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Servitude and Sacrifice

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Abstract

What does it mean to be a male servant in modern India? The rich anthropological literatures on 'home', 'sexuality' and 'work' have been oddly remiss in addressing the issue of masculinity and domestic work. More often spoken for than speaking, the life of a servant has an indistinct quality that begs attention. Using biography as a method to frame life lived as a male servant I suggest that a 'servant biography' is completed only in a subsequent life with which it is linked, imaginatively and substantively. Further, the historiography of servitude positions the female worker as the principal actor, so that the template upon which an understanding of domestic work is built is feminine. Additionally drawing on the literature on veiling and gender, I set myself the task of retrieving the male servant.

Keywords: Indian servants; domestic work; servitude; biography; veiling.

Panditji's corpse lay on a hospital bed, his body and face tightly wrapped in a white sheet. "Who is this?" his eldest son cried, tears clouding in his eyes, while his younger brother fled the room and sat, in stunned disbelief on the pavement outside the hospital ward.

Who indeed, was this? And what can we construct of a biography of a man who served?

Panditji's biography as a serving man in an urban household must be placed in the early 1960s political economy marked by increasing environmental degradation of the upper hill tracts of northern India—the Gharwal, Kumaon and Chamoli regions of UP (now Uttaranchal), and the adjoining state of Himachal Pradesh. Nehruvian infrastructure projects displaced people and extinguished social communities replacing them with townships of technocrats, engineers and disconnected local populations. The Bhakra Nangal dam project and its reservoir the Gobind Sagar Lake drowned the Himachali hill town of Bilaspur, literally pushing it up the hillside where little or no peasant agriculture was possible. The realignment of rivers for dam projects – the Sutlej and Beas for example – dried smaller rivulets and streams that irrigated hill farming. So while many might view an urban slum as the epitome of Hobbesian chaos, in the late sixties the upper valley regions of Uttaranchal and Himachal were in fact places where life was suddenly perilous, brutish, and short. The petering out of farm based peasant livelihoods and the impossibility of reproducing life along customary social patterns, forced people to leave their homes in search of sustenance and jobs. In part this migration was an attempt to sustain at least some semblance of a familiar world of field and family. Migration had already been part of the history of the hilly districts of Gharwal, Kumaon and Kangra. Accounts of colonial and early post-independence India speak of this region as a recruiting base of subalterns for the Indian army (Khalidi, 2001-2002, p. 530). By the late sixties and early seventies, however, this was no longer the case. Recruitment policy needed to be pan-Indian (Khalidi, 2001-2002, p. 530; Macmillan, 1969, p. 45-58) and so, India's independence also meant that Gharwali, Kumaoni and Kangri men could not rely on an identity as soldiers, the status as provisioners or on a secure salary from the army. It's against this trajectory of disappearing life choices came that people like Panditji came to the city as young men in search

of employment.

Their journey was enabled and encouraged in part by people from the region who deployed an army or an urban connection, parlaying these into employment for the migrants in offices, as messenger boys or petty clerks, or in homes as servitors. Dinanath, from Chamoli, a jawan or subaltern in the army, sent for his youngest brother Kishore Chand, hoping that the young man could be employed as a general dogsbody-cum- novice servant, in the home of the army officer for whom Dina worked as “batman”. The ‘batman’ was a salaried position in the army and indicated the post of a man who served in the household of a commissioned army officer. In his officer’s home, the jawan, transformed to batman acted as a general factotum-cum-valet, though he received a salary and pension from the army. The batman was a colonial term; in the post-colonial army, the batman is referred to as “orderly” or more colloquially “ur-dul-ee”. Upon retirement, the batmen/urdullee would sometimes follow the officer into civilian life to serve as a servant in the household in return for living quarters and a cash wage. Dina Nath converted his relations with his employer to a ‘resource’ for his brother, to enter the urban workforce. Soon after his arrival in the city of Delhi, Kishore Chand was sent to another family, relatives of Dina Nath’s officer, where Kishore lived and worked as a domestic servant until he married and had two children. Only much later in life did he fulfill his brother’s expectations, and become a peon [a petty clerk] in a school of middle-class children.

Men like Pandit ji were employed in urban homes for a number of reasons, but primarily because of reasons of their caste status. The appellation “Pandit” denotes a Brahmin, or a person of the upper, ritually pure, priestly caste. Very often the label served in lieu of the name for an individual. The addition of the honorific “ji” to a name indicates deference by the speaker of the addressee. So even though Panditji was a domestic servant in an urban household, the fact of his caste in an urban household, the fact of his caste was indicated by the appellation and the honorific suffix ‘ji’ to evoked deference.

Brahmins were preferred as cooks since they were thought of as belonging to the pure castes. Therefore food cooked and served by them was socially ‘safe’. In the 21st century however, the preference is rarely expressed since not many Brahmins are available as kitchen

staff. However, among all household staff, the cook is thought of as the most respectable, and the suffix 'ji' routinely added to the first name indicating a 'respectable' person.

The early years of Panditji's working life are only slightly different from the biography of Dina Nath and Kishore Chand briefly outlined above. During the day, Panditji was employed as a cleaner and guard in a home-based primary school, common in urban neighbourhoods; and in the evenings served as a cook in the household of the person who ran the school. The school closed down after a short spell and Panditji was "given" to a relative of the school owner. It is in this home that Panditji stayed until the last few years of his life, as a "family retainer" and live-in servant.

On the term 'Servant'

The etymology of the word servant, as we use it in our modern world, is attributed to the 13th century French term *servir* – to profess service, especially to a lady. The word transmuted to a term for slave by the 17th century. In this latter form, the servant was positioned within hierarchies of power and control. The term 'servant' was nomadic and travelled across cultural space and historical time, alighting in debatable translations of existing relations. For example, in India, exchanges between 'service' castes and landowners commonly referred to as the *jajmani* system of exchange (Wiser, 1969; Gould, 1986) was commonly translated as the relation between the master-jajman and the servant-kameen. Another translation was borrowed from the feudal terminology of patronage- so the *jajmani* system translated as a patron-client relationship. Unfortunately neither translation properly captured the cultural specificities of a caste based society and a system that incorporated ritual specialisation, menial work, duty, agreement, indenture, dependence and individual employment linked to work done by the entire family. The paired terms 'master-servant' were almost too abridged, severely truncating the depth of servitude, unable to capture the entirety of the dependence inherent in the structure of *jajmani*. Most significantly the translations did not indicate the fact that the *kameen's* entire household was bonded in in service to the *jajman* and

his household; so in fact, jajmani as a system hierarchically positioned sets of households in a series of unequal exchanges based on caste inequality, economic dependence and political domination. Despite the lacunae the paired terms were useful when ‘explaining’ the system of caste based occupational specialisations to a twentieth century audience [primarily composed of Indologists and Orientalists debating the ‘difference’ between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’] for whom servants were a vanished category of person.

Despite the *longue duree* of the term ‘servant’ the otherwise rich anthropological literature on domestic spaces and family in India has been oddly remiss in illuminating the lives of servants. The issue of servants does appear in discussions of caste, domestic space and service, for example in the work of V.Tellis Nayak (1983) and Kathinka Frøystad (2003), but male workers performing work in the household has been almost entirely overlooked. This is one of the reasons to begin this paper on a biographical note to unearth at least some traces of servitude in India, since analysis of history and social context are so inattentive to servant lives. Biography it seems to me holds up a mirror to existing social structures (Arnold and Blackburn, 2004) inhabited by people who otherwise might remain invisible. Biography alerts us to language and speech, as well as terms of address or reference that constitute identity and status. The question “Who is this” posed by Panditji’s son, is more than a rhetorical query to a corpse. It begs us to analytically try to find ‘who is this’ not just as name, but as a role, a category, literally inhabiting social personhood.

What do we call a servant in India? There are brief indications in Indic languages, Hindu textual references and in popular representations that give us a set of terms to consider; together these sources also suggest the presence of the servant, and specifically the male servant in everyday social contexts. In the Indian epic the Ramayan, for example, the monkey god Hanuman devotes himself as ‘servant’ or das to the hero Ram, acknowledging the latter as his master; Hanuman’s loyalty is viewed as an expression of *dasya-bhava bhakti*, the devotion of servant to the master as a deity. Bhakti is defined as loving devotion to a personal god, and the phrase evokes the master as the servant’s personal god, to whom he is utterly devoted. In the same epic, the Ramayan, servants were given as ‘gifts’ to the

priests who presided over the funeral ceremonials of Ram's father, the dead King Dasaratha. The 'gifted' person is valued¹, but that value by no means suggests autonomy - like the gift that can be given or received, the gifted servant was owned like an object, and had no legal rights of personhood.

The disputes around the Vedic term '*dasa*' as slave notwithstanding, the term *dasa* [female *dasi*] generically denotes 'servant'. Historically, the Arthashastra, an ancient treatise on statecraft, permitted the enslavement of the *Mleccha* – non-Vedic tribes, or those who were 'outside' the bounds of civilisation, as servants and slaves. Historical accounts attribute a surge of trade in slaves from Central Asia and the Middle East to Islamic and Mughal rule. Trade brought words and vocabularies, the Arabic term *ghulam*, servitor and slave, being one that has persisted across centuries to modern day Hindustani². *Gulam* were also servants in *Jannat* or the Garden of Paradise, the counterparts of the *houri* or mystical feminine companions of those who attained Paradise. The north Indian 'Hindi' term *naukar chakkar* suggests attachment, servitude and subordination. The usurpation of personhood implicit in all these terms makes domestic work a significant area in the discourses of masculinities.

Unfortunately the broader conceptualisations of 'home', 'sexuality' and 'work' in India have literally left out the male domestic worker in the construction the household. Male 'servants' make an appearance as cooks and nanny boys in colonial households in Zambia (Hansen, 1990), or batmen and urdeli's who doubled as valets and domestic help in the homes of Indian army officers³. Studies of sexuality have also briefly addressed the transgendered nature of domestic work [Chopra, 2006; 2009] attempting to fill in the details of a life lived as a man within the boundaries of domestic labour; but overall male workers continue to be a largely missing object in the analysis of domesticity and work in India.

Writing the servant into history

Accounts of the emerging middle class in England are perhaps among the more comprehensive sources of information on male domestic labour, as is writing on slavery, domestic reproduction and race in America. Both sources are of great relevance for framing and

analyzing lives of servants in modern India. Rosie Cox, in her work on domestic employment in a global economy (Cox, 2006) argues that in Britain the tax on the employment of domestic servants introduced in part to finance the battle against the 1777 American War of Independence and in part to encourage young battle- age⁴ men to join the navy, effectively removed male servants from households except perhaps in homes of high-status employers where they served *as a sign of wealth...and were given the roles where which were the most visible to guests- as footmen and butlers for example* (Cox, 2006, p.15). Within the hierarchies below the stairs male servants were placed in the position of the master of the household at the head of the kitchen table for example, or receiving guests at the front door. Among the various categories of male and female servants in the Victorian household, the butler and the valet were hierarchical superiors, often refusing to interact with the junior servants at all. Their position below stairs mimed their masters above stairs. In the seating arrangements at the kitchen table where all servants ate together, the butler sat at the head, with the housekeeper on his right, and the valet on his left. The rest of the staff sat in ranked order “away” from the head (May, 2008).

The tax on employing male servants was not removed till 1937, making the majority of household help predominantly female (Cox, 2006). Peter Earle similarly remarks that the majority of middle class households employed female servants, though *one man or boy gave the household distinction in the neighbourhood* (Earle, 1989, p.219). But the maid of all work was in fact the primary form of household help, serving at the table, cleaning in the kitchen or doing the heavy work, counted as a member of the household, below stairs. By 1851, domestic service was the second largest occupation after agriculture, and a whole series of institutions, like the Servants’ Registry Office and the Reference Letter or Testimonial revealed the mobile character of domestic labour moving between households and jobs (May, 2008). The emergence of the unregulated registry office where employers could meet prospective servants was an invaluable but strictly commercial establishment and despite being unregulated, quite critical to the process of hiring that could no longer rely on word of mouth or on continued “lifelong” service. Samuel Pepys diary, one of the more detailed accounts of the middle class household in London comments that

...Jane Birch, 'our old little Jane' ...stayed in all for seven years in three separate periods (Earle, 1989, p.221). The next longest service was that of Tom Edwards, who doubled as a junior clerk in the Navy Office and a footboy in the household, his wages being paid by the government. He stayed four and a half years. In all, the Pepey establishment of four women or girls and a boy was the normal arrangement till 1669, when the diary closes (Earle, 198, p. 221).

In India, modern 20th century elite households matched their mid-18th century British counterparts in expressing a preference for male servants. Raka Ray's keen analysis of the Calcutta household at the turn of the 20th century (research was conducted in 1998-99), confirms that *men have the higher status within the ranks of servants, and command higher wages... (though) female domestic servants are becoming the norm, with the more expensive male workers being out of reach for most middle class families today. Yet employers still think male servants are better, even though they no longer can afford nor perhaps would hire a male servant today...* (Ray, 2000, p.5). While the work of Laxmi Srinivas (1995) who examines the issue of 'difference' within the household as a way of framing the issue of servitude, and Chigateri (2007) who explores the links between *dalit* or lower caste feminism and paid domestic work are significant contributions to the writing on domestic workers in India, they focus primarily on women and work. Once again, men as a category of domestic workers are left out of the picture.

The eclipse of the male domestic worker can in part be overcome by taking recourse to biography. It is within the details of a life that relations of gender and servitude can be explored. For example, for men like Panditji there was a sense of moving into an occupation that flew against all norms of hegemonic masculinity defined vis-à-vis avoidance of all domestic chores; but conversely and simultaneously he, like all male servants, had a 'rarity value' and a symbolic significance in their employer's eyes. The male servant's presence added a distinction to the middle-class Indian home, pointed out by Ray for India, and Hansen for Zambia.

But unlike the fairly extensive literature on male servants in England or the US, including visual material like portraiture, cartoons and illustrations, the Indian – indeed the sub-continental context is

remarkable for the paucity of material on domestic workers. As already stated most writing on domestic servants is about the life histories and working conditions of women labour. Of male domestic workers there is a real dearth of available material. Bombay cinema and television soap operas are an interesting representational source. Examples of Bombay feature films include Shaukat Hussain Rizvi's *Naukar* (1943); Guru Dutt's *Sahib Bibi aur Gulam* (1962); Raj Kumar Kholi's *Naukar Biwi Ka* (1983); and Mani Kaul's *Naukar ki Kameez* (1999) among a few others, but narratives are romanticised or comedic versions of servitude.

There is very little secondary literature on male domestic workers. The few accounts that are available offer case studies and some anecdotal accounts of male servants, interspersed between cases of female workers (Ray, 2000; Frøystad, 2003). Most of the literature in fact deals more extensively with female domestic workers. And here, the literature is indeed revealing of the conditions of employment, the dyadic relations between employer-employee, theoretical frames that are productive for an analysis of the lives of servants. Frøystad, following Tellis Nayak, finds the patron client frame useful when understanding the master-servant relationship, especially in the context of a domestic reproduction of caste. Speaking of Columbia, but expanding the Latin American context, the authors of "Up off her Knees" Anna Rubbo and Michael Taussig argue that while *it would be an exaggeration to say that Third World societies are "servant-based societies"* (Rubbo and Taussig, 1983: 6) founded on what they call a "servant mode of production", they do however, think it is a helpful way of *gaining an initial perspective on an important and all too neglected topic of political economy* (Rubbo and Taussig, 198, p. 6).

Frøystad gives shape to the connections between caste and occupation in northern India, arguing that the modern Indian household and domestic life are critical in the reproduction of caste (Frøystad, 2003). In this sense her work echoes that of Rubbo and Taussig (1983) that domestic service is an essential link between the macrostructure of political life and the microstructure of domestic and personal existence. The hierarchy and segregation of domestic chores are based on caste notions of purity and dirt, and rather than tedium or repetition; it is the nexus of dirt and work that orient the hiring of servants (Frøystad,

2003, p.78). Cooking and cleaning toilets for example, are at opposite ends of the scale of avoidance, and those who are hired to cook will rarely cross the threshold between the household spaces of kitchen and bathroom.

Specific workers are hired to perform specific chores, many delineated by caste specializations- like the sweeper who scrubs the floors and takes away the garbage, or the washerman who does the family/household laundry (Froystad, 2003, p.79). Rubbo and Taussig assertion fits the paradigm of caste specialization when they argue that *the fact that unemployed women find work as servants presupposes the necessity for that occupational niche, which is not to be explained by the fact of unemployment* (Rubbo and Taussig, 198, p.6). The same assertion could, it seems to me, be extended to the work of men.

The connection between women, domestic work and servitude is clearly spelt out. Partly this has to do with the increasing numbers of women who are hired as domestic help, whether full time live in or part time help who circulate between households. But partly it seems to me it has to do with the assumptions that connect women with the domestic domain. The hegemonic constructions of home as a feminine space orient anthropological attention toward the women who inhabit this space. However, both in colonial and post-independence India the feminine zone is also the space of a specific category of men who are simultaneously part of it but also continue to be strangers in the home. The literature - whether on the architecture of the colonial bungalow (Tolen, 2003) or the hierarchy of work (Froystad, 2003; Ray, 2000) - gestures toward the existence of the male worker in the home, but unfortunately, while the presence of male workers is acknowledged, its minutiae remain in shadow. For gender studies this ambiguity is unacceptable. We need to ask the obvious question: what does it mean to be a man servant in a feminized space, where the template for incorporation into domesticity is the female domestic worker? How do male domestic workers interrogate the anthropology of work and the performance of gendered subjectivities? While it is possible to transfer some of the arguments women and domestic work onto men as domestic workers we cannot assume a complete correspondence or a uniformity of experience. Within the framework of work and domestic spaces, the issue of domestic service as a problematic because so much

of it does not address or examine the place where it is looked for- i.e.- the private home. Even for female workers, the 'object' of enquiry transnational migration, an issue embedded in analysis of state formation and nationalism is relatively ignored. Nevertheless, analysis of transnational migration has been a rich source for examining the movement of women as maids across transnational borders (Andall,2000; Anderson, 2000; Gamburd, 2000) and has examined the conundrums of paid domestic work that *are part of the outcomes of much larger social, economic and political processes that are increasing the importance of this work in the global political economy....domestic work has become part of state society relations and transnational politics* (Hansen, 200, p. 289) It is migration that brings to the fore the folding of the public into the private and the extrusion of the private into the domains of the public. Male servitude and the migration of men like Panditji, therefore has to be framed within the discourses of migration, albeit internal, or local level migrations.

Domestics Servants in the Indian context

What kinds of questions does biography raise and what kinds of issues does biography illuminate? It seems to me that one of the key questions is how did men like Panditji navigate the modern middle class home and construct their own place within it? What frames of reference were critical in this encounter? How do we as anthropologists narrate this encounter and negotiation? Did the emerging middle class of independent India break free from its colonial past or did rudiments of colonial homes shape contemporary urban households? The fact that modern day bureaucrats and politicians of a new nation literally moved into architected spaces built by colonial masters, is an issue of immense concern when we think about domestic labour and its place in modern India. Hierarchies of power, literally and metaphorically bricked into the built environment of the bungalow compound complex (King, 1976) were home to the leaders of modern India. One of the key distinctions within

the spaces of the colonial residential complex was the spatial and visual separation between the bungalow of the master, and the quarters of the servants. The quarters were built ‘down-wind’ from the main bungalow, so that miasma of lower class life never wafted up the master’s nose, and the off-duty servant was neither seen nor heard.

Segregation of space and visual seclusion are tropes that are critical to another richly detailed discourse: of *parda* or veiling. The discourse and practices of *parda* is a primary frame to understand the position of servants within the household. The fact that the *parda* literature [like the writing on domestic work] is woman-centric cannot – and does not – limit its analytical value when thinking through the location and subject positions of male domestic workers. In fact critical forms of veiling are adopted and imposed upon the male servant and therefore *parda* is a vital frame when understanding the process of becoming a servant and of being servant. (Chopra, 2006; 2009).

The frame of *parda* enables an analytic link between the ‘loss’ of masculinity through the performance of domestic work, and to argue further that masculinity is simultaneously recouped within the spaces of the domestic through a series of strategies which return the servant to the position of provisioner, ‘dong’ the work of men, sacrificing even his male self ‘for the sake of the family’. The juxtaposition of domesticities – of the employer and the servant – and the constant quotidian traverse between the two spaces and social locations, positions the masculine self as a negotiated gendered identity in the course of a working life. The fact that ‘doing’ for the family is no longer possible in tried and tested ways especially within the new economies that make life so much more precarious and risky, re-inscribes the frame within which male domestics are located. Michele Gamburd for example, points toward as a new formation of mothering by Sri Lankan migrant mothers who think of their constant absence to the Middle East as a broadening of *the spectrum of acceptable ways for women to “love” their children and care for their families...they did not divide working for wages from child care and family (and)...portrayed their work abroad as undertaken on behalf of the material well-being of those very children* (Gamburd, 2000, p.191) whom they are accused of heartlessly abandoning. The act of ‘fathering’ in and through the performance of domestic work-as-

sacrifice, re-inscribes both work and fathering. Still undervalued, domestic work by men is positioned as the ‘sacrifice’ that men perform for the ‘sake of the family’.

Through earlier ethnographic field work, I explored the lives of male domestic workers who are part of the interior spaces of homes not their own (Chopra, 2006), looking primarily at the working contexts of full-time live-in domestics as well as the life trajectories of part-time male workers. One of the important aspects of the working histories of these men is that they are almost always likely to be migrants in the city. In their narratives it is quite clear that many of them have left their own families and moved to the city in search of work. The second point of significance is that for some of them, domestic work is a “first halt” in their working biographies. Many will move on to other work. At this point they are in a way being processed simultaneously into their working lives and into domestic work negotiating a series of incorporations into social contexts of work and domesticity. Workers also move between multiple households of employers. Moves vary from live-in to live-out situations, full-time to part-time work as well as from domestic to a combination of domestic with non-domestic work. Movement is intrinsic to the formation of their identities, though its trajectories are diverse and there is no one passage that can be located within the framework of life cycle rituals, nor is there incorporation into a single or fixed gender identity.

Because domestic space is not open, workers will rarely be able to walk-in off the street to get employment. To get work an individual workers person-hood needs to be ‘vouched for’ by others. Reputation and reliability are the key tropes that make young men employable as household labour. Like the veiled woman the sense of self is looped out through other people’s ‘tellings’; thus like a woman who can be approached only through others who metaphorically stand before her, a young male worker is known and fleshed out by others who stand surety for him. Workers are sometimes passed along between employers who stand guarantee for individual workers. However quite unlike the protection that the outward oriented circuit of being spoken for provides (or is said to provide) for women, the safeguard of being

vouched for that is offered on behalf of male workers is 'for' the employers. Being known is not a guarantee of security for the worker. For workers, safety in employment depends on networks that connect workers with one another and therefore with a set of employment situations in other households.

Even with guarantees, becoming a member of a household depends on a series of inclusions and exclusions. Segregation of space is critical in demarcating the position of insider-outsider. Unlike the kitchen where the worker must be visibly present there are other spaces where a worker must remain unnoticed, especially in the presence of guests (the acme of the outside within the home). Employers congratulate themselves on servants who have successfully learnt their place and only then extend to them the 'right' to be part of family's ritual calendar though a workers participation is initiated by the employer, not the worker. The move toward being part of the family depends on learning the rules of exclusion, permission and prohibition. The body posture and somatic stylistics man in the photograph [Fig. 1] illustrate the exclusion that lies within the inclusive act of watching television with the family. The servant sits uncomfortably on the arm of a chair indicating that he is not settled into the 'circle' of the family at leisure. His whole body posture indicates that he is likely to jump up in an instant if work calls. The leisure time activity of watching television within the space of a home is only available to him in a truncated fashion. His 'real' place lies through the door, where a kitchen sink and a long-handled griddle, under the sink, provide evidence of his work and location in the home. His whole stance, sitting in the corner of the room, on the edge of chair, ready to move through the door suggests his station, in life and in work.



Figure 1 - A worker in an employer's home, Delhi, India (2001)

Source: Sanjeev Saith

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First name usage is rare unless a male worker is connected by prior ties with his employer's family and even then the suffix Singh or Chand is added to the "given name" so that the entire name with prefix and suffix is used marking a distinction in the way servants and family members are addressed. Workers never use their employers' first names without some qualifier like '*rani*' (queen) or *did*i (sister) for women and chotteh sahib for younger men of the family.

In contexts where *parda* is practiced name avoidance particularly of first names is an accepted mode of distancing and is practiced by both men and women particularly in cross gender interactions. When trying to catch a woman's attention for example, men cough or make a noise. This strategy is a form of communication that replaces speech and the necessity of direct address. Modern urban families who do not maintain such elaborate codes of speech avoidance between family members nevertheless re-instate *parda* practices like name avoidance and speech

restriction vis-à-vis their domestic workers. Often speech is literally replaced by a bell to summon a worker. The bell asserts hierarchy and conveys initiates required actions literally without a word being spoken. Domestic workers draw their bodies inward through a series of gestures that mute their maleness. Ways of standing with hands folded over the genitals, eyes lowered (*nazar ka parda*) accompanied by forms of address that signal the authority of the employer and the subordination of the worker are accepted cultural signs that a new body and a new being are emerging from the rough. Silence, soft speech tones, economy of speech (*awaz ka parda*) and a successful adoption of a 'listening' posture are read as incorporations into obedience. Workers can signal their dissatisfactions through the same set of body languages deployed by women- sulks, refusal to talk and so on, but seldom by shouting or abuse (modes that are available on occasion to women). Extravagant gestures of communication can lead to a loss of employment. Any sign that exaggerates or draws attention to the body is read as a dangerous assertion, converting the worker from a successful effeminate into a treacherous male stranger.

Workers have their own take on what domestic work gives them. Bringing their own family to the city is important reason that emerges in workers 'tellings'. Some of them talk of entering domestic work through compulsion (*mazboori*) while others think of it as safer than other forms of employment. One worker told me "yeh kam truck driveri se to beheter hai; yahan izzat to bacheti hai" (this is better than driving a truck; at least one's honour is secure). The uncertainty of work contexts in the informal economy and the sense of security provided in domestic work are cited by workers as a reason for doing domestic work. Often the employer's home is viewed as a form of safe housing. Workers with young school going children look to the city as a means of providing better education. Young single workers on the other hand move quickly toward part-time work in multiple homes, and make an effort to move between part-time domestic work and office work.

Biography and masculinity- notes toward a conclusion

For men like Panditji, the loss of his masculinity within the domestic spaces of his employer's household has a counter telling. In the loss of his own masculine self, lay the possibility of for his son to 'achieve' a more conventionally endorsed masculinity. Like Dina Nath's brother Kishore Chand, the peon, briefly referred to in the introduction of this essay, Panditji's son did not follow his father into servitude. He became an employee of an airline, and lived in housing provided by his institutional employer. But without his father's life as servant perhaps this realization into a modern masculine self would not have been possible. A loss is recouped in the next generation – but it is also claimed within the first biography as a future of another life foretold. Re-interpreting the issue of how remunerations are viewed by women workers, Michele Gamburd has pointed our attention toward new formations of mothering and care that are implicit in the narratives of transnational migrant women who work as domestic labour. It is a new discourse Gamburd argues, produced through work, earning, and remuneration, that challenges the ideal role of the mother, the practices of mothering and care. The new discourse of care enables women to reclaim their role as mother within the family, even though they are in actual practice, geographically separated from children and family. Gamburd's work is salutary when considering the issue of fatherhood in the family. Performing domestic work with its orientations toward femininity is re-cast by male domestic workers as a form of 'doing' and 'caring' for the family that reinserts them back into the very clear role of provisioning the family through labour. Working as domestic servants is a new formation of the masculine self, an area that needs far greater exploration.

I would in fact argue that Panditji's biography cannot be viewed within a single life-span. It projects outward to a second generation, with which it is intrinsically linked. And it is in that re-orientation toward a second life as it were, that Panditji's masculinity is finally retrieved and reinstated. Further, narratives of domestic workers question the view that biographies are stories of a single life: in fact the biographies of the male servants whom I follow though this paper, suggest that a 'servant biography' is completed only in a subsequent life with which it is

linked, imaginatively and substantively. Thus a male workers life is viewed as 'incomplete' within itself, simultaneously seen as oriented toward a future and woven into another life. I use the term 'coupled biography' to suggest that a single life span does not capture the nuances of a life lived as servant; to be properly understood, it must scan generations.

Notes

1. The most celebrated example of the person as a gift is the gift of the virgin- the kanya dan performed by the parents of a girl at her marriage; the girl as bride is gifted by her father to her husband's family and is forever a stranger, paraya, in her own home. Servants then were feminized in precisely the same way as object-persons to be gifted away but critically, unlike brides, forever paraya or stranger in homes into which they moved.
2. Hindustani is a language of composite cultures. It is simultaneously rooted in dialects that were, and are, prevalent in north India (around Delhi, western Uttar Pradesh and southern Uttaranchal), and incorporates a large vocabulary from Arabic, Persian, Turki and Sanskrit. Hindustani words are commonly used in the titles and lyrics of Bombay cinema. The film *Sabib, Bibi aur Ghulam* [1962] was hugely popular and depicted the fading fortunes of a feudal family, as seen through the eyes of the ghulam or servant, Bhoothnath, played by the producer of the film, Guru Dutt. A more recent film titled *Ghulam* (1998) is inspired by the Elia Kazan classic "On the Waterfront" (1954) starring Marlon Brando. Amir Khan was the hero in the Indian *Ghulam*.
3. It was only as recently as 2009, that the position of batman- or sahayak (literally assistant or helper) was abolished by the Indian government. The Sunday Times reported that current and former batmen complained that they (were) frequently humiliated by their officers, or more often their wives.
4. The term 'battle age men' is used by Adam Jones to indicate the cohort who become 'targets' of violence in a systematic attempt at what he calls 'gendercide'- or gendered aspects of genocide (Jones, 2004). However, here the term is used to indicate the cohort who became targets of recruitment into the armed forces.

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