from a devotee, and made her pay for it. While giving birth to her fourth child she got her arms, back and belly badly burnt. She didn't think the child would live, but it was rushed to Sassoon (the hospital) and survived. She still suffers a lot from the after-effects of the burns, and has lost two fingers. She has realized that the *maulâyâ* have to be treated with the respect and attention they demand. Each year she gives them an offering. Her 14-year-old daughter is also possessed by *satî asarâ*. She must eat meat. Jana bai prepares it for her, but doesn't eat any of it. Jana bai is a strong, active and efficient woman.

Kamal KALE left her first husband and now lives with a Mang in wretched poverty. The husband is an inveterate drunkard. She is possessed by the *devi* of Tuljapur. She spent 5,000 rupees to buy *pardî* (offerings of flowers or a kid in a large round bamboo basket which can contain all kinds of things). Her husband is possessed by Laxmi bai. The two sisters, Jayashri BHOSLE and Kamal RANE, cannot count on help from either their own family or their in-laws, both being too poor. Their shanty town is particularly insanitary and their husbands are alcoholic. This is important to remember when they become possessed by Kalu bai. Jayashri has installed a large idol of Kalu bai in her house. They have to make the Mandar pilgrimage. They still go there once a month to see a *bhagat*, They worship and make offerings of coconuts to the *devi* during nights without moonlight, and especially during the full moon. Mathu RAKHA's husband has two wives; she is possessed by the *devi* of Tuljapur. Matha NIMBALKAR lost her daughter, and can't get over it. Her husband and her brother-in-law are good-for-nothings, constantly mortgaging the land in the village. To get it back, Matha bai works the land until she is exhausted. She has still one daughter, possessed by Kalu bai. She does still more. She has set up altars to the *devi mâmd*, and gets *jâgaran gomdhal* and other rites celebrated. This costs her between 1,000 and 2,000 rupees. Her room is tiny, measuring 4 by 6 feet, and has little furniture. Her son aged 15 has just successfully completed seven years of schooling. She is concerned to get him married.

Paru PATNE's husband used to have a job in Bombay. But because of disputes he migrated to Pune 22 years ago. He managed to get a job with the municipality, and made his wife leave the village and come to join him. She hadn't followed him to Bombay. She now has three sons; the eldest and the second were in Bombay, but the second one lost a leg in an accident and returned to Pune, where he learnt tailoring. As a result the eldest had also to come back to Pune, where he operates a hand-cart from which he sells water ices. In summer he also sells grilled corn-cob. He is married and has two daughters and a son, but will not have his wife go out to work. As he does not get on well with his father, he and his wife live on their own. Paru bai has been in Pune for 22 years, since when she began to be possessed by Wagjai. Her husband initially did not believe her; the goddess to punish him caused the death of three of his children leaving only three alive in all. This restored the husband's faith in the *devi*. Paru bai is possessed by three gods. Every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday people come to prostrate themselves at her feet and to consult her. She speaks on behalf of the *devi* and answers the questions which people ask about their future. She falls into a trance on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. People come to fetch her from distant villages. She has been to Tuljapur, Pandharpur, Karhad, Satara and other holy places. She is now herself recognized as a *bhakti*. She takes no money from those who consult her, but they themselves decide to make offerings when they are satisfied with her oracular statements. Her daughter-in-law would like to go out to work, but her husband is against it, as is Paru bai: 'It isn't for young girls to work in the market. Coolies and the *dalâl* conduct themselves badly with women'. She returns late from the market, visiting other women friends on the way.

The urban environment

The urban environment not only encourages the expansion of the relations instituted by prevailing communication systems but also introduces its own networks, which are based on other values and purposes. We do not present here a comprehensive picture of the messages, representations or behaviour patterns disseminated by urban communication systems and relations. We shall take only three examples, in an attempt to understand how these affect market women porters, and the way the latter react. Even more important than the immediate extent of the impact of town life, what needs to be clearly grasped are its dynamic motivations and results. It is these motivations and results which will help us to measure the extent to which deviations are accepted, imposed or desired.

Language

Just because one comes to Pune does not mean that one suddenly forgets the language spoken in the village. People still use it among themselves, while at the same time learning a new urban vocabulary. This is done without any difficulty, except that some of the new words are mangled as the speaker chooses. English words are mixed up with those of the Marathi language and syntax, so that the new words resulting from the mixture become one's own language. This can be seen from expressions like 'We are in an *onarship* (ownership) *kîm* (scheme)', to quote Jija SHELKE. Hira KHENGARE and BHOINE bai also speak fluently of flat(s) and *onarship*, while Shakuntala SHINDE speaks of the *posh* (luxurious residence) where she would like to live now that she works in the market. BHOINE bai complains that the shops of her shanty town stock only *bhangar* goods (revolting junk).

While many new English urban terms are used, this has not made people forget their traditional sayings, proverbs, words, expressions and metaphors. None the less, the fact that new words are ousting the old idiom means the impoverishment of a very rich language which is threatened specially by television programmed which edit out country speech. Many

expressions and words such as those quoted below are not immediately understood by people living in towns. The meaning has to be explained to town-dwellers, such as myself.

Moreover it is not just the meaning of words which is involved, it is also a way of speaking and even rhetorical styles of expression which are unknown in towns. For example, in country speech blunt verbal aggressiveness is avoided and replaced by mild irony and indirect criticism, as in the saying: 'She scolds her daughter but the message is meant for her daughter-in-law'.

Below are examples of words and expressions which typify the wealth and forthrightness of country speech. 'I had a *duhât* miscarriage', says Jana NIVANGUNE. 'That's how we say it in our Mawal language' she adds after explaining to me what the word means. Révu BHEGADE migrated, alone, without her husband, at a very young age. She talks about it using an expression used by many women: 'A husband provides a place in the world; without a husband, the four corners of the earth are open'. This means that it is the husband who guarantees a set status and place in society, and that only through a husband can a woman be positioned or situated in society. Without a husband, a woman is homeless, buffeted by the winds, and belongs nowhere and to nobody. When she invited her husband to her daughter's marriage, the husband threw out his chest to give himself importance.

'Latrines belong to the owner (or husband - same word in Marathi), cleaning them to the Bhangi' (the lowest caste, whose role is emptying latrines and washing them), she explained to us. To denounce the arrogance of another woman she said: 'The bulls and the cart belong to other people, but the ornaments belong to my father'. Kamala MALEKAR said 'What's the use of showing off when you work on the land, you get your arse full of earth' (when you sit down). Hira BHOKAR, on her sufferings: 'If I told you all the cruel setbacks I have suffered, tears would fill your eyes. I've suffered "like Sita in exile in the forest". But destitution one day goes away. The sun's heat falls on you for a time and then afterwards it withdraws, leaving the shadow to take its place. Such is life. We therefore have to go on toiling. Days go by, each different from the other - literally meaning, "days run on"'). In the words of the song:

Woman, do not let destitution get you down
I tell you, this isn't going to last long, it's like a dark patch on the moon.

Hira bai had made this song the guiding truth of her life.

Mohit SUTAR told us: 'Even though I am a Muslim, I am a woman like all the others. This is what I say to these women: 'Castes divide people, but do manners or behaviour divide them? Why do you spurn me like a child because my husband has two wives?'

Sayings recur spontaneously as people speak. 'Here I am now, an old woman', says BARD bai. 'I can't work as a porter any more, but light work would bring in some money for the housekeeping. I no longer lift crates, but at least I would like to be useful in lifting a pad' (a thick piece of cloth which is inserted between the head and the load). PANSARE says that no one cares for anyone in the *market yard*. 'The women here try to find out all they can about each other, but there is no real friendliness.' As the saying goes: 'They snivel to make you talk, then have a good laugh at you behind your back'. Nila KAMBLE is going to repaint the hut which she built herself. She says: 'I've put a little money aside. Does one have to be extravagant and spend all one earns? Spend everything on food, and wipe one's bottom with one's hand?'

Whether or not taking sides with the women, the *dalâl* and the *hamâl* continue to speak as they did in the countryside. Paru INGULKAR is a union steward who sometimes causes trouble for Jana NIVANGUNE, but the latter stands up to her. The *dalâl himself* acknowledges this: 'Our Jana bai won't let herself be humiliated by this dirty leaf platter' (a large dried leaf used to eat off, which, along with the impure remains of food is afterwards thrown on the rubbish-heap to be burned). By applying this comparison the *dalâl* alludes to the fact that Jana bai's loose manners are talked about everywhere.

Dalâls in particular frequently use coarse language without any restraint in talking to the women. This is one way of imposing their authority. It is in fact nothing new for *dalâls*, being a very traditional practice. The coarseness of their language is so blatant that no one denies it. Everybody agrees on this, including the *hamâl*, not only the women themselves, who are preached at every night by their husbands warning them against speaking the language of the market at home. 'Don't bring the market language home. Leave it there.' This does not mean that such language isn't used in the village, or even that it is specific to the *market yard*. It is spoken just as much in the village, but with restraint and in limited circles, whereas in the market it extends everywhere in broad daylight. Jija SHELKE is always complaining that the *dalâl's* young son speaks to her in a 'savage voice', *ugrit vâni*, which is the word used in mill songs to describe the aggressive rudeness of certain villagers towards peasant women.

Children's schooling

One would rightly expect that once settled in urban areas where schooling facilities are by far better than those found in villages, migrants from rural areas would try to take advantage of these facilities and send their children to school. However, in addition to changing practices, we must understand migrant women's perceptions and intentions particularly in this respect.

OMBASA bai and TANDALE bai send their sons and daughters to school and they follow their education closely. Sindhu SHELAR used to live in Shukravar peth, a district full of alcoholics and brawls; Bhavani peth is more respectable and her two sons have a better chance of learning. Lila KARALE is a poverty-stricken widow, but she will do anything to have her children attend school. She does sewing for their schoolmaster, doing all his patchwork free of charge so that the children may be taught. Bayda PILANE was repudiated by her husband. She has got her son to attend lessons at the Indian Technical Institute and given him the ambition to become an engineer. Hira BHOKAR, in spite of all the hardships she has gone through, is not going to skimp on her children's education, and sees to it that her children attend school. Her eldest son has successfully completed the tenth year of school.

The few women who themselves have had the chance to go to school understand its importance. Hira NIMBALKAR, who has always been in Pune, did five years of school, and though her husband died young, she sees to it that her children go to school, KORPE bai went to school for seven years but unfortunately only one of her three sons is studying. The second ran off to Bombay, and the third takes care of the house and refuses to go to school. Maya KALE did not attend school for long, but understands the value of education. She makes sure that her children work well at school.

Four women have put their children in school hostels: BHUNDE bai in a hostel in Bombay, thanks to a woman for whom she did washing. GIRE bai could not avoid putting her children in a Christian boarding school, but they are learning well. RAKHA bai was so poor

that she sent her sons to a Barshi hostel; and Phule MALUSARE Mahar has put hers in a government hostel for the children of untouchables.

Sacrifices are made not only for boys but also for girls. 'I am gong to have my daughter go very far with her studies. I won't get her married in a rush. She should not have to suffer later from lack of education, like us', said Mathura bai. Yamuna JADHAV even sent her daughter-in-law to school. Shaku PAWAR's son, whose daughter is at school, said: 'I will not allow my sister to be married too early. She must at least reach the 12th grade'. WADKAR bai was repudiated by her husband. She has only one daughter, at present in the 10th grade, whom she would like to see a schoolteacher. She says: 'My daughter must be able to be self-sufficient'. Jana MORE's daughter went up to the 12th grade and now works at Sassoon. KONDAVALKAR bai does everything she canto educate her two daughters. She fought with the authorities of a school opened in the neighborhood of Parvati shanty town to force them to enrol her two daughters. Lila KARALE had her daughter educated up to the 10th grade. AINPURE made her daughter learn sewing and bought her a sewing machine before getting her married. Laxmi GORADA told me that if one's daughter was not educated, marrying her off would be difficult afterwards. Yet Dhangar rarely provide for their daughters' education.

Mukta JADHAV and Gita YEVALE, who are widows, nevertheless made sure their daughters attended school up to the 10th grade. Their sons are respectively an electrician and an employee of the telephone company. Anu SALEKAR's son is employed in public transport, thanks to the education his mother made sure he received.

Those who have not had their sons educated now regret their neglect, while those whose sons have attended school hope to see them like 'sahibs' in an office job, with a monthly salary. They imagine them seated in an armchair at a desk all day long. Being taken on by a firm is considered an honour, regardless of what work they are given to do.

It is not so hard to find a good husband for a daughter who is a little bit educated. That is why it is so important. She won't have to work hard, only to look after the house. She won't even have to worry about going out to do the shopping. She is guaranteed a happy life.

Things people desire

People have always sought a materially comfortable life, but the development of trade in a market economy gives new impetus to this desire. People's mentalities and attitudes are being profoundly changed. Migration to a town is a further stimulus. New migrants are mesmerized by all they hear and see in the market, ranging from medical services, to television, luxury soaps and other goods.

Dvarka KANDHARE consulted a doctor because she was childless. 'Who did you consult?', I asked. 'Several highly reputed doctors, who charge very high fees. As far as we're concerned, consulting small-time practitioners is out.' I then suggested: 'It would be good if the union opened up a community clinic'. She thought about the idea, then said: 'Perhaps, but who would go to it? Everyone's first idea is to see a doctor with a reputation'.

Shaku PAWAR said to me: When I had problems with my periods, I went to see a well-known consultant in a big hospital in Vanvadi. He charged me a lot, but it was worth it'. Révu BHEGADE's daughter gave birth in a hospital but the baby died. 'Next time, she'll go to a different hospital. There is no shortage of doctors here! You can have anything you want so long as you pay'.

Medical treatment has thus become a pure and simple commodity for sale like any other. Cures, tonics, pills and injections are of course included. Even when a long list of medicaments has been prescribed and bought, if four days later someone speaks convincingly of the discovery of a new prestigious doctor, the patient then immediately goes to the new doctor for another lengthy prescription. This takes a lot of money but it doesn't matter. Health is thus seen as purely a matter of marketable remedies.

Another irresistible attraction is photographs, with the photograph album and a camera. In any house you enter, people immediately make a point of showing you their wall photographs of marriages of sons, daughters and daughters-in-law, feasts celebrating a pregnancy, in particular banquets, and photographs of *pujâ, satyanâryan*, etc. Many women porters' sons have bought cameras. Obviously, they take colour pictures; there is no talk of black-and-white photographs.

People also long for video tape-recorders, radio cassette players, metal cupboards and steel beds, so much so that to buy them they borrow at very high interest rates.

Some of the expenses most enthusiastically incurred are those for the hiring of halls where marriages are celebrated or marriage banquets held. Banquets must comprise very many expensive dishes if they are to deserve the guests' praise. Kala LOKHARE, BHAME bai and Phula PAWAR were proud to describe their sons' marriages to me.

Another much sought-after item is the scooter or 'luna'. People talk about it all the time. A woman's dream is to be seen riding pillion on her son's scooter going to visit a god or relatives in Pune.

In the village none of these women find it difficult to walk the four kilometres which separate the village from the nearest bus stop. They will walk for two hours if it is necessary. In Pune, however, they immediately hire an expensive rickshaw. I once went on foot to the starting-point of a demonstrating procession. All the women workers blamed me for doing this. They themselves hired three-seater rickshaws to get to the starting-place before the procession began.

In the village a woman is content with three saris, one she is wearing, the second hanging up to change into, and the third kept in a chest and reserved for special occasions. But once they come to Pune, most women have seven or eight. To visit someone, or attend a marriage, one must wear a synthetic fabric sari worth between 300 and 400 rupees. Returning from the market one day, Pam INGULKAR came directly to my home. She kept on apologizing: 'If I had been able to finish work earlier, I would have had time to put on a beautiful sari'.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have already provided observations and analyses of the fields of relationships and social communication which, in both traditional and modern ways, motivate behaviour and build up representations. We will inevitably have to refer to them from time to time in the conclusions which follow. These conclusions directly concern the influence of relationship systems on migrants' personalities within the wider field of relations constituted by the fringe suburban zones where they live. Addressing the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, we place these conclusions in a three-level setting of practices, representations and the forces at work. The answers seek to show the main features of the social and psychological trends which are typical of the collective coolie women personality.

Relational deviations ranging from adhering to one's roots, to being overwhelmed

Two kinds of process govern relational behaviour, bringing into evidence two equally prevailing significant deviations which affect communication practice. These are diametrically opposed, but setting aside some partial contradictions, far from conflicting with each other, they actually in a way buttress each other. Seen as a whole they are evidence of two deviations within communication practices which constitute mutually a system of checks and balances.

The first deviation comprises a number of processes which continually expand while remaining deeply rooted in the old ways. This is basically the most dominant deviation, the second being its counterpart. The practices involved are all those whose initial form or subsequent development is determined by traditional communication systems and their existing relational networks. Such networks tend to spread on a socio-geographical basis - i.e. to develop over greater geographical and social distances, though still in the context of relational systems which are already established and recognized as standard in both their basic and developing forms. These relations explore wider geographical and social areas but still in conformity with their governing guiding principles. They thus tend at one and the same time to gain strength in their newly acquired positions, intensify in their new direction, increase by consolidating their basic roots and grow deeper in the increasingly conscious conviction of the validity of their semantic content and purpose. The relevance of duty, the meaning and legitimacy of traditionally instituted relations reassert themselves precisely since these relations develop in support of widening the contacts and relationships brought about by their peri-urban environment. In a way, what is taking place is the exploitation on a broader base of the proven advantages which established communication systems have always provided.

Thus we see the intensification of kinship relations both in the town and between town and village, thanks to the closeness of urban neighbourhoods and town-country transport facilities. Kinship and alliances, far from being weakened by the crowding together of so many people of different castes and geographical origins, have on the contrary tended to grow closer and more intense, providing stopping-places, outposts, places for mutual assistance and hospitality, bridge-heads for subsequent settlement and contacts between family, clan and urban areas, and a meeting-place or interface between the city and the countryside. Women villagers come for the first time to the town, settle down and carry on business. Through persistence those women maintain themselves there facing up to the challenges that confront them. In order to do all this, they are supported by the orders and network of relationships which they inherited at birth. Women migrants who have settled in town know how to exploit kindred and affinity connections. They increase the number of meetings which they are expected to make. Migration in this way becomes an asset in the broadening of fellowship and solidarity within the relations network itself which is defined by the cast, kinsmanship and by the village. In general, the well developed means of public transport in the State, by their deployment, facilitate the strengthening of relations which migration would have otherwise tended to draw apart. This would have been true for both related or allied families and between migrant women and their villages.

This process of socio-geographical expansion within the framework of established systems of relations is particularly noticeable and decisive in matters of matrimonial alliances. The ease with which exchanges and movements can be made facilitates new contacts between people. Consequently, people go to look for marriage partners from more distant places and affinity networks that are more remote. This practice is typical of a process of expansion without any break in continuity. Compelled by circumstances some women have managed to find in the expansion of the sphere of alliances solutions to constraints, prohibitions or to

ostracisms that were affecting them. The broadening of the circles of acquaintances and of urban relations has made it possible for some women to come out of a dead end, although they only did so by once again relying upon relational systems of a given (traditional) structure.

This is how in particular the tradition of alliances between first cousins sometimes turns out to be both prestigious and handy when it comes to times of need. The value that still remains the basis for caste systems and of kinsmanship inherited from tradition comes out most clearly through what is done by mothers who having got married outside their caste, broken relations with their in-laws, husband or village, still do everything to fulfil all obligations in order to make up with them - all their people and the village at the time of their children's marriage.

In short, a certain interaction within the people living in the fringe zones of the urban areas does not result in already existing forms of relations becoming disjointed but on the contrary, the shake-up which this more open and cosmopolitan environment makes on them facilitates their expansion along established lines while at the same time providing these very lines with an even bigger chance of being more consistent on a social and geographical plane.

The process of strengthening traditional networks is at its highest when it comes out and is expressed in the form of an awareness that asserts itself against another which is different from it, This differentiation may be caused by anything ranging from eating and dressing habits to values that are specific to a given caste or more generally to the culture of the State - *dharma* - that is considered to be a factor of collective identification.

Broadening the collective awareness which is based on the *marathi dharma* is facilitated by pilgrimages to Hindu gods in all the parts of the country. The transport systems reinforce the role of religion which in turn acts as the cement and foundation for collective awareness. The same applies to practices connected with religious rites within homes. These practices are multiplied and made to become more intensive because of the urban relations' fabric which gives them a new momentum as well as the means to regain vigour.

The second deviation in practices is a spill over from existing socio-geographical borders and the conquest of new relational spheres.

For the purpose of presenting clear-cut differentiated situations, this deviation has been contrasted above with the first one, as being its counterpart. While this is a fair description, some processes of the first deviation may also provide an underground passage to an entirely different kind of deviation. Thus for example the special situation of relations consisting of the intensification or deepening of friendships between women within small groups of mutual assistance and of exchanged confidences, tends precisely on account of its intensity to transcend dividing lines of kinship, caste or regional origin. We have already observed this qualitative change, brought about by the intensification of the actual form of relations during the recruitment process. Personal relations developed in the market or close relations between neighbors end up by people ignoring caste and geographical origin, with relations based solely on human interaction in the fields of mutual help and understanding. We have also noted that the waiving of standards, when tolerated as an exception in marginal cases, cannot but raise the tolerance threshold of the system. A forced or voluntary break in kinship or alliance ties in situations of crisis, survival or social ostracism, can only be coped with by abandoning social norms and adopting ties based on human values. In so doing, women go beyond existing relational boundaries and create new ones. Their united action leads to the setting up of a new relational sphere which transcends castes, alliance systems and the rules governing

interpersonal relationships. This occurs under the drive of a will to assert oneself, a desire for human brotherhood or under the pressure of daily simple needs.

However, this second deviation seeks explicitly and directly to penetrate into new spheres hitherto unknown or prohibited, but into which coolie women are invited by the human environment. Generally speaking, they throng to penetrate, naturally and without difficulty, fearlessly and full of determination and enthusiasm. This is seen mainly in the four following fields: access to knowledge through schooling, which is sought for both boys and girls; the women's interest in learning city language from certain sectors of the media, their adaptation to current taste - or bad taste - through television, radio, video tape-recorders and films; their firm determination to improve their living conditions by acquiring modern household appliances that lessen domestic work while keeping the house clean and tidy, and by consulting the best doctors, regardless of cost; and the acquisition and use of status symbols such as scooters, lunas, popular film-track music cassettes, neon lights for gods' altars and feast days, cameras, the hiring of town halls for weddings, the use of rickshaws, and the wearing of nylon saris etc.

It is quite clear that these processes follow a deviation from the set framework, of relationships and of communication systems observed in the village. They are not in themselves opposed to or destructive of traditional loyalties, though they may sometimes tend towards that aim. Photographs, radio, video, schools - metal cupboards - doctors with their numerous cures - nylon saris, etc. are not more destructive of traditional values and caste or kinship rules than modern means of transport which disrupt family ties, or schools which destroy religious culture and everyday worship.

These two deviations have admittedly different motivations and produce different results, but are only rarely opposed to each other in the same areas or fields. They can therefore exist side by side, or even reinforce each other, in the same way that neon lights and modern sound installations boost the glamour of religious festivities and proclaim in their own way the importance of the gods.

Land and blood ties

Respect and success

As already stated, the various processes governed by opposing deviations cannot be attributed to any basic antagonism: innovation does not originate from conflict between them. These processes are to be understood in terms of what motivates them. Whatever the case may be, it is the coolie women who instigate them, being both their driving force and the actors involved. It follows therefore that the processes should be examined on the basis of the women's intentions.

These intentions are based on various sets of values and representations which give them sustenance. They sometimes occur as a reaction to external constraints imposed by changing conditions of life in the world outside, combined with the crisis which they bring about. Here migration is the crucial factor. Whatever the objective causes and reasons that can be found for the contradictions in the male and female migrants' living conditions, they are all challenges imposed on the socially excluded by unavoidable external circumstances, at least in the short term. They have to be met. But how, and with what kind of attitude? Other value systems and ways of fighting back arise more directly from women's wills or desires, mostly by way of spontaneous attraction, perceived needs, newly developed tastes or likings, autonomous subjective goals or even their own initiative. Whatever the case may be, whether circumstances compel the women to act immediately, whether they follow their own inclinations or yield to

ways of feeling and perceiving transmitted by the neighborhood and the environment, their practice is guided by sensitivity and mental outlook. The objectives behind the processes are in no way reactions that can be explained by resorting to psycho-sociological mechanisms. They do not arise from any need. They are the dictates of will, wishes emanating from the soul.

Some of the most important objectives are as follows. In the deviation processes consisting of still deeper attachment to traditional relational networks, the women's objective is to anchor themselves as firmly as possible to the extended family, in the basic original spheres of belonging represented by kinship and alliance networks and village friendships, and most clearly symbolized by household and village gods. Amidst life's uncertainties one must aim at keeping one's place among one's own people; isolated, one cannot count on help from any other person or system of law. Hence the importance of maintaining the link with the land one still owns in the village. Equally symbolic in this regard are the desire to go back there in one's old age, and the importance given to places of origin, namely the villages of one's own parents and one's in-laws, both visited frequently. The great majority of migrant women, whatever the number of years separating them from their initial departure, long in their souls for the land of their ancestors. They live in urban areas, but their mind is continually haunted by the village god, who is above all the god of the land, not of a universal religion. The annual gathering, with the visit to the village god, is one of their strongest and most abiding inspirations. Land and blood ties are always paramount, the point of convergence of all their dreams. They fast to secure prosperity for their children and in honour of the gods who protect them.

Another essential objective is the preservation of the collective cultural identity, expressed in terms of caste and *marathi dharma* customs (this covers all possible cultural determinants, ranging from dress and cookery to the gods and their rituals).

As regards the deviation processes of 'overspill', the spheres and goods concerned are those which promote the women's vital aim of becoming fully recognized members of the urban environment in which they have landed. This objective is by no means antithetical to the first, that of maintaining one's attachment to ancestral land and blood ties. Having left their villages and land, the women seek to become full members of an urban environment which they have entered without having either a predesignated place or advance recognition. Recognition has to be acquired, wrested from other city-dwellers, an acknowledgement that one deserves the name of townswoman on the same footing as everyone else. Irrefutable proofs which guarantee a woman the longed-for achievement of being recognized socially include: the prestige conferred by a modern sari; the standing acquired through owning one's own dwelling and being able to receive guests; the self-confidence and esteem arising from a well looked-after home with model kitchen utensils; the modern conveniences which cut down on housework; the pride of having a son who takes you on his scooter to visit gods and relatives so that they can see how he has succeeded in life; and 'son et lumiere' programmed organized at home for prayer festivities to which the largest possible number of people are invited. Social recognition is sought as a reward, recompensing abilities now publicly demonstrated and exhibited to all - the ability to succeed unaided. Right from the time of their arrival in town, the women are eaten up by the ambition of proving to themselves and others that they are capable of building a decent and dignified life, and in so doing, of creating around themselves a sphere of conviviality permeated by interpersonal relations of which they are the centre and initiator. Driven by poverty, failure, loneliness, disparagement, scorn and rejection, and grappling with the ill fate of being 'non-persons' who belong nowhere in the urban environment, for them the only alternative to material and moral downfall is to prove to themselves and others just what they are capable of doing. Obsession with success becomes a driving force.

The same striving for strength and power can be seen in the phenomena of trances, or being possessed, which can be understood as symbolic and ritual assertions of power and status felt as a lack or threatened with loss. The women's aim is to reinstate themselves from a position of rejection and humiliation in which people refuse to recognize their worth and their ability, by their own energy, to become a centre of influence and social relations. The same aim inspires their frequent religious rites and numerous costly pilgrimages. Such behaviour puts one on the side of the sacred and therefore of power; it confers social autonomy and induces the respect which is given to gods. The same autonomous force and central radiating energy are to be seen actuating the behaviour of women union stewards with stentorian voices who hurl abuse and make decisions in their union offices.

Establishing a social identity and achieving dignity in one's own right

The first fundamental driving force behind these processes and objectives is that of creating a basis for one's personality which is anchored in the network of relations that fix one's position socially and describe an Indian woman in terms of caste, kinship, affinities, and the village with its hierarchies and gods. These communication systems define the special places where women are determined to establish themselves first, in accordance with the duties of their condition. Such places are for them the basis of their collective personality and the prime guarantee of social recognition. It is naturally within these networks that women find the basic foundation of their social identity and self-awareness. They would not think of seeking to build their identity and define their role elsewhere than in these exclusively women's fields. They would never try to occupy other independent positions of their own choice which would give them their own central status in a sphere of life chosen and fashioned by themselves. They never contemplate being the centre of any circle of identity outside the networks of social belonging and identification that are already marked out for them. Whether they happily take their place within the existing circles or whether they find themselves bruised and battered by them, all the women have so thoroughly internalized their order and values, that the order works as a driving force basically defining the form and content of their ambition for social identity, and determines the places where happiness can be found, both for themselves and for their children. However slight a deviation they may have made in regard to this order and these values in order to escape from a nasty mother-in-law or a contemptible husband, they will make sure they place their children back into the system in order to avoid the social ordeals which immediately follow when one tries to be independent.

What makes this force so dynamic and decisive is the fact that from the outset it provides security and a stable recognized social status. It guarantees a predetermined place within established communication systems. None of the migrants therefore ever finds herself lost in a vacuum of disrupted social ties, though these ties may be overstretched or broken off in places. The network never gets cut off. Only her husband's premature death, or above all being repudiated, leaves a woman with neither hearth nor home. And even then, these breakdowns would not completely exclude her from the network unless the woman outlawed herself. What usually happens in fact is that other parts of the network stave off the worst. This is also what usually happens at various points during the migratory process, which constitutes in itself a significant break in certain ties. It is precisely because these socio-geographical movements constitute a serious risk of isolation for the individual concerned that the driving force of belonging to a collective identity in one's home background and status is so important. It is natural for the individual woman to rely on all her basic social assets back home in order to avoid the danger of being rejected and/or having no identity. This driving force also strengthens her elementary feelings of belonging, and migration in no way weakens original structures or encourages a women to break with them. Such a break would mean social and

cultural death, and material decline as well. Tradition protects people from the dangers of being scattered and cut off by modern urban life.

Another driving force is want, and the need to satisfy it, to assert one's ability to succeed, to overcome deprivation, failure and ill-treatment, to end a state of psychological impotence and resignation, and to confront the anarchy and savagery of a situation out of control. It originates from a determination to take up the challenge of self-depreciation, the stigma imposed by society on women in general, and in particular on the migrant women porters who work in the *market yard*. This force should not be seen as a search for feminist independence, far from it. The aim is purely to demonstrate one's intelligence and ability to work efficiently on one's own, without always being inferior to men, or the plaything of chance cruelly deceived at all turns. Such action is therefore qualitatively different from simple attempts at socialization. 'Socialization' is a term which might be used here functionally, without considering the result achieved, but it would be too static an approach or diagnosis, ignoring the underlying motive force.

This force is the search by these women to knit together a broken life, bind up the psychological traumas and heal the endemic social stigmas besetting them, by mobilizing their own energies. The deployment of these energies, and the demonstration of success, of the power to fight and win, set the seal on public recognition of a woman's worth and ability to accomplish something worthwhile on her own. Trances, or states of being possessed, accomplish this on the symbolic and ritual plane. They inverse the relations between the possessed woman and her surroundings. By the coming of the god 'into her body' the woman is filled with the power and indisputable higher status of the divinity. People come to listen to her and to ask questions in veneration and awe. Her words are those of power itself. During a trance the woman has the recognized authority of a male *bhagat*, the specialist on trances consulted by almost all the market women. Once she has given proof of her powers to act effectively, that is successfully to predict, interpret, heal and prescribe in the name of the god, as an oracle she acquires the indisputed status conferred by the power incarnate within her. This symbolic strategy is only the work of a minority of the women porters interviewed. All the others use rites within their homes and pilgrimages to acquire, but in a less significant way, the aura of power and dignity these bring. Regular contacts with the sacred are the road to social power and authority.

However, in secular life the road that leads to the quickest gratification and confers undoubtedly permanent status is to acquire the assets of power in the world of men, which bring in rich dividends. These include being a union steward, in a position to lay down the law to others; having a dwelling and therefore a place in society; having furniture and kitchen equipment; going on expensive pilgrimages or incurring vast medical expenses which prove one's much sought-after standing. This is not primarily a concern for modern conveniences in the home, the pleasure of traveling, or cultural entertainment by means of television and radio cassettes played at full blast. Rather it is the social prestige derived from conspicuous expenditure and borrowing, the din of recorded music and the mesmerizing glare from the illuminated altars of the gods. The aim is not to enjoy music but to impress and stupefy people by the decibel range; to dazzle people and provoke cries of admiration rather than appreciate the light effects oneself; to display one's middle-class status by riding pillion on one's son's scooter to attend village gatherings, so as to enjoy the surprise effect on people and the gods.

Achieving success in these ways, women who are poor, alone, deserted, widowed, mistreated, despised, ignorant, barren, subjugated, beaten up or simply looked down on as porters in the *market yard*; who are overwhelmed by family setbacks and particularly by

drunkard and idle husbands, demonstrate clearly to society what they themselves can accomplish on their own. They are motivated by the desire to acquire full rights and a dignity of their own, not that of employment in domestic service redounding only to the glory of their husband.

V

THE FEMALE BODY: STRATEGIC ASPECTS

Addressing the question

The body explains society. It is a battlefield directly exposed to society where women are engaged in a fierce struggle to conquer new living spaces for themselves. In every patriarchal society, the female body is a symbolic and physical issue of great importance. Women's attempts to keep control of their bodies and to use them for their own purposes provoke reactions in society which tend to reinforce the different types of restriction aimed at keeping them in their place and confining them to their assigned roles. The female body, both the object of male domination and the instrument of man's domination of society as a whole, attracts strategies which result in some women being forcibly confined in reserved and protected areas, others making undesirable intrusions into forbidden territory, and some even acquiring positions of authority.

This chapter describes the different restrictions that the patriarchal ethos imposes on female porters and shows how the female body is the strategic point where the different forms of spatial confinement which keeps women in their separate spheres coalesce. One overriding concern underpins all the observations in this chapter. The body is taken as the unit of spatial measurement in this study of the living space of women. We will use this yardstick to try and measure the disintegration of patriarchal socio-cultural structures. In other words, we will attempt to identify and study the emergence of new types of sociability and social behaviour among female porters which help to erode the hegemony of patriarchal ideology. The analysis seeks to grasp the logic of the social and cultural dynamics which accompany, underlie, activate and follow the new patterns of relationships being formed in the socio-geographical spaces peopled with women.

Three sets of issues or three levels of analysis may be distinguished and used to draw inferences from the observations.

The first level deals with the restrictions imposed on the behaviour and actions of women. Some features of women's behaviour at home and at work have already been described and analysed. We consider here solely the rules and restrictions applying to women's behaviour in general. These include early marriage between the ages of 12 and 17, the blunt and firm refusal to send young girls to work at the market or to school for fear of exposing them to baleful influences or releasing them from family authority, the traditional practice of marrying within the caste and the observance of certain customs up to the wedding, in particular the exaction of a dowry from the bride's parents and the defraying of the entire cost of the wedding by the groom's parents.

The second level deals with the body proper. Six phenomena may be observed here. The first is the overwork which wives must endure because their husbands are disabled, or unemployed, or incompetent, or layabouts or, as is often the case, drunkards and wife-batterers. The wife is compelled to be the sole breadwinner for the whole family, including the husband. The second phenomenon is the socio-cultural pressure and patriarchal ethos which seek to turn women into objects of male domination and mere tools in the hands of male society. In this context, women have a duty to bear children, especially sons, or else endure the common practice of polygamy (the husbands of 7 per cent of the women interviewed have taken a second wife) as well as the indignity of, and rejection which follows from, being

stigmatized as 'sterile' (7 per cent of the female porters interviewed fall into this category). These and other factors explain why many daughters-in-law are rejected and abandoned by their parents-in-law and left to fend for themselves without support or protection, often with children in their charge (13 per cent of the female porters interviewed are in this situation). The same male supremacy engenders contempt for widows and compels them to bring up their family alone (25 per cent of the porters interviewed); widowhood automatically excludes women from the social sphere.

Three other groups of factors set new processes in motion. Thirty four per cent of the women interviewed have had themselves sterilized (tubectomy) and 7 per cent have also had their daughters-in-law sterilized. This percentage is fairly high when aggregated with the 25 per cent, 13 per cent and 7 per cent mentioned above. It shows that there is a strong tendency towards birth control among market women. The sharp rise in the number of spontaneous visits to doctors and the somewhat excessive recourse to modern cures indicate a similar trend towards greater control of one's own body. For many women, health has become a central concern. It means that they pay attention to their body that was previously denied. Extra-marital relations, or cohabitation, among female porters are one of the most widely discussed subjects in the market. It is difficult to say whether such relations are in fact more widespread in the city than in the country. One can only assume that they are, on account of the often tragic plight of female porters (widowed, rejected, solitary, 'sterile', etc.) and of a marked slackening of social controls on relations between the sexes in general. Free expression in this regard is something new for female porters. It is common knowledge that female porters offer sexual favours to the *dalâls* and *divanjis* of their warehouses in return for various advantages. It is also well known that single women entertain men at home or have lasting relationships in order to satisfy their need for a companion and security. A sort of de facto anomy has liberalized morality. The female porters put it thus: 'The city is without precincts' (unlike the village with its 'walls').

The above observation raises a number of questions about the implications of these body-related practices. Are they the outcome of a loosening, even rejection, or rules and restrictions: a sort of explosive reaction to past pressures and sexual repression, a purely individual lawlessness which acts as a safety valve against traditional pressures? Or is there a full-scale crisis of values in which permissiveness heralds a sought-for readjustment? Or again is it a freedom tolerated to a point by the patriarchal ethos only to reinforce traditional rules through the temporary satisfaction of the special needs and interests of the parties concerned? To what extent have normative structures collapsed and new social relationships emerged? Does the weakening of individual verbal inhibitions and the emergence of practices that are tolerated by the new peri-urban environment announce and express a yearning for a new order of human relationships?

One can only answer these questions with the help of a third level of observations and analysis specifically concerned with the new aspirations, hopes, perceptions and convictions slowly forming in the minds of the migrants and porters. In the prevailing system of dominant values and power relations, their hopes and fears may never be translated into new standards and patterns of behaviour and remain only tacit or expressed desires and dreams. This level of representations is more difficult to grasp, as it mainly concerns hopes that cannot be expressed directly or permanently but only during spontaneous exchanges in the form of unexpected reactions and transitory individual perceptions. So strong is the pressure of tradition that these hopes, and their implications, may not even be conscious. However, they may sometimes express themselves as explicit wishes and standard behaviour. But such behaviour does not necessarily engender the mental images and ideas required to legitimize it or establish its

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validity. This being so, the representations accompanying these hopes and behaviour, though marked by a negative socio-cultural note, inevitably open up subterranean passages below established orders and systems.

A woman's dharma

All the women interviewed were without exception explicit and unanimous about the specific female values and virtues that make up the duties and honour of a model woman in male society. All of them bring up their daughters according to these principles - principles on which they themselves have been brought up - and see to it that their daughters in turn obey the rules of good behaviour prescribed for women by society. All are anxious to give their daughters the same outlook, values, behaviour and self-conceptions that they had been taught as children. There is no better illustration of women's attachment to a certain image handed down from generation to generation, and the continuity thus engendered in relations between the sexes and in bodily practices, than a comparison of the precepts and sayings uttered by the female porters at the market and the mill songs learned by them from their mothers and mothers-in-law in the village during the grinding of corn at daybreak.

The upbringing of daughters

Women workers, together with the society in which they live, insist on teaching their daughters the behaviour and attributes expected of a woman.

Schooling and education are not considered important in themselves and are often discarded in favour of other knowledge and skills, even by people like Yamuna Shirke and her husband who are intelligent and strive to improve their lot. Yamuna bai's daughter is in her fifth year of schooling, but now 'her mind has stopped working' and she can't keep up with the rest of the class. Her mother has taken her away from school and gets her to look after the house. She could have enrolled her in private classes next door which could have rekindled in her daughter a desire to study. But the boys in the class, she says, would tease and bully her. We have to be careful right from the beginning. You know what *marathi dharma is like* - its very exuberance is its failing. No sooner has Yamuna bai said this than she recites the words of the mill song:

'The child is king, the prince of the palace
Youth is afire, its exuberance is its failing!'

One of the reasons why Yamuna bai left her village and followed her husband to Pune was that she wanted to give her daughter proper schooling in the city. But when the decisive moment came, she was faced with a choice: give her daughter the up-bringing prescribed by society or give her an education. Yamuna bai, however, sees nothing wrong with her sons continuing their schooling. In fact she is quite happy to let her sons get on with their education. This attitude can only be fully understood if it is seen in the context of the family.

Yamuna SHIRKE is about 35. She comes from Purandar and has two daughters and two sons. Her husband came to Pune 18 years ago with a dignitary from his village who got him a job at the Katraj dairy co-operative, near Pune, where he is still employed. He has no bad habits. While a bachelor, he lived in Shukravar peth with about a dozen friends from his village. Every day their meals were brought to them from the village by public van. Nine years ago, he acquired a plot in Janata colony. He was joined by his wife, whom he had married in the meantime but had left behind in the village to till the land. Their main aim was to provide a good education for their children. The eldest was then about seven. Today, the family lives in

Appar Bibv. They have decided to build a second room at the back. 'One only builds one's house once in a lifetime. When the construction is completed, we'll buy a straw-mattress and little by little all the other things. Yamuna bai never worked until now because she was looking after her younger children at home. She found a job at the market two months ago. Her neighbour, Hira BHOKAR, who has been working there for 18 years, took her to the market for the first time. 'I don't speak to many people there. I concentrate on my work; otherwise the *dalâl* gets angry and uses foul language to keep order. I don't like squabbles. In the beginning, I wasn't able to lift heavy 100 or 120 kg loads. I didn't try to either, so as not to injure myself by attempting something beyond my strength. I am, however, slowly getting into my stride. At Appar Bibv, there are people of all castes thankfully there aren't any Mahars in the neighboring houses on my street. We only need to mingle with them for weddings.' The small plot of land owned by Yamuna bai and her husband in the village is tilled by someone else and, as is customary, the crop is shared equally between them and the tiller.

PANSARE bai did not take away her daughter from school like Yamuna bai. She kept her children in school up to the tenth year. But to my surprise, she answers that she has three children when I ask her how many children she has; and three boys and one girl, when I am more specific. Why didn't you say you have four children?

'A girl, oh, she is someone else's property' she replies, alluding to the fact that after the marriage a girl belongs to a house of strangers, her parents-in-law. She hadn't forgotten the mill song that goes:

'The girl, stupid creature, goes to a strange house
The boy, the smart one, remains in our home'.

It is important to teach a girl the skills that will stand her in good stead during her life, whether or not she has had schooling. Ratna PAWAR may have been much too poor to give her girls the schooling she would dearly have liked them to have, but she did teach them how to cook, though without keeping them at home all day long.

Even if a girl has had a good schooling, she still enters another home as a housewife and has to show off her cooking skills there. Shaku PAWAR has a girl who goes to school. The girl's brother is keen that she should study up to the tenth or twelfth year but her mother considers that for a girl instruction in domestic skills is as important as schooling. 'She cooks everything to perfection', she says of her daughter. 'Her food is mouth-watering.' Yet Shaku Pawar doesn't hesitate to beat her if she doesn't clean and scrub the floor of the house twice a week. Anxiety makes her violent - 'If we don't give her a sound upbringing now, tomorrow her parents-in-law will blame her mother. She must receive proper training now'.

Sakhu SALEKAR lost her land in floods from the dam and in compensation received a plot in Doud where her husband lives, while she remains in Pune. 'My children are very intelligent', she remarks. She is giving them a good education in Pune. The youngest son follows classes at the engineering college; he suffers from headaches and for the time being looks after the house. She has sent her daughter to stay with her father in Doud, because he needed someone to prepare the food and keep house. During her spare time, the girl goes to school and is in the seventh year. Women are born to be housewives.

Ahiliya HARANAVALA, a Dhangar, took her daughter away from school, where she was in the ninth year, so that she could look after the house. 'My son doesn't like her going to school. The boys tease her on the way', which brings dishonour on her brother. Is it not better, therefore, to keep her at home where no one will have a chance to gossip about her? Her

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brother beats her if he sees her talking to someone on her way to school. Her mother has inculcated in her the lesson she learnt from the women at the village mill:

‘When walking past a group of men,
I lower my eyes to look at my feet,
My brother glows with pride,
Handsome like a lord’.

This is what Ahiliya bai tries to teach her daughter. She never lets her out of the house, even to go to the mill to pick up the day’s supply of flour. She must spend her time on household chores.

Malan PATIL, also a Dhangar, enforces the same traditional discipline at home. She married off her first daughter while she was still a child, according to the custom of her caste, four years before she began her periods. She is now looking to marry off her second daughter, having taken her out of school where she was in the sixth year. I asked her ‘Why marry her so young? She is still only a child. She could receive an education’. ‘It’s quite enough for her to be able to sign her name. Its pointless educating girls. You don’t know the ways of our caste. Don’t talk to me about this. A girl is a glass dish. Once its broken, that’s the end of it. Its better to marry them off early’.

Hira DALVI is not a Dhangar but a Maratha. She has decided with her mother to take away her daughter from school when she reaches the seventh year. Her daughter is tenth in her class, ‘But why should a girl need to have more schooling? The more education they receive, the more arrogant they become. Girls should know their limits and walk with bent heads. We can’t let them put on airs’. There is nothing new in all this. Past generations of peasant women referred to the same humility in their songs:

‘They say my house is huge and made of silver. Woman, tradition demands that you shall not answer back’.

Sindhu BOINE complains about the friend her daughter brought to the house. ‘She has absolutely no manners or breeding. She is forever munching something. She speaks and laughs loudly. She has no composure. How can one marry such girls? If the mother has no breeding, how can the daughter be well-bred? Like mother, like daughter - they go the same way.’

Family honour

A woman must always be mindful of the fact that nothing should stain the honour of the house (*gharân*). Dvarka KANDHARE has no children. Her husband, at the instigation of a cousin, is looking to remarry, but his wife refuses to give him a divorce. ‘First put half the land in my name, then you can get remarried.’ But her husband doesn’t want to do that. Dvarka bai’s mother is afraid that her daughter might commit suicide. But for Dvarka this is unthinkable, as her family reputation is without blemish. ‘How could I bring dishonour on my mother’s progeny?’ Folk songs of the past have taught her that women are the guardians of the honour and glory of their menfolk.

‘Lively and merry, people say I am happy
I put my priceless body at the service of my forefathers’ glory.’

Hira and Jana KHANGARE are sisters who are married to the same man. They are very proud of their family’s *marathi dharm*a. Jana bai was at home the day we went to see her. She

was alone. She invited us in but we were pressed for time and didn't stay long. Hira bai, whom we met a few days later, told us how angry she had been with Jana bai for not having served us any food. 'Is that how we should behave?'

Many female workers object to and disapprove of the practice of taking young girls to work at the market where there is such a lax and bad atmosphere. They fear that these girls would stain the honour of the family. Even widows and repudiated women like TANPURE bai or Gita POLEKAR are not in favour of taking their daughters there. They prefer to look for something else.

It is the duty of a woman, at all costs, to remain with the family to whom she has been given in marriage. This precept is firmly imprinted in the minds of all the women since early childhood. It has been chanted and repeated so frequently over the centuries that it has not failed to leave its mark on those for whom it was intended:

'The father and mother say: daughter, spend your life where you've been given
I tell you, peasant woman, firewood for the house must be burnt in the house.'

Suman PAMGARE is 25. Her husband, who is a drunkard, doesn't live with her. When it pleases him, he returns home to beat her. Suman bai's brother-in-law is not remotely concerned about her. But her own brothers and sisters support her. Why, in these circumstances, does she not leave her husband? 'One must die where one has been given. Otherwise, how will you marry your daughters tomorrow? People call you all sorts of names.'

Amby KOKARE has been to school. She is between 25 and 30. Her husband can only sign with his thumb mark. 'I 'didn't want such a husband; but how can one oppose one's parents?' In one song, the father says:

'My daughter, the lamb that I have raised
Let us sell you at the market in Pancavi.'

'What can you say under such circumstances?' You simply have to accept what Satvi has written on your forehead. 'Once you have understood that, it's easier', observes Ambu bai. Shaku KORPE faced the same problem; she had to give up her ambitions and comply with the will of her family. 'Is this a reason for leaving one's husband?'

'A woman should serve her husband and be his support
My lass, you must wipe his feet with the loose end of your sari.'

Shaku bai has to provide for her family's needs and remain true to her idle husband, according to her *dharma*, showing how apt is the saying: 'By being devoted to your family, my girl, you will earn it a good reputation'.

Lakshmi MORE spoke about how her husband's infirmity had been concealed from her on the day of their wedding. On that day, he never took off his shoes, standing with them on through all the ceremonies and rites. She found out that he was lame when they got to Pune. For the next two years, her mother watched her very closely. 'She observed my every step to see whether I was settling down in the family of my in-laws. My father and mother warned me that if I didn't adjust to the way of life there, my in-laws would tie my feet and hands, bundle me up and throw me in Khadakwasla lake. I was so afraid that I had no choice but to please my in-laws.' She now has three fully grown sons and is 65. Her disabled husband died six years ago. Lakshmi bai's mother constantly reminded her of the moral of this song:

Woman, remember that the man who has put five pearls around your neck on the day of the wedding becomes your master’.

Chabu NANGARE gave her daughter an exemplary upbringing and married her before she reached puberty. But she did as she pleased: as her mother-in-law did not give her food or clothing, she took her courage in both hands and ran away from home to join a Mahar boy. This led to the breaking off of all relations with her family. She now lives next door to her mother’s house. But mother and daughter are not on speaking terms and never see each other. ‘What can I do’, says the mother, ‘she left of her own free will. She never asked our opinion. It is not our fault’. ‘But don’t you miss your daughter?’, I asked. ‘Yes of course! She still is my daughter in spite of what she has done. I bore her. But I am terribly afraid of our Vanjari caste. I am convinced that Mr X, an elected local representative, killed his girl cousin and chopped up her body in small pieces. He got rid of her because she had behaved badly. The cousin’s mother never said a word. In these conditions, what can I do?’

One of Sona MARATHE’s daughters married a Mahar police inspector after leaving her first husband. Her mother maintains relations with her because her daughter provides her with a little financial assistance, but none of the other family members have any contact with her.

Extra-marital relations

The need to keep secret any deviations from the rules governing relations between the sexes, so as not to sully the honour of the family, does not prevent indiscretions or even open adultery. There is nothing new or exceptional about this. But by working at the market, it seems that female porters spontaneously attract what PANSARE bai calls ‘covetous looks’, ‘After all, we are in a market.’ Women workers have a naturally poor image. They come to the market to work for subsistence wages that enable them to cope with the hardships confronting them. This is a situation some people are able to exploit for their own advantage. At times, the women are also affected by the freedom they enjoy in this new environment and may easily be led astray.

Suman SONAVNE was widowed at an early age. She has a daughter. People gossip about her behaviour. The fact that she lives with her mother and her brother is a point in her favour and helps to moderate people’s remarks. Chabu SHINDE claims that she returned to her parents’ house to look after the family but was later abandoned by her brothers. She now lives alone. It is said that she keeps a *divânjî* at home. Shakuntala SHINDE’s husband is a drunkard suffering from tuberculosis. He lives in the village. His wife is still quite young. Some people have a very poor opinion of her morality. Mangal BORKAR’s situation is similar to Chabu bai’s: She looks after her needy parents and neglects her own family. She now lives in disgrace for this reprehensible conduct. Although she is a union leader, she can’t stop tongues wagging about her. Indu JADHAV lost her young husband in an accident and was left with two children to raise. She took a lover, whom she supports. Her parents don’t like it and have little contact with her. Kamal POTDAR, a Nahar, was married to her maternal uncle who later abandoned her, leaving her to fend for herself. Her mother, abandoned in early life by her parents, had been living with her brother, who then married her daughter only to abandon her in turn. Kamala bai doesn’t have a brother to look after her and her mother has lost the support her brother was providing. Kamala bai has a relationship with one Potdar, of the Sonar caste, by whom she had a daughter. Potdar then broke with her. Kamala bai went on a pilgrimage to Mhasoba’s shrine in Kharoda and Majmalag’s shrine in Bombay. She visited many temples and holy places before returning to Potdar. She then gave birth to a boy. He was still an infant when a heavy sack of pepper fell on her, keeping her off work and preventing her from having

herself sterilized. She then had a second boy, after which she had herself sterilized. Every evening, Potdar visits her in her hovel, since Kamala bai, as a Mahar, cannot leave her shantytown to go and live with Potdar, a Sonar. He is ready to marry her, but his sisters are firmly opposed to it. Tulsa Pawar explains that her husband fell in love with another woman and ran off with her. But according to her colleagues, it was she who left her husband for a stone-mason who then dropped her. She has her little boy who is dependent on her, and since the age of 20 has lived as a dishonored social outcast.

Women who have extra-marital relations have the finger of scorn pointed at them. Society ostracizes them and condemns them to isolation and deadly insecurity. To make matters worse, it is their children who have to pay for their transgressions. Paru INGULKAR is having an affair with her 'dalal' Kedari. There is a lot of tittle-tattle about her behaviour. Some even say that she killed her husband. Each fellow-worker has her own version of events. Her son, from the age of 11, had to endure neighbors making spiteful comments every time Kedari came to see his mother: 'Look, here is your father!' As a boy he was greatly affected by this. He himself has two sons today, but earns next to nothing and drinks a lot. In addition he takes drugs and causes trouble at home. He wants his mother to sell the house so that he can buy a rickshaw. He has just smashed the television set and a metal cupboard. Paru bai is continually visiting some god or other, or a '*bhaktin*', in the hope that he will stop drinking. She is known at the market as 'Kedari's Paru'.

Shakuntala PAWAR left her first husband and has been living in Appar with a man called Mohol. Every now and then her first husband returns to beat her at the market, but none of the onlookers ever intervenes. They all consider that he has the right to beat her because he is her husband. She has a son by him, her only child, who lives with her in Appar. But he doesn't go to school, never comes back home during the day, and is forever playing truant. When he returns in the evening, he doesn't say a word to his mother. He is about fifteen. His mother fears that, sooner or later, he will fall into bad ways. Society will reject him and he will be done for.

Kala LOKHARE, a widow, has several lovers. She has two small children in their fifth and seventh year of schooling. But they do not attend school regularly. They use arrogant language at home. Kamala MALEKAR has been living with a man since becoming a widow. One of her sons is a drug addict. She had to borrow between 30,000 and 40,000 rupees for him. She lets out her room and lives in a garret to pay off her son's debts.

It should be noted that the extra-marital relations of mothers are one of the main causes of their children's waywardness. The son of Vimal YADAV, Kamala bai's neighbour, smokes marijuana and takes drugs. Both women are angry with Shile RANJNE, their neighbour and a union leader, whom they accuse of having deliberately encouraged their children to smoke hemp.

Children are the main victims of their mothers' social ostracism. They are upset, and unable to distinguish between their mothers' faults and the situation resulting from them, against which she has to struggle daily.

There is also much scandal-mongering, at the market as well as at home, about married women who, while living with their husbands, have affairs with other men, for example Sindhu SHELAR and Hira KHENGARE. The list of women talked about in this way at the market is endless. When one visits women workers at home, they can often be heard speaking ill of each

other. Admittedly, there is an element of exaggeration and spitefulness in these stories, but in the majority of cases rumour seems to reflect reality.

The social image of female porters is definitely negative. They have a reputation for being loose women, both individually and collectively. In Kamala MALEKAR's view 'there is no difference between the work of a female porter and that of a prostitute. One has to yield to the demands of the "*dalâl*" and the "*hand*". According to Indu PANSARE, 'the situation in the market is similar to that of an actress who sleeps with an actor in the same company in order to have enough to eat. Society speaks ill of us. We must endure it. This is the lot of female porters'. This notwithstanding, everybody points an accusing finger at the women as being the only guilty parties. Even if their behaviour is faultless, they will still be seen with a disapproving eye. Each woman we met spoke in the same way about herself: 'I'm irreproachable, I resist people's advances, therefore no one gives me trouble. But others aren't like me. Their behaviour is objectionable. They misbehave'. What does this frequently expressed reproach of 'misbehavior' signify? It denotes the following types of behaviour: courting familiarity with '*hamâls*' and '*dalâls*'; *mixing* with men; using insulting language; seeking occasions for physical contact; behaving unabashedly in full view of everyone; and above all, having relationships that infringe established rules. The right to address women in a familiar way is enjoyed only by the oldest male members of the family, the village elder, the brother and the husband. 'Misbehavior' occurs when a woman tolerates this familiarity from strangers and people outside these circles. Laughing in the company of men, giving them knowing smiles, drinking tea with them frequently, brushing against them and touching them are all examples of 'misbehaviour'. Every woman knows that immodesty brings dishonour on the household and the community. A mill song warns against this type of behaviour:

'She gesticulates, raising the sleeve of her blouse to uncover her arm/Why do women dishonour their brothers-in-law?'

When faced with provocative behaviour from a man, women ought at least to retort:

'I'm a woman of high birth, sharper than pepper
Keep your distance when you speak, idiot, and my honour shall not be stained'.

'Pervert and degenerate that you are! your look is lustful
I am somebody else's wife and not yours'.

Such frank and direct answers are necessary to save one's own and one's family honour. Otherwise, people would say: 'the mother has brought into the world a perverse daughter. She has wrecked both her and her in-laws' family'.

Female porters say that their poor reputation is due to the lax morals of some of their fellow workers, as peasant women at the millstone used to believe. One song alludes to a woman whose lover, in his eagerness to undress her to satisfy his passion, has torn her clothes:

'The sari is torn, the shreds trail in the street
thus the woman who fornicates sullies the virtuous woman'.

Reprobation is often sarcastic:

'The *pâmgârâ* tree has grown high in the garden
the depraved woman has fallen sick, while her partner blows on the sacred ashes'.

It is not only the couplets of mill songs that allude to dishonorable sexual practice in traditional society; the language abounds in sayings and maxims on the subject. Take, for instance, what Kamala MALEKAR had to say to me about a market woman of easy virtue: 'She looks like fidelity incarnate, yet thousands have fucked (!!!) her'. We had to take in that whore, otherwise she would have been cast out by society.' Or what she had to say about another woman: 'she has a kingly name (that of her husband) and yet she is a street-walker'. 'She works on the sly for few ponces.' NIVANGUE bai spoke of a fellow worker at the market whose easy virtue earned her large sums of money. She quoted the following saying to demonstrate her point: 'One fornicates in bed and spends all one's life robbing it'. Of another woman she said: 'the safflower has no worms, a depraved woman no remorse'.

Again and again, one hears an astonishing variety of folk sayings applied to women workers who commit adultery with *hamâl* workers or other men. 'A (short) two-word message (to her lover) makes it huge.' When she sets out to fornicate, there are no holds barred', 'when she is in heat, she sends messages around from village to village'. Jana NIVANGUNE told me that extra-marital relations form the theme of many a mill song.

It is noteworthy that a great number of sayings refer to sexual relations and the female body and sexual organ. The female body is a place of dishonour, of 'sin' and sexual deprivation, bringing opprobrium on the woman and her family, never the man:

'You will laugh and laugh, your laugh is but an illusion
False is a woman's life, there is no stigma on that of a man'.

This is a widely and deeply held social conviction.

When asked how the husbands of women of easy virtue react, the women answer: 'They have learnt to eat shit (in other words, they live off their wives' immoral earnings). They must resign themselves to it. Anyway, what can they do with such wives?'

'The straps of the palanquin on the elephant are broken,
the woman is deprived, the man can do nothing about it. '

There are many reasons why husbands are powerless. Fear of being beaten up by local musclemen (*dadâs*) from the market or shantytown, failure to get a job or earn a livelihood, lack of money at a time of urgent need, etc. In situations like this, the overriding concern is to keep the family's head above water.

This is not to say that people do not have extra-marital relations in the village. It is just that the market makes them so much easier that some female porters even act as procuresses and earn a commission for this service. Extreme poverty drives them to it. Needless to say that the *dalâls* and *hamâls* get their cut in turn.

This behaviour can be seen as a reaction to the traditional constraints on the lives of young women who have migrated far from home and live outside the control of the village. Driven by the need to earn a living, they have to fall back on their own resources in order to cope with the often insurmountable difficulties that confront them outside the security of their home. The pressure maintained for so long is suddenly relaxed and the barriers collapse under the impact of the struggle for survival and the urgency of desire. Traditional value systems, however, continues to survive unaltered in their minds and in society at large, despite the radical change in these women's conditions of life and their observance of new modes of behaviour and practices in daily life. But these old value systems do not show them how to act

or cope with the new challenges. The result is confusion: the future is without hope and the traditional rules which governed everyday life, protected people and guided them in their behaviour are totally unsuited to the job of enabling people to meet the harsh challenges of everyday life and satisfy their basic needs. The move to an environment offering relative freedom leads to the disintegration of constraints and strict rules which yield to new, irrepressible forces. This new behaviour, no longer governed by any established rule, signals the abrupt and more or less radical breakdown of the old system of restrictions. The women have entered into an anomalous condition, a sort of ethical wasteland, but one which is still adverse to them. For in this sphere without markers (other than basic needs), a moral transgression remains an offence, a stigma, a non-value and a negation of culture. It is just as barbaric as the extreme poverty, helplessness and insecurity in which the women find themselves. This violation of strict traditional rules, condemned as a perversion by society and subjectively perceived as a stigma by those who have flouted them, engenders a state of mental turbulence in which the moral blame and social stigma attached to the transgression have to be endured and borne. Mental and psychological endurance calls for the deployment of special psychological energies if the women are to be able to survive condemnation and denigration.

Pilgrimages and fasts help to buildup this endurance.

Mother-in-law versus daughter-in-law

A girl is educated only to make her fit to be sent to another home, where she must always be on her best behaviour. Her mother has one overriding concern: that she will never have to hear complaints about her daughter not fitting in or meeting the expectations of her in-laws, or being work-shy or unfit to perform the tasks expected of her. Once she arrives at her parents-in-law's house, the most important and crucial relationship in this new environment is that between her and her mother-in-law. Her relationship with her husband is of secondary importance.

The relationship between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law is complex. It is based on a combination of affection, jealousy and competition. The power wielded by the latter will one day pass into the hands of the former. The mother-in-law therefore attempts to cling to power and the means of domination for as long as possible; the daughter-in-law, for her part, attempts to make as many inroads as possible into this power. It is like a tug of war, with all its aggression and violence. The exercise of authority and power by one woman over another and over her household is the root of the conflict. The relationship between the two women is marked by a sense of antagonism, anger, frustration and gratification. The mother-in-law tries to hold on to everything she possesses from the start (and she possesses absolutely everything) to the exclusion of the daughter-in-law. The latter clearly has no choice but to submit. As we will see, the conflict follows a set pattern. In some cases hatred can even be transformed into affectionate subjection and understanding. In fact, the relationship goes through all the phases from opposition to co-operation. Mill songs describe the main features of this relationship, and help us to form a clearer picture of the overall framework within which the relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law develops. They are the best introduction to the testimonies of the women interviewed by us.

The benediction conferred by the mother-in-law on her subservient and grateful daughter-in-law emphasizes the common destiny that binds the two women in the service and maintenance of the line of descendants, as well as the dependence of an anxious daughter-in-law who knows that her duty and role are to give birth to children and in so doing fulfil the

most cherished hopes of her mother-in-law, who has parted with her most valuable possession, her son (the *kumku* box), for this very purpose:

‘Scarlet *kumku* box, the mother-in-law asks:
Now, my daughter-in-law, who enjoys such good fortune?’

‘O mother-in-law, your fingers are made of gold
may your benediction make my belly swell’.

‘Vast is my house, its splendid façade discreetly hidden from view
My mother-in-law is the pride of the home’.

The secret latent reason for conflict and tension is the jealousy of a possessive mother who has to give her son, the apple of her eye, to a young daughter-in-law, who is bound to have a tremendous hold over him. The mother’s exclusive grip is suddenly loosened and her son escapes from her. The bitter frustration and emptiness she has to endure makes her nasty, even violent and perverse:

‘Daughter-in-law Savitri, like the papaya at the door
I have given the hero of my bosom for her pleasure’.

‘May the favours of a mother-in-law exceed those of a mother!
She has allowed someone to reign over her bosom’s treasure’.

‘He is not a husband, but a heavy gold chain
Ripped from the neck of my mother-in-law!’

The daughter-in-law enjoys this shadow boxing, in which she feels she has the upper hand. The mother-in-law, for her part, tries to influence her son to deny the daughter-in-law her victory. She uses her authority over her son in an effort to remove him from the spell of his wife.

‘A pearl from the nose-ring has fallen into the buttermilk
I tell you, my son, keep your queen in your power.’

Instead of telling herself that it is she who has given her son a wife, she seeks to oppose and humble her daughter-in-law. Why can’t two flowers enhance each other’s beauty rather than damaging and hurting each other through contact?

‘Why must the mother-in-law inflict torment (*sâsurvâs*) on her daughter-in-law?
On a *champak* flower stalk has grown an alien *jasmin* flower.’

‘The daughter-in-law is greatly admired for her grace on her wedding day:

‘Under the canopy over the door, lies a carpet of scarlet powder for the married couple
Bearing the footprints of the daughter-in-law and the marks of her bell anklets.’

She receives much attention from everyone when pregnant, and is offered the appropriate fruit as a pledge of a happy pregnancy:

‘Who has picked for them the fruit of the jujube-tree?
The wives of my sons are pregnant.’

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But the same mother-in-law cannot avoid harassing and humiliating (*sâsurvâs*) her daughter-in law, who frequently laments:

‘O mother-in-law, your kindness makes me cry
Why have you made marks on the bread basket?’

The mother-in-law had marked the bread basket at the level reached by the pile of millet cakes in the basket to check if her daughter-in-law ate any on the sly during the day.

‘Mother-in-law, must I tell tales about you?
I’m doing my work, but I have no water to drink.’

The daughter-in-law’s resentment is understandable:

‘At dawn, as I scrub the trays for kneading dough, I tell myself that there should be no mother-in-law in the house.’

The mother-in-law, for her part, only harbours thoughts of revenge:

‘Mother-in-law: ‘The slut, she answers back!
I didn’t know she was such a bitch!’

The mother-in-law’s anguish springs mainly from her fear that her daughter-in-law may take her son away from her:

The daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law quarrel while the son listens at the door,
‘Shut up! Shut up! the old woman is a loud mouth!’, says he.

Often it is light-hearted teasing:

‘In the nurseryman’s garden, the trigonella has three leaves
The daughter-in-law is pregnant and the mother-in-law has her periods!’

As times change, so do attitudes. The daughter-in-law obviously can’t help feeling that she is smarter:

‘O mother-in-law, you have spent your life in darkness,
Today we have electricity!’

‘Today a new car was brought out,
the daughter-in-law eats bread, the mother-in-law sweeps the gutters. ’

The mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship remains as complex and ambiguous as ever.

Jija UTTEKAR has a son and a daughter-in-law, Kalpana UTTEKAR, who is still childless. So strong is her desire to have grandchildren that she nurses a terrible grudge against her daughter-in-law. Kalpana is shown no respect and has no authority at home. She can’t take any decisions and has to hand over whatever she earns at the market to her mother-in-law. She hasn’t a penny to her name. A neighbour once took her to see a doctor in Sangamner. The mother-in-law put the money for the journey in the neighbour’s hand. The daughter-in-law has to endure humiliation in silence. Jija bai is constantly raging against her daughter-in-law, especially when the latter has her periods. She makes her sit outside for four days. Her shack is

so tiny (8 feet by 4) that the daughter-in-law sits by the door, where her mother-in-law gives her food or rather throws the remains of millet cakes to her. 'Let her eat these dry remains, if she wants', she says. Jija bai moved to Pune eight years ago. Her land was submerged by the Panshet dam. Her husband lives on land received in compensation near Dound. Her daughter and her husband, who has returned from Bombay, live close by in a room paid for by Jija bai. Her daughter has four sons, while her daughter-in-law has none. This only exasperates her more. She holds highly traditional views on inter-caste relationships and goes on pilgrimage to Alandi and Pandharpur. She has no social contacts outside these narrow circles. She paid for her daughter's marriage, and bought her a place close by, not with borrowed money but with her savings, which she carefully built up by avoiding unnecessary expenses. Her daughter, Mangal BERGE, hasn't had herself sterilized even though she has borne four sons and has been working at the market for four years.

Jana NIVANGUNE is proud of being such an organized and active woman. 'I came to Pune with nobody to count on but myself. I have provided for my family in the face of many hardships. I have had to work very hard ...', etc. are her stock phrases. She has two daughters-in-law whom she keeps under her control with characteristic firmness and determination. When visitors like us come to see her, the two daughters-in-law are not allowed to remain in their presence or to utter so much as a word. Once they have served the visitors in silence the ritual cup of tea they have rushed to prepare, they immediately retire to the kitchen. They stand behind the door, surveying the moment the visitor will have taken his last sip of tea so that they can come back and take away the cup. Jana bai's daughter is possessed by the goddess of Tuljapur. She therefore has to observe strict standards of purity, especially during the *navarâtra* fast. It is the daughters-in-law who must wash the bed linen soiled by the husband and wife during sexual intercourse. If her daughters-in-law don't do what they are told, Jija bai kicks them and then goes and brags about the hiding she has given them to her neighbour. Her daughters-in-law evidently can't say a word, nor can her sons. When I pointed out that it is her daughters-in-law who would look after her during her old age and that it would be better if they had pleasant memories about her, she replied that as long she had strength in her arms and legs she would use it to impose her authority and that she would bother about the rest when the time came. She finds serenity and mental strength by going on pilgrimage once a month to Alandi and once a year with the *vârkaris* to Pandapur. It goes without saying that whoever comes to see her makes it a pious duty to fall to their knees in veneration of this devout pilgrim. *Marathi dharma* and caste are the bulwarks of her honour and the main points of reference in her life. She recognises that if the *Mâvlâyâs* created trouble for her it was because she did not treat them with due respect. To punish her they burned her badly during her fourth confinement. Ever since, she has made offerings to them every year. Generally speaking, she says 'I have hardly any friends'.

Vimal YADAV's son smokes Indian hemp and decided to live separately along with his wife. The drug habit cost him his job. He doesn't earn a penny, and what is worse, he squanders the money earned by his parents and his wife, who has to support him. Despite this dreadful behaviour, Vimal bai never misses a chance to assert her power over her daughter-in-law. During the *Gauri* festival if her daughter-in-law doesn't come to see her or goes to see her own parents, she flies into a rage: 'How arrogant she is! I am going to show her who I am! I will take all the pots and pans from her place and bring them to mine. I will padlock her door and tell her to live here! She can stay as long as she likes at her mother's place, but when she leaves she must live in my house. On one festive day, she didn't serve my son any food! She makes the most terrible mistakes!'. 'Your son doesn't earn a penny. Your daughter-in-law is the family breadwinner. Your son is good for nothing. Why don't you take account of all this?', I asked her. The boy may be what he is, but that is hardly a reason. Isn't it the daughter-in-law's

responsibility to look after him? I have given her a son from my womb. Now I'm perfectly entitled to teach my daughter-in-law a lesson! I will not tolerate her abandoning our customs and behaving in this way.'

Sita DIGHE's daughter-in-law is still childless after five years of marriage. Her mother-in-law has spent a lot of money seeking the help of gods and doctors, but to no avail. She is desperate. Her own life has been ruined by her husband who drinks heavily and beats her. At her age, she still has to earn a living. She recently found a job at the market, where she carries heavy loads. She also has to repay the money she borrowed to build a house in Appar Bibvévadi. The *Mâvlâyâs* of her ancestors possess her daughter-in-law and make life hell for her. To deliver her from them, money has to be found to pay for their altars and tired liturgy. She has therefore sent her daughter-in-law to her own family to get the necessary funds. She also wants straw matting for the house. 'There are five people in the house. That means many chappatis have to be made every day. Having to cook them standing must be tiring for your legs?', I asked. 'No, not at all! It's the daughter-in-law who makes them.' No one seems to care how tired the daughter-in-law gets. It is she who does all the housework. Her mother-in-law wears a very large *kumku* on her forehead and is dressed in a traditional cotton sari, not a dyed synthetic one. Most of her neighbors come from Mawal, her birthplace. Sita bai mixes only with people of her caste and village, where she and her husband return to attend assemblies. She is god-fearing and worships several gods. She visits their shrines in Pune, using *devrishis*, who are porters at the market, as go-betweens.

Alcoholism killed Gita GHULE's husband and then two of her sons. All three worked at the market. A young widow herself, she now has two young widowed daughters-in-law in the house. But while she was helped by her brothers-in-law and their wives when she became a widow, she doesn't provide her daughters-in-law with any support. 'I couldn't stand the sight of their white foreheads! (an allusion to the red dot they can no longer wear on their forehead since the death of their husbands). Why should I keep them and support them? I drove them out of my house,' she told me without any sign of remorse. She goes on pilgrimage to Pandhrapur and Gangapur, worships the gods of her fields and offers them a goat once a year. She wants her two surviving children to succeed in life. But the wives of her first two sons do not count among her children because her sons are dead.

Hare SULE is the mother-in-law of Lakshmi SULE. Unlike other daughters-in-law, she doesn't kow-tow to her mother-in-law. She escaped from her clutches ten years ago and went to live separately with her husband. But not before Haru bai had cursed her and invoked the gods against her. Lakshmi bai and her husband had been staying with her mother, who was providing her with financial support, for four years when the husband woke up to the seriousness of the situation and took his wife back to his mother's house. But his mother continued to torment Lakshmi. Then one day, during the Diwali festival, a big quarrel broke out between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law threw her daughter-in-law out of the house. Lakshmi's reaction was courageous and sensible. She went to live far away in Bibvévadi. Haru bai kept telling her son that as she had obtained two plots in Bibvévadi, her son could live on one and she on the other. But Lakshmi bai refuses to visit them as long as the plot is not put in her husband's name. Although they live separately, the fact that their houses are next to each other allows Haru bai to persecute her daughter-in-law. 'I will only live in a house which is under my authority,' says the daughter-in-law. 'I don't want to have to bend to the will of my mother-in-law.'

Thaku NANGARE is a robust woman despite her age. She still has the strength to sell vegetables at the roadside on her way back from the market. She is a strong woman with a

stentorian voice that is made to be heard. She is proud of having taken part in a demonstration We Vanjaris were also there!'. Her brother is a union leader at the market but she doesn't see much of him outside festivals and marriages. She is now a widow. Her husband was a porter too. She has always been a porter. Her two eldest sons are married and have returned to the village where they work as watchmen in a small local firm. Another who lives with her is soon getting married. He is a wrestler and takes part in wrestling championships. When he gets married he will return to the village with his wife and look for a job. Thaku bai did not try to hoard gold, but rather to give her children enough to eat. She doesn't get on with any of her daughters-in-law. That is why she doesn't want to return to the village in Gardavbe, We don't see eye to eye. What is the point of going there?'. She doesn't get on with her daughter OMBASE bai, either, although she too lives in Dandékarapul. Mother and daughter are at daggers drawn. The reason for this is that the daughter doesn't listen to the mother. OMBASE bai is convinced that people speak ill of her and her mother's house. 'If I'm not treated with respect in the family gatherings at the house, why should I go there and bend to their will?'. On the other hand, Thaku bai's second daughter, a widow, Suman SONAVNE and her young daughter, live with her mother. She has to obey her mother. She obviously doesn't have any alternative. Suman bai has a relationship with a man who has a bad reputation at the market and in the neighbourhood. Her mother chooses to ignore it. The daughter has no longer any relations with her in-laws since the accidental death of her husband. Because of her loose morals, she is cut off from her parents as well. Notwithstanding all her energy Thaku bai has to yield to several pressures: those of her '*dalâl*' who gets her to carry her onions and potatoes, those of her caste and those of tradition. She spends a lot of money on pilgrimages to various shrines and holy places. When I went to see her I was dressed in Punjabi clothes. She reacted with typical candour, criticizing my dress and swearing loyalty to respectable clothes such as the traditional striped sari rather than the multicolored and patterned sari made of synthetic fabric.

After quarreling with her mother-in-law, BHEGADE bai decided to organize her life as she thought fit and show what she was capable of. But she herself doesn't allow her daughter-in-law to set foot in the house. 'My son knows nothing about the world' she says. 'True, my daughter-in-law today is very nice. But once she goes out to work, she will learn the ways of the world and escape from my power.' Rather than send her out to work, she gets her to fold paper for a company at home.

Hira DALVI has had a daughter-in-law in her home for a year. Her son did as he pleased. He fell in love with a Gujarati girl, ran off with her and then brought her back with him. But her father came to fetch her, took her back to Gujarati and immediately married her off. Hira bai married her son to a girl who had lost her mother, completely concealing her son's escapade from the girl's family. After the marriage, she started to criticise her daughter-in-law. 'She doesn't know how to cook. She doesn't make *pâpads* as well as my daughter. Even after a year she hasn't improved or learnt anything', she complained. The daughter-in-law, who was pregnant, started to bleed unexpectedly. They immediately took her to Sassoon hospital. Traditionally, the first childbirth always takes place in the house of the mother of the woman having the child. Hira bai was worried because it was now her responsibility to take care of her daughter-in-law who was giving birth prematurely. As for Hira bai's mother, she too can't stop railing against the daughter-in-law 'who doesn't know how to cook and isn't smart'. We had a pearl, in exchange for which we got a rag', as the saying goes. Although the daughter-in-law has to be looked after, mother and daughter can't avoid speaking ill of her, 'Didn't the daughter-in-law eat all the time during her pregnancy?' They are afraid that the new-born baby may not survive. They also complain that when she was pregnant the daughter-in-law was always feeling sleepy. There is a rule in the community that during pregnancy a woman should

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neither eat nor sleep too much, otherwise she may give birth to a child suffering from rickets. Every mother-in-law is keen to prevent this.

Bhim CORGE came to Pun as a widow with her four children. One of her sons is dead, so that she has only one daughter-in-law living with her, her second son's wife. But she doesn't get along with her daughter-in-law. Her son drinks and earns nothing. Bhima bai lodges her daughter-in-law and four children in one room of the house. The daughter-in-law can't do without her mother-in-law's help. To bring up her children, she has to keep her nagging mother-in-law happy.

Narmada SONDKAR, CORGE bai's sister, also lives apart from her daughter-in-law. Her only son is an alcoholic wreck. As a young woman, she courageously migrated on her own initiative because her husband was mentally retarded. Now that her daughter-in-law has three children, on whom she places all her hops, she has to help bring them up. In other respects, she keeps her daughter-in-law at arm's length. The daughter-in-law isn't ready to be led by the nose and do her mother-in-law's bidding either. Consequently, the two of them quarrel endlessly. While the mother-in-law neither maintains any links with the village nor seeks solace in the gods (when does one find the time to go on pilgrimage? One doesn't solve a problem by observing religious rites and praying to gods. 'The *bhagats* take our money and fleece us', she says). By contrast, her daughter-in-law returns to maintain links with the village, as she will have to marry her children one day. How else will she do it?

In Bhima bai and Narmada bai's situation, it is clear that the house, the money and the chattels will go to the only son. But they are not yet ready to surrender their hold and claim over this property. They display a sort of cautious realism. After all, they have to protect their own interests, especially as their daughters-in-law wish to gain control over the house, the money and the chattels as soon as possible and become mistresses of the house. In this tug of war, each is pulling in her direction. No one is happy with the present situation.

Women like Dhonda BORADE and Paru SUDARIK - each of whom have three sons who are married, have a job and live close to their mother's house - prefer to live separately from them as they don't get along with their daughters-in-law. Both of them work at the market, and although the work is tiring, they had rather do that than remain idle at home. In addition they can't give up their jobs because they don't want to be dependent on their daughters-in-law - even though relations aren't by no means cordial. The daughters-in-law have no option but to live separately because they are married with children and because if they didn't they would be ill-treated by their parents-in-law. 'I have never been able to get on with my parents-in-law. They live in Kasba peth. I found a shack in Dankavdi so that I could live separately', says Kamal RANE.

Awareness of the law against the ill treatment of daughters-in-law enables some of them to score points against their parents-in-law and get the better of them. One of Sakhu SALEKAR's daughters-in-law had schooling up to the seventh year. After coming to Pune, she learned sewing and now earns money from it. Her parents live in Bombay. She didn't want to take orders from her brother-in-law and her sisters-in-law and wanted a separate kitchen. To make her point, she poured kerosene on herself. The police came and she is now entitled to live apart. She has her own kitchen in the same house. In fact, there are two stoves and two kitchens in a space of 10 feet by 10 feet. Proximity, far from being a source of neighbourliness and help, provokes tension and misunderstanding. It is a case of 'separation under the same roof'.

Paru KOTKAR owns a three-roomed house in Gokhale Nagar. The eldest daughter-in-law lives separately in it. The second ran off with a lover, leaving her children in Paru bai's care. The third had to leave because the eldest was always picking quarrels with her. Paru bai has had an eye operation and her eyesight is still poor. What were she and her husband to live on? She had to let out a room to tenants, who also boarded with her. But they left because the eldest daughter-in-law pestered them endlessly. One of Paru bai's daughters has been abandoned by her husband. These are some of the problems confronting her at present.

Sindhu BHOINE married her only son in Diwadi in 1990. Four months later, he left the house to live with his parents-in-law. He has filed a suit against her and she has received a summons to appear before a magistrate. 'My son was in my power until now', she says. 'If I was late, he washed my saris. When he wanted a rickshaw, I bought him one by borrowing money at 10 per cent interest a month. What haven't I done for him.' If he is behaving like this, it is because his mother-in-law has put a curse on him'. But people at the market tell a different story. They say that after her son's marriage Sindhu bai slept between her son and her daughter-in-law because she couldn't bear the thought of losing him. (She already refused her son's demand that the house be put in his name. There is nothing new in this; many female porters insist on keeping the house in their name and refuse to transfer title to their sons.) Her son couldn't stomach the situation. So he left to live at his wife's parents' house. His mother went too see his wife's mother to vent her anger and to tell her what she intended to do: 'I am going to make a widow of your daughter in the next six months'. So deep is her frustration that she is prepared to kill her son.

This brings to mind the behaviour of Kaikayi in the mill songs, the archetype of the wicked mother-in-law who is about to send Sita into exile (*vanavâs*) and is even prepared to have her killed by Laxman.

'Sita describes her *vanavâs* to Ram, who turns the page.
Kaikayi her mother-in-law is listening at the door.'

Sita's *vanavâs* is a symbol of the persecution of a daughter-in-law by her mother-in-law, ever present in the minds of all daughters-in-law. The songs speak of the endless suffering inflicted on the son and his wife. Deep down, the young brides are convinced that, like Sita, they too must endure their *sasurvâs* (ill treatment) by their parents-in-law:

'It is you, mother, who inflicted this *sasurvâs* on Sita
It is twelve years that my queen has been missing from my bed'.

'Sita's exile -it is she who must have ordered it -
was long as the hair on her head,
The tamarind leaf carries
the same fate to Sita's sisters in all countries'.

But many of Sita's sisters in India are today rejecting Sita's unbearable submission as a role model. As for the young husbands, they are less inhuman and inhibited than the base god of the epic. Many mothers-in-law too behave differently from Kaikayi with their daughters-in-law.

Konda SHEJAVAl has a son who is a cook, Try as he can to be difficult with his mother and make unreasonable demands on her, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law live in perfect harmony. GHODEKE bai's eldest son is married and works for a company. The second works as a day labourer. The third helps his father, a butcher, in the shop. The youngest goes to

school. The first few years in Pune were very difficult while the children were still young. Their mother would do washing up in other people's houses but this wasn't enough to keep the family going. Her children accompanied her to the sugar cane juice store where she worked and later were taken on at a cycle repair shop. As children they had to find work, and the family still lives from hand to mouth. The eldest son has three children. GHODKE bai steals vegetables from the market and sells them in her shantytown. Everybody lives crammed together in a tiny shack. But mother-in-law and daughter-in-law get on extremely well. They find the time to go on pilgrimage together to Alandi and Pandharpur but, unlike Ghodke bai's husband and son, don't often return to the village.

Paru PATANE is an old woman with a traditional outlook on life. She is a well-known *Bhaktin* who reads the future with success and authority. While her son doesn't get along with his father and lives separately for this reason, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law get on like a house on fire. Paru bai doesn't behave in an overbearing manner with her daughter-in-law, contrary to tradition and what the 'devi' who possesses her suggests to other women during trances. Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law actually wish to live together, not separately. It is the disagreement between the eldest son and his father which forces them to live apart. Yamuna JADHAV has married a son to her niece. Her daughter-in-law has four daughters; the mother-in-law doesn't torment, criticise or annoy her. Both women would undoubtedly be happy to have one or two sons. But this hasn't spoiled their relations or reduced their affection for each other. The mother-in-law adores her grand-daughters, has had her daughter-in-law sterilized and even sends her to school. The daughter-in-law has never had the door shut in her face. She even does the shopping for the family, something no mother-in-law lets her daughter-in-law do.

There is nothing traditional about Hausa KADU. She has always faced life with courage and intelligence. She is one of the few women who has never sought refuge in gods and pilgrimages, but relied entirely on her own mental and intellectual abilities. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that she treats her daughters-in-law with understanding, affection and kindness. Kala AMBADE, a Cambhar, had a Maratha daughter-in-law. Although she made a determined effort to understand her, her daughter-in-law left the house because she couldn't get along with her husband. Kala bai gets on equally well with her son's second wife, who is a Cambhar too. Her son, however, beats and ill-treats his wife. Kala bai doesn't like it, and was worried that her son's spendthrift ways might bring the family to ruin. She therefore decided to take her daughter-in-law with her to the market. But her son put his foot down and stopped her doing so. Tara KAMTE is a simple, unobtrusive woman. Her son has taken to drink. He has four children. In order to raise them, Tara bai helps her daughter-in-law to fold paper at home when she returns from the market. This is what she has to say: We had a champak, and brought someone else's jasmin to our house. We must treat her with understanding'. Anusuya BARDE may not get along with her daughter-in-law, but she does make an effort to understand her. Jija SHELKE is a well-informed, discerning and sensible woman. Just as, at the market, women workers should have a recognized status and be held in respect, so at home, the same women should have rights and be treated with respect in their roles as daughters-in-law. She has voluntarily handed over the management of the household to the daughter-in-law. She never complains about or criticizes her daughter-in-law, who holds her in great affection. Jija bai is an enterprising woman with plenty of experience and contacts, especially in the property business. The husband of one of her sisters was a driver at Tata. This enabled her to contract an arranged marriage with another Tata driver who could neither read nor write. He was a union worker and leader. He clashed with the management over a demand that the company provide furniture for the union office. His bosses, displeased, reported him to the police for stealing. He was sent to jail and lost his job. He then took to drink. He later found

temporary employment in a dairy. It was in this period that the family left the Camp and came to live in Navi peth. It is a good environment where children can acquire good habits. The two boys became porters at an early age. The youngest son attended school and worked at the market in his spare time. He graduated with an advanced diploma in commerce. He saved money to buy his brother a rickshaw (Rs.12,000) but as the vehicle didn't work properly he had to sell it (Rs.28,000). The brother returned to the market as a porter. A proud Maratha woman, who despises Mahar women sweepers and makes pilgrimages to holy places in North India, Jija bai believes that all women, and female porters, have the right to be respected. Although she considers the work of a porter to be 'a degrading and unworthy occupation', she married her daughters with the help of a fellow worker at the market and, as she herself comes from Barsi and Aurangabad, had no reservations about giving her two daughters in marriage in, and finding a daughter-in-law from, another district (Velhé). She never used her influence on wide-ranging skills to exercise domination over her daughter-in-law. It is possible that, being successful in her working life, she did not feel the need to assert her authority at home.

Anu SALEKAR has two daughters-in-law, one of whom is her brother's daughter. One lives with her, the other next door. Anu bai is kind to both of them. Her sons have received an education which has enabled them to find a job. They never drink. Laxmi MORE has had a difficult life. She was married without being told that her husband was disabled. He became an incorrigible drunkard who insulted her all the time and whose behaviour so annoyed the neighbors that the family had to move out and find another place to live. She first worked in a snuff factory where she contracted tuberculosis. She left this job and found another where she went out to do washing-up but the skin of her hands suffered from repeated contact with detergents and water. Kadu bai took her to the market where she made kind friends, to whom she is extremely grateful. Her three sons are married. They live rather far from her (in the village, Bhavani peth and Chaturshringi). Her daughters-in-law have maintained a rural lifestyle. They come from the village not from Pune. Laxmi MORE goes to their house to see her grandchildren whenever she can find the time. There is harmony and affection in the family. The past has not left any traces of bitterness and the daughters-in-law are not made scapegoats. Laxmi bai is something of a traditionalist. She wears simple cotton saris. A picture of Kalu bai watches over the house. 'I observe strict rules of purity', she says. This means that on returning from the market she sprinkles cow stale on the floor before she enters the house, which is protected by the 'devi'.

Indu PANSARE is extremely poor. Her boys, who never went to school, don't have good jobs. She is thus compelled to work, but despite her privation, she gets along with her daughters-in-law. This is a real solace to her. Sari VIRAL's husband and her son are drunkards. Often, she doesn't feel like returning home. There are endless squabbles and arguments at home. Such is her and her daughter-in-law's fate. What can her daughter-in-law do? Should she look after the children and the house or should she do washing-up in other people's houses? Her daughter-in-law's condition distresses her. Both women, however, are trying their level best to cope. KARLE bai, on the other hand, is fairly well-off. There is a good atmosphere at home. She has found separate accommodation for her son and her daughter-in-law, as she feels the whole family shouldn't have to live in cramped quarters. The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are friends and help each other out. Sakhu BAMGUDE has had a fairly eventful life. She was one of the two wives of her husband; he died and she remarried, but her second husband died too. She has two sons and lives with the elder one. The younger one lives separately. Sakhu bai gets on very well with both her daughters-in-law. When she was living in Paud Phata, she met a lady doctor who gave her financial support and advice. This made a strong impression on her. The many disappointments she has had to face in life have taught

Sakhu how to deal with difficulties. She has learned that harmony between women living under the same roof is one of the keys to happiness.

Relations between husbands and wives

The primary role assigned to a wife by society is to look after the family and manage its daily affairs (*samsâra*). *The wife* is the mistress of the house, responsible for the well-being of the family members. Her other major role is to give birth to sons in order to continue and add to the family (*gharân*). Her womb alone can produce 'the light of the family line'. The daughter-in-law is chosen for the specific purpose of bearing patrilineal descendants. The system of values governing the role of the wife/daughter-in-law is underpinned by these two essential goals. A girl's upbringing before marriage is aimed at preparing her for this very role. Moreover, parents are anxious to marry girls off as soon as they reach puberty (all the women interviewed were married between 15 and 17, except for Dhangar girls who are married before they have their first period). For a wife, the first rule of marriage is to remain with the family to which she has been given, be faithful and submissive to her husband and her in-laws, bear sons for them and bring up the children.

The function and meaning of marital relations should be understood in this context. Once a girl has been given to another house, she must never contemplate leaving. This principle has been internalized by all the women. They know they must remain with their husband's family, whatever the circumstances. A girl who has been given away in marriage by her family to her in-laws is barred from returning to her family. It is interesting to observe the behaviour of women who leave their husband's home for one reason or other and decide to live separately with their children. Does such behaviour imply a real change in values, both symbolically and normatively? Is the challenge to traditional values direct and explicit, or indirect and practical, or significant in some other way?

Two mill songs recall the traditional framework of symbols in this regard used by peasant women in the past. The frost song declares that the husband is the sole guarantor of status and security in life. Without a husband, a woman has neither hearth nor home. A woman with a husband is ensured parental and family protection and may over time acquire a certain degree of power, albeit qualified. A husband is a woman's chief sanctuary.

'However puny the husband, don't say "what a poor specimen!"'
Even a rich father and mother cannot provide for you to the end of your days.
Do not scorn the husband you have married
This dot of red kumku on yellow saffron
is more valuable than gold itself.'

The kumku dot worn on the forehead by a woman is the sign she cherishes most, for it denotes she has a husband who is the centre and mooring-point of her life.

A happy family

A woman's concerns after marriage are generally the following: to have many children, to promote harmony of views between herself and her husband, to fulfil the hopes she cherishes for her family, to perform her duties as a woman and mistress of the house by scrupulously following the rules laid down in the *grihastha dharma*, the code of conjugal duties. A wife's model duties under the *grihastha dharma* are: to be hospitable to one's parents, people of the same caste and guests; to educate children in accordance with social customs; to exchange and go shares with members of the same household; and to solve common problems jointly. The

model projects the image of a united household capable of coping with the vicissitudes of life and achieving its hopes of success and happiness. The central feature here is not the concept of the couple, but the duties of the partners as part of a wider network of relationships. The relationship between husband and wife is only one part, however important and vital, of this whole. It should not be considered in isolation, because it is neither a complete entity in itself nor an end in itself, neither a thing in itself nor a thing for itself. The relationship has wider aims that constitute and establish the means and conditions for the couple's success and happiness. Some women feel satisfied that in this way they have achieved their aims in life.

Thaka JADHAV has two disabled children. Her work as a cook physically affected her, and the job of a porter is difficult. But husband and wife share the same views. Mutual understanding helps them to shoulder the burden of life. They give their children the right upbringing and are able to support their family on what they earn. Although the children are a cause for concern, the future can only be tackled together and with the help of the gods.

Anusuya TANDALE has a happy family. Her husband has a job, After the firm where he worked went out of business, he found a job as a day labourer. 'He no longer receives workers' benefits, payments from a reserve fund or bonuses.' The family has been living in Appar Bibvévadi since 1987, They have built a back room for Rs.15,000. They send a little money to his needy parents-in-law who are looking after a mentally retarded brother-in-law. The land is in his brother-in-law's name, in compliance with the new law which proclaims 'the land belongs to the person who farms it'. The couple will return to the village when their children's education is completed. They go to the villages every year during the rice planting season. As the husband does not drink, the family is able to deposit some money in the community loan fund at the village, and has been able to buy a few household goods as well. The husband enjoys meeting and receiving decent respectable people who have become his friends. There is no reason for the family to be ashamed about anything or before any one. On the contrary, the family and the house are doing well and there is a full range of utensils in the kitchen. Everything works and is well-maintained. Effort and hard work have borne fruit. They look back with great satisfaction on the fact that they have worked for something and haven't wasted their energy. Once a week the god is marked with kumku and a pinch of saffron is sprinkled on him. There is no need to observe fasts or do penance of any sort. Awareness of the law and one's rights is just as reassuring.

Shaku PAWARA has an equally gratifying story to tell, although, in her case, success has led her to settle in the city. She came to Pune in 1980 and was taken to the market by a sister-in-law. But she only took a job there after telling her husband: 'I am going to work at the market. This means that I will be talking to many men'. Her husband has complete faith in her and never comes to her workplace to see how she is behaving. When she comes back exhausted after a hard day's work, her husband rubs her legs at night. They have a rich and rewarding relationship. Her sense of contentment and satisfaction allows her to work cheerfully. Her mother-in-law comes to see her from time to time but doesn't nag her. This story should be placed in the wider family context if its full meaning is to be grasped. Shah's husband previously worked at a factory in Bombay where his brother-in-law had a job. The brother-in-law was a trained mechanic, and was posted to Sudan by his company. When her husband left his job in Bombay to return to the village, she tried to find something for them to do and told her husband that she wanted to buy and rear two buffalo cows and put one in her son's name. The rearing of buffaloes proved complicated and affected her health. She sold the animals and recovered her health. Her husband took up various jobs in Pune in small companies. He is currently working in Vithalvadi for 400 rupees a month (April 1988). The husband of a sister living in Bombay also helped Shaku bai a lot. Shaku bai had herself

sterilized of her own free will. She has been working for the same *dalâl* since she came to the market. The women working for this *dalâl* decided at his instigation to set up an independent trade union. Shaku bai is its president. On arriving in Bombay she bought a hovel for 3,500 rupees in Dattavadi. In 1987, she spent 10,000 rupees on improvements. Today, her house has everything. When she came to Pune, she used to bathe in cold water every day. But by dint of hard work and courage, she has everything she needs today. Her husband is understanding and has never beaten her. He believes that the wife is the pillar of the whole family. He doesn't have any bad habits. The mother-in-law is kind and co-operative.

Chaya BAGAL and her husband work hard and bring up their family together. The children attend school regularly. Chaya bai runs the household. The husband gives her everything he earns without ever asking how she spends the money. He respects her greatly and has complete faith in her. We could cite numerous examples showing how the union of heart and mind allows people to surmount difficulties. Take the case of Lila BHEGADE and Kala KARLE. The latter was helped by her in-laws, who used to send her sacks of rice from the village, by acquaintances who directed her family the place where she has been living for the past 25 years (the landlord charged a ground rent of 25 rupees and allowed her to build a hovel on the plot), by an aunt living in Kadakmal street who took her to the market, and by her husband who has been a porter all his life. The burden of raising a family, and isolation from fellow workers and neighbors, have meant that all efforts are concentrated on raising a happy family. The husband's understanding, support and good behaviour are an additional source of happiness. A mill song reveals the happiness that lies in store for families who meet the challenges of life in a spirit of harmony:

When husband and wife squabble with each other day and night
The goddess Lakshmi says "I had better get out of here fast".

These examples show that in the wide context of the *grihastha dharma* system of values, rules, relationships and representations these women have, through their own efforts and following the role model, made a success of their family and married life. The mental satisfaction they feel at having been faithful to their self-image and role is more than justified.

Drunkenness, disability and illness

'A wife and her disabled husband must share and share alike.
She should not return to live with her rich parents.'

This is what a wife is taught and what she abides by in life. It does not matter if the husband is weak or disabled, as long as he is willing to relate to her, and both husband and wife strive to help each other out. Where communication exists, a wife should seek to live in harmony with her husband, even if he is physically impaired. There are times, however, when understanding and communication are impossible. Domestic disharmony has three main causes. Alcoholism is the most serious, because it reduces the husband to a subhuman state in which he is incapable either of communicating or of running the family's affairs.

Sam AINPURE told me: 'Look at my husband and my brother-in-law. They are idle. The two of them run a *bhel* (snacks) vending business from a handcart, but they are hardly ever to be found at the cart. They are busy drinking. It is as hopeless a situation as if fate itself had written it on my forehead on the fifth day'. Her son has been led astray by her father. Help from one's family usually makes up for a husband's incapacity. Sari bai's family and parents-in-law own land and send her cereals. She has a close relationship with them, and will be helping with the harvest. Her sister-in-law, Gavu BHAREKAR, took her to the market. The *dévi*, which has

a tremendous hold over her, is another support. But her greatest support is the neighbors and the friendship she has struck with women like Sindu SHELAR, who has been her neighbour for many years and took her to the market six years ago. She has little contact with other women workers, the bank or the union even though she is a Bhumata member. The heart and soul of her life are the restricted group of friends who form a *bhishi*, talk about the gods, help each other every day and lend each other money.

Sindhu SHELAR's husband and brother-in-law are also inveterate drinkers. They too have a small snack business (betel leaves and cigarettes). The brother-in-law drinks more than the husband. He is so useless that his sister-in-law has to look after the shop. The family can't live on what the husband earns. Sindhu bai is worried that her husband may sell the shop she brought for him and squander the money on drink. Under the influence of drink, he is capable of anything. This is perhaps the cause of the close friendship between Sindhu bai and Saru AINPURE. Her 18-year-old son has lost consciousness on three occasions. All this gives an insight into Sindhu bai's behaviour: her trances, her faith in *bhagats*, the influence of the *Mâvlâya*, the goddesses of family lands, and her boundless workshop of gods. She is particularly careful to propitiate the *Mâvlâyas* by worshipping them in the proper fashion. After the birth of her son, she went to consult them. She made an offering of five baskets of fruit and gifts, and sacrificed a cock in their honour. She is possessed by them. She often returns to the village to accuse such and such a woman of casting evil spells. When we went to see her, she had a *bhagat* at home. She had called him because her younger brother's cattle were dying. She wanted to put an evil spell on someone.

Although some husbands drink only occasionally, it is still a huge drain on resources. KANDHARE Bai's husband drinks from time to time, as does JORI bai's. But at least they spend the rest of the money on the family. SULE bai's husband is a welder. He installed a welding machine in the house, but it has never been used. There is a big difference between occasional and regular drinking, but it is common practice for men to be led on from one to the other. CHAVAN bai and her husband, for instance, were brought to the Dankavdi shantytown by KARANJKAR bai's husband, a heavy drinker, in whose company he inevitably became a heavy drinker also.

Shaku JORI is a woman whose industriousness and sense of enterprise save her from the poverty and solitude that a husband who drinks could subject her to. Her fellow workers claim that she beats him mercilessly when he returns home drunk. The various jobs she has had over the last 25 years in Pune have enabled her to support her family. She started working at the market four years ago. In 1982, she bought a room in Dandékarpul for Rs.1,200. She recently bought a second place, a tin shack for Rs.800 and has built brick walls there. Since coming to the market yard, she has been putting a small amount of money in the bank every day through a bank employee who comes to the market. With these savings, she married off her daughter for Rs.1,800. The daughter's parents-in-law also live in Dandékarpul. They come from Pomgao. The father-in-law works in Chinchvad and earns Rs.2,500 a month (1988). The son, on the other hand, does nothing. Nobody quite knows whether his father lost his first wife or abandoned her, His second wife - it isn't clear whether he has married her or keeps her as a mistress - comes from Konkan. Sakhu's husband drinks and every time we meet him he never misses an opportunity to praise the *dalâl*. He tells us that since becoming a porter at the market, life has been kind to him. Saku bai's situation has also improved since she started to work at the market. She made only Rs.40 to Rs.50 a month doing laundry. At the market she earns more.

Examples abound of husbands who drank only a little in the beginning but slowly took to the habit till it became an irresistible need. The causes vary, but the effect on the family is the same: it quickly breaks up.

Gavu BHAREKAR's husband was a porter at the Thorat warehouse, one of the market's leading and best-known warehouses. For four years, he was a model employee. His wife ran a restaurant at home. She was so successful that she was able to save 35 tolas of silver (105 grammes). But her husband started to drink and slowly all her hard-earned savings were frittered away. Gavu bai was forced to work at the market as a porter. Her eldest son had taken to drink like his father. He worked at a printing press but didn't contribute a penny for the family's maintenance. The family had nothing left to live on. It was Gavu bai who had to deal with the situation. She had to find a way of preventing things from falling apart. Until then she had never left the house. She was ashamed of going to the market to work, but there was no alternative. In the beginning she would go there furtively; now it's a job like any other. The second boy is a rickshaw driver. In spite of living so many years in Pune, none of her children has received schooling. Gavu bai believes in evil spells, charms and the evil eye.

SONDKAR bai's husband is a night-watchman at Fergusson College. After taking to drink, he started to absent himself from work and beat his wife. Some of the women workers feel that Salu bai's fidelity is not above suspicion. This probably explains her husband's behaviour. Kamal KALE's husband is a Mang. His work consists in dissecting corpses at the public hospital, a job reserved for untouchables by tradition. He finds it difficult to perform this task repeatedly without doing something that would make him forget his shame. So he gets drunk and beats and insults his wife. KONDAVALKAR has a husband who started drinking a long time ago. His alcohol consumption increased with the vicissitudes of life. At first he worked at a factory which made cooking utensils, but shortages of raw material forced him to stop. He found a job at a timber market, but the shop where he worked burned down and his employer was forced to lay him off. He now does odd jobs. At the moment he transports goods on a handcart. In the circumstances there is little likelihood of his giving up drinking or of the family shack not resembling what his wife calls 'Sita's hut during her exile'. But she doesn't lose heart, for her family depends on her for its survival. She had to find work at the market after the fire and has been working there for the last 20 years. She obtained a plot in Appar Bibvévadi where she brought a hut 'like Sita's'. She used to put money into a bank account but now invests her money privately. She struggled to provide her children with schooling. Her husband often beat her. The children could not study and failed their examinations. She went to visit many gods but in vain. She has now stopped. Her eldest daughter has a job in an electronics firm.

Hira bai's husband is a stone mason. He gets a good daily wage, but most of it is spent on drink. Every night, there are terrible scenes at home with blows, arguments and cries. The neighbors try to reason with the husband but he won't listen. Hira bai prays a lot to the gods, observes fasts and goes on pilgrimages so that her husband will stop drinking, but in vain. She hasn't been to Donje yet, because the god there is a savage one and she is afraid of him. If she makes the slightest mistake and her husband relapses after an improvement, he gets nasty with her. Her husband's brother lives with them, but has never tried to calm him. Hira bai has hung many lemons on her door but this has had no effect. She has had herself sterilized. She puts money into her account every day. Her three sons go to school. She has everything at home. She wakes up at 2.30 in the morning to prepare everything for the day. 'I'm not getting any sleep, but what can I do?'

Indu TAGULE'S hovel is filthy. She has 10 daughters, only one of whom remains to be married (two have died). Although she hasn't given birth to a son, she doesn't spend any money on religious rites to have one. She previously lived in the village where she married off her two eldest daughters. Her husband went to Pune before her. He lived near a tall barrier and earned a living from transporting goods on his horse-drawn cart. She came to Pune to look for an opportunity to marry off her daughters. She found a job at the market as soon as she arrived. It was easy for her, because many of her neighbors were already working there. They used to take her with them. She gave her daughters in marriage to local boys. The unmarried daughter alone has schooling. In such a difficult situation as hers, she had to choose between having enough to eat and giving her daughters an education. She is a member of a *bhiski* at the market. She recently earned Rs.1,300 and used the money to pay back loans and to buy vegetables for her husband to sell, cloth to make blouses for her daughters and bangles and dresses for them. She got two of her married daughters taken on at the market three months ago. But one of the husbands is suspicious and keeps a close eye on his wife. Indu bai is the family breadwinner. Her husband sold his cart eight years ago and his only activity since has been to resell the vegetables his wife brings back from the market. Otherwise, he squanders most of the family budget on drink, leaving his wife to provide for the family's needs single-handed. It was she who supervised the construction of the shack at Appar Bibv. To begin with, the husband lived on a piece of wasteland, but was forced to leave it. To move to Appar, they had to pay a deposit (the rent for the plot of land allotted to them) to the municipality, Indu bai built her hovel on this plot. The ceiling is low and leaks when it rains. The place is damp. As the eldest daughter had helped her mother to marry off the second daughter, the hovel is in her name. Indu bai can't pay back the money she has borrowed and hopes that her son-in-law will 'repay her debts after her death in this hell'.

Kala DAMALE's husband was formerly a porter, but now he drinks all day long and prevents his wife from sleeping at night. Kala bai's life has been made a hell. Her eldest daughter looks after the small shop that she has opened in her house. Although she does not get any sleep, she is up early to make sure that everything is ready before she leaves the house at four. Her husband spends his time insulting the neighbors and urinating all over the place. At times, he passes out in the street and has to be brought back home. Kala bai says, 'members of my family help me financially but do not dare to spend the night here'. She provides for her own, her husband's and the three children's needs all by herself.

Kamal RANE is TAGULE bai's daughter and Jayashri BHOSLE'S sister. She lives in a shack measuring 10 feet by 15. Her parents-in-law live in Kasba peth, but she doesn't get on with them. That is why she decided to live in Dankavdi shantytown. Her husband is an alcoholic, ugly and illiterate - not at all what she deserves, as she is pretty and has a touch of class. Her family's poverty was the main reason for this mismatch and the wretched life she is condemned to live. It is rumoured that she has adulterous relations, and that makes her husband jealous and drives him to drink to drown his sorrows. This is destroying their marriage. Kamal bai scrupulously observes purity rituals, and is possessed by Kalu bai to whose shrine she makes a yearly pilgrimage. She sits by the door of her small hovel during her periods. It is unthinkable for her to do any cooking in this condition. She was taken on at the market four months ago. Before this she would cut grass on the hills to sell. She is particular about who she meets and never eats with Mahars or Mangs. She is ill-treated by her drunkard husband and keeps her cooking pots safely hidden in a sack out of sight.

Many husbands take to drink because they feel their wife is betraying them. Malan PATIL's experience is a case in point. Her husband locks her up at home when he goes out and keeps an eye on her when she works at the market.

The husbands of young women between 25 and 35 like SHINDE bai, KHAMKAR bai, KINARE bai, POL bai, etc., lost their jobs some years ago during the long general strike at Bombay's textile mills. These men had to go back to their village, jobless, desperate and discredited in the eyes of their own family. They never found another job. They suffered from a sense of failure and helplessness. Penniless, having already developed a taste for alcohol in the city, they gradually took to drink to overcome their frustration and boredom in the village. The burden of providing for the family, therefore, fell on the shoulders of the women who were forced to migrate or find better-paid jobs to support their family.

Some women implore the god of Donje to make their husbands give up drinking. This particular god is renowned for his powers in this field, but also greatly feared. For, if the husband starts drinking again, the god punishes the whole family. Driven by despair, and as a last resort when life becomes unbearable, many wives visit this god at Donje, which lies 20 km west of Pune.

Kusum THOPATE knows that she can expect no help, either from her own poverty-stricken family, which lives in Pune, or from her parents-in-law. Although her husband's behaviour was irreproachable at first, he suddenly turned into a very heavy drinker. Kusum bai is compelled to do two jobs: one at the market in the morning, and the other as a help in the homes of other people after work. She barely has time to eat between the two. She has only one son. A year ago her husband stopped drinking after she had been to Donje. Her husband even returned to his job at the cooking utensils factory. The day we went to see them, he had offered his wife a new sari. We have since learned that he has started to drink again and things are as bad as in the past: lack of money, beatings, etc. Kusum bai finds temporary solace in the *dévi* that possesses her.

Chandra UBHE gave birth to nine children, five of whom died. Three sons and a daughter survived. She has been working at the market for many years. She was taken thereby her mother-in-law, who also worked there. She started to work there before she had even reached puberty and hasn't stopped since. She took her second daughter-in-law, who is also her niece, to work at the market. Chandra bai's mother-in-law decided that her son, who too is a porter, should take a second wife. He is a drunkard. The second wife lives separately, and the husband has been living with her for the last two years, having cut off all marital relations with Chandra bai. He only comes to see Chandra bai for money and to beat her. She has restored her social respect by becoming a union steward and finds solace in new rites, which she hopes will be effective. A brother-in-law forcibly appropriated the land at the village. Each of her three sons has a job. Her daughter-in-law, the wife of her eldest son, has run away, leaving behind three children. Her eldest daughter died four years ago. She thinks that her daughter's mother-in-law had put the curse of the god Mhasoba on her. She has taken in her granddaughter. AU members of the household are fervent devotees of *Santoshi mâtâ*, to whom they have made a number of vows in return for protection. These vows have been kept for the last 30 years. They consist of drinking tea only on Friday evenings, followed by a *puja* and a good meal, observing fasts, going on pilgrimage every year as far as Benares, Alandi and Pandharpur and attending the village assembly once a year. She wants her grandchildren to have a traditional upbringing. She has put Rs.1,500 into a bank account to buy a flat from her union. Although her room is tiny, it has all she needs - straw matting, a gas stove, etc. She keeps her savings in the bank and in the *bhishi*. She puts her earnings from the *bhishi* into her bank account. She keeps her daughter-in-law and grandchildren under her thumb, although it remains to be seen for how long. It would not be surprising if the children followed their father's example and took to drink, thereby perpetuating the curse that has bedeviled the family. The daughter-in-law will suffer tomorrow what the mother is suffering today.

There is a tradition of alcoholism in the families of Sakhu AINPURE, DALVI bai, UBHE bai, KHILARE bai, BHAREKAR bai and VARAL bai. The latter confided in me: 'I was already poor, and if that wasn't enough, both father and son are drunkards. Life at home is sheer hell. There is no happiness.

Sometimes I feel like never going back home'.

The system of two wives

Notwithstanding the law prohibiting a man from having more than one wife, at a time, the husbands of 13 of the 166 women interviewed (7.8 per cent) have taken a second wife. AU the women feel this is a grievous situation, but they must learn to put up with it. It is difficult for a woman to accept that another should supplant her in the special and exclusive relationship she seeks and is entitled to with the man who has taken her as his wife. It is hard to imagine her mental suffering at sharing the marriage bed with another woman. How does the first wife react to the arrival of the second? The sages of Maharashtra depict this situation in the story of the god Malhari or Khandoba (the divinity of Jejuri, one of Maharashtra's most popular gods) who took a second wife, the shepherdess Banu from the Dhangar caste, although he was married to Mhalsai, a shopkeeper from the Vani caste. A mill song depicts Mhalsai's:

I am a Vani by birth.
I did not let her climb the steps leading up the hill.

Banu has her abode at the bottom of the hill, inhabited by the god and his frost wife. The latter sees the new wife as a threat and resolves to keep her out. However, as time goes by, the two women become friends and live in harmony:

Mhalsai: Banu, my husband's second wife, in the name of the god Malhari, let us eat out of the same plate.

Mhalsai bai had no option but to yield and resign herself to her fate.

Hira KHENGARE's husband had a job in a factory which involved moving house a great deal. He has lived in Phalgar, Bombay, Nasik and, for the last 12 years, in Pune. Hira bai earned Rs.250 to Rs.300 a month working at a factory in Bhavani peth which made cooking utensils. Since moving to Bibvavadi, where she was allotted a plot to build a house, she has been working at the market. One day a big argument broke out in the warehouse where she worked. She changed warehouses, and now divides her time between the onion and potato warehouse and the vegetable market where she works one-and-a-half hours. She comes back with vegetables, onions and potatoes, which she sells in her neighbourhood in the evening. She makes a daily profit of Rs.5 to Rs.7. She also supplies condiment paste to her husband's second wife. Previously, Congress party workers launched a project for manufacturing condiment paste in the shantytown which was expected to create jobs for some 90 women. Hira bai's job was to roll *pâpads*. When, after four months, the women were still waiting to be paid, she organized a demonstration in front, of Congress House. She thinks that the pay cheque has been received. She says that plans are now under way to setup a chocolate sweet factory. She belongs to a union and attends its meetings. She did not invest in its real estate project because she did not understand what it was all about. She holds that all the union officials are corrupt and pocket union funds. She does not trust them. She occasionally attends meetings of the Baba Adhav porters' association to keep herself informed. She comes from a poor family which helps her as best it can. She is the eldest of the brothers and sisters. As she was not able to have a child, she returned home one day and tried to talk the rest of the family into letting her

take her youngest sister back with her as her husband's second wife. At first, her brother rejected the idea. But when she proposed to contribute money towards the marriage costs of the other sisters, who were still unmarried, the brother relented and let her take the youngest sister back with her as her husband's second wife. This sister gave birth to a boy, then Hira bai had a daughter after which her sister gave birth to another boy and a girl. The two sisters carefully give the outward appearance of getting along with each other, but in private they continually speak ill of each other. The husband is due to retire in two years. To make up for the loss of income, they plan to run a street stall. Getting town council permission for this is no easy matter. But Hira bai is a strong personality: she will dig her heels in and wheel and deal until she gets her own way. Her husband dare not contradict her. She adores gods and rites. In January 1989, she spent Rs.2,000 on a basket of offerings for the *Mâvlâyâs*. When her brother failed to father a son, she and her mother were accused of putting an evil spell on him in an attempt to end the male line. She has spared no expense to clear herself of this charge.

She bought land in her mother's village (Rihe, Rasalvadi) for Rs.25,000. The plot is irrigated by a pump which draws water from a nearby stream. Half the land is tilled by her brother. In 1988, he was growing vegetables there, but seeing that this brought her very little, from 1989 she told him to grow wheat instead. She hopes to get two sacks for herself. She got land from her parents-in-law (Khamboli) when they divided their holding and arranged that her brother-in-law farm half of her share in return for a little grain.

SHELAR bai has three sons and two married daughters. She chose her cousin as a second wife for her husband. The cousin was already, married, but as she didn't get along with her in-laws she came to live in Pune with SHELAR bai, whose husband then made her his second wife. It seemed natural, almost like taking in one's own sister. But as the second wife she never gave birth to any children. She is still living in Pune, while SHELAR bai has returned to the village to till the family land. When I asked her how she reacted to her husband having a second wife, she replied: What can we do? This is what men do. What harm is there in having a second wife? One simply has to accept it. Men take a second wife for their pleasure'. The two women, who are no longer young, have spent most of their life trying to get along with each other.

Yashoda RANJANE had no children after several years of marriage. Her cousin became her husband's second wife and gave birth to children.

Anusuya KUMBHAR is a second wife. Her husband's first wife, who was barren, died. He remarried and then took Anusuya bai as his second wife. The other wife works at the village farm and has borne three children. Anusuya had five, of which only the youngest daughter has survived. She has prayed to the gods and spent a lot of money to have a boy, but in vain. After her own daughter's baby son had to be sacrificed during labour to save the mother's life, she stopped fasting to get a son or asking the gods and the *bhagats* to give her one.

Tara DHAVNE's husband was a lorry driver. He broke his leg in an accident. He tried to set up a small brick and sand retail business at home but it didn't work. His wife then bought him a bicycle repair shop. Tara bai came to Pune 20 years ago, after she got married. Almost immediately, one of her sisters-in-law found her a job at the market. As Tara bai failed to bear any children, her sister-in-law BHOINE bai found a second wife for her husband 10 years ago, when Tara bai was only 22. The second wife had two children. Tara bai feels that so long as she has the strength and the condition to work at the market she will be all right. But she is worried about what will happen to her when the second wife's children have grown up. She

feels that they might abandon her in her old age. The house at Apar is in her name. She also has savings in a bank. She doesn't tell anyone that she is a member of a *bhishi* at the market, lest her husband should spend all her money on drink. She has no contact with BHOINE bai. When she pauses to think, all kinds of unpleasant thoughts assail her mind. She is at a loss what to do and is resigned to suffering in silence. Her husband is possessed by the polygamous god Khandoba, while she is sent into a trance by the *Mâvlâyâs* of her village. She and her mother-in-law spend a lot on religious rites so that she may conceive. With the *bhishi* money, she paid off her debts, built a room for Rs.15,000 and bought her husband a bicycle repair shop. When she has a little spare money, she lends it at 10 per cent interest a month to other women at the market. 'All my energies go into these business deals.' She is thinking of opening a sweet and confectionery shop. She plans to build an extra room in her house with a door giving on the street and to set up the shop there. It would be run by the children.

Sindhu BHOINE left her first husband and remarried. She had a son from her first marriage and nine children from her second, from which none have survived. She feels that she is being punished by the village god Mhasoba. She blames her brothers and sisters for not worshipping him as they should. Since 'to carry on the family line every household must have a light and someone to keep it burning', she herself found her husband a second wife. The second wife gave birth to a daughter, but Sindhu bai was so nasty to her that she ran away. Sindhu bai found yet another wife for her husband, who also ran away in protest at the ill-treatment. Sindhu bai is completely obsessed by the wifely duty to bear sons and thus ensure the continuity of the male line of the family. She keeps bringing new spouses for her husband without any regard for the psychological consequences for them. So strong is her conviction and so insensitive her attitude that she is oblivious to the harm she might be inflicting on another woman.

Mathura RAKHA is a Vanjari. She was married to a man whose first wife was barren. Her husband was a porter and they went to live in the village shortly after their marriage. Meanwhile, the first wife had an affair with another man and returned to the village in a rage. Her husband returned to Pune and Mathura bai found a job at the market. She had a daughter and two sons before having herself sterilized. She married her daughter to a boy from the village but, as they had no land, they were forced to return to Pune where both of them found work as porters. Mathura bai has sent her two sons to boarding school. Her greatest wish is that they should receive an education. Her husband's second wife lives in the village. But neither of the wives is happy. Their husband is a spendthrift and a drunkard. Mathura has left him to fend for himself, for she believes people should live by their own efforts. She has taken in her blind sister, has a nanny-goat and sells its kids. She will give one to her 'big brother' or *guru-bhau* who lives near Mancar. She has invested in the union's real estate project, for one day she will need to have two rooms for her two sons. She keeps herself informed about porters' rights and attends union meetings. She is possessed by the Tujapur *dévi*. Every Tuesday and Friday she begs alms of her neighbors (*jogvâa*) in the goddess's honour.


Hira BHOKAR's husband had two daughters by his first wife. Hira bai was his second wife, by whom he had two sons. He is 25 years older than her. For 20 years after her marriage, she never spoke to her brother who had wrecked her life by marrying her off in this way. Her husband is a jealous drunkard who beats and harasses her. Hardly ten days had elapsed since the birth of her child when she was forced by him to return to work. She buys vegetables at the market and after work sells them in front of her house. She is not allowed to rest when she gets back home, even if her feet are sore and swollen. Her husband is paralysed now and his second wife is back in the village. Her invalid husband is a burden to her, for he is incapable of doing anything for himself. She has to do all his washing but goes about her work without

complaining or showing signs of fatigue. 'Such is a woman's *dharma*. One simply has to accept it.' For her there is no question of neglecting any of the duties of *patni-dharma* (*serving the husband*).

Sakhu BAMGUDE was married to her cousin from Ravde. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, blessed their house. The family acquired more land. They built a six-roomed house in Bombay. However, when she went to see her mother, her husband took a second wife. She remained at her mother's house, refusing to return to her husband. Her brother-in-law came to fetch her against her will. She was forced to agree to her husband having two wives. Her husband took her to Bombay, where he got her work with a *marwadi*. He got involved in a land deal and committed a crime. He was arrested and spent three years in prison before being released. But someone had a curse on the family by the god Mhasoba of Karavide, as a result of which her husband, his second wife, her mother-in-law, her father-in-law as well as his second wife died one by one. She was widowed and remarried a Bangude whose first wife had died leaving two children. Sakhu bai gave birth to two boys. The youngest was five when her husband died. She moved to Pune where a friend gave her shelter. She found a job for the eldest boy in a hotel where he learned to make confectionery. She worked as a washer woman at the house of a lady doctor in Paud-Patha-Vadarvadi. She lived there for five years among friendly and helpful neighbors. A Vadar woman neighbour looked after her younger son while she was at work. A well-off maternal uncle, who lived in Paud-Patha, refused to help her or even to find a room for her. She broke off all relations with him. Her friend SONDKAR bai, who came from the same village as her, found her a room opposite Sai Baba's, and later lodged her in a room she owned in Janata Colony. Shaku bai then obtained a plot in Apar Bibv where she and her elder son now live. The younger son is a carpenter.

Shakuntala PAWAR has one son. Her husband took a second wife while she was giving birth. He was an invertebrate drinker and wife-beater. She had to put up with endless suffering and received no help from her family. She has no brothers, and her mother and father both died young. She has a sister who is married, but as she lives with her in-laws she is of no help. Shakuntala bai has left her husband. She lives in Appar Bibvevadi and has a man living with her. According to some, her husband ill-treated her because she was a loose woman. She says that she behaved the way she did because she needed to find a protector. Whether one believes the husband or the wife, one thing is clear: their 16-year-old son has become a delinquent. He is a layabout, illiterate, always roaming and never at home. Her mother fasts and prays for him to Mhasoba and Satvi. Her husband comes to the market from time to time and beats her.

A last example will serve, if one is necessary, to elucidate the reasons for double marriages - a widely accepted practice often accepted and even sought by the women themselves in their family's interest. The failure to bear a son - 'the light of the line' - calls for a second marriage. A barren wife is so conscious of the need to bear a male child that she will tend to tolerate or even look for a second wife for her husband, however painful it is for her. The feelings of guilt with which she is racked because she has failed in her duty to give birth to a son outweigh any other consideration. Society sees nothing wrong with a husband deprived of male offspring taking a second wife in order to continue the line.

Jana KHENGARE had not had a child for a long time. Her sister, much older than her and also a porter, asked her to become her husband's second wife, after obtaining the brother's consent with difficulty. The husband works in a factory. Everyone in the family is extremely religious (the house is full of pictures of gods), observes regular fasts and consults *devrishis*. The elder sister is a stickler for observing these rites. She has just taken Jana bai's eldest son to the village because he has a large boil, a clear sign that he is possessed by  She goes

with him to a *devrishi* to exorcise *Mothî bâî*. They have everything at home, including a television set and gas for cooking. The two sisters regularly return to the village to work in the fields.

Repudiated and husbandless

The god Ramchandra, the hero of the epic Ramayana and model of private and public virtues, turned out his wife Sita, the most faithful of women and a model of devotion and obedience, to scotch an ill-founded rumour about his wife circulating among his subjects. In India, this practice has been observed by men since time immemorial. Of the 166 women interviewed, 23 (13.8 per cent) have been repudiated. The reasons for this are many and varied. Just as accident, sickness or old age are some of the reasons put forward to explain a person's death (no one would think of attributing death to the god of creation), so there is no shortage of arguments for a woman's repudiation or for justifying the practice. For the rejected woman, however, being forced to leave the house which is her refuge, *raison d'être* and world is a dreadful plight to be in. Not only does she lose her honour and respect - qualities which only a husband can give her - but she also has to bear her suffering and stigma alone.

Ranjana NANGARE has been working at the market since she was ten. Her mother worked there before her. She was repudiated by her husband when she was 17 or 18, just after she had given birth to a son. Abandoned in the prime of life, she at least receives some financial support from her son, however uncertain or inadequate.

Shaku bai was deserted by her husband in the prime of youth. She has a son. Mother and son have been living together ever since. She has been working at the market from an early age, as her mother was already living in Pune.

TEMKAR bai was deserted by her husband when she was about 25 because she did not bear him a son. Anyway, this was the reason given at the time.

Indu UBHE was married in Kécaré. Her husband turned her out because she was barren. She found another husband in Temghar. Indu bai simply followed the example of her elder sister, who had also been deserted and had remarried. She joined her husband who was working in Bombay. As she was still childless, she adopted an orphan who died when he was one year old. After the adoption, however, she bore children. Her husband has gone back to live in Temghar. Indu bai decided to go to Pune and stayed with her brother, first in Bhavani peth, and then in Dankavdi. She got her job at the market through her sister. Back at the village, her husband bought her a buffalo cow. One of her sons, who is four years old, lives with his father and her parents-in-law in the village.

MATHURA bai was abandoned, with two sons and one daughter, by a husband who was a womanizer and a drunkard. Yet, everybody thinks ill of her, as also of her sister Kala SHELAR and Sula SONDKAR. All three are seen as loose and dissolute women. People say that is why their husbands are debauched. SHELAR bai's husband attempted to burn himself to death at home. Mathura bai lives with her mother and her three children. This gives her some social respectability and allows her to save face in public. She belongs to a group of six or so women from the same warehouse and in the same 'socially irregular' marital situation. They speak much more freely and candidly than other women, and observe the rules of caste less rigidly. Their views are more egalitarian. For society this is unforgivable licence, and the price these women have to pay for their freedom is public censure.

Women like Bayda PILANE, Chandrabhaga TEMKAR, GIRE bai, Tusa PAWAR and Chabu SHINDE from Premnagar and Ambedkar shantytowns, which are particularly cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, are in the same situation. Although all these women are Marathas, they openly mix with Lamans, Mahars, etc. They were particularly forthcoming during the interview. As they have had to battle to survive, they are naturally inclined to bend social and cultural rules. They thus have a bad reputation and are looked on as women of easy virtue. By breaking down social barriers they have forsaken the protection offered them by traditional social groups such as the caste, the family, the village, etc. They are no longer confined to the areas prescribed for women, having been more or less banished from such areas. They thus display a more tolerant and egalitarian attitude. Their boldness and audacity, however, will never be forgiven by society. Unfortunately it is the children, especially girls, who are the hapless victims of their mothers' misbehavior and the scorn they are held in as social outcasts. Their daughters will be permanently ostracized by society. They are regarded as a social, and even if they so desired, they would not be allowed to enter recognized social groups. The mothers' families may accept the boys, for males are redeemable. But the daughters are systematically rejected, victims of their mothers' freedom. Many women leading a socially unacceptable life maintain close links with the village so that they can marry their children there.

Bayda PILANE gave birth to a son but her husband, who was a shopkeeper in Pune and fairly well-off, repudiated her shortly afterwards. She tried to return to the house several times but on each occasion her husband beat her to dissuade her from staying and forced her to leave. Once he beat her so savagely that she fainted and received a cut on the head which needed stitches. In despair, she had no option but to live apart. She stayed several years with her parents, who raised the boy. Her sister was living with them as well, for she too had been deserted by her husband, a drunkard, who lived in Mogarvadi. The two sisters later went off to Premnagar. They have been living together since, but have separate rooms. Although their shantytown is particularly insalubrious, they have everything they need in their hovel, including a television set and gas for cooking. Much to her family's disapproval, she insists on maintaining links with her in-laws. She visits her brother-in-law and sister-in-law now and then because they have land in the village, and staying in touch with them would help her to find a good match for her son. He, however, is not in favour of his mother maintaining these links after the dreadful way her in-laws have treated her. 'I never bend with folded hands before a god', she says. She rarely attends union meetings, because she has a low opinion of them: nobody speaks frankly or dares to challenge the leaders who are capable of sending you home for 15 days if you get on their wrong side. As the meetings only provoke disputes, it is best to say nothing. She dreams that one day her son will become an engineer. He is a graduate of an institute of technology. When he asks her to break with her in-laws, she replies: While a man does not have to stoop so low, a woman in a situation like mine must swallow her pride'.

Chabu SHINDE and Malgal BORKAR's story that they had to come back home, leaving their husbands, so as to look after their parents, is not very credible. It is hard to imagine that parents would ask a daughter they have just married to stay with them. We were not able to ascertain why they had been turned out or why they wanted to hide the truth. Chabu bai's father died very young. Her mother, brothers and sisters turned their back on her six years ago. She lives with a *divanji* from the *market yard* who is much younger than her. Malgal bai, on the other hand, still has a close relationship with her family. Both women are union leaders but their behaviour provokes much malicious gossip. They have learned to live with it. As Chabu bai has large savings, her family is beginning to show interest in her, although they wonder where the money comes from. She obviously sees herself as an important union leader and a tactful and smooth person skilled in organizing things and getting the most out of her contacts.

Tulsa PAWAR says that her husband left her for another woman when they came to Pune. According to her colleagues, it was she who abandoned her husband for a mason in Solhapur for whom she was working. He in turn abandoned her soon after she gave birth to a son, who is today one year old. She is left with a fatherless son and a permanent blot on her reputation. She is only 22. She renounced, in one go, her parents, her relations and her village, only to find herself completely alone, without any sense of belonging. She is now trying to make new friends but her bad reputation is a severe handicap. Her colleagues claim that she holds hands with customers while drinking tea with them at the stall. She lives in Appar with a couple who take all she earns in return for looking after her baby. She keeps a nanny-goat that roams freely during the day and returns under her roof at night-

Karnal POTDAR's mother came to Pune a long time ago. As she only bore a daughter, her husband lost interest in her and took a second wife with whom he lives in Barsi. She came to Dandékarapul to stay with her brother, to whom she married her daughter, Kamal. She worked in a brickyard in Dankavdi and lived on a nearby plot that belonged to the proprietor of the factory. Her sister took her to the market, where she worked. After a disagreement with the proprietor they had to move to a plot on a hillside where they built their hovel. She is involved with a Sonar man, whose sisters strongly object to the relationship. She had a daughter by him, after which he didn't see her for three years. She went to pray to Mhasoba in Karavde and he came back to her. She bore a son and had herself sterilized after giving birth to a second boy. She had tried in vain to abort the second child by taking pills. Her eldest daughter looks after the two small boys. Her Sonar lover spends one or two hours with her every evening before returning to his home. He gives her Rs.250 a month. He is prepared to marry her and has hired a tutor for her eldest daughter, who is too old to attend school. Because of this relationship she has been shunned by her parents and relatives. Karnal bai's chief worry is that her mother may have to vacate the land on which she has built her hovel because the owner wants to demolish the 20 or so hovels erected there. She risks being thrown out at any time. She has no other place to go to and wonders whether 'god will come to her rescue'.

It is difficult at times, to know whether a wife has been deserted by her husband or has run away because she found life with him unbearable. The condition of women who have of their own free will left their husbands and parents-in-law is in every respect comparable to that of deserted and husbandless women.

SATPUTE bai returned to her parents' house because her parents-in-law harassed her. She obtained a letter of separation from her husband and came to Pune, where she lives with her sister. 'I will remarry if I feel like it', she says.

Mangal ROKADE left her first husband, went to Pune to live with her mother and remarried a man of her choice who later died. Once more, she found herself alone and childless, cut off from both her parents and parents-in-law with whom she had broken by rejecting their authority. She stayed on in the hovel she had shared with her second husband and every morning went to work at the market, like many other women from the shantytown. She had an affair with a porter at the market as a result of which she became an object of ridicule among her fellow workers. Her lover would pay her a visit from time to time, extract money from her and beat her. He did not give her any support and only exploited her. When he quit his job at the market, the affair came to an end. Once again Mangal bai was all alone. One of her neighbors in Dankavdi had deserted his wife and abducted a young Brahman girl with whom he had three children. Mangal bai had a relationship with him from which a daughter was born. She has just been deserted by this man. She is thus left with a baby girl on her hands,

whom she has to raise single-handed. Since she has no one at home to look after the baby while she is out working, she takes it along with her to the market, keeps it beside her and plays with it. She bears the indelible stigma of loose living. Her family and society have cast her off completely, and will do the same thing to her daughter.

DARVATKAR bai's husband was mentally retarded. As she came from a very poor family, her parents were unable to find her a normal husband and she had to accept an idiot. She found it impossible to raise a family with such a husband and returned to live with her poverty-stricken parents. Out of desperation she therefore renounced her husband and went to Pune. This happened 25 years ago. People from her village helped her in the city. For two years, her mother brought up her children. In Pune she was put up by other people. Her only belongings when she came to Pune were two aluminium pans. She would cook enough cakes for a few days in other people's kitchens and wrap them up in a cloth. She still lives in Pune and has managed to buy a room. She borrowed money to furnish it according to her taste. The day we visited her, her daughter-in-law was sitting on the floor making millet cakes. As there was a lot of work to be done, she did not want to sit on the matting. Her eldest son works in an aluminium mill but suffers from fainting fits. His mother has spent a lot on cures, *bhagats* and gods but there is no permanent improvement. Her youngest son drives a rickshaw. Her daughter-in-law stays with her and cooks for three paying guests for Rs.250 a month. When we were leaving, DARVATKAR bai confided: We husbandless women are pilloried by everyone, no matter what we do'.

Sula SONDKAR, Narrnada SONDKAR's daughter-in-law and Hausa KADU's daughter, left her husband and in-laws and came to Pune after the birth of her first son because, according to her, her husband was mentally retarded and impossible to live with. Her children are porters at the market today. Her mother-in-law had her sterilized. She has been working at the market for a few years. Her second husband, who is a night-watchman at Fergusson College, drank heavily for four years and then stopped. Sula bai maintains links with Nandivli, her in-laws' village, for she will need family connections to marry her children.

Indu PAWAR also had a feeble-minded husband who was totally under his sister's control. After giving birth to two sons she left her in-laws and went off to Pune. She had some land near the village but not enough to sustain her and her sons. Her husband is still living with his brother and sister-in-law. He does not earn enough to provide for the children. Indu bai is ready to return to him and look after him, but he never makes the effort of visiting her. She moved to Dandékarpul to live with her family, including her sister, aunts, brothers, etc. She followed their example and worked at the market. Everybody helped her. 'I never asked anyone for anything. I have never been dependent on anyone. I worked hard at the market and was able to buy a room here in Appar with my savings. I owe people nothing. '

BHOINE bai has one son. She found him a wife, whom she persecutes mercilessly, giving her neither food nor clothing. She is a terribly possessive mother and has her son totally in her power, Her son was only two-years-old when she decided to desert her husband and live separately with her son. She duly divorced her husband at the police station in Paud. But her divorce, while official, did not earn her any respect in society. Who would come to the rescue of a young persecuted daughter-in-law, whose husband is an idle good-for-nothing subjugated by his mother? She arrived in Pune and was taken in by an elderly man, who, later, threw her out for stealing his cooking utensils. She then remarried and had nine children, none of whom survived. The last two were twin daughters. After this, in 1989, she had a hysterectomy for Rs.10,000. She believes that her children's deaths were the work of the god Mhasoba, who is buried in the fields of the BHOINE (her second husband's) family. As none of the in-laws were

prepared to go to the expense of unearthing his body, setting up an altar to him or worshipping him, he punished them. She herself does not have the money to build him an altar. To counter Mhasoba's curse, she has turned to Khandoba who possesses her cousin DHANVE. She makes offerings to him, observes fasts, goes on pilgrimages and protects her house with pictures of gods. She also found two additional wives for her second husband. The first one soon left because Bhoine bai ill-treated her. The second wife gave birth to a daughter. Bhoine bai tormented her because she had not given birth to a son. She too left, taking her daughter with her, to live with her mother. Bhoine bai also found a second wife for her cousin DHANVE - who is sent into trances by Khandoba - since his first wife, Tara DHANVE, is barren. Dhanve's second wife gave birth to three sons. Bhoine bai is firmly convinced that it is a husband's absolute right to have sons, 'the light of the line', and a wife's duty to ensure this by all possible means. To this end she shows as much energy and enterprise as she did to obtain her divorce, earn a living, build and furnish a nice house, invest in the trade union's real estate project and maintain her ties with the village, where she married her son in order that he should one day inherit the land belonging to the family of her first husband.

This desire to dominate and have her way drove her to persecute her daughter-in-law. The latter, like her mother-in-law had done in her day, has run away to start a new life. Only this time, she was not alone: her husband left with her.

Chabu VADKAR chose to leave her in-laws rather than put up with a second wife, her mother-in-law's taunts, being blamed for not having a son, and with the agonizing wait in the hope of producing one. She felt that by staying with her mother she would have greater social respectability. She has been living with her ever since and sees nothing wrong with it.

Thaku HAZARE left her husband for reasons she did not wish to disclose to us, and remarried.

Kamala KALE, who left her first husband to live with a Mang and in so doing broke off all links with her family, lives in a dirty hovel with a drunken husband who humiliates her in front of all the neighbors by beating her regularly and abusing her in the vilest language. She finds solace in trances of possession.

Revu BHEGADE had to fend for herself after being driven out of the house by her mother-in-law because she had a skin disease. She sought protection from a village elder whom she regards as her father. She stayed with him a few days before moving on to Pune, where she was put up by her brother for some time. She erected her hovel next to his and returned to the village every 15 days to see her children. One day, she asked somebody to bring her daughter to her while she waited at a distance. She seized this opportunity to get her daughter back and return to Pune. Her mother-in-law said nothing but was determined to prevent her from doing the same thing with the boys. About five months later, using the same ruse, Revu bai succeeded in recovering her eldest son. This time the mother-in-law protested. Revu bai had to wait for her mother-in-law to die two years later before she could get her younger son back. She has always taken great pains to project the image of a strong, upright and determined woman. She gave her sons a good upbringing: the elder son had seven years schooling and the younger one ten. Although she was turned out of her parents-in-law's house she never broke off relations with them. She is now planning to send one of her sons back to the village. She gave her daughter in marriage at Chandivli to a boy from Pune. Her elder son is married too to, a girl who has had eight years schooling. She is, however, not prepared to let her daughter-in-law go out to work. 'She would get too smart if she did. My son is sensitive by nature and would be easily dominated by his wife.' She wants her daughter-in-law to stay in her place, at

home. She was foiled in a first attempt to remarry by her brother-in-law and sister-in-law, who let it be known that she had a skin disease. She found another suitor and had a wonderful wedding which was paid for with her savings and money borrowed from a bank. At home, there is neither straw matting nor a cupboard, but a conspicuous array of colour wedding photographs on display. As with many other women, the wedding album is a great source of pride and pleasure. It is a sign of success. We too can have beautiful photographs like other people'. Her husband is an alcoholic, but something of a simpleton. He has left her, but has not remarried. He visits her from time to time and lives in his house in Pashan where their son's wedding took place. 'The marriage was arranged by my in-laws', she says. When her husband asks her to return to him, she replies: When I was young my body needed yours, but I learned to live without it. Now that my youth is gone what is the point in coming back? But the children will return and stay. When my son has a son, he will settle with his family in Pashan'. All her daughter-in-law's belongings, including the cupboard, have been moved from her place to the house in Pashan, in anticipation of this great day which will be the greatest reward for her pains.

All these women who no longer have a husband, either because they have been deserted, or because they have left their husbands and their in-laws, or because they felt that their children were being ill-treated by their in-laws even more than they themselves were - once they find themselves cut off from the one place in the world (*duniyâ*) which can give their life a meaning, a significance and its *raison d'être*, refuse, undoubtedly for this very reason, to abandon the decorative signs symbolic of fortunate women, *saubhâgya*, i.e. women with a husband?. 'Even if our husbands have deserted us, we will never stop wearing our marriage necklace, *mangalsutra*, and the red *kumku* mark on the forehead. We will continue to use them forever.' This is what SATPUTE bai had to say on the subject. Why should I give up the ornaments of good fortune?' she asked.

Widows

Widowhood, for young or middle-aged women, is not simply a state of being husbandless: it also dishonors the women by excluding them from certain rites and inflicts great suffering on them. Not only do widows have to bring up their families all alone, they are also repeatedly subjected to indignity and humiliation. They may behave in an exemplary fashion, but they will still be suspected of loose morals. Of the 166 women interviewed, 42 are widows (25 per cent), 30 of whom lost their husbands because of alcoholism (18.07 per cent). Twenty-eight lost their husbands very young. Only one widow, Sakhu BAMGUDE, remarried.

Hira NIMBALKAR has lived in Pune since birth. She had two mothers: one tended the fields in the village, and the other lived in Pune. She lived with the latter in Bhavani peth. She followed her mother to the market as a child and has been working there for the last 30 years. Her husband worked in a flour mill. He died 16 years ago. She obtained a plot in Appar Bibv with a Janata Colony identity card. She had 5 years schooling in Pune. She still sells vegetables in her neighbourhood because, as a widow, it is difficult to provide for her children's needs. The eldest child is in his tenth year of schooling. He works a little. Hira bai gets up very early in the morning to prepare his food and leaves the house at 4 a.m.

Suman SONAVNE is Thaku NANGARE's daughter and was brought to the market by her mother soon after her husband lost his life after falling off a train. Ever since, she has been living with and supported by her mother. She has no contacts with her parents-in-law. She has a daughter. Her brother bosses her around. He is a wrestler and forces her to observe the purity interdicts during her periods. He sees himself as a guardian of traditions as far as she is

concerned. Suman bai is still young but as long as she is supported by her mother she has few worries. People gossip a lot about her behaviour though; they say that her virtue has so far remained intact only because an opportunity to slip up hasn't come her way. Such scandal-mongering makes remarriage practically impossible.

Lila KARALE and Ratna PAWAR are fortunate to receive some support from their brother. There is still some hope for them. By scrupulously and resolutely observing the rules of *marathi dharma*, the widowed Lila bai is able to support not only her family (whose customs she faithfully upholds) but also her in-laws and the *dévis* (goddesses) of Maharashtra. 'One cannot mix with everyone', she says time and time again. She is aware of belonging to a respectable family (*gharan*). Her strength of character, the firmness of her traditional convictions and her irreproachable behaviour have earned her everyone's respect. 'Even at the market, nobody gets familiar with me.' She is above suspicion because she safeguards the honour of her mother, father, brother and sister and submits to the superiority and domination of men. 'In our *marathi dharma*, women are not haughty.'

Gita TEVALE's parents-in-law owned an oil mill in Pune, but as it wasn't in her father-in-law's name, someone else appropriated it after his death. Gita bai then lost her alcoholic husband in an accident and was left with a son and a daughter to bring up. Although her mother-in-law was still alive, one of her dead husband's sisters turned her and her children out of the room that they were occupying in the centre of Pune, behind Dagaduhavai Datta, after stealing Rs.7,000 and 15 grams of gold from her. She rented another small room in the same district. Today she has two rooms: she uses one to lodge her brother and his wife. It was she who brought up her brother. He, however, is ungrateful. To make matters worse, her landlady wants to evict her. To put pressure on Gita bai, she won't give a receipt for the Rs.75 of rent she receives and from time to time cuts off the electricity. After returning from the market Gita bai therefore has to work as a waitress in a nursery school and as a charwoman in private houses. The school authorities are generous: she earns Rs.300 a month (1990) plus tea and meals. Her work as a charwoman brings in Rs. 100. In both places, she works for Brahman women who have helped her to marry off her daughter. The school gave her an interest-free loan of Rs.8,000 and her mistress Rs.7,000. Her son-in-law is well-behaved. Gita bai is a level-headed woman. But in spite of her strength, she can't prevent herself being betrayed and exploited. She has been so badly exploited and treated by everyone, including her own brother, whom she brought up, that she is surprised that the school authorities and her mistress have helped her. She has an 18 year-old son and is worried whether he will be able to cope with the vicissitudes of life.

Although GHULE bai receives help from her brothers and sisters-in-law, few widows can count on their in-laws' support. GHULE bai herself offers no help to her young, widowed daughters-in-law. The parents-in-law usually help for a few days after the husband's death, if only to avoid being accused of heartlessness. But in many cases the in-laws try to take advantage of the situation and dispossess the widow. This is what happened to Ratna PAWAR; her brother-in-law has an eye on the house she built in Appar Bibv, and wants it to be put in his name. After failing to support her in her hour of need and ignoring her for so long, now that she has found a way out of the extreme poverty to which she had been abandoned, by dint of hard work, he comes to her to appropriate the fruit of her labours and exemplary courage. Kala LOKHARE and Laxmi BHAME's parents-in-law behaved in the same way. In such circumstances, who does one go to for help and security? Kala bai has a reputation for being a dissolute woman, like DHANVE bai, her friend who lives in the same neighborhood. She began by doing a number of odd jobs in Dandekarpul. She had an affair with a Mang who visited her regularly. But the man's wife, his sisters-in-law and some local women turned him

against Kala bai. One day he beat her and took her to the police station where he got the police to beat her as well. She had a second affair with a much older man who betrayed and exploited her. At present, she has a relationship with a man from Konkan who has moved in with her. It was she who had to arrange her daughter's marriage as her brother is extremely poor. He comes to see her often to ask for help. Her other relations have little contact with her. Her brothers-in-law are all drunkards with a bad reputation back in the village. She married her daughter to a boy from Khed Shivapur, a village far from her place, with the help of acquaintances from Pune. People claim that she prostituted herself to earn the Rs.37,000 and more for the construction of their two-storeyed house in Appar Bibv. Kala bai spoke a lot to me about her childhood which seems to have marked her greatly. Well before she reached puberty, when she was still tending animals in the fields, she used to get a lot of pleasure from listening to her sisters and sisters-in-law speaking about sex. She would sew brassieres from pieces of rags and eavesdrop on the conversations of men.

Laxmi BHAME placed her daughters as *au pairs* in Brahman families because she felt that the atmosphere of the shantytown was not right for them. She put her sons in a *remand home*. One mentally retarded son was sent to Satara. Two of the daughters are married. The third is still with the Brahmans and waiting to get married. One of her sons-in-law, a rickshaw driver, stays with her. She found him in Kondavle, her parents-in-law's village. The second son-in-law, a delinquent, was killed by a local gang. But his family is very decent and look after his widow. Since there was no one to help her, Laxmi bai was unable to find the best husbands for her daughters. She does not have any man, brother or brother-in-law to support her. Far from assisting her, her brother-in-law wanted her to sell her house in order to pay for the marriage of his own daughters. She bought her place with her savings which she kept in a bank and in the *bhishi*. She invested Rs.22,000 in all. 'There is no one to whom I can pour out the grief in my heart', she says. When one's spirit has been broken, there is nothing to do but fold one's hands before god. There is nobody else to turn to for help.' Laxmi bai is a strong woman who has shown she was capable of coping with life alone and unassisted.

Nanda GARADA lost her alcoholic husband without having any children. 'I have not had a single day of happiness in my life. Even when my husband was alive, my parents-in-law did not hold me in high regard. Therefore, after his death, I didn't return to their house.' Her mother lives in Pune because her father was working there. But he was always ill, so her mother had to step into his shoes. They became destitute. Her elder sister came with her son to live with them after being driven out by her husband. The two sisters decided to work at the market. The parents have died and the two sisters live together in Appar. But the plot belongs to an aunt and they have to pay Rs.7,000 for it. Both have savings in a bank and in a *bhishi* upon which they will draw to pay the sum. After this, they will have to build up their savings again.

Phula MALUSARE, BHUNDE and HONMANE had also to struggle on alone after the death of their husbands. None of them had anyone to turn to. They have to fight for survival day in and day out. The future does not look secure. They have to struggle and toil all the time. HONMANE bai must marry off her daughter, provide schooling for her boys and repair a water-damaged wall in her hovel. She is the only wage-earner of her family, and theirs is a hand-to-mouth existence. Her parents-in-law are moreover making trouble for her in connection with the marriage of her daughters. She also has to endure people slandering her. Her youngest daughter is still in school. Every evening, she goes out to do washing up for a Brahman family. This brings in Rs.80 a month. One of her sons is in the tenth year and wishes to continue his schooling. People have helped her to pay his school fees. The youngest son is in the sixth year. The hovel is tumble-down. But it is better to have well-behaved sons than a

beautiful house. She doesn't earn enough to have savings. Although she has a bank account, she has no money in it. She has to repay the private loans she incurred for the marriage of her two eldest daughters. To pay for their marriage, she borrowed money from the people for whom she works, since 'no one at the market lends money'.

Hausa BARGE has lost her two sons who were her only hope in life. There is nothing else for her but to wait for her own death and beg from passers-by.

Kamala MALEKAR's husband died of alcoholism soon after their marriage. She has few relations who can help her. As a result, she has developed close ties with people whom she regards as her foster parents. This has given her a bad reputation. Her son, who takes drugs, told her to her face that he had fallen into bad ways because she was a slut. His mother retorts by hurling abuse at him. Her son's drug addiction is driving her to despair. She knows she alone can help him. For this, she will need to take matters into her own hands. She owes Rs.4,000 on account of his addiction. She is having a relationship with a man who lives with her in her shack. At the market she wears the black *kumku* of the widow and at home the red *kumku* of the married woman.

Thaku HAZARE and Hira GIRE married according to their parents' choice, but left their husbands to remarry men of their own choice. When they became widows they were in turn abandoned by the families of both husbands. This kind of conduct violates the traditional rules of behaviour so blatantly that society has no option but to punish them. The most common form of punishment consists in widows' parents breaking all ties with them. The parents are afraid that they may face the same punishment as that meted out to their daughters; they are afraid of being boycotted by the community and the village notables because they continue to maintain ties with women who are guilty of infringing accepted rules, even if these women are their own daughters.

Nila KAMBLE is a good example of the ordeal suffered by a single woman, without parents, brothers or husband, deserted by her own kith and kin and exploited by others because she is a young widow without protection. The situation is different when a woman is widowed at an advanced age. An old widow is not a target of scorn or derision, especially if her sons are successful and respectable. In such a case, she will be a happy old widow. It would be very different if her sons were gangsters. If this were the case, the mother would be subjected to censure. Their misconduct would bring dishonour upon her. Anusuya BARDE's son died of alcoholism. She has to look after his widow and her six children. Kala AMBADE, Tara KAMTE and Paru SUDARIK have children who drink and daughters-in-law who don't listen to them. Tara bai has some cause for satisfaction: her youngest son has a good job and earns a salary of Rs.3,000 a month. He is still unmarried. She upholds traditional values, which gives her a better image, She lifts heavy loads in spite of her age, does not wear printed saris, fasts regularly and worships Kalu bai. She has no money in the bank or the *bhishi* and spends everything she earns to provide for the family. Her simplicity, uprightness and reserve lead her to look down on the misbehavior of women workers at the market. 'To this day the *dalâls* call us "grandmothers".'

Paru SUDARIK's mother-in-law migrated as a widow in 1962 after her village was hit by a severe famine. Many people migrated at the time. Paru bai works at the market. Her husband was employed in a munitions factory. She was his second wife. He died recently aged 92, leaving behind three sons. She had a daughter who was allegedly poisoned by her father-in-law. He nevertheless, continued to buy her things for the home, everything except a television set. Her sons drink, but at least they have a job: one is employed in the munitions factory, the

other as a rickshaw driver and the third in a sweet shop. One of Paru bai's sisters had a sweet shop in Ganjpath, where Paru previously lived and sold vegetables. She came to Dattavadi five years ago and bought a plot for Rs.2,000 upon which she built a hovel measuring ten feet by ten. She brought two of her sons there to have them close to her, putting them up in the two front rooms. She married her three boys to her three nieces. She has visited all the gods and has made the pilgrimage to Cari Dham. Her house is full of pictures of gods brought back from her pilgrimages. Her husband was possessed by Khandoba and she is possessed by Kalu bai. Although elderly, she continued to work at the market. 'There is no use staying idle at home. Is there anything wrong in going to the market? If one stays at home, one spends one's time gossiping and casting aspersions upon others. One quarrels with the neighbors for no rhyme or reason. Its much better to earn some extra money.' Paru bai's widowhood is without frustration or shame; although her sons are alcoholics, they live with her, on her plot and in her house. She surrounds herself with pictures of gods and idols. By working at the market she is able to earn a livelihood.

Sons

The purpose of marriage and of bringing a daughter-in-law to the house is that of ensuring the continuity of the line. The daughter-in-law must give birth to a son, 'the light of the line'. If she fails to do so she is stigmatized and disgraced. Many a traditional song mentions this:

'How did she turn black when her skin was fair?
Her womb is barren, I'm overcome with despair.

A fertile woman and a barren woman went to the fields,
the fertile woman returns home, while the barren one remains
yoked to the cart'.

Whether they are married like KANDHARE bai, Kalpana UITEKAR and Mangal JORI, or widows like HAZARE bai, KAMBLE bai, and GARAD bai, or second wives like Tara DHANVE, or deserted like SHINDE bai, SATPUTE bai or BORKAR bai, their sterility is the cause of their shame and lack of social respectability.

To have a child, and with it social dignity, UBHE bai adopted one. This is not a widespread practice. BHOINE bai has a son from her previous marriage, but the one she had by her second husband didn't survive. To maintain 'the light of the line', she found other wives for her husband. Rakhama TANPURE doesn't have the slightest hesitation or compunction about marrying her mentally retarded son. Even such people have to satisfy their sexual desires, she says. 'Does he not have the right to satisfy his desires?' What she wants most is grandsons. It doesn't bother her, obsessed as she is by her desire for male descendants, that this would involve sacrificing the life of a girl with a perfectly sound mind. BARDE bai's son is an alcoholic and doesn't earn a living. But he must have a son. She let him have six daughters before he fathered a son. It is no matter whether the son's life is wrecked in the process; what counts is that a grandson is born and the future assured. A light has been lit. She is satisfied.

To have sons, a wife visits gods, fasts, shows penitence, recites spells, follows the rites prescribed by *bhagats*, tolerates other wives and even finds them for her husband. Women are ready to suffer all these torments to avoid worse ones. The essential function assigned to them by society is to bear sons. None of the female porters interviewed dares to challenge this social rule which lays down their basic role in society.

Sterilization

However strong their urge to bear at least one son who survives, female porters seriously question the need to remain fertile beyond a certain point. These women are in fact rather sceptical of sayings which tell them that children are a gift of god, that the more children one has the better and that unlimited procreation is a blessing. Despite their conviction that it is necessary to have at least one son, if not two, most women agree that after three or four children it is time to stop procreating and have themselves sterilized (tubectomy). Even older women like GHODKE bai, aged 62, and Tara KAMTE, aged 65, approve of the slogan that 'a small family is a happy one'. These two took the initiative of sterilizing their daughters-in-law. Opposition to, or fear of tubectomy has died away. What is more, female porters have frank discussions on the subject. Many go to the doctor to have themselves sterilized of their own free will. 'My husband is feeble-minded', says Indu PAWAR. 'To make matters worse he's under the influence of his brother's wit-e. There is not much land at the village. There is less and less agricultural work available. The last time I got pregnant I went to Pune and had myself sterilized after childbirth. How many children do I have to bear? And who will feed them? There is no one to help me. I can't rely even on my own parents. I don't want to be dependent on anyone. I wish to live by my own efforts'.

Mathura RAKHA was taken as a second wife. She has one daughter and two sons. On her own initiative she decided to have herself sterilized after the birth of her last child. When you live in great poverty who is there to help you? What is the use of having so many children when you are poor? Moreover, after childbirth you have to stay at home. Where is your next meal going to come from? My husband is an alcoholic. He is totally irresponsible. One day he brings back money, the next day nothing.' Her husband, who is a porter at the market, lived in Pune with his first wife, who was childless, before marrying Mathura bai. After the marriage, he took her to spend a few days in the village. Meanwhile, his first wife started a relationship with another man. The enraged husband returned to Pune. Mathura followed him there and found a job at the market. Her decision to have herself sterilized shows strength of character. She runs her household with a firm hand. She married her daughter to a boy from the village, but because they were landless, she brought her daughter and her son-in-law to Pune and got them taken on at the market. She sent her two boys to a boarding school in Barshi. They return home during the holidays. Their schooling is of paramount importance to her. Her husband's first wife farms the land at the village, while her husband is a drunkard in Pune. She refuses to pay off her husband's debts, which she feels are his sole responsibility. She never borrows money herself. Husband and wife often quarrel over this but she sticks by her view that one should live within one's means. She keeps her savings in a bank. Her blind sister lives with her. She keeps a nanny-goat and sells its kids. She has an 'elder brother' in Mancar to whom she will give a kid. She has invested in the union's building project, as she needs two rooms for her sons. She is possessed by the goddess of Tuljapur. Every Tuesday and Friday she begs alms for the goddess. She is aware of the porters' legal rights and attends union meetings.

Hira BHOKAR is her husband's second wife. He has two daughters by his first wife. Hira decided to have herself sterilized after giving birth to two sons. Who will raise the children?' She had to take her 12 day-old boy with her to the market in a basket. Mercifully, the people around her kept an eye on him. 'We know only one thing: hard work. If I tell you my life story tears will come to your eyes, as if I were describing Sita's *vanavâs*. Just as the sun which burns us is followed by darkness, so our misery will come to an end sooner or later. That's life. We have no option but to work hard. The days go by. On my frost day at the market, I slipped and the basket I was carrying on my head with the baby inside fell. I waited ten minutes on the roadside. I then picked up the basket and placed it back on my head. What is the use of sitting

around? Does it help? One has to slog.’ Her decision to have herself sterilized, like many other facets of her personality, demonstrates an urge to be the mistress of her own destiny and to live by her own efforts. Her husband is now totally paralysed. ‘I do everything for him. There is not so much as a tea stain on his *dhotar*. Every day I give him a bath. I wash his dirty clothes. In life, one must rise to the occasion.’ She arrived from her village with only a millet cake wrapped in a cloth and two small tin boxes. Today, by her own efforts, she has a house where there is nothing missing: cooking pots, a mattress, a television set, a metal cupboard and a bed. She is going to withdraw the money invested in the union’s real estate scheme to buy a plot in Appar. ‘I foolishly let myself be talked into investing my money in the union scheme. Meanwhile, land values in Appar rose. If I hadn’t blocked my money, I would have bought a plot in Indira nagar.’ She gets up at 3.00 a.m., does the cooking, packs lunch for her son who’s in the fourth year, carries her food with her and leaves. She never eats in any local eatery, in order to save money. ‘I don’t have much money, so how can I eat out?’ She doesn’t like seeing Mahars and Mangs now working at the market. ‘They make us unclean. One has to purify oneself on returning home.’

Hause KADU is 57. She went to Sassoon to have herself sterilized. Anusuya TANDALE attends to her family’s welfare with diligence and perseverance. She has two boys, one in the eighth year and the other in the fifth year of schooling. Her husband lost his first job in a firm when it wound up. He is now employed daily as a labourer. Luckily, he is sober and cares about his family. As she wasn’t earning enough doing laundry for other people and had to bear her mistress’s bad temper in silence, she decided to get a job at the market. She spent Rs. 15,000 on building a room at the rear of the house in Appar where she has been living since 1987. She sends money to her in-laws, as one of her brothers-in-law is mentally retarded. She deposits money in the village mutual aid fund. She has some knowledge of the law which enables her to make decisions that are advantageous to her. She wants to send her sons to the village after they have completed their studies. She worships the gods with moderation, doing *pujâ* once a week and is proud that respectable people frequent her house. She has two children and believes in a small family if one wants a well-run household with all modern conveniences. A large family makes this impossible. She thus had herself sterilized after her second boy. She supervises her sons’ studies without worrying unduly. Although she likes a well-equipped house, she doesn’t allow herself to be overly influenced by fashion and advertising. Why accumulate unreasonably? For instance, she will not buy a television set because she would rather spend her money on her sons’ moral education, schooling and future in the village. She has decided to invest her money productively in the village farm.

SHINDE bai, KHAMKAR bai, Shanta KINARE and POL bai, when asked how many children they had, said that they had themselves sterilized after the birth of their last child. It was therefore unnecessary to put the question of sterilization to them directly.

Among the women who haven’t had themselves sterilized yet, quite a few are planning to do so fairly soon. Ambu KOKARE has one son and one daughter. Her husband wants another son but not her. What’s the point of having more children?’ She has definitely decided to have herself sterilized after her third child. Ambu bai has in fact had some schooling, whereas her husband only signs with his thumb mark. She didn’t want to marry him but didn’t dare oppose her parents’ decision at the time. Her daughter would never submit to her parents’ choice, but for Ambu bai ‘Satvi had written my daughter’s fate on her forehead on the fifth day’. Her husband cuts grass in the hills and sells most of it as feed for goats. They belong to the Dhangar caste who traditionally raise goats and sell kids. She, for her part, has been working at the market for four years. Like many other Dhangars, who rather than spend money immediately prefer to save for some future expense such as jewellery or a marriage, she puts

Rs.5 a day into an account opened in her daughter's name. We Dhangars hardly touch alcohol.' In contrast with the practice of child marriage and *dyaj* (in which the parents of the five or seven year-old child bride get an agreed sum of money), which, according to her, 'is not observed by us, but by the Lamans', she considers that if 'a Dhangar woman earns Rs.500 and her husband Rs.1,000 the wife's salary would be enough to pay for the household expenses while the husband's would be saved'. This ensures that there is enough money available for a daughter's marriage. Ambu bai's shrewdness and practical sense have not weakened her caste consciousness. We have our own god Biroba back in the village and must go to his *jatra*. There's no question of mixing with the Mahas. Our children will never eat at the home of a Mahar or a Mang!'

Kamal POTDAR has a daughter. As the result of an accident after the birth of her second child, a son, she was not able to have herself sterilized. She tried in vain to have an abortion during her third pregnancy. 'Why have so many children?' she asks. 'How does one raise them? But I was not able to get rid of it.' She lost no time, after her third child, in having herself sterilized.

CHAVAN bai lost her land due to the building of the Panshet dam. She lives in Janavadi shantytown, along with many other people from her village. Among them there is a woman whom she regards as her 'elder sister' and adviser, or *guru bhagini*. It was she who introduced her to the market. CHAVAN bai's husband is careless. He occasionally casts an eye over the land obtained in compensation to the east of Pune, half of which is being farmed. It yields some cereals. CHAVAN has had seven miscarriages. Only two of her children have survived. She is pregnant again and determined to have herself sterilized after delivery (be it a son or a daughter). Her husband is indifferent; so why should she continue to have miscarriages and ruin her health? Her pregnancies did not give her any respite. It is better to stop having children, she feels.

Ahilya HARANAVLE has undergone an operation for cancer of the uterus. Otherwise, she says, she would have had herself sterilized. This openness of mind sharply contrasts with her highly traditional behaviour and convictions. She has two sons and a daughter. The eldest, a rickshaw driver, took his 15 year-old sister out of school and confined her to the house, because he was afraid of losing his honour. She is taking sewing classes at the house of her Muslim neighbour. Ahilya bai is extremely strict about observing caste and purity rites. She is not free to make the acquaintance of people outside her caste and her family. Her house and her parents are all the world to her. Ratna PAWAR said that she too would have herself sterilized after the birth of her next child. But as her husband died soon afterwards there was no need for her to do so.

Kamala KALE was the only woman we met whose husband had her sterilized. She is possessed by the *dévi*. When she went to the hospital to have herself sterilized, she dreamt that the *dévi* appeared, frightened her and threatened her that if she had herself sterilized she would be punished and end up having 14 stitches. She returned home terror-stricken, but her husband sent her back and the *dévi* kept quiet.

Husbands, by and large, never think of having themselves sterilized. 'Men have to lift heavy loads', says OMBASE bai. 'But don't you as well?' I asked. 'If we women get tired we can eat at our husband's expense. If men lose their virility, they will no longer be able to lift heavy loads. But they are the heads of the family, the breadwinners, the main prop.' This firmly held view is so widely shared that the women are ready to have themselves sterilized voluntarily. The second reason is that women are worn out by repeated pregnancies. Of the

166 women interviewed, 57 (or 34 per cent) have already had themselves sterilized or are planning to have themselves or their daughters-in-law sterilized. If one adds to this figure the 7 per cent of women who can't have children, the 11 per cent of women who have been deserted and haven't remarried and the 18 per cent who lost their husband while they were still young, **70** per cent of all women are thus protected against fertility.

Conclusion

From the struggle for survival to the threat of lawlessness

We have sought to treat the body as a yardstick to measure the socio-cultural changes that female porters at the market produce in the systems which traditionally confine their existence to predetermined spheres and roles. The conclusions we draw here from the foregoing analysis take account of the social, cultural and psychological dynamics behind the practices observed. They are discussed under three headings.

Most of the women interviewed are initially engaged in a fierce struggle for survival. While 38 per cent of them have been able to endure their anguish and cope with the crisis with their husbands, most, if not all, find it difficult to make ends meet; they have to find the means of supporting themselves and their family in an environment where paid work or one that pays a living wage is at best scarce and at worst precarious, inadequate and uncertain. It is also a psychological crisis for many of them; for the ill-treated daughter-in-law who leaves because life with her in-laws becomes unbearable; for the widow without hearth or home abandoned to the vicissitudes of life; for the single husbandless woman who has to fend for herself; for the mother who raises her children single-handed in difficult circumstances made worse by an alcoholic husband who ill-treats and beats her. For all these women, the burden is twofold, working at the market and running the household. For some there is no respite, since they have two jobs plus the housework.

The market offers these women, beset by crises and their oppressive and depressing consequences, a relatively open and friendly working environment, especially if one takes into account all the other doors that are closed to them. The market is above all a place which offers a stable job. The spectre of going hungry is thus exorcised.

Paid employment provides women who are socially and culturally rejected with a place where they belong, even if it is only temporary and small. It is significant from this standpoint to observe how old women, those who are tired or unable to work or single women - in short, isolated women - return to the market as if it were a haven when there is no other place to go.

A place 'which is not enclosed with walls', unlike the village or the area where one resides, the market provides an anchor for women who have been rejected by society and excluded from the network of relationships because they are considered undesirables or for reasons beyond their control. The market offers an anchor to ostracized or unwanted women. The market is a place which is far more open to them than any other they have access to. The relationship between male workers and female workers, between employees and employers and between female porters and customers and suppliers is no longer subjected to the traditional restraints which prevail elsewhere in society, at least not to the same extent. At the market these constraints are confined to work relationships; they don't extend to the whole range of human relationships which are not directly related to work. The market is an environment which lies outside the family and the village, and its network of controls covers only a very narrow field both in time and in space. In this sense it is a kind of social enclosure or enclave within and surrounded by a wider society.

The spatial and temporal limits of the relationships at the market directly controlled by its work code make the market, for this very reason, an area of relative tolerance and permissiveness, albeit temporary and localized, within society at large.

The first manifestation of this permissiveness is free expression in matters relating to the body, in particular the sexual body. From this standpoint, the market is an arena for obscene language, for the expression of erotic desire and verbal aggression. Erotic desire is usually expressed indirectly by means of cultural formulations such as sayings, mill songs, proverbs (which are standard, indirect expressions of desire), opinions, slander, slurs, ridicule and insults. At the market, however, these indirect references or erotic expressions, channeled through a cultural medium (many of these innuendoes and rhetorical forms are moreover incomprehensible to a city dweller) often give way to a direct manner and frank and plain speaking. Three aspects should be mentioned here.

Firstly, society and the family can no longer prevent women in groups from speaking freely with each other. These institutions lose the hold and the inhibitory and repressive control they exercised over these women as individuals or as beings isolated in a family, the village or even just the neighborhood.

Secondly, the body's sexuality and sexual licence are among the topics most frequently discussed by these women. The leitmotiv 'I'm not like the others . . . who do this and that No one tittle-tattles about me' denotes both the freedom exercised and the rhetorical defence mechanism adopted, especially in the presence of a stranger to this environment who broaches the subject.

Thirdly, the frank exchanges that take place on the subject of the body's sexuality immediately reveal the violent form of the relationship between the sexes. Male domination and aggression on the one hand and social condemnation and repression of women's desire on the other are the important features of the conversations about the body.

The market is, above all, an area of tolerance in that it facilitates contact between men and women driven by a simple desire for partners rather than by the need to conform to established practice or play institutionalized roles. The way in which extra-marital relations are discussed at the market is a clear illustration of this.

With regard to this liberalization, it should be pointed out that these relations do little to usher in equality or an egalitarian alternative. The permissiveness often involves an increase in the sexual exploitation of defenseless and helpless women by men who see them as an opportunity to satisfy their own desires and not as companions on an equal footing (apart from some rare examples of decency worthy of admiration). This sexual permissiveness is riddled with all the contradictions inherent in a system of social inequality (rich/poor, high caste/low caste, man/woman).

From the socio-cultural standpoint, it may be said that the market is a place that allows people to meet each other of their own free will (and not because of their work) outside their working hours. Secondly, this impulse inexorably leads, as far as relations between the sexes is concerned, to anomy and male exploitation of women's desires and frustrations. The open references to extra-marital relations, and the veiled language used (in the presence of a stranger) to refer to prostitution networks, reflect the slackening of behavioral rules and controls. This slackening is inevitably greater and more significant than can be established by a study of this scope. The candour, freedom and vigour with which the women workers themselves speak about these matters reveal the extent to which constraints on permissive

behaviour and on the use of erotic language have been eroded. The influence of tradition is significantly weakened at the market, as reflected in the low opinion people have of female porters and the oft-heard expression 'It's the market after all!', a place of moral depravation from which many mothers wish to shield or keep out their daughters. It may be said that the contractual and, therefore, partial and free nature of the work relationships at the market naturally results, if only unconsciously, in contractual, free and independent relations between the sexes which are free from any allegiance and motivated by the partners' desires, needs and interests. These relationships are diametrically opposite to those stemming from women's organic integration into a family, a village or society. The veiled references to the secret sources of the money owned by women workers, whose personal or family resources are public knowledge, highlight the same contractual, commercial and anomie character of relations between the sexes. While the extent of the conversations on the subject may inflate its importance, the discussions reveal the excitement and repressed desire that the thought of free and unrestrained sexual relations evokes.

Distress causes many of these women to enter into relationships freely and openly out of an urgent and irrepressible need for a partner, for help and for a human presence and support in life. The flouting by certain women and their children of the rules governing relations between the sexes is proof that they have the ability and audacity to follow their own volition and desires and lead their lives as they think fit, regardless of the prevailing taboos, customs and the consequences of a bad reputation. This freedom, however, should not be seen purely as a consequence of their ability to earn a livelihood at the market. One cannot but be struck by the difference between the reception and refuge offered by the market to women in need (be they widows, 'sterile', deserted, ill-treated or snubbed) and the failure of society and the women's families to give them security and respectability.

While the market neither encompasses nor engenders the various new relationships between the workers, the relationships it does foster, namely those arising from paid work, have a knock-on effect in that they facilitate the development of independent and free contractual relations between partners. Two such relations are significant: those between women workers and banks based on the savings these women keep with the latter, sometimes without the knowledge of the family; and those which the union initiates and controls. These two relations also transcend the traditional relations between the sexes.

To sum up:

The contractual, free and highly partial nature, in time and space, of the relationships fostered by the market leads to the establishment 'outside the walls' of the family, village and mainstream society, of human relations that enable the women to cope with hardship and distress.

Some of these new relations free themselves from the stronghold of the value systems governing social behaviour and relations. It is precisely because these systems prove ineffective and often detrimental to their well-being that the women who are excluded and thwarted take advantage of the relative slackening of controls at the market.

This suddenly opens the door to individual initiative (bank accounts), social intercourse (groups of friends), desire (friendship and extra-marital relations), self-affirmation (leadership in the union) and reappropriation of one's own body (voluntary sterilization).

Free expression and liberalization of relations between the sexes for a large number of women make a gaping hole in traditional relational systems.

These inroads, made under pressure of the need to survive, leave dangerous holes in the 'walls of the village'. The gaps, tolerated openly or covertly by people at the market, impose a severe strain on established value systems and behaviour. The result is looming anomy.

The resistance of models which breed a guilty conscience

Traditional values resist and even reinforce themselves against deliberate encroachments and transgressions. The standards of behaviour, values and principles received and learnt by these women are reawakened in their minds and keep them on their guard against the temptation, threat, and acts of misbehavior prevalent in their language and attitudes.

It would be useful to list the main features of these internal imperatives which trigger a sort of mobilization on several fronts to check any outbreaks of anomy and disorder. These features are strict traditional upbringing for daughters, reluctance to take them to the market or let them go out, even for their schooling, on the grounds that they would be in the company of boys, arranged marriages within one's kith and kin, with which parental links exist, despite the fact that the parents themselves avoided marrying into a network of relations, acceptance by the wife of her traditional *dharma* even if her husband is an inveterate alcoholic, acceptance, however painful, of the system of two wives, and the blind conviction that a son is all-important and the 'light of the line'.

The essential and most significant aspect of the power of the established system and of the strength of its internalization by the market women is the conscience or sense of guilt which afflicts those who have had the audacity to disobey a system that has thwarted their efforts to make even a marginal improvement in their conditions of existence. The audacious act of violating rules is violently denounced by others in scornful and repressive language. These women have neither the power nor the vision to replace the existing system of values with another based on their own experience. They deviate and go astray out of need, out of desire and for the sake of pleasure. They are incapable of justifying or understanding themselves independently of the biased judgments of others. Even those women whose survival, well-being, pleasure and success lie outside established rules and norms, look on their non-conformist as a handicap, a deviation and a fault. Their ability to triumph over their material, psychological and moral difficulties is not translated into a counter-culture which affirms itself without being ashamed of infringing traditional rules or clearly asserting its own legitimacy. The liberties taken are seen as undue licence. The system reasserts its hegemony in the minds of those who infringe its rules in their attitudes and behaviour but never withhold their assent from it and never really call into question its legitimacy. Ultimately, the system and its rules remain intact. The system even hits back by giving a guilty conscience to those whose licence it has tolerated up to a point. Women alone are guilty of licence; men are above reproach. Permissiveness denotes women's disregard of conventional rules. Men can never be guilty of this. This sense of guilt, whether clear or confused, deep or embryonic, prevents any reassessment or questioning of the rules. It prevents anomie behaviour from being perceived as an expression of or demand for socio-cultural change.

There is a duality of mind, a dichotomy between individual experience and the values of a hegemonic tradition. The anguished soul becomes a guilty conscience.

The women salve their conscience, in the majority of cases, by having recourse to gods, pilgrimages, fasts and trances. The honour which the worship of gods confers on them offsets the social disgrace they suffer by disobeying conventions.

The way out of need to gratification: psycho-cultural strategies

The foregoing conclusions raise two sets of questions.

Firstly, how does one account for the predominance of socio-cultural traditions over such widespread anomy and, more importantly, for their powerful and firm hold over the minds of women guilty of licentious behaviour? Why are the rules of behaviour that are so openly flouted in practice so deeply entrenched in the mind?

We should discard explanations which unthinkingly put the reasons for this power down to the pressure patriarchal society brings to bear on women to accept the idea of male domination. Not only would such an explanation be a tautology, it would not stand up to scrutiny. Not all *dalâls*, husbands, notables, male porters and union leaders are advocates of so-called patriarchal repression. Moreover, many of the husbands of the women interviewed are unable, for various reasons, to impose their will on their wives. Indeed, one could even say that this is one of the causes of alcoholism among husbands. The husbands' lack of authority is a problem affecting many households.

It is vital to bear in mind that the traditional value system is predominant because it successfully resists the anomie drive in the very minds of female porters. They themselves are the agents of reaction to acts of defiance. The question, therefore, is what forces inherent in the values system, what constraints on relations between the sexes and what strategic motives peculiar to these women, inexorably drive them in their anguish to take refuge in the very rules and values that have often been the cause of their difficulties and frustration?

This first set of questions immediately gives rise to a second set which is a corollary to the first. The fact of the matter is that the same women in certain fields display autonomy and independence and in others strict conformist, be it in their personal lives, the management of their family affairs or in their relations with their kith and kin. Young daughters-in-law, who have only recently broken with their in-laws, become oppressive mothers-in-law while mothers try to reintegrate their children into the wider family, having themselves tried to escape from its constricting influence. How can one explain these ambiguities and such patent dualism?

There is nothing to be gained by dismissing the contrasts as behavioral inconsistencies. Many of these women show such shrewdness and enterprise in their lives that it would be odd to accuse them of lacking common sense or behaving in a downright foolish manner. The inconsistency one may reproach them with is more likely to be the result of our inability to grasp the internal logic of their motivations and purposes which, without any real contradiction on their part, drive them one day to disobey, indeed openly infringe, established rules and the next to uphold them with great conviction.

It would be equally futile to lament the fact that the anomie behaviour produced by extreme hardship does not in turn engender an authoritative and legitimate alternative value system and set of rules. It would be far more profitable to try and understand why such audacious behaviour is not backed by the language and values that could serve as the basis for a genuine counter-culture. Rather than express its surprise at the prevalence of restrictive traditions in the minds of women who are desirous of freedom, informed about the law and their rights, awake to opportunities and their surroundings, hardworking and not afraid of facing difficult challenges, we should seek to understand why, in spite of this energy and potential, the women interviewed seem to react in contrasting ways.

The issue really boils down to the psycho-sociological motivations initiating the processes observed as well as the psycho-cultural strategies governing the pursuit of somewhat contrasting aims. What is the inner logic behind their unity? It goes without saying that this unitary logic should be seen in the context of the tension which brings women living in privation into conflict with the socio-cultural values governing their lives. These are the only values the women have to guide them through life.

One may distinguish among the female porters three sets of basic concerns directly stemming from their many-sided and cumulative forms of hardship. Three crucial concerns underlying three vital imperatives that give rise to three sets of aims or three dynamics characterizing the collective identity of the women interviewed. In short, three responses to three basic needs.

The first of these is the concern for their own and their family's security and survival. This drives them to have recourse to sterilization, to somewhat expensive cures and medical consultations, to the maintenance of bank accounts the existence of which is at times concealed from their family, to the accumulation of savings (particularly among Dhangar women), to flight from their in-laws in order to escape from the ill-treatment suffered at the hands of a mother-in-law or the wretchedness of having a husband incapable of providing for his family, to exhausting jobs in which they struggle on alone to provide for the family, to borrowing at exorbitant rates, to repeated loans and stratagems, even prostitution, to find the money needed. And as the son is the best possible guarantee of the family's and the mother's security, it explains why women are so anxious to bear at least one boy and prepared to spend vast sums on rituals in order to do so.

This first concern corresponds to the traditional and deep-rooted belief that a woman's fulfilment lies in selfless devotion to her family. A wife is the pillar of the house, especially when the husband is away or disabled, and the procreator of 'the light of the line'. The performance of these two domestic duties is the sole guarantee of her security. The wages she earns from her work at the market are channeled towards this purpose, as are all her creative drives. The physical cost of bearing this burden is immense, but she accepts it unquestioningly as her lot and as the guarantee of her security. From this standpoint, working as a labourer at the market is hardly a novelty: it is simply the prolongation of the farm work done by women every day for the very same reasons.

The second concern is that for social respectability and dignity. It drives mothers to keep a close eye on their daughters as they approach puberty, and to favour early arranged marriages. It forces them to remain faithful to their husbands, for this preserves the honour of all the men in their and their in-law's family. It induces them to endure the anguish of an alcoholic or disabled husband, for only a husband, however debauched or mentally retarded, can guarantee social status and protection.

This second concern corresponds to a second article of faith: that the collective honour of the family rests on absolute sexual fidelity on the part of all the girls and women of the family. Honour demands that a woman's sexual activity should be reserved exclusively for the husband. A woman's sole purpose in life is to bear lineal descendants.

The third concern is that for the assertion of authority through the exercise of power for the purposes of self-fulfilment and self-gratification. It expresses itself in the domination of the weakest member of the family, namely the daughter-in-law whom a mother finds and brings to the house. The exercise of arbitrary power over the daughter-in-law gives the mother an

indirect hold over her son. A woman, in order to be a woman, must be the mother of sons. The latter are her *raison d'être* and her life's greatest achievement. A mother strives to have a hold over her son, to have him close to her and to subject him to her will as, in the final analysis, she can only rule through him. Many women, if they can't provide accommodation for their married sons at home, get them to live close by to ensure that the source of their authority in life is not lost from view. A mother also exercises power independently of the son in her capacity as mistress of the house; she rarely allows her daughter-in-law to run the house. She may spend money on her daughter or give her daughter money to buy things, but she will never allow her daughter-in-law to buy anything, and on the rare occasions the daughter-in-law is allowed to do so, the purchases are never for her. The acuteness of the tension and conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law shows the extent to which the quest for power is one of the basic concerns of the women interviewed.

The psycho-cultural dynamics at work in the processes described should not be explained in terms of the opposition between tradition and modernity, the old and the new. This would be misleading, as the two concepts, despite their manifest advantages, are not really relevant to the issues under consideration. The crux of the problem is that the women suffer from three vital needs which correspond to three concerns: a living wage, social respectability and affirmation of power. Each of these women channels her energies and abilities to overcoming the deficiencies from which she suffers at these three levels, manipulating at times the levers of tradition and at others those of modernity according to what is most readily available and best-suited to her purpose. The only relevant dynamic seems to be the search for the greatest satisfaction of basic needs with the means available. A mother may therefore seek to take full advantage of the rewards to be derived from a son with a modern education and a job, while asserting her authority over her daughter-in-law in a traditional manner. Contrariwise, a mother may grant her daughter-in-law greater freedom because she has found another way of satisfying her need for authority. Traditional religion offers image-boosting role models to those whose social image and good name have been tarnished by their reputation for loose behaviour or economic plight. Poverty, after all, is always degrading. Women union leaders who lead a licentious life find their authority reinforced by the observance of religious practices. Impoverished women find that by attending programmed organized by a political party they gain a recognition no-one else will give them.

Any role, action or value which rewards these women *financially* (a mother-in-law's holding of the purse-strings, money obtained immorally, usury, illegal property deals and skill in getting round the law in these matters, receiving a cut for recruiting women workers and girls into prostitution); *psychologically* (domination of the daughter-in-law, wearing a new and showy sari or owning a house which attracts attention); *socially* (expensive pilgrimages, leadership of the union); *morally* (absolute marital fidelity, devotion to housewifely duties even to the point of exhaustion); *culturally* (trances); or *physically* (sterilization) may at any time become a means to fight hardship, regardless of the contradictions between the methods used or their apparently contradictory interconnection in time and space from the standpoint of other value systems or of the tradition versus modernity argument. Such a mixture is clearly visible, for instance, in the recourse to sterilization. There is a marked and widespread desire among women not to have any more children after the third or fourth child, provided there are enough sons. The lack of land and jobs, the burden of repeated pregnancies, financial insecurity, the lack of medical facilities and a host of other reasons spontaneously lead them to take the decision - unequivocal, modern and rational in nature - not to have any more children. But it is equally true that in order to have one, they will consult with *bhagats* as often as custom permits.