

PROCESSES OF NEGOTIATING INTIMATE HETEROSEXUAL IDENTITIES
AND RELATIONS: NARRATIVES OF THREE GENERATIONS OF URBAN
MIDDLE-CLASS BENGALIS LIVING IN KOLKATA, INDIA

by

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Sociology or otherwise, my family always gave me 'home' to all my unanswered questions, and meaning to all that is apparently meaningless. Even before I was formally trained into feminist schools of thought; my grandmother, Anjali and her daughter, my mother, Arpita, unwittingly sensitized me into the generational nuances of a woman's world, her 'bargain with patriarchy' and her 'situated feminism'. My research is dedicated to them and many more Anjalis and Arpitas. Unlike what most of my friends think, these four years of rigorous research on heterosexual intimacy, romance and coupling have possibly made me less romantic and more sceptical like most feminist sociologists. For living and sharing with me my scepticisms and for loving me precisely because of my contradictions; I cannot thank enough Rajarshi, my best 'friend'. His gender sensitized perceptions that are emerging not from any direct feminist training but in his narrative,

from his love for a woman and her love for sociology, gives me an inspiring glimpse of the other side of oppressive heterosexual love in mundane experiences of heterosexuality.

Ultimately, this research is dedicated to an intimate teacher – life: its intimate pains and paradoxes.

ABSTRACT

Through interview generated narratives of subjects of three generations of urban middle-class Bengalis living in Kolkata, India and other auto-ethnographic narrative texts; this research seeks to examine generation, gender and class specific meanings of intimate heterosexual identities and relations. It focuses on the ways in which subjects negotiate institutionalized heterosexuality or hetero-normativity within everyday practices of intimacy. Subjects' on-going negotiations that tell stories of multiple and contradictory subjectivities, are analysed to show how personal narratives of intimacy vary across a range of conflicting and competing colonialist, nationalist and trans-nationalist discourses of heterosexuality. Through analysing stories of homosocial intimacy, heterosexual coupling and expressions of intimacy; the research examines the power and vulnerability of 'doing gender', illustrates how 'practices of intimacy' overlap with 'family practices' and demonstrates that expressions of intimacy are socially ordered and linguistically mediated. The research critiques the 'individualization thesis' of reflexive modernization by showing how practices of intimacy are socio-culturally embedded within family relations, both real and imagined. By appreciating multiple meanings of power and agency, it also critiques a colonial-modernist notion of linear progress by illustrating the shifting meaning and the mutual co-constitution of the categories of 'past' and 'present', 'tradition' and 'modern', 'East' and 'West'.

GLOSSARY

Abhijato- Sophisticated.

Adda- A distinct Bengali speech genre and is the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and non-rigorous conversations.

Addadhari- One who holds together an adda.

Addakhana- Places for giving adda.

Addhatmikata- Spirituality.

Alakshmi- The opposite for 'Lakshmi' (Goddess of wealth and domestic prosperity).

Antahpur- Interior spaces within home.

Antarangata- Intimacy.

Antorikota- Heartfelt sincerity.

Apni- It is a Bengali pronoun which is used in instances of high degree of formality, formal respect and honour and in this context, a low degree of intimacy that presumes distance.

Atmiyashwajan- Relatives or kinsmen. 'Atmiya' comes from the word 'atma' which means the soul and 'shwajan' means of the self.

Bangali- Bengali or people from Bengal.

Bangaliana- Bengaliness.

Bhadra- Respectable.

Bhadralok- Respectable men or respectable people generally. It implies men of middle-class where respectability and middle class is made synonymous.

Bhadramahila- Respectable women implying middle-class women.

Bhadrasmaj- Respectable society implying middle-class society.

Bhakti- Devotion.

Bhnare cha- Tea served in mud pots.

Bokachoda- Foolish fucker

Bonedi- Aristocratic.

Chhok kosha- Political scheming

Chyala- Disciples.

Dada- Elder brother.

Dadagiri- Big bullying

Dharma- Proper moral conduct.

Durga Puja- Bengali festival of the worship of Goddess Durga who is the epitome of feminine strength and represents good over evil.

Gandu- Impotent

Ghonishtota- Intense closeness.

Grihalakshmi- 'Griha' means home and 'Lakshmi' means Goddess of wealth and domestic prosperity.

Jhakidorshon- Implying men collectively looking at women.

Jharimara- Casual 'checking out' of girls.

Kakima- Auntie

Kaku- Uncle

Kanyadan- A marriage ritual in which the father gives away his daughter to the groom.

Lagano- Slang for sexual penetration.

Lajja bastra- Used in the context of a hindu ritual marriage to represent feminine modesty and grace in marriage.

Lajja- Grace and modesty

Loha- A pair of iron bangles.

Memsahib- European woman. In the context of colonial Bengal Memshahib comes to represent the western 'other' of the patriarchal/nationalist construction of the bhadramahila.

Meyeli- Girly/effeminate

Moddhobittyo- Middle-class.

Mohilakora- Literally means 'doing woman', its a slang for playing up with women sexually

Ogo shunchho- My beloved, do you hear?

Pala- A pair of red bangles.

Para- Neighbourhood.

Patibrota Nari- Husband worshipping woman.

Pourush- Masculinity.

Prem- Romantic love

Rawk- Rawk or verandah is a narrow raised platform outside a dwelling house on the streets.

Ruchiban- One who has good taste.

Ruchishonmoto- Conforming to taste

Rupa- Physical external beauty.

Saree- Traditional attire for the Bengali bhadramahila.

Saundarya- Emotional internal beauty

Shadharon Bhadraklok- Ordinary middle-class.

Shakhi- Female Friend.

Shnakha- A pair of white bangles made of conk shells.

Shnidur- A red marital sign on the forehead.

Shnidur khela- Vermillion play is a Bengali cultural ritual performed during the fourth and final day of the most important Bengali religious-cultural festival of the worship of goddess Durga, the symbol of good over evil and the epitome of feminine strength.

Shoi- Female companion to another female.

Shoi patano- Forming a female friendship between women.

Shomporko- Relationship.

Stree- Married wife.

Thek- A colloquial slang for a fixed place of *adda* also termed as *addakhana*.

Tui- Bengali pronoun implies casual relationships with relatively low levels of formal respect. It is often used in cases of sibling intimacies of similar cohort group or close intimate/close friendships that are not bound by strict formal codes of behaviour.

Tumi- It is a Bengali pronoun that signifies relatively more intimate companionship, more familiarity, less formal distance and formal respect. However, it signifies relatively more distance, respect and formality in relation to the third pronoun '*tu*'.

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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

The 'Why' of the Research:

a) 'Personal' Contextualization

As part of growing up 'like many others', even I had moments of restlessness, for there were too many questions and too few answers, most of which were again unconvincing. Alongside, there was a heavy romanticization in the individualization of 'problems' and quest for meaning such as – “/ don't understand” and “why should it only happen to *me*?” Brought up in a family of three generations, the individualized romanticism often heightened in negotiation with and in relation to the family's jointness and its collectivity; of which I was an integral part, both through association and disassociation. Every time I went to my mother with my personal agonies and pains of growing up and tried to fathom the meaning of life particularly that of intimate relations and self-identity, my mother only demystified these individualized pains by narrating through relevant anecdotes, how my experiences were 'like many others' and my problems, common problems of growing up of 'many others like me'. Such demystifications made me feel less special and less important. However, it implanted in me from an early age the classic sociological-Durkheimian concern (1893) with the fit between individual and collectivity. I grew up continually trying to assess my mother's claims about whether and how my problems were common problems of 'many others like me'. If there were these others, who were they? What meanings do they give to these problems? How do they

negotiate and deal with these issues? How do they narrate it as individuals and as part of collectivities?

Today, there are still more questions than answers. The only difference is the knowledge that my problems are not just mine. A sociologically induced imagination comforts me to be able to share my stories of intimate relations and identity with many others like me. This process of demystification might make one a romantic sceptic but it helps to realize that the 'chaos of love' is 'normal' and that it affects all 'actors in a common play' in a certain pattern of behaviour and crisis (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 191), contingent upon time and space.

What intrigues me more is not how many of us culturally share stories of growing up as individuals and part of collectivities, but also how we similarly and differently narrativize these. Growing up in a culture whose subjects are famous or infamous for *adda deya* ('giving' *adda*) where *adda* means informal chatting, and *golpo kora* ('doing' stories); I best understand intimate relations and identities through the stories we share and through the process of storytelling. The active and integral cultural practice of storytelling can be noted in the verb form of such practice in the vernacular usages of 'doing' stories and 'giving' *adda*. Relationships are of varying forms but what strikes me as the most nuanced and multilayered dimension of storytellings across generations within the urban middle-class Bengali culture, are the stories of friendship, homosocial bondings and everyday heterosexual coupling. Among other forms of intimacy, these forms are most popularly discussed and narrated. The dynamism of this form of storytelling lies in the ways in which subjects similarly and differently experience and

negotiate with these forms of intimacies within a society that is both homogeneous and fragmented.

This raises significant sociological questions to explore – what is the shared commonality of cultural experience of intimate relations of an urban Bengali middle-class who grew up in a certain time period? When people narrate a similar experience differently, what are the structural and cultural factors that induce such different tellings? How do people assert selfhood or personhood through social relationships? In what ways do men and women experience and narrate intimacy? Do all middle-class people narrate the same ‘scripts’ of intimacy? What roles do gender, class, generation, family and kinship play in shaping personal intimate relations? Finally, how do we subjects negotiate, that is, conform, circumvent, subvert and challenge institutionalized discourses of intimacy at the inter-subjective, everyday practices and cultural imaginings of intimacy? Personal experiences of intimate relations that are ultimately part of a collective cultural upbringing, made me deeply contemplate upon the sociological significance of its exploration through a research on these forms of relationships. Thus my research question on ‘Processes of Negotiating Intimate Heterosexual Identities and Relations: Narratives of Three Generations of Urban Middle-class Bengalis living in Kolkata, India’, is an exercise of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ (Mills, 1959) with an auto-ethnographic (Reed-Danahay, 1997) epistemological position in which the researcher is also the researched subject, studying one’s cultural ‘home’ and self at the same point in time.

b) Academic Contextualization

Within an 'absent present' appreciation of *la vie quotidienne*, an analysis of everyday life has only "recently become recognized as worthy of study in its own right" within sociology (Scott, 2009: 3). Within this relatively new mode of inquiry inspired by Henri Lefebvre (1947) and Michel de Certeau (1984), the everyday appreciation of the processes of negotiating the sociology of emotions and intimacy is newer in terms of its academic status as fit topics for sociological inquiry in the West (Hochschild, 1983) and particularly in the Indian context (Dwyer, 2000).

Some feminist sociologists maintain that 'main-stream', 'male-stream' sociologists find emotion personally threatening, to be relegated to the irrational, unquantifiable and therefore essentially untheorizable (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976), leaving a sociology which is about 'rational men' rather than 'sentient persons' (Eichler, 1981: 206). The compulsive creation of the contrast between rationality and emotion has been a central part of the discourse of modernity and the development of the European masculine intellectual tradition, which has helped to shape sociology and heterosexual masculinity. This feature of sociological thought has been an epistemological impediment in undertaking my research and legitimizing its academic seriousness and methodological viability. Actually, the very sociological idea that cultural forces and not one's uniquely personal qualities might have shaped the form of one's love seems like an interference of personal freedom, an intrusion into the private mysterious world of one's inner feelings (Sarsby, 1983: 1). As the title of Evans' book, *Love: An Unromantic Discussion* (2003) suggests, a sociological enquiry which demystifies the romance of romantic love is indeed unromantic. According to Mills, men often feel that their private lives are a

‘series of traps’. Underlying this sense of being trapped are impersonal changes in the very structure of society at large. However, men do not usually define their apparently private lives in terms of ‘historical change and institutional contradiction’ (Mills, 1959: 3). He offers a solution to this feeling of being trapped. It lies in the concept of ‘Sociological Imagination’, the ability to link personal to social and biography to history.

Barring recent Western sociological-feminist concerns with intimate relations and personal lives; of the already few works on intimate relationships, most works within the sociology of family, kinship and marriage in Bengal, have primarily been framed from within a modernist sociology. The anchorage on a modernist sociology to understand relationships was based on an Enlightenment induced, Euro-centric, colonial modernity and its associated claims to truth, reason and linear progress. This academic commitment of modernity to an Enlightenment image of knowledge as both systematic and unitary (Shotter, 1992: 63 cited in Macleod, 2002: 12) and to the ‘Enlightenment episteme’ of binary thinking (Roberts, 2002: 171) has often reproduced a Euro-centric vision of modernity that failed to appreciate the multiple and nuanced meanings, experiences and practices of heterosexual identities and intimacies across cultures. To give an instance of this in the context of India, Ullrich’s ethnography on ‘Marital Intimacy: A Four Generation Study’ (2010), reinforces the orientalist modernist notion of linear time and progress. It argues for increasingly relaxed practices of intimate conjugality and caste structures with every generation in Bangalore, India; so that the notion of generation is a story of linear progression (Ullrich, 2010: 106-108). It fails to problematize the notion of generation, the cultural practices and continuities of class, gender and caste structures. It fails to interrogate the apparently relaxed and open

practices of intimacy and analyze ambiguities of practices of intimacy within generations and the power relations associated with the narrative of linear modernity.

My research on intimate relations across three generations is understood in relation to the modernist claims of sociology and its influence on the narratives of subjects. However, my analysis moves beyond to critically assess the claims of modernist sociology through these very narratives of intimacy by deconstructing these narratives and unfolding through them, multiple and contradictory subjectivities that vary across a range of conflicting and contradictory discourses of modernity. In exploring both continuities and changes across generations, my research tries to bring out the ambiguities of heterosexual intimacies and identities that are shaped by heterogeneous regimes of power and knowledge. Inspired by the critical knowledge that “despite – and because of – its claims to truth and legitimate knowledge, the social theory of modernity and the modernist sociology have often been imbued with patriarchal, colonial and hetero-normative interests” (Heaphy, 2007: 7); I seek to bring into sociology issues of power, difference and otherness that are concerns of ‘reflexive sociology’ and a post-structuralistic ‘spirit of deconstruction’ (see Chapters 1, 3, 4, 9). Through my research on intimate relations and subjects’ associated narratives of ‘traditional’, ‘modern’, ‘progressive’, ‘respectable’, ‘Eastern’, ‘Western’ forms and practices of intimacy; I seek to extend my concern on intimate relations within an everyday specific context, to broader analyses and stories of colonial-national encounters, postcolonial ambiguities and its cultural politics of class, gender and race to which everyday narratives of intimacy are integrally intertwined. These issues of post-colonialism and of everyday culture which are otherwise integral to understandings within sociology have hitherto

been left by sociologists of Bengal for the analysis of post-colonial historians and cultural theorists.

Bengal has remained the capital of colonial rule and therefore, has a strong history of the power and difference associated with colonialism-nationalism. The cultural politics of class 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984) and gendering that mediated colonial Bengal have also shaped heterosexual relations. The socio-historical appreciation of colonial-national construction of heterosexual intimacies and identities and their classed and gendered codes are important because these are still powerful enough to shape contemporary post-colonial, urban, middle-class Bengali relationships (Sangari and Vaid, 1989) and subjects' narratives of these relationships. In this Bengal's colonial 'past' and post-colonial 'present' are co-constituted. The context of my research, therefore, is at once specific and general where Bengal represents a case for post-colonial cultural politics of relations and identities. This makes the research problem an important academic quest, calling for a rigorous empirical research consistent with the spirit of sociology and much required interdisciplinary theoretical analyses that is at once sociological, post-colonial, post-colonial feminist and post-structuralist. This approach intends to provide a space for sociology within Bengal, from where a critical dialogue and a shared space with other disciplines that are also concerned with intimate relations, is made possible. Through incorporating an appreciation for discourse, the deconstruction of binaries and a 'reflexive methodology' associated with post-structuralism and 'radical difference' theories like post-colonialism and post-colonial feminism (Heaphy, 2007: 40-45); my research "problematizes ideas about reason, progress, agency, power and subjectivity

that were at the heart of both founding and critical theories of modernity and modernist sociology's self-understanding" (Heaphy, 2007: 7).

It is important to note that modernist sociology and its traditional interest, in some way or another focused on the importance of relationships, associational bonds and patterns of friendship (Allan, 1989: 2). Yet, only a limited amount of work has been done on *processes of negotiating* intimate relations in India, particularly Bengal and on intimate friendships even outside India. My research seeks to fill in a part of this academic void by bringing back the academic necessity for studying intimate relations, initiated by Simmel within sociology and by reviving interpretivist concerns that focused on a) subjective meaning-making of actions and b) subjects' processes of negotiating social relations within an everyday cultural context.

c) Theoretical Inspirations

Through a theoretical inspiration and empirical contextualization of the Western debates on hetero-normativity (Smart, 1996b, 1996a; Jackson, 1996, 1999; Richardson, 1996; Hockey et al., 2007) and Bourdieu's concept of class-culture and 'class distinction' (1984) within post-colonial Bengal, my research on intimate relations debates with and nuances the theoretical claims of 'reflexive modernization' on intimacy by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, 2002) and particularly by Giddens (1991, 1992). Their claims for de-traditionalization and redundancy of modern institutions such as family and class, in the context of a 'transformation of intimacy' (Giddens, 1992) are critically interrogated in terms of their 'universalizing tendencies' (Heaphy, 2007: 8, 77). Giddens' claim is set against a 'connectedness thesis' (Smart, 2007), that argues for a re-inscription of the inequalities of family, class, gender and generation within heterosexual relations

(Jamieson, 1998, 1999, 2011) and inequalities and constraints of power such as “strong ‘local’ or ‘community’ guidelines” even within non-heterosexual intimate relationships (Heaphy et al., 2002: 256). Giddens’ claims for ‘new universalities and new forms of global connectedness’ (Heaphy, 2007: 77) are also empirically appraised viz-à-viz post-colonial appreciation for ‘alternative modernity’ (Chakrabarty, 2002) that argues for local mediations of global connectedness (Majumdar, 2000) and recognizes ‘otherness’ (Mohanty, 1991; Hall, 1992) rather than erases them (Giddens, 1991: 27). Theories of reflexive modernity that promote a ‘reconstructivist sociology’ and articulate a sociology of reflexivity are critically evaluated against the reflexive sociology of Bourdieu and his concepts of habitus, class distinction and class culture that set limits to and critique the reflexive nature of reflexive modernity (Heaphy, 2007: 178-179). However, my theoretical inspiration takes from but also moves beyond the power and difference framed within Bourdieusian sociology to issues of discourse, difference and otherness associated with post-structuralist and post-colonial feminism which appreciate experiences of the marginalized through an emphasis on ‘differences *within* difference’ (Heaphy, 2007: 176).

The ‘What’ of the Research:

The first chapter of analysis focuses on “Narratives of Male Homosocial Intimacy: Constructing and Negotiating Masculinities”. Through exploring male homosocial intimate spaces, the chapter understands how men engage in a continuous process of constructing, re-enforcing and negotiating with the cultural expectations of masculinities in the context of their intimate friendships and as part of their intimate heterosexual identities. How such practices of intimacy overlap with family and kinship practices will

also be explored in relation to masculinity as a nationalist project and as embedded within the structure and culture of Bengali middle-class community.

The second chapter of analysis is on “Narratives of Female Homosocial Intimacy: Constructing and Negotiating Femininities”. Through exploring female homosocial intimate spaces, this chapter understands how women in these spaces of friendship confirm, challenge and resist the cultural mandates of womanhood and the cultural expectations of femininity. The chapter problematizes the category ‘woman’ by showing that women’s experiences and meanings of femininity are fragmented and contingent upon their specific material and cultural locations within the middle-class. Taking ‘woman’ as a contextual analytic, the multi-layered dynamic of power relations is analyzed in relation to women’s narratives of a politics of difference.

The third chapter is on “Narratives of Heterosexual Coupling: Negotiating Hetero-normativity”. Through exploring intimate spaces of coupling, this chapter understands how subjects give meaning to courtship and conjugality and negotiate with institutionalized hetero-normativity in their everyday practices of intimate coupling. How these practices of coupling take shape within structural and cultural relations of family, class, gender and generation are explored. The power relations associated with subjects’ narratives of ‘traditional’, ‘modern’, ‘Indian’ and ‘Western’ notions of intimacy are also critically interrogated.

The fourth chapter of analysis is on “Expressions of Heterosexual Intimacy: Negotiating the *Bhadralok* Distinction”. By exploring urban middle-class distinction of expressions of heterosexual intimacy, this chapter understands how intimate expressions are culturally

constructed, socially ordered and linguistically mediated. By nuancing the nature of intimacy of intimate rituals and intimate language, the analysis highlights the processes through which 'personal' and 'intimate' expressions are mediated by hegemonic codes of gender and middle-class discourses of 'respectability' and 'taste'. Finally, the analysis will bring out the multiple ways in which these hegemonic codes are maintained and altered in the everyday 'scripting' of intimacy, and within a rather fragmented and heterogeneous middle-class.

The 'How' of the Research:

My research is based on an auto-ethnographic (Reed-Danahay, 1997) epistemological approach, narrative interviewing (Riessman, 1993), and a deconstructive discourse analysis (Macleod, 2002), the details of which are outlined in the chapter on methodology. I must admit that the methodological issues concerned with eliciting stories of intimacy and thereby doing a research on heterosexual intimate relations, were complicated and culturally challenging. The ethical discourse in the overall ethnographic enquiry was related to complex issues of power and privacy. This was taken care of by 'dialogical research' (Schrijvers, 1991: 169 cited in Heaphy, 2007: 45) and a reflexive negotiation between the researcher and the researched. My auto-ethnographic experience as ethnography of my home, my culture and myself is intertwined with the ethics of a 'reflexive methodology' (Heaphy, 2007: 44-45) which recognizes the researcher's subjectivity and positionality and the context of research in shaping the sociological narrative of the research (Plummer, 1983; Steier, 1991).

In this context my research seeks to be what I call, a 'reflexivity of reflexivity' that brings out power, difference and otherness from within the most reflexive intimate negotiations and their narrations. The conceptualizations/practice of such kind of reflexivity is theoretically and epistemologically embedded within Bourdieu's understanding of 'reflexive sociology' and Foucault's concept of difference and discourse. It particularly takes inspiration from 'radical difference theories' such as feminist and post-colonial theories' understanding of 'difference within difference', (Heaphy, 2007: 180), and from a 'reflexive methodology' (Heaphy, 2007: 44-45) that recognizes the power associated with any form of narration and any form of reflexivity.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Heterosexual identities and intimacies within contemporary urban middle-class Bengal are mediated by colonial, post-colonial, national and trans-national discourses of gender, sexuality, class and family relations. The chapter identifies the multiple discourses with which these relations and identities are infused. The normative basis of modernity and its critiques within which the research question is contextualized will also be explored. Dimensions of modernity like industrialization, individualization and hegemonic heterosexuality with which heterosexual intimate relations and identities are interconnected, are theoretically examined in relation to the 'individualization thesis' of reflexive modernization and their critiques by 'anti-individualization thesis' and 'connectedness thesis'. The normative basis of Enlightenment-induced modernity and its trans-national universal claims of 'progress' which are legitimated within post-colonial nations by a hegemonic power of colonial modernity and progress, is then critically interrogated in order to culturally contextualize the research question. The universalization of a homogenous modernity is theoretically contested by poststructuralist deconstruction of truth claims, post-colonial historians' appreciation for multiple modernities and post-colonial feminists' appeal for a 'politics of difference'. Notwithstanding their different and conflicting theoretical positionalities, these theoretical bases share an appreciation for multiple languages of subjectivity and power. Hence, they are important in understanding the multiple ways of negotiating heterosexual intimacy that are contingent, and situated in global and local histories and institutions.

Appreciating Western academic scholarship on heterosexual intimate relations was theoretically necessary. This is not merely because of the lack of academic focus on such areas within India, particularly Bengal, but more importantly because of the intertwining of nationalist and trans-nationalist discourses that shape heterosexual intimate relations and identities within Bengal. European colonization and its cultural politics of class and gendering that mediated colonial Bengal, make it particularly pertinent to critically engage with Euro-Western scholarship on hetero-normativity that has informed intimate relations within colonial and also post-colonial Bengali *bhadrasamaj* (respectable society synonymous with middle-class society). Sociology within Bengal has not only paid little attention to the cultural meaning-making tradition of interactionism to understand a processual dynamic of gender, class, family and heterosexual relations within an everyday context, but has also often missed situating these processes within the socio-historical politics of imperialism and nationalism in Bengal. By far it remained complacent with post-colonial historians' engagement with these problems, perhaps given the 'historical' nature of this engagement. Post-colonial history, however, is inseparable from a sociological analysis of intimate relations within post-colonial Bengal because of post-colonial Bengali society's intimacy with the colonial, and cannot therefore be left to the strict purview of history only. This research aims to fill in these academic voids. Academic dialogues thereby become both a cross-cultural and a cross-disciplinary necessity. This is particularly pertinent to my research question where something as basic as intimacy is obviously expected to be critically appreciated through multiple and competing discourses and disciplines. I will now elucidate the sociological premise of intimate relations in order to specify my broad

theoretical point of departure and then provide a critical review of the sociological bases of modernity with which these are interconnected.

The broad sociological premise upon which this research on intimate relations is based is Mills' (1959) concept of Sociological Imagination, the 'quality of mind' that enables one to grasp 'history and biography' and the 'relations between the two within society' (6). Mills argued that we need to develop a way of understanding the interactions between individual lives and society because neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both (1959: 3). The necessity of translating 'personal troubles' into 'public issues' thus lies at the heart of Mills' Sociological Imagination (1959: 8). This understanding is crucial to a sociological analysis of personal intimate lives and private emotions. In the words of Mills, "personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues...and the problems of history-making....the meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles- and to the problems of the individual life" (1959: 226). My examination of heterosexual intimacy lies in being able to appreciate this mutual co-constitution of 'personal troubles' and 'public issues'. Men do not usually define their apparently private lives in terms of 'historical change and institutional contradiction', however (Mills, 1959: 3). People generally find it difficult to comprehend how the dynamics of their personal relationships could be determined by relations of power (Sarsby, 1983: 1). This supposed dichotomy between intimate emotions and power has been seen by feminists to map onto another supposed dichotomy between the 'private' and the 'public' which, it is argued, supports the mistaken belief that power

only manifests itself in the public sphere of life (Beauvoir, 1972; Delphy, 1984; Dworkin, 1987; Ingraham, 1996; Smart, 1996b).

Sociologists, particularly feminist sociologists, have questioned the putative boundaries between public and private and have argued that intimacy and its underlying emotions are, in fact, socially patterned, culturally 'scripted' and linguistically mediated (Barthes, 1978; Hochschild, 1983; Jagger, 1989; Lutz, 1990). Emotions are structured by our forms of understanding (Rosaldo, 1984: 143); and our subjectivities, which embody these emotions, are very much a part of everyday cultural competencies and narratives (Johnson, 1986). However, although our subjectivities, including our emotions are shaped and structured by socio-cultural processes, we do not simply passively accept them. We actively participate in relating ourselves to the structures which, in part, explains our strength of subjection to them (Jackson, 1999). We give meaning to what it means to be in love by learning the cultural 'scripts' and positioning ourselves within discourses (Weedon, 1987), constructing 'narratives of self' (Jackson, 1999; Giddens, 1992). Cultural scenarios provide 'scripts' for emotion, personal enactment of the scripts informs and maintains the cultural scenarios and in some cases produces new scripts, enhancing or contravening those already in existence (Gagnon and Simon, 1974). Moreover, the discourses around individual subjectivities which have emerged in the past few centuries have been intricately intertwined with discourses around gender (Beauvoir, 1972; Cancian, 1986; Giddens, 1992; Lutz, 1990; Seidman, 1991).

The sociology of intimate relations is now analyzed within the socio-cultural and economic bases of modernity, located in industrialization, hegemonic heterosexuality or hetero-normativity and individualization.

Intimacy and Industrialization:

Broadly, the narrative of heterosexual intimacy and its associated ideas of romantic love, companionate marriage and the nuclear family has been identified by anthropologists, historians and sociologists to be intertwined with the rise of modern industrial societies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Engels, 1891; Giddens, 1992; Luhmann, 1986; Stone, 1977). With the shift from an agricultural way of life to an industrial one, marriage ceased to be an economic necessity of joint family production from one generation to the next. It came to be a site not for economic production but for emotional security and companionship. With an expansion of the labour market in the first decades of the twentieth century that enabled women to go out to work (Illouz, 1997) and the rise of individual capitalist freedom, there is a shift in focus and importance of broader kinship obligations to that of the conjugal unit.

However, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) analysis of this new bourgeois economy and culture opens up a contradictory nature of the bourgeois ideology. They say that bourgeois economy required a compatible socio-cultural setup that could ensure its survival. Without the nuclear family, there would be no bourgeois society with its typical working conditions and without the traditional unequal division of gender roles between the man as the wage-earner in the public sphere and the woman as the house-worker in the private sphere, there would be no nuclear family. Something was therefore required to conceal this contradiction that is, a modern industrial order with a modern family form run ironically by traditional gender roles. In short, it had to simply conceal the feudal nature of industrial society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 25-28). "These feudal 'gender fates' are mitigated, cancelled out, aggravated or concealed by our commitment

to love one another” (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 27), and by the bourgeois ideological creation of a certain discourse of romantic love where discourses can work to conceal or legitimate relations of subordination and domination (Delphy, 1984). Such “discourses can be internally contradictory while at another level serving to hide such contradiction” (Jackson, 1996: 116). This process is evident in modern romantic ideals. Love, then, far from being liberated by capitalism, is critiqued as a mystifying ideology that reinforces stereotypical femininity as selfless and nurturing while also being responsible for reproducing the labour force (Engels, 1891; Van Every, 1996). Overall it means acceptance of and belief in the notion that relationships require an ongoing emotional labour and nurturance if bonds are to survive (Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 1997). For instance Kipnis (1998) draws on Marxist language to argue that companionate marriage not only facilitates the reproduction of labour but in fact has itself become an onerous mode of production for both men and women. Modern married couples indoctrinated by ideologies of intimacy (often considered as markers of progress) slog away at the work of conjugality and the idea that marriage ‘takes work’ (Kipnis, 1998: 291).

This indoctrination by ideologies of intimacies has been noted by various feminists to be highly gendered in character. This gendered aspect is institutionalized through hegemonic heterosexuality (Van Every, 1996) or hetero-normativity whose normative status is legitimated through institutions such as the nuclear family and through discourses that render other sexualities deviant and abnormal (Hockey et al., 2007: 23; Foucault, 1990; Weeks et al., 1999). The rise of industrialization engendering the concept of nuclear family is also therefore integral to the concept hetero-normativity at

the levels of institution, practice, experience and identity (Jackson, 1996: 30). The following section is an engagement with the theoretical debates on hegemonic heterosexuality or hetero-normativity.

Intimacy and Hetero-normativity:

Heterogeneous feminisms echoed the same voice in identifying the personal as political and theorized thereby the power-laden personal intimate spaces in terms of coercive sexuality (MacKinnon, 1982; Millett, 1972), penetrative heterosexuality (Dworkin, 1987), compulsive heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), and exploitative heterosexual love (Beauvoir, 1972; Firestone, 1972). Narratives of romantic love are noted to be differentiated by gender, discursively constructing for us gender specific subject positions (Jackson, 1999; Richardson, 1996). Men's distancing of themselves from emotion, fear of commitment, their fear of loss of control, has been noted by a number of writers and is experienced by women as a problematic aspect of heterosexual relationships (Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Cancian, 1986; Hite, 1988; Mansfield and Collard, 1988). For instance, to be overly emotional and expressive for a Western male particularly within the Anglo-Saxon culture is to bring his masculinity into question for it is strictly a feminine domain (Jackson, 1999: 108). According to Giddens (1992) historically "men have tended to be 'specialists in love' only in respect of the techniques of seduction or conquest....the connection between romantic love and intimacy was suppressed" (60). For them, at least apparently, love remained closer to *amour passion* or passionate love. Interestingly, however, although men were cynical about romantic love, they were in favour of the feminization of 'respectable love' and for instance would never wed a whore.

This double standard sexual reputation was concealed by the hegemonic construction of 'good' and 'bad' women, of 'Madonnas and whores', 'women you bed and women you wed', 'slags and drags' (Holland et al., 1998: 11; Evans, 2003: 112). The power of heterosexuality is sustained and reinforced through the power of 'the-male- in- the-head' which lies at the heart of hetero-normativity (Holland et al., 1998). 'Hetero-normativity' or hegemonic heterosexuality is hegemonic in its construction as a coherent, universal, monolithic, fixed and the 'natural' way of being (Richardson, 1996: 2) that conceals its sociocultural and historial specificity through the 'heterosexual imaginary' (Ingraham, 1996) and the 'heterosexual matrix', a "grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized" (Butler, 1990: 151). The structure and desire of modern intimate relations is therefore typically mediated through dominant, heterosexual gender norms (Richardson, 1996; Smart, 1996b; Jackson, 1999). As Bartky (1990), through a Foucauldian critique of power notes, the desire to be sexually attractive appears to be a profoundly important aspect of heterosexual feminine identity and bound up with disciplinary practices through which docile feminine bodies are produced.

However, the 'cultural dupe' (Jackson, 1999: 118), or 'dope' (Davis, 1991: 80) notion has been challenged particularly in relation to reading of romantic fiction (Radway, 1987). A common theme of romance narratives is the idea that women can tame the male beast by getting him into the bonds of love (Modleski, 1984). The power it delivers is of course often illusory (Langford, 1992 cited in Jackson, 1999: 117) for it keeps untouched the structural basis of power and inequality in heterosexual relationships. What she is providing is emotional labour which, like domestic labour, may offer her a

sense of self worth while simultaneously being exploitative (Bartky, 1990). The point, however, is that “romanticism and realism can simultaneously coexist at different levels of our subjectivities. It is perfectly possible to be critical of heterosexual monogamy, dismissive of romantic fantasy and still fall passionately in love: a fact which many feminists can themselves testify to” (Jackson, 1999: 118) or as Jackson puts it “even sociologists fall in love” (1999: 94). “Romantic ideals can be deeply embedded in our subjectivities even when we are critical of them” (Jackson, 1999: 118).

It is pertinent in this context to appreciate that although feminists agree with the power of hetero-normativity, they do not succumb to the political nihilism of viewing heterosexuality as monolithic and un-negotiated (Davis, 1991: 82). Unless we find new ways of speaking about *heterosexualities*, we cannot appreciate the multiplicity of its meanings and experiences or the agencies through which subject’s negotiate institutionalized heterosexuality at the level of their lived experiences (Smart, 1996b; Jackson, 1999). However, just as we should appreciate the nuance that heterosexuality is heterogeneous and plural, at times we need to collectivize its differences, as when recognizing heterosexual privilege and its naturalization (Smart, 1996b: 170) and the ‘institutionalization of gender hierarchy’ within the ‘system’ heterosexuality (Jackson, 1999: 164). Feminist discussions of heterosexuality frequently distinguish between heterosexuality as institution and as practice or experience (Jackson, 1999; Richardson, 1996; Robinson, 1993; Smart, 1996b; Hockey et al., 2007). Although these aspects are interlinked, the distinction enables us to avoid the frequent construction of heterosexuality as monolithic and devoid of any complexity or competing meanings.

In this context of appreciating heterosexualities as experiences rather than a historically and culturally undifferentiated, over determining top-down, repressive force, a Foucauldian (1990) analysis of power as constitutive rather than merely repressive (95) could be useful. It sensitizes us to the multiplicity and contradictory ways in which heterosexuality is constructed and regulated, particularly at the level of individual subjectivities (Weedon, 1987). Various heterosexual feminists, for instance, have personally struggled against hetero-normativity, questioned and reconceptualized phallogentric models of sexuality and defined individual pleasure in ways that cannot be read as passivity (Smart, 1996b; Hollway, 1993, Segal, 1994).

Foucault has, however, been critiqued by feminists for his gender blindness and for not linking his concept of socially diffuse power to structural analysis of inequalities (Ramazanoglu, 1993). As argued by Jackson (1999: 20), "The discourses around sexuality circulating within modern Western culture have been framed from a predominantly white and middle-class, as well as male and heterosexual, perspective, and bear the marks of our imperialist history". Therefore, any critique of heterosexuality that attends to its institutionalization as a hegemonic norm, should also analyze the intersectionality of heterosexuality with the discourses of race (Mohanty, 1991) and class (Skeggs, 1997; Lawler, 1999). With the incorporation of the sociological mediations of race, class and gender, a Foucauldian understanding of sexuality as an object of regulatory discourses and practices can be made more appropriate. Jackson argues that libertarian arguments use Foucault selectively, emphasizing only that aspect of his work which sees 'bodies and pleasures' as sites of resistance to power, not recognizing the constitutive effects of power as creating the very desire (Jackson,

1999: 20). A Foucauldian analysis of the 'technologies of self' and the analysis of desires as discursively constitutive can be useful if it is complemented with the regularity and pervasiveness of the gender hierarchy of patriarchal power (Ramazanoglu, 1993; Jackson, 1999; McNay, 1992). Although a strictly Foucauldian (1980) concept of 'discourse' counterposes it to ideology, it is sociologically necessary for feminists to view "discourses as ideological in their effects" because discourses are not divorced from structural inequalities characterizing the societies in which they are produced (Jackson, 1999: 21, 116).

It is useful in this context to bring in Butler's understanding of the process of becoming a subject in order to appreciate to an extent the relationship between our individual desires and the discourses circulating within society. Butler's writings draw from Foucault's works on 'subjectification' and 'regulatory power', where power does not affect pre-existing subjects but in fact shapes and forms subjects. Thus to be "subject to a regulation is also to become subjectivated by it, that is, to be brought into being as a subject precisely through being regulated" (Butler, 2004: 41). To Butler, our bodies are constituted politically by social vulnerability (18) as the very idea of 'being a person' relates to the desire of 'being recognized'. Recognition in turn is dependent on existing social norms that are located outside of one's immediate choices or control. It is in this paradoxical situation of critique of normalizing practices and need for recognition for a subject to exist – where feminist politics is located.

Plummer suggested that as we approached the millennium we were faced with two contending stories of gender, 'a narrative of abolished gender' and 'a narrative of polarized gender' (1995: 158). This basic paradox of modern feminism of undersanding

‘woman’ as a collective political identity and yet as simultaneously fragmented (Snitow, 1990:9 cited in Glover and Kaplan, 2007: 6-7) is a concern that echoes a classic Durkheimian problematic (1893)- what explains enduring connections and togetherness in social bonds (intimate bonds or gendered bonds in this context) that are enmeshed in a strong individualist culture. This Durkheimian concern that is broadly the concern of sociology even in its contemporary times which tries to grapple with the interrelation between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984), is also a shared concern of the proponents of reflexive modernization or individualization thesis (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, 1995; Bauman, 2000). The sociological problematic of the collective versus the specific came with a culture of individualization and was echoed in the narratives of gender, intimacy and individualization. For instance, with increasing individualism, men and women wanted to become themselves at the same time when they wanted to become partners to each other in the face of weakening external bonds (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). This brings us to the question of intimacy that is constructed within individualized cultures and analyzed by theorists of the ‘individualization thesis’ who offer a sociology of intimacy but often at the cost of over exaggerating the individual over the social and cultural (Smart, 2007; Jamieson, 1999; Gross, 2005). The following section is a review of the thesis and its critiques in the context of intimate relations.

Intimacy and Individualization:

Stone, (1977) used the concept of “affective individualism” to convey the increasing glorification of personal emotion in England during the eighteenth century which he linked to a turn towards companionate marriage during that period. A companionate

marital ideal is part of a larger cultural 'transformation of intimacy' and its associated rise of the reflexive 'narrative of self' (Giddens, 1991; 1992). Along with Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2002) and Bauman (2000) have been among the more influential European voices engaged in debates over the current context of intimacy amidst a rising concept of individualization.

Underlying this culture of institutional individualization and reflexive modernization are three interrelated propositions of increased capacity of self reflexivity, individualization and de-traditionalization. These changes of late modernity involve a 'transformation of intimacy' facilitated by a transformation of modern kinship, away from relationships of social obligation and towards "pure relationships", in which relationships are governed by individual desire, pleasure, choice, and mutual satisfaction (Giddens, 1992). To Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), the growth of reflexive orientations to personal relationships which implies self conscious negotiations and reciprocal considerations in marriage and other romantic bonds occurs at precisely the historical moment when former social supports and structures of all kinds like the traditional family recede, leaving behind an institutionally generated need for individualized life strategies in most parts of our lives. How one lives becomes a "biographical solution to the systemic contradictions" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxii). The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity becomes the central character of our time (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 22-23).

They suggest that in late modernity which is by nature a risk society where traditional bindings like feudal bonds or religion fade away, love becomes a major source of

satisfaction giving meaning to life. It becomes one's secular religion (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 168). However, as love becomes more important than ever before at the same time it becomes more elusive. Although love is a product of individualization it is in a way a move against it (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 182). As much as it lays stress on being different, being one's own self, it promises togetherness to all those lone individuals (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 196).

A pessimistic interpretation of this 'transformation of intimacy' is 'liquid love' (Bauman, 2003) in 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000), of men and women with weak bonds, specifically with none of the strong durable bonds that would allow the possibility of a stable self-definition and self-assertion that Giddens, as I will show, has espoused. Bauman (2000) expresses the contradictory nature of this institutionalized individualism as conflicting desires to tighten the bonds yet keep them loose, engendering what he conceptualizes as 'Liquid Love' in a 'Liquid Modernity'.

An optimistic interpretation of the 'transformation of intimacy' is a 'democratized intimacy' based on 'pure relationship' which despite making relationships more fragile, give rise to a more gender equal 'confluent love' or shared sense of self disclosure and 'plastic sexuality' or a more responsive or creative form of sexuality, that is mutually pleasurable (Giddens, 1992). "A pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver" (Giddens, 1991: 6). This transformation of intimacy is intertwined with the reflexive 'narrative of self' (Giddens, 1992: 75). It is the 'freeing' of agency from structure that allows for increasing reflexivity with regard to the norms, rules, expectations and forms of authority associated with the 'social' life of modernity (Adkins,

2002: 3, 16; Lash, 1994: 111). Giddens (1992) in this context argues that self-reflexivity and especially the performance of a 'reflexive project of the self' where self-identity is constituted by a reflexive ordering of self-narratives, is key to participation in the contemporary affective practice of intimacy, involving emotional and intimate quality.

There have been critiques of this conceptualization of reflexivity which set the limits of reflexivity and account for the 'structural conditions of reflexivity' (Lash, 1994: 120). Heaphy argues that like other kinds of distinctions and relations such as gender, race and ethnicity, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus that is associated with class distinctions and class relations, set limits on the reflexivity of social action and interaction (2007: 179). Instead of bracketing off the life world to arrive at individualized forms of knowledge, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology involves 'situating knowers in their life world' (Lash, 1994: 156). "Bourdieu's vision of reflexive sociology provides an important corrective to analyses such as Giddens' that overstate the possibilities that reflexivity affords for agency and empowerment" (Heaphy, 2007: 179). Unlike Beck and Giddens, whose accounts foreground radical individualization "(I am I)", Lash, through Bourdieu's sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), provides a concept of 'hermeneutic reflexivity' (Adkins, 2002: 37). This reflexivity breaks with the objectivity of Beck and Giddens who presume a subject who exists outside of a world and for whom the world is conceptually mediated. McNay, however, critiques Lash's analysis of the limits of reflexivity because of his gender blindness and lack of awareness that 'hermeneutic reflexivity' may be unevenly constituted within and across fields (1999). Through this we may then ask if Lash's reflexivity is exclusionary to women and his 'we' of reflexive modernity is actually masculinist (Adkins, 2002: 46)?

This brings us back to the appreciation of intimate relations and reflexive practices as mediated by gender relations and their socio-cultural embeddedness within other relations of class and race and generation (Smart, 2007; Jamieson, 1999, 2011). In this context, it is important to appreciate Heaphy's (2007) argument that the theory of reflexive modernization, in promoting 'new universalities and commonalities in human experience' (170) that cut across 'old boundaries of class, generation, geographical location' (9) and where there are no 'others' (4); often fails to recognize and therefore incorporate the centrally important questions of 'otherness', 'difference' and their strategies of power that heavily shape everyday personal intimate lives (4). The theory of reflexivity failed to recognise the limits of reflexivity and therefore, "failed to be *reflexive*" (Heaphy, 2007: 177). The following section, through a critique of the individualization thesis and broadly and perhaps grossly categorized under the label of 'anti-individualization thesis', is an appreciation of the sociological relationalities of intimate and personal lives through the conceptualization of the 'individual' as 'person' (Smart, 2007).

'Transformation of Intimacy' and 'De-traditionalization of Intimacy' Reconsidered through 'Connectedness Thesis'

Drawing on an impressive array of research on marriage and families, Jamieson (1998, 1999) provides an empirical assessment of the contemporary intimate ideals and finds that the transformation of intimacy as suggested by Giddens has been over exaggerated, for there is still evidence of unequal gendered division of housework and emotional rewards in marriage. She shows that these families are based not solely on the ideals of pleasure and self realization but also on traditional notions of commitment,

care, practical responsibility and sacrifice. Although there is an interconnection between public and private stories and shifts in the former will gradually affect shifts in the latter, some divergence between these two realms is not unexpected. Public stories are necessarily schematic and partial and offer stereotypes and ideals rather than the details and contradictory complexity of real life (Jamieson; 1998: 159). An empirical appreciation of families, intimacies and private lives can reveal more complex contradictions that are unproblematically generalized in public stories such as Giddens' 'transformation of intimacy' in late modernity or reflexive modernization.

Similarly Gross's reconsideration of the de-traditionalization of intimacy (2005) argues that the de-traditionalization or individualization thesis is theoretically 'under-specified' and 'empirically problematic' (288) as it fails to distinguish between two different ways in which socio-cultural traditions can mediate social action. What the theorists of individualization seem to have in mind is the decline of "regulative traditions" relating to intimacy and the family. There is some evidence that this tradition is in decline but that does not mean that self-reflexivity and unconstrained agency has completely replaced it. Social action is also shaped by "meaning-constitutive traditions" which involve patterns of sense making, transmitting from one generation to the next (Gross, 2005: 288). Although the distinction is only an analytic one, regulative traditions, Gross argues, shape action by constraining it from the outside, whereas meaning-constitutive traditions shape action by enabling it from the inside (296). Gross stresses the importance of sedimented habituality and the impact of inter-subjectively shared cultural and linguistic traditions on individuals. A semiotic and narratological concept of self is

embedded in culture and history and is constituted by these shared meanings that pose limits to its unbounded creativity and reflexivity.

In this context, it is pertinent to bring in Smart's (2007) 'connectedness thesis' that is sociologically grounded in many of her empirical research projects. Connectedness is not a normative concept but is important for defining the 'personal' in personal life that incorporates all sorts of families, relationships and intimacies, diverse sexualities, friendships and acquaintanceships. The personal here is significant in denoting the importance of the individual, yet avoids the sense of separateness and autonomy that overlook its socio-cultural embeddedness (Smart, 2007: 188). The individualization thesis which focuses solely on fragmentation and differentiation needs to be counter balanced by an awareness of reciprocal emotion, entwinement, memory, history and all forms of sociality that keeps people connected (Smart, 2007: 189).

A very important sociological contribution made by Smart's (2007) theorization of personal lives is the social significance of the 'imaginary', memory and nostalgia. She argues after Mizztal (2003) that individual memory is profoundly collective and social as it relies on specific contexts to be meaningful and on communication to become a memory (39). The imaginary therefore is connected with memory and is not limited to individual or personal imaginings but also connects with the social and cultural level (Smart, 2007: 49). Her novel contribution lies in the sociological acknowledgement that although recall is often a largely conscious process, what is recalled may come with multiple layers of desire, meanings and imagination that may go beyond the simple rational or conscious (39). Her conceptualization of the imaginary is sociologically radical because it establishes both the imaginary and the irrational as highly socio-

cultural and therefore as viable for sociological enquiry. She effectively critiques the Enlightenment-induced dichotomy between the rational and the irrational and real and imaginary. Smart argues, this concept of the imaginary and its recognition as a social possibility, complements Morgan's (1996) understanding of family 'practices' or 'doing' by stressing the entwinement of thinking and doing (2007: 37-38; Griffiths, 1995). She argues that the concept of memory in personal life contributes to the increasingly iconic status of families in our cultural imaginary (39) or; how the families we live 'by' in our imagination impinge on the actual routine practices or the families we live 'with' (Gillis, 1996: xv). Smart's theorization on connectedness of personal life therefore, rather than downplaying the cultural significance of family, broadens its scope to include diverse arrangements of thinking and living that thrive simultaneously on creativity and commitment. It is in Smart's (2007) theoretical focus on the 'cultural turn' on personal lives (see Chapter 2) that links her 'connectedness thesis' to Gross' conceptualization of 'meaning-constitutive traditions' which, in turn can be connected with the meaning-making tradition of interpretivist and interactionist sociology.

Similarly in their theorization on family, friends and personal communities, Pahl and Spencer (2010) demonstrate that far from being 'isolated, anomic, or narcissistically self focused' people still feel committed and connected to others through their personal communities in a significant and meaningful way (207). To claim that the family in the traditional social sense is unsustainable in practice does not imply that social obligations based on hierarchy and consanguinity are necessarily abandoned. It is interesting to see how they are modified where one set of values is not replaced by another, rather the two sets fuse where principles of equality and hierarchy exists comfortably in the

same relation (Paul and Spencer, 2010: 203). They illustrate the simultaneous coexistence of values of choice and obligation through the fusion of kith and kin (203). Allan (2008) similarly notes, the boundaries between family and friendship are becoming less clear cut and are often getting blurred in people's construction of their micro-social worlds (6). For instance, they note empirical evidence where, in some relationships, friends are perceived as playing family like roles and family as playing friend like roles (Spencer and Pahl, 2006: 118). This process of fusion is explicitly acknowledged in the language that people use when referring to a family like or a friend like tie, for example, calling a friend, a brother or a sister, a friend (Spencer and Pahl, 2006).

Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) in their sociologically grounded research on the 'cultures of intimacy and care' in the early 21st century noted that "across a range of lifestyles and sexualities....friendship occupied a central place in the personal lives of [their] interviewees" as an 'ethical practice' (146). In such contexts, it becomes necessary to understand the sociological importance of friendship, its forms of sociality that are, in fact, heavily mediated by class, gender, family structures and relationships (Allan, 2008) and can therefore impact on heterosexual identities and intimacies in personal lives. Understanding friendships especially in its gendered form as homosociality is therefore necessary to connect to my central research question and its gendered dynamic.

Intimacy and Friendship:

Given this immense socio-cultural significance of friendship in personal and intimate spaces, it is ironic that sociologists have so rarely seriously and consistently engaged

with its meanings and practices. With the exception of Simmel and Tonnies of the early sociologists who devoted much of their work to an explicit analysis of forms of sociality and how these were patterned by social conditioning, friendship has seemed well removed from concerns like class conflict and class consciousness (Marx), forms of community and solidarity (Durkheim) and understanding of status and social stratification (Weber). Yet interestingly all these problems point in some fashion to the relevance of patterns of friendship and other associational bonds inherent in these traditional sociological interest (Allan, 1989: 2). Notwithstanding the important contributions of some sociologists, no full-fledged sociology of friendship has been theorized (Allan, 1989: 3). Within the already scarce literature on intimacy and personal lives, there is even less literature on friendship and analysis of its gendered nature. Theorizations on intimacy have focussed more on heterosexual intimacy than homosocial intimacy and have failed to appreciate their co-constitution. This can possibly be connected to the birth of sociology amidst a bourgeois revolution which as we have seen needed to thrive on this modern ideology of heterosexual intimacy. However, understanding of intimate lives including heterosexual intimate spaces is dependent on an understanding of friendships which in their highly gendered character (Allan, 1989: 65-84), shape and are shaped by heterosexual intimacies and identities of masculinities and femininities. Since gender is constructed as an ongoing basis in social life (Connell, 1987; West and Zimmerman, 1987), even in times of gender relaxed norms of sociality, cross gender friendships are often limited by the possibility of sexual undercurrents that impinge on these friendships and forms of sociality (Adam, 1989). Gender quite remarkably affects friendships almost across all ages with fewer cross

gender friendships reported (Allan, 1989: 84). The following sections will therefore review literature on male and female homosocial intimacy and their associated concepts.

a) Intimacy and Male Homosociality:

Homosociality refers to social bonds between persons of the same sex and, more broadly, to same sex focussed social relations (Bird, 1996: 121). Issues of homosocial friendships are integrally intertwined with hetero-normativity. An understanding of the processes of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) that construct heterosexual relationships are often best captured within gendered friendships that are co-constituted by heterosexual relations and identities. For instance, male homosociality is important to understand because it shapes and organises heterosexual relations in many dynamic ways (Flood, 2008) as the analysis chapters will later show. Male homosocial relationships therefore perpetuate gender inequalities and the dominance of particular hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Bird, 1996). "Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or de-legitimation of alternatives" are widely documented features of hegemonic masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 846). As gender is always relational (Connell, 1995: 44), patterns of masculinities are always socio-culturally defined in contradistinction to some model of femininities, real or imaginary in which subordinated masculinities through their agency and conformity to the normative, act both in compliance with and in contestation of hegemonic masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 848). Hegemonic performances of manhood are also carried out by identifying with and simultaneously competing against other men (Kimmel, 1994).

It is interesting to analyze in this context, two emerging paradoxes in the practices and organization of these homosocial intimate spaces. The first paradox is that while on the one hand, hegemonic masculinity defines its status by the rejection of others like women, gay, lesbian, transgender persons and men of different region or origins; on the other hand, it also depends on these marginalized and derogated 'other/s' to ensure its hegemonic and dominant status, for self definition as real men with true masculinity (Gough, 1998; Connell, 1995, 1987). Further, the humour, ridicule and abuse through which other groups of people are constructed as weak or laughable and excluded and oppressed by these 'real men'; suggests ironically, some degree of anxiety around and fear of the power that other people could wield over their dominant power (Gough, 1998).

The 'humour-oppression-anxiety' discourse could be connected to 1990s culture, often viewed from within the academia and beyond as 'pro-feminist', even 'emasculating' (Gough, 1998: 431). For instance, a particular feature of doing masculinity in contemporary society concerns suppression whether of masculinist ideas such as aggression towards feminist colleagues or partners or politically correct sentiment such as pro-feminist ideas in the presence of 'old boys'. This is referred by Gough as a phenomenon of 'biting your tongue' (183). This observation opens up the possibility and the need to appreciate masculinity as multiple, conflicting and multi-layered, rather than masculinity in the monolithic (Connell, 1995). Although he sees heterosexual men as entrenched in the defence of patriarchy, Connell (1987) also finds reasons for men to want to change this system, even though they are beneficiaries of such oppressive structures, through 'complicit' masculinity (Connell, 1995:79). Hegemonic forms are

therefore never totally comprehensive. Not all men actually meet the normative standards, like 'effeminate or unassertive heterosexuals', 'subordinated and marginalized' groups (76-80). Robinson argues that if we are to see masculinity as contested, ambiguous, contradictory and open to change, then this ambiguity-simultaneously both vulnerable and powerful, is necessary (1996: 115).

The second paradox of male homosociality is the idea of a potentially unbroken continuum between homosocial and homosexual - a continuum whose visibility and possibility, for men, in our society can be radically disrupted (Sedgwick, 1985). Taking on Rubin's (1975) argument that patriarchal heterosexuality can best be understood as traffic in women for cementing male bonding, Sedgwick (1985) in the context of nineteenth century British literature argues that men have homosocial relationships that verge on being homosexual. In such a case, a woman is exchanged between the two men as a sexual object in order to deflect and obscure their homosexuality. Sedgwick argues that Western culture in the twentieth century is obsessed with the dangerous possibility of homosexual connection, and guards this possibility through a complex network of homophobic violence. Integral to this violence is the deep rooted anxiety that the putative fundamental distinction between the 'hetero' and the 'homo' is, in fact, non-existent (Sedgwick, 1991). One of Sedgwick's key points is that men of privilege suffer from homosexual panic because assuming the habits and trappings of power seems to run dangerously close to seeking the sexual company of other men (1991: 186). Other authors have also suggested that male homosociality in particular, has involved a sexual or erotic bond (Flood, 2008). In fact, some homosocial practices among seemingly heterosexual men seem potent with homoeroticism such as those

involving genital contact or genital exposure (Agostino, 1997; Muir and Seitz, 2004). In the context of Bollywood melodramas, Ghosh (2007) notes that even in many of the most masculinist films based on the depiction of hegemonic masculinity, homoeroticism can be read between overlapping lines of love and friendship, particularly by queer friendly spectators who can read such male bondings as evocative of romantic friendships and homoerotic love (Ghosh, 2007).

b) Intimacy and Female Homosociality:

Just as Sedgwick theorized a continuum of 'hetero' and 'homo' in the context of male homosocial space, through a different argument, Rich (1980) theorized a continuum in female homosocial bonding. Her novel contribution lies in the introduction of terms like 'lesbian existence' and 'lesbian continuum' in gender and queer studies (648). The usage of lesbianism, she argues is often associated with clinical reductionism and since the term lesbian has been perceived through the lens of such clinical gaze in its patriarchal context, female friendship and comradeship have been consciously set apart from realizing it (650). Lesbian continuum widens this constrictive clinical limitation to include a range of women identified experiences throughout every woman's history, not restricting it compulsorily to the performance of or desire for genital sexual experience with another woman. It signifies a woman identified world of a rich inner life, bonding against male tyranny and mutual sharing of practical and political support (648-649). Lesbian existence is therefore a form of resistance through female bonding and intimacy, to a compulsory heterosexual way of life. Delineating the lesbian continuum also helps us discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is not restricted to any definitive part of the body or even the body itself but is a diffused energy (650). Lorde

understands this erotic as a 'sharing of joy' whether physical, emotional, psychic or intellectual (Lorde, 1997: 280). The knowledge and experience of such an erotic energy empower us and 'make us less willing to accept powerlessness' or 'self denial' (Lorde, 1997: 281).

According to Raymond (1986), in this institutional hetero-relational society, however, most of women's personal, social, political, professional and economic relations are defined by the ideology that woman is for man. She argues, male-female relationships are here, the "really real" ones for women (11). Historically, Raymond states, friendship in the Greek homo-relational tradition that was to be the basis of the state, as considered by its philosophers, was in fact only friendship among men because the citizens of the polis were all male and women had no civic status (8). In this 'hetero-relational' world, men's destiny and desire while they include women are not encompassed by relationship with her (Beauvoir, 1972). His destiny is that of world building, together with his fellow men. Therefore unlike women's, men's world is 'homo-relational' and in no contradiction to hetero-reality. These hetero-relations, Raymond argues, 'obscured' and 'eclipsed' (1986: 11) for all women, their female friendship or 'Gyn/affection' (9) that is in a way an identification with the primal self and others like the self or women relational. She relates this concept to Aristotle's notion that "the friend is another self". Therefore female friendship according to her, begins with a companionship of the Self (6). This hetero-relational world obstructs the realization of such a self and of such a friendship.

In general, such obstacles to female bonding are couched in stereotypical patriarchal discourses like 'women are their own worst enemies' (Raymond, 1987: 6; Allan, 1989:

76). Seiden and Bart (1975) argued that the apparent truth behind such popular stereotypes is usually masked in a fashion that favours the vested interest of more powerful groups. At one level the content and nature of female friendship and the issues and concerns that unite women are, from a traditional male perspective, quite trivial. They are about the concerns that dominate many women's lives - domestic and familial matters- just as men's conversation is dominated by their usually equally mundane interests contingent upon their social location. According to Allan, (1989) the topics that unite a lot of women are perceived as trivial because men have been successful in holding the more socially esteemed and economically rewarded positions that have been defined and socially constructed as more valuable and important in relation to the undervalued, unpaid domestic servicing.

These stereotypes of undervalued female spaces and female duplicity serve to undermine the value of women as confidants and therefore correspondingly strengthen the idea of dependence on men because of their greater reliability (Seiden and Bart, 1975). However, another set of cultural stereotypes about friendships represents women's friendship as intimate relations in which disclosing intimate feelings are seen to form the basis of their sociality (Seiden and Bart, 1975; Allan, 1989). Such representations are again bolstered by the putative compatibility between intimate qualities such as closeness, empathy, caring and female identity (Rubin, 1985). Male bonding on the other hand is represented as one in which sharing activities like sports for instance, is more prevalent than sharing intimate feelings or talks and is simultaneously bolstered by the gendered cultural ideology that masculine identity is incapable of intimacy (Rubin, 1985). Walker (1994) argues that evidence from her

empirical study of friendship patterns between men and women, shows that these stereotypes are more accurately viewed as cultural ideologies than an observable gender difference in behaviour. These differences are further intersected by divisions within the same gender in terms of class and profession. She suggests that the privileging of women and intimacy lies in the emergence of the women's movement and the self conscious attempts to valorize women in response to older cultural ideologies that only men were capable of true friendship and women were not (262).

The second wave feminist movement in particular celebrated female bonding and rooted its connection to its essential feminine identity and its associations with intimate capabilities (Rubin, 1985; Raymond, 1986). Through a genealogy of female friendship, Raymond argues for instance, that the basis of 'Gyn' or the feminine self is its relational capability to anything that is female and feminine. This trans-historical Gyn suggests a possibility and even confirms that 'sisterhood is global' and 'sisterhood is powerful' (Morgan, 1984). The necessity for sisterhood arose out of the recognition that women were and are oppressed in all cultures throughout all periods of history. Sisterhood therefore became a way of expressing the spirit of women's resistance to the common global reality of women's oppression and without gyn/affection this politics and political struggle against oppression remains superficial (Raymond, 1986: 28-29). The following section is a critical interrogation of the universality of womanhood and the trans-historical 'gyn' through post-colonial feminism.

The Political Implications of Post-Colonial Feminism:

An engagement with secondary literature on intimacy has so far been read within a Western and particularly the European context. The rationale behind focusing on this context is because of Europe's colonial engagement with Bengal. Bengal's connection with a colonial modernity has influenced its values and ideologies on intimate relations. For instance, the immense impact of Victorian ideas of romantic coupling and conjugal companionship upon colonial and post-colonial Bengal, necessitated this review of Euro-Western scholarship on heterosexual intimacy. Smith's (1993) proposition of a contradiction at the heart of modernism is important in this context. While it proposes a 'universal rational human subject', it also claims that all individuals are unique (8-9). At the heart of modernity's discourse is also another contradiction; the dependence on, yet an opposition, rejection and condemnation of the 'other' for the definition of the 'self' (Banerjee, 2006). The rationality of white Western subjects was often defined in opposition to the irrationality and non-subjecthood of the colonized peoples, especially women (Mohanty, 1991: 32). This discursive and material subordination of the 'other' was interconnected with the discourse of colonial modernity and its 'politics of time'. As Banerjee argues (2006: 5), the political imperative of defining the self as modern and others as 'primitive' and 'backward', made "time appear as an empty, common denominator, wherein different peoples could be positioned in successional terms" and where "modernity appears as a temporal construct" (4). She states that to lay any claim to the label 'modern' (say, for instance, 'modern' practices of intimacy or 'modern' definition of selfhood, in the context of the research), "one must admit to history and to the haunting shadow of what I call history's colonial-anthropological imperative" (2).

Hence, Banerjee argues that a context such as “Bengal shows up modernity for what it is: always already colonial modernity” (2). It is for this reason that my research understands Bengal's modernity in terms of its negotiation with colonial modernity. Contemporary urban middleclass Bengal's post-colonial legacy is one in which the colonial is not yet unambiguously post (Said, 1995: 6). Its heterosexual relations, identities and intimacies particularly within its middle and upper middleclass society are heavily mediated by its colonial cultural politics of gendering. The gendered codes within urban Bengal akin to Victorian femininity and sexuality (Basu, 2002); notions of middleclass respectability akin to the class distinction in France (Bourdieu, 1984); the ‘benglish’ (colloquial slang for a mix of Bengali and English language) language of intimacy which simultaneously reinforces and destabilizes the English language (Hall, 1991); and more generally the tension between a global identity and a local one (Lakha, 1999), attest to this.

These post-colonial conditions manifest both affinity and difference within and between the colonizer and the colonized. The encounter between the self and other in such contexts often engenders situations of cultural ‘hybridity’ and a ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1991). This ‘third space’ which Bhabha calls contra-modernity rather than postmodernity (1991:59) conforms neither to an ‘authentic cultural tradition’ nor to a universalized modernity (Chatterjee, 1989). Hybridization which engender hybrid or mixed identities encompasses the contradictory history of colonization, destabilizes the ‘politics of polarity’ or dualistic thinking and instead, appreciates ambivalence and multiplicity. “The hybrid strategies or discourse opens up a space for negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal...It makes possible the emergence of an ‘interstitial’

agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism” (Bhabha, 1996: 58). This critique of binary and appreciation of multiplicity both within and between the global and the local resists homogenization of men and women’s experiences and is able to comprehend multiple and often competing cultural narratives of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in relation to practices of intimacy and gendered, raced, and classed identities. This has important theoretical implications for understanding heterosexual identities within my research. It deconstructs the universal category ‘men’ in recognizing the colonial cultural constructions of the ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ (Sinha, 1995) and the latter’s patriarchal politics of regaining of masculinity within their culture through ‘their women’ (Sarkar, 2001). Similarly, it interrogates the universal category ‘woman’ which conceals differences among women and privileges definitions of womanhood framed from ‘White Western viewpoints’ (Jackson, 2001: 285). Post-colonial feminism deconstructs the Euro-centric vision of feminism (Mohanty, 1991) and shows that the category ‘woman’ is not unitary (Brah, 1991). In this context, it is important to argue that ‘Gynocentric’ feminism is definitely a story of womanhood but only a partial one. Different modernities have evolved in different parts of the world, in which the very idea of a pure and originary Western modernity has become rather difficult to sustain (Mitchell, 2000 cited in Benerjee, 2006: 6).

Therefore, I seek to contextualize the research question within the specific context of India, particularly Bengal and its subjects’ narratives of heterosexual identities and intimacies. This contextualization, however, draws inspiration from feminists across the nation who recognized a politics of difference (Haraway, 1991) and critically interrogated a trans-historical, monolithic unitary heterosexuality (Smart, 1996b, 1996a).

In this contextual appreciation and application of trans-national feminisms, like Spivak, I disagree with a repressive and fundamentalist politics of claiming that “only a native can know the scene” (interview with Spivak by Arteager, 1993-1994 in Landry and Maclean, 1996: 15). I argue for an appreciation of multiple modernities (Majumdar, 2000) and the cultural politics of ‘difference and belonging’ that engender situated knowledge/knowers and its situated feminism. This approach to the situatedness of knowledge and of feminism is developed within the epistemological traditions of post-colonial feminism (Mohanty, 1991), postmodernism and its interconnection between power and truth claims (Foucault, 1980) and finally, post-colonial history and its contextualization of the ‘woman question’ within Bengali *bhadrasamaj* (Chatterjee, 1989) that connects the post-colonial with the colonial. In interrogating a universal rational human subject of Enlightenment-induced modernity, both post-modernism and post-colonialism acknowledge that the production of knowledge is caught up in multiple relations and strategies of power. Appreciative of the social and discursive construction of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ which are, in fact, mutually co-constitutive; a post-modern and post-colonial sensitivity critiques and deconstructs dualistic binaries or ‘politics of polarity’ between the self and the other and its politics of exclusion in terms of race, class and gender.

Combined with an appreciation that the discursive can have socially grounded material effects and that gender can be a product of structural hierarchy (Jackson, 2001: 285), my research employs the post-modern and the post-colonial as these re-orient feminist theory by speaking for the hitherto marginalized ‘other’ (Spivak, 1987). These theoretical perspectives, I believe, will extend the multiple representational possibilities

of feminist knowledge within post-colonial situations like that in Bengal and make it trans-nationally responsive, relational and more politically appreciative of issues of affinity and difference. This critical dialoguing with a focus on the multiple relations power in terms of gender, race, class, nationality and sexuality, with which my research question is inseparable; is theoretically and epistemologically cross disciplinary but definitely not non-sociological. A contribution to the sociology of Bengal in this context is made by this research's ability to incorporate into the discipline of sociology; the sociology of post-colonial history, post-colonial feminism and post-structural discursivity which, I argue, are already sociological. This is evident in 'interpretivist' and 'interactionist' sociology that appreciate a) mutual co-constitution of self and society (Mead, 1934) and the social and the cultural through inter-personal interactions (Hall, 1997b: 223); and b) narrative identity formation through an emphasis on meaning, action and dialogue between structure and agency (Somers, 1994: 614)

The following section will interlink the postcolonial with the post-structural and connect this to interactionist feminism in order to sociologically ground the central research question. In doing this, it will delineate from an otherwise wide ranging meaning of post-structuralism, those aspects of Foucauldian post-structuralism that have relevance for a politics of difference but that have been made useful by incorporating within its fold, feminists' concern with gender and interactionism's focus on the everyday processes of meaning-making. This focus on interactionism and its associated understanding of feminism shares common sociological concerns with post-structuralist discursivity. These are Herbert Blumers's (1969) three basic principles of interaction: people act on the basis of meanings, these meanings emerge from everyday interaction with others,

and they have to be *interpreted* by the individuals in interaction (Scott, 2009: 24). It is in these principles that I link the interactionist turn to the cultural turn without losing focus that the discursive can and do have 'real' effects on people's lives and in the way they construct narratives of selfhood and relationships.

Foucauldian, Interactionist and Post-Colonial Feminist Perspectives:

It is useful to understand the inter-connectedness of truth, power and knowledge as analyzed by Foucault. According to him, rather than knowledge being a pure search up to 'truth' (which is a chimera, for truth is already power), in fact, power operates in that processing of information which results in something being labelled as a 'fact'. However, for Foucault, power does not operate from a 'single centre' but 'through networks' and is 'exercized from innumerable points' (Foucault, 2003: 27-34). Foucault's novelty in understanding power lies in the fact that unlike the conventional Marxist or early feminist model of power which sees power simply as a form of oppression and repression (that Foucault terms as the 'repressive hypothesis'), he sees power as in fact productive, giving rise to new forms of counter behaviours, even when it is most constraining. Foucault argues, "where there is power, there is resistance" (1990: 95). He would for instance agree that, multiple discourses exists simultaneously and non-dominant discourses may offer alternative positions and modes of subjectivity through which one can challenge or resist dominant discourses of gender and gender identity (Mehta and Bondi, 1999: 70). He is able to see the production of knowledge as not wholly oppressive but as vulnerable to constant alteration and change by the marginalized groups of people within a particular context (Mills, 2003: 70). It is important to

remember, however, that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1990: 95).

Foucault’s bold assertion that wherever there is power there is necessarily resistance has, however, been critiqued by scholars due to his lack of empirical demonstration of the same (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Said, 1978). As the feminist critic Sandra Bartky argues, “Foucault seems sometimes on the verge of depriving us of vocabulary in which to conceptualize the nature and meaning of those periodic refusals of control that, just as much as the imposition of control, marked the course of human history” (1988: 79). Jackson and Scott (2010) also argue that the Foucauldian emphasis on the normative effects of discourse often makes it difficult to conceptualize agency (820). It also gives no account of how, in what intentionality subjects position themselves within discourses and resist available discursive positions (Jackson and Scott, 2010: 820). This lack of emphasis on agency and empirical evidence of specific instances of resistance and its intentionality is sought to be overcome by interactionist feminism. Interactionist feminism seeks to interconnect the focus on the discursive and the focus on the social by trying to understand how subjects actively make meaning of various subject-positions within discourses and how they are materially and culturally affected by these in the process of negotiating everyday relations and identities (Jackson and Scott, 2010). It therefore tries to appreciate that ‘if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’ (Thomas, 1923: 572 cited in Scott, 2009: 21)

This appreciation of an interactionist feminism that had been buried into the long lost tradition of micro-sociology and almost replaced by the ‘postmodern turn’ (Jackson and Scott, 2010; Jenks, 2002: xi) is brought back into this research to complement the

postmodern turn. It links the micro-sociological to the discursive, discourse to subjectivity and structure to agency. For instance, the interactionism of Simon and Gagnon (1986) effectively connects cultural narratives with the inter-subjective and the intra-psychic scripting that helps to understand how cultural scenarios get into embodied interaction and are variously negotiated and modified (Jackson and Scott, 2010: 820). Not failing to acknowledge the internal differences amongst scholars from within the interactionist school, I take inspiration from the interactionist school's general focus on multiple social selves in interaction (James, 1890; Mead, 1934). I particularly apply their understanding of the mutual co-constitution of their concept of 'I', the creative agent of social action and the "Me", the image of the self seen from the perspective of others, understood as the 'Looking Glass Self' (Cooley, 1983). Similarly I appreciate Goffman's (1959) interactionist concept of 'dramaturgy' that understands society as theatre and multiple social selves as playing multiple roles within it in according to the demands of the audience, but unlike Goffman and like a post-structuralist I do not claim for 'the real self'. It is in this regard that I distance my theoretical position from the interactionist school of thought.

However, I appreciate "the increasing value placed on the 'real' and 'authentic' and an increasing desire to discover this by whatever means are available" (Morgan, 2011: 17). Focussing on the central questions of power and discourse in shaping the 'real', and the quest for it, I bring into the sociological tradition of interactionism, feminist and post-structuralist understanding of power and difference. Such incorporations help interactionist-feminism with the analytical tools to link culture, subjectivity and discourse to everyday practices and meanings of intimacy. This also enables us to account for the

ways in which sexuality is shaped not only by gender but also simultaneously by a multiplicity of interrelated social differences and divisions like class and race, which are once again mediated through interpretive meaning-making processes of reflexivity of the self; a self that is not unitary but constructed and re-constructed through multiple sociological contexts (Jackson and Scott, 2010: 821).

This focus on the mutual co-constitution of subjective meaning-making and cultural narratives in the everyday context of experiencing and practising intimacy, takes Foucault's arguments further than he himself took and provides us with a vocabulary of resistance subject to specific cultural contexts in empirical situations. A link between the discursive power and knowledge at the historical level and an interactionist approach to interpretive meaning making in the everyday world also helps us better appreciate the racial politics of gendered meaning making – of who defines whose experience, of who speaks for whom – a concern of much of subaltern studies (Spivak, 1990) today and a concern with the 'narratives of difference and belonging' (Weedon, 2004).

For instance, the account of many Western feminists¹ theorists who tried to document the truth of women's conditions or experiences cross culturally have been challenged by women from marginalized non-Western groups who did not feel that these images accurately reflected their situations, concerns and values (Mohanty, 1991; Minh-ha,

¹ Taking after Mohanty (1991: 52), I state that my intension is not to portray the 'West' or the 'East' or 'Western feminism', or for that matter even 'feminism' as monolithic or homogenous in action or interest. What I wish to put across is the dimension of powerplay and smugness in imagining one's cultural practices as "the norm" vis-à-vis the other's; often arising out of an uneven economic and cultural the relation amidst the world system. By the same argument I am also critical of the many in-house, within country discourses of the powerful urban middle-class on that of the working class people that create such similar effects, even within the same gender.

1989). From a post-colonial feminist lens, Mohanty argues (1991: 72) that third world women, are often defined by the Western feminists as a group or category who are necessarily victimized, powerless, “religious (read “not progressive”), family oriented (read “traditional”).....domestic (read “backward”)”. Such representation of the average “third world woman”, Mohanty (1991: 66) argues, is in contrast to the implicit self representation of Western women as educated, modern, agential and having control over their bodies and sexuality. An appreciation of post-colonial feminism is theoretically and epistemologically significant for my research of a post-colonial context.

First, by bringing out the interrelated questions of gender and race, it materially enriches a Foucauldian understanding of power and truth which shape heterosexual identities and intimacies (Jackson, 2001; Ramazanoglu, 1993).

Second, by exposing the strategies of power with which knowledge claims are intertwined, it is able to deconstruct the Eurocentric claims of a homogenized modernity and problematize the strict dichotomy/binary/polarity between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ practices of heterosexual coupling (Majumdar, 2000).

Third, by critiquing a politics of polarity between self and other, it appreciates cultural hybridity of intimate ideologies and practices within a post-colonial space such as Bengal which sensitizes us to the multi-faceted patterns of cultural exchange evident in the national and trans-national discourses of intimacy within contemporary Bengal (Bhabha, 1996, 1991).

Fourth, it is able to appreciate multiple and ambivalent meanings and embodiments of heterosexual subjectivities and intimacies that cannot be understood through a dualism of 'either/or', or 'us/them' or 'West/East', premised on exclusion and purity (Hall, 1992)

Post-colonial feminists' concern with the intersectionality of gender, sexuality and race (Hooks, 1981) is enriched by a Bourdieusian sociological understanding of 'class distinction' (1984) analyzed also by feminists (Skeggs, 1997; Lawler, 1999). The following section is a Bourdieusian appreciation of the sociological imperatives of 'class-culture' on everyday lives, particularly in its relevance to the understanding of the class distinction of the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* (middle-class society) and its 'woman question'. As I will show, this conceptualization of 'class-culture' is particularly pertinent to critically appreciate urban middle-class Bengali society's project of re-moulding or re-casting women as a strategy against colonial power including their notion of women's chastity, heterosexual intimacy and patriarchal power underpinning this notion. A Bourdieusian appreciation of class distinction will provide a theoretical anchor to Bengal's national-colonial encounters which constructed women, particularly the *bhadramahila* (respectable woman, implying middle-class woman) as embodying cultural 'authenticity' in their specific middle-class location. This interesting gender-class dynamic underpinning the colonial encounter that particularly affected the Bengali middleclass is, in fact, a major reason behind taking this class as my unit of analysis. The following section elaborates on Bourdieu's understanding of class, culture, capital and class distinction.

Bourdieuian Analysis of Class-Culture: The Bengali Middle 'Class Distinction' :

It was Bourdieu's immense socio-cultural contribution that broadened the hitherto narrowly defined concept of capital to mean only economic capital by incorporating within it cultural, educational, social, symbolic and linguistic capital. An attention to the subjective dimension of classed experience and to the historical power relations which constitutes, at least partially, the classed subject can provide insights into the cultural factors that are considered significant indicators of class distinction and class inequality which cannot be understood by merely objectivist accounts of class (Lawler, 1999: 4). This is particularly relevant to the understanding of Bengali *bhadrasamaj* because as Chatterjee observes, the Bengali *bhadralok* hoped to achieve through education what was denied to them by the economy (Chatterjee, 1997: 11). This class can be understood as Bourdieu's category of the 'new cultural intermediaries', whose low economic capital was compensated by their relatively high cultural capital (Lane, 2000: 157). Therefore this class was historically understood to use their educational and cultural capital to hegemonize their elite and middle-class dominance through what Bourdieu conceptualizes as symbolic violence and symbolic capital.

"Symbolic violence...is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167).

Economic, social and cultural capital (which often encompasses educational and linguistic capital) becomes socially effective and the ownership is legitimized through the mediation of symbolic capital (Siisiäinen, 2000: 2). Symbolic capital inevitably

assumes an ideological function: it gives the legitimized forms of distinction and classification a taken-for-granted character, and thus conceals the arbitrary way in which the forms of capital are distributed among individuals in society (Joppke, 1987: 60). Symbolic capital thus takes the shape of symbolic power as a recognized power (Bourdieu, 1984: 251). According to Lash, Bourdieu's economic heuristic entails key assumptions of reproduction - of his circuits of symbolic and cultural capital and of social classes and class distinctions. It does so in a manner that inhibits the possibility of any strong theory of social change or reflexivity unlike Beck's and Giddens' focus on reflexivity (Lash, 1993: 203, 210). However, although Bourdieu does not explicitly talk about social change, he is critical of 'class racism' (Lane, 2000: 148).

The reality of the social world Bourdieu believes, is partly determined by the struggles between agents over the representation of their position in the social world and, consequently, of that world.

"In the course of these struggles, the very shape and divisions of the field become a central stake, because to alter the distribution and relative weight of forms of capital is tantamount to modifying the structure of the field. This gives any field a historical dynamism and malleability that avoids the inflexible determinism of classical structuralism" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 18).

Bourdieu opposes both 'methodological individualism' and 'holism' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15-16). He is against all forms of "methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological priority of structure *or* agent, system *or* actor, the collective *or*

the individual” Contrarily he affirms the “*primacy of relations*” and of “processes” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15).

This is best analyzed by the mutual co-constitution of ‘field’ which “consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)” and ‘habitus’ which “consists of a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 16) (see Chapter I, II). Field and habitus “*designate bundles of relations*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15) and “function fully *only in relation to one another*” (19).

Interestingly, where the petite-bourgeoisie sought to distinguish itself from the working-class ‘vulgarity’, the bourgeoisie sought to distinguish itself from petite-bourgeois ‘pretension’ or the put up effort to uphold a newly acquired culture (Bourdieu, 1984: 251). Underlying Bourdieu’s concept of capital and its historically changing dynamic is an understanding of class relations in process that is not fixed. Although he theorized the concept of capital and class distinctions in particular empirical instances of France, the appeal of these concepts lies in the possibility of their wider application. For instance, his findings can be applied to the Bengali middle-class of India.

The middle-classes of Bengal belong to the social category of the *bhadralok*. The term is multivalent but generally means ‘respectable people’. They were the traditional literati, distinguished by the refined behaviour and cultivated taste but did not necessarily have substantial wealth and power. The *bhadralok* attained their socio-political pre-eminence under British rule during the eighteenth century, as they were the first to gain education

and enter the civil service. At this historical juncture, they emerged as the key intermediary class in India, embodying Western education and culture while retaining a degree of 'Indian-ness'. Through their occupation in teaching and administration, they gained a measure of wealth and maintained their high social status (Scrase, 2002: 327-328).

The Bengali middle-class, however, was not a homogenous class with a monolithic cultural disposition and world view. The localized heterogeneity of the the *Bhadralok* structure is somewhat thus. For instance, a distinction can be made between *abhijat* (refined, aristocratic) *bhadralok* and *sadharon* (ordinary) *bhadralok*. The former can be defined as those who hold more liberal humanist values, are culturally open and internationally aware and concerned, and are cosmopolitan in outlook. The latter tend to hold more conservative values, are provincial minded and show a strong concern for the supposed moral decline of Indian society and Bengali language and culture as a result of Westernization. The *abhijat bhadralok* look down upon the rigid world view of the *sadharon bhadralok* but nevertheless wish to distinguish themselves from the crass materialism of the consumer culture often characteristic of the industrialist or the neo-rich middle-class (Scrase, 2002: 328). Bourdieu's fluidity of the concept of class, culture and capital helps accommodate in the Indian context the new meaning of the middle-class today in terms of inclination to high consumption as one of the symbols of distinction besides access to good education, English communication and respected cultural activities (Lakha, 1999).

What is interesting to note here is the presence of mostly high caste Bengalis in the category of this Bengali middle-class implying an overlapping of social categories of

caste and class (Lakha, 1999: 265). This is an example of the higher caste Brahmins manifesting symbolic capital in the form of Hindu notion of 'purity' and claiming a legitimate access to higher education and thereby acquiring the educational and cultural capital needed to be respected as the *bhadralok*. A simultaneous corollary process was the denial of the ritual purity (a form of symbolic capital) to the lower caste and to the Muslims (who coincidentally in many occasions belong to the lower caste and classes) to have the required cultural capital to become the middle-class with its class distinction of 'taste'.

Taste is a social construction and functions to be a 'matchmaker'; "it marries colours and also people, who make 'well-matched couples' initially in regard to taste" (Bourdieu, 1984: 243). The couples experience their mutual election as a coincidence which 'mimics transcendent design' as Bourdieu puts it in Sartre's words, 'made *for* each other' (243). The social sense, Bourdieu argues, is guided by the system of mutually reinforcing science of things such as 'clothing, pronunciation, bearing, posture, manners' and which 'unconsciously registered', are the basis of 'antipathies' or 'sympathies', and of the 'elective affinities' in love or friendship (241). The most indisputable evidence of 'elective affinities' and 'social compatibilities and incompatibilities', is provided by class and even class-fraction endogamy. This is ensured almost as strictly by the free play of sentiment as by deliberate family intervention. Bourdieu holds that the structure of the circuit of matrimonial exchanges tends to reproduce the structure of the social space (241). The following section is a cultural contextualization of the intersectionality of the discourses of gender, sexuality, race and class within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*.

The 'Woman Question' at the Juncture of Colonialist and Nationalist Discourses:

Cultural studies in India and particularly Bengal especially in my context (as Bengal provides the first paradigm of colonial domination in India) will be a-historical if it does not trace the relevant questions to their colonial roots. The complex process of gendering that underlies the colonial history reveals much about the present situation today. The world view of the Bengali Hindu elite or the *Bhadrolok* viz-a-viz their women under the colonial rule should be an interesting analysis here. The ambivalent position where women are placed in regard to the fundamentalism latent within the vision of this class arises from the disturbing fact that it is based on an apparent model of 'empowerment' for women (Jayawardena et al, 1996: 115). One of the earliest regions to be thoroughly colonized, Bengal represents that moment in our history when the argument of modernist transformation had hit the psycho-social life of upper and middle-class India. The aspect of our social life that was most seriously affected was the question of remoulding or recasting women (Sangari and Vaid, 1989).

The otherwise oppositional projects of nationalism and colonialism that came to debate the 'woman question', constructed and represented her role with their vested interest and specific patriarchal requirements of political power. They shared through this political agenda a common hegemonic gendered language. The colonialist constructed Indian women as exotic yet oppressed thereby justifying their 'colonizing/civilizing mission'. In response to such colonialist claims, there emerged a patriarchal anti-colonial nationalism which endorsed women's education and social reforms like that of the colonialists, yet situated their ideal role in the realm of the spiritual, identified as the

home or the inner sphere (Chatterjee, 1989). This domain was imagined to be one which is free from Western influence and in direct opposition to the material sphere of science rationality and modern methods of state craft inhabited by European nations, which privileged their colonizing mission. The inner sphere, however, served the function of establishing the superiority, cultural distinctiveness and an authentic identity of the national culture of the colonized over that of the West. In this, the women were vested with the notion of cultural authenticity which made them the chief conduit of nation building (Sarkar, 2001; Bagchi, 1996).

In setting up its 'new' patriarchy as a hegemonic construct, nationalist discourse on one hand demarcated its cultural essence from the West and on the other hand from the mass of common people within its own community. This cultural essence was constructed by creating the image of the 'new woman' who was culturally and morally superior to the often sexually promiscuous Western or Westernized woman; to the traditional, uneducated, superstitious Indian woman and finally to the common ordinary woman of lower classes and other religion. The analysis of the nationalist construction of woman shows how in the confrontation between colonialist and nationalist discourses, the "dichotomies of spiritual/material, home/world, feminine/masculine, while enabling the production of a nationalist discourse that is different from that of colonialism, nonetheless remain trapped within its framework of false essentialisms" (Chatterjee, 1989: 632). In responding to a raced, classed, gendered, sexualized colonial discourse, the nationalist discourse ironically ended up constructing a reversed discourse of self and other and also introducing with it the communal dimension in terms of the 'pure' upper caste, upper class Hindus and the 'non-pure' 'others'. As

Chatterjee (1989) rightfully notes that the new woman in this context was doubly subjected to colonialism and to indigenous patriarchy. In echoing the sensibilities and expectations of a nationalist patriarchy whether in their writings or disposition towards sexuality or in their familial and societal roles, women were caught up in the male hegemonic discourse. The emasculation that the colonizers gaze had ascribed to these men was sought to be overcome by the power of chastity of their wives and the affection of their mothers, both earthly and divine (Sarkar, 2001).

The nationalist discourse of intimacy and their apparent notion of empowerment of women through denial had to nevertheless contest with simultaneously existing contradictory forces of liberal reformism² and the Bramha Samaj Petition (late 1860) of marriage based on the 'rights of conscience' which tried to undo various oppressive structures of nationalist patriarchy on women. The contradiction of revivalist/nationalist discourse was not only between itself and the liberal reformist but also within it in terms of the 'woman question'. The two modes of representing the goddess *Kali*³ best manifest the inner tension within nationalism; the principle of female's strength versus the violence and the destructiveness latent in it (Sarkar, 1987). Tanika Sarkar's contrast

² In the discourse of liberal reformism, there is a strong presence of universalist rationalist argument about natural injustices against women but it cannot be unproblematically claimed that social reform equals women's emancipation and cultural nationalism, women's enslavement because the gender question for social reformers was largely applied to the upper caste and was therefore intimately related to the cleansed, purified Hinduism of the women who formed the backbone of the socially upwardly mobile classes. (Jayawardena et al., 1996: 118). Their politics of class distinction was therefore based on an elitist aesthetization of 'taste' and 'spirit' that engendered a different dimension to class, gender, and cultural division.

³ Kali is a Hindu goddess and the consort of God Shiva on whose body she is often seen standing while she was on rampage killing evil. The controversy around her representation emanates from the apparently contradictory qualities that she epitomises- the feminine power of destruction and the divine mother goddess. Generally she is considered as a ferocious form of the divine mother.

of Bankim's reading of the image of *Kali* with that of Mukunda Das is useful in this contest (Sarkar, 1987: 212):

"Bankim saw in her a measure of her shame, deprivation and exploitation; Kali is a have-not figure, a woman who has abandoned her femininity and even a basic sense of shame- 'She is trampling upon her own Shiva herself, alas, our mother;' the woman on top signified the total collapse of the ordered world, a violence directed basically against the self. Other poets like Mukunda Das, however, have glorified in her power, in her capacity to destroy evil and transcend death".

Veena Das' (cited in Bagchi, 1996) argument regarding female sexuality is relevant here. Patriarchal contradiction is best exemplified in their constant derogatory references to women on one hand and their feelings of insecurity and fear with regard to the power of women's sexuality on the other. Controlling female sexuality on which depended the prosperity and health of a nation therefore can be understood to be an incessant theme in which wider participation of the community can be ensured.

The nineteenth century debates about social reform from both the nationalist and the liberalist perspectives consensually criticized for instance, women's interior space or *antahpur* and the sexual vulgarity and excesses characteristic of the ritual practices of marriage in which women actively participated (Majumdar, 2000). *Bashor* or wedding songs sung by women for instance, came under the critical gaze of men and women alike. These songs involved teasing the groom by indulging and inviting him to match his wit with the bride's side and the women who belonged there. Sexual innuendos abound in their honest admission of love and lust in the physical world through which they celebrated the imminent physical union of the couple. Rather than resembling sexually inhibited stereotypes of docile, proper, culturally modest and submissive

bhadramahilas (respectable middle-class women), women on such occasions played out free, and sexually subversive roles that were otherwise denied to them (Ghosh, 2007: 196).

Reformist ideas looked down upon such disruptive and aggressive behaviour of women who they thought were in need of 'correction' through their androcentric standard of 'refinement' and 'taste'. *Bashor* songs came to be regarded as a 'social disease' by the entire *bhadrasamaj* or respectable Bengali middle-class society in nineteenth century (Ghosh, 2007: 194). These practices it may be argued are constitutive of the language of resistance to a dominant cultural order as they had within them alternative visions of the social world, and which were practised and valued despite attempts to suppress them (Kumar, 1994: 52). That it required a concerted effort from educated Bengali men, English missionaries and administrators to finally put an end to these practices and spaces performed and inhabited by women, bears testimony to the enduring nature and resilience of such cultural traditions (Ghosh, 2007: 192).

Ghosh eloquently argues how in the nineteenth century Bengali homes and within its confines of the *antahpur*, women waged a battle of their own through their solidarity and sisterhood; "Shielded from direct surveillance and nourished by oppression, this secluded space proved an ideal breeding ground for gendered social discontent" (2007: 212). However, she argues that this tremendous potential of hidden domains of conflict through 'hidden transcripts' in fostering enduring social consciousness, struggle and bonding has not been appreciated enough (212). It is only by reclaiming the visibility and strength of these spheres that we can see resistance where we did not see it before, and read conflict in apparently normative situations (Ghosh, 2006). Refusing to

recognize the structural imperatives of a tradition that outcasts and condemns a woman who outrightly rejects compliance to the patriarchal structure is just as blind as viewing the woman as a mere dupe of tradition with no agency (Bulbeck, 1998).

Modernity: A New Language of Family, Conjuality and Love:

With the compulsions of urbanization, office jobs and limited living space, a new normative discourse on the family was produced in nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal (Bose, 1996: 118 cited in Karlekar, 2005: 93). The new family marked a radical departure from the ethos of the joint family, the norm for several generations. Conjuality as well as parent child interactions that were subsumed within the overall rubric of complex joint family ties and emotions soon gave way to a section of *bhadrasamaj* that loyally nurtured the Victorian concept of the married couple as a unit. Many anglicized Bengalis, like the Victorians, looked to the home as a bulwark against disruptive social change a source of order and morality, a counter-balance to the individualistic and commercial pressures buffeting modern life (Mintz, 1983: 67 cited in Karlekar, 2005: 93). The new family became a refuge in this fast changing uncertain times and also became thereby the subject of considerable debate and discussion. In the Westernized, upper rungs of Bengali society the notion of the wife as a companion, emerged as a new value (Chakrabarti, 1995: 301). The companionate wife was expected to act as a buffer between the pressures of a fast changing outside world with often contradictory expectations and the secure home (Karlekar, 2005: 93).

The new normative discourse on the family and conjuality was accompanied by a new language of love – a new romantic attachment between individuated selves as Kaviraj

argues (2006). Rabindranath Tagore's poetic and narrative art played a determining role in the constitution of the language of modern love in Bengal with the coming of artistic sensibility of modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Kaviraj, 2006: 162). Through the prism of Tagore's artistic reflection on love Kaviraj identifies a social and cultural re-figuration in the language of intimacy. It represented a shift from erotic, sexualized physical or external love to *prem* or emotional love and an appreciation of inner beauty (162-163). Tagore's conceptualization of this emotional modernity Kaviraj argues was conditioned by and simultaneously conditioned the appreciation for an ethos of individuated selves (171). This sensibility, imagination and practice of individuated love, however, were differently conceptualized from that of the Western context. It demarcated itself from a Western idea of the celebration of self interest without a commitment to communitarian ethos (Majumdar, 2000: 124).

Bengalis it appeared coped with the Victorian model of companionate marriage only by indigenizing it in terms of circumscribing the novel ties of the bourgeois couple intimacy by the context and the ideal of a reconstituted joint family that included at the very least their children and the bride's in-laws (Majumdar, 2000: 127). Bengali male writers and also some women writers in the early twentieth century it is true, depicted romantic love through their artistic sensibilities but at the same time a tradition of women's *bhakti* or devotion to the husband was also being invented and valorized (Majumdar, 2000: 129). An emerging ideology of a patriarchal idealization of marriage that sought to infuse marriages with taste and refinement through *addhatmikata* or spirituality and *antorikota* or heartfelt sincerity was an attempt at producing social distinction or in Bourdieu's terms, cultural capital, and based itself on a compromise between two extremes – a

Western inspired romantic model of the couple and the nuclear family and an Indian extended family which gave little space to the couple.

The Post-Colonial Context:

The discourse and imagination of the new woman of the new patriarchy underlying the anti-colonial main-stream, male-stream discourse continues to exert its hegemonic influence over a large cross section of population today. Puri (1999) beautifully describes the ambivalent social expectation of womanhood amidst the post-colonial milieu: “we were expected to embody a ‘modern’ India without jeopardizing our ‘traditional’ roles as good mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law” (Puri, 1999: 1). For instance she says that while their socialization made them question retrograde traditions such as marrying too early or lacking self ambition altogether, they were equally taught that women should become neither too modern nor too Western. Both at home and at school in various ways and forms they were constantly reminded how important it was to embody what was feminine, to carry themselves in a way which protects their reputations and chastities in society (Puri, 1999: ix).

The influence of family and a surveillance of the community at large, particularly over women remain very strong. A living example of this influence of the family and the community is best upheld in cases of love marriages which although have become quite frequent, are still a complex negotiation of both traditional and modern ways of living. The efforts of couples in love marriage trying to present their case as a love cum arranged marriage is a manifestation of how the individual in the romantic tie accommodates this individualism to the broader acceptance of the community. For

instance, Modi (2002) in her research on love marriage in Delhi notes that although love-marriage couples dramatically redefine the parameters of 'Indian' morality and 'Indian' marriage, they do not do this by inhabiting a different social or moral platform from other young people having arranged marriages. They rarely openly rebel or pit the legitimating power of the court against that of their families, but rather seek to transform their own relationship and try to re-inscribe them within the terms which they hope are acceptable to the wider society. In cases when they fail to portray their love as love-cum arranged marriage they justify their relationship by claiming their love to be spiritual and pure. They often allude to the imagery of religious devotion against the social opprobrium cast upon the popular connection of sexuality and desire with love marriage.

Although there has been a growing trend of an individualist and an industrialist way of life splitting the joint family into the smaller nuclear setting, the influence of functional jointness does have a hold over individual decisions, in addition to the broader community pressure. Indian scholars on kinship and family like Madan (1976) and Desai (1955) argue that the assertion that industrialization and urbanization will alter traditional family institutions, is simplistically based on what are believed to have been the consequences of these processes in the West, for instance, as asserted by Goode (1963).

Although there is evidence of large families shrinking under the forces of higher education and occupational mobility, consequent geographical mobility and neolocal residence patterns (Vatuk, 1972; Madan, 1993: 431), a necessary distinction must be made between complexity and largeness, between simplicity and smallness of the family. Desai (1955) was the first sociologist to point out that numerical size gives us no

clue to the relational structure of the household group and that the joint-ness may be felt not by its size but by its functional aspects of togetherness. As Kakar and Kakar note (2007) if there is one “ism” that governs Indian societies and its institutions, then it is ‘family-ism’. It is interesting to note that the ideal Indian family which people often feel will break up with women’s economic independence is more imagined than real (Thapar, 2000: 55). Even then as Nabar (1995) argues, the Indian middle-class is representative of the winds of change and can also be identified as symptomatic of what can be defined as a collective Indian identity and “Indianness” and this Indianness is defined in terms of family and community, commitment and responsibility in the context of tradition (49). An appreciation of this post-colonial space finds an echo in Smart’s thesis of ‘connectedness’ as a counter balance to the individualization thesis, Gross’s conceptualization of ‘meaning-constitutive traditions’, Jameison’s evidences of familial intimacy and her critique of Giddens’ over-exaggerated transformation of intimacy as ‘pure relation’ as a pleasure of the self.

As Liechty also notes, there is a general tendency among these middle-class people to produce and represent themselves as members of a world that is both modern and of its own nationality, emotionally, intellectually and at the material level (Liechty, 2003:XI). It is useful in this context to see how Scrase’s middle-class respondents of Bengal distinguish between Western and modern (2002).

Scrase’s informants defined modernity with technocratic and scientific rationality and associated the ‘Western’ with morality and values, particularly those pertaining to family life and kinship. The whole hearted acceptance of the public world of governance and science and the simultaneous rejection of, and at best ambiguities about Western

cultural values are traceable to the long standing engagement with Western modernity among the *bhadralok* since the nineteenth century (Scruse, 2002: 335). As Chatterjee (1993) points out in his account of the anti-colonial nationalism of the Bengali *bhadralok*, attempts were made by them to adopt certain aspects of Western rationality like liberal tolerance, secularism etc whereas the cultural domain of the home and family was largely left alone. There was thus a clear distinction between a public, a more liberal tolerant culture and a private, traditional or conservative lifestyle. A significant gender demarcation emerged where women were expected to be the bearers of tradition and to uphold the virtues of the family and the home. This ideology still holds strong even in the liberal discourse of modernity which in conjunction to national and trans-national hetero-normative discourses reinforce rather than challenge hegemonic gender codes (Puri, 1999; Das, 1994).

Although it is important to locate the presence of traditional narratives in the lives of women in the postcolonial times, it is more important to appreciate how they simultaneously draw upon and strategically circumvent hegemonic codes of gender identity that are imbricated in the cultural discourse of the nation state, give new meanings to these old traditions and negotiate with the dominant prescriptive norms. For instance, although Puri's middle-class women's narratives suggest the acceptance of the cultural mandates of marriage and motherhood at some points in their lives as important aspects of being women, they do so using them equally as means of active self identification and resistance to the patriarchal power by often being a part of it. In fact, they often invoke the same categories that suppress them using them as means to liberate them and assert their own rights and secure a place at home (Puri, 1999;

Seymour, 1999). Cultural identity as Lakha says in terms of his research on middle-class in India, is built around a tension between globalization and local affiliations (Lakha, 1999: 252).

At the end of this theoretical review I, as an urban middle-class Bengali trying to continuously grapple with the problems of intimacy at an entwined juncture of the personal and the political myself, am faced with a particular theoretical concern of self and society: how to situate and appreciate the locally and historically specific language and space of intimacy of a post-colonial modernity within the “indispensible yet inadequate”, to borrow Chakrabarty’s phrase (2002), universal ideas of individual, agency, power, resistance and choice. In this theoretical and methodological concern, I find myself in a project similar to those many post-colonial scholars. The four chapters of analyses is an endeavour in the same post-colonial pursuit and the next chapter, a narrative of the methods and methodologies used to undertake this research.

CHAPTER 3- METHODOLOGY

This chapter is a description and rationalization of the methods and methodologies employed and practised in order to critically appreciate the sociological processes of constructing heterosexual intimate relations within contemporary urban middle-class Bengal. It is a narrative of the epistemological problematic that arose during the multiple stages of the research and of the various stories of the processes through which it took shape. The substantive theoretical basis of a research question is integrally intertwined with its epistemological and methodological problematic. What will be legitimated in this regard is a fit between the substantive enquiry and the methods and methodology appropriated to explore it.

My research on 'Processes of Negotiating Intimate Heterosexual Identities and Relations: Narratives of Three Generations of Urban Middle-class Bengalis in Kolkata', seeks to answer certain questions that have risen from the ethnographic field and also from reading the existing literature on intimacy. The overarching research question is to examine how constructions and negotiations of heterosexual identities and relations amongst middle-class Bengalis are gendered, generational and class specific. The related research questions are as follows:

- a) How do subjects of a certain class, culture, community, gender and generation; experience, practice and give meaning to intimate heterosexual relationships and identities of masculinities and femininities?

- b) How do subjects negotiate, that is, confirm, circumvent, subvert, challenge and interrogate institutionalized heterosexuality or hetero-normativity at the inter-subjective level of everyday practices of intimacy?
- c) How do local narratives of intimacy engage with broader discourses of class, race, gender and generation; and colonial, national and trans-national narratives of these discourses?
- d) How do subjects re-affirm and also destabilize hegemonic constructions, cultural stereotypes and dichotomous binaries in their multiple and often contradictory invocations of broader discourses to make meaning of their local narratives of intimacy?

These questions were sought to be answered through an exercise of the 'Sociological Imagination' (Mills, 1959) with an auto-ethnographic (Reed-Danahay, 1997) epistemological approach, in-depth qualitative narrative mode of enquiry (Riessman, 1993) and deconstructive discourse analysis as method of analysis (Macleod, 2002). In this exercise of the sociological imagination that links biography to history, personal to structural/social, my research is tied to a methodological conception of 'ethnographic imagination' (Brewer, 2000) that seeks to connect personal narrations to broader structural events in society. The meaning of 'ethnographic', 'narrative' and 'discourse' is understood and invoked in multiple and contested ways in plural contexts. I will therefore delimit the specific conceptualization undergirding these notions according to their practices and meanings within the context of my field research. I will specify the nature and 'brand' of the 'ethnographic', the 'narrative' and the 'linguistic' in tune with a 'cultural turn', a 'narrative turn', and a 'linguistic turn', and show how these turns share

common concerns with the 'interpretivist turn' within sociology but also critique it and go beyond it. Since there are competing discourses of the narrative, linguistic and cultural turns as well, it is important to delineate their understanding and interrelations in the way I contextualize these within my research in tune with a sociological spirit of enquiry. The next section will locate these turns in relation to one another and in how they are employed within this research.

The 'Cultural', 'Narrative', 'Linguistic' and 'Interpretivist' Turns:

The employment of multiple methods and epistemological turns that is in tune with a qualitative epistemological approach has sometimes been difficult to legitimate within an academically respectable tradition of mainstream sociology. This is because mainstream sociology in its scientific, positivistic mode of enquiry and a sole focus on *longue duree* and macro-structure has privileged only 'grand narratives' over 'local narratives'. In-house critics of this tradition came from the 'interpretivist' turn within sociology that emerged in opposition to the Enlightenment-induced positivist and scientific approach to studying social reality. The interpretivist turn takes a turn/shift from the positivistic claims of studying social reality in an objective manner towards focusing on people's interpretations and their processes of meaning-making within their interactions in order to understand social reality (Scott, 2009: 16). I take theoretical and methodological inspiration from the analytical point of departure in the interpretivist turn's appreciation of the socio-cultural constructiveness of interactions/relations by focusing on the concept of 'scripts' (Simon and Gagnon, 1986), 'cultural narratives' (Laumann et al., 1994) and the spirit of 'verstehen' or interpretative understanding as a methodological tool within sociology. My epistemological positioning of the cultural,

narrative and linguistic turns takes inspiration from the focus on meaning that lies at the heart of the interactionist and interpretivist approaches within mainstream sociology of the 1950s and 1960s (Hall, 1997b: 223). However, it critiques the interpretivist and interactionist assumptions of “knowing and knowable actors” and the focus on “real” meaning. In that it stresses on the significance of narrative meaning and argues that even “sociology must acknowledge that it is involved in narrative production” (Heaphy, 2007: 43).

Narrative turn is a turn towards understanding social lives as ‘storied lives’ and a mode of understanding it through narrating and story-telling (Somers, 1994: 614). Narrative and narrativity are thus understood as concepts of “*social epistemology* and *social ontology*” (Somers 1994: 606). This turn is especially relevant to the ever-increasing sociological attention to identity formation that is contingent on the “destabilizing dimensions of *time*, *space*, and *relationality*” (Somers, 1994: 606). Since narrative understands knowledge as organized through language for the act of assigning meaning to a text or object (Punday, 2002: 22), it is integrally intertwined with the linguistic turn which focuses on language and meaning to represent ‘reality’. The linguistic turn emphasizes ‘perspectival, contextual, and contingent nature of all truth claims’ (Best and Kellner, cited in Heaphy, 2007: 56). The employment of discourse analysis in this research is theoretically and epistemologically connected to the linguistic turn and its focus on discourse that “refers both to the production of knowledge through language and representation and the way that knowledge is institutionalized, shaping social practices and setting new practices into play” (Hall, 1997b: 222). The cultural turn is integrally connected to and expands this linguistic turn to social life. Focussing on the

'centrality of culture' (Hall, 1997b: 225), the cultural turn argues that "because economic and social processes themselves depend on meaning and have consequences for our ways of life, for who we are- our identities- and for 'how we live now', they too must be understood as cultural, as discursive practices" (222). The cultural turn is variously interpreted within postmodernism and therefore can have various implications in its incorporation within sociology. It is therefore important to specify how this turn is invoked within this sociological research. Heaphy cites Lemert to argue that unlike what many 'radical postmodernists' propose, 'the cultural turn does not mean.....that the social is no longer significant' (2007: 57). In fact, as Hall argues, "in some respects, the 'cultural turn' could be read as representing a 're-turn' to certain neglected classical and traditional sociological themes..." like Weber's interpretive sociology which defined the subject of sociology in 'social action' as 'action which is relevant to meaning' (1997b: 223). It is in this 're-turn' that I attempt to link the narrative, linguistic, cultural and interpretivist turns within the domain of the sociological.

By incorporating the multiple modes, methods and methodologies of enquiry and analysis through the ethnographic, the narrative and deconstructive discourse analysis that cut across various disciplines but is definitely conducive to the sociological; I wish in my modest way, to appeal to the interdisciplinary potential of a sociological enquiry of everyday intimate lives and also thereby show the immensely expansive potential of the discipline of sociology both in terms of substantive and epistemological enquiry. I will now move on to delineate the contextual conceptualization of the various modes of enquiry and analysis that have been employed in this research. I begin by elaborating on the nature and brand of the ethnographic employed.

The Ethnographic:

Most commonly ethnography is understood as the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by methods of data collection which attempts to capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner (Brewer, 2000: 6) but without meaning being imposed on them externally (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Such a definition is premised on an implicit ontological position based on a naturalistic world view where people are considered as 'meaning endowing' in their naturally occurring settings, whose motivated actions arise from and reflect back on these meaning laden actions and experiences. Its associated epistemological assumption is that social life should be studied without any external imposition from the outside or a scientific manipulation on it.

Ethnography in this context aims at grasping the meanings people give to their actions and this is done by what Geertz (1973) would call 'thick description' of phenomenon from natives' point of view or as Fetterman (1998: 20) calls 'the emic perspective'. 'Thick description' invokes emotionality, self-feelings and webs of social relationships. In it, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. I employ this interactionist 'interpretive ethnography' (Denzin, 1997) in undertaking my research. In this context, I link the 'cultural turn' executed through this 'interpretive ethnography' to the 'narrative turn' executed through 'thick description' of the 'emic perspective'. These are in turn linked to the interpretivist and interactionist turns or traditions in sociology that focuses on the micro-*processes* of everyday *interaction* and on how subjects interpret or make meaning of their actions. However, I distance my

theoretical and methodological stance from any claim of a 'real representation of reality'. I adopt a reflexive postmodern ethnography that is critical not only of the scientific but also of the humanistic ethnography (Goffman, 1961) on the basis of 'naive realism', for both assume there is a knowable world 'out there' that can be studied directly and accurately, and the 'correct' representation of which is feasible in the ethnographic text (Brewer, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998a).

Ethnographers themselves have challenged the claim that ethnography can produce universal valid knowledge by accurately representing the nature of the social world. This 'moment' in the history of ethnography is referred to as the 'double crisis' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998a: 21-22). Since all accounts of ethnography are constructions and there is no privileging of one single account there is 'the crisis of representation'. Correspondingly since ethnographic descriptions are partial, selective, even autobiographical and are tied to the particular ethnographer and also the contingencies under which the data were collected, the traditional criteria for evaluation in ethnography become problematic. What we face is another 'crisis of legitimation' as we deconstruct terms like 'validity', 'reliability' and 'generalizability' (Brewer, 2000: 24-25; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998a: 19-22, 411-416).

Post-modern ethnographers (Silverman, 1989; Brewer, 2000) have sought to rescue ethnography from the excesses of post modernism by incorporating some of its criticism. It seeks to tie up some postmodern theories with the continued commitment to disciplined, rigorous and systematic ethnographic practice (Brewer, 2000). In tune with this I do not radically subvert the 'real' in its effects and consequences on people's lives but embrace a version of 'analytical realism' rather than 'naive realism'. Analytical

realism is based on the view that the social world is an interpreted world always under symbolic construction and reconstruction by people and ethnographers themselves. In this, I see “discourses as ideological in their effects” (Jackson, 1999: 116) and having ‘real’ consequences on people’s lives as and of which I shall elaborate later.

The process of research is a process of both ‘finding’ and ‘making’ (Shotter, 1992 cited in Macleod, 2002: 12) where the ‘knower is part of the matrix of what is known’ (Wilkinson, 1986: 13). All knowledge is therefore ‘perspectival’ and hence ethnographer’s perspective must be specified as much as of the subject of the research and the overall process of the research. They call this ‘validity-as-reflexive-accounting’ (Altheide & Johnson, 1998: 291-294). It recognizes both the impossibility of ‘telling it like it is’ (since there is more than one ‘telling’ and there is more than one ‘is’) and the desirability of going beyond people’s words. To quote Altheide & Johnson (1998: 297), “capturing member’s words alone is not enough for ethnography. If it were ethnography would be replaced by interviews. Good ethnography reflects tacit knowledge, the largely unarticulated, contextual understanding that is often manifested in...silences, (and) humour...”. They close this remark by alluding to the chief solution to the double crisis of ethnography. The solution lies in the practice of ‘reflexive ethnography’ which means a turning back on oneself, of critically introspecting and retrospectively in ways in which the products of research are affected by the personal and the processes of doing that research (Davies, 1999: 4).

In social science research generally three domains of bias are recognized; those arising from the subject being interviewed, those arising from the researcher and those arising from the subject and the researcher interaction. It is precisely through these ‘sources of

bias' that a 'truth' comes to be assembled. The reflexive task of the researcher is not to nullify these variables, but to be aware of, describe publicly and suggest how these have assembled the specific 'truth' (Plummer, 1983: 102-104). How the research question took shape in the researchers mind, the location and setting in which it is studied are also questions that need to be pondered including the positional reflexivity of the researcher in terms of class, race, age, gender and her/his ontological and epistemological positions viz-a-viz the research. In the absence of such reflexivity, the strengths of the data are exaggerated and/or the weaknesses underemphasized. Before I move on to how I carried out my research and why I did it that way, it is important to state the ethical anchorage of my ethnographic practice. It lies in the spirit of auto-ethnography of which I shall elaborate later and it lies in doing collaborative research (Banks, 2001) which means doing research *with* your respondents and informants, rather than *on* them. It lies in privileging the 'emic perspective' through subjects' narratives that is produced through a shared interactive process of doing research with the subjects. I now turn to the 'why' and 'how' of narrative mode of enquiry through in-depth qualitative narrative interviewing.

The 'Why' of Narrative:

A research on the exploration of intimate heterosexual relations is intended to be understood through reading subjects' 'narratives' of intimate heterosexual relations and identities. The 'study of narratives...promise new theories..new methods and new ways of talking about self and society' (Denzin, 2000). I combine the methods of 'textual analysis' with 'interpretive ethnography' (Denzin, 1997) to read the narrative interviews of subjects as ethnographic 'texts', interactionist 'scripts' (Simon and Gagnon, 1986),

and 'cultural narratives' (Laumann et al., 1994). These narratives are complemented by reading other 'naturally occurring' narratives outside interviews through ethnographic observation and/or participation within the field. The focus on the narratives/narrative of self (Jackson, 1999: 106; Giddens, 1992: 75) and 'cultural narratives' (Laumann et al., 1994) has roots in both the sociological tradition of interactionism and in more recent discourse analysis (Jackson, 1998, 2001). Jackson's reading of Mead's (1934) concept of 'I' that comes into being only in relation with the social other makes the self be understood 'in process' by virtue of constant 'self reflexivity' and inter-subjective interaction (Jackson, 2001: 288). I take methodological inspiration for undertaking narrative enquiry from Jackson's claim that experience is constantly worked over, interpreted and theorized through the narrative forms and devices available to us (Jackson, 1998). This is how I link the 'narrative turn' to the 'interactionist turn' and focus on micro processes of interaction within interactionist sociology, in which subjects' narratives and 'cultural narratives' can be read as 'scripts' and 'texts' in interaction. Jackson's reading of this conceptualization of scripting at the cultural, inter-personal and intra-psychic level appreciates the link between the local productions of narrative texts/scripts to other texts and scripts in the broader cultural field. This in turn can facilitate an analysis of the network of power, relations and knowledge (Foucault, 1980) through which these scripts emerge, evolve, are interactively re-worked and negotiated, contested and changed. This interactionist concept of script can harmoniously be linked to the 'identity', 'relational' and 'ideational' functions of language (Fairclough, 1992) and the constructive effects of discourse.

I grew up like most children within my cultural space, hearing stories from my grandmother who barely received formal education but was highly adept in life through ‘oral’ teachings of the world. Popular stories from the ‘Thakurmar Jhuli’ (Grandma’s bag) series initiated most of us in the urban Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, into the culture of listening to stories and telling stories. As we grew up it was quite common to have friends and cousins make an assumed rightful demand - tell me your ‘story’ of romance – How you met him? Where you saw each other? What happened thereafter? How did it develop into a relationship? What has been going on since then? And in some cases, how did you both break up and why? Such sequence of events almost narrated a plot, the central and supporting characters, a climax, tying them in and through a culturally heterosexual romantic ‘script’.

These stories and ‘tellings’, particularly pertinent within the context of relationships, made me deeply consider the narrative quality of intimate relations and more generally about narrative as a typical form of social life (MacIntyre, 1990: 129) and an ontological condition of social life (Somers, 1994: 606, 614). Narrative can be understood as the representation of process of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Therefore narratives are not records or facts but a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of a life (Josselson, 1995: 33). In this we live ‘storied’ lives (Somers, 1994; Riessman, 1993; Weedon, 2004) that are continuously constructed through continual and varying narrations hearings and telling (Jackson, 1998).

Narrative is also a form of meaning-making that tells stories through a chronological movement in time. This invocation of time in interaction noted in oft quoted expressions

of, “then in our times”, I thought, could be useful in making sense of and also problematizing the generational construction of intimate lives and stories as socio-culturally relational (Smart, 2007). My grandmother told me stories of the coupling of my parents, my parents narrated the same story in a different way, and I re-narrate these versions within my third generational context of heterosexual coupling that probably found more empathy from the first generation of the grandmother than of the second generation mother. One needs to therefore focus on who is narrating to whom and to what end. ‘Interactive positioning’, that is how subjects position characters in relation to each other within a particular discourse; and ‘reflexive positioning’ that is, how a subject positions him/herself in personal narratives can be important indicators that signify the performance of identities in relation and in specific contexts of interaction (Riessman, 2002: 701-702; Goffman, 1959). This positioning of the self in personal narratives is also important to appreciate because, “fluid positioning, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situations that they find themselves in” (Harre and Van Langenhove, 1999: 17). Identifying the varying positions of the self is also coupled by an ‘unpacking’ of the ‘grammatical resources’ that subjects appropriate to justify a moral legitimacy of the positioning of the self (Riessman, 2002: 702). Every culture and age host many competing stories and competing narrations in which they struggle to reach a hegemonic, prevalent, dominant and legitimate one through what is called discourse. Generational narratives and the narrative of time broadly are troubled in the multiple ways of telling a story that is understood and given shape through multiple narratives ultimately. The employment of a narrative mode of enquiry is, therefore, crucially associated with a sociological narrative of identity formation and “clearly should be on

the agenda for sociological studies of action and agency” (Somers, 1994: 606). A focus on narrative and narrativity is able to appreciate the social construction of identity that is caught up in multiple relations of gender, class and race; and that is at once “temporal, relational, and cultural, as well as institutional, material and macro-structural” (Somers, 1994: 607). This ‘narrative turn’ is thus crucial to a sociological understanding of personal relationships and identity formation.

The ‘How’ of Narrative:

Methodologically inspired by Riessman (1993, 2002) and by a self-introspective criticality of ‘reflexive methodology’ (Heaphy: 2007: 44-49); I as a third generation urban middleclass Bengali woman with a post-colonial feminist bent of intellect, confess at the outset that my approach to this research and to the production of its sociological narrative does not assume unmediated, un-negotiated objectivity. Instead, it critically acknowledges positionalities of gender, class, generation and subjectivity of theoretical and methodological inclinations including the context of knowledge production that variously shaped the narrative of this research (Plummer, 1983; Steier, 1991). This epistemological standpoint is influenced by and contributes to ‘reflexive methodology’ that understands the sociological researcher as a “story producer” and critically reflects upon the politics of knowledge production to acknowledge that “academic narratives exist in the flow of power” (Heaphy, 2007: 44-45). Therefore, instead of ‘the true story’ there are ‘truths’ and ‘stories’ that are continuously generated through the ways in which a subject makes meaning of the story by him or herself, by imaginary and real dialogues with other characters in the story, present or absent, by the subjects’ engagement with the researcher and the researcher’s engagement with the subject. This epistemological

commitment is practised in and through the ethical anchorage in a practice of 'auto-ethnography'.

Auto-ethnography is interpreted and understood in plural ways in plural contexts. As much as I appreciate the multiple and inter-related conceptualizations of the term, I shall specify the boundary of its practice and meaning in the way I have applied it within the context of my research. Ethnography, qualified as reflexive ethnography forms the basis of my understanding of auto-ethnography. Inspired by a Bourdieusian 'reflexive sociology', my auto-ethnographic ethic critiques a universalized 'reflexive narrative of self' that Giddens' 'sociology of reflexivity' seeks to promote (1992, 75). The reflexivity in my auto-ethnography recognizes the structural and cultural limits of self-reflexivity (Heaphy, 2007: 179; Lash, 1994: 120) and acknowledges that the researcher's structural positionalities, his/her subjective narrative and intimate relationalities within the local-cultural field of ethnography may, in varying ways, shape the production of the research narrative. These positional, subjective and intimate relationalities are, in fact, tied to my epistemological condition where I share a culturally familiar and often personal intimate space/involvement with the subjects of my research. The spirit of auto-ethnography lies precisely in such relationalities and cultural connectedness within and through which the dichotomy between subject and object or between researched and researched, becomes blurred. It is in the recognition of the mutual co-constitution of self and society, in the production of my research's narrative, that I seek to practise auto-ethnography. Without undermining any mutual co-constitution, it is, however, important to specify an epistemological point of departure; that is, the auto in my auto-ethnography is realized through privileging the voices of the research participants rather

than privileging the auto in order to understand the subjects within the ethnographic field. This is in spirit of a sociologically/anthropologically driven auto-ethnographic exploration that understands the self as socially and culturally embedded and tied to multiple relationships.

Reed-Danahay (1997: 2) defines auto-ethnography in a double sense—referring either to the ethnography of one's own group or to auto-biographical writing of an ethnographical interest. However the authors rightly seek to transcend this dichotomy and point to the ways in which the two senses of the term are inter-related. They break down the distinction between autobiography and ethnography by questioning the binary between self and society and experience and reality. The postmodern/postcolonial conception of self and society to which auto ethnography is allied, both as a method and methodology, is one of the multiplicity of identities, and shifting axes of power (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 2). What is also important is the concern with the 'subjective processes' underneath the seeming rationality of the sociological product and the concern with how the path of becoming a sociologist is connected to the sociologist becoming a person (Horowitz, 1970: 12). "Under the impact of feminist and post-modern thought, the distinction between 'autobiography' and 'biography' has been challenged" (Roberts, 2002: 30). This also interrogates the putative boundary between self and other, public and private (Stanley, 1993). I agree with Scholte (1972 cited in Callaway, 1992: 32) that there is not and should not be a discontinuity between experience and reality, between the investigator and the object investigated; for my research is not only a research of 'others' but of myself within the same culture as those 'others'. This involves as Scholte (1987 cited in Callaway, 1992: 44) states a crucial shift from an observational and

empirical methodology to a communicative and dialogical epistemology, from objectivity to inter subjective understanding. I wish to adopt a similar dialogical methodology which rejects the binary division between subject and object, places the self within the field of investigation, and evaluates positionality and power relations including the critical ontology of ourselves as gendered and classed selves in the context of one's culture. It is in this ethics of auto-ethnography which joins the personal, the biographical with the political and social, that I locate my research (Denzin, 1997: 200).

The central research question, therefore, itself is a product of the researcher's positionality and subjectivity. The theoretical assumptions underpinning my central research focus, 'negotiation of intimate heterosexual identities relations', assumes the discursive construction of such relations rather than other theoretical claims of its naturalness. A focus on negotiation is also indebted to post-structuralist assumptions of multiple cultural representations at the contextually specific levels of everyday interaction. However, I not only study intimate relations at the level of subjectivity but also connect them at the level of hegemony, ideology, discourse, institutional contradictions and contestations. Moreover, it is important to clarify that precisely because the central question is premised on a post-modernist, post-structuralist, post-colonial theoretical framework; it disrupts but is also formed *in critique with and in relation to* the modern, the structural, the colonial, theoretical framework.

The central research focus which is broadly the 'negotiation of intimate heterosexual relations and identities' can here be read as the general story and the various processes of negotiation, the specific stories. The central focus of my research has four sub-focus or dimensions of enquiry each of which constitutes a chapter of analysis. The

first chapter of analysis examines 'narratives of male homosocial intimacy: negotiating masculinities'. The second chapter of analysis examines 'narratives of female homosocial intimacy: negotiating femininities'. The third chapter of analysis examines 'narratives of coupling; negotiating hetero-normativity'. The final analysis chapter of analysis examines 'expressions of heterosexual intimacy: negotiating the *bhadralok* distinction'.

I will now state the epistemological nuances within which the research took shape, the possible biases that crept into its construction, the various potential and limitations that it embodies, and how I practised auto-ethnography, dialogical and collaborative research with my subjects.

Description of the Research Process, Sample Makeup, Modes of Interviews and Ethical Considerations:

There were 56 subjects/participants who were interviewed for this research. Of these, there were 28 women and 28 men. It was difficult to find an equal number of interviewees in every age cohort for various practical and cultural reasons. Generations were marked through constructed age groupings and also through subjects' relationships within the family. Subjects' age ranged from 21 years to 71 years with many subjects representing the transitional age cohort between one generation and the other, allowing for continuity in cultural analysis. The generational splits through age groupings are as follows:

Third Generation	20-35 years
Second Generation	45-60 years
First Generation	70 years and above

First generational subjects were most difficult to find for an interview owing to the problems of old age and physical health. Second generational women most readily agreed to participate and third generational men and women were generally more conducive to the idea of involvement within the research. Two families I interviewed consisted of all three generations living under the same roof with a first generation woman living no more in one. Four families I interviewed consisted of two generations living together in the same house and in one case the interviewees were generationally related in terms of a first generation grandmother, second generation mother who is now married into another family and her third generation daughter.

Of the 28 men, 20 are working professionals, 4 retired professionals and 4 students. The number of men across the three generations who participated in the research is split in the following manner:

Generation	Number of participants
Third	16
Second	7
First	2
In between First and Second generation	3

Of the 28 women, 9 are home-makers, 12 working professionals and 5 students. The number of women across the three generations who participated in the research is split in the following manner

Generation	Number of participants
Third	11
Second	6
First	2
In between First and Second generation	1
In between Second and Third generation	4

The sample makeup stated above is only a synopsis and a detailed description of subjects' biography is listed in Table-1 and 2 of the Appendix.

Besides the 56 participants who were interviewed for personal stories of intimacy and whose narrative texts were analyzed in the research, I also interviewed 10 male and 4 female professionals who are well known public personalities from the fields of arts, culture and academics directly or indirectly connected to issues on intimacy. These public personalities were interviewed not to elicit personal stories of intimacy but to provide a cultural background of their understanding of heterosexual intimate relationships and identities of masculinities and femininities within the urban Bengali *bhadrasmaj*.

Since the works and ideas of these personalities are heavily consumed by a major section of the Bengali *bhadrasmaj*, I interviewed them in order to get a perspective of the nature of readership of urban middle-class subjects with regards to the issue of intimacy. This dimension was focused through questions on their works about the

bhadrasamaj's construction of Rabindranath Tagore as their symbolic capital and its critique. Focus was also laid on their production and engagement with contemporary music, poetry, satirical songs of love, and films on heterosexual and homosexual relationships, its contextual reception and academic critiques of these narratives of multi-textuality. Particularly they were interviewed to narrate on the questions and themes that were gradually generating from within subjects' narratives and from within my cultural field of ethnography. In lieu of their professional capacity of detailed engagement with these questions, knowledge was generated about their cultivated perceptions on urban middle-class' nature of 'readership' which then also informed various research questions for exploration.

Of these 10 men, Anindyo Chatterjee and Chandril Bhattacharya are song writers of a Bengali music band and political and literary critics; Rituparno Ghosh is a film maker and actor; Alokannanda Roy is a dancer and theatre person; couple, Gauri Ghosh and Partha Ghosh are poem reciters; Suchitra Bhattacharya, Pabitra Sakar and Ronjon Bondopadhaya are novel writers; Moinaka Basu is a film critic and academician; Prasanta Ray, Abhijit Mitra, and Shibaji Bondopaddhayay are academicians and cultural critics.

The 28 women and the 28 men from ordinary field were selected through a method of purposive sampling to ensure a strong bond of trust, friendship and familiarity with the subjects. Sixty percent of this research sample was already known to me with some of whom I shared a personal warm rapport in the capacity of their being friends, parents and grandparents of friends, neighbours, teachers, family friends and well wishers. This condition of sharing a dynamic of intimacy with my subjects was important as an

epistemological necessity for exploring a sensitive issue as intimate relations. One of the possible factors that facilitated this bond between my subjects and I, was our shared habitus, particularly in terms of education, profession, lifestyle, life chances, and cultural engagements.

This very sharing of similar habitus, field and cultural experiences of my subjects and I turned out to be both an epistemological strength and weakness engendering ethical issues of other kinds. For instance, the nature of intimacy that I share with few of my friends' parents and grandparents were based more on conventional rules of kinship than of friendship. This often put cultural restrictions on the appropriateness of the questions that could be asked to them. My daughter-like and grand-daughter like position to this above mentioned age cohort evoked a sense of respect towards them that often made us embarrassed to discuss issues that were related to the 'most intimate'. It is important to mention, however, that the problem was generational but also more gendered in which it was more difficult to engage with reciprocal openness with second and third generation men than the second and third generation women.

However, a joint family upbringing in varying dynamics induced in me a capacity to strike inter-generational closeness and empathy that often blurred the boundaries of kinship and friendship (Spencer and Paul, 2010). My personal intimacy with my mother was also conducive to striking friendships with many others in her age cohort with whom I have frequently shared intimate spaces, stories and inter-generational experiences. This has often helped me to bond with my older generation cohort by experiencing a shared space with them. In fact, this interactionist aspect of my upbringing implanted the seeds of thinking about non-linear dynamics of intimacies that cannot be

simplistically read as a story of generation gap. This auto-ethnographic experience, in which I was both a subject and a participant was in fact, one of the many reasons for conceptualizing my research question along the lines of generation.

It is important to confess that I have excluded interviews of subjects with whom 'intimate' discussion did not go too 'far' or 'deep', as the interviews hardly produced any elaborate and consistent 'texts' for analysis. Among these subjects, most were men of the second generation who might have possibly been culturally obstructed in terms of disclosing a) issues on intimacy, b) to a female researcher and c) of the third generation. Cultural hindrances in undertaking this research on 'intimacy' were not only inter-generational but also intra-generational in nature. For instance, I often sensed a discomfort in discussing varying dynamics of the intimacy of coupling in cases where either both the partners who formed the couple were close to me, or when one between them were closer to me than the other.

In order to take care of the epistemological problems that arose due to my personal relationship with both the individuals who formed a couple, I sought to undertake multiple modes of interviewing. For instance, in cases where there were two individuals who also formed a couple, I conducted an interview with them first as a couple and then as individual participants of the research. This double mode of interviewing granted the individuals a space to narrate simultaneously as an independent individual and also as a heterosexual partner to someone. The individual and couple modes of interviewing produced interesting insights from two different spaces and were important 'texts' for analysis in themselves. For instance, many men narrated different stories of intimacy when interviewed separately as an individual, giving insights into stories of his

homosocial intimacy that were often in contradiction with his self claimed companionate coupling and gender democratic space within it. The total number of couple interviews undertaken was 14 with 7 men and 7 women also giving individual interviews.

In order to counterbalance the inter-generational and intra-generational cultural hindrances in eliciting narratives of intimacy, I also consciously modelled interviews on the basis of various kinds of grouping. I conducted 4 focus group interviews in which the first one consisted of 6 men of the third generation. The second focus group interview consisted of 3 men and 3 women of the third generation. The third one consisted of 5 women of the second generation and the last one consisted of 3 second generation women, 2 third generation women, 1 first generation woman. These interviews ensured conversations and dialogues between and amongst the participants of this research without the researcher's explicit intervention into it. Such inter-generational and intra-generational groups based on gender produced insights that were sometimes difficult to elicit from direct one to one interaction with an individual. These focus group interviews involved debates, discussions, agreements and dialogues where from stories kept emerging one after the other, providing unhindered and spontaneous insights into various gendered and generational power dynamics of intimate relations and identities.

Most of the one to one individual interviews and also couple interviews were carried out at the subjects' home to ensure privacy. Group interviews of both men and women were designed to be intergenerational and were conducted sometimes in any of the subjects' home through an informal get together of participants, some of whom already knew one another. These interviews were consciously modelled on *adda* (which means casual chats, gossips and informal discussions, integral to the culture of urban middle-class

Bengal. The distinctiveness of Bengali *adda* will be discussed in the first chapter of analysis). At every step of the interview, analysis of text and the final written narrative of the research, participants were ensured full anonymity and confidentiality as part of an ethical consideration. Participants' names have thus been changed in the research. Almost every interview went for as long as five hours. In many cases, there were multiple sittings with a gap of one and a half years between the sittings, occurring during my first (January 2010 – October 2010) and second (June 2011 – September 2011) visit to the field.

To compensate for the difficulties that arose from sharing friendship or kinship with my subjects, I consciously selected a few participants with whom I had no previous contact. Forty percent of the interviewees from the ordinary field were reached through a process of 'snowball' sampling with a faith in the referent's conjecture or conviction that the recommended subject could be 'relevant' for my research in terms of his or her openness to issues of intimacy and through the stories s/he could possibly bring into this research. It took time to start off conversation and dialogue with them and develop an immediate rapport within the time of the interview but this non-intimate relation often ironically made it easier to discuss intimate issues owing to minimal immediate accountability of friendship and the burden of 'keeping face'.

Subjects' class identities were discerned not through objective criteria of income or economy but by subjects' self definition, that most often mapped onto indicators of middleclass culture and world views. These were in turn indicated by subjects' claim to education, conventional middleclass professions and lifestyle choices, middleclass status, a general desire for upward mobility through knowledge and consumption and

an appreciation for cultural and symbolic capital of middleclass respectability, *ruchi* or 'taste'.

All subjects resided in urban Kolkata with variations of specific localities in terms of Southern or Northern part of Kolkata, both imagined and real, which influenced their fragmented world views and identities of a middleclass that were rather heterogeneous alongside claims of its shared values.

In-depth qualitative interviewing that was mostly interactive in nature was based on subjects' interpretation and meanings of intimacy through narrative story-telling of intimate relations. This involved not only reconstruction and re-reading of past lives to make sense of it in the present but could also possibly involve a 'fictionalization of past' (Freeman, 1993). In the words of Mead (1938: 456 cited in Flaherty and Fine, 2001: 152), "all history is the interpretation of the present". Thus, 'each generation perceives the past in new terms, and rewrites its own history' (Strauss, 1969: 167-168 cited in Flaherty and Fine, 2001: 152). This mode of narrative through imagination and reminiscence, I argue, is real in as much as it is embedded within socio-cultural interactive relationalities. As Carol Smart explains (2007: 39), "individual memory is also profoundly social because it relies on context to be meaningful and on communication to become a memory". Lives have to be understood, therefore, as lived within time and time and space are products of narrative experience rather than matters of temporal determinism (Flaherty and Fine, 2001: 158). Narrative therefore makes a story coherent through linking the present and the past (Ricoeur, 1980: 186). In the words of Roberts, "individuals, from a narrative view point, move between different 'time perspectives' as they reflect on the past, contemplate the present and rehearse the future." (Roberts,

2002: 124). An in-depth narrative qualitative interviewing heavily focuses on this aspect of interactive meaning-making in time.

To gain a deeper insight into the life-world and life-processes of people that complements ethnography as narrative interviewing, I chose observant participation (overt and covert) (Brewer, 2000: 61). Visual ethnography was carried out in social sites like cafeterias, pubs, restaurants, shopping malls, theatres, public transport, marriage ceremonies and places of local *adda*. Ethnography was also conducted by visiting five couples' residences with their consent with an aim to read other narrative 'texts' like photographs (Pink, 2002; Grady, 2004) before and after marriage, videos of the family, gifts (Rose, 2007) presented to each other including love letters and to undertake an overall exploration of their everyday interaction. The photos that have been used for the purpose of this research have been collected from subjects' personal collections and have been produced in the research with the prior consent and approval of the subject. In cases where other 'texts' were generated during the process of doing participant ethnography or visual ethnography, mental notes were taken which were then written down at the earliest possible opportunity, aided often by photographs taken during this process. This aspect of visual knowledge (Pink, 2002) has complemented interview texts of intimacy. Sharing with my subjects their personal spaces was in a sense symbolic in terms of gaining insights into and sharing intimate stories that often did not appear during the formal interview phase. Narrative 'texts' generated through reading photographs, gifts, and couples' shared habitus were equally important stories of intimacy that engendered knowledge about the cultural 'distinction' of the *bhadrasamaj* and their intimate middle-class practices of respectability and taste (Bourdieu, 1984).

Most interviews were audio recorded and in some cases also audio-visually recorded with full consent of the subject. In some cases subjects were conscious of this external device and politely denied its usage. Some of whom had agreed, had agreed on the condition that a copy of the same be given to them after the interview. Recordings were facilitated through note-taking undertaken whenever possible, particularly when it would not hinder the flow of interview. In cases where it was thought to have possibly been an interruption into an emotional flow of storytelling, notes were written down on sociological significant analytical themes, at the earliest next opportunity of the interview.

Subjects' reported speeches and interview 'texts' that were often bilingual in nature have been translated from Bengali to English. These translations have been presented within double inverted commas and italicized with English words originally used by subjects themselves in their bilingual narrations, presented within single inverted commas. This technique of translation and presentation was undertaken to ensure reproducing the intended meaning of subjects' narration as far as possible and to bring out the cultural politics of using the English language to describe intimacy in specific contexts within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*.

As stated therefore, the interview 'texts' in vernacular were translated in ways that tried, as far as possible, to retain the original intended meaning of the narration and the contextual cultural backdrop. However, vernacular narratives often invoked terms and emotions that were culturally specific in both language and feeling and therefore challenged a direct translation. The process of translation from one cultural context to another, in this sense is always one of translation of ideas, emotions, and punctuations.

Since there is no one 'correct' translation, a major ethical and methodological weakness and challenge of a research is that some meanings are often lost in translation. In this context, "I was, as a researcher, not a neutral, impartial collector of text" (Macleod, 2002: 19). Instead, in my selection of particular narrative texts for analysis and their translation, I as a researcher in interaction with the subjects mutually co-constructed multiple versions of social reality that is socio-culturally and subjectively specific. The rationale for selecting specific narrative 'texts' for analysis, however, will be provided in every chapter of their analysis. The transcribed versions tried to spell chosen vernacular words phonetically as far as possible.

An ethical issue that arose during carrying out this process of narrative interviewing and ethnography is important to state. A standardized ethical guideline from the ethics committee of the University demanded that interviewees had to grant their consent to the interview by signing on a consent sheet after having read in detail the nature of the research, the interview process, and its implications and conditions.

These guidelines that sought to ensure ethical research often became counterproductive owing to their absence of cultural contextualization. Many of my interviewees for instance, were absolutely uninterested to go through the participant information sheet before the interview and 'deal with' the consent sheet that was part of the research ethics as prescribed by the University. Paradoxically alienated by the long information sheet the very idea of which was to empower the interviewees, they often became uptight and tight lipped, sceptically worrying about the serious business that they were getting involved with and that required mediation by impersonal non-friendly legal contracts. Starting the interview required another round of rapport building and

breaking the ice after requesting them warmly to 'just do the passing formality'. A major section of Bengali society operate comfortably through emotions, word of mouth, honour of trust and mutual respect that are strong enough not to require formal written codification, particularly in cases which involve people who already know each other. Violation of written rules have more than one way to be negotiated but a breach of trust and friendship amidst a close community of friends and kin into which I am socialized and working within, often incurs incurable and irrevocable emotional damage and repute.

The discourse of ethics within the overall ethnographic enquiry was couched less in legal contractual terms than in more deeply penetrating terms of power between the researcher and the researched. For instance, a charged emotional disclosure of one's intimate stories to an empathetic listener often left the interviewee unknowingly emitting through their body language and other non-verbal gestures, an experience of a certain loss of power over his or her life viz-a-viz the researcher who now 'knows' all the secrets of the interviewees life. Sometimes they also verbally (humorously) insinuated my power position gained by multiple accumulations of multiple people's life stories. Behind this humour, I sensed a certain serious loss of power of a middle-class urban individual otherwise notorious in the literature of Bengal to guard their privacy at any cost. As a middle-class Bengali myself, I imagined how a one sided asymmetrical transfer of information and knowledge in the form of intimate experiences can engender a sense of imbalance of power between the researcher and the researched, especially in gendered terms. Besides maintaining all the ethical guidelines of the University, I also constructed auto-ethnographic ethical principles that my context demanded of me. I

assured my interviewees a certain restoration of this imbalanced power position by 'sharing' stories rather than only 'knowing'. If they wished they could interview me as well after I interviewed them. Interestingly many did and quite excitedly, as I experienced multiple times how it was to sit at the other side of the table being interviewed, thereby dissolving the conventional binary division of the self and the other, subject and the object, experience and reality, researcher and the researched. My auto-ethnographic experience is intertwined with the ethics of 'dialogical epistemology' (Scholte, 1987 cited in Callaway, 1992) and '*dialogical*' and '*reflexive*' research (Schrijvers, 1991: 169 cited in Heaphy, 2007: 45) that do not claim to erase the power that arises between the researcher and the researched but reflexively negotiates with it. Dialogical research with self critical reflection that the researcher's subjectivity, positionality and context of research shape the sociological narrative (Plummer, 1983; Steier, 1991) of this research, lies at the heart of a 'reflexive methodology' that forms the epistemological basis of this research.

It is important in this context to discuss the issue of, who represents whose life, and how, as central topics of auto-ethnographic ethical concern. For the most part, auto-ethnography has been assumed to be more "authentic" than straight ethnography. The voice of the insider is assumed to be truer than that of the outsider in much debate (Deck cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997: 7). According to Deck, the author of auto-ethnography is the indigenous ethnographer, the native expert whose authentic firsthand knowledge of the culture is sufficient to lend authority to the text. By similar logic, Lejeune is also highly critical of outside ethnography in his discussion of auto-ethnography (Lejeune, 1989 cited in Deborah et al, 1997: 7).

Insider and outsider, I argue, are, however, simplistic constructions of dichotomous identities that overlook subtle processes of representation and power. Strathern, for instance, is sceptical of the “insider” view which as she rightly points, need not necessarily be the narratives of the ‘natives’, simply owing to the researcher’s field site being his/her “home” (Strathern, 1987 cited in Reed-Danahay, 1997: 5-6). I too believe this is the case given there cannot be one single story of either the home or the native. In such a case there might be the researcher’s bias to privilege one among the many stories that he or she best relates to from his or her positionality at home that is socio-culturally and inter-subjectively conditioned by generation, gender and class. Hence whether the auto-ethnographer is the anthropologist or sociologist, studying one’s ‘home’, this figure is not completely “at home” in telling ‘the’ ‘native’ story.

For instance, it has not been a mere coincidence to experience as a woman researcher, a pronounced gendered receptivity of this research question on intimacy. Almost all women across all three generations seriously contemplated questions on intimacy and relationships, narrating about these more emotionally than sexually, though not at the exclusion of the latter as the two dimensions of intimacy seem to be intricately intertwined for most of these women. On the contrary for many men, physical intimacy was often disengaged from emotional intimacy. Interestingly their initial reaction to my research on intimacy evoked vivid sexual imageries rather than anything else. Some men humorously commented on the ‘sexiness’ of such a ‘hot’ and ‘spicy’ topic. I could read that the humour behind such sexualization was only apparently humorous. “Did you mind, it’s just a joke lady!” they said, to apologize. “No, I don’t mind that”, I said. I said so, to welcome more of such unhindered data in the form of spontaneous

reactions, for this may have been a joke but a serious one nevertheless hinting at a gendered narrative of intimacy that needed further provocations of such story-telling.

This is only one aspect of the gendered reaction to my research question. The other aspect is more gendered in persistence and operation, as both discourse and practice and has had consequences on my epistemological position as a researcher viz-a-viz male interviewees almost across all ages. I have lived through during this fieldwork the initial problems that Ingham (1984) faced in interviewing those forty middle-aged middle-class husbands for her research. My interviews, like Ingham's, were at first unrevealing because male disclosure was limited and curt. It seemed to reflect substantially and qualitatively much less on intimacy in their everyday ordinary living, than their female counterparts who had expressed elaborately, eloquently and in often emotionally engaged ways. When couples were interviewed men often pointed to their female partners and said, "she would be able to better answer you on this", smugly relaxing thereafter. The woman would shake her head, give a thrifty smile and 'do' the emotional expressing (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993: 221) on his behalf. One could read into her body language, a sense of dissatisfaction in his unwillingness to do the intimacy which, however, has been so regular now that she is almost used to living with it as 'normal' gendered arrangement of roles in coupling. Some women, in fact, took pride in doing the expressing on his behalf. Sometimes even, she would interrupt him and excitedly say, "You don't even remember when we first met, can't even describe properly. Let me say!"

An ice-breaking technique with most male interviewees was to begin with questions concerning homosocial friendships and their fun-filled experiences of the male peer

group. They were more willing to discuss this space of male homosocial intimacy in which they could be 'free without being judged'. Therefore they excitedly discussed how as same gendered friends they bonded together through sexual jokes, flirting, teasing one another, sharing drinks and smokes or planning together to help a friend propose a girl for a date or even falling out because of the same girl. These disclosures also took time until they could become flowing narratives. Such spontaneous flows were often aided by 'breaking the ice' through a keen, empathetic, non-judgemental body language that needed to be performed as friend in the researcher.

Having said this, it is important to qualify that in no way do I intend to theorize an essentialized maleness/masculinity or femaleness/femininity or treat intimacy as a 'naturally' sexed or fixed gendered emotion. These were at best culturally specific gendered cues to subjects' 'doing' intimacy that provoked further explorations to unravel its negotiated dynamic. In fact, ethnographic experiences also often overturned this conventional gendered dynamic amongst interviewees in which men with whom I share a close intimate friendship often disclosed more intimate stories than many women. This spurred an analysis of a more nuanced nature through a deeper delving into the gendered dynamic of heterosexual identities that were often fragmented subjectivities that varied across a range of conflicting, competing and contradictory discourses of heterosexual intimacies. The next section elaborates on the method of deconstructive discourse analysis that was employed to appreciate the multiplicities of discourses and subjectivities that can sociologically shed light on the dynamic contexts and processes of interaction, interpretation and meaning-making.

Method of Analysis:

The method of analysis employed in the research is deconstructive discourse analysis (Macleod, 2002). I will specify the nature of discourse analysis and deconstruction that has been used to delimit the varying conceptualization of these terms and usages. The discourse analysis that I employ is heavily focused on the meaning-making tradition of symbolic interactionism and the Foucauldian understanding of power, language and discourse, in both restricting and producing these meanings (Foucault, 1990: 95) that are also historically and culturally specific (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 7). It is in the employment of an interpretive, reflexive style of discourse analysis that I link the 'linguistic turn' to the 'interactionist', 'interpretivist turn' in sociology. In using the method of deconstructive discourse analysis to analyze narrative 'texts', I take inspiration from the theoretical bases of Foucault and Derrida that, I argue, can be usefully selectively drawn into sociology to perform discursive analytic work in line with the 'interpretivist turn' of sociology.

Therefore, although I take theoretical inspiration from Foucauldian and Derridean project of post-structuralism, like Parker, I distance my theoretical and methodological stance from 'fervent Foucauldians or derisive Derrideans' (Parker, 1989: 4 cited in Macleod, 2002: 3) in the retention of the Gramscian concept of ideology and cultural hegemony in understanding gender relations. It is methodologically important to note in this context that "Gramsci anticipated Michel Foucault's emphasis on the role of "discursive practices" in reinforcing domination" (Lears, 1985: 569). Also a "Gramscian approach allows one to integrate the insights of symbolic interactionism and cultural anthropology with an awareness of power relations" (Lears, 1985: 573). I argue

therefore, that the structural, material and political bases of gender relations and sexuality can have ideological, hegemonic and discursive anchorages in which the symbolic can have 'real' consequences on people's lives. In this I take inspiration from Jackson's understanding that "whereas a strictly Foucauldian use of the term 'discourse' counterposes it to ideology...feminists need to retain a conceptualization of discourses as ideological in their effects in that they can work to conceal, legitimate or render palatable relations of subordination and domination" (1999: 116). In vein with the interpretivist tradition of sociology, I am also inclined to understand discourses as 'interpretive repertoires' (Potter et al., 1990: 212) and as having hegemonic and counter-hegemonic implications. In this research, I understand discourse as "a particular network of meanings, their heterogeneity and their effects" (Hollway, 1989: 38) and as "historically variable way of specifying knowledge and truth" (Ramazanoglu, 1993: 7).

Discourse analysis sought to 'explore how cultural representations become part of subjective identity' (Roper and Tosh, 1991: 15) through analysis of discursive patterns of heterosexual intimate relations and its specific stories of confirmation, circumvention and subversion. The discursive approach focused on how cultural representations of heterosexual intimate relations 'must perpetually be achieved, asserted and renegotiated' (Roper and Tosh, 1991: 18). Precisely because of the operation of multiple 'truth' claims and multiple power relations (that is central to discourse analysis), analysis not only focused on collective homogeneity but also on the heterogeneity and differences in these collective imagination and claims that are at once coherent and fragmented. This is undertaken to engender a sociology of knowledge on relationships

and personal life that are understood best through their nuanced processes of negotiations which represent conflicting and contradictory structures and agencies, discourses and subjectivities.

The process of analyzing cultural patterns and contradictions involved grouping the interview transcripts into stories told about a particular topic. These were then coded using sociological significant themes of: 'relationships'; 'intimacy'; 'family'; 'relatives'; 'friendship'; 'choice'; 'individual'; 'personal'; 'arrangement'; 'love'; 'romance'; 'marriage'; 'men'; 'women'; 'heterosexual'; 'homosexual'; 'modern'; 'traditional'; 'past generation'; 'present generation'; 'community'; 'nation'; 'Indian'; 'Western'; 'Bengali'; 'respectable'; 'taste'. Narratives were read in whole with emphasis on these themes that are manifested either through direct invocation of the concepts or a story of it that implies its invocation through related descriptions, associations and knowledge. This way of reading often revealed broader discursive patterns and at many other times revealed ambivalences within the claimed patterned of authenticity.

Language as a system of power and truth (Foucault, 1980) categorizes, labels and classifies spaces, times, cultures, peoples and things. Subjects' narratives that use specific terms and language often confirm this practical linguistic tendency to order the social reality into apparently manageable narratives of neat binaries. Subjects narrated continuously on how 'we' think as Indians, of what 'we' collectively do as men, of how 'we' shared our stories as women, of how 'we' grew up as educated middleclass Bengalis, and of how 'our' generation is more modern in the present time. These binaries in narrativizing "presence" through "absence", in which 'A' relies on 'not-A' for its meaning while at the same time subordinating it (not-A or absence) (Derrida, 1978),

co-constituted the self and the other. Narratives confirmed the binary and often superiority of 'us' and 'our' through its implicit logical other 'they' and 'theirs' (Hall, 1992). A discourse analysis brings out these binaries and helps understand how discourse and subjectivity are co-constituted. A deconstruction of the very same narrative 'text' can then lay bare fractured, contradictory, ambivalent subjectivities that cut across a range of multiple and conflicting discourses. In the context of this research, this can be understood as the revealing of gendered and classed subjectivities that cut across co-existing but often contradictory discourses of colonialism, nationalism, transnationalism, neoliberal politics and their narratives of intimacy. Laying bare these ambivalences requires the researcher to not only stick to subjects' surface narratives but to read in between the lines along the sociological tradition of hermeneutics and also go beyond them. I have attempted to partially accomplish this by focusing on two aspects of narratives. They are:

- Goffman's (1959) concept of 'Dramaturgy' in narrations that involve, what I call, 'extra-narratives' or "paralinguistic features ("uhms")" (Riessman, 1993: 19-19) and other bodily movements (Bauman, 1986).
- Multiplicity of narratives, where one self-narrative is internally contradicted with a contrasting self-narrative that aims to bring out differences in the processes of meaning making in different contexts and interactional situations and discourses.

'Extra narratives' and multiple narratives tell multiple stories, subjectivities, interpretations, discourses, and hence, multiple narrative texts. Understanding this multiplicity is necessary in order to bring out the network of power relations within which everyday stories are caught up and operate.

Deconstructive discourse analysis is employed to not only bring out the co-constitution of discourses and subjectivities but also to deconstruct them to order to bring out differences, ambivalences and fragmentations. “Deconstructive discourse analysis implies undermining the revelation of essence, destabilizing meaning as presence, and disrupting dominant, taken-for granted notions of a subject” (MacLeod, 2002: 8). Discourse analysis, therefore links ‘discursive practice’ (the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation) to ‘social practice’ (the institutional circumstances that shapes the discursive practice) (Fairclough, 1992). Derridean deconstruction to discourse analysis then, attempts to destabilize the discourses, stories, scripts, narratives and texts. Deconstruction aims neither at destroying the text nor asserting it as to its truth value. Instead, it questions discourses by exploring (deconstructing) them in terms of their claims of ‘presence’, and their dependence on ‘absences’ (Dant, 1991).

Understanding heterosexual intimate relations in Bengal merely through subjects’ narratives and cultural narratives is incomplete without situating them within colonial history of Bengal for the cultural politics of gendering that mediated much of middle-class colonial relations is still powerful to enter into a dialogic relation with the present postcolonial Bengali *bhadrasamaj*. Sociology in India and particularly Bengal, has given little academic attention to intimate relations as meaning-making processes within everyday culture (Dwyer, 2000). In addition, it has also neglected the ‘social practice’ of situating class and gender relations, necessary for the study of heterosexual intimate relations in post-colonial Bengal within the colonial-national history and its narrative of ‘modern’, ‘traditional’, ‘Indian’ meanings and practices of intimacy. Situating everyday culture within the social, institutional, structural, and material helps better understand

the everyday processes of cultural meaning-making and appreciates the 'social' and 'cultural' as intertwined rather than separate, as often claimed (Jackson and Scott, 2010). My research primarily seeks to privilege how subjects give meaning to their practices of intimacy within everyday culture but also seeks to explore how their subjectivities are intertwined with Bengal's colonial-national history and its material relations.

By employing a discourse analysis of subjects' narrative 'texts' and 'scripts'; I seek to bring out the multiple, coexisting and often contradictory colonial, national, trans-national and neoliberal discourses of 'modern', 'traditional', 'progressive' heterosexual identities and practices of intimacies. I then show through deconstruction that subjects' narratives do not only cut across these contradictory discourses but also sometimes illustrate contradictions within each of these discourses, manifesting a multiplication of contradictions. Sociological concepts and processes of family, friendship, marriage, class and gender relations in Bengal that shape and reflect these discourses are therefore understood simultaneously at the institutional, structural, cultural, interpersonal, subjective levels which link the 'discursive practice' with the 'social practice'.

Through this link between the discursive and the social, I bring into sociology the academic necessity for sharing inter-disciplinary spaces in ways in which sociology as a discipline is internally enriched and is also opened up for critical dialoguing across disciplines of history, anthropology, cultural studies, women's studies and postcolonial studies. Through employing the methods of reflexive interpretive ethnography, narrative interviewing and a deconstructive discourse analysis that is theoretically linked to the

'interactionist turn', a post-structuralist Foucauldian based discursive approach and postcolonial history and feminism; I humbly wish to initiate into Bengal's sociology an academic necessity for studying everyday cultural processes of negotiating intimacy, both theoretically and epistemologically.

CHAPTER-4 NARRATIVES OF MALE HOMOSOCIAL INTIMACY: CONSTRUCTING AND NEGOTIATING MASCULINITIES

An exploration into the increasingly accepted heterosocial spaces of intimate friendships within contemporary urban Bengali *bhadrasamaj* (respectable society understood as middle-class society, where respectable becomes synonymous with middle-class) confirms trans-national literature on friendship as highly gendered (Allan, 1989; Walker, 1994). Ethnographic explorations reveal that in most occasions, “relaxed” cross-gendered intimate spaces tend to develop sub spaces of same gender intimacy or homosocial intimacy that exist within and also develop outside of these heterosocial spaces. This chapter focuses on male homosocial intimate spaces through an analysis of subjects’ stories, narratives and various cultural performances and practices, like *adda*, to illustrate the heavily gendered, classed, and communal character of such intimacy. By analyzing the ways in which male homosocial bonds are strengthened by fusing friendship and kinship (Paul and Spencer, 2010), this chapter will show that the ‘individualization thesis’ of reflexive modernization as espoused by Giddens (1991, 1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002, 2005) does not apply to the empirical cases of urban middle-class Bengal.

Subjects’ narratives show that ‘practices of intimacy’ overlap with ‘family practices’ (Jamieson, 2011), that masculinity is a nationalistic discourse (Enloe, 1990; Pettman, 1996; Haywood and Ghail, 2003) which is embedded within ‘sedimented structures and the imaginary’ (Smart, 2007: 29), ideals of joint family and its patriarchal national

valorization of 'brotherhood'. The real and often imagined idea of brotherly love and unity strongly underpinning narratives of male homosocial intimacy is analyzed to highlight the cultural construction of such intimacy as highly 'liberating' viz-a-viz other intimacy like heterosexual coupling. This discourse is then deconstructed to lay bare the internal fragmentations and ambivalences of the Male self and its multi-layered homosocial friendships that are sometimes laden with homoerotic desires (Flood, 2008). In deconstructing the power and vulnerability of the socio-cultural process of constructing the male 'self', the chapter will illustrate the self's dependence on and its discursive subordination of the 'other' (Connell, 1995; Gough, 2001). Finally, this chapter will synthesize the above analysis and seek to address one of the central concerns of this research: processes of negotiating intimate heterosexual identities. Through exploring male homosocial intimate spaces, I will show how subjects engage in a continuous process of constructing and negotiating hegemonic masculinities by confirming, subverting, and reproducing institutionalized heterosexuality or heteronormativity in their everyday practices of such friendships that are both discursive and embedded within material structural inequalities (Holland et al., 1998). The following section will analyze the construction of middle-class masculinity within and through *adda*.

'Adda': Public, Male, Middle-Class Intimacy:

Adda is a distinct Bengali speech genre (Sen, 2011: 521) and is the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and non-rigorous conversations (Chakrabarty, 2000: 181). The content of *adda* Sen (2011) notes, has historically been of intellectual significance ranging from subjects of local/global politics to art to literature to music. She

argues, “casual conversations and gossips are common in many societies but the creative performance of this genre by Bengali elites made *adda* a marker of an urban middle-class identity, especially in response to the cultural hegemony of British imperialism” (521-522).

The *Bhadralok* (respectable men, implying middle-class men or generally middle-class people) who engaged in *addas* are a product of colonial modernity (Basu, 2002). The popularity of *adda*, for instance, was both facilitated by and a reaction to Westernization which is understood from the interconnection between the English language and world politics that formed the discourse of *adda* (Sen, 2011: 522). As is implied therefore, literacy and *adda* went hand in hand. Men who were the first ones to go out to seek education and be exposed to Westernization and to the English language therefore became the historical subjects of this highly public character of *adda* (Sen, 2011: 522). Also in its hegemonic middle-classness, it has traditionally been predominantly an engagement of the high castes, as hinted by Bhabha’s expression of “the Chatterjees and the Banerjees at a Calcutta *adda*” where Chatterjees and Banerjees are the Brahmins, the representations of high caste Bengalis. (Bhabha, 2002: ix). Although *adda* is a product of colonial modernity, contradictorily by many standards of judgements in modernity, *adda* is a flawed social practice; predominantly male in its modern form in public life, oblivious of the materiality of labour in capitalism, hegemonic in its middle-classness and forgetful of the working classes (Chakrabarty, 2000: 181). This contradiction in the culture of *adda* is manifest in contradictory Bengali middle-class subjectivities- on one hand, men condescend the leisurely ‘waste’ of time by ‘giving’ *adda* in times of ever-increasing work and family demands; on the other hand,

men continually seek for communal and cultural belongingness through *adda*. These subjectivities simultaneously embody a death of *adda* and a desire for it.

Adda and Narratives of Masculine Nostalgia:

First generation Nirmal's narration summarizes the cultural contradiction of *adda*,

"Not only others but the bhadralok themselves claim that the Bengali 'culture' has been doomed because of the notorious practice of lazy people wasting time giving adda rather than working. As much as this is true that we Bengalis live on fish and rice and are also quite lazy and work-shy, it cannot be denied that our integral 'culture' of adda has seen a Rabindranath Tagore⁴ who is compared to Shakespeare but definitely greater than him! It has also seen the best of literary and cinematic creations and the masterpieces of 'great minds' and 'great men' who were known to indulge into unending addas!"

Despite *adda*'s historically gender, class and caste bias, *adda*'s perceived gradual disappearance from urban life of Calcutta over the past three or four decades, owing to its weakening hold against the pressures of industrialization and the individualization of modernity, has created cross-generational nostalgia. "It is as if with the slow death of *adda* will die the identity of being a Bengali" (Chakrabarty, 2000: 181). Subjects cross-generationally narrated that male *adda* these days are constrained by pressures of work and conjugality. Third generation Arjun, an IT engineer, echoes his other five friends, who are all married now, and have 're-united' after a long gap of their now rare get-togethers,

⁴ Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the first non-European Nobel Prize winner for Literature. He was the poet, philosopher and writer who was globally renowned particularly for reshaping his region's literature and music. He is still highly regarded amongst Bengalis, particularly among the urban Bengali *bhadrasmaj*. He is also the epitome of symbolic capital of the *bhadrasmaj*.

“The growing demands of ‘corporatized culture’, time-consuming married life and ‘office’ leave no ‘time’ for us male friends to indulge in adda.” His friend Raj adds, “we hardly get ‘our own guy-time’ these days. ‘Family and work pressure’ are mounting everyday, not to mention, a ‘strict timetable set by the beloved wife’ to get back home after work!”

In contemporary late modern capitalism, where work is valorized over leisure, first and second generation men often expressed a judgemental retrospective narration of times ‘then’ and ‘now’, or as ‘our’ *adda* in ‘those’ days, in ‘our’ times. Second generation Ashok claims,

“Life becomes worthless without adda. Your Kakima, (meaning ‘aunty’ – referring to his wife) complains about my everyday evening habit of going out of the home to give adda at the local para (neighbourhood) club and not returning back in time for dinner, as I always get drowned in these addas. But I will not compromise on adda, which is my food for thought. Going to para club for a smoke and adda, in fact, defines Bengali masculinity (laughs with pride). This club which is part of growing up is almost home-like and its members, brother-like friends. These days not many people can turn up for adda because they are busy, but those of us who come, chat for hours almost every day recollecting our ceaseless addas of those days, of lost times and lost friends!”

Seventy-one year-old Ronjon is a retired writer and journalist and is passionate about *adda*. I interviewed him and three of his other male friends who are four to five years younger than him but regard their Ronjon Da (Da is a shorter form of Dada, or elder brother) as,

“heart of their para adda that still takes place at Bhola’s tea stall and where addas are often animated by addadhari (one who holds together an adda) people like Ronjon Da.”

Ronjon links *adda* to nostalgic images of Bengal's illustrious intellectual past and great men who participated in it. He romantically narrativizes the concept of *para* as *"one of the fixed locations of adda that is hardly to found today in the fast growing 'apartments', 'flats' and 'multiplexes' of this city."* He continually re-invokes the collective sentiment of the Bengali community in their *"shared intellectual character, community solidarity, and secured local identities that is threatened by the 'neo-liberal political changes' in the city today."* He also emphasizes,

"Adda in our times was a very 'productive intellectual space' where, global politics and world literature were our regular discussion and debates of adda over god knows how many cups of roadside tea and cheap 'cigarettes'. As you can understand, the 'communist left inclined Bengali intellectual' always ran short of money to indulge regularly on expensive 'global brands'. Addas these days, I suppose, are not so 'rich' either in terms of thought, depth, or friendship. People have become more self-centric these days and are only running after a 'consumerist culture' which also results in the waning of adda. 'The newly rich middle-class of the neo-liberal politics of today' has only money, no culture and is destroying the distinct character of a 'culturally rich Bengali bhadrasamaj'. Fortunately, our area still has a strong para culture where us few men still take time out to meet." He mourns, *"these days adda and social solidarity is dying with the rise of modern capitalism and consumerist cultures!"*

Adda, Bhadrakalok, Bhadrasamaj and its Modernity:

The narratives of Ronjon and Nirmal that are highly representative of subjects in their age cohort reveal a sociology of *adda* that connects this cultural practice with *"great men and great minds"*, with *"culturally rich Bengali bhadrasamaj"*, *"rich thought and friendship"*, *para* solidarity of *"men"* that is dissolved by, *"neo-liberal politics, capitalistic*

consumerist culture and the newly rich middle-class". It is significant in this context to note how Ronjon reinterprets the capitalist hegemonic ideas of 'rich and productive'. He disassociates the concepts necessarily with economic capital and understands these through the lens of cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). By characterizing the 'distinction' of Bengali *bhadrasmaj* through symbolic and cultural capital, he assigns superiority to these forms of capital and to the society which embodies these. His narrative can be read as a desire for an 'alternative modernity' (Chakrabarty, 2002) that critiques or at least attempts to critique, a globalized capitalistic modernity. Such critique is evident in his romantic invocation of 'roadside tea, cheap cigarettes, and the communist left inclined Bengali intellectual.' 'Intellectual productivity' is held as the basis for leisurely *adda* that is not a 'waste of time'.

Ronjon's narrative reconceptualizes a modern 'politics of time' that associates progress with capitalism, capitalism with work and work with economic productivity. It upholds a version of localized modernity that destabilizes a monolithic hegemonic modernity (Hall, 1991). However, although Ronjon subverts and interrogates hegemonic notions of modernity, progress and power through a critique of consumeristic capitalism; he nevertheless, confirms and reinforces another hegemonic notion of culture and progress. This hegemony lies in upholding a male, intellectual middle-class nature of *adda* through which the Bengali cultural community is seen to be constructed. Such character of *adda* is upheld by many others across generations as the "*real*" form of *adda* that acquires meaning precisely through its intertwined gendered, classed and communal character. This Bengali male cultural chauvinism, within everyday mundane practice of *adda*, illustrates the everyday inter-subjective interactionist processes of

reproducing the cultural imperatives of hegemonic heterosexual identities through hegemonic masculinity and its homosociality. The following paragraphs will bring out the generational transmission of this masculine desire.

Ethnographic explorations reveal that *addas* in contemporary times are definitely more gender democratic, both in their public and private forms. However, although it has now become more democratic with non-elite appropriation of the elite practices of *adda*, (Sen, 2011: 522), many cross generational narratives still romanticize the hegemonic nature of *addas*. This is identified in subjects' desire for the "meaning-constitutive" (Gross, 2005) traditions that are both gendered and classed as evident in the cross-generational semiotic registers. This confirms Smart's connectedness thesis that focuses on the importance of memory and generational cultural transmission as important aspects of 'personal lives' that are "embedded in both sedimented structures and the imaginary" (2007: 29).

Forty-one year-old Shantanu expresses his desire to keep alive the intellectual spirit of Bengali *adda* that takes shape not only in the form of content and talk but also in the locations, spaces or habitations of its practice as also noted by Sen (2011: 522). He narrates,

"I frequently visit various 'posh clubs and cafe' to give adda with my friends but adda at traditional places like the 'coffee house' has a 'charm of its own'. It has the 'history and heritage of legendary men who gave adda over cups of coffee and from such addas sprang so many of their literary and cinematic masterpieces'. Coffee house also reminds me of the much familiar milieu of 'College Street'. Memories of 'college days, university friends, boys hostel, college canteen' and smell of new and old books in the boi-para (a locality where

books are sold, by which he refers to the historically famous place, College Street in Central Kolkata) *flood back with the idea of adda at coffee house!*"

Shantanu, once again semiotically hegemonizes the male intellectual class-culture of *adda* which shapes and is shaped by cultural and symbolic capital.

Twenty year-old Ronojoy has grown up hearing stories of *rawker adda* or *adda on the rawk* (rawk or verandah is a narrow raised platform outside a dwelling house on the streets) from his uncles and elder brothers. Today such *rawks* are hardly available for the purpose of *adda*. It is his dream, however, to experience the traditional charms of such *adda* in his generation. As a group of five male friends they re-create the semiotic of *adda* by carving out a make-believe *rawk* for themselves. Such creative performativity has been an important attribute of *adda* that made *adda* an emergent cultural form in contemporary globalized Bengal (Sen, 2011: 523). In the way the third generation recreates a historical past in their present space, they reinvent both the present and the past. It is sociologically significant and interesting to note how a part of North Calcutta, named Salt Lake, which is otherwise notorious for not facilitating *adda*, is innovatively turned by Ronojoy and his friends as their everyday *thek*, (a colloquial slang for a fixed place of *adda* also termed as *addakhana*), which as they say has now become their 'second home'.

A 'lack' of collective locality sentiment or neighbourhood solidarity in Salt Lake is structurally and culturally conducive to an urban anonymity with no obvious *para* gaze over the whereabouts of its residents. Such anonymity however is antithetical to locality *adda*. Residents frequent the various parks within this locality but only occasionally have been heard to have developed intimate friendships. One of such parks has an

extended and elevated bench-like contour that Ronojoy and his friends have imagined to represent the lost *rawk*. Since two of their friends already live there, as a group they first meet at this common venue for a collective chat, cigarettes and tea (Ronojoy has also heard how tea and cheap cigarettes have been indispensable elements of *addas* then). Their fixed *thek* has today attracted and accomodated many of their other friends from college and Ronojoy's music band. The space today is a second home for many and a hub of ceaseless *addas* on films, sports, music and women. A ritualistic performance of their hegemonic masculinity can be noted in their claimed 'playfull' *jharimara* (casual 'checking out' of girls) or what Radha Prasad (2010) referred to as *jhakidorshon* (implying men collectively looking at women) in the context of 1940s Bengal.

Such performances of middle-class maleness confirm a generational cultural transmission of the highly gendered Bulterian (1990) concept of 'performativity' of masculinity through the 'performance' of *adda*. Semiotic registers of *adda*, both public and private are often made more pleasurable with the consumption of imported vodka, rum, whiskey, and coke. The increasing inclinations for globally branded cigarettes and the finest of whiskeys by the elite middle-class have shown relaxations of their communistic bourgeois critique in the name of 'classy taste'. However, the everyday enactment of *adda* at the slightest possible break from 'office work' still upholds the inexpensive *bhnare cha* (tea served in mud pots), 'good food' and middle-class affordable cigarettes. Enactment of *adda* through the dependence on familiar semiotic registers therefore makes *adda* as a semiotic value, a generationally binding sociality

and a form of gendered, class relationality through which the *bhadralok* and *bhadrasamaj* are valorized.

By narrativizing the *thek* as the ‘second home’, the idea of home is linked with the intimate - *adda*, male friendship, secured belongingness and a sense of unchanging fixed place. The invocation of *thek* or *addakhana* in the cross-generational narratives of *adda*, brings out the cultural significance of family and home. It also blurs the strict demarcation between the private and the public, through which *adda*, even in its public form is domesticized or made homely. Narratives of *adda* therefore confirm ‘the idea of home’ which provides a sense of security and control over one’s life in contrast to the market and state controlled lives in modern societies (Morgan, 2011: 13) or in the words of Ronjon, in contrast to ‘neo-liberal politics and consumerist culture’. Ashok’s description of his *para* club as “home-like” or “as part of growing up”, Shantanu’s familiar comfort with coffee house, Ronjon’s romanticization of *parar adda* and Ronojoy’s *thek* as his “second home”; narrativizes the sociological significance of family, the idea of home and its gendered and classed underpinnings, in constructing the idea of the intimate through the practice of homosocial *adda*.

The specific semiotic registers of the *thek*, *bhanre cha*, local brand cigarettes can be read as texts that narrate unique local and cultural deviations from an uncritical absorption and assimilation into a hegemonic homogenous modern knowledge systems and global consumerist consumption (Hall, 1991) and can be understood as instances that indicate varying responses to globalization (Chakrabarty, 2002). Underlying multiple responses to globalization, are the problematized negotiations between an ever-changing capitalist modernization characteristic of an unsettling habitus and a

comfortable, secure and familiar habitus in the collective imagination of the people; an unyielding bargain of locating one's 'home' amidst newer uncertainties and anxieties (Chakrabarty, 2000: 182).

This holding back of one's self from an uncritical absorption into the global market and its crass materialism associated with the 'newly rich middle-class' which is the 'other' of the educated tasteful 'cultured' 'self' of the *bhardrolok*, is sometimes real and often imagined. A culturally defined 'intellectual' critique of the bourgeois culture by the 'abhijat' or sophisticated middle-class can be read as a form of patriarchal romanticization through radical left politics that has historically been pre-dominantly male-dominated. A paradox which belies this critique is that, in a continual negotiation with modernity, the *bhadralok* in their overwhelming critique of blatant bourgeois lifestyle, most often inhabits and appropriates the very same bourgeois spaces and desire. What is therefore continually discursively co-constructed is both the local and the global, the self and the other, the 'real'/ 'authentic' and the unreal/inauthentic, past and present, then and now, and tradition and modernity.

The co-constitution of 'now' and 'then' forms a significant aspect of contemporary *addas* where *adda* of the past is continually invoked to make sense of *adda* in the present. Putative dichotomies of 'past' and 'present' or 'traditional' and 'modern' generations are mutually constituted just as *addas* of these times are, even within the same generation across one's lifespan, as illustrated in Ashok's narrative. In this co-constitution, hegemonic performances of gender and class-community culture keep being continually constructed and reproduced.

What problematizes these spaces and negotiations is never being able to surely locate the 'real' or the 'authentic' in the claimed Bengali authenticity of *adda*. It indicates continuous grappling with the new but logically not being able to strictly locate the newness about it; for, if the authentic 'self' is unstable, so is its 'other'. For instance, when I asked my subjects if they could tell me about what they meant by 'our *adda* is different' or if they would locate their 'actual or real *adda*', most subjects paused to think about an oft-claimed authenticity of Bengali *adda*. Subjects could hardly confirm what 'real *adda*' was and only variously located it in multiple aspects of the Bengali culture such as food, music, politics, literature and its lazy spirit.

Anthropologically it is significant to note that even amidst shifting embodiments and imaginations, there is a high value placed on the 'real' self, the collective desire and effort to locate it by whatever means available (Morgan, 2011: 17). This involves conditions of collective reading, criticisms and pleasures which Appadurai terms, a "community of sentiment", a group that imagines and feels things together although in its heterogeneity (1996: 8). However elusive the 'authentic' might be, or however unstable its hegemonic nature might be; the collective imagination of the Bengalis in seeking to locate the 'authentic', as evident in the cultural discourse of *adda*, cannot be under-emphasized. This is because with every attempt to define the 'authentic'; the 'real', 'original' and 'true' nature of Bengali *adda*, Bengali society and Bengali identity is continually discursively constructed and re-imagined.

These spaces of *adda* in a globalized Bengal are best understood as habitus of global subjects struggling to grapple with a sense of Bengaliness in motion, which is, however, predominantly still male and middleclass. A sense of intimate belongingness is, to an

extent, socially structured by one's 'habitus', 'field', a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 130), and thereby intertwined with a cultural politics of belonging (Weedon, 2004) that is both gendered and classed. This cultural politics of intimacy narrated through the cultural practice of *adda* illustrated how hegemonic codes of gender, class, community and family sentiments, shape masculine identities and intimacies. The next sections narrativize other aspects of male homosociality, particularly its embeddedness within family relations in order to illustrate the everyday mundane processes of constructing heterosexual masculine identities and intimacies.

Friendship and Kinship:

The Bengali word *atmiyashwajon* is conventionally used to refer to one's relatives usually connected through blood or marital relations, or in few cases through the adoption of children who are brought up within the family like one's biological relation. Across all three generations, particularly in the third generation, subjects often reconceptualized the structured denotation of *atmiyas* (kinsmen) to connote friends who, unlike kinsmen, are 'chosen'. This section problematizes the 'chosen' aspect of friendship by illustrating the structural and cultural limits of this 'choice'. Second generation Ashok narrates,

"In times of need, neighbours and friends will come to help, not relatives. Everyday familiarity and dependence make friends closer than many kins. In fact, friends are our real kins!"

Third generation Arjun binds the notion of *atmiya* with 'personal choice' stating,

“Relatives cannot be ‘chosen’ but friends can be. It’s obvious that you ‘choose’ someone who you like, with whom you have a ‘heart-to-heart connection’. Atmiya in the ‘real sense of the term’ should mean people who you wish to individually connect to and not ones you are related by blood.”

Third generation Boudhayan’s narrative is significant in terms of the way he defines the ‘actual’ meaning of *atmiya*,

“Friends are much ‘better’ than atmiyashwajan. In fact, if we take the actual meaning of atmiya, then only ‘true friends’ can be regarded as atmiya.”

In Boudhayan’s narrative, the first usage of *atmiyashwajan* is the conventional structural meaning of kinsmen related by blood or marriage. The second usage according to both him and Arjun is the “real” sense of the term. The meaning of the word *atma* from which *atmiya* is derived means the soul. *Shwajan* means people of the self. *Atmiyashwajan* therefore are ones who are connected through the soul, and are of the self; with whom one feels *ghonishtota* (intense closeness) or *antarangata* (intimacy) and who can only be ‘chosen’ and therefore “true” friends. ‘True’ or ‘real’ friends have been narrativized as emotionally more supportive, trust worthy and less judgemental than less satisfactory familial spaces particularly in its extended form.

This shift from the institution of kinship to that of personal friendship or a shift from structure to agency, from family obligations to individual wish, constraint to choice, denotation to connotation is however, much more complex than it appears on the surface. I will argue in this context that denotation and connotation are integrally intertwined with mediations of the ideological in both (Heck, 1980: 116). Subjective connotations and individual ‘wishes/choices’ are not outside of family structures and

practices but are, in fact, shaped by them. Self and society, individual and family/community are continuously co-constituted.

I will illustrate through the space of male homosocial intimacy that the cultural transformation of structured kinship to agentic friendship is not a simplistic story of the individual who is now 'free' from social bindings, whose agentic experiences are structurally unmediated and who is non-conforming of the social rituals and the familial conventions of the institution of kinship. The putative shift from structurally 'given' intimate relations to individually 'chosen' intimate relations, or what Smart terms 'elective kinship of affinity' (Smart, 2007: 20) has been optimistically (Giddens, 1992) over-exaggerated as the cultural zeitgeist (Smart, 2007; Jamieson, 1998, 1999; Gross, 2005). In the 'individualization thesis' of reflexive modernization, 'free-floating' 'individuals' and their unfettered agency are prioritized over the more empirically founded socio-cultural imbeddedness of 'the personal' (Smart, 2007: 28-29). Personhood rather than individualism that takes into account the social and is conceptualized 'as always already part of the social' (Smart, 2007: 28) is more nuanced than unbridled individualism. Smart's concept of the personal is able to appreciate the overlapping discourses of friendship and kinship (Pahl and Spencer, 2010), of the 'practices of intimacy' and 'family practices' (Jamieson, 2011). Many narratives do indicate the waning of 'regulative tradition' of family (Gross, 2005) but in another sense also narrativize extensive potential of the cultural imagination of family. I will now illustrate within the space of male homosocial intimacy, the presence of 'meaning-constitutive-traditions' (Gross, 2005) and inter-subjectively shared traditions and rituals of family that make these spaces of friendship quasi familial spaces in which, the

distinction between family and friends get blurred and relations become fused (Pahl and Spencer, 2010: 197, Allan 2008: 6).

For instance, it is quite common to come across intimate friends referring to each other in kinship terminologies (Allan, 2008, Spencer and Pahl, 2006, Pahl and Spencer, 2010). Many of my male subjects across all generations referred to their closest male companion as 'brother' or 'brother-like', such as Ashok's 'brother-like' para friends for *adda*. This is also confirmed by Pahl and Spencer's research in the Western context (2010: 203). True friends perceived as playing family-like roles or simply being the family or 'true' friends as *atmiya*, have only widened the scope of kinship and family by no more restricting the performance of 'family practices' (Morgan, 2011) to the strict boundary of the conventional family. The re-inscription of family in friendship is best illustrated when men often expressed their disbelief that a friend had broken trust through betrayal. The reason for such disbelief is generally couched in the language of kinship as the cross-generationally representative narrative of third generation Rahul suggests,

"Joy (Rahul's male friend) 'was like my brother' and I gave him no less love than I gave my own brother. My mother too treated him like her own son! I wonder how he could betray me!"

On personal reflection, even I realize how unreflectively, almost automatically, I and many others like me within the same culture refer to our friends' kinsmen by the same terminologies as they do. For instance, subjects often call a friend's sibling as one's own sibling and in cases of more intimate friendships, by similar affectionate qualifications used before the terminology. For instance, Raj calls his best friend Arjun's elder sister

as Sundordi (adjective *sundor* means beautiful and *di* is the shorter version of *didi* which means elder sister) Raj echoes many subjects' emotions in his narrative,

"Since I've known Arjun from school and 'he is just not a friend but also a dear brother', it is 'quite obvious' that we are very close to each other's family members. Every year his elder sister, who we call sundor di gives both me and Arjun bhaiphota (a cultural occasion where sisters put a dot of curd on the brother's forehead and wish him well-being through a prayer). Similarly, my mother will cook special 'desserts' for Arjun every year on his 'birthday' as my mother's 'homemade desserts are his favourite!' (excited)."

Friends' parents were generally referred to as *Kaku and Kakima* (Uncle and Aunt respectively). This established not only a connection between the subject and his friend's parents but also indirectly the friend's parents with the subject's parents. Hence it was common, for instance, for my mother to refer to my friend's father as *Dada* (elder brother).

This cultural pattern emerged across all generations where practices of friendship overlapped with 'family practices'. This process of familializing intimate friendships interconnects the discursive with the social and makes claims about the dissolution of family and kinship and the complete transformation of kinship to friendship, only superfluous; for 'true' friendship is ideologically constructed in kinship terms. Intimate friendship is not devoid of familial rituals, obligations, responsibilities, expectations; all of which seem to get accentuated by a relation's ascendancy from 'just' friend to 'real' friend, who almost inevitably becomes family-like or "*of the family*". This reinstates that homophily is deeply intervened by structural, social, and ideological parameters that often set limits to our capacity to freely 'choose' our friends as noted in this context of highly gendered

class-centric, family mediated friendships (Davies, 2011: 79, Allan, 1996: 100). The ideological construction of 'doing' or 'displaying' friendship in its 'true' or 'real' form that equates this 'doing' to family relations, presumes a collective imagination and a shared knowledge of normative family by its audience and participants (Pahl and Spencer, 2010: 205). Through such cultural 'doings' of 'chosen' friendships, conventional 'family-like' qualities are more positively established and reconfirmed (Finch, 2007: 79-80). This confirms the social constructedness of the 'personal', and the familial commitments of the personal but in a way that redefines the nature and significance of family life; which in its cumulative character and range of connections, is more "flexible rather than brittle or breakable" (Smart, 2007: 29). This ethnographic finding helps to answer one of the research questions: how personal relationships are socially constructed and what roles family, class and community play in this. The next section will illustrate the gendered nature of the social constructedness of intimate friendship.

The cultural prevalence and desire to imagine and practice intimate friendship in the language of kinship is interestingly more common among men than women. Research revealed that women particularly in the third generation hardly referred to their female friends as sisters whereas, men across all generations often referred to their very close male friend as a brother or brother-like. Such male practices can be analyzed as the masculine desire to hold on to their structured forms of patriarchal kinship of the joint family arrangements where brotherly love, affection and loyalty are emotions that are intricately connected to such patriarchal cultural sensibility, and provide the very foundation of the joint sentiment of the family, both territorially and functionally. A possible historical and theoretical connection of such imagined and constructed

brotherhood in male homosocial intimacy can be traced to the myth of fraternity based in the idea of a natural unity of brothers that underlined the patriarchal assumptions of nationalist politics in Bengal. Hindu Bengali nationalist writers of the late nineteenth century, much like nationalists anywhere in that period imagined the political community of the nation as a brotherhood of men, and in that sense as a structure of modern patriarchy (Chakrabarty, 2000: 217). The cultural vestiges of such national imagination are strongly echoed in the contemporary male homosocial intimate spaces that have been ideologically constructed as 'liberating' in comparison to other spaces and other relations which are often culturally imagined to disrupt and break the otherwise strong unity of male brotherly friendship.

The 'Liberating' Narrative/Discourse of Male Homosociality and Brotherhood:

This section examines how maleness is maintained and reconfirmed through mundane male homosocial intimacies particularly in a period often associated with 'tension' and 'transition' in masculinity (Gough, 2001: 170; Kimmel, 1987: 9). Male homosocial space has been celebrated by almost all male subjects as the most liberating space for male intimate disclosure and forms of pleasures that are otherwise often difficult to access due to the ascendance of a compulsive heterosexual intimacy that is gradually becoming increasingly constrictive, restrictive, and socio-economically demanding. Arjun's, Raj's and Ashok's already stated narratives of *adda* represent other male narrative in terms of companionate heterosexual conjugality and the rising demands of family standing against male bonding and "reunion", without which life becomes "worthless" and devoid of "masculinity".

Echoing his friends, Ronojoy suggests that the *thek* which is their second home,

“Relaxes and liberates our free spirits. The only thing we boys look forward to in the day after ‘tuitions and studies’ is this ‘get-together of us male buddies’. ‘Girlfriends and other things can wait’. Amader bondhutyo (our friendship – referring to the friendship amongst the five boys) ‘comes first’ for ‘it is the only space where we can be our real selves’. Sometimes our female friends, who are also girlfriends to some of our group members, wish to join in. Not that we do not ‘give them an entry into our group’ but to be frank, we boys like to maintain our ‘privacy and independence’. After all, it’s ‘already’ known that girls can disturb male bonding by their nagging demands and domination over their boyfriends.”

Four men, who are part of a Bengali music band and also close friends, all in their early forties narrate a similar story of male homosociality. I interviewed two members of the band during one of their music rehearsals and my ‘entry into their group’ is also epistemologically significant to note. Ishan, for instance jokingly told me,

“You should feel quite fortunate to be a part of our group rehearsal. Generally we maintain a strong shared code of not allowing outsiders, like for instance any of our girlfriends or women generally into our domain!”

Realizing that Ishan’s comment could hurt me, Sounak quickly got in to rationalize his friend’s comment. He narrates,

“Actually you might understand Ishan’s sentiments if I tell you its context. We as a band are so highly inspired by the ‘English’ band ‘The Beatles’ that we often feel their story to be ours. We do not want to repeat the history of the group’s splitting apart which was instigated by the presence of Lennon’s ‘girlfriend’ Yoko, who entered the group only to destroy the unity, loyalty and friendship of the members. Across all places this situation is the same!”

This narrative illustrates trans-national, generational learnings of male homosociality, hegemonic performance of heterosexual masculinity, and the protection of the male 'self' against its 'other', the "outsiders" and "women"- issues that are "already known" and almost universalized "across all places". Both Ronojoy's and Ishan's narratives suggest gender as relational (Connell, 1995). Construction of masculinity occurs in relation to a construction of femininity which is constructed as instigating disturbances to an otherwise united male bonding or *amader bondhutyo* and its 'free' spirit, through the 'nagging', 'dominating' and conflict provoking nature of women.

Male homosocial intimacy was overall narrated as a 'free' and 'liberating' space. It is a space where men claimed they could legitimately be their 'true selves' without the 'pressure' of performing politically correct gender sensitive behaviour. Here they did not need to suppress their 'innermost' masculine thoughts and practices— a phenomenon described by Gough as "biting your tongue" (2001). The naturalizing discourse that frequently appeared in subjects' narratives of the 'real', 'innermost', 'original' male and female self/space, concealed to a large extent the sociocultural and the discursive construction of masculine and feminine embodiments with their political identities and interests. These concealments, purposeful or otherwise, ensure, to an extent, the strength and resilience of male power (Holland et al., 1998: 13). The resilience of male power and priority was ensured in the everyday mundane context by subjects' often used linguistic tendencies of 'defending our side', like *amarder bondhutyo*. This constructed gender relations as "sport/war"— "a particularly masculine metaphor crucial in upholding patriarchal values" (Gough, 2001: 178).

Women's entry into public life, their education and occupation has gradually changed the story of the exclusivity of male homosociality. The increasing ideals of companionate marriage and its heterosocial mixings, it can be thought, would strengthen this change. The story, however, is more complex than a story of 'transformation' from undemocratic closed spaces to democratic open spaces of sociality unlike what Giddens (1992) has proposed. The cultural prioritization of *amader bondhutyo* as 'liberating' spaces for the expressions of the 'real' male self, where "girlfriends and other things can wait", even in the third generation, problematizes Giddens' claim for gender democratic spaces. This is best manifested through the deeply internalized 'male-in-the-head', that culturally constructs the 'good' and 'bad' woman— reputation policed just as forcefully by women as by men (Holland et al., 1998: 11).

Third generation Rohan's narrative attests to the ideological construction of gender stereotype,

“It is well known to all that women come in the way of men's friendship. Marriage ruins it the most with wives dictating about who her husband should be with, what he should wear, how many cigarettes he can have with his friends and when he should come back home and all that crap! A good understanding woman will not come in the way of her husband's male bondings but nowadays women are hardly non-interfering!”

Besides confirming the hegemonic codes of gender stereotype in the everyday mundane context of constructing and imagining the 'self' and its 'other', Rohan's narrative is significant in another sense. His entire narration in English possibly

suggests the cross-cultural reliance of gender stereotypes with trans-national hegemonic gender codes shaping local narratives of male homosociality.

Male subjects across all three generations narrated the desire for prioritizing *amader bondhutyo* and protecting it against the challenges of women who it was imagined would destroy such friendship. Men constructed, reproduced and continually controlled patriarchal discourses of ideal femininity through the everyday mundane practices of male friendship. Ideal femininity is constructed as one that “will not come in the way of her husband’s male bonding”. It helps in the preservation of male bonding that has broader consequences on the preservation of ‘natural’ brotherhood of the family and the nation; a brotherhood which paradoxically, even in its natural and innate character, is pathetically vulnerable to feminine wile. The patriarchal construction of ideal femininity is controlled and celebrated through a feminine aestheticization represented by the cultural metaphor of *grihalakshmi*. *Griha* (home) *lakshmi* (Goddess of wealth and domestic prosperity) summed up the aesthetic figure of the ideal housewife by associating her with the beauty of the goddess Lakshmi who has long been upheld in Hindu mythical text as the model wife (Chakrabarty, 2000: 226; see Walsh, 1995: 331-363).

Second generation Dilip narrative confirms this,

“Our Lakshmi Bouma (daughter-in-law) takes care of everyone in the family. These days you hardly find girls who wish to live with their in-laws and work towards holding the unity of the family. I’ve always maintained the popular saying that a woman can make or break a family.”

This process of mundane-ization or profane-ization of the sacred image of the goddess by her everyday domestic associations with ideal femininity is reaffirmed by a construction of *Lakshmi*'s binary/opposite, *Alakshmi*, (anti-Lakshmi), her dark and malevolent 'other'. This other side came to embody a gendered and elitist conception of inauspiciousness and the opposite of all that the Hindu law givers upheld as *Dharma* (proper moral conduct) of the householder. The very presence of words like *Lakshmi* and *Alakshmi* in the literature on women's education reveals much about the ideals of modern Bengali patriarchy (Chakrabarty, 2000: 226-227). Lack of education would make women quarrelsome and too much of it, defiant of authority. Western education in "improper doses" would also turn a woman into a "Memsahib" who is the Western 'other' of the nationalist/patriarchal idealization of *bhadramahila* or the respectable middleclass woman, marked by her education but also by her feminine *lajja* (grace and modesty) (Chakrabarty, 2000: 224).

Third generation Boudhayan similarly claims,

"Today men and women are equal and for instance, it will be 'backdated' and 'politically incorrect' of me not to offer a 'cigarette' to a female friend when I light one myself (expresses sarcasm). We middle-class Bengalis are indeed more 'progressive' than people of other states in India in terms of equality of education and opportunities for men and women. However, at the risk of sounding 'conservative', let me confess, amra Bharatiya purushera (we Indian men) and particularly moddhobittyo Bangalira (middle-class Bengalis) are still uncomfortable with seeing a woman smoke and drink because we are not very familiar with seeing most of our mothers do these. Like my friend Siddharta says, a woman's beauty and 'grace' is destroyed with a 'cigarette' in her hand and slang coming out of her mouth!"

Similar narratives across all generations manifest deeply internalized ideas of such 'pleasant femininity'. The cultural reproduction of this patriarchal discourse of pleasantness can be noted in men's romanticization of the cultural mandates of womanhood as represented by their earlier generation mothers. It illustrates an aesthetic euphemism for national/patriarchal discourses of the *bhadramahila*. Narratives that celebrated and romanticized brotherhood confirm literature on masculinity and nationalism which narrate the association between gendered nationalisms and national regimes of masculinity (Haywood and Ghail, 2003: 84). They also show how localized masculine identities are constructed through the discourse of colonial-national encounter that reconfigure and localize global processes (Hall, 1991).

This can be particularly located in narratives where the masculine self is continually communalized, nationalized and classed: '*we Indian men*' and '*we middle-class Bengalis*'. It is theoretically important in this context not to forget that "nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope" (Enloe, 1990: 44) and is a process that results in the oppression and objectification of women as the symbols and reproducers of the nation (Pettman, 1996: 48-63). Bengali middleclass male romanticization and control of their women can be read as a direct negotiation of men's otherwise colonial powerlessness (Sarkar, 2001). The emasculation that the 'Manly Englishman's' gaze had ascribed to the 'effeminate' Bengali men (Sinha, 1995) was sought to be overcome by the power of chastity of the *bhadramahila* who came to be vested with the dubious honour of bearing the cultural superiority and 'authenticity' of the entire national 'tradition' (Sarkar, 2001, Bagchi, 1996). Underpinning the patriarchal-nationalist politics of Bengal that reverberate even

today through the spaces of male homosociality, is the binary between the good and the bad woman that controls ideal femininity as noted by Holland et al. (1998) in the Western context. The bad woman is thus one who is either “too Westernized” and sexually promiscuous (Chatterjee, 1989: 632) or a quarrelsome and jealous wife who turns a brother against a brother and thus breaks up through her ‘entry’ into ‘his’ family, the solidarity of the *kula* or clan or in the wider context, the nation, whose basic premise is the imagined solidarity of ‘natural brotherhood’.

Shubhojeet is in his early thirties and his father, Sujit is quite concerned about his son’s marriage. Sujit narrates,

“These days giving a son’s marriage is quite risky, for who knows if the girl will be good or not (expresses worry)? After all, these days girls should have the right to say if she wants to stay with her in-laws or not (sarcastically sighs).”

Shantanu is in his early forties and faces social pressures for still not having married. He narrates what he usually tells people regarding marriage,

“Do you not like the fact that I am happy with no family conflicts and disputes? I’m very comfortable living with my parents and younger brother and I don’t need a woman to come and split the family!”

These stories that construct and reproduce the cultural expectations of ideal femininity have, in large part, shifted from its blatant injunctions of a joint family space to the male intimate spaces of friendship. In its so called democratic nature, these spaces continue to reproduce culturally hegemonic codes of gendered performances and expectations, even more effectively in these ‘chosen’ spaces that are apparently constructed as unconstrained by tradition. Through an appreciation of how spaces of male friendship

perform family-like rituals and tradition, this section illustrated how 'choice' is shaped and co-constituted by 'structure' and how family and kinship play an important role in the performance and cultural imagination of male homosociality and heterosexual masculinity. The next section will illustrate nuanced negotiations of masculine identity, by showing that the reproduction of maleness is not only 'disturbed' by the male self's other, but also by the fractured nature of the self. This internal fragmentation of the self makes any fixed notion of hegemonic masculinity unstable and reinforces the analytical departure of my thesis which is the socio-cultural and discursive construction of heterosexual identities and intimacies.

Critiquing Narrative Discourse of 'Liberating' Male Homosocial Intimacy and 'The Real' Male Self:

Exploring the perils of the male peer group was much more challenging than exploring the pleasures of the male peer group. It is useful to explain in this context how my auto-ethnographic epistemological position as a female researcher who is automatically an 'other' or an 'outsider' to this male space created multi-layered cultural barriers to its exploration in which my 'entry' into such a male world was narrativized as "fortunate" by a subject. This in turn, however, engendered substantive theoretical analysis of the gendered codes of intimacies for the research.

For instance, a continual male surveillance of my cultural position as a twenty-seven year-old urban middle-class Bengali woman researcher on 'heterosexual intimacy' deeply problematized my auto-ethnographic research of 'home' as an 'insider'. It critiqued the constructed dichotomy of insider/native and outsider/non-native

ethnography and epistemologically reinstated that researching one's 'home' may not necessarily guarantee the comfort of being 'at home' within 'home'. The idea of belonging as a native, as this research has also shown and will further show, is a matter of cultural politics. It is mediated by the researcher's structural positions of gender, generation, class-culture and her ideological commitments. Who can be a rightful 'insider' therefore depends on, who is constructed as the self and who, the other.

Not only an external male surveillance but also an internal inspecting gaze on my own gendered position continually made attempts to draw the 'normative'/'appropriate' cultural balance between stepping into the male world and overstepping it. A male-stream, main-stream sense of gendered exclusion continually cautioned me about the 'boundary' of gendered knowledge and inculcated in me the art and cultural strategy of transgressing it whenever possible. 'Entry into' the male circle, particularly into its 'innermost' stories in order to deconstruct the ideologically projected coherent solidarity of male intimacy and lay bare its fragmentations and heterogeneity, was indeed a challenge. Stories of how the male space has not always been 'liberating' for many men have been revealed not in direct response to a straight forward question about it. The stories 'came out' gradually as the interview progressed and deepened. Through various contingent situations that made certain narrative moments emerge 'comfortably', men often came out of a sui generis group-collective MALE identity to defend his subjectively negotiated masculinity that was at various times made vulnerable to the hegemonic masculine expectations and its peer pressure (Seidler, 1989).

It is significant to note that stories of failed masculinity were always stories told of some 'other' man. The storyteller's sympathy with the other's failure to live upto the hegemonic performance of maleness can be read as the storyteller's attempt at recovering his hurt self-male ego. This indirectly reconfirmed the importance of hegemonic masculine performances in the construction of heterosexual masculine identities. For instance, when asked to narrate some fun-filled moments of boyhood, third generation Arjun and Raj in reminiscing their school days, could not stop laughing at how they derived fun by playing pranks on their *"really good natured, 'cute', and 'dumb friend', Shouro*. Arjun narrates,

"It's really a 'pity' how Shouro always became the 'target of our fun!' 'Actually' he was slightly meyeli (girly, effeminate). We always teased him that he would become 'gay' as he could hardly do 'boy's stuffs' like play outdoors and was more interested in 'girlie stuffs' like 'sit and have intimate discussions, cry at silly things' and be a part of dance groups (tries to hide laughter)."

Raj shares the laughter with Arjun about Shouro but sympathizes with Arjun's failed masculinity this time. Despite Arjun's casual objection, Raj tells me Arjun's *bhetorer golpo* (inside story),

"Arjun is acting the 'big man' now in a woman's (referring to me) presence. Do you know how my 'poor little sissy brother' never went to play outdoors as he feared burning his fair complexion? (laughs)"

Arjun gets back at Raj accusing him,

"You guys always 'bullied' Shouro. I too followed you all but sometimes stayed back with him, only to give him 'company'. 'Poor guy', often told me how we had 'pressurized' him to do 'our men's stuffs' (smiles mischievously). I realized during

these 'one-to-one personal' conversations with him that he was so good natured that he never held vengeance against us!"

Raj agrees with Arjun, emphasizing,

"Yes, Shouro is indeed very good and never accused us for poking fun at him. Abhishek on the other hand was the 'sly chap'. He hung around with our rival group and tried to show us borrowed masculine powers of his 'gurus'. Compared to Abhishek, I'd say, 'Shouro is more a man' for his bravery and honesty to express who he 'really' was rather than Abhishek who was a 'coward' and 'hardly a man'!"

Stories of inter-group rivalry, intra-group competing and conflicting intimacies and loyalty, reveal much about the multi-layered intimacies of male homosociality and corresponding multiple male subjectivities. These 'funny stories' told in funnier ways about how someone within the group always came under group male bullying, for either his lack of competence in drinking, sports, sexual skills and/or his perceived effeminacy; effectively reinforced through joking and apparently innocuous humour, the conventional enactments of conventional masculine identities (Holland et al., 1998: 152; Gough and Edwards, 1998). Stories that narrated the peer pressure of male intimate spaces as fraught with male rivalries, power games, and a restricted grammar of male expressions, were, however, quickly qualified by the same subjects through stories of the pleasures of such peer groups. Such qualifications can be read as male subjects' defence of male homosocial space despite its constraints and hegemonic masculine imperatives.

Forty-five year-old Anirban, for instance describes,

“Precisely because I detest the smell of hard drinks, my well-wishing friends (expresses sarcasm) often provoke me to drink by saying I am not man enough! We male friends constantly tease and make fun of one another’s ‘weaknesses’ but it is all in ‘good humour’ and as a group we are really close, just like brothers!”

In this context of shifting narratives between pleasures and pressures of the peer group or as Holland et al. (1998) term “the pleasures and perils of the peer group”, normative masculinity is re-instated even amidst its internal tensions and contradictions.

Subjectivities, as noted in Arjun’s nuanced narrative of maleness, shifted from an individual’s position within the peer group to his position outside of it. The male homosocial space has shown to manifest, in this context, all the characteristics of Durkheim’s social facts (1895). As narrated by their heterosexual partners, outside the male homosocial group, men showed relatively less gender insensitivity and tried to be more caring in their practices of conjugality. Even between two male friends outside the wider male group context, like the case of Arjun and Shouro, ‘one-to-one’ discussions are more intimate- ‘deep’ and ‘personal’. This overpowering collective strength of hegemonic maleness, manifest in male subjects’ non-reflexive, often uncritical ‘following’ of the male group norm, suggests a panopticon of Male gaze, whose grammar operated best by gradual internalization of its language that produced submissive, conforming, self-regulated, disciplined, docile bodies (Foucault, 1977). This not only benefitted the fittest and the powerful but also subordinated men who through ‘complicity’ with other men’s power and “borrowed masculine power of his ‘gurus’”, enjoyed, defended, and reproduced its structural patriarchal advantages (Connell, 1995: 77; Holland et al., 1998: 149; Gough, 2001: 170).

Contesting Hegemony, Contesting 'Real' Masculinity:

Subjects' tension between personal negotiations with masculinity and the social construction of its hegemonic nature, noted also in Holland et al.'s research (1998: 150), illustrates the myth of a 'ubiquitous', 'real' male self and calls for a deconstruction of masculinity to 'masculinities' (Kimmel and Messner, 1992) or masculinity as fragmented (Connell, 1995) or the multiple ways of being a man (Whitehead, 2002). A nuanced analysis of 'liberating and pressurizing' stories of male homosociality, requires us to look beyond the dichotomy of 'powerful'-'powerless' or subject-victim male subjectivities. Hegemonic masculinity, in whichever way it is defined in a particular time, space and context is reproduced, reinvented and resisted at the level of the interpersonal (Gough, 2001: 170). For instance, cultural debates about the very constitution of hegemonic masculinity can be noted in the representative stories of Raj and Arjun, where Raj assigns 'true masculinity' to Shouro rather than Abhishek. Shouro's bravery and honesty overpowers his effeminacy. By defining bravery and honesty as important features of masculine identities, Shouro is constructed as 'more a man' than the sly and cowardly Abhishek who takes pride in the 'borrowed masculine power of his 'gurus' and is, thereby, 'hardly a man'.

Third-generation Boudhayan on the other hand, is disdainful of,

"'Stupid' displays of masculinity, like physical strength or expertise at outdoor games." He claims, "Moddhobittyo Bangali has always shown his true masculine prowess through the 'mind and intellect'!"

Boudhayan's friend Siddharta adds,

“Other things may change such as our generation men probably being more understanding in conjugal life than our fathers did but the ‘basic foundation of’ Bangali pourush (Bengali masculinity) ‘remains same’. It lies ‘in ‘middle-class Bangali intellect that distinguishes us as superior from the ‘dumb Punjabis’ (people from Punjab in northern India) whose masculinity is all about ‘muscle power’ and money!’”

These narratives illustrate that the very concept of hegemony is a ‘slippery concept’ (Rojek, 1995) and the very construction of ‘real’ or ‘true’ masculinity is vulnerable to contested codes of hegemonic masculinity. In this context, in as much as the concept hegemony is rooted to critical structuralism of Gramsci (1971), it can also be interpreted as close to a Foucauldian model of power; that is power as circulatory rather than centralized where hegemony becomes less about domination and more about negotiations (Hall, 1991). Negotiations of hegemonic masculinity are, however, shaped and constrained by hegemonic codes of class, culture and community.

The male space becomes a battling ground for competitive homosocial bodies who struggle to inhabit ‘true’ masculinity. On one hand they compete against one another within the group to claim deeper intimacy and more closeness to the most influential one within that group. On the other hand, they compete against one another in the game of heterosexual intimacy to get closer to the ‘other’, the woman, outside the group. These competitive homosocial bodies in this way negotiate between competing discourses of intimacies, loyalties and commitments, competing masculine subjectivities (Connell, 1995). The following section will provide an illustration of these competing masculine subjectivities through the competing intimacy between men-men friendship

and men-women coupling which will also show how homosociality shapes and is shaped by heterosexuality.

Self and Other: A Mutual Co-constitution:

a) Homosocial Friendship and Heterosexual Coupling

The third generation, much more than the earlier generations, narrated facing a range of contradictory and conflicting discourses of masculine embodiments and expectations. The increasing 'demands' of companionate marriage based on 'choice' is contingent upon a 'politically correct', gender sensitive performance on part of the man. This 'ideal' of gender democratic conjugality is more often than not in contradiction to his homosocial allegiances and therefore a 'pressure', as subjects' narratives of *adda* also suggest. Masculine subjectivity becomes more challenging as a result of a continually required balance between the dominantly masculine patriarchal embodiment and that of the gender egalitarian embodiment. In their competition for the heterosexual goal which is, in fact, an aspect of hegemonic masculine subjectivity, the 'old school' hegemonic male might not often successfully win the heterosexual game to become heterosexually competent. He may need to be 'tamed' towards romance and softer masculinity that often required underplaying hegemonic male performances (Modlesky, 1984). According to Holland et al., "the threat of sexual failure can turn a potential gladiator into a wimp" (1998: 160).

Men therefore often become vulnerable as sexual encounters may sometimes engage their emotions, stimulate a need for affection, and render their dependence on women

blatant and visible (Seidler, 1989). Stories of heterosexual conquest within the middle-class Bengali culture have their culture-specific negotiations of maleness.

Third generation Kaushik echoes many men when he says,

“As a typically moddhobittyo Bangali, I feared women’s rejections and hence hesitated to ‘propose a girl’. Fear of rejection often made us male friends seek refuge in each other’s friendships in which we shared our collective male fantasy and desire for women. Chandrabindu’s (a Bengali music band) song ‘Moddhobittyo Bhiru Prem’ (Middle-class Cowardly Love) eloquently captures this sentiment.”

Twenty-six year-old Ayan narrates a slightly different story,

“I was always a carefree man, until love made me highly dependent on this woman; love sometimes makes us men vulnerable and feel a loss of control over self!”

Second generation Shubinoy confirms the association of effeminacy with men’s subservience to heterosexual conjugality,

“Anupam is a kalonko (shame/disgrace) to the purush jaat (male species). After marriage he has become a stroino (henpecked)! He gives his wife so much time that he has no time for our (male friends) reunion!”

Hegemonic masculinity that equates the quality of care, dependence and romantic love with effeminacy was cross-generationally narrated to create pressure on:

i) the realization of male self: *‘love sometimes makes us men vulnerable and feel a loss of control over self’*

ii) the realization of male homosocial intimacy: *'he gives his wife so much time that he has no time for our reunion'*.

In this quest for love, however, male ego can often be hurt through romantic rejections and negotiated through seeking protective refuge in the male peer group (Holland et al., 1998: 161-161). This homosocial space then provides a legitimate avenue for 'shared collective male fantasy and desire for women'. What is evident as a conspicuous pattern through men's narratives is the sui generis character of the male homosocial collectivity that is practically, emotionally and ideologically prioritized over other intimacies and other spaces. A political 'calling' of this homosociality through its insidious 'male-in-the-head' ensures the loyalty of even the most romantically 'softer man', who could be potentially bullied for his effeminacy through subservience to heterosexual conjugality.

Majumdar (2000: 147) confirms through her reading of a collection of cartoons by Binay Kumar Basu published in 1927 and titled *Meye Mahal* (or the domain of women), 'the average Bengali's' unease with the ideas of romantic love and the centrality of the heterosexual couple within it. Numerous satires- plays, essays, cartoons, she says, suggested the emasculation of manhood through his engagement with romantic love that also adversely affected the collective sentiments of a 'Bengali' joint family based on brotherhood. The competing intimacy between male homosociality and companionate heterosexuality often has the potential to thwart the strength of male bonding and as such has to be zealously guarded by men themselves in order to ensure the continuation and legitimacy of the Male self against its imagined inferior other, who contradictorily is also the object of his pleasure and desire. It is interesting to critically analyze in this context how romantic heterosexual love which is contradictory to male

homosocial bonding and loyalty is, in fact, constituted by the very requirements of the male homosocial space (Flood, 2008) that ‘empowers men through a disempowering femininity’ (Holland et al., 1998: 160).

Second generation Shubinoy narrates with a masculine pride how he cannot and will not run after his wife and her fancies unlike his *stroino* friend who has “no personality” (implying no maleness).

“*Chhele amader ekhon shongshari honu*” or our boy is now a domestic expert is read by third generation recently married Aniket as an insult from his unmarried friends who ‘grab the slightest chance’ to mock at his ‘loss of independence after marriage’. He confirms himself that,

“Gone are those days where I could stay for late hours out of home drinking, smoking up and playing cards with friends. Smoking a cigarette at home even has become a conjugal chap (pressure). Every man in his ‘bachelor’s party’ feels that ‘it is the last day of my freedom!’”

He narrates ‘jokingly’ that he grabs every opportunity to relive his bachelorhood through getting together with ‘old friends’ and ‘old stuffs’ when his wife goes to her father’s. Such male homosocial bonding ensures men’s exclusive possession of one another and a collective possession of hegemonic Maleness.

Thirty-five year-old Arka, retrospectively narrates stories of *dadagiri* (big bullying) of ‘amader colleger dada’ (our big brother, referring to a college senior). Arka’s story is representative of many cultural stories of the practice of *dadagiri* which explains the various ways in which male homosociality structures men’s heterosexual relations with women. These ways include- the ideological prioritization of male-male friendships over

male-female relations, dangerous feminization of male-female platonic friendships, and telling of stories about sexual relations with women (Flood, 2008: 342). Arka's college senior, his *Arindam Da* can be understood in the context of the urban Bengali middle-class milieu to be representative of the symbolic Male power who ensures the loyalty of his college juniors and thereby help in reproducing hegemonic masculinity. Arka narrates,

"Arindam Da was a 'very influential figure'; he was an 'academic genius' and also led a 'political party in college of which we were all members'. He was like our 'guru' and we, 'his juniors', competed against one another to be become his 'closest one', by showing our 'loyalty', trying to be a part of his stories and taking pride in his 'power' in college. Many of his chhyala (disciples) vicariously lived through his stories of lagano (slang for sexual penetration and implies through its literal meaning 'to hurtfully touch', expressing a clinical reductionism of the phallocentric discourse); mohilakora (literally means 'doing woman', its a slang for playing up with women sexually) and chhok kosha (political scheming)."

Arka has fallen out with Arindam for some personal reasons and confesses,

"I was so blind towards Arindam Da that I 'fiercely displayed my loyalty' towards him by often making his enemies mine, by 'uncritically protesting' against and 'attacking women who tried to point at his chauvinism', even if it would be my girlfriend who is now my wife. My wife had helped me to see his nasty deeds and I started to gradually become critical about his actions and his dadagiri. I admit 'I was blinded by his charm' and have been an 'accomplice', myself having sometimes performed dadagiri on my 'juniors', as Arindam Da did on us. However, I will still not deny Arindam Da's has taught us a lot and had affections for some of us as well!"

This narrative illustrates how hegemonic codes of Bengali, middle-class maleness is most effectively reproduced through the cultural practice of *dadagiri*, apparently

'innocuous' ragging and informal spaces of college male friendship. Spaces of male homosociality like school, college, university and *adda* clubs can be seen to be performing the social roles of an otherwise weakening Bengali joint family by policing individual heterosexual relation and by upholding romanticized brotherhood. However, as much as the figure of the *dada* is symbolic of male power, he is also sometimes the symbol of the erotic in his homosocial-homosexual intimacy with the younger cousin brother. The following section is an analysis of the theoretical blurring of the heterosexual and the homosexual through the homo-erotic in the homosocial.

b) Male Homosociality and Male Homosexuality:

A narrative of a thirty-five year-old heterosexual unmarried man may be insightful in this context. Aditya discloses very intimately that,

“Too much of male mixings, playful bromance and physical touching’ often ‘awkwardly’ and ‘strangely’ reminded me of my ‘playful’ physical closeness with my older cousin brother during school days. He ‘got me into being quite close to him physically, sometimes through his’ dadagiri. ‘You are a researcher and I’m sure you will not judge me by this childish stupidity’; for it is, as you know, a secret but common experience of growing up of many Bengali boys, especially ones who have been in male boarding schools and its sexually restrictive environment. Thinking about ‘such things’, however, makes me quite ‘unsettled and discomforted’. A curious desire for male sexual organ basically incited these ‘childish’, ‘stupid’, ‘casual’ touching of each other. In retrospect, this makes me feel ‘extremely weird, embarrassed and also sometimes disturbed by the memory of such sexual abnormalities which flashes back occasionally!’” Aditya quickly rushes in to add after his intimate and secret disclosure, how he is *“‘absolutely straight’, and an ‘absolutely normal heterosexual man attracted and drawn*

towards almost all beautiful women' lest you should conclude that I am 'gay!'
(laughs at his dramatic expressions).

It is interesting to note that the adjectives he invokes to describe the 'unsettling and uncomfortable' experience of 'abnormal' sexuality, are commonly used to express 'queer' or in his words, 'strange' or 'weird' sexual orientations. Aditya's narrative tells a tale of the making of a 'normal heterosexual man' and cultural internalization of the 'sexual script' of the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990). His bold confession voices many heard but silenced cultural stories of incest and 'illicit', 'non-normative' 'bromance' within educational institutions and within the very 'licit' and 'normative' spaces of the family, especially in its jointness. These illustrate an important post-structuralist and post-colonialist theoretical concept of 'hybridity' (Bhabha, 1991: 59) in which the 'self' and 'other', 'normative/licit' and 'non-normative/illicit' co-exist and are mutually co-constituted. This co-constitution of the self and other into a 'third space' critiques any 'real', 'actual', 'original' or essentialized notion of self and other and shows how identities are socially and discursively constructed, shifting with varying positionality of self and other, across different interactional situations. Without assigning any particular sexual identity to Aditya or even conjecturing about it, what is important to appreciate is the possibility of blurring sexualities through an unbroken continuum of sexual experiences (Sedgwick, 1985; Kinsey, 1948). In fact, as Foucault (1980) might say, the self-management practices imposed by normative sexuality to suppress homosexuality ironically may incite a heightened self consciousness about such desires.

Also as Sedgwick (1991) explains wherever there is a possibility of male bonding and male power, there is a possibility of male homosexuality which, however, threatens

male power; modern homosexual intimacy is antithetical to male power and hence must necessarily be accompanied by homophobia to sustain that power. Aditya's 'discomfort' with 'too much of male mixings' confirms this. Sedgwick argues that this is the organizing paradox in the construction of male political allegiance. It is in this paradox that the 'phobic' and the 'erotic' overlap (Bose and Bhattacharyya, 2007) and hegemonic male self simultaneously becomes powerful and vulnerable. The making of 'normal heterosexual men' also confirms that subjects are socially positioned through bodies, and bodies and sexualities are socio-culturally mediated upon (Bartky, 1988). The Foucauldian notion of power, enriched through the incorporation of a gendered dimension (Ramazanoglu, 1993), can be useful in understanding bodies as sites of a hetero-normative gaze that produces disciplined 'docile' bodies over and against which the individual himself exercises surveillance (Foucault, 1977: 155).

The possibility of homoeroticism within homosociality can also be read in Arka's narrative of male shared space of '*lagano*' and '*mohilakora*' and Kaushik's collective male fantasy of heterosexual desire. Arjun's retrospective narrative of 'our boys' fun' in school suggests the possibility of homoeroticism within homosociality,

"We had this 'very popular game in school' where during 'tiffin break', you could see our whole 'class' running around one another, 'trying to poke fun by doing the most funny but harmless thing' like pungibajano (slang for squeezing a man's nipple) or 'dick grabbing'. 'The deal' was that one who could survive unscathed from these 'attacks' would 'win and be known as a strong and a fit man'. Shouro was often made the victim as he was 'too soft' to show strength and 'attack back!' (laughs)"

Raj relives this fun with Arjun and says,

“‘Those were the days of our boy fun’. Remember those ‘dick measuring games?’ (talks to Arjun) Such games that defined one’s manliness also became indicators of ‘group power and inter-group rivalry’.”

‘Dick’ measuring games defined the strength of a man as directly proportional to the size of his penis. Such phallocentric standard of masculinity was effectively reinforced by bullying and bantering of the ‘other’, the not so masculine; ‘too soft’, ‘sissy’, ‘girly’, ‘gay’ (Gough and Edwards (1998: 415). These homosocial-homosexual power-plays also reinforced male bonding by strengthening inter-group solidarity, and attacking rival groups (Flood, 2008: 342). The defeated group was constructed as *meyeli* (girly/effeminate), *bokachoda* (foolish fucker) and *Gandu* (impotent). These slangs that pathologized effeminacy and gayness indirectly re-confirmed the ‘strong and fit’ heterosexual male self through the most effective form of banter.

The narrative texts can have two readings that reconfirm the paradoxical process belying the construction of the heterosexual masculinity. On one hand, these can be read to project the insidious power of hetero-normativity through the cultural reproduction of hegemonic masculinity in the most effective form of ‘harmless boy fun’. On the other hand, the hegemonic sexual codes belying peer power, pleasure and peril can be read as practices that are often charged with high eroticism (Agostino, 1997; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Flood, 1998). Also in its most masculinist forms, male intimate friendships, like that of Arjun and Shouro, often developed a ‘deep’, ‘personal’, companionate dyad. Such overlapping lines of love and friendship in otherwise masculinist spaces often unwittingly blurred the distinction between homosociality and homo-sexuality and demonstrated that ‘doing gender’ is a dynamic process in continuous interaction (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Through various cultural practices, ideological constructions, and subjects' narratives of male homosociality, this chapter explored one of the central concerns of the thesis: the processes of negotiating heterosexual identity through negotiating masculinity. It showed how everyday male friendships that are classed, gendered, and embedded with relations of the family and community confirm, subvert and reproduce the cultural constructions of hegemonic masculinity at the inter-subjective level of everyday practices and performances of homosociality. Narratives were deconstructed to show that the construction of hegemonic masculinity necessarily depended on the discursive subordination, rejection of, and distantiation from the 'other', in order to create of 'a circle of legitimacy' around the 'self' (Connell, 1995: 76). The paradoxical nature of heterosexual self-making which depended on the other and simultaneously rejected it, brought out the dynamic processes of negotiating and 'doing gender'. This was also shown by illustrating the multiple codes of hegemonic masculinity and the competing meanings and practices of 'real' masculinity. Masculinity in this sense is shown to be constituted simultaneously at the level of the social, institutional, structural, experiential, embodied, and the discursive (Holland et al., 1998: 149). I wish to conclude by arguing after Robinson (1996: 115) that if we are to see masculinity as contested, ambiguous, contradictory and open to change, then it is necessary to appreciate the ambiguity in the way masculinity is simultaneously both vulnerable and powerful. The next chapter, through an exploration of female homosocial intimacy, seeks to illustrate the constructive and negotiated nature of heterosexual feminine identities and intimacies.

CHAPTER-5 NARRATIVES OF FEMALE HOMOSOCIAL INTIMACY: CONSTRUCTING AND NEGOTIATING FEMININITIES

By exploring intimate spaces and stories of female homosociality and by analyzing cultural constructions and expectations of heterosexual femininities, this chapter seeks to understand the power and vulnerability of the processes of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) through doing femininities. Through a colonial-induced modernity, women of India, and thereby also women in Bengal, particularly middle-class women termed as the *bhadramahila* (respectable woman), were expected to uphold 'modern' identities of femininity without failing to perform 'traditional' roles of good mothers, wives and daughters-in-law (Puri, 1999; Sarkar, 2001). The aspect of Bengal's social life that was most seriously affected by the colonial-national encounter was the 'woman question' – the question of remoulding or recasting middle and upper middle-class women (Chatterjee, 1989; Sangari and Vaid, 1989). This chapter appreciates subjects' narratives of heterosexual feminine identities from within the space of female homosociality and situates these narratives within the cultural politics of gendering that mediated colonial Bengal.

Through a socio-historical contextualization of contemporary cultural narratives, this chapter aims to examine the processes by which women negotiate; that is, confirm, subvert and challenge heterosexual femininities and its hetero-normative underpinnings within the spaces of homosociality. Through the lens of interactionist feminism (Jackson and Scott, 2010), the chapter will empirically illustrate that femininity as an object of

knowledge and practice is an ongoing accomplishment and the product of interaction-specific accountability (Garfinkel, 1967). As argued by McRobbie and Garber (1976), the cultural politics of gender will be shown to have material affects on the life chances and experiences of women as individuals. My analysis, however, moves beyond this to illustrate that the category 'woman' within the very same middle-class is often differentiated, owing to their differential socio economic position in relation to the patriarchal mode of production. The cultural construction of "house-wife" and "working woman" and its material consequences on and oppression of women will be analyzed to illustrate the intertwined operation of the social and the discursive. The chapter will then bring out the ways in which 'home-makers' through their homosocial intimate spaces simultaneously confirm and interrogate the capitalistic notions of 'time' and 'productivity' associated with the patriarchal discourse of public 'work'. The chapter will show that women's experiences are both collective as a gender and also variable in terms of their class-culture, profession and generation. Through various empirical instances, the chapter will reiterate the theoretical point that without losing sociological focus on the collective effects of the gender discourse at large at the institutional level; it is important to appreciate 'women' as a heterogeneous contextual analytic (Foster, 1999) by privileging the meanings that women themselves give to their identities of femininity from their experiences of power, or lack of it. In this regard, the chapter will suggest a 'politics of difference' (Haraway, 1991) and its 'situated politics' of hetero-normative subversion. This recognizes the importance of fragmentation in a post-structuralist and deconstructive academic climate but also 'still' recognizes the lived experiences of sexed subjects-in-culture (McRobbie, 1997). The chapter will finally conclude by hinting

at homosocial bondings nesting homo-eroticism (Rabinowitz and Auanger, 2002) that suggest potentially strong feminist possibilities (Rich, 1980). Multiple layers of homosocial intimacy and its associated multiple feminine and feminist subjectivities will be analyzed to illustrate how such subjectivities destabilize the homo-hetero binary. This will critique hetero-normativity but also show that such de-stabilization does not lie outside of the power dynamic of heter-normativity (Jackson, 1996).

I shall begin with the female *adda* and the idea of the intimate 'private' within it.

The Female *Adda* and the Idea of the 'Private':

Chakrabarty asks whether the space of the modern *adda*, the one that was opened up by the coming of universities, student dormitories, modern literary production, restaurants, tea shops, coffeehouses, and parks was a male space (2000: 207). He says, as narrated by Manashi Das Gupta, the Bengali cultural and literary critic, the very public acts of orality (speaking and eating) through which *adda* created its sense of community tended to form "traditional" barriers to women's participation in a male *adda*. Women, if they were to adhere to nineteenth-century middle-class ideas about respectability in public (that is, avoid exposure to the gaze of men from beyond the confines of kinship), were barred from these practices of orality. Yet this does not mean that women did not enjoy or practice *adda*. First, one has to remember that the separation of spheres for men and women both before and after British rule in India meant that women could have their own *addas*, and that is, in part, still the practice. The sites of such *addas* would have been different, being spaces where women could meet.

The topics discussed may have also reflected the separation of social domains (cited in Chakrabarty, 2000: 207).

A striking gendered pattern is noticeable in subjects' narrations across all three generations of women's spaces of *adda*. '*Amader nijeder adda*' or our own *adda*, narrativized by a fifty-two year-old woman, Mita, within the context of a core group of three women, Mita, Mala and Dola, is pertinent in this context of separate space and separate domain of female *adda*. When asked about how they see their space of *adda* and what it means to them, Dola on behalf of her other two friends unambiguously narrativizes – "*Mitar barir nicher tolaye amader teen bandhobir moner kichhu shukh dukhher golpo*" translated as stories from the hearts of us three female friends of some happiness and sorrows on the ground floor of Mita's house.

This narrative of *adda* as 'our own', as stories of 'us three female friends' is sociologically significant in terms of its implication of a relatively separate identity and space that is of a gendered nature. This separateness invokes a sense of a gendered privacy and exclusivity against its middle-class feminine other, 'they'. The gendered character is heightened by a cultural construction and narrative association of the feminine with emotion, the feminine with the private and the private with emotion. The intimate tales of 'some happiness and sorrows' is therefore narrated as '*moner golpo*' or stories from the heart in which 'our' intimacy is constructed as emotional, internal and of the private.

This narration of private space has two inter-related but contradictory connotations. In the first sense, it can be understood as Mita's house; private as the domestic, the

inside, the family. In the second, and probably in a more important sense, this private is not only Mita's house but qualified as the 'ground floor of Mita's house'. The mention of the ground floor can be sociologically significant if it is placed within the ethnographic context. The ground floor of Mita's house is usually kept locked and left vacant unless for *para* rehearsals for cultural programmes. It is a space that is within the house but is in fact isolated from the everyday domain of mundane heterosexual domesticity. The invocation of the ground floor as the space of female *adda* can therefore imply a sense of the 'our own' private within the domestic private. It indicates the possibility that the 'personal' or the 'private' may not necessarily overlap with the domestic, even though it is within the domestic.

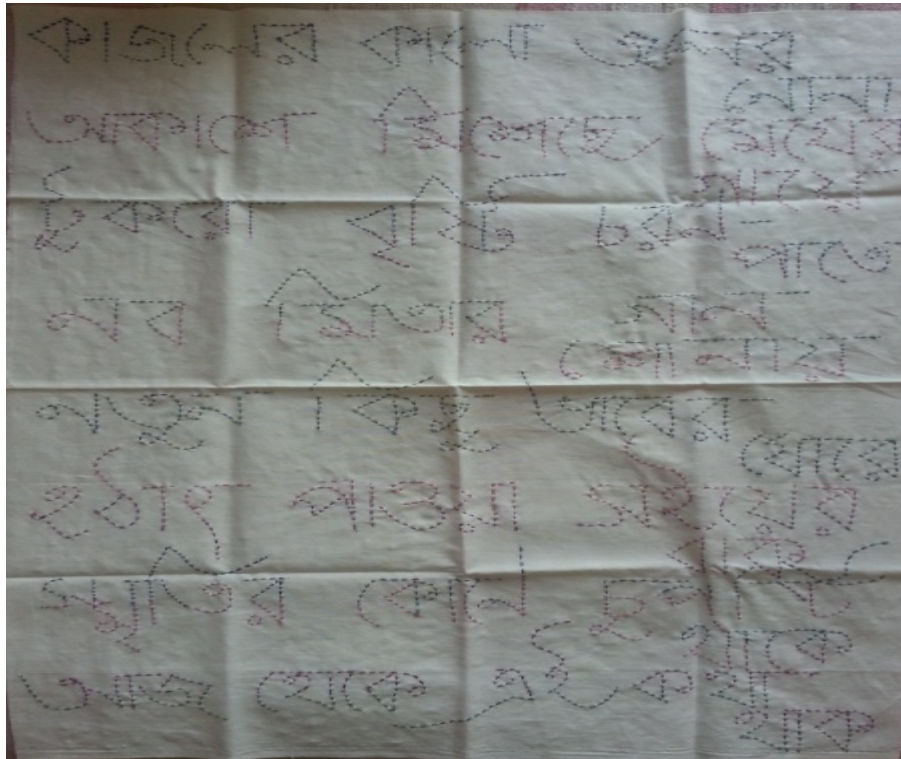
Gendered space has been narrativized across all three generations of women. The idea of the private, personalized, individuated female homosocial spaces of *adda* is echoed in narrative descriptions of '*meye mohol*' (girl domain), '*amader chhotto jogot*' (our small world), '*meyeli adda*' (girly *adda*), '*amader bhetorer golpo*' (our inner stories), '*antaranga kotha*' (intimate talks). A sociological analysis of this descriptive narration can be understood better by anchoring it socio-historically to Kaviraj's (2006) reading of Tagore's modern language of love. In colonial modernity the modern discourse of love associated with a shift from external, bodily erotic love to that of internal, emotional romantic love was also accompanied by an increasing recognition of the 'individuated woman' within the family (Kaviraj, 2006:162). This individuation entailed a recognition of the woman's 'inner qualities' rather than just her external beauty. This focus on the 'inner' self that differentiated one from another, however, often reinforced the dichotomy between the private and public, external and internal. This cultural dichotomy mapped

on to an associated binary politics of 'new' patriarchy in terms of a dichotomous male and female domain (Chatterjee, 1989), also linked with the sexual and the emotional domain respectively (Sarkar, 2001). The discourse of the emotional, private, internal sphere as the domain of women has been a feature of patriarchal nationalistic politics. In seeking to recover its colonial powerlessness through its women's sexual chastity, the patriarchal nation bound her by a male hegemonic discourse and confined women within the private 'home' (Sarkar, 2001).

The photo below is one of a poem, hand-stitched, given as a gift from one friend to another. The personal touch (semiotically manifested through the hand-stitch) invokes 'emotional', 'individuated' or 'personalized' female friendship, the traditional notion of a *shoi* (a female companion) and a modern language of internalized intimacy. Terms like 'secret', 'silence', '*shoi*' in the poem attest to this. The appreciation of the emergent culture of individuation within the female domain, associated with the new language of love is implied by the poetic usage of the proper noun (friend's name) within the poem. The last four lines of the poem are as follows:

Photo-1: Illustrates a gift from third generation Sukanya to third generation Nabamita

[Source: Nabamita Das' collection of gifts]



Enwrapped in some new imaginings,

A voice of a female companion was suddenly heard,

A promise is made hereafter,

To keep this secret friendship in memory's silence.

The modern language of intimacy, as this narrative text suggests, reconstructed women as individuated selves accompanied by a shift from erotic, external to that of emotional, internal intimacy (Kaviraj, 2006: 170-171). This transformation of intimacy is directly echoed in the structural and cultural practice and 'imaginings' of homosociality of the *bhadramahila*. The 'individual', is however, better understood in Smart's (2007) term as 'person'. The term 'person' implies that the self is socio-culturally embedded within and

conditioned by sedimented structures and the cultural imaginings (Smart, 2007: 29) of gender, class, family (Jamieson, 1989) and the colonial-modernist *bhadrasmaj* (Majundar, 2000: 124), rather than being a product of unbridled individualism and embodying unbounded agency, as claimed by proponents of reflexive modernization, particularly by Giddens (1992). Such structural 'field' and its internalized 'habitus' do set limit to women's 'reflexive narrative of self' and their intimate relations (Bourdieu and Wacquant; 1992: 16-19; Heaphy, 2007: 179); Lash, 1994: 120). In this sense, the emotional, intimate, private space of *adda* for individual women, as will be elaborated in further sections, can at best be seen as negotiated spaces of 'bargaining with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988). It sought 'home' within 'home'; 'our own' 'private' within the 'private'. It was a negotiation that was not outside the heterosexual domestic and its associated gender inequalities, but it definitely problematized the idea of the domestic 'home' or 'private' and therefore logically its 'other', the 'public'. "The very division between an 'inner' and an 'outer' world is particular to Western conceptions of the self" (Hockey et al., 2007: 89) and maps onto the nationalistic discourse of 'tradition' and 'modernity' (Chatterjee, 1989). Even in its habitation within the traditional private space, female homosocial intimacy destabilized a patriarchal trans-national and nationalistic dichotomy between the private and public or the female and the male which lies at the heart of a hegemonic heterosexual nuclear family (Sarkar, 2001; Beauvoir, 1972).

Feminists' critique of the non-visibility of women in the public world and their 'confinement' within it is partly confirmed but also troubled by subjects' narrativization of this space. The individualistic, personalized, non-conforming idea of the 'our own' private, troubles the conventional conceptualization of the private as the domestic and

also problematizes a simplistic understanding of traditional modes of feminine ‘marginalization’ and ‘confinement’ within it. This is best captured by a first generation narrative of this homosocial space as a ‘*moner janala*’ (window of the heart) or, in an article on the same by Krishna Basu (2010), describing it as an ‘*ekti abikolpo janala*’ (an irreplaceable window). This idea of the irreplaceable space of female homosociality confirms its importance in the lives of women across all three generations.

For instance, fifty-five year-old woman, Mili, understands ‘*ghonishto antarangata*’ or (intensely close intimacy) with Gitasri, her school and college friend. She states,

“Gitasri was my most intimate shoi (female companion another female) and will always remain so. Our relationship was intimate in the sense that we knew each other’s deepest secrets, our first love, our dreams, and our pleasures and struggles of growing up as women. She got married and went out of Kolkata and I remained here in my conjugal life. Work life, family and different cities have made it difficult for us to regularly keep in touch but if we meet we connect without any feeling of the physical distance. She is my other self and therefore always in my heart even in her absence. I am the same for her. In fact, my husband and children also does not know so much as she does about me. I think it’s the woman bond that you must also have surely felt (smiles).”

Twenty-seven year-old woman, Anandita says,

“I have a very mixed group of friend circle and can relate to both men and women comfortably. However, my most intimate friend is a woman in that group with whom I can share my pains most easily, even sometimes without verbal expressions. Certain unconventional ways of being intimate, like for example, admiring someone after marriage, is a possibility that men don’t usually understand. That way I think they are more conservative. Suparna is my only

friend with whom I can share these feelings of intimacy without being judged and same for her.”

These narratives of female homosocial bonding can be read as feminist critique and subversion of the “hetero-relational” vision which conventionally perceives that women left alone could not have been happy together, and that, women’s activities produce less than happy women (Raymond, 1986: 3). Subjects’ sharing of the deepest secrets of first love and ‘unconventional’ ways of being intimate outside institutional marriage can be seen as nurturing collective indigenous feminist-feminine homosocial experiences of, and desire for, subverting and circumventing hegemonic, heterosexual, monogamous marriage and its associated identities and intimacies. It also interrogates ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich, 1980) by undermining its compulsory prioritization over other forms of intimacy, both in practice and imagination.

Academic scholarship on ‘bedroom cultures’ (McRobbie, 1978) has similarly focused on the ‘private’ bedroom as the only biographical space – the personal, personalized and the intimate space over which teenage girls are able to be ‘private’ from parents and siblings within the home (Lincoln, 2001: 7-8 cited in Nayak and Kehily, 2008: 55). Ethnographic exploration of this space suggests a cultural reproduction of the ‘girly activities’ and an enactment of a range of a feminine activities that reinforce heteronormativity (Nayak and Kehily, 2008: 54-56). My subjects’ narratives of this space in its emotional undertone do uphold such culturally traditional feminine emotional intimate subjectivities that are also a confirmation of the Enlightenment coupling of femininity with the emotional and private. However, the narrative meaning of this space as a personalized ‘window of the heart’ also radically reconceptualizes the coupling of

feminine private with 'marginalization' (Nayak and Kehily, 2008: 55). Women describe how they wish, through this space, even for a temporary brief period of time, to dissociate their individuated identities from the mundane heterosexual routines of wifehood and motherhood. This is evident in second generation Mala's narrative and it highly representative of many others within her class and generation,

"It is time for amader adda. I have left back all thoughts of home, domestic responsibilities and worries. Let the children and their father take care of these for some time. They too should understand what it is to run a family!"

In this perspective, the academic scholarship on bedroom cultures in the Western context is significant in its own right but is hereby enriched by an indigenous 'situated' feminist potential characteristic of the culturally specific ethnographic experiences of middle-class urban Bengal. This theorization of the private *adda* is important because it highlights the empirical processes of negotiating heterosexual intimate relations and heterosexual femininities in relation to and in critique of hegemonic heterosexual identities and intimacies. The section will illustrate an important concern of the thesis, which is, how gender and class mediate the way we define our sense of intimacy and selfhood and show that the desire to dissociate from heterosexual identities of femininities through the space of intimate female homosociality is, in fact, more nuanced and fragmented than simplistically straight forward. This is better understood in the context of 'bargaining with patriarchy' (Kandioti, 1988), the nuanced category 'woman' (Brah, 1991) and her 'situated politics' that emerge from specific interactional relations and cultural meaning of class, space, time and profession.

Situating 'Woman' and 'Homo'-sociality:

I will show that the expressions of the desires for personalized friendships through *shakhi* (female friend) or the long tradition of *shoi patano* (forming female friendship), which shaped and was also shaped by the modern ethos of personalized emotional intimacy, was not outside of the discourse of the hetero-normative. The transformation of intimacy through the modern discourse of love within the *bhadrasamaj* was highly imbued with a language of 'new patriarchy' and was heavily influenced by a trans-national discourse, particularly a colonial Victorian ideology of sexual respectability through restrained femininity (Basu, 2002; Mosse, 1985). Even the 'our own' private within the domestic private was not outside of the cultural politics of gendering that created a binary between the superior self and its inferior other, within the same gender. As I will show, there was a paradoxical process of intra-gender 'other'-ing going on within this space of female homosociality. For instance, as much as this space was collectively constructed in relation to and negotiation with the hetero-normative, it was also internally 'other'-ed by a process of hegemonic masculinization where 'woman-only' space was constructed as 'inferior' and 'unproductive' to its male counterpart which was 'superior' and more 'productive'. Such masculinization was not only undertaken by men but also by many 'professional working women'. Through an internalized 'male-in-the-head' (Holland et al., 1998: 11) that constructed the meaning of selfhood, identity and its success with hegemonic masculinity as the norm, these women, for instance often expressed their desires to dissociate themselves from 'woman-only'-'unproductive' spaces of 'inferior banality'.

It is through this fractured female homosocial space and the heterogeneity of the category woman that I seek to interrogate the trans-historical, monolithic category of woman through a post-colonialist 'situated' feminism (Mohanty, 1991) that critiques a radical feminist political vision of a universal sisterhood (Raymond, 1986) that is not only differentiated across cultures but also within a culture and in fact, within the very same class. By such argument, I also reinforce the academic necessity to focus on understanding intimate relations as *processes* of negotiation within specific interactional situations and relations of gender, generation, class and profession that contextually come to bear upon heterosexual identities intimacies. My analysis of this space therefore problematizes what Raymond theorizes as the "Gyn/affection...the passion that women feel for women, that is, the experience of profound attraction for the original vital Self and the movement towards other vital women" (1986: 7-8). I argue through subjects' narratives that there does not exist any 'original self' or 'original woman' (Raymond, 1986: 4-5) or the 'original impulse' (68) outside of the discursive regime, power and truth that mediate various processes of gendering and womanhood both at the material and at the symbolic level (Holland et al., 1998). The original 'Self' is already and always sociological. In that, I agree with Raymond that women's lives just like their spaces of friendship have often been in Raymond's use of Mary Daly's term 'dismembered' *under patriarchy* (1986: 4).

The patriarchal fiction and ideological myth that 'women never have been and never can be friends...or women are their worst enemies' (Raymond, 1986: 6), maps on to a corollary patriarchal myth of the liberating nature of male homosocial intimate space, as the earlier chapter illustrated. In the context of Bengal, this politics of the united,

homogenous male self and space is underpinned in the structural and cultural imperative of nationalism and its patriarchal myth of 'brotherhood'. This projection of the self is constructed through an implicit projection of its other – the disjointed and disunited nature of woman's self and her space. This projection, as I have already shown and will further argue, is more of an ideological construction than an everyday practice and experience of mundane heterosexual intimacies and identities. Therefore I agree with Raymond's patriarchal contextualization of the dismembering of women's friendship but disagree with any ontological or essentialized notion of 'woman' or gyn/affection understood by her as "woman-to-woman attraction, influence and movement" (1986: 7). Just as I understand 'natural brotherhood' as a discursive construction, I understand 'womanly bond' or 'sisterhood' through its constructed nature as argued by 'interactionist feminism' with its focus on micro-processes of interaction and by post-colonial feminism with its focus on macro-structures, politics and relations of colonialism. This brings us to appreciate how space (home and office), profession ('home-maker' and 'working professional') and culture (capitalistic productivity and unproductivity) mediate personal narratives of 'womanhood', perpetuate gender and class inequalities that limit the unbounded reflexivity of selfhood and thereby critique Giddens' theory of reflexive modernization (Jamieson, 1999; Smart, 2007; Heaphy, 2007).

Masculinizing Professionalism and Productivity through a Patriarchal Capitalistic Lens:

The economic boom and corporatization that has brought out many middle-class women in the public as 'working' professionals cannot simply be seen from as a gender 'correction' to the under representation of women in the public sphere and therefore as

a solution the gender inequality both in structural and cultural terms. This needs to be subjected to further analytical scrutiny by deconstructing the very idea of the 'productive' and the 'professional' as highly masculinized and capitalistic concepts that has incorporated women into it but has left largely untouched its patriarchal bias. For instance, it is interesting to note the ways in which not only professional middle-class men but also some professional middle-class working women narrativize 'homemaking' as a less important female-only space of "*house-wives*". They express their desire to 'other' this space by a condescending rejection of it and a desire to distance the professional 'self' from this inferior 'other' (Walker, 1994).

Forty-two year-old Arna, a manager in the education sector, assumes an unspoken pride in her body language and tone in narrating how her busy professional life does not allow her a,

"leisurely 'useless' waste of time and the luxury of spending husband's money like the 'housewives' who cannot appreciate the hard labour of 'working' woman who have to deal with 'more important issues'!"

Fifty-year-old woman, Dipti, who is a doctor by profession is disdainful of female *addas* as,

"unintelligent and typically feminine in their unproductive engagement with nothing better than family politics, gossips, rivalries, television soaps and at best a bit of NGO work!"

Forty-two year old Dalia who is Arna's colleague and also an intimate friend adds,

"I would go crazy if I had to stay back home to contemplate what spices I should put in the cooking- coriander powder or mustard? It's such a 'non-intellectual

waste of time' and moreover I don't want to be contented spending my life being a 'housewife' thinking only about sarees, jewelleries and cooking and the 'typically feminine'!"

These narratives are deeply laden with structural and cultural ideologies patriarchy. The narratives not only structurally domesticize and culturally feminize 'unproductivity' but also narrativize the meaning of productivity/work through the lens of economic capitalism and its associated patriarchal bourgeoisie culture. By acquiring a 'working' professional status, these women assume economic and intellectual superiority over the space and culture of the private home of the 'housewives' and their 'typically feminine' engagements. The 'typically feminine' and its implicit unprofessionalism and unproductivity is set against masculine professionalism and its public 'work'. The 'housewives' as they are called by the 'working women' are imagined to be unproductive, irrespective of their continuing immense economic labour in the private with its ramifications in the public, a point heavily taken up by Marxist feminist and Socialist feminist who see women's inferior position as a direct result of capitalistic exploitative class relations and its ideological manifestations through patriarchal relations (Delphy, 1984). Such a hetero-normative discourse that heavily manifests in the construction of hegemonic heterosexual identities both at the discursive and material level is best understood in the invocation of the term 'house-wife' rather than 'home-maker'. Home-making belies a concept of productivity in its own right through the active verb 'making'. The term 'housewife' implies the patriarchal discourse of the *stree* (married wife) within the private sphere of the house. It understands the woman's identity as necessarily hetero-relational, defined in relation to her husband. Her 'work' at home is also taken-for-granted as the hetero-normative discourse of the 'labour of love'

and goes unrecognized as 'work' given its unpaid domestic labour. The cultural normalization and internalization of this patriarchal label of the 'house-wife' is best understood in the context where most 'home-makers' themselves label themselves as 'house-wives', although at times with a slight discontent. This is expressed by second generation Gopa,

"The children and their father hardly bother to listen to me. Sometimes it makes me so bad about myself I can't explain! It feels like I should have a say at home, do something of my own. Unfortunately I spent the whole life remaining 'just a house-wife!'" (Sighs)"

Such cultural imaginings and their associated inequalities at the material level owe their legacy to a nationalistic politics of the woman's place at home which maps on to a deeper Western modern colonial discourse of the binary where A cannot also be not A (Bulbeck, 1998), where one is essentially more superior than the other. The West or male comes to be colonially constructed as the modern, rational, active, productive, professional self in contra-distinction to the East or female that is constructed as traditional, emotional, lazy, unproductive, unprofessional other (Mohanty, 1991). A modern capitalist ideology is intertwined with such patriarchal constructions of 'work', 'time', and 'productivity'. 'Waste of time' and feudal/traditional laziness is feminized and is pathologized in relation to masculinized modern/capitalistic norm of public economic productivity. Intertwined with this is the politics of time in which the house-wife is constructed as the traditional 'other' of the 'modern' woman who is granted the status of a 'working professional' owing to her work outside home. This narrative of the 'modern' can be traced back to the nationalist association of the 'modern' with capitalistic,

materialistic, public 'work' and scientific endeavours outside the domain of home and the feminine (Chatterjee, 1993).

Problematizing the Homogeneity of the Professional Space:

The previous section problematized the homogeneity of the category 'woman' by illustrating the different cultural constructions of 'working women' and 'house-wives' and the material consequences of such constructions on these women who belong to the same middle-class and culture of urbanity. Moving beyond the discursive and material differences between the 'professional' working woman and the 'house-wife', this section delves further to illustrate the heterogeneity within the professional space. It does this in three ways:

- By deconstructing the internal coherence of this space.
- By illustrating how the professional 'self' also paradoxically inhabits and enacts the so-called inferior space of its 'other', which it tries to distance itself from.
- By showing how the professional self's 'other', the housewife also shares with the 'working woman', the ethos of professionalism and its male public material desire.

Sixty-one year old Aparna who is a teacher and writer by profession is assertive of her public professional status and narrativizes it as a critical marker that transformed her identity from '*just another woman, someone's wife, someone's mother*' to that of a '*shwadin byakti*' or independent person. This narrative can be read as Aparna's appropriation of the traditional space of the male public professional world which she then strategically uses to subvert 'traditional' heterosexual identities of wife and mother.

Her interrogation of hetero-relational identities is also expressed through her 'unconventional' practices of conjugality and a de-gendered division of housework of which she, however, sometimes feels deeply guilty. For instance, her husband is now retired and mostly at home and so he does majority of the house-work, including cooking for his wife when the maid takes leave from work. She explains,

"My other professional colleagues are more skilful than I. They maintain the 'ideal balance' between working out of home and maintaining domestic responsibilities of a wife and a mother. I also know that like my in-laws, even they are highly sceptical of me and my incapacity to maintain this balance which is highly expected of women in this culture. These bothered me earlier much more than it does now when I am more confident and 'financially stronger'. The whole day I keep busy and 'genuinely' it becomes difficult for me to take care of things like cooking and cleaning. But 'fortunately' my husband has accepted it (sceptically smiles)."

What is sociologically interesting to note in Aparna's narrative is her simultaneous subversion and confirmation of the colonially induced modernist discourse that constructed women in contemporary post-coloniality as embodying a 'modern' India through education and work outside home but not jeopardizing her 'traditional' roles as good mothers, wives and daughters-in-law (Puri, 1999: 1). Her circumvention and subversion of hegemonic gendered codes is expressed through her assertion of selfhood, independent of her hetero-relations and her de-gendered way of 'doing' intimacy. She is, however, sometimes guilty of such subversions and is conscious of relatives' and colleagues' criticism of her womanhood. Aparna is 'unconventional' in 'doing' intimate conjugality but is conventional in the way she narrativizes this as 'fortunate' 'acceptance' by her husband without whose consent, it seems, she could not

afford this subversion of hetero-normativity. Her sarcastic tone through which she narrates her colleagues' criticism of her hetero-normative 'incapacity' is, however, important in its 'extra-narrative' to tell us that she is also partly critical of their critique. This is also a reason why she has continued to circumvent and subvert a 'conventional' 'doing' of intimacy despite her 'guilt' of the same.

Her narrative is an illustration of 'situated' and 'interactionist feminism' that takes account of Aparna's interaction specific accountability of 'doing gender' (Garfinkel, 1967; West and Zimmerman, 1987) and its material negotiations through patriarchal bargains (Kandiyoti, 1988). It also upholds Cooley's (1983) interactionist concept of the 'Looking Glass Self' and its three inter-related elements in the constitution of Aparna's interactionist feminism. These are, a) culturally imagining how we must appear to others, b) culturally imagining how others might judge us and c) the resultant self-feelings of self-assertion, pride, shame or guilt (Scott, 2009: 24). In this context, her sense of '*shwadhin byakti*' or independent selfhood/personhood is better appreciated by situating her power of 'bargaining with patriarchy' within her material circumstances viz-a-viz her husband's. This also includes her and her husband's meaning and interpretation of this circumstance that also takes into account gender accountability both real and imagined, to a societal audience like her in-laws and colleagues. Within these *situated* negotiations Aparna's "subjectivity can more effectively be re-cast as *intersubjectivity*" (Hockey et al., 2007: 89). In this context, Aparna's social self could be conceptualized from the interactionist co-constitution of Mead's (1934) 'I', the creative impulsive agent of social action and 'Me', the image of oneself as seen from the perspective of others. However, it is important to take this argument further with

Cooley's interactionism which argue that even the 'I' is equally socially constituted, for it is impossible to think of oneself without considering its relationships and interaction with others (Scott, 2009: 24). A sense of selfhood is also constituted by one's social, economic and cultural capital and their associated bargaining power. For instance, Aparna's 'botheraton' with people's image of her womanhood, as we can see, is connected to her professional working status outside home and its material underpinnings. With time and the consolidation of her material anchorage, she is 'more confident' of the assertion of an independent selfhood and 'bothers' less about society, although cannot completely ignore it. This instance that suggests a degendered arrangement of household chores interrogates the essentialized feminization of 'home-making' but reinforces the patriarchal capitalist notion of 'work' as work outside home, in the public and its material and cultural recognition.

Also the resilience of hetero-normativity both as practice and imagination, is confirmed by Aparna's narrativized 'incapacity' to 'skilfully' 'balance' work and home like her other professional colleagues who embody an 'ideal' state of womanhood through this hetero-normative 'balance'. The internalization of the cultural mandates of womanhood, through performance of wifehood and motherhood as crucial to 'doing' and maintaining heterosexual relations, is narrativized by many women across all generations and both by home-makers and professionals. This cultural 'ideal' of the balance between work and home and the cultural ideal of the form of femininity/womanhood which maintains this balance, unites most women as a collective 'class' who are materially and culturally 'exploited' and whose labour is appropriated by most men as a collective 'class' (Delphy, 1977).

The Generational Re-production of Femininity and its Class-Culture:

It is important to note that although gender may be understood as a collective class, the issue of generation plays a significant part in the construction of its experience. This is expressed through a generational dimension in Aparna's narrative. She is deeply critical of the increasing corporatization and a bourgeois ideology that is coming to bear upon the IT sector and its working professionals in the present milieu of urban Bengal which is witnessing a burgeoning 'new middle-class' created through this bourgeois professional space. She says,

"A corporate professional culture of the 'new middle-class' doesn't allow for creative thinking and also poses a threat to the conjugal companionship of our next generation who do not even have the time to spend time together as partners!"

Aparna's narrative is significant in the two different ways she perceives heterosexual coupling – a) she subverts heterosexual couple space to establish her independent personhood and b) she critiques the capitalistic nature of professionalism that is not conducive to heterosexual coupling. This expresses a modern problematic of heterosexual intimate relations and identities. For instance, with increasing individualism, men and women wanted to become themselves at the same time when they wanted to become partners to each other in the face of weakening external bonds (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). The question of whether bonds are realized as 'individually together', or 'together individually' (Bauman, 2002: xiv-xix), remains open to negotiations although definitely within the structural and cultural limits of this negotiation. For instance, this corporatized capitalistic culture is generation and class

specific in plaguing the younger professionals who are the “*new middle-class’ and paid enough money but not allowed the creativity or time to spend it together as partners*”.

Anandita and Suparna are in their late twenties, married and professionally ‘working’. They talked to me about their friend Sunanda, who is a teacher at a school and has only recently got married. Suparna asserts,

“One cannot always afford to mix up professional academic concerns of feminist equality and the ‘practical’ duties of the family life. As a woman we have to ‘compromise’ with respect to family values ‘to an extent’. This ensures a happy coupling. It’s true that our ‘modern’ practices of coupling and time-consuming office work often makes it difficult for us to balance work and home as skilfully as our mothers many of who were again ‘doing jobs’ (refers to going out to work) and just not ‘housewives’; but Sunanda seems too obsessed with her ‘career’ and hardly takes care of Aniket (Sunanda’s husband). He’s a great guy and ‘adjusts’ a lot for her”.

To this Anandita adds,

“Sunanda says that she dislikes the social pressure from Aniket’s joint family but I personally feel that in-laws can feel bad about the negligence of their son by the wife. They ought to expect something from the newly wed. I heard from a friend that Sunanda has started to help her mother-in-law with some housework. Afterall, it’s difficult to take people’s criticisms as a newly wed. The initial phase of marriage, especially in the in-laws’ presence definitely needs a lot of ‘adjusting’ from the girl’s side!”

Narratives from both the second and the third generation show how negotiation of heterosexual intimacy is a cultural pattern. There are different forms of this negotiation through confirmation and subversion of hegemonic heterosexuality that are both continuous and changing across generation and that simultaneously amend, reinforce

and reproduce institutionalized heterosexuality at the level of practice and imagination (Hockey et al., 2007). Anandita's and Suparna's critique of Sunanda's subversion of hetero-normativity is significant here. It illustrates generational amendments but not outright rejection of the hetero-normative codes of femininity: conforming to norms 'to an extent', by the 'newly wed' who cannot afford to resist 'all the time' and needs to do a 'lot of adjusting'. 'To an extent' is to what extent, is significant in terms of generational continuities of 'practices of intimacy' and their gendered underpinnings.

The narratives reinstate the cultural prioritization of family relations, expectations, and 'practical duties' and 'compromise' within the family especially within the in-laws' family over professional commitments such as Sunanda's commitment to 'feminist equality'. Being 'too obsessed with career' at the cost of one's duties as a wife and daughter-in-law is a pathology even within 'modern' practices of coupling. The difficulty in handling social 'criticisms' as a 'newly wed', the desire for its recognition in society and the everyday social accountability of a woman to her immediate family and to the broader society, set limits to the unbounded reflexivity of constructing one's identity and intimacy. It empirically illustrates an important research question of how self and emotions are shaped by social relationships (Morgan, 2011: 11-20). It also illustrates that "macro-level social order is dependent on micro-level (inter)action for its accomplishment and reproduction (Scott, 2009: 16). The narratives interactionally reinforce the 'traditional' structured gendered inequalities, behind the maintenance of a heterosexual family and a 'happy' conjugality even within 'modern' practices of coupling. Narratives which suggest that adjustment/compromise in a marriage is primarily the 'duty' of the woman, whereas it is 'greatness' of the man, actually demonstrate the

hegemonic gendered codes of intimacy. These gendered narratives across generations indicate that the 'transformation of intimacy' suggested by Giddens (1992) has been over-exaggerated (Jamieson, 1999). Jamieson's empirical research in the Western context also tell us that families are based not solely on the ideas of pleasure and self-realization but also on traditional notions of commitment, care, practical responsibility and sacrifice (1989: 159). This co-constitution of the traditional 'sedimented' family 'structure' and individual 'agency' that is otherwise underlined in Giddens' theory of 'structuration' (1984) has been ignored by his very own conceptualization of 'pure relationship' (1992).

The "*compromise with respect to family values*" in heterosexual relations comes out as a generational pattern but remains subject to varying negotiations of this compromise. Compromise "*to an extent*" is what extent of compromise is contingent upon a woman's power of 'bargaining with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) as I have shown through the discursive construction of the 'house-wife' and the material consequence of this construction on the material value and respectability of her 'work'. The internal critique of an 'imbalance' between 'work' and home by the very voices of professional women makes this space unstable and internally fragmented, embodying fragmented subjectivities. These subjectivities are mediated by co-existing and often conflicting colonial, national and liberal discourses of personhood, femininity and womanhood. This section was an analysis of the ways in which a 'working' professional status comes to variously bear upon the 'intimate' negotiation of heterosexual relationships and identities in women's lives. It also showed that idealized femininity is constructed

through a woman's prioritization of home and her family and at best a balance between career and home (Hochschild, 2003).

This analysis that focuses simultaneously on the social, the material and the discursive, is able to incorporate the cultural into the material, capitalist, social relations (Jackson, 2001: 284). It can also account for an inter-sectionality of both capitalistic and colonial imperialistic structures and ideologies. This inter-sectionality has been empirically evident in women's narratives which are doubly conditioned by a colonial modernity that emphasizes women's traditional roles even within modern professional work and the capitalistic feminization-devaluation of woman-only space and domestic housework. These discourses of capitalism and colonialism, "intersect and interact", often in "unpredictable and contradictory ways" so that the "social order is not some seamless monolithic entity" (Jackson, 2001: 284). Jackson's reading of Delphy's materialist feminism is important in this context because just like an analysis from an 'interactionist feminist' lens, in Delphy's argument, women's oppression is not reduced to a single cause. It eschews attempts at totalizing grand theorizations and trans-historical universalistic claims (Jackson, 2001: 284). Instead through problematizing an essentialized discourse of 'woman' or 'typically feminine', we are able to appreciate the interactionally accomplished negotiations of femininity and their social and material consequences on women's lives. In the following section I will show how the professional 'self' and its 'housewife' 'other' come to share each other's space in ways that blur the boundary between the two and reconfirm their discursive construction which is concealed through both men's and women's narrative discourses of 'typically' feminine and its almost naturalized 'inferior', 'unintelligent', 'non-intellectual' space.

Nuancing 'Professionalism', 'Domesticity' and the 'Typically Feminine':

Subarna, Dalia and Arna taught at the same school and are best of friends whose friendship is so strong that they decided to move out together from the school to start their own partnership venture in the education sector. They share their emotional intimate stories with one another, do activities collectively like going to the cinema, eating out and shopping and also as Subarna says humorously, *"dressing up for each other with the three friends as one another's audience, needing no male audience to look at us!"* Their intimate homosociality is sociologically significant for two reasons:

- a) By inhabiting the traditionally public male nature of corporate professionalism and traditional public spaces of male *adda*, they challenge traditional boundaries and practices of hetero-normativity. As Arna says laughing out loudly *"our husbands have given up on us and our mothers-in-law think that these women have no home to come back to, no proper time of getting back, no familial responsibility."*

Subarna adds saying, *"in short, what they say is that we are lost cases with no hope of being the pativrata nari !(husband worshipping wife)"*

- b) By sharing their emotionally intimate stories and activities, these women often verge on the so-called 'typically feminine' spaces and activities that they, as individual professionals, have otherwise been deeply critical of in their narratives of 'housewives'. This contradiction comes out through Subarna's narrative,

"We three are so tight-knit and have such similar tastes that we land up buying the same sarees and accessories from the same shops. This sometimes becomes really embarrassing as there have been occasions in which we reached school and saw that two of us were wearing the same saree (laughs)! So now we have decided to

brief each other about how we are going to dress in office particularly in special occasions in which we go together.”

This narrative is interesting because it illustrates contradictory subjectivities of femininity which varies across conflicting discourses of femininity (Leahy, 1994: 49) and that can have heterogenous effects on how women come to inhabit gendered spaces. For instance, on one hand, while these professional women accused ‘housewives’ of their leisurely indulgence into woman-only spaces stereotyped by their engagements with sarees and jewelleries and ‘nothing intelligent or intellectual’; they themselves come to inhabit such spaces and also define their womanly bondings through such ‘typically feminine’ activities. In this contradiction, they unwittingly untangle a compulsive association between the domestic, the womanly, the housewifely and the inferior. The narrative also illustrates the overlapping space of the private and public, of home and office in the way the three friends personally and informally co-ordinate their professional ‘self-presentation’ through their attires. Now I am going to problematize the ideological construction of the domestic private space of the homemakers as necessarily unprofessional in the way it has been projected by many professionally working men and women.

Mala is a homemaker and she thinks it is a full time work that needs a sense of art, discipline and meticulous sensibility. She has always been focused on the career of her daughters and expresses her desire to fulfil through her daughters’ successes, her unfulfilled dream of being a working professional in a respectable job. She decided to leave her job after marriage in order to be able to look after her family and children in a committed way. She describes this as “*bhalobeshe mon diye shongshar kora*” (to do

homemaking with your heart and love). Although she has compromised on 'work' outside for 'work' inside, she believes that professional work is integral to one's self-independent identity especially in the context where conjugal spaces have become more seconomically demanding than ever before and where a sense of independence and respect comes from one's financial independence. She says,

"This is the age of 'competition' and you have to be the best in your field to excel in the job market. I may not be a working professional myself but I am able to appreciate that material earnings of your own does give you a better bargaining power within the family. It is sad but true that however much you might put your labour at home, your work is ultimately recognized when you go out to work. Since I have given my full dedication to bringing up my daughters by sacrificing my job, as a mother I expect them to do well both academically and professionally. It has always been a dream for myself (sadly contemplative)."

A common sight in urban Bengal is small groups of women clustered outside of schools to give *adda* when they go to drop and pick up their children from school. Dalia labels these groups of women as *"housewives who have no work other than to fanatically discuss about their children's progress in school and criticize teachers for not doing their work properly. They seem to want to fulfil all their unfulfilled dreams through their children!"*

Contrary to her accusation of these women's 'obsession' with their children's performance, Mita, a second generation homemaker is critical of working mothers. She says,

"Women who work outside home get so busy with their own professional life and individual self that they often fail to be good mothers whose duty is to guide and shape the future of their children."

Dalia is highly disdainful of putting too much focus on children's performance. She narrates,

"Mothers go crazy preparing their children to be best in everything –studies, dance, music, swimming, sports and what not! Running behind kids all the time is not necessarily proper mothering. We working mothers know how to give space to children and this space is important for the child's sense of independence."

A reading of these narratives is interesting in many dimensions. The invocation of the 'material', market competition and the preparation of the next generation 'professional', within and through Mala's domestic space, problematize the patriarchal nationalistic binary of the spiritual-inner-private-female domain and the material-outer-public-male domain. Mala's narrative which expresses a desire and dream for the public material world of professionalism that she wishes to relive and fulfil through her daughters, can be read as overturning this nationalistic dichotomy because it nurtures the material within the very domestic. However, Mala's and Mita's narratives can also be read as conforming to the hetero-normative discourse of 'working mothers' as 'failing' to be 'good mothers' whose work out of home can intervene into the cultural construction of ideal motherhood and 'committed' domesticity. This idea of 'ideal motherhood' also has its material and social consequences on women's lives. For instance, in upholding the view that a negotiated balance between 'work' and home will ultimately affect her role as a wife and mother, Mala decided to leave her job. This reinstates the point that cultural and discursive constructions of gendered identities do have social, structural and material effects on women's lives and thereby on their bargaining power within home and outside.

The cultural construction of motherhood, however, is not 'given' but culturally contested by competing discourses of what constitutes 'proper mothering'. Contrary to the belief that working mothers cannot be good mothers, Dalia unlike Mala, in fact, associates 'proper mothering' with 'working mothers' who unlike the 'housewives' are not obsessed mothers, know how to give space to their children, and do not impose their unfulfilled desires on their children. What comes out through these highly representative narratives is the continual negotiation and debate of the various ways of conceptualizing and practising heterosexual intimate relations and identities that simultaneously conforms to, circumvents and overturns the structural and cultural imperatives of hetero-normativity.

The definition of motherhood and wifehood as integral to the definition of womanhood (Puri, 1999) is confirmed both by women working outside home and homemakers. Women may contest the ideology and practice of 'proper mothering' but still hold themselves more accountable than their partners for child rearing and home-making. Many research findings about the household division of labour have unambiguously reported that even when women work outside home full-time, they shoulder the majority of household and child care (Berk, 1985). Through an interactionist feminist lens that focuses on the 'fluid' processes of 'doing' and narrativizing gender, femininity can be understood as constant interactional accomplishment that does not simply exist in the social world as a structure but is also culturally internalized and recreated by individuals (Giddens, 1984) through codes, routines, rituals and habits (Garfinkel, 1967). Such social accountability of 'doing gender' and the internalized desire for the cultural recognition of embodying an 'idealized femininity', however shifting that may be, set limits to a gender democratic 'confluent love' between equals (Jamieson, 1999) who can

only practice a reflexive narrative of selfhood and intimacy 'to an extent', in and through the constraints of gender, generation, class-culture, relation to the mode of production, its cultural meaning and material consequence.

Reinterpretation of the Idea of 'Productive':

This section is a reinterpretation of the very idea of 'productive' in the context of a female homosocial intimacy by insiders themselves. I have shown in the previous sections that materially, domestic labour goes without receiving a wage and hence any status of work (Walby, 2002: 95). In cultural terms, such domestic work is heavily feminized and made inferior to 'work' outside home. However women within the private space often narrativized their homosocial intimacy as a 'window of the heart' through which they expressed the self's desires. Such desires were constituted in relation to but in critique of hetero-normative conjugality. Through this space they re-asserted their personhood that had been drowned within the regime of an often unrecognized and taken for granted routinized domestic conjugal 'productivity'. Hence this private space of home that was otherwise patriarchally constructed as 'unproductive' was re-interpreted as productive and constructive by many women for whom it provided a site for feminist bonding, and solidarity that often helped women in coping with the exigencies of a sexist cultural patriarchal power (McRobbie, 1978).

Seventy year-old woman, Hashi, says:

"In our times we did not have free mixing. Men and women were mostly segregated so that if you are seen in your para with a man, talking to him, it would surely have been reported to our guardian. But we had our own friend circle, our cousins and sisters-in-law in our joint family. Since public intimacy

between partners was restricted, moner kotha (intimate disclosure) were often expressed to other female members who guided us through their experiences. Some experiences are specific only to women and bond us in our own ways. Together as sisters and friends we often expressed our spontaneous desires by secretly doing deviant things that was restricted by respectable middleclass womanhood. I remember these with fond memories as it provided a window of the heart and a sense of antarangata (intimacy)."

Hashi's narrative can be read as a critique of Giddens' sole focus on the self's pleasure through intimate disclosure realized either through heterosexual or homosexual relations (1992: 28). A 'narrative of the self' can be understood through these homosocial intimacies within the private sphere. Secretly 'deviant' of hegemonic middle-class codes of respectable womanhood, these intimacies interrogate 'plastic sexuality', 'confluent love' and 'pure relationship' as the only bases and reflection of self-disclosure and a reflexive narrative of self. This dimension of self-disclosure through the homosocial space has not been emphasized in Giddens' project of reflexive individualization. This narrative, representative of many other subjects' narrative within Hashi's generation and also within the next generation heavily interrogates Giddens' argument that only de-traditionalization provides the basis for a reflexive selfhood. Any form of 'subject'ion involves the possibility of a subject and it can be argued that one is brought into being as a subject precisely by being regulated (Butler, 2004: 41). By this argument precisely because Hashi is structurally and culturally restricted by the traditional relations within the family and its classed and gendered character, she is left to negotiate her subjection through other means of subjecthood. In her case, this happened through her homosocial bondings and their secret subversions of hegemonic codes of middle-class respectability and femininity. Research has shown that the

possibility of such subversive homosocial bondings have often been obstructed amongst middle-class professional working women. They are not restricted in the traditional way Hashi is but they often remain secluded amidst a masculinized and competitive world of modern professionalism which hinders the formation of their homosocial intimate relations and their bondings (Walker, 1994).

Hashi's sense of selfhood is akin to Ghosh's argument that within nineteenth century Bengali homes and its confines of the *antahpur* (private domain), women waged a battle of their own through their solidarity and sisterhood – “shielded from direct surveillance and nourished by oppression, this secluded space proved an ideal breeding ground for gendered social discontent” (2007: 212). According to Ghosh, unfortunately these spaces have not been previously appreciated enough in terms of reading these sites as hetero-normative resistances in apparently normative situations (212). In the Western context McRobbie (1978) elaborately analyzed how female friendship provided a site of support in young women's lives. However, McRobbie's analysis focused on working class girls and from a perspective in which female friendship prepared these young women for their future roles in the domestic sphere as wives and mothers. My analysis of this female homosociality is centred on the middleclass, which in its professional working status is often seen as not being conducive to friendship amongst women (Walker, 1994). It is not only analyzed in relation to how it provides preparative ground for women's heterosexual roles but also in how it collectively critiques its hetero-normative imperative. I am inclined to read social discontents and critiques of patriarchy as the first step towards initiating changes in gendered arrangements at the micro-

interactional level first and eventually towards effecting changes within the institutional make-up of women's oppression.

Fifty-four year-old woman, Gayatri, tells her story of intimate homosociality,

“After marriage, family and children became the focus of my life. I left my job in the dream of becoming a devoted homemaker. Their happiness wishes and fancies became my priority over my own. The children are on their own now and your Uncle (referring to her husband) still has his share of adda in the local para club. I am always at home struggling to kill time. Two of my female friends from school run a cultural workshop where they give music and dance lessons to children. They often asked me to join it and I never took it seriously until when I realized that I had stopped living for myself. I joined that workshop and renewed my passion for dance that I had given up after marriage. It does not give me any income but definitely (assertively) a sense of personal achievement! I do not think of myself as just a housewife. It makes me feel I am capable of much more (smiles shyly). The last three years have rejuvenated my life with these friends. We share our conjugal experiences and grievances. Your Uncle is however not uncritical of it especially when my absence at home affects his day to day routine. But when he can have adda with friends outside, why can't I? (smiles)”

Quite contrary to the patriarchal discourse of unproductivity, the female homosocial space is narrativized as providing a space for ‘a sense of personal achievement’. This sense of achievement interestingly is not necessarily dependent on a material ‘income’. It critiques the patriarchal capitalistic construction that only ‘work’ that is paid provides basis for selfhood and its productivity. Gayatri's selfhood is best understood in the way she re-asserts a long lost identity of a skilful dancer, a skill that was drowned in the everyday household chores of domestic conjugality and hetero-relational identifications. This re-assertion also has consequences in the way Gayatri's defines herself now “*I do*

not think of myself as just a housewife...I am capable of much more". Gayatri's sharing of a homosocial space with professionally working women in terms of collective 'conjugal experiences and grievances' illustrate the possibility of collectively shared gendered space that occasionally transcends differences amongst women and unites them as a gender. In such instances of ventilating grievances of hetero-relationality, women show awareness of a collective experience of womanhood and its patriarchal oppressions. In this context, the heterogeneity of 'woman' is overshadowed by the cultural politics of heterosexuality in which marriage seems to have affected the sense of independent personhood of most women through a common cultural pattern.

Gayatri's critique of hetero-normativity through her mellowed (hinted by the nature of her smile) claim for gender equality within the public spaces of *adda* that have hitherto primarily remained a male space, however, is not an outright subversion of the hetero-normative. Her children are 'on their own now' aiding a shift in her heterosexual priority which is also not left un-criticized by her husband. This space therefore is not completely devoid of the negotiations and bargains with patriarchy (Kandiyoti, 1988). These negotiations have consequences on how women view themselves and therefore view others through inter-subjective interactions. This, in turn has consequences on how women position themselves in discourses of femininity and confirm or challenge the hegemonic cultural mandates of womanhood that legitimate gender inequalities.

Classed Homosociality, Hetero-normative Homosociality:

In this section I analyze the layered nuances of female homosociality within the private sphere. A continual shifting of subjectivities that vary across a range of conflicting

discourses fractures a coherent homosocial space and further fragments the already discursive construction of the 'woman'. Women as active agents of a patriarchal culture embody and collude with the 'male-in-the-head' (Holland et al., 1998) through a process of internalized patriarchy and its politics of 'othering'. By ridiculing women who seek to interrogate hetero-normative boundaries, they actively take on the responsibility of upholding sexual morality and hegemonic gender codes of the family, society and nation. In this, they conform to the nationalist politics of gendering where the *bhadramahila* were vested with the dubious honour of bearing the cultural 'authenticity' of the nation (Sarkar, 2001; Chatterjee, 1989). This section will analyze how participants inhabiting the homosocial space strategically circumvent and also conform to the hegemonic codes of gender stereotypes (Puri, 1999).

In critically analyzing the multi-layered intimacies of a group of six women in my *para*, varying dimensions of power relations and a discourse of their middleclass-ness becomes evident alongside their critique of hegemonic heterosexuality. I closely know these six women in the *para* through our annual collective initiative to stage a cultural programme on the occasion of Rabindranath Tagore's birthday. They boast of their untiring spirit even at this age (ranging from forty-two years to fifty-four years) to undertake such collective initiative and narrate with pride their female bonding to their relatives who have also expressed a desire to develop such a group themselves, owing to their occasional loneliness and boredom of mundane routine within conjugal spaces. Through this non-materialistic cultural effort, they have redefined the notion of the 'productive'. After every cultural performance, they get together for a celebration of their hard labour in staging a programme that they believe 'will lead to *parar unnoti* (progress

of the *para*) and provide cultural education for the next generation.’ The ‘core group’ often colloquially narrated by them as *amra amra* (we we) invites everyone in each turn for evening get togethers. A reading of their spaces during these get togethers is sociologically significant in terms of generating knowledge about the multi-layered intimacies mediated by the power and imperatives of class-culture.

For instance, it is interesting to note these women’s occasional resistance to welcoming other men or women into their tight knit solidarity of *amra amra* which itself is sometimes characterized by inter-group rivalries and competing intimacies. They do not want to dilute their intimate space by incorporating ‘other’ members. This exclusionary politics of ‘othering’ is classed and gendered (Skeggs, 1997; Lawler, 1999). This other is sometimes a man from the same class who is distanced as ‘the other gender’ and sometimes a man or a woman from a different middle-class culture who is rejected as the ‘parochial lower middle-class’, or ‘uneducated lower class’ or ‘too Westernized or bollywoodish new middleclass’. Unlike them the ‘others’ are not *abhijato* (sophisticated) and/or *ruchishonmoto* (conforming to taste).

Female Homosociality, Middle-class ‘Distinction’ and Interrogation of Hetero-normativity:

In this section I elaborate on the impact of middle-class codes of tastes on the space of the homosocial. The multi-layered nature of intimacy among the six women in my *para* is heavily mediated by hegemonic codes of middle-class ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984). They collectively claim that their nature of intimate expressions is *abhijato* middle-class. The group’s inclination of staging a Tagorean cultural programme can be precisely

understood in the context in which Tagore is considered a symbolic and cultural capital of the *abhijato bhadrasamaj*. They also narrate a naturalized discourse of their enculturation of Tagore who, as Dola claims, “*lives in our minds, soul and body where both love and pain is and has always been understood through Tagore*”. Their middle-class tastes that are ‘natural’ to them find an aesthetic expression in their ‘habitus’; in ways they decorate their living room, ‘choose’ particular books on their bookshelf, dress up and speak (Bourdieu, 1984). Through this naturalizing discourse of middle-class taste, they pathologize the ‘lower middle-class’ (Lawler, 1999) who ironically form the majority of their audience during the cultural programmes. On one hand they seek to democratize their capital and knowledge by hoping for *parar unnoti* through it, whilst on the other, they pathologize the ‘lower middle-class’ people who can never be *abhijato* and therefore implying that they can only ‘pretend’ sophistication. An examination of the homosocial space of these six women illustrate their resistances to many aspects of hetero-normativity but also illustrate their conformity to the nationalist ideology of the ‘new woman’ who is ‘culturally superior’ to ordinary, ‘pretentious’ lower classes or ‘Westernized’ ‘new middle-class’ (Chatterjee, 1989: 628)

They have their own narrative of distancing the ‘others’. Mita and Dola argue how people in the *para* initially used their power to sabotage all female efforts to stage their cultural endeavours. Moreover, Mita, Mala and Arpita are heavily critical of these ‘others’ who were always critical of Dola for her ‘failed womanhood due to her failed conjugal life’. Mita supports Dola and narrates,

“We are proud of Dola in how she is single handedly bringing up her daughter. Her husband has no sense of duty or loyalty. When he goes around with other

women, the people of the para have nothing to say (expresses anger) but when a woman has a male friend outside marriage, they think she is a bad woman. Is it only the woman's responsibility and her failure? It is just not possible to mix with such people who think so narrowly?"

In empathizing with Dola's single parenting and also supporting her heterosexual relation outside of her marriage, these women and particularly Mita subvert the hegemonic heterosexual institution of monogamous marriage and compulsory wifehood. It is an instance of a space which appropriates a power position of middle-class cultural capital to critique and overturn another power position of hetero-normativity. Most of them, however, conserve a hetero-relational vision through which they think it is best for Dola to not seek a divorce from her husband keeping in mind the well-being of her daughter. Dola is herself convinced by her 'natural urge for motherhood' and still thinks that 'keeping her marriage' will assure the well-being of her daughter both financially and emotionally. These imperatives of hegemonic heterosexuality in which a woman is bound by the structural and cultural underpinnings of the family and through her role within it, particularly as mothers indicate the persistence of gender inequality and its internalization through Foucault's (1977) concepts of self-surveillance and gender accountability (West and Zimmerman, 1987)

Female Homosociality and Confirmation of Hetero-normativity:

Alongside conformity and critique, an intra-group patriarchal panopticon of hegemonic gender codes is also often evident. For instance, Gopa is often critical of Arpita's refusal to bear marital signs that are patriarchally symbolic of the well-being of a husband. The intra-gender hetero-normative vigilances morally police strict boundaries between

hegemonic heterosexual femininity/womanhood and its deviation. This male surveillance even without the physical presence of a patriarch is evident in other female homosocial spaces as well. Many women for instance are sarcastically critical of highly dominating women and sympathize with their 'good' natured husbands who cope with such controlling wives. Second generation Shikha echoes many women across all generations in asserting that,

"If I tried to control my husband by domination, it would not be successful given his temper!" Her friend adds, *"in fact men lose their charm if they do not have any authority or are absolutely spineless or stroino (henpecked) and I would hate to be with such a man myself."*

Sangeeta, aged fifty-four, recently came back from a holiday with her husband. After she returned from holiday to share with her friends the photos, she was playfully teased for *"another 'honeymoon'?"* and for such heightened conjugal romance *"even at that age"* and untimely *prem* (romance).

Through their critiques of dominating wives and 'teasing' about untimely heterosexual romance, subjects can be seen to symbolically assume the patriarchal roles of the extended joint family in controlling the conjugal companionship that is often imagined to thwart extended family solidarity. In wondering how a *woman* can be so dominating to accomplish her power and wishes over her 'good natured' husband, the tone of those critiquing such a position is sarcastic, caustic towards the dominating wife and sympathetic towards the husband. The story is made more interesting by the continuing sarcasm that adds with long sighs and deep breath, regrets about how they could never

successfully become so dominating and 'tame' their patriarchally firm husbands. These wonders, sarcasms and regretful sighs can however also be read as desires to embody such a subject position that overturns the traditionally stereotypical gendered arrangements. Hidden in their apparently conforming gendered subjectivities are desires that wish to embody enough courage to de-familiarize the familiar, interrogate the taken-for-granted habitual which is otherwise partly internalized in its moral policing of selfhood. The next section problematizes the homosocial boundary by the desire of the homoerotic within it.

Female homosociality nesting homoerotic desires and destabilizing the homo-hetero binary:

This final section is an analysis of homoeroticism. In extending Foucault's understanding of the constitutive effects of power as creating desire, I will show that bodies and pleasure that nest homoeroticism resist the power of the hetero-normative, but are not outside of dominant gender norms (Richardson, 1996: 5; Jackson, 1996: 26). Let us re-read the narrative of Subarna where she talks about her intimacy with her other two friends and their indulgence in the collective adornment of themselves. In not needing men as their audience to look at them, they resist the hetero-normative 'male gaze'. However, in succumbing to the 'womanly' and 'typically feminine', which they paradoxically other as 'inferior' in another interactional context; they reproduce through 'the-male-in-the-head' this 'typically' and emphatically feminine. This femininity is always in relation to masculinity and cannot be seen to completely dissolve the hetero-normative even within homoerotic desires.

Narratives and 'extra narratives' which were analyzed as instances where women paradoxically critiqued and desired to be the woman who held her husband captive by her charm and domination, can be read as instances that simultaneously illustrate homoeroticism and hetero-normativity. Despite critique or precisely because of critique of a woman by another woman, two possible forms of desires are simultaneously expressed. One is an intra-gender desire for a control over the man/heterosexuality imagined to be between two sexually competing female bodies and the other is a desire for the 'charming' homosocial female body that tames and controls the man/heterosexuality through feminine charm. Aloka's appreciation for Sangeeta's husband that is often 'jokingly' constructed by other female friends as sexually charged, similarly establishes both a heterosexual and a homoerotic desire. The more subtle homoerotic desire is underlined in Aloka's appreciation of Sangeeta,

"Whatever you wear like the simple cotton saree that you have worn, looks so glamorous on you; why won't your husband listen to what you say and be in your control? After all he's got such a charming wife (teases and laughs)!"

These intra-gender and intra-generational admiration of physical beauty of otherwise sexually competitive bodies, read in a new light, can open up older texts of homosocial admiration for newer readings of homoerotic desires (Gopinath, 1998).

Homoerotic desires and pleasures are also narrated in homosocial gifting that express a heightened sense of sensuousness and sensuality. Homosocial intimacy that is strengthened by gifting worn clothes or jewellery as parting gifts to one another possibly hints at a romantic desire within homosociality through a visceral experience and its erotic sensuousness. Gouri's remembrance of her friend, Natasha through the

smell of the fragrance Natasha wears implies intense homosocial-homoerotic intimacy.

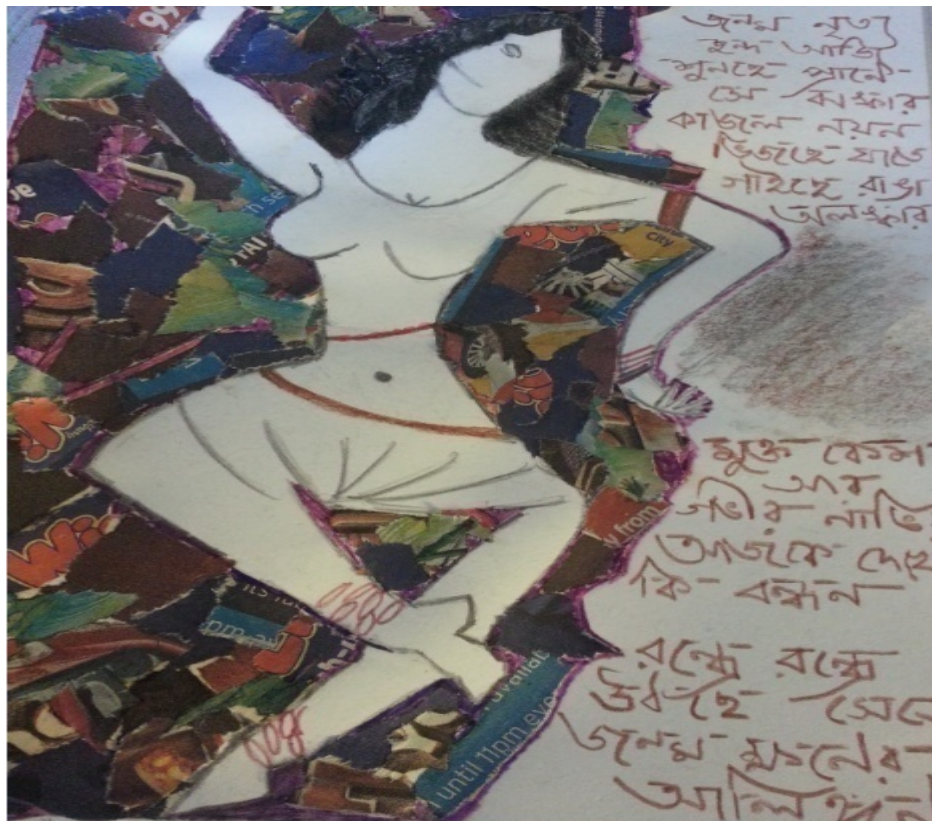
In Gouri's words,

"The top that Natasha gifted to me as a parting gift has been worn by her many a times before. I wished to keep it with me as it would often make me feel she is around. I haven't washed it as it would give me the smell of her favourite perfume."

The physical distancing of two homosocial intimate bodies and their narrativized visceral sensuality and emotion, engender a familiar heterosexual romantic script and suggest the possibility of homoeroticism in the homosocial.

Photo-2: Illustrates a homosocial and homoerotic gift from third generation Priya to third generation Gouri.

[Source: Gouri Ganguly's collection of gifts]



'The union of a let loose hair and a deep naval' is a translated line from this art and poetry that evokes vivid erotic images and imaginings that can be read as deeply charged with homoeroticism. The art poetry also evokes the pleasure of sensual romance coming out through the sensuousness of the dancing figure and attests to Rabinowitz and Auanger's analysis of homosocial intimacy nesting homoerotic desires in Ancient times (2002). To be able to read this homoeroticism underlined in the text, is to be able to go beyond the narrow, clinical reductionist masculinist readings of the 'homo'/ 'hetero' binary of sexual experiences (Rich, 1980). The institutionalized gendered binary that compulsively focuses on the hetero-sexual 'act' of male penetration as an 'invasion and colonization' of women's bodies is a phallogentric discourse that cannot appreciate either the multilayered possibilities of 'post-heterosexual' desire (Smart, 1996a: 236) or the deeply charged erotic imaginings of homosocial intimate subjectivities (Lorde, 1997: 280-281). Although subjects did not automatically invoke the term lesbian to describe their sexual identity, these experiences can be read from such an angle, particularly in the way Rich (1980) theorized a continuum of 'hetero' and 'homo' in female homosocial bonding. Her concept of 'lesbian existence' and 'lesbian continuum' (1980: 648) eloquently captures the homoerotic. Lesbianism, Rich argues, is often associated with clinical reductionism. Lesbian continuum expands this clinical limitation and validates a lesbian existence to mean a woman identified world of 'rich inner life', mutual bonding against male tyranny and sharing of practical and political support (1980: 648-649). Rich's theorization of womanly bonding captures the homosocial intimacy in its broadest sense. However in

exaggerating gendered commonalities at the cost of its heterogeneity, 'male tyranny' and a 'woman identified world' is left unproblematic.

The homosocial intimate space is not only a space for intra-gender disclosing and sharing of intimacy but also a space for nurturing inter-gender pleasures. Discussing men emotionally and sexually, and mutually deciding to share their heterosexual desires and fantasies can be read as simultaneously nesting the hetero-normative and the homosocial. This is also particularly manifest in women exchanging one another's clothes and doing one another's makeup, in which one almost relives the erotic beauty through another's body. Mundane homosocial activities become invested with sexual and erotic energy where it can no longer be assumed that things are as 'straight as they appear' (Gopinath, 1998). The charged up intimate emotions realized through the collective experience of femininity on one hand provides a space that prepares these women for future roles of womanhood (McRobbie, 1978) but on the other, also provides a space for collective resistance of hegemonic codes of femininity. In that the homoerotic and the homosexual critique but also exist in relation to hetero-normativity.

This chapter has variously shown that the category 'woman' is heterogeneous, fragmented and can only be understood through her position within a class, her relation to the mode of 'production' within that class through her profession and her generation. This objective positionality is, however, not enough to appreciate women's experiences that are both different and collective as a gender. It is important to understand how she herself gives meaning to these positions and places herself within discourses and through inter-subjective interactions. The chapter demonstrated the collective experiences of women as a gender and the significance of homosocial friendships

within the lives of women across all generations. However, it also showed that these homosocial spaces are highly classed and fragmented in terms of the discursive construction/label of one's position as a 'house-wife' or a middle-class working professional. Through various empirical instances, the chapter illustrated that such discursive constructions and labelling do have social and material consequences on women's lives which interconnects the discursive with the social and the material.

Through examining gendered spaces of intimate friendships, the previous chapter and this chapter sought to analyze the processes of negotiating heterosexual intimate identities of masculinities and femininities. These negotiated spaces were shown to exist in critique of and relation to institutionalized heterosexuality or hetero-normativity. The reflexive narration of these identities were illustrated to be simultaneously shaped and constrained by inter-subjective relations and meanings of gender, class, class-culture, generation, profession and their discourses within the narratives of nationalism, colonialism and modernism. The institutional, material and particularly social, cultural, and symbolic consequences were then brought out through the processes of these negotiations. The next chapter takes from the analyses of heterosexual identities of masculinities and femininities in order to explore the ways in which such identities come to bear upon subjects' negotiation of hetero-normativity through heterosexual coupling.

CHAPTER-6 NARRATIVES OF COUPLING: NEGOTIATING HETERO-NORMATIVITY

Through an analysis of the personal narratives of subjects, this chapter attempts to understand the culturally specific meanings and cross generational constructions of heterosexual intimate relations, courtship, conjugality and coupling. This involves focusing on the various ways in which subjects confirm and interrogate, uphold and challenge, submit and rebel, institutionalized heterosexuality (VanEvery, 1996) or hetero-normativity at the inter and intra subjective level of everyday practices of intimacy (Richardson, 1996, Smart, 1996b, Jackson, 1996). Subjects' ongoing negotiations at these inter subjective levels tell stories of multiple and often contradictory subjectivities and 'practices of intimacy' (Jamieson, 2011) that vary across a range of discourses (Weedon, 1987; Leahy, 1994: 49); that are not amenable to rigid categorizations in terms of 'modern' generation as opposed to the 'traditional' generation, powerful and powerless, passive and active subjectivities (Mohanty, 1991). This calls for acknowledging heterosexual intimate practices as diverse and competing heterosexualities instead of a monolithic, trans-historical heterosexuality (Smart, 1996b: 166, 170).

The constructions of heterosexual intimacy and its socio-cultural contingencies are understood primarily through privileging women's narratives. The theoretical rationale for such epistemological privileging is a cultural politics of gendering that mediated the colonial history of Bengal and is still strong enough to enter into a dialogic relation with the contemporary post-colonial relations within the *bhadrāsamaj* (Sangari and Vaid,

1989). Within colonial and anti-colonial deliberations and their associated hegemonic discourses of gender and class; women, particularly the *bhadramahaila* came to be expected to simultaneously embody a 'modern India' without jeopardizing their 'traditional' roles within the family and without failing to bear national cultural 'authenticity' (Puri, 1999; Sarkar, 2001; Chatterjee, 1989). How women narrativize their heterosexual intimate spaces, identities and practices therefore becomes sociologically relevant in terms of their material and discursive relations with national and trans-national discourses and intersections of gender, class and race. Through a focus on cross-generational narratives of intimate coupling, I not only seek to theorize on heterosexual intimacy but also contribute to broader questions of family, gender, class, time, continuity and social change that shape so-called personal intimate spaces.

It is necessary to qualify that the analysis of this chapter heavily focuses on the narratives of few subjects which will be methodologically presented as case studies because 'study of personal narrative is a form of case-centered research (Mishler, 1999 cited in Riessman, 2002: 697). The reason for presenting the narrative texts of Shanta and Priya, from second and third generation respectively is because they are highly representative of the inter-generational dynamic of heterosexuality. The mother-daughter story is thus at once specific and general. The case study of first generation Pushpa is an anomaly within the general cultural pattern. Her transgression of the norm, through her story of elopement with her lover, however, indirectly informs the readers of the norm of her time- the norm of 'arranged' marriage and the pathology of marriage of 'choice'. Her story of negotiating heterosexual intimacy is nevertheless representative in other ways, particularly through the sociological role of imagination in her life that is

often invoked to strategically circumvent the otherwise normative structural injunctions of coupling in her generation. A focus on a few cases of coupling allows for a 'thick' description of the narrative structure, language and a depth of analysis which could be diluted by a shallow reading of quantity-focused narrative texts. This would then fail to keep up to the methodological spirit of in depth qualitative narrative interviewing. I begin my analysis of the processes of negotiating heterosexual intimacy through a first generation narrative text.

Case Study of Pushpa: Narrative of the first generation:

Seventy-three year-old Pushpa narrates that "*prem kore nije pochondo kore biye*" (love marriage of one's own choice) was rare in her generation. A strict gender segregation, both in private and public domains of life, rendered exposure to the other gender and interaction between them structurally and culturally hardly possible. Family, particularly the eldest male member, the patriarch, was omnipotent and hence the last word for the family and its members. Marriage was clearly a family matter, an issue of the family by the family and for the family. The self or the individual and its 'life-world' was 'colonized' by the family as part of the larger community (Das, 1995: 15). Courtship was rarely heard of and intimacy before marriage, if and when it developed, often strategized a space for itself beyond the vigilance of the 'home'. Open rooftops were in many instances such a space, especially if the beloved was a next door neighbour where the rooftops of the two adjacent houses were both architecturally and culturally close enough.

These 'open' rooftops therefore can be understood as sociologically significant spaces as their architectural location allowed, even temporarily, for an articulation of the intimate that was otherwise restricted within the then socio-cultural context. These 'open' rooftops can also be understood as metaphors for freedom- freedom from the bindings of community structure, from the discipline and regimentation of the joint-family and its tight-knit surveillance. This freedom is best understood as negotiated, an instance of 'bargaining with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988). Pushpa's strategic circumvention of patriarchal norms through structural transgression and subversive imagination creatively carves out its own space and meaning of power and subjectivity. Her subjecthood that is brought into being by a paradoxical state of being subjected (Foucault, 1990; Butler, 1997) to familial hetero-normativity, can be read as a critique of but not as an outright rejection of hetero-normativity. Pushpa's narrative will illustrate this point.

Pushpa narrates how she and her sister would look for excuses to be at their rooftop to catch a glimpse of the man who lived in the adjacent house and who Pushpa had nurtured a romantic feeling for, for the many past years, since her school days. Pushpa narrated how she always imagined that,

"One day the boundary that separated our houses would collapse, he would take me as his wife in his house and we would be under the same roof holding hands forever. Our secret moments, stolen from others' eyes were indeed very 'romantic'. We would wait for the moment to see each other all day around six in the evening when I went there in others' eyes, to bring down the dried clothes as a regular household chore. My younger sister accompanied me for them not to suspect. She was my only intimate confidant in the house apart from Nandita, my next door best friend. Our moment of meeting which were often just romantic

exchanges of glances was a feeling of temporarily breaking away from all bindings and I imagined that we were actually a union of two souls. A lot was left to the imagination which was a place of my own, my dream home outside all societal rules and limits. I imagined our romance would materialize into a happy married life, with him as the dear son-in-law of my parents and me, the dear daughter-in-law of his parents.”

Life for Pushpa has been a constant struggle and she paid heavy price for exerting her independent choice to marry Bimal, the person of her love. The two families never agreed to this marriage primarily because it had threatened familial patriarchal authority over individual desire and wish. As Pushpa says,

“Even he (Bimal) had to struggle with his father who thought his son wanted to marry a girl who had no feminine modesty and whose selfish desire was the cause of two family’s destruction. Of all this I was the most maligned. My father was more concerned about how shameful it was for me to get married just next door and about what the neighbours would think about his daughter’s unrestrained, disrespectful and bold sexual desire and its expression. Apparently I had brought bad name to the family’s reputation in the community and I wondered how insignificant individual happiness was! I always felt sad thinking that our fathers were less concerned about our happiness than matters of status, class, caste and neighbourhood. I cried a lot feeling guilty that I was a burden to them and brought in bad name to the family but my prem (romantic love) was pobitra (pure) and how I wish they would understand this. We married without their consent in a temple without any social gathering or festivity. I had big dreams of how I would look like a bride and how much fun there would be in my marriage! (Sighs and keeps silent for a while). We lived separately and our parents rarely visited us. The relation between the two families had also broken and I always felt responsible for all this which in retrospect I feel I should not have felt (expresses firmness). I sometimes doubted if I was really very self-centric as I had affected so many relations especially his (Bimal’s) relation with

his family, solely because of my love for him. How I wish we had our parents' blessing in our marriage (a pause of introspective silence). Without their acceptance and recognition, our marriage seemed incomplete. Afterall, true marriage is not only between two individuals but also between their two families. I longed for it almost every day and hoped that one day they would understand us. Bimal at times went to see his parents but he didn't like taking me to his parents or even my family. Our family got reunited with us in the real sense only after our son, Bidhan was born. The funny thing is that even Bimal had a love marriage and strangely they had gladly accepted it for him (smiles)."

The following sections will analyze Pushpa's narrative texts to bring out the multiple layers of her subjectivity in relation to the processes of negotiating intimate heterosexual intimacy and identity.

a) Negotiating Hetero-normativity: Situating Power and Agency:

A reading of Pushpa's narrative suggests the co-existence of nuanced, conflicting and contradictory subjectivities that varied across a range of discourses (Leahy, 1994: 49) of heterosexual intimacy. Her fragmented identity can best be appreciated from a post colonial, post-structuralist lens that recognizes the simultaneous existence of compliance and resistance (Mohanty, 1991; Puri, 1999; Weedon, 1987). Pushpa's narrative of heterosexual conformity and rebellion can be usefully theorized in terms of Foucault's and Butler's notion of 'subjection'. Inspired by the Foucauldian idea that there is nothing outside of power and that power simultaneously disciplines and creates new subjects, Butler envisions the individual as empowered as a subject with its possibility of agency in and through a process of subjection to power. In Butler's words, "the subject

eclipses the conditions of its own emergence; it eclipses power with power” (1997: 14). Pushpa’s agency can be seen from the point of view of Butler’s account of agency that recognizes its inherent ambivalent nature, the fact that it is always situated in existing relations of power and in relations to prevailing norms.

Pushpa was anything but a passive recipient of the patriarchal authority of her time. She strategically circumvented norms and disciplines of the family by creating her ‘dream home’ within the familial ‘home’; a space for herself from where she secretly articulated her intimate wishes and heterosexual desires. How an ordinary, otherwise feminized household chore like bringing down dried clothes, was complied with and yet gradually built up to a rebellious act, is a classic exemplar of a paradoxical state of resistance through compliance. Her silence indicated through mere exchanges of glances should not be read as passivity as it has often been understood in the male, orientalist discourse of modernity (Mohanty, 1991). Her conformity can rather be read as a creative negotiation where an ordinary chore in an ordinary mundane space is turned out into a means for momentarily breaking out of the normative restrictions and a disciplinarian regimentation. This provides an empirical instance of Foucault’s assertion that as soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance (1990: 95). Carving out a space amidst the strict surveillance of a patriarchal family, through the strategization of a mundane feminized domain, engenders negotiated meanings of agency and power that can only be appreciated through a ‘situated knowledge’ of the structural and cultural imperatives of her generation. An appreciation of ‘situated knowledge’, that is integral to my post-colonial and post-structuralist feminist epistemology, helps to privilege ‘local’ narratives of power, subjectivity and agency over

universalized meta-narratives of the same. Through this 'situated knowlwdge' it is possible to appreciate not only Pushpa's agency in subverting the patriarchal surveillance of respectable femininity, but also to appreciate the indirect agency of her intimate confidante, her sister, her best friend, Nandita and Pushpa's homosocial bonding with them in aiding this patriarchal subversion. It is relevant in this context to appreciate post-structuralists' understanding of people as agentic and as gendered subjects who make choices within a range of socially available discursive positions, moulding and creatively adapting discourses as they act (Leahy, 1994).

However, it is interesting to see that the way she narrativizes her *pabitra prem* or pure love is heavily shaped by a strong gendered, monogamous, institutionalized heterosexuality. Pushpa's narrative imagination that one day her beloved would take her as 'his' wife to 'his' house unquestionably conforms to the 'heterosexual imaginary' which "conceals the operation of heterosexuality as an organizing institution" (Ingraham, 1996: 169) and normalizes the discourse of institutionalized marriage and its monogamous nature (Van Every, 1996: 40). This naturalized monogamous heterosexuality belies her romanticized narrative of hetero-normative marriage, of 'holding hands forever' and 'a union of two souls'. Pushpa's perennial longing to reunite with family and re-assert her natal and affinal kinship relations from which she and Bimal have been excommunicated, is indicative of Pushpa's wish and hope to heal the societal pains of transgressions and its 'guilt'. Despite her transgression, she wishes to be absorbed into the community from 'not-community' (Mody, 2008). Pushpa's narrative that although Bimal periodically visited her family she was not *taken* to her, or Bimal's family, as '*he didn't like taking me*', is also indicative of institutionalized heterosexuality.

Her constant self-doubt and guilt that the expression of her wish and desire particularly of a romantic and sexual nature had broken many other relationships between and within the families and *particularly* Bimal's relation with his family, indicates Pushpa's subjective embodiment of nationalistic/patriarchal discourse. This discourse hegemonically positioned the *bhadramahila* as the bearer of familial solidarity, national fraternity and middle-class respectable sexuality that distinguished the nation's cultural 'superiority' from the Western 'other' (Chatterjee, 1989: 623). This cultural politics of gendering is best illustrated by Pushpa's narrative,

"Apparently I had brought bad name to the family's reputation in the community. Of all this I was the most maligned."

This reinforces the cultural construction that a woman could either make or break a home underpinned in the metaphors *Griha-lakshmi* and its counterpoint, *Alakshmi* respectively (Chakrabarty, 2000: 226-227). These cultural constructions of femininity reign strong in Pushpa's narrative of self-doubt and self-blame. Therefore, even though she transgresses the normative, she is never completely outside of it. It is important to note, however, that in retrospect, she thinks that her guilt and self-doubt may be was not necessary, indicating her shifting perspective of self-esteem with the passage of time. But as a critique of power herself she nevertheless operates within other power relations.

Her narrative of *pabitra prem* that she thinks is not an antidote to her family's interest is an attempt to re-inscribe the parameters of her relationship within the existing socio-cultural imagination, and portray her interest as similar to that of her family's interest (Mody, 2008). This demonstrates how hegemonic gender codes are reproduced

through continual self-surveillance and self-control (Bartky, 1990). Her persistent longing and hope to be blessed by her family, as familial recognition makes marriage a 'true' marriage, in the absence of which it is 'incomplete'; echoes Smart's (2007) 'connectedness' thesis that stresses on the significance of family, kinship and socio-cultural relationality in shaping our very heterosexual desire and 'practices of intimacy' (Jamieson, 2011). Her narrative of the entwinement of family sentiments and happy conjugality empirically demonstrates the resilience of hegemonic heterosexuality and renders other sexualities outside the patriarchal family, as deviation from the 'normal' (Hockey et al., 2007: 23), as 'incomplete' and 'untrue'. Pushpa's romanticized heterosexual familial images of a daughter-in-law and a son-in-law particularly demonstrate that it is only through heterosexual relationships rather than gay or lesbian relationships that marriage is made 'complete' (Weeks et al., 1999).

b) Imagination: Co-constitution of Self and Society:

An interesting contradiction in the narrative of family as the basis for legitimate sexuality has been noted by Hockey et al. (2007) in their research on 'mundane heterosexualities'. "Despite the social insistence that the family be the legitimate site for the expression of one's sexuality, for some of its members, the family – both as an institution and a 'location' – can in practice represent a considerable barrier to sexual expression, communication or activity" (Hockey et al., 2007: 148). Pushpa similarly comes to represent contradictory subjectivities of heterosexual intimacy. Despite her insistence on the familial legitimation of her love, Pushpa constructs an imaginative space, a space of her 'own', her 'dream home' within her familial 'home' that lies outside all 'societal rules and limits'. It is for her intimate imagination, possibly of both emotional

and sexual nature that was otherwise difficult to freely articulate within the legitimate confines of the patriarchal familial 'home'. The imaginative space thereby acquires a special dimension of privacy, individual creativity, and agency, and manifests a space in which the non-normative inhabits within the very normative space of the home.

Such a 'dream home' of all her inner wishes and desires raises questions about which 'home' she is at home. Is it home as the family or home as 'a place of my own', 'my dream home' of imagination? Or is it both? Gurney's concept (2000) of the relation of 'privacy' with the feeling of being 'at home' where being 'at home' means the freedom to express one's sexuality without any restriction or embarrassment (40) is pertinent in the context of Pushpa's imaginative 'home' where she was 'at home'; a place that she kept hidden from the public eye and that possibly had her romantic and sexual secrets. Such a space is an instance of Pushpa's creative capacities to transcend structural conditions (Wray, 2003: 514) of her time and its limits. Pushpa can be understood to act within a context that indicates 'more contingent, varied and flexible modes of resistance' (Rajan, 1993: 11).

Pushpa's space for imagination was a place of her own beyond the moral constitution of patriarchal authority that set limits to her heterosexual expression. However, we cannot forget that although Pushpa's private 'home' subverted middle-class notions of respectability of her family, for instance, its image among the neighbours and its parameters of modest femininity, her imaginative space was nevertheless also defined by the same parameters it sought to collapse in her imagination. In this context, it is more appropriate to appreciate Pushpa as an embodied, socio-emotional heterosexual individual who "make(s) choices, albeit within constrained parameters or circumstances"

(Hockey et al., 2007: 88). For instance, her dream that one day she would become 'a dear daughter-in-law' to Bimal's parents and he would become 'a dear son-in-law' to her parents, strongly indicates the socio-cultural embeddedness of imagination (Smart, 2007) and the social structure of its creative capacities that are anchored in shared cultural and symbolic traditions (Gross, 2005), in relational dynamics which simultaneously liberate and constrain the individual through what I call, 'negotiated agency'.

In this context, it is useful to think of this space of imagination as that which, in the words of Barthes is, the "inner language" ruled by the "law of imagination" in such a way that it is absorbed into and never outside a system of 'trans-linguistics' (1964: 2). In that sense, Pushpa's inner language of imagination is inner and outer at the same time as it always stands in relation to existing discourses which are also part of other discourses and therefore absorbed into 'trans-linguistics'.

In the words of Hockey et al., (2007: 89) "we understand our interviewees as people whose agency is not simply an individualised 'inner' propensity exercised vis-a-vis an externalised abstraction such as 'structure', or indeed 'hegemonic heterosexuality'. Rather, their agency is something we see as integral to their nature as *social beings*, as members of...imaginative and socially interactive collectivities. Pushpa's negotiated agency by which I mean socio-culturally rooted imaginative creativity can be theorized after Jenkins (2002: 81-83) as the capacity of human beings to imaginatively transcend the here and now of the material moment; to identify with other people within social groups; to draw on shared traditions and shared symbolic systems; and to participate in the dynamics of group interactions.

Pushpa's imaginative space was interiorized and privatized as a 'place of my own, my dream home'. However, this 'place of my own' is continually shifting against and also in relation to a place of the 'others' where at some points in time the others become a part of this 'place of my own'. In this context it is useful to argue that imagination and its interior, ceases to only remain a subject matter of psychology and becomes immensely significant as a sociological subject of study and analysis. In this place of imagination, the self derives its social and relational definition, for instance, as an identity of a daughter-in-law to someone else. The 'others', who lie outside a 'place of my own', also live within it and define it. This is how Mead's (1934) concept of 'I' and 'Me' become inextricably enmeshed. A binary between the self and others collapse through a relational dynamic in which the interior/private/self and the exterior/public/society become mutually co-constitutive.

The nationalistic narrative of the spiritual feminine home is shaken by the interrogation of what is 'home' in this context- Pushpa's family? Or is it the 'place of my own'? Her narrative also interrogates what constitutes the 'spiritual' – a) is it her family's notion of constricted respectable middle-class sexuality; or b) her imaginative uninhibited creative sexual capacities that circumvent conventional gendered codes of middle-class respectability and femininity; or c) her notion of *pabitra prem* in which the so called 'illicit' is re-inscribed within the societal parameters of the 'licit' As the normative/licit and the non-normative/illicit is mutually co-constituted and derive their meanings only in relation to one another, the discourse of national cultural 'authenticity' and the meaning and boundary of what constitutes the spiritual is destabilized and its essentialized claims of cultural superiority, troubled.

Categories do not remain fixed but are open to re-constitution and re-invention of new boundaries and newer imaginings, new structural constraints and newer negotiated agencies. An instance of this process of continuous shifting of limits and boundaries is noted in the rather glad acceptance of the love marriage of 'choice' of Pushpa and Bimal's son by his grandparents who had once ex-communicated their children for a marriage of their choice. It is interesting to add here that at one point in the interview Pushpa narrates that despite having a "love marriage" himself, her late husband Bimal had expressed initial apprehensions for his son's love marriage as *he* was not too sure of the girl that *his* son had chosen. Grandparents as Pushpa narrates were rather more supportive of their grandchild's choice of partner. First generation grandparents' encouragement of individual choice and second generation fathers' apprehension about it thereby problematizes a linear chronological orientalist story of 'past/traditional' and 'present/modern' generations.

This case study also helps us appreciate as feminist sociologists how agency manifests in mundane life experiences – how agency "pertains to change, to renegotiation, to resistance and refusal" (Hockey et al., 2007: 91); how particular lives come to be lived in which "heterosexuality is reproduced and amended, or indeed resisted" (86); and finally how contradictory, inevitably incomplete process of identity formation is entwined with the relations between experience, subjectivity and agency (Brah, 1996: 117).

In the following sections, I will describe and then analyze the narrative of fifty-five year-old Shanta who belongs to the same age cohort as Pushpa's next generation and Shanta's daughter, twenty-seven year old Priya. Such cross generational exploration focuses on how subjects narrativize 'modernity' and 'tradition' in relation to intimacy of

'present/now' and 'past/then', and give meaning to structural 'constraints' and personal 'choice' of heterosexual coupling.

Case Study of Shanta: Narrative of the Second Generation:

Shanta begins her narrative by contrasting time frames and their associated forms of coupling that are not just description but evaluative judgements. She says,

"We were not as 'lucky' as you all (referring to her next generation). In our times we hardly had so many 'choice' that you now 'enjoy'. Now restrictions have relaxed. In those days we had to 'struggle' to assert ourselves and now it's all about one's own wish. In fact, a bit too much of it (slightly frowns). I see the next generation and think they are more individualistic and 'practical' than we were. We were much more 'emotional'. Love for us was 'blind', more 'pure', from the heart. We neither had the choice nor the mentality to be rationally 'calculative'. Falling in love wasn't easy in those days. It was like committing a sin and the entire community's eye was over you. Love never came easy and I guess that is the reason we, more than our next generation have learned to treasure a relationship and take pains for it.

Your uncle (her husband) and I had a 'love marriage' which was initially not accepted by my parents. I did a lot to have their approval. We were neighbours but hardly spoke except occasionally. Whenever we passed each other on the street, we exchanged glances and smiled. There was something 'special' about it that is missing in today's generation of more open expressions. He would often stand at the bus stop that I availed to go to college and I was aware of it and pretended not to be (chuckles). One day he approached me with a love letter, 'proposing' me for marriage. I do not even remember how many times I read that letter. Secretly I too liked him. Moreover he was from a good respectable family. Much later I had accepted his 'proposal', deliberately taking time as a sign of feminine modesty and shyness (laughs). Since then we courted for almost two

years in love sites that were far off from our locality so that none could catch us. We would take the same 'bus' back home but I still remember that he used to get down one 'stop' before mine so that no one could suspect us. I stealthily got home hoping no one spotted us anywhere. Uncles or father's friends or for that matter even the shop keepers had their eyes over 'tader parar meye' (their para's girl). These days, boys and girls mix freely and hardly feel 'awkward' about being physically intimate in open public places (displeased surprise). One day when my father guessed about the two of us and heard it from me, he was furious with my confessions and decided to arrange my marriage elsewhere. In their eyes your uncle (her husband) was not suitable to marry me as he belonged to a lower caste than us and also they expected me to get married to a person with better material prospects and a better job and future. When I said that I would also work after marriage and both our earnings would suffice, my parents who belonged to an upper middle-class location in the society, regretted an envisioned middle-class married life for me. It took me time to convince them that he was from a very respectable, educated background and that he was a good man, 'practically responsible' and 'caring'. For days I suffered their refusal but was firm about not getting married elsewhere. On my mother's coaxing, my father ultimately agreed and now your uncle is quite dear to both my parents. Love requires this struggle, commitment, labour and stability. My daughter's 'Westernized' generation (sarcastic tone and a body language of disdain) I doubt, will take so much pain to sustain a relationship. Relations today are more 'fast, easy' and quickly changing or unstable."

Case Study of Priya: Narrative of the Third Generation:

Priya acknowledges that her generation has many more options and choices than her parent's generation,

"Times are more liberal' now. It offers diverse range of choices and sometimes can be confusing how to choose the right one from so many'. We are much more

'open' and 'flexible' about things rather than 'rigid'. 'It's normal to be friends with the opposite sex and mix around freely with them'. In fact, 'it is a must to choose the right man for love and marriage'. I wonder how someone can be with one man for lifetime without having been really 'good friends' before. For instance, 'me and my boyfriend, Siddharta, are the best of pals'. We really 'gel well' together. It is important to 'rationally and practically understand if two individuals have a mental match and compatibility to stick on. Other things don't matter much. It's all about how two individuals match and if they have similar outlook to life'. However, it is but 'natural' that you experiment to find the 'right man' for you. After all we will not be marrying again and again (with an excited confidence). And hence you cannot be 'blind or emotional about it'. It might take a while to find the 'right man' and so there is no problem to look around for the man who is best suited for you. 'That way I think blind love and all such things are backdated and traditional. We are more modern in that sense and that's how it ought to be!'

Influence of Hegemonic Western Modernity and Anti-colonial Nationalist Evaluative Dualism on Subjects' Narratives:

Both Shanta's and Priya's narratives' certainty of more 'choices', 'now' in the present time, clearly indicates that their narratives conform to a neo-liberal discourse of globalized modernity. This is also confirmed by both generations' use of the English term 'choice' whenever they used it. However, although Shanta regrets not being 'lucky' enough like her next generation to 'enjoy' these choices which were not available in her time, she perceives this condition of more choices through a narrative of evaluative dualism- of a morally superior self in contrast to a Westernized other. For instance, although she regrets about a time with relatively more structural limitations and less relaxed norms, she romanticizes such a lack and its pains as culturally and morally superior in effect in relation to the ideals of intimacy. She takes pride in her 'struggle' for

love which taught her to value 'commitment' and the 'labour' required to sustain a relationship viz-a-viz her next generation's 'fast and easy', 'quickly changing', nature of love.

By relating her generation's nature of coupling as 'pure' and pejoratively associating the third generation as 'Westernized' (pejorative in her body language and tone), she indirectly ties up the 'pure' or 'emotional' love with the non-Western superior self viz-a-viz its 'Westernized' inferior other. "Cultural beliefs that middle- and upper-class women embody a changing, modernizing national cultural identity are frequently offset by concerns that these women are being corrupted by the influences of modernization, and especially, "Westernization"" (Puri, 1999: 3). Such beliefs reflect a strong impact of the nationalist anti-colonial discourse of cultural tradition (Chatterjee, 1989) which is constructed as superior in terms of its modern but spiritual embodiment ('pure' love in Shanta's narrative possibly implies this) in contrast to the less superior Westernized individualism and materialism ('individualistic' and 'rationally calculative' in Shanta's narrative possibly implies this) – *love for us was 'blind, more 'pure', from the heart* and now, for the "Westernized" next generation, it is more '*rationally calculative*' and '*practical*'. Shanta's narration of intimacy is also shaped by national and trans-national hegemonic codes of gender performance and class boundary. This is manifested in her appreciation for middle-class respectability (read in her description of her lover/husband's respectable background) and a gender appropriate performance of 'feminine modesty and shyness' (although she partly conforms to it and partly plays to it by deliberately performing it). It is sociologically significant to note that she

disassociates the idea of respectability with caste structure and instead ties it with considerations of education and its associated family background.

It is interesting to note that narratives of both generations understand the present as quickly changing and moving, compared to a logically derived unchanging committed past. However, such descriptions of the present become value-laden through the words chosen to describe such a change coupled with the non-verbal gestures and cues that accompany such description. For instance, Shanta interprets Priya's 'rigid' 'then' as 'stable', 'firm' and 'committed' rather than Priya's understanding of it as 'flexible', 'open' or 'more liberal'. Priya's use of the term 'confusing' in the context of making 'the right choice' will be elaborately analyzed through her later narrative of 'choice'. What is clear, however, from her present narrative is the influence of a normalizing and a naturalizing discourse of the now 'liberal modern times', its companionate nature of coupling and an obvious/'natural' need for courtship experimentation. Its other is 'backdated' and 'traditional' compared to the 'modern', which is *the way it is ought to be*. So far the two generations' narratives have been analyzed as heavily influenced by both nationalist and trans-nationalist discourses of modernity. In the following sections their narratives will be further nuanced.

Individual Choice and its Validation: A Post-feminist Neo-liberal Discourse:

Both the narratives' focus on 'choice' and its availability to the individual, echoes a post-feminist, neo-liberal discourse that celebrates the spaces available for women to achieve autonomy through expanded agency (Budgeon, 2011: 130). Taking after

Foster's argument of choice within the context of sustainable development, I contend that within modernist, neoliberal regimes, "one has the choice but this choice is framed through a 'right' or 'wrong' that has already been somewhat determined" (2011: 146). Foster argues that this modernist neo-liberal discourse of choice demonstrates Foucault's governmentality and biopower (2011: 146). The stress on an 'authentic' self and its focus on making and validating the 'right' choice are aspects of neo-liberal modernity that are reflected in Priya's narrative. A surface reading of Priya's interpretation of contemporary 'liberal', 'open' times that allow for exercising more 'choice' and 'flexibility' than past generations, seem to confirm the arguments of the theories of reflexive modernization. However, further readings of her parameters of choice-making and its validation will interrogate these theories of 'individualization' and 'detraditionalization' by illustrating that concepts of agency and choice are heavily mediated by gendered subjectivities, family relations, class locations, power relations and shared symbolic tradition (Smart, 2007; Gross, 2005; Jamieson, 1989). Moreover, Shanta's narrative of more choice confirms but also critiques Giddens' optimistic interpretation of the 'transformation of intimacy' and its necessary 'reflexive' character (1992). Further readings will tell us if Giddens' 'transformation of intimacy' is indeed a transformation of the ideals and practices of intimacy.

Budgeon's argument that "the capacity for acting autonomously is linked to moral autonomy" and becomes meaningful only when situated within specific socio-cultural contexts and sets of social relations (2011: 136), is useful in this context. The Western hegemonic discourse of agency and choice that influenced Priya's narrative, problematically privileges not only a Eurocentric perspective of modernity (Majumdar,

2000) but also generally an individualist and instrumental mode of being, irrespective of its plausibility or desirability (Budgeon, 2011: 138). This hegemonic privileging is troubling as it denies the discursive construction of the self and presupposes a coherent, unified, authentic self (Leahy, 1994). It also promotes through this neo-liberal ideology “an exaggerated emphasis on change rather than continuity which conceals stability (or worsening of the position of women)” (Baker, 2008: 62 cited in Budgeon, 2011: 133). As Foucault argues, the creation of the individual is one of modern power’s primary effects (2003: 30). Therefore by participating in a culture of selfhood that incites women to construct themselves as self-determining subjects whose choices reflect their ‘true self’ and which are considered not the outcomes of insidious forms of governance, women are subjected to more subtle forms of subordination and modern power (Budgeon, 2011: 133; Bartky, 1990). Similarly I argue that Pushpa’s to Shanta’s to Priya’s times cannot be argued to be increasingly becoming more liberal and necessarily liberating. The following narratives will trouble the so far analyzed linearity of time and intimacy. They would demand a more nuanced analysis of contradictory subjectivities (Leahy, 1994) that problematize a simplistic understanding of choice, agency and self-determination.

Shanta’s Contradictory Subjectivity:

Hinting at her daughter’s decision to marry her friend in college, who is with her in the same department and three months younger to her, Shanta says,

“The girls and boys of these days seem to make very hasty and ‘impulsive decisions’ in love. I keep telling Priya that at her age, people become emotionally blind and often make mistakes. I mean you also have to see the other things. For

example, there are a lot of 'practical' issues that can arise with partners of the same age. In our times we could not even think of it and moreover this age difference is practically necessary. After all, the boy has to be financially independent if not the girl. Both can work together but if both are equally struggling to get a job, it becomes 'practically' very difficult and moreover, they (Priya and her boyfriend, Siddharta) both 'research students in English Literature'. You must know 'practically' how difficult it is to make 'financially strong career' from it. At this age we can understand how important it is to have money. Love alone cannot last long. Also the age difference is necessary for respecting the husband. Moreover, in those days love was more pure and strong and could survive against all odds but now, one needs stronger material anchorages to keep a relationship intact. I tell Priya that parents have practical wisdom and experience and so she should listen to them sometimes. In fact, I tell her that their 'generation' is quite fortunate that they can discuss such things with their parents. In our times we hardly dared! But who cares, it's all about what they (refers to Priya's generation) think is right and as if the earlier 'generation' would not understand. They think they are 'modern' and can take their own decisions but these are more of the negative effects of 'Westernization'. She tells me that even I had a love marriage but she doesn't understand that her father was older than me and already earning before our marriage. Then she tells me that in modern times no one bothers about unnecessary things like age, that too a difference of only three months. In her words, 'I am not a fool and I am not getting married now, so give him time and he will do something and prove himself. If not, then you tell me. Moreover it makes more 'practical' sense to be with someone your age who is your friend because you know his shortcomings even before marriage which makes it easier to sort out issues together and therefore have a more emotionally fulfilling marital companionship'. Now what would I say to that? (sighs)"

It is interesting to note the number of occasions in which Shanta invokes the term 'practical' and its importance in intimate relationships (Jamieson, 1998). She contradicts

in this narrative, her earlier narrative that contrasted an emotional past or 'then' to a practical present or 'now'. While in one instance she narrativizes 'blind' and 'emotional' love as characteristics of a specific generation, in another, she narrativizes these as characteristics of every generation, of all times, that happen at a specific age of one's life course – at Priya's age people are emotionally blinded and make 'impulsive decisions' and 'mistakes' in love. 'Other things' or practical issues that love in her times was devoid of and hence more 'pure' are also the ones she thinks are absent in her daughter's impulsive decision of love. She, more than her daughter, is bothered about practical economic problems that can arise because of both studying a subject that hardly promises a 'financially strong career' and also of both being almost of the same age.

Her narrative, that age difference between partners is 'practically necessary' and also 'necessary for respecting the husband' 'where the boy has to be financially independent if not the girl', empirically illustrates how institutionalized heterosexuality is transmitted through family relations from one generation to another by a discourse of its naturalization. In her time, her deviations from normative codes of sexuality, caste considerations, her firm decision to marry someone of her choice and not one arranged by her father, or her romanticization of the struggle of a middle-class couple earning together and refusing a future with better material prospects and a rich husband; strongly overturned the patriarchal injunctions of both the family and the community. This patriarchal injunction is now embodied by her and applied over her daughter through practical emphasis on age, hegemonic gender codes, and material considerations in coupling. She legitimizes such hegemonic heterosexual norms by her

experiences and practical wisdom and a retrospective realization of the importance of material comforts in a relationship where 'love alone cannot last long'.

The reader is made to think if this is a generational story of intimacy or a story of every generation; a story of different time frames or different ages of all times. Rather than privilege one narrative over another, what is important to appreciate through a post-structuralist lens is the influence of multiple and contradictory discourses that engender multiple and contradictory subjectivities (Leahy. 1884: 49) and through which 'then'/past and 'now'/present are continually discursively mutually constructed. What can be appreciated from the reading of Shanta's narratives is an appropriation of specific discourses at specific situations that calls for recognizing situational multiplicities and contingencies of the ideals of coupling.

Multiple Time Frames, Multiple Eyes, Multiple Perceptions and Multiple Subjectivities:

It is interesting to analyze in Shanta's narrative, multiple perceptions, multiple meanings and multiple contexts. For instance, Shanta narrativizes, 'the girls and boys of these days' through more than one perceptual frame:

- She imagines how these boys and girls imagine themselves and their time: 'they think they are modern....and hardly care'.
- She imagines these boys and girls and their time: 'they think they are modern and can take their own decisions but these are more of the negative effects of Westernization'

Therefore, what she thinks they think of being modern is actually, a negative impact of Westernization for her.

Similarly it is interesting to analyze in her narrative the generational subjectivity of meaning. For instance, what Shanta narrativizes as a practical problem (Siddharta is slightly younger to Priya) in terms of economic uncertainty, is narrativized by her daughter to make more 'practical sense' in terms of companionate coupling. Concerns of age (although within certain limit – 'that too a difference of only three months) for her in her modern times are unnecessary and meaningless issues that can be sorted out together if the couple knows each other as friends. The focus of intimacy seems to be different for the two generations here. A practical problem for one generation, therefore, is a matter of practical sensibility for the other. As argued by Jamieson (1989), the significance of 'practical' is confirmed within couple spaces. What I add to Jamieson's argument is that what is understood as practical within and across generations, is itself shifting and variously given meaning in relation to ideals and practices of coupling. Shanta's contradictory and multiple subjectivities that vary across a range of conflicting discourses also problematize the essential nature of intimacy such as anything like "Westernized" intimacy. In one instance, Shanta describes the present generation and their time as 'practical' and 'rationally calculative'; in another, as 'emotionally blind', 'impulsive' and ignorant of more important practical issues or 'other things' in love. In the third, she brings another dimension to the narrative of generation and intimacy. She states that with experience and 'practical wisdom', she 'now' realizes in retrospect that 'pure love' or 'love alone' that she otherwise regarded as emotionally and morally superior would not last a relation too long if it does not have a strong financial

anchorage. This is especially true of her daughter's generation where love relationships are not as strong as that of her generation. As we see therefore, Shanta continually shifts in time and perception and variously narrativizes through situationally shifting the lens of time and lens of vision. For instance, she narrativizes:

- 'Then' from 'now' through her eyes
- 'Now' from 'then' through her eyes
- 'Now or the present through her daughter's eyes
- 'Now' or the present through her eyes
- 'Now' or the present through others' eyes

Such multiplicity of time and vision constantly shifts the meaning of practical, modern, traditional and Western. Past and present, now and then, are therefore mutually co-constituted where the past is continually invoked to make sense of the present and in fact, shape the 'now'. These are socially and discursively constructed categories and are not essentialized, linear, static or neatly bound. These shifting categories also entail multiple subjectivities that are not unified, coherent, stable or authentic.

Priya's Contradictory Narrative:

This section will analyze contradictory and multiple subjectivities that Priya embodies in her narrative. In contrast to Shanta's romanticization of 'pure' and 'blind' love of the past times, Priya characterizes such romanticized 'blind' love and as 'backdated and traditional'. She appreciates the present time which is 'modern', 'more open', offers more choices and almost naturalizes or normalizes this modern way as 'that which is ought to be'. The imagination of the exercise of self-determination and agency is

constantly evoked in Priya's repetition of 'individual compatibility' where 'other things don't matter'.

A deeper analysis of her narrative, however, brings out interesting ambivalences that makes her linear story of liberalism more complex in which the linear ceases to remain straightforwardly one directional. For instance, she constructs a naturalized necessity for 'liberal', 'free' and 'open' experimentation through courtship, only however, to make the 'right' choice of the 'right' man for marriage because 'after all we will not be marrying again and again'. Priya's modern times as we can see therefore, promises liberal experimentation only partially in the stage of courtship and understood as functional only for the purpose of reaching a more stable, less open and monogamous conjugality whose stability is indirectly contingent on the 'right choice of the right man'. From this it can be analyzed that the time from 'then' and 'now' hasn't radically changed in terms of heterosexuality as an institution and its gendered imperatives. The continuity of monogamous imagination and practice of heterosexual marriage through a narrative of its normalization cuts across national and trans-national hegemonic codes of gender and class underpinning institutionalized heterosexuality.

Choice: A Socio-cultural Problematic:

The frequent invocation of the term 'right' choice problematizes the apparently available wide range of multiple choices for individual appropriation. It begs the questions – what is the nature of this 'right' choice or the cultural imagination of the 'right' man? What are the parameters of validating one's choice as right? And are the promises of 'more' choices really available to all? Who appropriates these and on whom does this burden of validating a choice as the right choice fall? And finally is this process of validation

circumscribed by socio-cultural contingencies or the reflexivity of the self, or both, in which self-reflexivity is itself socio-culturally conditioned?

Priya's 'liberal' times and an 'open' society has come a long way from the non-liberal, 'traditional' society like Pushpa's where 'class, caste, status highly mattered'. In the present modern times what matters as Priya narrates is 'mental match' and 'similar outlook' of two individuals where 'other things really don't matter'. However, when asked about specific conditions and criteria for choosing a partner, rather than a generalized question of choice, Priya mentions factors like, "*similar class, culture and family background, education, respectable profession and more importantly similar outlook*." In the following section I will illustrate how these factors are sociologically insightful in many respects in terms of shaping the nature, boundary and socio-cultural ordering of so-called individual 'mental match'. Her criteria show an apparently permissible attitude towards caste like her mother who similarly focused on respectability and education rather than someone's caste. As B  teille (1996: 164) argues, it is possible that "a more permissive attitude towards caste is being accompanied by a greater attention to other restrictions such as those relating to occupation and income" or as Mody (2008: 197) notes in the context of urban milieu of Delhi that 'secular' considerations of class status and standing in selections of partners are important.

I critique such apparent reading of class, status and education as focuses devoid of or disjointed from caste considerations and their historical structures and relations. So called 'secular' considerations of class or class-culture which indicate one's 'taste' or in Priya's word 'outlook', I argue, are not historically disengaged from considerations of caste and community hierarchies and their parameters of class distinctions. As Lakha

argues, there is often a possible sociological overlap between high *caste* and upper or upper middle-*class* locations (Lakha, 1999) and their associations with various forms of capital. The accumulation of this capital is a social process but is narrativized as a part of one's naturalized *habitus* and an intrinsic feature of the self rather than an acquired feature contingent on *caste*, class, locations and their implied social inequalities (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, factors of *caste*, community, class, status and all other 'unnecessary things', in Priya's words, go into the construction of 'mental match' which, on the surface, appears and is made to appear devoid of these things. Priya's modern identity unfortunately is also not devoid of 'backdated', 'traditional' unnecessary considerations which are intertwined with its artificially constructed "open" or 'modern' binary.

Cultural Capital: A Critical Appreciation:

Priya's narrative is more nuanced on further probing about what she exactly means by two individuals with 'similar outlook' and 'mental match'. Her reply makes it clear, how such apparently secular or individualistic conditions are tied up to socio-cultural history and family tradition which in Priya's earlier narratives apparently did not matter for relationships. Priya states,

"Having a 'similar outlook or world view implies having similar likes and dislikes, common areas of interests and similar preferences'."

She adds on further reflection,

"Siddharta and I come from similar family background; his family is well respected for its history and tradition. For example, I heard that his grandfather in

those days was extremely 'liberal' as a person and 'influenced' Siddharta in many ways (her body language gives across a sense of pride in her confident narration). Therefore, 'he is not one of those wanna be pretentious kinds' (her frowning indicating a conspicuous disdain for the cultural pretentious kinds). 'I mean he was brought up in a very culturally rich environment and I can very well relate to such a background as I am myself just like that. Our relationship is highly compatible at an individual and familial level which is so important because to be honest, although the two individuals are in love, families ultimately do come in'. We still have time to get married and by then I am sure our parents will have no 'problems' with our relationships. That way 'I am quite confident about him', also because in many ways he 'resembles' my father who I simply 'adore for his romantic and charmingly chivalrous nature' of love for my mother still."

As is clearly implied in Priya's narrative 'mental match' as characteristic of a modern self is to do with the idea of 'taste' which is ultimately a social construction (Bourdieu, 1984), and strongly embedded within a sense of family 'tradition' – a term which otherwise always remains opposed to Priya's 'modern' self. Bourdieu's (1984) argument that taste functions to be 'match-maker' is important in this narrative context as it marries colours and also makes 'well-matched couples' (243). The social structure is strongly guided by the pattern and system of mutually reinforcing science of things such as 'clothing, pronunciation, bearing, postures, manners' and which 'unconsciously registered' through the habitus, are the foundation for what Priya says, 'similar outlooks' or 'elective affinities' in love and friendship (Bourdieu: 1984: 241). The most indisputable evidence of such 'elective affinities' and of 'compatibilities' and 'incompatibilities', Bourdieu argues, is provided by class and even class-fraction endogamy which is ultimately made to appear natural and part of the self. Therefore it is ensured almost as strictly by the

free play of sentiment as by deliberate family intervention which is made a part of that social self. In this way, the structure of the circuit of matrimonial exchanges tends to reproduce the structure of the social space (Bourdieu, 1984: 241).

Priya's quest for the 'right man' also legitimizes a middle-class culture as inherently valuable, respectable and 'rich', not necessarily in the economic sense but in the sense of a cultural heritage – 'family history and tradition' is superior to its pathological other, the 'wanna be pretentious kinds'. In this sense, culture that is otherwise accomplished and acquired, is made as something intrinsic and inherent, as part of self-history which lies almost within the self rather than in the external. Naturalizing this otherwise discursive nature of class culture as something essential and inherent to the self, Priya for instance says, 'I myself am just like that'. In Bourdieu's argument this illustrates an internalized habitus. The internalization of her middle-class culture that has symbolic power inevitably assumes an ideological function. It gives the legitimized forms of distinction and classification, a taken for granted character and thus conceals the arbitrary way in which various forms of capital are distributed among individuals in society (Joppke, 1987: 80).

Generational Continuity: Co-constitution of the 'Practices of Intimacy' and 'Family Practices':

It is interesting to locate the continuity of ideas, imagination, sensibilities and the structure of 'then' and 'now' – the importance of 'practical care, responsibility' and a respectable family background for being a good husband in Shanta's narrative of an emotional 'then' and the ideas of 'respectable family tradition and familial compatibility'

in Priya's narrative of a practical 'now'. It is also important to remember Priya's qualification that between the time of her courtship and marriage, her partner will financially do something that will grant family's approval of their relationship. Also, her sole stress on individual compatibility is later coupled with a stress on familial compatibility which she later narrativizes as equally important because the 'family ultimately comes in'. Familial compatibility, meaning both compatibility with the spouse's family and compatibility between two spouses' families, significantly shapes the construction of self-narratives and its intimate imagination. Love marriage or marriage of 'choice' is thereby re-inscribed into acceptable parameters of social arrangement that often overlaps with a family's 'choice'. The dichotomy between the categories of love and arrangement are thereby collapsed. How this dichotomy is blurred will be illustrated in detail a little later.

An integral aspect of intimacy that belies all the narratives, even in the stories of transgression and individual 'choice', is the sociological significance of family that binds the three generations in terms of its continuity. Pushpa's narrative, *"Afterall true marriage is not only between two individuals but also between their two families"*, demonstrate this in the most direct way. 'Practices of intimacy' that overlap with 'family practices' and are materially, socio-culturally and symbolically embedded within family history and kinship relations, problematize unbounded pleasures of the self and 'pure relationship' as claimed by Giddens (Jamieson, 1999, 2011; Smart, 2007). Moreover, the repertoire of 'practices of intimacy' interrogate the claim of 'pure' relationship' that couples are together till it is mutually desirable. Practical caring, sharing and responsibility also constitute important bases of the practices of intimacy (Jamieson,

1998, 2001). These empirical instances 'reconsider' the 'de-traditionalization thesis' (Gross, 2005) and confirm Jamieson's argument that the 'transformation of intimacy' has been over exaggerated (Jamieson, 1999).

In this context of the co-constitution of family and heterosexual intimacy and its shared space of cross-generational ideologies of intimacy, I agree with Das' argument that the self or the individual and its 'life-world' is 'colonized' by the family as part of the larger community (1995: 15). However, I nuance Das' argument by demonstrating through Priya's narrative that self, individual and its life-world are not just simply 'colonized' by family/community but are, in fact, also shaped by the very ideologies and practices of the family and community. Priya's confidence about her 'right choice' of the 'right man' for instance, is reinforced and validated as the 'right' one by drawing parallel between her partner and her father on his 'romantic and charming chivalry'. As Puri argues, this comparison of marital ideology between the two generations and the desired reproduction of such romantic ideals indicate that there may not be the distinct generation changes in marriage and marital ideologies as widely represented in literature (1999: 139) and in colonial/orientalist discourse of linear modernity (Majumdar, 2000). Also, this desire for continuity indicates the cultural reproduction of hegemonic gendered codes that engender a common space between generations through a shared 'heterosexual imaginary' and its inter-generational and inter-subjective narrations (Ingraham, 1996; Hockey et al., 2007). This can be related to Puri's (1999) research on generational implications of marital relationships in middle-class urban Delhi where single middle-class women narrativized how they would like to have marital relationships similar to those of their parents (143-145).

What is, however, important to note is a change across generations in terms of the disclosure of heterosexual desire and the condition of more open spaces for such conversation and sharing between the second and third generation with regard to love, marriage and individual choice. Such 'open' conversation, although constrained by various familial and cultural conditions, was relatively absent in case of the interaction between the first and the second generation in relation to such interactions between the second and the third generation. This indicates increasing recognition and negotiated acceptance of the possibility of self-determination and individual choice in selection of spouses within the parameters of existing social relations. Such a condition and possibility, for instance is well articulated by Shanta when she says how in her times she never dared to discuss 'such things' with her parents which her daughter is fortunate to be able to do with her. However, this generational change rather than be read as simplistic generational opposition must be read in the light of the cross-generational shared spaces for conversation and interactions. This indicates a mutual co-constitution of two generations through their mutual debate and recognition of ideas, sensibilities, discourses and reflexivity of heterosexual intimacy. The non-linearity of the values of intimacy is also demonstrated in the context of Pushpa's parents' and then husband's approval of the 'love marriage' of Pushpa's son. This mutual co-constitutiveness of generations is escaped in a 'politics of time'; that is associated with linear modernity (Banerjee, 2006), a 'politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 1994) of self and other (Hall, 1992) and the associated orientalist and popular implications of less open/liberal and more open/liberal time spaces. The following section is an illustration of the cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1991) of the ideologies and practices of intimacy and the continuity of

self and society through a critique of the artificial dichotomy between the popularly termed 'love marriage' and 'arranged marriage'.

'Love' cum 'Arranged' Marriage: Critiquing a 'Politics of Polarity':

Narratives of intimacy which manifest in Puri's words, "a Little Bit of This and a Little Bit of That" (Puri, 1999: 140) and are popularly narrativized by many middle-class Bengalis as 'love cum arranged' marriage, illustrate 'hybrid' or 'hyphenated' narratives and subjectivities. Subjects' embodiment of cultural hybridity that is a result of the intertwining of national and trans-national ideologies and practices of intimacy and the intertwining of self and society, critique the putative dichotomous categories of 'love marriage' and 'arranged marriage' and their stereotypical associations with modern and traditional identities respectively. According to Majumdar (2000: 7), "the association of arranged marriage with antiquated ideas of gender relations and cultural backwardness is a by-product of the coupling of love marriage with progress, choice, agency and modernity". While European colonial domination contributed much to such constructions and evaluative dualisms, these impressions, Majumdar argues, outlived formal colonial rule in popular representation of marriages within the nation (2000: 7).

While the narratives of Shanta and Priya are laden with notions of 'pure', 'emotional', 'love' and 'mental match', their narratives are also riven with practical considerations of class, status, respectability, family tradition that are often typically associated with 'arranged marriages' (Puri, 1999: 140). The associated entwinement of self and society is also noted in Pushpa's love marriage of 'choice' which is subjectively re-interpreted by her as *pabitra prem* or pure love. These narratives problematize the nationalist and

orientalist association of romantic love with “choice, agency and modernity” (Majumdar, 2000: 7) by illustrating that the very categories of choice and agency are socially structured and culturally embedded and the category ‘modern’, discursively constructed and inter-generationally negotiated. A narrative of the self that embodies practical and emotional sensibilities of intimacy is difficult to categorize as either modern (read active) or traditional (read passive) (Mohanty, 1991), based on love or arrangement (Mody, 2008: 156). Subjects’ narratives show that everyday experiences of family life do not segregate the emotional and the material into separate spheres but are shaped by both at once, and they have to be grasped in their systematic inter-connection (Medick & Sabeen, 1984: 11).

Cross generational narratives of intimacy problematize the discourse of nationalism that associates material/practical with ‘Westernization’ and spiritual/emotional with ‘Indianness’. Subjects’ narratives illustrated how middle-class and upper middle-class women came to be expected to embody national cultural tradition and its hegemonic codes of feminine and sexual respectability. However, narratives also showed that if women’s bodies and identities are used to articulate hegemonic discourses of gender and nationalism, then these are also the sites where fear of loss of national tradition are expressed (Puri, 1999: 2-3). Subjects’ accounts of heterosexual conjugality are shaped by the inter-connected discourses of hetero-normativity, nationalism, also equally trans-national hegemonic gender codes within the postcolonial middle-class urban milieu of Bengal, India. It can be argued thereby that women’s subjectivities embody culturally hybrid identities, (Bhabha, 1991, 1996) that is, their identities are “hyphenated – neither one nor the other; at most, they challenge what means to be Indian” (Puri, 1999: 3).

In the way familial arrangement creeps into individual choice, the latter also creeps into the former. Sometimes, again these two domains of experience are so intertwined that it is difficult to even distinguish one from another. Twenty-nine year-old Sudip's narrative manifests agency and structure through such multi-layered co-constitution, that it becomes difficult to assign an ontological priority to either structure or agent (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 15). Sudip narrativizes the institution of marriage in a way which sees no '*real difference*' between love and arranged marriage,

"It's all the same 'ultimately'! 'I am too busy with my career at the moment to even find the time to look for a girl' but as you can understand, parents want you to get married at this age. So I have given them the responsibility of looking for a girl and 'I will just marry'. 'I'm concentrating on my professional life and career and have really no time for any romantic engagements. Anyway, it's not a man's cup of tea especially at this age amongst much more important issues of work'!"

Sudip's bilingual narrativizing in Bengali and English suggests an influence of both national and trans-national discourses of intimacy. These discourses influence his narrative idea of a gendered romance through which he upholds the hegemonic masculine construction that romance is not a "man's cup of tea". This disassociation is heightened with his professional life, career and work that are 'much more important issues', at his age. It is significant to note that although he has no time for looking for a girl to marry, the need for an institutionalized marriage, particularly its familial wish is conformed to by Sudip. However, although he willingly gives his family the responsibility of choosing a girl for him, his parents narrate various instances where they had 'arranged' for the prospective couple to meet and how, in many cases he "*rejected the girl*" on the basis that "*there wasn't any vibe that said yes she is the one!*" It is

interesting that although he narrates marriage primarily through the wishes of his family and his parents' arrangement of the girl, his individual decision based almost on an intuitive vibe plays a significant role in subverting familial arrangements. Moreover, this also shows that contrary to what he initially says, he has expectations from a marriage and that his disengagement from it is partly an ideological construction of hegemonic masculinity.

Twenty-six year-old woman Sanhita's narrative is also important in the context,

"At some point in my life I definitely wish to get married, have a family and settle down, but there is no hurry. Men and womwn are 'equal now.' So I want to be 'financially independent' myself and then 'find the right guy' to marry".

This narrative at once interrogates and reproduces the cultural mandates of womanhood and heterosexual intimacy. Many women across all three generations conform to the inevitability of marriage by hinting at its practice as culturally mandated status for being a '*shompurno nar*' or a 'complete woman'. Third generation Rimi unromantically narrativizes how, "*every woman has to get married at one point or another whether they like it or not*". The first and second generation women often romanticized such mandates unlike many of the third generation women who in attempting to delay this cultural mandate by highly personalizing its practical responsibilities, risks and burden, tended to de-mystify the romantic ideology of marriage.

Their decisions to procrastinate, however, are often narrativized as "preparing themselves for the right time", both 'financially' and 'emotionally' and being able to better realize marital companionship and its conjugal experiences. Hence, the initial

phase of de-mystification can, in fact, be re-read as over-expectations and over-romanticization of the cultural mandates of heterosexuality and womanhood rather than refusal of it. What is therefore important to note is that beneath the de-romanticization of marriage, and an expectation of gender equality in marriage among the third generation, there is, in fact, an ever-increasing expectation from heterosexual conjugal companionship. Moreover, the commonly narrativised socio-cultural conditions that circumscribe 'choice' of 'the right' man for marriage, problematizes the idea of gender equality in marriage.

Many interviewees like Priya, for instance, narrativized in their period of courtship a waiting period between love and marriage in which the boy would work towards becoming "fit for marriage" or "marriage material" in order to be approved by the girl's family and her society. This gendered angle implies that both individual and society still place relatively more importance to the social standing of men in marriage in terms of his financial position and educational and professional qualification which are ideally desired to be 'more' than the woman's. This reconfirms institutionalized heterosexuality and its hegemonic codes of masculinity and femininity (Beauvoir, 1972) despite claims for gender democracy (Giddens, 1992)

As we can see therefore, love marriages which are arranged and domesticated avoid the devastating possibility of being excommunicated (Mody, 2008: 157) as in the case of Pushpa and Bimal who suffered a societal non-recognition of their relation but where Pushpa never came out of the desire for such familial legitimation of her 'incomplete' marriage. What primarily comes across as an important theoretical point is a sociologically enduring and significant influence of the family in both real and imaginary

terms (Kakar and Kakar, 2007). Personal life and intimate relations are strongly socio-culturally and historically embedded (Smart, 2007; Morgan, 2011) and not individualistic expressions of one's unbounded reflexivity and self-pleasure (Giddens, 1992).

What I have argued through my reading of subjects' narratives is the simultaneous disruption and re-inforcement of hetero-normative discourses of middle-class cultural tradition, its boundaries of respectability, particularly sexual respectability and its gendered underpinnings. Personal narratives of gender, class and sexuality in intimate coupling are analyzed to explore the way in which urban middle and upper middle-class women's heterosexual identities are routinely mediated through definitions of what is 'normal' and 'natural' (Bartky, 1990; Puri, 1999). Subjects' negotiations of practices of coupling, however, indicate both cultural amendments and reproduction of hetero-normativity across generations (Hockey et al., 2007). Narratives of self and identities are continually constituted and mediated by how one is positioned within a family or community. Cultural idealizations of heterosexual intimacy are shown to overlap with the cultural idealizations of the family (Smart, 2007) and to re-inscribe the structural and cultural inequalities of gender, generation and class (Jamieson, 2011). These practices of intimacy within a post-colonial climate of the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* are also shown to inscribe multiple narratives of 'modern' and 'traditional' forms of intimacy that cut across conflicting and contradictory discourses of colonialism, nationalism and trans-nationalism.

The categories of 'material', 'spiritual', 'emotional', 'practical', 'modern' and 'tradition', and the boundary of 'Indianness' and 'Westernization' in relation to ideologies and practices of intimacy, are continually constructed through inter-generational dialogues

and subjects' positioning within interactional situations. Thus narratives and subjectivities of intimacy do not conform either to an 'authentic' cultural tradition or a universalized global modernity. Concepts like power, agency, choice, individual, selfhood, womanhood have culturally contextual and situational connotations whose meanings cannot be universalized through the lens of hegemonic modernity (Mohanty, 1991, Majumdar, 2000). 'Past/then' and 'Present/now' are not fixed categories of dichotomous cultural sensibilities and practices but are constituted in relation to one another and intertwined through continuities of practices of intimacy across generations. This overlapping shared space of time and its subjective meaning critique a binary 'politics of polarity' and the strict 'progress'-ion of heterosexual intimacy through a linear time. The cultural continuity of the ideologies and practices of intimacy confirms that a 'transformation of intimacy' (Giddens, 1992) and its associated thesis of 'detraditionalization' and 'individualization' (Beck and Beck-germsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992) have been over-exaggerated and grossly universalized (Jamieson, 1999).

CHAPTER-7 EXPRESSIONS OF HETEROSEXUAL INTIMACY: NEGOTIATING THE *BHADRALOK* ‘DISTINCTION’

Through ethnographic participation-observation and subjects’ narrative, this chapter seeks to illustrate the mutual co-constitution of personal and political, self and society, by bringing out how personal ‘scripting’ of intimacy is shaped by cultural politics and intersections of gender, class and race (Lawler, 1999; Skeggs, 1997; Hooks, 1981; Jamieson, 2011). It critically evaluates the multi-textual and multi-lingual expressions of heterosexual intimacy that exist in the discursive field of the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, and across which play, conflicting and contesting regimes of power/knowledge. The chapter then aims to appreciate how subjects negotiate and engage with these multiple, contesting, and often contradictory discourses of intimacy at the interpersonal levels of classed and gendered interactions. In so doing it analyzes hegemonic codes of *bhadralok* ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984), and *bhadrasamaj*’s power and vulnerability in upholding ‘respectable’ and *ruchishonmoto* (in accordance with cultural ‘taste’) intimate expressions. This analysis of multiple and contradictory expressions of intimacy and their subjective meaning-making then problematizes the claimed coherence of ‘modern’, ‘traditional’, ‘progressive’, ‘middle-class’, ‘respectable’ forms of intimacy by illustrating that:

- the meanings of these categories shift as they interact
- these forms of intimate expressions are constructions of power positions

- these categories of intimacy and their associated intimate identities and practices are not strict dichotomies but are in fact mutually co-constitutive.

The co-constitutiveness of putative dichotomous categories of intimacy then critiques the gendered, classed and raced 'politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 1994). In order to bring out the shifting instability of these forms, practices and expressions of intimacy and thereby interrogate the politics of legitimating the claimed superiority of one category over another, this chapter will nuance the so called intimate nature of 'intimate' expressions. The chapter will thereby bring out the socio-cultural politics of heterosexual intimacy by analyzing intimate rituals of marital signs and their subjective meanings, performance of Bengali marriage and everyday intimate language of conjugal pronoun.

This chapter is based on subjects' narratives but also heavily based on cultural narratives that were informed by ethnographic participation and observation of the field of the urban Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, couple spaces, cultural performances of marriage rituals, and quotidian practices of the conjugal pronoun. Much material, therefore, sprung from the ethnographic field which in itself provided a narrative 'text' that engendered data, otherwise difficult to gain from an interview. The voices of Sunanda, Udayan, Manjir, Anandita, Shanta and Tanya were consciously selected to illustrate the varying cultural patterns of intimate ideals and practices within a rather heterogeneous and internally fragmented middle-class.

'Intimate' Rituals: Marriage and Marital Symbols:

In the following sections, I will show how particular meanings are produced and mediated by cultural codes and representation (Hall, 1997a) in relation to the

interpreter's structural location and its discourses. By analyzing context specific meanings and usages of various marital symbols, I will argue that meaning is not inherent in signs but discursively constructed and continually shifting. However, what is important to appreciate through a Foucauldian and a Butlerian understanding of power is that although meaning at one level is re-signified and creatively imbued with individual interpretation, no interpretation or re-signification is ever completely outside the broader chain of significations, or some kind of a discourse. In appreciating the instability of meanings and the multiplicity of connotations of signs and expressions, we can appreciate from a post-colonial feminist lens, the necessity to take caution before orientalizing, exoticizing and culturally homogenizing heterosexual intimate spaces and their expressions that are, in fact, plural, contradictory and nuanced (Spivak, 1990; Mohanty, 1991; Bulbeck, 1998;).

For instance, popular inter-cultural and cross-cultural representations of a married Bengali woman often stereotype her in her traditional attire with all marital symbols. This image is real and often imagined, gendered and communal. Such stereotypical representation is read from some nationalist perspectives to symbolize a *patibrota nari* or a husband worshipping woman, and from some feminist perspectives, to symbolize an oppressed victim of patriarchy. Both these perspectives read the 'text' from outside, imposing *their* meaning rather than privileging the actor's meaning who could neither be *patibrota* nor oppressed and could possibly resignify the stereotypical associations of these marital signs by giving new meanings to the conventional action of bearing such signs. Hence the subjects' voices with the multiple and contradictory layers of meaning-making at the inter-subjective and intra-subjective level of 'scripting' is important to

appreciate and then read in relation to a cultural narrative to bring out both subjective variations and cultural patterns. The following sections attempt to understand how subjects' give meaning to these signs in everyday interactions. The interactionist and post-colonial feminist perspectives to these empirical cases offer varying and challenging modes of 'reading resistance' in subjects' everyday negotiation of 'practices of intimacy'. This way of reading resistance in everyday processes of negotiation will critically overturn and theoretically nuance the cultural stereotype of the "average third world woman" as victim (Mohanty, 1991: 72; Chowdhry, 1995: 28 cited in Foster, 2011: 141). It will appreciate subjects' reflexive and creative negotiations of national, trans-national, colonial and post-colonial discourses of intimacy but will also show how such reflexivity is shaped through and limited by subjects' field and habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 16-19; Heaphy, 2007: 179; Lash, 1994: 120)

Marital Symbols: Confirming, Subverting and Strategizing Hetero-normativity:

A pair of *Shnakha* (white bangles), a pair of *pala* (red bangles), a *loha* (iron bangle) and *Shnidur* (red mark on the forehead) have traditionally been coded as signs of a married Bengali *bhadramahila*. These signs signify a popular cultural belief that a woman who bears such signs ensures their husbands' well being and long life. It is strongly tied to the hetero-normative ideals of institutional marriage where spinsters cannot bear such signs and widows are 'deprived' of bearing them. Widows, in addition, are also prohibited from wearing anything that is red in colour as red is codified with a meaning of sexuality that is only permitted within the licit boundaries of legal institutionalized heterosexual marriage. These signs are often read as representing hegemonic

patriarchal ideology where myths about these signs particularly the iron bangle connote patriarchal sexual conquest and possession that construct marriage as men's conquest over women and their sexuality. Keeping to the spirit of narrative interviewing, I focused on how subjects themselves gave meaning to bearing such signs. This prioritization of subjects' self narrative revealed interesting diversity of meanings of such signs.

The following photo⁵ below is an instance of Bengali ritual marriage where the man puts *shnidur* on the woman's forehead for the first time.

Photo-3: Illustrates a moment in Bengali Hindu ritual marriage.

[Source: Tanya Roy's marriage album]



⁵ The red piece of cloth around the bride is a *saree*, a 'traditional' attire for the Bengali *bhadramahila* which is ritually used in this context of marriage as the *lajja basta* or the graceful attire. As the name suggests, the concept of *lajja basta* stands as a metaphor for feminine modesty in marriage and sexuality. Such feminine display of modesty can be noted in the woman's downward look in the photo. The newly wed bride and the woman holding the *lajja basta* around her are both wearing the *shnakha*, *pola* and *loha*.

Today, some women bear these signs, some do only occasionally and some do not at all. Those who wear them regularly mostly believe in the religious significance of such rituals but comply with such practices mostly as non-reflexive performance of routinized habituality. Deviations from this conformity were narrativized as disturbance of their femininity and wifehood which only took 'real' meaning with the signs. Such practices are imbued with hegemonic gender codes of hetero-normativity in which a woman's identity becomes almost synonymous with her identity as someone's wife. The signs of marriage familiarize her with her hetero-relations where routinized bearing of marital signs stands as symbolic of the mundane everydayness of hetero-reality. Such hegemonic codes of femininity are reinforced not only by the patriarchal institutions at large but policed also within micro-interactional spaces of female homosociality. The intra-gender surveillance of hetero-normativity was noted in the chapter on female homosociality; in Gopa's disapproval of Arpita for the latter's not bearing *Shnakha* and *Pala*.

The following photo⁶ below illustrates second generation women variously bearing marital signs. They are gathered in a temple to perform within their female homosocial intimate space, the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore.

⁶ The combination of red and white colours in their *saree* reveal an intertwining of the significance of religious, cultural, communal, community, gender and class belongingness.

Photo-4: Illustrates second generation homosocial gathering and their bearing of marital symbols

[Source: Dola Banerjee's personal album]



There are other women who are sceptical of the religious significance of such rituals but cannot also deny completely, the semiotic value of such marital signs as “meaning-constitutive traditions” (Gross, 2005: 288) which involve patterns of sense-making transmitted from one generation to the next. Third generation Tanya says,

“I am not a ‘big fan’ of wearing shnidur but since I have always seen Ma (her mother) wear it and how important she holds it for her love for Bapi (her father), it feels a little ‘strange’ for me not to wear it at all. Moreover being newlywed it is a little ‘odd’ to immediately break familiar taken-for-granted marital traditions in in-laws’ presence. So I just wear it like a very small ‘dot’ so that it cannot be easily visible. That way you take care of all sentiments! (Expresses contentment on her face)”

This narrative brings out the concept of self as embedded within one’s habitus; in class-culture, family relations and traditions (Smart, 2007: 188) and as constituted by shared generational meanings that pose limits to the self’s unbounded creativity and agency which the individualization thesis seems to unproblematically champion (Jamieson,

1999; Gross, 2005; Smart, 2007; Heaphy, 2007). Tanya and many other women of her age do not identify their femininity with such signs and therefore bear them in a way that is inconspicuous to others' eyes. They often avoid the *shnakha* and *pala* but rarely the gold made ornamental *loha* and bear the *shnidur* by paradoxically concealing it. Their modern professional identities and trans-national representation of self through 'smart Western wear', in Tanya's words sometimes seem to be uncomfortably at odds with the supposed traditional conformity to bearing marital signs. Therefore, they negotiate this 'traditional' practice that is also a part of their 'modern' identity at the inter-subjective and the intra-subjective level, in a strategic way if not by its outright rejection.

The photo below illustrates the insignificant way of bearing the *shnidur* as a dot on the forehead, and ornamentalizing the *loha* as a gold bangle worn in the left hand.

Photo-5: Illustrates third generation Anandita's cultural politics of bearing marital symbols
[Source: Anandita Dutta's personal album]



Such negotiations appreciate the co-existence of otherwise dichotomous categories of 'tradition' and 'modernity' within an ambivalent third space of hybridity (Bhabha, 1991), and manifest 'interstitial agency' of 'cultures in-between' (Bhabha, 1996: 58). The next narrative will go further than the concept of hybridity to nuance the very category of 'tradition' and 'modern'. Twenty seven year-old year-old Anandita narrates disdainfully,

"I find wearing shnakha and pala, but not so much loha as quite gayiya (of the rural) and 'backward' shekele pratha (past traditions)!" Although she claims, *"love and marriage do not need signs of proof"*, she contradictorily wears her diamond wedding ring which she narrativizes as *"very 'special' to me as it symbolizes our 'togetherness' and lifelong coupling."*

It is interesting to appreciate Anandita's subjectivity as fragmented and contradictory where she, at once confirms and rejects the semiotic registers of heterosexual love, romance and conjugality. What is more sociologically significant in this contradictory narrative is the influence of a broader orientalist politics of time and progress. It is interesting to note her chain of significations of *shnakha* and *pola* as 'rural' and rural as backward and backward as traditional, whereas its implicit 'other', the wedding ring which is culturally more Western comes to be signified as the urban, progressive and modern. This association of a Western symbolism of coupling with modern and modern with urban and urban with progress and progress with 'lifelong coupling' establishes the orientalist discourse of progressive hegemonic Western intimacy and its hetero-normative basis for monogamy viz-a viz its 'other', the traditional, backward, rural, Eastern signs and signification of intimacy.

A third generation urban middle-class subject myself, I, like many other subjects within my field sometimes find it difficult to categorize my contradictory heterosexual

imaginings into neat dichotomous classification. Having mentally rebelled against the idea of ritual marriage for all its patriarchal symbolism and practices, I also seek belongingness of my identity through these rituals that socially bind family traditions and kinship relations. All I can appreciate through reflective self introspection is my identity as a fractured feminist who at once is able to critique the conventional traditional beliefs associated with these signs, and also at the same time, relate to its semiotic strength and its familiarity as part of growing up as a woman within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*.

It is also interesting to see how many women ‘modernize’ these ‘traditional’ marital symbols by wearing more decorative *shnakha* and *pola* to exhibit it as an accessory or read in another way, as a spectacle of consumption. Second generation Gayatri narrates,

“I have bound my pola with gold patterns to make it ornamental and also ‘modernized a sleek size’ of the otherwise clumsy ugly thick gayiya traditional looking ones which really look bad”.

Narratives of speak of ‘modernization’ of traditional signs of marriage, come to signify tradition as constraining, metaphorically represented through adjectives like ‘clumsy’, ‘thick’ and ‘ugly’. To keep alive these traditional signs, they need to be modernized and to modernize means to make these more pleasurably commoditized. Notwithstanding subjective modifications of traditional signs of intimacy, I contend that such intimate subjectivities are embedded within the imperatives of capitalistic cultural economy. Narratives in this context often illustrate the capitalistic ‘romanticization of commodities’ and ‘commoditization of romance’ that is based on a trans-national globalized “hedonistic” model of intimacy (Lasch 1997: 53). They also reflect the politics of

Giddens' individualization thesis that constructs tradition as self-limiting and reflexive-modernization as self-enabling. The commoditized implication of 'modernization' as narratives of intimacy suggest, demonstrate that in reflexive modernization, reflexivity, agency and narrative of the self are highly bound by the structural imperatives of market 'rules' and capitalist economy of commodity consumption that consumes not only commodities but also selves. I will critique Giddens' association of tradition with constraints by later showing how traditional spaces are also culturally narrativized as conducive to self-reflexivity and realization of the self. The subjective 'modernization' of 'traditional' signs definitely re-signifies meanings at one level of discourse but nevertheless operates within another level of discourse and is thereby never outside the discursive regime.

The traditional religious significance of marital signs is also often radically secularized by re-defining and re-interpreting its religious value. For instance, some women who occasionally bear these signs often wear them as accessories that enhance a traditional Bengali attire of a white sari with a red border worn particularly although not exclusively during traditional Bengali festivities. A non conformity with these Hindu ritualistic notions of marriage at one level, however, reinforces a communal discourse of hegemonic middle-class Bengaliness and a gendered discourse of hegemonic codes of feminine respectability of particularly the *bhadramahila*, on the other. Specific colours are intertwiningly communalized, communitarianized, and gendered. White and red colours represent a hetero-normative mix of virginity/purity and sexuality respectively and come to symbolically mark off through the woman's body, the non-Bengali, the non-Hindu 'others'. Women thereby once again come to represent the cultural 'authenticity'

of a particular community and bodily bear its claimed cultural superiority over others. The religious, re-signified as the secular eventually re-inscribes the religious, intertwined by further connotations of communal and gendered class-culture of hegemonic *bangaliana* or bengaliness.

The way a twenty three year-old unmarried woman, Chandrika endows meaning to the ritual of *Shnidur Khela* brings out the co-constitution of personal narrative and cultural discourse of heterosexual intimacy and identity. *Shnidur Khela* literally translated as vermillion play is a Bengali cultural ritual performed during the fourth and final day of the most important Bengali religious-cultural festival of the worship of goddess Durga, the symbol of good over evil and the epitome of feminine strength. *Shnidur Khela* is performed by married women although unmarried women also often take part in the 'play'. *Shnidur* is rubbed onto each others' faces and particularly onto the forehead of those married. Played within an intra-gender intimate space, this ritual symbolizes marital happiness within and through female homosociality. Chandrika and her cousin sisters, of whom one is married, get together for their 150 years traditional family Durga *Puja* (worship). She says,

"We have a lot of fun putting Shnidur on each others' cheeks. Sometimes, playfully in 'fun', we put it on each others' forehead just to feel like we are married and imagine how we might look after we get married (shyly smiles). It's a very 'romantic' feeling to temporarily play this role of a married woman 'in fun' with other sisters and probably in the presence of some of our boyfriends who also play along in this fun and act as if they were husband to their 'girlfriend' and 'would-be!' (Implying would-be wife)"

Chandrika's narrative illustrates how a semiotic register of marriage and class-cultural identity sets the stage for collective preparation for traditional feminine roles and heteronormative institution of marriage through the most effective strategy of 'playful fun'. The communal and gendered connotation underpinning this 'playful' performance of *Shnidur Khela*, effectively reproduces through individual's 'subjectification' to it, the cultural constructions of the 'heterosexual imaginary' (Ingraham, 1996). The secular re-signification of the religious is therefore not radical enough to lie outside of the broader regime of power/knowledge.

In the photo below, the second woman from the left has recently been married and is shown to bear all the marital signs. The rest of the women in both the photos are unmarried and are engaged in *shnidur khela*.

Photo-5: Illustrates the ritual of *shnidur khela* during the Bengal festival of *Durga Puja*.

[Source: Chandrika Podder's personal album]



Photo-6: Illustrates the homosocial playfulness of *Shnidur Khela*

[Source: Chandrika Podder's personal album]



Third generation Sunanda, is a teacher of the social sciences in a school and also part of a women activist NGO group in which her mother has long been a prominent member. Sunanda chooses to describe her family and her upbringing by her mother as “educated”, “cultured”, “progressive” and “feminist”. She claims that these attributes differentiate her and her family from the “*shadharon moddhobittyo*” or ordinary middle-class who are ordinary because they live life in a taken-for- granted non-reflexive way. She claims,

“As modern and educated women of today, we should not unreflexively and passively remain victims of male domination and its taken-for-granted rituals.

What is education of any use if we cannot be modern enough to question patriarchal religious prescriptions that oppress women?’ I told my ‘partner straight away that forget about my wearing those shakha shnidur’, I will only get married if we just have a ‘court marriage’ and a simple ‘engagement ring exchange ceremony’ rather than go through all that meaningless ‘high caste brahmanical Hindu ritual marriage’. ‘Although my in-laws are pretty traditional and conservative and I knew they would not easily accept just a legal marriage, I told my partner that if he ‘cared’ for me then he will have to ‘convince’ his parents.”

Sunanda’s resistance to ‘meaningless’ high-caste hindu ritual marriage and to bearing of marital signs attempts to make a ‘reflexive’ political language of resistance to hegemonic codes of gender and its associated ‘patriarchal’ ideologies of casteism and communalism. Her refusal to undergo ritual marriage and perform only a court marriage and a simple ring ceremony however, cannot be read as an absolute resistance to patriarchal power structure. In resisting a patriarchal religious discourse, she complies with another patriarchal legal discourse of legitimate institutionalized marriage. The Westernized ritual of ring ceremony popularly known as the ‘engagement’ ceremony and adapted within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* illustrates local adaptations of hegemonic codes of trans-national intimacy and its hetero-normative romantic coupling (Puri, 1999).

Sunanda’s ‘modern’, ‘educated’, ‘cultured’, ‘progressive’, ‘reflexive’ and ‘feminist’ self is contrasted with the ‘*shadharon*’ and ‘oppressed’ other. These invocations of self identity in relation to her intimate space politicize certain hierarchical value judgment that distinguishes the self from the other. Sunanda’s directly narrativized and implied binary can be seen to be an influence of hegemonic Western modernity and feminism

(Mohanty, 1991). A direct and also a logical derivation of the binary are thus understood from her self-narrative in the table below:

<u>SELF</u>	<u>OTHER</u>
Modern	Non-modern/traditional/conservative
Progressive	Non-progressive/backward
Feminist	Non-feminist/anti-feminist/patriarchal
Liberated	Oppressed
Secular	Religious
Reflexive	Non-reflexive
Cultured	Uncultured
Educated	Uneducated

What Sunanda's educated, modern, progressive, self-reflexive feminism fails to critically interrogate is her conformity to a trans-national hegemonic discourse of hetero-normative intimacy and a monolithic feminism that stereotypes and homogenizes identity, experience and practices and also legitimizes superiority of the self over inferiority of the other.

In this section I have shown the multiplicity of the processes of meaning-making, and representation (Hall, 1997a) with regards to practices of intimacy. Within a certain historical time and cultural space therefore, there is always a range of meanings and interpretations 'floating about' with regards to any given socio-cultural phenomenon. Negotiating intimate practices and their meanings simultaneously confirms,

circumvents, subverts, hegemonic codes of gender and classed practices of intimacy. Subjects' narratives empirically illustrate Foucault's claim (1990: 95) that 'where there is power there is resistance'. However, these empirical cases also illustrate the relatively less quoted second part of Foucault's claim – 'and yet or rather consequently this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (95). Claims to different forms and practices of intimacies such as 'modern', 'progressive' or 'traditional' may be 'personal' narratives of the self but nevertheless highly mediated by power relations and broader discourses of subject formation.

Performing Marriage- Performing Selfhood

a) 'Modern' Intimacy and 'Intimate' Modern Selfhood

Udayan is a third generation academician in a family of social science professors. His family boasts of a tradition of modern 'progressive' 'intellectual' minds. An indicator of such forward thinking according to Udayan is their communist and secular bent of mind, conditions which are also generally defined as indicators of progress in the history of Bengal and its 'radical' left politics. Udayan's father Alok narrates,

"Your aunty (his wife) and I in our times rebelled against age 'old backward traditions' of 'high-caste Hindu' ritualistic marriage. We faced a lot of resistance from our parents and relatives yet we were obstinate that if we were to marry we would not conform to the oppressive rituals and traditions. We have brought up Udayan in similar 'progressive secular thinking'. 'Educated intellectual' minds should question the power associated with high-caste brahmanical ways of marrying. Unfortunately we take things as they are; quite comfortably inhabiting a safe space of 'middle-class' location. The only thing that a whole section of the

new middle-class is concerned today is about making more money rather than thinking of 'progressive ways of being'!"

Udayan is proud of his family's radicalism and is committed to upholding the family's and his immediate peer group's political agendas of secular communism even if this meant continually negotiating and bargaining in his intimate space. This sometimes knowingly or unknowingly, as it will be evident from his narrative, took the shape of imposing his ideological beliefs and his male rational modern 'self' over the irrational traditional female other:

"I had to do a lot to make Manjir (his partner) agree with me on the issue that religious or ritual marriage is a traditional irrational thing to do for us educated people'. Moreover what would our friends think of us? All my college life I had supported the communist party, suddenly how can I change my belief on modern secular modes of thinking? Manjir comes from a typically 'north Kolkata conservative middle-class family background' and her family is very religious unlike ours. I was at pains to tell her that the ritualistic way of marriage cannot go with my and my family's progressive and adhunik (modern) thoughts and practices. I was stubborn that if we had to marry then we would only marry in this way!"

Through hegemonic codes of modern patriarchy, rationalized by the superiority of legal discourse over religious discourse, Udayan constructs a certain idea of 'progressive' and/or *adhunik* intimate self and practice.

In rejecting and distantiating the self from the other, Udayan narrates with disdainful surprise,

"I wonder how 'modern forms of coupling that are based on choice and individual consent' can tolerate the fact that their coupling will be legitimated by a Brahmin

priest who would 'sanctify the union of two adult individuals in love'. I told Manjir that this is something that my parents and close friends within the 'academic circuit' have rebelled against and so would I. After all should anyone from the outside come and sanctify our marriage? She and her parents objected in the initial phase but later agreed on some other conjugal conditions. So, we had a registry (court) marriage and my witnesses were my father and 'Professor Ashim Roy, the renowned social science academician' as you might already know."

On one hand Udayan vehemently criticizes external mediation of individual space of intimate coupling based on personal 'choice' and 'love'. On the other, he seems to abort his criticality about the legal necessity of having witnesses for legitimizing a 'modern' legal court marriage. His critique of external 'sanctification' of marriage and uncriticality of external 'legitimation' of marriage leaves untouched the problem of mediation of intimate spaces by positions of power. The extra-intimate or external mediation of personal intimate space through power, status and capital that the renowned professor brings with him is uncritically taken-for-granted as the legal need for witness in modern marriage.

Udayan like Sunanda carves out a 'modern' and 'progressive' form of coupling that is based on individual choice and consent and a critique of traditional backward religious discourses. A surface reading and claims of their narrative texts confirm the claims of reflexivity of de-traditionalization thesis or individualization thesis of reflexive modernization espoused particularly by Giddens (1992). It is important to note, however, Sunanda's and Udayan's affiliations with their 'progressive family background' or history and a commitment to uphold in the first case, the feminist beliefs of the mother and in the second the radical communist ideologies of the family. Such affiliations with the family tradition is legitimated by the claimed superiority of such ideas

and beliefs that distinguishes them or their cultured, educated, progressive community of middle-class culture from the 'ordinary middle-class' and the 'new middle-class'. Such affiliations to family, community, culture and the ideologies they represent problematize their apparently unbounded self reflexivity and unbridled individual agency, choice and consent. The self is understood as part of the family, the family as part of a certain section of middle-class and the class as representing certain world view and political commitment with regards to intimate practices and identities. The individual is therefore strongly embedded within family relations, culture and history (Smart, 2007), and produced by chains of cultural significations, representations and discourses (Hall, 1997a).

Subjects' narratives illustrate the interconnection between power and subjectivity through Foucault's notion of 'subjectivation', the process of becoming a subject and becoming subordinated to power- family, peer group, and the ideologies they come to represent, create Sunanda and Udayan as subjects by subjecting them to their power (Foucault, 1982: 212). This is also an instance of Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' (1991) in which power is internalized and works to regulate the behaviour of individuals. Foster (2011) brings out this aspect of Foucauldian governmentality by arguing that "in the word governmentality, we encounter the word mentality" which "indicates that one governs oneself by internalising social, political, and cultural regulations, rules, and norms" (139). Taking from Butler's reading (1997) of Foucault's 'subjectivation', I argue in this context that subjects' conformity to a modern legal language of intimacy also provides them the very condition of their 'modern' identity because a subject is formed ambivalently by being subjugated or subjected (7,

11). Sunanda and Udayan, by being regulated by modern structures of intimacy and its associated legal discourse, are by virtue of being subjected to them, “formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures” (Butler, 1990: 2). An intimate politics of Sunanda’s and Udayan’s narratives is the association of modern practice/form of intimacy and coupling with a) legal discourse of marriage and b) feminist resistance to patriarchal symbols such as marital signs. This implies that ‘traditional’ practice/form of intimacy is without feminist resistance and without any form of legality. Through the voice Manjir who represents a diverse pattern within the same middle-class, I will now narrate a different meaning and association of ‘tradition’ that interrogates the above associations especially of tradition with passivity and lack of feminist consciousness or selfhood.

b) ‘Traditional’ Intimacy and ‘Intimate’ Traditional Selfhood:

Manjir and her family believe in the Hindu, ritualistic way of marriage both in terms of their faith in the religious significance of the scripts and also in terms of its cultural embeddedness within kinship and family ties. This religious faith and familial orientedness, Manjir’s’s parents believe, are in no way contradictory to, in the words of Manjir’s father, “*an educated, modern, cultured middle-class morality*”. The girl’s side, however, gives into Udayan’s and his family’s desire for performance of a ‘modern/progressive’ heterosexual intimacy. Arguing after Mohanty, Manjir and her family’s giving in to Udayan and his family’s choice of and control over the situation can be quickly read from a hegemonic Western feminist eye to represent a situation in which Manjir comes to be signified as the average “third world woman” who is necessarily victimized, powerless, “religious (read “not progressive”), family oriented (read

“traditional”)...domestic (read “backward”)) (1991: 72). The superiority of the Western male modern, civilized, secular, universal and rational self is defined through and against the inferiority of the Eastern female traditional, primitive, religious, local and emotional ‘other’ (Bulbeck, 1998: 45). My analysis of this narrative moment, however, tries not to be restricted to how the ‘self’ defines the ‘other’ but how the ‘other’ defines it‘self’. This I consider to be the starting point of a postcolonial attempt to heal the ‘epistemic violence of imperialism’, to borrow Spivak’s phrase (Bulbeck, 1998; Bhabha, 1996; Minh-ha, 1989; Mohanty, 1991; Spivak, 1990; Ashcroft et al., 1995). To only limit one’s critique in terms of self definition of the other is never to be able to understand how the other defines itself and thereby destabilizes the self-other rhetoric. My postcolonial feminist consciousness and a subaltern imagination and practice teach me to ask how Manjir defines herself and thus defines Udayan and his family in relation to this self. To ask this, it is important to privilege the voice and narrative of Manjir as a subject. Manjir narrates,

“Although I eventually ‘gave into the performance pressure of political correctness’ which Udayan unfortunately is too conscious about; I only apparently conformed to the modern legal norms of marriage.” This modern legal discourse of intimacy is not strong enough to shake her internalized faith and power of individualized conviction- “‘performances’ are for others, for the community and often pressurized by the immediate ‘peer group’; you know like the pressure to ‘keep one’s face to friends’, like that of Udayan’s case. ‘Religious or more precisely spiritual faith’ is to one’s own. I can compromise on the ‘performance bit’ but not ‘moner bhetorer bishwash’ (internalized faith) which defines one’s ‘shattya’ (selfhood) and ‘byakti’ (personhood). I only feel sad for my parents whose wish for a ritual enactment of marriage of their only child could not be fulfilled!”

Manjir's narrative that sets different parameters of individualism than her partner's claim for the legal, rational bases of individualism, redefines notions of selfhood, subjectivity, reflexivity and agency. It critiques Giddens' (1991, 1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1992, 1995) argument of reflexive modernization as the only basis for reflexive individualization. Their theory of reflexive modernity that claims for 'universalizing tendencies' and 'new commonalities' (Heaphy, 2007: 9) in the context of identity and intimacy fails to appreciate how "otherness and difference" and "difference and power", "are centrally important-locally and on a global scale- to shaping personal life and day-to-day experience" (4). Firstly it fails to appreciate difference of class-cultures, gender, generation and race (Jamieson, 1999, 2011; Heaphy, 2007: 9-10, 175) and secondly "differences *within* difference" (Heaphy, 2007: 176) in shaping personal lives. In this context, the 'reconstructivist sociology of personal life that is promoted by the theory of reflexive modernity' (Heaphy, 2007: 175), ironically manifests a 'lack of reflexivity with respect to how sociological narration is involved in the flow of power' (5) and, in shaping, constraining and enabling different forms, practices, and meanings of intimacy and selfhood.

Manjir's individualism is best understood as 'personhood' in which although it is independent of social performance, it is nevertheless strongly embedded within the family, its culture and tradition (Smart, 2007). Her familial belongingness, traditional embodiment and 'religious or more precisely spiritual faith' are in no way contradictory to her *shwattya* and *byakti*. In fact these define her selfhood and personhood. Moreover, her internalized individualism is made social through familial rootedness which is narrativized as the very source of her inner conviction and internalized faith. She says,

“Udayan often complains about my ‘conservative’ family background but I tell him that it is only when you have a strong ‘family heritage’ and ‘tradition’ to ‘conserve’ that you become ‘conservative’. Fortunately I have these with me and in my upbringing. These are not in opposition to but a ‘part of my identity’ and these take me through life’s struggles.

I do feel sad that my parents did not have their say in my marriage but I also know that they will understand me, stand by me and would not pressurize me to forceably prove any point where I would compulsively have to perform their wishes. Without their belief and confidence in me and their unconditional support, I could not derive my internalized strength!”

What can be easily misread from the outside as a state of Manjir’s victim-hood, in fact, produces a radical meaning of subject-hood. It critiques a hegemonic Western and orientalist association of spirituality and religion with ‘oppression’ and ‘backwardness’, ‘tradition’ with ‘passivity’ and ‘non-reflexivity’ by affirming the capacity for Manjir’s agency within, through and precisely because of her familial-traditional-spiritual affiliation. Also, Manjir’s rebelliousness that is uninterrupted by her apparent subjection of the self to the meanings, power, knowledge and regulation of a modern legal discourse is, from a feminist, postcolonial postmodern lens quite radical. Manjir’s inner subversion and recalcitrance of Udayan’s legal discourse problematizes the disciplinary nature of modern power in one sense and renders its uninterrupted, unquestioned control over subjects, vulnerable and troubled.

An Ethnography of Bengali Marriage: Negotiating the *Bhadralok* 'Distinction':

Owing to the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of the middle-class, there were ideological differences amongst Sunanda, Udayan and Manjir in terms of the different meaning-making processes as to what constitutes an ideal form and practice of intimate heterosexual coupling. Despite ideological differences at one level, the subjects were, however, interestingly united in their world view at another level that conformed to urban Bengali middle-class' symbolic distinction and taste viz-a-viz other classes and communities (Bourdieu, 1984). A nineteenth century colonial middle-class ideology based on a patriarchal idealization of marriage that sought to infuse intimate spaces of marriages with taste and refinement through *adhatmikata* or spirituality and *antarikata* or heartfelt sincerity, was an attempt from both the couple's sides at reinstating their social distinction (Majumdar, 2000). The self's distinction is maintained through the construction of an 'other' who did not share the so called inherent tasteful judgements of the progressive Bengali intellectual minds. These others were othered through the basis of state (for instance, the pompous Punjabis of North India), community (for instance, the business minded Marwaris or slanged by the Bengalis as *Meroes*), newly acquired money (for instance, the nouveau riche or the newly rich middle-class) and the more obvious working class.

The new middle-class which is popularly perceived as the nouveau riche product of uncritical globalization is most often constructed as challengers to Bengali middle-class heritage. Third generation Udayan critiques this new middle-class as “‘too *Bollywoodish*’ without any sophisticated Bengali culture”, second generation Aparna

objects to them as “too ‘consumeristic minded’ and ‘bourgeois’” and Manjir condescends that they “lack tradition and ‘history’.” This new middle-class is constructed as imitating the *bonedi Bangalis* or aristocratic/sophisticated middle-class Bengalis and are therefore understood as ‘pretentious’ rather than ‘authentically’ or ‘actually’ *abhijato* or sophisticated. The struggles to distinguish the self from the other is in the social world a function of belief, perception, appreciation, knowledge and recognition – “name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority, everything which constitutes symbolic power as a recognized power always concern the ‘distinguished’ possessors and the ‘pretentious’ challengers” (Bourdieu, 1984: 251). This constant struggle “helps to maintain constant tension in the symbolic goods market, forcing the possessors of distinctive properties threatened with popularization to engage in an endless pursuit of new properties through which to assert their rarity” (Bourdieu, 1984: 151-152).

Aimed at upholding family’s class-culture, prestige and distinction through a history of its educated middle-class status, the aesthetic celebration of marriage and its form was highly deliberated by many of the Bengali families within my ethnographic field. Circumscribed by economic capital a general pattern showed that most middle-class families desired their family’s marriages to be marked by ‘*abhijato ruchi*’ or sophisticated taste; rather than non-aesthetic flamboyance that was narrated by many to “suit the new middle-class or the non-bengalis like the Marwaris or the Punjabis”. Subjects’ ‘intimate’ spaces came to be therefore mediated by extra-intimate deliberations - an “art of consumption, entrapped in a system of fine distinctions, status battles and competitive adventure from which they could not escape because their whole identity depended on

it” (Mennell, 1987: 389-390). It is interesting to note that although educated middle-class taste and distinction underplayed the importance of economic capital over cultural and symbolic capital in most of their narratives, economic capital was definitely an indicator of one’s status and respectability in society. The important consideration is whether this economic capital is spent on ‘tasteful’ and ‘refined’ artifacts and other cultural representations that mark off class distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984).

Stories that compulsively expressed the desire for maintaining *abhijato* taste for maintaining class distinction are not exhaustive of other stories within the same urban middle-class society. Many subjects within this class fall in between the values of a hedonistic new middle-class culture and the more restrained values of ‘traditional’ elite middle-class. In adopting both the restrained elitism of middle-class culture and the conspicuous consumption of the new middle-class, subjects destabilize the hegemonic codes of class distinction and trouble and claimed dichotomy of the self and the other. In fact, many subjects perform multiple and varying forms of marriage celebration and do not necessarily associate the quality of ‘being cultured’ with ‘being sophisticatedly restrained’. Third generation Tanya and Anandita are educated middle-class, the first working as an IT professional and the other, as a professional in a bank. They both narrativize a denial of uptight middle-class sophistication and narrativize the desire for an open celebration of fun and pleasure within their heterosexual intimate spaces. Anandita confidently emphasizes,

“Some ‘boring Bengalis’ do not like it but I ‘absolutely adore’ the flamboyant Punjabi culture of marriage. I think it’s a lot of fun and a celebration of music and colours. I decided to adopt ‘their ritual of mehendi ceremony’ (hand painting with henna that also often inscribes the initial of the partner on the palm) and

‘sangeet’ (musical musings involving an open celebration of sexuality and bodily pleasures underpinning heterosexual marriage) into my Bengali ritual wedding. So what I basically did was ‘mix and match the best of both!’

Tanya similarly says,

“Middle-class Bengali ‘mentality’ often tends to economize on heavy expenditure in marriages. My parents, for instance always believed simplicity is a virtue and they looked down upon ‘showing off money’. However ‘these days with too many options and choices’ in the marriage market we inevitably tend to expand our spending. This is also facilitated by the thought that marriage is meant to happen once in a lifetime!”

Tanya and Anandita represent a section of middle-class today which is often split between a critique of conspicuous consumption and a desire for embourgeoisment. Subjects, in the practice of such critique and desire often tend to creatively ‘mix and match the best of both’ in a way that upholds the aesthetics of sober Bengali middle-classness together with the pleasure of a more globalized consumption of the new middle-class. This combining of the ‘best of both’ also merges the national and trans-national hetero-normative discourse of modern coupling as monogamous – ‘marriage is meant to happen once in a lifetime’, with a person whose identity in the form of his name’s initial is symbolically engraved on the brides palm in the *mehendi* ceremony. Such middle-class cultural identity is built around a constant tension between globalization and local affiliations (Lakha, 1999: 252) through a process by which the hegemonic nature of what constitutes middle-class is simultaneously confirmed, made unstable and fragmented. Despite this internal heterogeneity of class culture, the economic sobriety/sophistication of this class, induced by colonial-national modernity is strongly and widely practised. This is manifestly visible in the way they construct the

practice of dowry in which dowry is popularly narrated by many within this class across generation in the words of Udayan – “as primarily practised by ‘money minded’ ‘business class culture’ of the ‘marwaris!’” The culture of dowry is uniformly looked down upon within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*. Second generation Bidhan’s narrative in this context is heavily representative of many others’ narratives within this class-culture,

“We ‘respectable’, ‘literate’ and ‘cultured’ Bengalis take pride in our morals and values. Unlike other states in India like for example, Punjab or Hyderabad where even educated people take dowry, Bengal generally but particularly ‘educated’ middle-class banagli people refrain from this immoral practice. That way, we are much more ‘progressive’ and ‘better’ than the rest of India where there may be more money but ‘less morals, culture and education!’”

Although there is a general consensus among the *bhadralok* that the practice of dowry is a sign of ‘backwardness’, a sign of ‘illiteracy’ and ‘lack of culture’, it is important to note that the gender inequality associated with this practice is heavily persistent within the *bhadrasamaj*. For instance, the status of the bride’s side of family is often measured against the ‘gifts’ it ‘sends’ to the girl, to the boy and to the boy’s side at the time of marriage. The marriage ritual of ‘*kanyadan*’ which implies the giving away of the daughter to her husband by her father, epitomizes this culture of dowry at its best, although this ritual is never given the meaning of a dowry within much of the *bhadrasamaj*. The Bengali *bhadralok*, is, in fact, proud of his ‘respectability’ across its community and nation and hence quite respectably and sophisticatedly euphemizes dowry as symbolic ‘gift-giving’. Interestingly the responsibility of ‘gift-giving’ is undertaken almost one sidedly by the bride’s side and is most effective through its

internalization as an 'obvious duty'. This obviousness of 'gifting' is expressed by a third generation couple, Radeep and Suparna.

At the time of their marriage Suparna said,

"We would definitely want to set up a family of our own. It's difficult to 'adjust with in-laws' especially with our 'modern' practices of intimacy and friendly coupling that do not conform to many traditional practices of conjugality. The only problem is the financial burden in 'buying a flat, buying furniture and all the rest'; although 'furniture and stuff like that will be given by my family obviously!'" To this Radeep agrees and says, "'Ya bed, 'television, sofa set and things like that' will be given from her (Suparna's) family but the rest is a totally new set-up and is a matter of a lot of money. This is the only reason we are doubtful about moving out of my family, for being with parents practically saves you lot of money!"

Most educated Bengali middle-class families practice dowry in the most effective way through the internalized ritual and the cultural practice of 'gifting' the girl and gifting the boy and the boy's side as a sign of reverence towards the boy's side of the family. Such gifting that reinforces hetero-normativity and perpetuates gender inequality in intimate relations confirms the politicized nature of 'intimate' spaces and also set material, structural, cultural and symbolic limits to the reflexivity (Heaphy, 2007: 179; Lash, 1994: 120) of 'modern' practices of coupling and conjugality. The most common form of 'gift-giving' constitutes expensive and 'tasteful' gold jewellery. Precious stones and heavy gold come to represent a family's respectable history and status and are passed down as economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital from one generation to another. It is important to appreciate therefore that gender, class history and its tradition act as important markers of heterosexual intimacy (Smart, 2007; Jamieson, 2011). Gender inequalities and hegemonic codes of class respectability do persist even within and

more so within the self-proclaimed 'progressive' Bengalis who, it can be argued, operate in relation to a 'respectable' colonial modernity (Banerjee, 2006) and its 'new patriarchy' (Chatterjee, 1989). It is also noteworthy in this context how the structure of the circuit of matrimonial exchanges tends to reproduce the structure of the social space where taste and class distinction become intertwined through a vicious circle, functioning to be a match maker (Bourdieu, 1984 : 241-243).

Sunanda, Udayan, Manjir, Anandita, Tanya belong to the same generation and class but interestingly represent diverse and similar cultural patterns through their practices of intimacy. Through a selection and analysis of their narratives, I show differing patterns and common patterns of embodying a middle-class culture that is at once homogenous and heterogeneous in its effect of shaping intimate spaces of heterosexual coupling, family ideologies and self narratives. This intersection of class culture, family relations and gender in shaping intimate relations illustrate how personal intimate relations are, in fact, mediated by one's socio-cultural locations and their subjective interpretations.

'Intimate' Language: Intimate Conjugal Pronoun:

In addition to the detailed discussions/debates on how a marriage should ideally be performed, presented to the society and consumed or celebrated by its participants, the language of intimacy is also highly deliberated upon and carefully 'chosen' by couples often in conjunction with their families. The modern ethos of 'affective individualism' (Stone, 1977) that facilitated marriage of 'choice', popularly known as 'love marriage' helped to deliberate upon the intimate language of conjugality within couple spaces. The modern individual continuously strives to negotiate with the socio-culturally

prescribed institutional imperatives of marriage by simultaneously inhabiting, complying with, circumventing and resisting them through contextual biographies. As analysis will show, subjects' reflexive capacity and desire to challenge, rebel and negotiate are, however, limited and in fact, shaped by their gender and class specific subjectivities. Classed and gendered reflexivity critiques reflexive modernization's claims for de-traditionalization, unbridled individualism and its unbounded reflexive capacity to 'choose'. The following section analyzes subjects' socio-culturally embedded negotiation of the 'intimate pronoun' within intimate conjugality.

Udayan's, Manjir's and their family's discussions on marriage and intimate relations is further narrativized with regards to their deliberations upon how the couple should refer to each other after marriage which I term as the politics of the 'intimate pronoun'. Their story in this context is highly representative of other stories within my field but I continue with this case study for already having introduced the characters within it and for having given the readers a familiarity with their sociological biography.

Udayan's grandparents through most of their married lives that was well arranged for them by their parents, referred to each other as '*ogo shunchho*' which can loosely be translated as 'my beloved, do you hear?' This indirect reference of calling one's partner that avoids taking personal names is, however, highly gendered as this socio-cultural restraint is more applicable for a woman than for a man. Such avoidance which signifies a sense of conjugal respect, conjugal distance and restraint of conjugal intimacy, especially in public was arguably a way of weakening the conjugal dyad in a joint family structure. This was needed because a heightened conjugal intimacy was thought to weaken the jointness of a family within a culture where preservation of the extended

family is a pre-requisite for the survival of older generations (Parkin and Stone, 2004). Calling by the partner's name is symbolic of the connection between intimacy and individualism which, it must be stated is a modern language of love (Kaviraj, 2006), a product of the colonial modernity and its ideals of companionate coupling (Chakrabarti, 1995; Karlekar, 2005). This colonial-European induced individuality and companionate coupling, however, needed to be localized within most joint-family structures of Bengali *bhadrasmaj* and avoidance of the partner's name which signified restraint of conjugal intimacy, especially applicable for woman, ensured this. The individual better understood as the socio-culturally embedded 'person' (Smart, 2007) thus adjusted between the culture of individualism, its associated modern ethos of companionate conjugality and the ethos of collectivism of a Bengali joint family culture. This cultural adjustment that is part of both the global and the local ideologies of intimate coupling can be read as an instance of 'hybridity' of 'cultures in-between' (Bhabha, 1991, 1996) that encompasses the contradictory history of colonization and combines national and trans-national ideals and practices of intimacy. It is also an instance of postcolonial modernity (Majumdar, 2000: 240-243) that represents 'contra-modernity' (Bhabha, 1991: 59) and 'alternative modernity' (Chakrabarty, 2002) in a post-colonial space of Bengal; a Bengal that has a distinct indigenous culture but where the colonial within it is not quite 'post' (Said, 1995: 6).

Negotiating the hetero-normative language of intimacy: Negotiating the collective and individualized discourse of coupling:

The indirect referencing of one's partner as '*ogo shuncho*' meant to veil intimacy was in most cases, however, contradictorily reinterpreted personally and socially as a highly

romantic coupling cue. This phrase thereby gradually came to signify across generations a semiotic register of exaggerated heterosexual love and affection particularly, of an ‘emphasized femininity’ (Connell, 1995; Leahy, 1994) with its accompanied accentuated tone, pitch and other non-verbal gestures like the secret exchanges of the eyes. This way the postcolonial modernity of Bengal creatively negotiated intimate spaces by strategically localizing the colonial modern imperatives of individualized romantic coupling to suit its extended family cultures (Majumdar, 2000: 127). The ‘practices of intimacy’ thereby overlapped with the ‘practices of family’ in which heterosexual intimacy was realized in and through family and kinship relations (Jamieson, 2011). This is best captured in second generation Shanta’s ideal of romance,

“Our next generation does not understand that staying away from others just as a couple with having no one else in the family can often become burdensome with no one to distribute familial responsibilities to. More importantly it can become quite boring where too much of each other can saturate love and cause more conjugal conflicts. Contrary to idea that the joint family is not conducive to romantic coupling, I think that romance is best experienced in the presence of others (smiles shyly)...by hiding from them, secretively exchanging glances, coming close, and stealing from others some shared togetherness.”

Udayan says his great grandmother, referred to her husband as ‘*shunchhen*’ rather than ‘*shunchho*’ in the initial stages of her marriage. The former is accompanied by the pronoun ‘*apni*’ and the latter ‘*tumi*’. The Bengali pronoun ‘*tumi*’ is the English pronoun you but ‘*apni*’ does not have a direct English translation. It therefore represents a classic methodological challenge for striving to keep its cultural connotation intact, the meaning of which runs the risk of getting lost in translation. I have only tried to transcreate its

meaning, context and implication like I did for many other vernacular expressions. The pronoun '*apni*' is used in instances of high degree of formality, formal respect and honour and in this context, a low degree of intimacy that presumes distance. In relation to '*apni*', '*tumi*' signifies relatively more intimate companionship, more familiarity, less formal distance and formal respect. However, it signifies relatively more distance, respect and formality in relation to a third pronoun '*tu*' which implies casual relationships with relatively low levels of formal respect. It is often used in cases of sibling intimacies of similar cohort group or close intimate/close friendships that are not bound by strict formal codes of behaviour. '*Tumi*' most often is culturally considered as the most appropriate 'intimate pronoun' within a couple space. It must be added, however, that this conjugal code is heavily middle-class and urban in nature. The class politics of this intimate pronoun will be taken up shortly to bring out the politics in the personal and the extra intimate in the intimate after I have described more specifically the generational dynamic of this 'intimate pronoun'.

The ethos of romantic coupling, as I have illustrated earlier and will further show, is best appreciated within postcolonial Bengal as socio-culturally relational and as part of embedded personhood (Smart, 2007) rather than of an individualized autonomous self that is associated with Giddens' pleasure seeking 'transformation of intimacy' and its 'pure relationship'. Manjir's mother, for instance, continuously referred to her husband as '*tomar kaku*' or your uncle rather than by his name, Ashok. She also, I noticed, referred to him as '*apnar chhele*' or your son while speaking to her mother-in-law. Similarly Udayan's mother referred to her husband most of the times, if not always as 'Udayan's father'. This habitual practice of referring to one's partner (more applicable for

woman then for men) through the process of prioritizing his relation with others in the family or with anyone apart from oneself and thereby bypassing the direct couple relation, is an instance of consciously underplaying the self/individual over the social/collective. It is as if an exaggeration or emphasis of the individual self within the conjugal space would imply a direct threat to the extended relations within the family that are socially prior to the conjugal connection at least more symbolically if not also equally materially.

Intimate conjugality or conjugal companionship is therefore socially constructed as having the capacity to potentially destabilize a social familial cohesion that is otherwise culturally and nationally imagined, romanticized or idealized as naturally united and automatically prior. The gender dimension shouldn't be missed here; it's more common for women to call their partners through indirect links of his family members than men to do the same. This implies that a woman who comes into the man's family after marriage is culturally imagined to be a threat to solidarity of the man's extended family and its culturally romanticized value of brotherhood, as discussed in the context of male homosociality. The woman thereby again comes to be culturally vested with the task of bearing the cultural unity of a society/nation through upholding the unity of her husband's family as feminist post-colonial scholarship argues in the context of Bengal. The woman, however, often strategically circumvents this socio-culturally imperative by privately calling her husband by name. In this way she subjectively circumvents a hegemonic gendered code and also often indirectly controls the dynamic of joint-family relation through her personal power over her husband.

These symbolic conjugal representations through the 'intimate pronoun' confirms Kakar and Kakar's (2007) argument that if there is one 'ism' that governs Indian society and its institutions then that is family-isms. This 'Indianness' particularly in its middle-classness is synonymous with this family-ism (Nabar, 1995). Such idealization as I have illustrated in the discussion on male homosociality, is more imagined than real (Thapar, 2000). A Western inspired Victorian model of romantic companionate marriage within a nuclear family was therefore indigenized amidst the structural imperatives of the extended family within which the couple often inhabited and with which they negotiated (Majumdar, 2000: 127). These conjugal practices of intimacy sometimes strategically expressed intimacy, and sometimes withheld intimate expressions in a way in which these practices never remained unmediated by power and negotiations.

Intimate Conjuality: Intimate *Bhadrasmaj*:

Now I will show how this intimate pronoun is heavily anchored in the class culture of the urban *bhadrasmaj* and its hegemonic codes of respectability. Udayan and Manjir have known each other since their college days and have been batch mates. Like any other friend of the same age who shares with another friend an informal closeness, they called each other through the pronoun '*tui*'. Three years had passed before they knew they were in love and another couple of years before they decided to marry each other and bring this to their family's knowledge for their parents' formalized approval of their love. In all these five years they had continued calling each other as '*tui*' disregarding the conjugal appropriateness of '*tumi*' within their middle-class location. The comfortable habitual friendship and its expressions had overpowered this sense of respectable middle-class coupling until this was constructed by their families as non-normative who

then mediated their marriage of 'choice' by arranging for them to shift their 'intimate pronoun' from '*tui*' to '*tumi*' to suit an institutionalized and respectable conjugality.

Manjir's parents in agreeing to not have a traditional Hindu ritual marriage had only agreed on the condition/arrangement which seemed to be no problem for either Udayan or his family. The condition was that Udayan and Manjir would have to refer to each other through the 'intimate pronoun' '*tumi*' rather than '*tui*'. This shift in pronoun is not merely a shift in language but is inter-connected with structured institutionalized inequalities of class. The shift of pronoun from '*tui*' to '*tumi*' is simultaneously a shift from illiterate coarse lower class vulgar intimacy to educated cultured middle-class sophisticated intimacy. To quote the heavily representative voice of Manjir's father,

"Husband-wife calling each other 'tui' is harsh to the ear, unpleasant, unsophisticated, 'improper and indecent'. It suits the 'unsophisticated' labour class or villagers who do not have a 'respectable' conjugal space. We are 'educated', ruchiban (one who has good taste) bhadralok and therefore shouldn't lower our taste to their level. Moreover, conjugality requires seriousness and mutual 'respect' and husband-wife calling each other tui spoils this respect!"

I argue after Lawler that although my intention is not to reduce class to symbolic system, this instance is useful to illustrate that "one of the ways in which social class is made 'real' is through cultural mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, of normalization and pathologization (1999: 4-5). The couple is slightly discomforted and often slips into old habits of calling each other as *tui* but they continuously rehearsed the appropriate expressions and codes of this new legitimate intimacy when they had institutionally entered into it through marriage.

Udayan and Manjir have been quite conscious of the public performance of their conjugal space which they seem to have by now well internalized and with which they are now 'at home' so that, a once familiar *tui* now strikes them as odd and where the 'front' and the 'back stage' intermesh. On one occasion Manjir downplays public performance through narrativizing a strong internalized individualism. However, in another occasion her intimate practice depends on such performance in order to project her 'respectable' middle-class identity. In this way, she embodies contradictory subjectivities that vary across contradictory discourses (Leahy, 1994: 49) of intimacy and identity. Similarly, Udayan's uncritical acceptance of the hegemonic codes of middle-class intimacy critiques his claim that personal spaces of intimacy should and can remain unmediated by external interventions. The couple's non-reflexive, repetitive performances of an expression of intimacy, in this instance effectively reproduces through its personal space, a certain political hegemonic code of middle-classness and urbanity in ways that make these codes appear as almost intrinsic and normal to these class cultures. It is interesting to note here a striking similarity of the ways in which both class and gender is a 'doing', whose norms are reproduced and internalized through non-reflexive 'stylized repetition of acts' (Butler, 1990: 140; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Narrativization of something always at home, is almost always compulsively necessary to conceal its socio-cultural accomplishment and discursive construction. Similarly the self is narrativized as unbridled, unified and coherently meaningful as if always embodying, as in the case of Udayan and many others like him, a 'pure', modern rationality without any fragmentation.

Through narrating over and over stories of a coherent life and its essential identity to the self and to its other, “habitus is naturalized” (Lawler, 1999: 14; Boudieu and Wacquant, 1992) and the discursive construction of self, class, time and intimacy; concealed. Manjir and Udayan in embodying this class culture, unite in their world view of middle-class aesthetic character and language. This unity destabilizes their once differential world views of intimacy. Thereby the constructed dichotomy of the self and the other is dissolved in this narrative instance and its discursively constructed nature that varies with varying situations, exposed. However, since the self’s aesthetic has to be defined in relation to something else, an ‘other’ has to be created. The working class with its vulgarity is created as the other in this context, therefore. Such politicized practices of intimacy can be read as symbolic violences of class racism in which the middle and upper middle-class’ appeal of universality of their culture are potential euphemisms that veil the symbolic uses of power and violence and vested interests of the class (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167).

Subverting *Bhadralok* ‘Distinction’ and Reinforcing Trans-national Hetero-normative Language and Politics of Intimacy:

Some couples I interviewed were more firm about holding on to their habitual comfort of friendship even after marriage where they prioritized biographical contexts over the institutional one. Anandita and Rahul have been married for more than two years now and have known each other since school. Anandita narrates,

“I call Rahul as Rahul and ‘tui’ as I have always been used to as a friend. Marriage hasn’t changed this friendship and therefore calling him as ‘tumi’ will make me feel he is a different person all together. I met him in ‘school’ at the end

of which he 'proposed' me and we started 'dating' and 'going around' 'officially' as 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend'. All this while we have been friends and will remain so even after marriage, if we are to be 'truly modern' and not just 'pretend' to be 'modern'. It is really a 'stupid thing' to shift from 'tui' to 'tumi' just after marriage. It is bhishon gaiya ar shekele (extremely rural and backdated), like traditional shwami shree natok (traditional theatrics of husband-wife conjugality). It reminds me of 'premik premikar ga gulono nyaka prem' (sickly antics of lovers' romance) like ogo shunchho [expresses exasperation on face]. Seriously, I just can't imagine telling Rahul 'ami tomake bhalobashi' (I love you). It is 'too gaiya and backdated'. I would rather tell him 'I love you'. Also many of our friends think that 'tumi' elevates a conjugal relation to deeper romance but who says there is no romance between Rahul and me? People often make fun of us but they are extremely traditional and conservative. Sometimes in their presence, especially if they are elders, we refrain from calling each other anything or to avoid controversies, just call each other as 'you' and at times perform to call each other 'tumi' in order to avoid criticisms that our's is a flimsy conjugality or I disrespect my husband and all sorts of 'meaningless nonsense'!"

These narratives illustrate how in specific interactional situations middle-class structure and code of intimacy are maintained and modified. These also demonstrate the social accountability of 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and of doing class (Bourdieu, 1984; Lawler, 1999; Skeggs, 1997) through doing intimacy. 'Practices of intimacy' (Jamieson, 2011) do not simply exist in the social world as a structure, imposing itself on individuals as 'cultural dopes' depicted in structural functionalism (Garfinkel, 1967). 'Practices' (Morgan, 2011) in 'practicing intimacy' rather imply actively negotiated meaning by meaning-making individuals (Hall, 1997a) in the micro-processes of everyday life. Goffman's 'dramaturgy' (1959) is highly relevant in Anandita's narrative of performing intimacy at different 'stages' of the everyday

‘practices of intimacy’, in which, ‘the front stage’ embodies a different person of Anandita’s self than the ‘back stage’. In Anandita’s narrative the ‘front stage’ of life theatre is one in which she performs intimacy for others and maintains its hegemonic middle-classness. The ‘back stage’ is one in which she actively negotiates with this hegemonic code of middle-class respectable intimacy by interrogating it but only to replace it, however, with another trans-national hegemonic code of Western (noted for instance, in her English language expression of intimacy) and/or ‘modern’ intimacy, as I shall analyze in the next section.

Like James, Goffman (1959) believed in multiple social selves through which we suit our performances to the audience we meet by an art of ‘impression management’ or through a technique of self presentation. While I appreciate Goffman’s recognition of many social selves I, however, critique him for his claim for a knowable ‘real’ underlying self of an actor. This is where I theoretically and epistemologically depart from Goffman’s concept of ‘dramaturgy’ within the sociological tradition of interactionism and move towards a more post-structuralist appreciation of multiple and contradictory selves. Manjir and Udayan’s habituality and routinization of the ‘front stage’ to make it their ‘back stage’, for instance, illustrated an intermeshing of the different selves at different stages that made it difficult to determine the ‘real’ self of the actors, if any at all. The meaning of ‘real’ is thus interactionally shifting and subject to actor’s meaning of it.

The hegemonic codes of *bhadralok* distinction is similarly destabilized and troubled by counter hegemonic discourses and continual processes of cultural re-signification, as Anandita’s narrative illustrates. Her politics of the ‘intimate’ pronoun is representative of the world view of a section of the Bengali middle-class that overturns the cultural code

of sophisticated respectability that Udayan, Manjir and their families seem to embody as representative of another section of the *bhadrasamaj*. It needs to be qualified that the various sections of the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* and their ideologies and practices are only analytically separate and can often be ethnographically seen as overlapping. The important point that needs to be noted is the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of Bengali middle-class and its associated practices of intimacy. For instance, where Udayan and Majir understand the shift from *tui* to *tumi* as representative of cultural respectability, Anandita, critiques such a shift as backdated husband (lord)-wife theatrics. By creatively individualizing her companionate conjugality and refusing to conform to its hetero-normative imperatives and hegemonic middle-class codes, she interrogates and radicalizes the normative class boundaries that conserved the middle-class values against its other. In fact, in defining herself, she others the conjugal symbolism of Manjir and Udayan as 'rural' instead of its self proclaimed urbanity; 'traditional' and 'backdated', instead of its modern progressive claims. By this she defines herself and her practice of intimacy as 'truly modern' that is also by her narrative implication, progressive and urban. What should not be missed here is that although she dissolves class boundaries at one level, she constructs other boundaries at another level of 'true' modernity versus 'pretentious' modernity or the traditional 'other'.

What is also interesting to critically appreciate in all these narratives is the 'politics of time' in operation (Banerjee, 2006). Defining what is the other of modern lies at the heart of the discourse of modernity. "In this time, only one can exist in the present – the truly modern...if both the modern man and his other had to inhabit the same space, then the latter must be seen as inhabiting another time" (Banerjee, 2006: 5-6).

For instance to define the self as 'modern' and 'progressive', Udayan had to construct its other - the 'traditional', 'backward', 'religious', Manjir. Similarly, to define her coupling as the 'truly modern', Anandita had to construct its other- 'backdated', 'traditional', 'rural', 'conservative' coupling that is represented in the chapter through Manjir's and Udayan's middle-class ideology of intimate conjugal pronoun. The compulsion to continually re-invoke the past as the tradition as if they were synonymous in order to define the present or the modern as if they were synonymous ultimately makes these categories mutually co-constitutive. As I have shown, however, in various narratives, in varying contexts, what is constructed as the present/modern and past/traditional is continually shifting and therefore these categories are also being continually reinvented at every re-invocation. Across varying discourses, thereby, the self is othered as the other, selfed.

The Modern Language of Love: Re-invocation and Reinvention:

As the narratives tell us, the shift from '*tui*' to '*tumi*' as the appropriate 'intimate pronoun' in the expression middle-class conjugality, is variously interpreted even within the same generation and the same class. In this section, I elaborate upon the dynamic of the processes and multivalent connotations of intimate expressions to show how the normative is often made unstable through subjective re-significations that are counter discourses to the normative but are not outside the discursive regime. It is within the contemporary itself that what is conjugally romantic for Anandita's friends is backdated '*prem*' for her. '*Prem*' as a discourse of love, however, served to signify the modern language of love in the nineteenth and twentieth century (Kaviraj, 2006). Associated with the shift from a traditional aesthetics of love to a modern one, was a shift from

'*rupa*' or physical external sexual beauty to '*saundarya*' or emotional internal beauty (Kaviraj, 2006: 170). Rabindranath Tagore championed the transformation of ideals of love through this specific discourse of love as '*prem*' (Kaviraj, 2006: 162).

The rationale behind historicizing this modern language of love in Tagore is to contextualize the obsession of the *Bangali bhadrasamaj* with Tagore as their symbolic capital and his new discourse of emotion in their narrative texts of intimacy. This modern discourse of love as narratives suggest, heavily mediated the 'subtle', 'indirect', 'non-physical', 'spiritual', 'poetic', 'respectable', 'tasteful', 'modest', 'sophisticated' expressions of the *bhadralok* narratives of intimacy. The few love letters that subjects have kindly shared with me, for instance, narrativize intimacy through various quotations from Tagore's works in ways that made his language of love, their own. This modern Tagorean aesthetic of love that has by now well established its sophisticated refined subtlety, however, is re-coded by many like Anandita as 'traditional', 'rural' and 'of the past'. Such language of intimacy is also charged against its high handed patriarchal language, dismissed by a third generation man Soumya as '*antel bhnat*' or pseudo rubbish and by his male friend who also is a radical communist, as '*bourgeois chauvinist chaat*' or bourgeois bullying/licking. It is important to state in the context that this modern language of love and emotion, was a direct product of the colonial encounter of the Indians with the British in the nineteenth century (Chakrabarti, 1995; Karlekar, 2005). This encounter gave birth to a sort of refracted localized Victorian ideology of conjugal companionship and its associated sexual sobriety particularly through feminine modesty that also influenced the rigidly conservative patriarchal mentality in Bengal (Chakrabarti, 1995: 298). Basu (2002: 296) argues how this modern Victorian ideology

of sexual sobriety still reigns strong in the imagination of the *bhadrasamaj* in the postcolonial times. Sex and sexuality is therefore a 'social taboo' and its expressions in language, literature and arts; an obscene anathema for the conservative.

As a third generation woman researcher I confirm Basu's argument through the socio-cultural reservations and barriers that exists in terms of posing questions related to issues of sexuality to most of my first and second generation subjects. The few questions that were asked to some who seemed to be relatively more comfortable with such discussions were also heavily under-toned and insinuated rather than direct, and subtle rather than candid. The relatively more relaxed rapport with some third generation friends helped me pose questions of such sorts only, however, to get the general view of the subject rather than very personal stories unless they willingly decided to tell. Subjects expressed reserved, apprehensive and hesitant modes of expressing sexuality and often referred to the actual sexual act as '*kora*' or 'doing' or in English as 'doing it' or just 'it' and hinted this 'it' by non-verbal cues, in the formal context of discussions where slang was not invoked. Taking cue from such cultural expressions of sexuality, I asked my subjects how they would verbally and linguistically express the meaning of sexual intercourse. This question that was hypothetical in nature elicited interestingly similar responses from all the subjects. Most said they would not express it at all as it is very private. Then I asked how they would describe it if they had to hypothetically express it. Subjects indirectly hinted at it through expressions like '*prem korchilam*' (did love) or '*ota hoyechhe*' (that happened) and metaphorically described it as '*ekshathe shuyechhi*' (slept together). I probed deeper to ask how they would express it without indirect insinuations. To this almost everyone, except for one

male in his forties fell back on English language to say we made love or just 'had sex' or 'sexual intercourse'. I probed further to ask if they could express the same in Bengali and to this almost everyone went silent. They contemplated deeply for at least a minute and conveyed their incapacity to specify its vernacular expression in culturally acceptable formal speech. One man who described it in Bengali has mastered the Bengali language as a writer in critical columns and fell back on a rarely used Sanskrit expression of '*sangam korechhi*' (did union) which also again only insinuated sexual union. Most men overpowered this discomfort by resorting to the abundant repertoire of sexual slangs although some did only apprehensively in the presence of a woman researcher.

This cultural narrative confirms Basu's argument that since the *bhadrasamaj* equates sex with obscenity, any words to express it would inevitably be a slang or obscene language bordering on the vulgar. He strongly argued that almost eighty percent of educated Bengalis are not comfortable in expressing '*jouno milon*' or sexual union even in Sanskrit. This inexpressiveness of the sexual in an accepted standardized language implies that within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, talking openly and freely about sexuality is a taboo as is evident from the dearth of its acceptable linguistic expression. This brings us to another dimension of the cultural politics of intimate language. It is *bhadrasamaj's* cultural comfort and ease with the English language expression of intimacy, particularly, sexual intimacy.

'Intimate' English Language: Trans-national Intimacy:

It is sociologically interesting to note that whenever these urban Western educated Bengalis are faced with the cultural inadequacy of vernacular expression of the carnal or sexual, they comfortably take recourse to and find a cultural comfort in using English as the language of intimacy in general, and particularly the sexual (Kakar, 1990; Basu, 2002: 300). This tendency among the Bengalis to indulge in sexual pleasure yet avoid discussing it is a nineteenth century colonial modern teaching that Basu (2002) argued, never existed in pre-modern India⁷ that openly celebrated sex. In the context of my analysis, it is useful to argue after Basu that a renewed interest in the discourse of sexuality in the recent past in arts, literature and cinema has occurred in Bengal again. Although it is a Western influence, this time it is primarily America and not England, for we still haven't completely come out of the Victorian hangover of sexual morality (Basu, 2002: 297) in our post-colonial constructions of heterosexual identities and intimacies.

To get back to the narrative text of Anandita, it is important to deconstruct her evaluative dualistic narrative of conjugality in order to bring out its associated orientalist politics of time and modernity. *Prem, premik, premika* invoke traditional, rural, backdated conjugal antics. By this she makes an in-house critique of a modern conjugal construct of intimacy that suited the patriarchal elitist taste of the so-called Bengali intelligentsia and

⁷ It is necessary to qualify that this claim about pre-modern India is solely based on a secondary reading of literature and is not my personal claim as the period under discussion is not my field of enquiry. It is based on Basu's argument which is, however, highly regarded in the field of post-colonial scholarship. Although I use Basu's argument here, I am wary of his claims for a homogenized pre-modern India, being theoretically sensitized to India as fragmented and heterogeneous across and between states, and their gender and class structures.

its hegemonic code of *bhadra* class distinction. However, as she de-stabilizes class racism, by invoking the supposed 'intimate pronoun' of the lower classes, she simultaneously stabilizes an orientalist construction of the 'tradition' and the 'modern'. The 'truly modern' in her narrative is often characterized by the Western practices/ideals of intimacy. This can be noted in Anandita's frequent use of the English language of intimacy. Her comfortable and regular usages of terms like 'dating', 'going around', 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend' instead of *prem*, *premik* or *premika* illustrate her trans-national narrative of the truly modern self that is re-inforced through its non-English and/or Western binary other. The truly modern and urban in her narrative is located in the non-vernacular, in English with influences primarily from America. The influence of the English language of intimacy is particularly illustrated by her discomfort with expressing '*ami tomay bhalobashi*' and comfort with expressing the same meaning in its English translation 'I love you'. The significant cultural politics to be noted is that Anandita's discomfort with the discourse of *prem* does not lie in its English translation as in its vernacular expression. Such an instance is a confirmation of the internalization of a trans-national hegemonic discourse of intimacy, particularly its orientalist 'politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 1994) and the power, discourse and knowledge of "the West and the rest" (Hall, 1992). What can be de-constructed in her text is the traditional/past/rural/East as the other of a truly modern/present/urban/West. What is forgotten in this orientalist narrative/discourse is that the very discourse of *prem* as the modern language of romantic love has been inspired by Victorian ideals of romantic conjugality with its divorce of the carnal from the emotional, to make it more sexually respectable and morally superior in relation to its 'other'.

This section on the language of intimacy illustrated the shifting politics of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ forms and practices of intimate coupling that are shaped by multiple and often contradictory colonial-national and trans-national discourses of intimacy and their associated narratives of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’. These varying processes of meaning-making within a rather heterogeneous middle-class illustrate the competing cultural politics of gender and class-culture that mediate the most ‘intimate’ practices of intimacy.

Through various cultural narratives and ethnographic observations, this chapter attempted to illustrate that expressions of intimacy are not free-floating, private or neutral but heavily imbued and invested with multiple layers of cultural significations. The so-called personal expressions that are zealously guarded by the privacy of the intimate are analyzed to be socially negotiated, culturally mediated and linguistically learnt (Hochschild, 1983; Jackson, 2006). With increasing multilingual, multi-textual cosmopolitan appropriation by the heterogeneous middle-class, what is increasingly becoming complicated though, is the cultural politics of negotiating this intimate space that is constituted by intersection of local narratives and broader cultural discourse(s). Subjects, as I have shown, continually conform, rebel, circumvent and strategically negotiate the normative in ways that make the ‘normative’-‘non-normative’, ‘past’-‘present’, ‘tradition’-‘modern’, ‘self’-‘other’; mutually co-constitutive, shifting and unstable. The processes of self reflexivity, conscious manipulation and self validation through ‘choice’-making are constrained by the internalization of the habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) which sets limits to reflexivity (Heaphy, 2007: 179; Lash, 1994, 120) through its gender and class-cultural politics of intimacy. Therefore, however

creatively meanings are constructed at the subjective levels of 'practices of intimacy'; these often inscribe structural and cultural inequalities. 'Practices of intimacy' are shaped by intersections of class, race, gender, family relations and history (Smart, 2007; Jamieson, 2011; Skeggs, 1997; Mohanty, 1991) rather than transcend these 'difference and power' towards a new 'universalization' of personal life and intimacy as Giddens' and Beck's theories of reflexive modernization have argued (Heaphy, 2007).

CHAPTER-8 CONCLUSION

Through interview-generated narratives of subjects and auto-ethnographic narrative 'texts', this research showed that the construction and meaning of heterosexual intimate relations and identities are continually negotiated and culturally contingent on relations of family, kinship, generation, gender and class specific locations and subjectivities. It illustrated the varying ways in which subjects negotiate; confirm, subvert and interrogate institutionalized heterosexuality or hetero-normativity at the inter-subjective and the intra-subjective levels of everyday practices of intimacy. Subjects' on-going negotiations that tell stories of multiple and contradictory subjectivities were analyzed to show how personal narratives of intimacy are caught up in multiple relations of power that vary across a range of conflicting and competing colonialist, nationalist and trans-nationalist discourses of race, gender, class and sexuality. Negotiations of heterosexual identities and intimacies are illustrated through 'stories' of intimate homosocial friendships, intimate coupling, courtship, conjugality and the varying gender and class specific expressions of intimacy.

The four chapters of analysis explored different dimensions of intimate relations and sought to bring out the ways in which,

- a) people assert selfhood or personhood through social relationships;
- b) men and women experience and narrate intimacy;

c) gender, class, generation, community, family and kinship shape personal intimate relations of homosociality and heterosexual coupling, of 'true' friendships and marriages of 'choice' and *pabitra prem*;

d) the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, despite its fragmented and heterogeneous nature, uphold its 'class distinction' and 'taste' by narrating a 'respectable' and 'sophisticated' 'script' of intimate rituals and language;

e) subjects conform, circumvent, subvert and challenge national and trans-national hegemonic discourses of intimacy and institutionalized heterosexuality at the inter-subjective, everyday practices and cultural imaginings of intimacy.

The following section summarizes the ideas of the four chapters of analysis.

Summary of Analyses:

Through various cultural practices, ideological constructions, and subjects' narratives of intimacy:

- a) The first chapter analyzed the processes of constructing and negotiating heterosexual identity through negotiating masculinities and illustrated how middle-class men experience, practice and narrate intimacy. The chapter showed that everyday relations of male friendships are classed, gendered, communalized and serve a political purpose of patriarchal nation-building through the fusion of family/kinship practices and practices of homosocial fraternity/brotherhood. The power and vulnerability of the 'liberating' discourse of male homosocial intimacy that shape and are shaped by the discourses of heterosexual coupling are shown

to confirm, subvert and reproduce the cultural constructions of hegemonic masculinity at the inter-subjective level of everyday interaction, gender performance and gender accountability. Narrative texts were deconstructed to show that construction of hegemonic masculinity necessarily depended on the discursive subordination, rejection of and distantiation from the 'other' in creation of 'a circle of legitimacy' around the self. This paradoxical nature of masculine self-making which depended on an 'other' and simultaneously rejected it; brought out the mutual co-constitution of self and other; of homosociality and homosexuality and the multiple codes of hegemonic masculinity including the competing meanings and practices of 'real' heterosexual masculinity. Masculinity in this sense was shown to be constituted simultaneously at the level of structural, institutional, experiential, embodied and discursive.

- b) The second chapter analyzed the processes of constructing and negotiating heterosexual identity through negotiating femininities and illustrated how middle-class women experience, practice and narrate intimacy. Like the previous chapter, it showed that femininity as an object of knowledge is an ongoing accomplishment of interaction-specific accountability and cultural performances of femininity/womanhood. Through different stories of female homosociality, the chapter illustrated that women's experiences of femininity are both collective as a gender and also heterogeneous. These experiences were shown to be socially and discursively constituted by an inter-play of the subject's generation, class, culture, profession and relation to the patriarchal mode of production. This specific positionality and subjectivity was then shown to have consequences on

how participants gave meaning to their power in terms of their negotiation with hetero-normativity and of the cultural mandates/expectations of womanhood within the family, community and nation. Through appreciation of culturally contingent positionality and meanings of femininity, the chapter brought out the necessity to appreciate 'situated knowledge' of women's agencies and subjectivities that emerge through continual negotiation and 'bargain with patriarchy'. By situating women's narratives within colonial and post-colonial male hegemonic discourse, the chapter showed how women strategically circumvent and challenge both national and trans-national discourses of femininity and the social and discursive construction of the *bhadramahila*. It finally illustrated the potential possibility of homo-erotic bondings within female homosociality that critique hetero-normativity but does not lie outside its imperatives.

- c) The third chapter analyzed the processes of negotiating hetero-normativity through negotiating heterosexual coupling and illustrated how gender, class, generation shape and give meaning to heterosexual courtship, coupling and conjugality. Building on the analysis of the construction of heterosexual identities of masculinities and femininities, it analyzed how such identities come to bear upon the meaning and practices of heterosexual coupling. It illustrated that subjects' ongoing negotiations of coupling, courtship and conjugality at the inter subjective levels, tell stories of multiple narratives of 'progressive', 'modern' and 'traditional' forms and practices of intimacy that cut across conflicting and contradictory discourses of colonialism, nationalism and trans-nationalism. Such

illustrations showed that it is not possible to rigidly categorize subjects in terms of 'modern' generation as opposed to the 'traditional' generation, and subjectivities in terms of powerful/powerful and powerless/passive. Instead, heterosexual intimate practices must be seen as diverse and competing heterosexualities over a monolithic, trans-historical heterosexuality. Cross-generational narratives of coupling illustrated that cultural idealizations of heterosexual intimacy overlap with the cultural idealizations of the family and re-inscribe the structural and cultural inequalities of gender, generation and class that reproduce and amend the imperatives of hetero-normativity.

- d) The fourth chapter analyzed the processes of expressing heterosexual intimacy through negotiating the *bhadralok* 'distinction' and illustrated that personal expressions of intimacy are socially ordered, culturally learned and linguistically mediated. By showing, how 'personal' 'scripting' of intimacy is intervened by the intersection of gender, class and race, this chapter brought out the mutual co-constitution of personal and political, self and society, subjectivity and discourse. The chapter showed how nineteenth century colonial constructions of gender and class respectability were still intertwined with contemporary hegemonic codes of *bhadralok* 'distinction'. It illustrated *bhadrasamaj's* vested interest in upholding *bhadra* and *ruchishonmoto* 'script' of intimacy and brought out subjects' everyday inter-subjective negotiation, confirmation, circumvention and subversion of these hegemonic codes of classed and gendered intimacy. It also showed that in these processes of negotiation, hegemony is a contested terrain within a rather fragmented, heterogenous middle-class that is continually struggling to

distinguish, multi-textually and through shifting significance of economic, cultural and symbolic capital; the legitimate distinguished possessors- the *abhijato bhadralok*, from the pretentious challengers loosely understood as the 'new middle-class'. In this, the chapter recognized post-colonial 'hybrid' expressions of intimacy in which self and other are mutually co-constituted and critiqued a claimed essentialized notion of self and its naturalized superiority. By analyzing multiple and contradictory expressions and practices of intimacy, and by politicizing the 'intimate' character of 'intimate' marriage rituals and 'intimate' language; it problematized the categories of 'modern', 'traditional', 'secular', 'religious', 'middle-class', and 'respectable' intimacy by showing that their meanings and practices are shifting and hence open to reflexive negotiations although within the structural and cultural limits of one's 'habitus'.

Through analyzing multiple subjectivities and practices of intimacy that vary across a range of conflicting and contradictory discourses and by illustrating that personal expressions of intimacy are mediated by structural positions and subjective meanings of gender, class, family, kinship and generation; my research critiques and nuances various theoretical positions and thus contributes to the academic debates on not only intimate relations and identities, but also to academic discourses of reflexive sociology, post-coloniality, post-colonial-feminism, post-structural and post-modern deconstruction, with which the sociology of the research question is intertwined. It is this kind of interconnection between theory and the empirical that is central to sociological analysis and the furthering of theoretical projects.

Research Contribution: Theoretical and Epistemological:

My analyses of the research interrogate Beck and Gernsheim's (1992, 1995) and particularly Giddens' (1991, 1992) theories of reflexive modernization and their associated claims of a universalized globalization, individualization and de-traditionalization. Empirical instances of intimacy within contemporary post-colonial Bengal show that the theories of reflexive modernization over exaggerate unbounded agency of unbridled individuals, fail to appreciate specific socio-cultural connectedness of personal lives (Smart, 2007) that are, in fact, embedded within 'meaning-constitutive traditions' (Gross, 2005), structural and cultural relations of family, kinship, gender, generation (Jamieson, 1998, 1999, 2011), and embodied class-culture through 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984). By adapting Bourdieu's concept of the habitus and class distinction within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, I show how notions of class-cultural respectability and its social accountability within an already fragmented Bengali middle-class culture, set structural and cultural limits on the 'reflexivity' of social action and interaction and thus problematize unbounded 'reflexivity' as espoused by the theory of reflexive modernization (Lash, 1994: 120; Heaphy, 2007: 179).

The research illustrates how different practices of intimacies like modern female homosociality that, in fact, dates back to a traditional practice of '*shoi patano*' (formation of intimate friendship between women), can engender intimate disclosure and reflexive narratives of self that strategically circumvent and subvert the cultural mandates of compulsory heterosexual coupling. This analysis critiques Giddens' theory that 'pure relationship', 'confluent love' and 'plastic sexuality', associated with a 'transformation of intimacy' within late-modernity, are the only and universalized bases for reflexivity,

selfhood and intimate disclosure. By illustrating that subjectivities produced under conditions of social, cultural and structural imperatives of the family, kinship, community, class and gender; can, in fact, sometimes develop different but quite strong sense of *shwattya* or selfhood like that of Manjir and also resist hetero-normativity to create a sense of reflexive selfhood through subversive imagination, like that of Pushpa; this research re-conceptualizes 'tradition' or generally power as not merely restrictive but also productive (Foucault, 1990: 95). Thus, it interrogates whether 'de-traditionalization' associated with the erasure of family, class, gender, and kinship ties is the only condition for a reflexive narrative of self. This interrogation of tradition as necessarily oppressive and antithetical to reflexivity and selfhood contributes to the academia of post-coloniality and its feminism by opening up multiple ways of conceptualizing agency, power, resistance and subjectivity. By appreciating 'situated knowledge' within which subjects give meaning to heterosexual identities and practices of intimacies, this research empirically grounds the conceptualization of reflexivity and opens up multiple possibilities and limitations of practising and envisioning reflexivity and reflexive ordering of self-narratives. By this it not only offers a reflexivity of 'reflexivity' but offers a chain of reflexivity, that is, a reflexivity of reflexivity of reflexivity. In this chain, no reflexivity is ever final. Instead, it is continually negotiated under varying material, social, cultural, institutional and discursive conditions.

The research also critiques Giddens' cross-culturally monolithic 'narrative of self' (1992: 75) associated with his claims for "new universalizing tendencies and commonalities in experience" (Heaphy, 2007: 70) and 'transformation of intimacy', in which there are only 'we' and no 'others' (Giddens, 1991: 27). This research within a context of post-

coloniality academically necessitates Euro-centric modernist sociology and also sociology of reflexivity to reflect upon whose Narrative and Self is represented in their narratives (Heaphy, 2007: 176), and who can speak for whom (Spivak, 1987). This requires modernist sociology both within and beyond Bengal to be reflexively self-critical about its 'enlightened' nationalist and orientalist discourses of 'progress', 'reason', 'truth' that legitimates the superiority of self, and inevitably creates an 'other' in which both the self and other are homogenized. By contextualizing with post-colonial Bengal, the theoretical insights from post-structuralism and post-colonial feminism which help deconstruct the grand narratives of modernity and the globalized narratives of reflexive modernity, the research brings out the central importance of power, difference, otherness (Heaphy, 2007: 178-180) and 'differences *within* difference' (Heaphy, 2007: 176) in shaping personal lives, heterosexual identities and intimacies. The thesis brings within sociology a critique of orientalist, modernist, nationalist and patriarchal sociology that was highly called for within sociology as a discipline and within sociology of Bengal, in particular. Also, by emphasizing the academic necessity for studying intimate relations and identities, particularly by focusing on dimensions of their *processes* and *negotiations*, this research contributes to the sociology of Bengal, hitherto unexplored subjects of study and their everyday interactional dynamism.

Combined with an appreciation that the discursive can have socially grounded material effects and that gender can be a product of structural hierarchy (Jackson, 2001: 285), my research employs the post-modern and the post-colonial in the way these re-orient feminist theory by speaking for the hitherto marginalized 'other' (Spivak, 1987). Binary oppositions between 'us' and 'them' seem to be fundamental to all linguistic and

symbolic systems and to the production of meaning itself (Hall, 1992: 279). Thus, rather than suppressing the multiple, contradictory and heterogeneous discourses of nationalism, colonialism, and trans-nationalism that continually constructs a putative dichotomy between 'self' and 'other', 'us' and 'them', 'West' and 'East'; (Mohanty, 1991; Hall, 1992), this research of intimate heterosexual identities and relations within post-colonial Bengal brings out the cultural politics of the dichotomy and eventually critiques it by illustrating the mutual co-constitutiveness of the 'self' and the 'other'.

The significant contribution of this research to post-colonialism, however, is the ability to empirically illustrate not only how a Western, modern, male self creates its 'other' (Mohanty, 1991), but also to show how the 'other' creates its relational 'other'. This creates continually shifting identities of 'self'-'other' through shifting discourses. Through cultural contextualization of heterosexual identities and intimacies, this research illustrates subjects' continual narrativization of dualistic dichotomies of 'past' and 'present', 'tradition' and 'modern', 'rural' and 'urban', 'emotional' and 'practical', 'private' and 'public', 'Indian' and 'Western', 'Bengali' and 'non-Bengali', '*abhijato bhadralok*' and '*shadharon bhadralok*', 'progressive' and 'backward'. A deconstruction of these very dichotomies, however, illustrate that these categories are fragmented, unstable and continually discursively and historically constructed rather than coherent. Such deconstruction that shows how self and other is continually discursively and mutually co-constituted, is able to critique both the nationalistic and orientalist politics of dualistic dichotomies (Chatterjee, 1989) or the 'politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 1994) and thus critique any claimed essentialized superiority of the self in relation to the exclusion of the essentialized inferior other (Hall, 1992).

In this context, by appreciating the mutual co-constitution of the putative dichotomy between 'past' and 'present', 'tradition' and 'modernity', 'East' and 'West'; the research critiques a 'politics of time' (Banerjee, 2006), which is a colonial-modern linear notion of time and progress that universalizes a hegemonic global modernity of heterosexual identities and intimacies and/or thereby tries to establish the 'progressive' nature of such modernity. This research problematizes any linear notion of 'progress' and critiques any homogenized notion of modernity by empirically illustrating instances of multiple and 'alternative modernity' (Chakrabarty, 2002) that is built around a tension between globalization and local affiliations (Lakha, 1999). For instance, it provides illustrations of indigenization of global bourgeois ideologies of intimacy like the post-colonial adaption of colonial Victorian discourses of heterosexual romance and companionate marriage within the structural and cultural requirements of Bengali kinship system and joint family (Majumdar, 2000: 124).

Post-colonial 'hybrid' practices and forms of intimacies that are common in urban Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, manifest national and trans-national narratives of intimacy and thereby problematize both the erasure of otherness and also of any essentialized notion of 'self' and 'other'. These post-colonial conditions manifest both affinity and difference within and between the colonizer and the colonized. The encounters between self and other in such contexts are shown to often engender situations of 'cultural hybridity' and a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1991). This 'third space' conforms neither to an 'authentic' cultural tradition nor to a universalized, homogeneous, modernity (Chatterjee, 1989). It suggests what I term a 'cultural politics of ambivalence' which appreciates contradictions and multiplicity both within and between self and other, and appreciates

the continuous discursive construction of heterosexual identities and intimacies. This appreciation of multiplicity both within and between the global and the local resists homogenization of men's and women's experiences of masculinities and femininities, and is able to appreciate multiple and often competing cultural narratives of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in relation to practices of intimacy that are gendered, raced, and classed. The tensions among these discourses and subjectivities are then shown to open up spaces for subverting and disrupting the discursive regime that construct the hegemonic narratives of 'tradition 'modernity' and their associated politics of time, space and people.

By contextually applying the centrality of 'power and difference' that lies at the heart of Bourdiueu's and Wacquant's (1992) vision of 'reflexive' sociology (Heaphy, 2007: 178-179); and the deconstructive spirit of post-structuralism, post-colonial history and feminism within a sociology of heterosexual identities and intimacies, this research problematizes the 'reflexive' nature of reflexive modernization, reflexive narrative of self, the reconstructivist theories of modernity and the sociology of reflexivity it promotes (Heaphy, 2007: 15). This problematizing of the claims of 'reflexivity', through the recognition of the central importance of power, difference and otherness, in any form of knowledge production, theoretically and epistemologically contribute to criticality and continuing debates within and outside of the discipline of sociology. This research suggests some possible although not exhaustible bases of self-criticality:

- a) recognition of power, difference and otherness even within the most 'personally intimate' and 'objective'

- b) deconstruction of both the 'self' and the 'other' and an appreciation of its mutual co-constitutiveness
- c) cross-disciplinary academic dialogues that critique the notion of 'pure' sociology and its superiority viz-a-viz 'other' modes of knowing through post-colonial history, post-colonial feminism and post-structuralism that, in fact, share academic concerns with sociology and its critical spirit.

In this vein of self-criticality, I am therefore aware that even this research's narrations of heterosexual identities and intimacies that employ auto-ethnography to reflexively dissolve the dichotomy between researcher and researched, are still mediated by varying relations of power and difference (Heaphy, 2007: 5) like researcher's subjectivity, positionality within 'home', and the discursive and material conditions of its knowledge production (Plummer, 1983; Steier, 1991). Moreover, a research on intimacy that required a certain intimate space between the researcher and the researched was often ethnographically challenging in terms of gaining insights into stories that were 'too intimate' and paradoxically difficult to share with an 'intimate' person. Also, a researcher's intimacy with the culture s/he is researching can be a research strength but also a weakness. It requires a continual reflexive self-introspection and a balance between immersion into the culture and also a distance from it in order to look at its familiar anew. Reflexively aware of these epistemological challenges, my research does not claim to have exhausted all stories of heterosexual identities and intimacies within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* that is itself heterogeneous and fragmented in terms of differences between and within gender, generation and class-culture imagination and embodiments. This self-introspective criticality arguably contributes both to a reflexive

sociology (Heaphy, 2007: 177-181) and a reflexive methodology (Heaphy, 2007: 44-47) within and beyond Bengal, India.

In fact, epistemologically and ontologically committed to the significance of inter-subjective interactions and their localized negotiations of broader discourses through everyday narrative story telling(s), I argue that there are stories of intimacy rather than 'The Big Story'. Moreover, the requirement of one single big overarching story of any research is a disciplinary/disciplining imperative of a modernist regime. The power/knowledge that any modernist regime engenders, and is engendered by, is simultaneously colonial, patriarchal and heteronormative. My research's spirit of deconstruction and reflexivity has emphatically critiqued and nuanced this very idea of grand narrative and its modernist politics. Thus I conclude with an appreciation of emerging local narrative(s) of intimacy that are definitely intertwined with broader discourses of gender, class, race and their intersectionality, but in no way reducible to one big grand discourse or narrative of heterosexuality.

Subjects's personal narratives of even the most intimate of relations have been shown to thrive on multiple and contradictory power relations, competing intimacies and their competing narratives within and across class, gender and race. This interweaving structural and cultural politics of class, gender and race into so called 'personal' intimate spaces, illustrate important theoretical insights that build on but move beyond the sociological understanding of heterosexuality or intimate relations alone. They shed light on an intersectional socio-cultural politics of class, gender and racial categories that is particularly pertinent within a post-colonial context. The significant analyses of my research that have risen from local cultural narratives within my field, and from a critical

dialoguing with existing scholarship on the subject of my research, have contributed not only to sociology but also to anthropology, cultural studies, post-colonial history and post-colonial feminism through the appreciation of:

a) Intersectionality:

Intimate relations and personal lives are continually classed, gendered and raced. Also, classes are raced, and gender and sexuality, continually raced and classed. The people of the Bengali *bhadrasamaj* primarily referred to as the *bhadralok* (translated as respectable **men**), are constructions of heavy gendered codes, as can be inferred through its obvious gendered reference. This gendered *bhadrasamaj* and its *bhadralok*, in addition, are also products of the English-Bengali racial encounter and its colonial imperative. The construction of the *bhadramahila*, in particular, as my research has shown, is highly bound by male hegemonic discourses of a patriarchal colonial master and an indigenous nationalist patriarchy. Also, she is the 'average third world woman' who needed to be 'civilized' by the white middle-class Victorian feminine ideologies of sexuality, and 'saved' from the hands of indigenous patriarchy by white middle class feminists who already and always defined her agency and sense of oppression.

My research has acknowledged and recognized this colonial hangover in the contemporary, not so 'post' colonial times. However, it has also illustrated through specific case studies and instances, how subjects have continually negotiated with these broader discourses of class, gender and race in everyday cultural contexts. Through privileging subjects' voices, this research has demonstrated multiple ways of understanding agency, subjectivity, power and oppression without this language being

necessarily assimilated in the language of hegemonic modernity and progress or dissolved into the language of an 'authentic' cultural tradition.

The post-colonial feminist politics in my research questions the basis for the colonial politics of the saviour discourse by redefining through multiple meanings of modernity, the very notion of power and by appreciating the paradoxical nature of subject-ion. It empirically illustrates that the very idea of subjection circumscribes the possibility of a subject. Since to be brought into a subject is precisely to be regulated by it, subject-ion becomes simultaneously constructive and restrictive. Hence oppression and liberation and are rendered inextricably intertwined, and mutually co-constitutive rather than dichotomous binaries of dichotomous time (past-traditional and present-modern), place (East and West) peoples (Eastern and Western) or subjectivities (powerless victims and powerful subjects).

This intersectional analysis may have been engendered from within a specific context of urban middle-class Bengali society but it does have broader implications for post-colonial conditions and their cultural politics. This is not an attempt at generalizing across cultures from specific cultural findings such as generalizing the specific nature of agency or subjectivity that the *bhadrasamaj* has variously embodied. This is only an attempt at opening up possibilities for multiplicity and theoretically claiming through empirical research, that the very narrative of agency, power and subjectivity is not necessarily bound by a hegemonic discourse of monolithic Western modernity and hence cannot be understood through the lens of a grand, linear narrative of modernity.

b) Self-Other Reaffirmation and Cultural Stereotyping:

The Bengali middle-class people's ideologies and practices of intimacy have been shown to continually create an 'other' in order to define itself. The creation of dichotomous binaries has been particularly pertinent in the context of race, class and community. The most interesting dynamic in the creation of the other is the process of continuous internal fragmentations of categories that remain far from coherent and homogeneous. For instance, this research has shown that the politics of the construction of the self and the other occurs not only through creating dichotomies in between but also within categories and groups. Intimate sensibilities, beliefs and practices are thus distinguished between:

- Indian and Western
- Bengalis and Non-bengalis
- Middle-class Bengalis (*Bhadra*) and Lower-class Bengalis(*Abhadra*)
- *Abhijato Bhadr लोक* and *Shadharon Bhadr लोक*
- *Bonedi Bangali* and the Nouveau riche

The contribution of this analysis to the scholarship of post-colonial studies lies in appreciating the multi-layered cultural politics of the construction of self and other. My research not only demonstrates how the self creates its other but also how the other continually constructs its relative other. This engenders a never-ending discursivity of othering in which the construction of the self and the other is simultaneously made powerful and vulnerable.

c) Self-Other Destabilization and Cultural Hybridity:

Through the very relational nature of self and other discourse, and the instability at the heart of the 'self-other' construction, this research has theoretically and empirically demonstrated the continuing mutual co-constitution of the self and its other. This mutual co-constitution appreciates the existence of a 'third space' that embodies cultural hybridity but does not uphold in this hybridity; any coherent, monolithic, distinguishable category of a pure self and its pure other. The hetero-normative identities of masculinities and femininities are expressed in the third space through potential homoeroticism belied in their homosocial ties. These homosocial-homoerotic spaces simultaneously confirm and subvert institutionalized heterosexual identities of masculinity and femininity. The heterosexual coupling represents its third space through the co-constitution of the categories of tradition-modern, past-present, East-West, conformity-subversion, subject-victim, religious-secular, sexual-emotional, self-society, love marriage-arranged marriage, normative-non-normative imaginings, domestic-non-domestic, material-spiritual, inner-outer, private-public. This co-constitutive third space located in the research contributes to the scholarship of anthropology and post-colonial studies in the way it interrogates essentialized meanings and any claims for inherent superiority of the self over the inherent inferiority of the other.

Although intersectionality and discursivity of self and other are not completely new theoretical insights, what is new about these dimensions of knowledge is its socio-cultural contextualization within the specific empirical field of the urban post-colonial Bengali *bhadrasmaj* in India. What is also new about the project is to examine the

various power dynamics involved in the most intimate of relations that are intertwiningly gendered, classed and raced. Without making any claims of having produced 'The Big Story' of heterosexual intimacy within the Bengali *bhadrasamaj*, I confess on the contrary, that further research within the field will open up further areas to explore and understand. This research has sought to open up only some areas of intimate relations and some areas of its cultural politics. In tune with the spirit of deconstruction, I invite deconstructions of my deconstructive analysis, keep open to hearing many more stories and story-tellings of intimacy and always prepared to reflect upon the limits of my reflexivity seen and shown through a different eye.

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APPENDIX

Table-1: Brief Biography of Male Participants of this Research

Name	Age	Generation	Occupation	Marital Status	Mode/s of Interview	Family Sets
Nirmal Bhattacharya	76	First	Retired government service professional	Married	Individual, Couple	A
Ronjon Bose	71	First	Retired writer and Journalist	Widower	Individual	B
Ashok Das	60	Second	Retired Government Service Professional	Married	Individual, Couple	F
Dilip Sarkar	60	Second	Retired Teacher at School	Married	Individual, Couple	D
Alok Chatterjee	56	Second	Senior Editor in a news corporation	Married	Individual	C
Anirban Bose	45	Second	Doctor	Married	Individual, Couple	B
Sujit Dhar	58	Second	Civil Engineer	Married	Individual	
Shubinoy Roy	57	Second	Electrical Engineer	Married	Individual, Couple	E
Bidhan Bhattacharya	52	Second	Doctor	Married	Individual, Couple	A
Raj Banerjee	29	Third	Marketing Manager	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual, Couple, Group	
Arjun Ghosh	29	Third	Software Engineer	Married	Individual, Group	
Boudhayan Roy	31	Third	Lawyer	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	J
Rohan Sen	25	Third	Student	Single	Individual	
Siddhartha Roy	26	Third	Research Student	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual, Couple, Group	
Radeep Roy	29	Third	Mechanical	Married	Individual,	K

			Engineer		Couple, Group	
Sudip Jana	29	Third	Doctor	Single	Individual	
Udayan Chatterjee	29	Third	Lecturer of Sociology	Married	Individual, Couple	C
Soumya Bose	24	Third	Student	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual, Couple	B
Aditya Basu	35	Third	Journalist	Single	Individual	
Arko Sen	35	Third	Lecturer of History	Married	Individual	
Aniket Ghosh	30	Third	Manager at an NGO	Married	Individual, Couple	H
Ayan Dasgupta	26	Third	Operations Manager	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual	
Kaushik Ghosh	29	Third	Bank Manager	Married	Individual	
Rahul Dutta	27	Third	Businessman	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	L
Ronojoy Bhattacharya	21	Third	Student	Single	Individual, Group	A
Sounak Bhowmick	42	In between Second and Third	Musician	Married	Individual	
Ishan Roy	42	In between Second and Third	Musican	Married	Individual	
Shantanu Kar	41	In between Second and Third	Research scholar	Single	Individual	

Table-2: Brief Biography of Female Participants of this Research

Name	Age	Generation	Occupation	Marital Status	Mode/s of Interview	Family Sets
Hashi Bhattachaya	71	First	Home-maker	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	A
Pushpa Das	73	First	Home-maker	Widow	Individual	
Mita Bhattacharya	52	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	A
Mala Sarkar	55	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	D
Mili Roy	55	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	E
Dipti Ganguly	55	Second	Doctor	Married	Individual	
Gopa Roy	53	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual, Group	
Gayatri Das	54	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual, Couple	F
Sangeeta Boral	54	Second	Business	Married	Individual, Couple	
Shikha Sen	53	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual	
Aloka Ghosh	54	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual	
Shanta Segupta	55	Second	Home-maker	Married	Individual, Group	G
Sanhita Das	26	Third	Research student of Economics	Single	Individual	
Rimi Bhowmick	23	Third	Student	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual	
Sunanda Ghosh	28	Third	School teacher and social activist	Married	Individual, couple	H
Manjir Chatterjee	29	Third	Lecturer in Sociology	Married	Individual, Couple	C
Priya Sengupta	27	Third	Research student of English Literature	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual, Couple	G
Gouri Ganguly	24	Third	Student	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual, Couple	I
Nabamita Das	29	Third	Research Scholar of	Unmarried, in a	Individual, Couple, Group	

			Sociology	relationship		
Chandrika Podder	23	Third	Student	Unmarried, in a relationship	Individual	
Tanya Roy	29	Third	IT professional	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	J
Suparna Roy	29	Third	IT professional	Married	Individual, Couple, Group	K
Anandita Dutta	27	Third	IT professional	Married	Individual, Couple Group	L
Subarna Kar	42	In between Second and Third	Teacher and Education Manager	Married	Individual	
Dalia Bose	42	In between Second and Third	Teacher and Education Manager	Married	Individual, Coupe	B
Arna Ganguly	43	In between Second and Third	Teacher and Education Manager	Married	Individual	I
Dola Banerjee	42	In between Second and Third	Advertising	Married	Individual	
Aparna Bhattacharya	61	In between First and Second	Teacher and writer	Married	Individual	I

Notes:

- **Participants from the same family are categorised by Alphabets e.g. Nirmal Bhattacharya, Hashi Bhattacharya, Bidhan Bhattacharya, Mita Bhattacharya and Ronojoy Bhattacharya are all from the same family and therefore labelled as 'A'.**
- Aparna Bhattacharya is the mother of Arna Ganguly who is married and is mother to Gouri Ganguly. Thus the three subjects do not belong to the same family in the patrilocal system of heterosexual marriage but in this research has been understood to belong to one family in terms of their maternal generational relationship.