Through Her Lens

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Abstract

This paper will look at the professional lives of women who work as cinematographers in various media industries. It will focus on what cinematography as a profession means to them and what it entails to be a part of a "culture" industry. All of this is analysed in the backdrop of women's work and labour and the changes brought in by digitisation and neoliberalisation of the industry (Ganti 2012; McRobbie 2015). The major points of discussion are the informal and passion-driven nature of work and the effects and contestations of digitisation of the field. This is used to foreground the changing nature of the profession itself and its effect on women. Lastly, the question of collectivisation of cinematographers is looked at from a critical perspective, comparing the work focused-individualistic approach of the Indian Woman's Cinematographer's Collective (IWCC) with that of a more equity-based, active approach of the Women in Cinema Collective (WCC).

Theoretical arguments are backed by lived experiences of five women who are currently working in the Hindi film industry as cinematographers. Three of them received their technical training from one of the two national film institutes, while two had graduated from a mass communication institute. All women were at different stages of their career at the time of their interviews and thus were able to reflect on their past and futures with respect to their careers.

Keywords: cinematography, women, camera, film industry, culture industry, neoliberalisation, work and labour, digitisation

The Industry: A Background

In 1998, Bollywood was accorded industry status, legitimising its output and validating its function in the country's economy (Ganti 2012). Estimated at INR 180 billion in 2019, the Hindi film

industry is projected to reach a gigantic net worth of INR 260 billion by 2024.[1] While the industry has proven its economic potential, issues like gender disparity persist. In 2016, The Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, in association with UN Women, published a report citing a highly skewed gender ratio behind the camera of 6.2 men to 1 woman in the Hindi film industry (Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper 2014). The ratio of male directors to female directors stood at 10:1 (ibid.). While the skewness is apparent enough, the report gave a number to a previously nebulous estimate.

With the coming of economic liberalisation and the rise of the middle class, employment opportunities for urban upper-class and upper-caste women opened up. Accessibility to global media and to mid-level jobs looking for semi-skilled labour led to an increasing number of urban young women stepping out of the domestic domain to work. Similarly, there has been a slow increase in the number of women behind the scenes as well. Tejaswini Ganti, in her book *Producing Bollywood* (2012), traces this increase in the number of female crew members on Bollywood sets, which, according to Rai (2014), also paralleled a departure from the "postcolonial socialist" in film narratives. She recalls her exchange with Madhuri Dixit, the then Hindi film stalwart, in 1996 by virtue of being the only other woman on set. She compares this to the early and mid-2000s and finds that the presence of women as assistants and associates was common on film sets. However, even in 2020, the inflow seems to be bottlenecking to mid-level positions and limited to certain above-the-line sectors, none of which have any decision-making capacities.

Cinematography, one of the key positions on set, is increasingly perceived as lucrative by film-school aspirants. A first-generation male aspirant shared that many first-generation film-making aspirants prefer to study technical courses. Even if they eventually wish to enter direction, they see the economic stability and steady workflow as one spends more time in the industry as a positive of technical fields. While all key roles in film-making require training, technical trades require a sounder educational background than what might be required for direction, production, or script-writing. This need for education gives cinematography what one might call institutional validity (Mazumdar 2018) a sense of legitimacy in terms of being perceived as a profession (as compared to some other specialisations of film-making). As Van Ness (2005), when talking about the ubiquity of film education in modern times says, "Given the gap between aspiration and opportunity, film

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[1] As projected by the Statista Research Department. Available from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/235837/value-of-the-film-industry-in-india/ [Accessed: 26th November 2021].

education has often turned out to be little more than an expensive detour on the road to doing something else." In India, it has been hard to differentiate film-making from Bollywood, and Bollywood has had a hard time differentiating itself from its nepotism, glamour, and general lack of respectability. According to Ganti (2012), the pursuit of respectability is still a "state of becoming" since had the industry indeed achieved this status, it would not still be claiming to have done so. Further, she explicates that the entry point into all film-crew positions is to act as assistants: assistant cinematographer, assistant director, etc., which requires one to be physically present and available, more or less shadowing the crew day in and out. This respectability is not just in terms of chastity and morality; it is also about the myth of un-intellectual nature of film and media work, which assumes that only academia can theorise, criticise, and be reflexive about production (Jackson 2014), given its proximity with manual labour and lack of institutionalisation (Mazumdar 2018).

Digitisation

Digital intervention in films started creeping in around the 1990s. In 1999, George Lucas incorporated digitally shot footage in his *Star Wars: Episode 1* (Prince 2004). This had huge implications on the global film industry, from how movies were made to who could make movies. According to Strachan (2014), in reference to the music industry, there have been two strands of changes owing to the digital revolution. First, barriers to the traditional entry points are reduced and multiple new segues are forged as entry points into these ghettoised professions. Second, the market available for diverse content creators becomes wider and the reach is manifold of that available through the traditional medium. This applies to the camera department as well. With the proliferation of digital options and affordability, newer content and diverse content creators are fast emerging.

The first major shift that Strachnan (2014) pointed out, i.e., accessibility, has had implications for cinematography to a great extent in that cameras became lighter, the complications with developing film stock were eliminated, and, most importantly, digital cameras became an everyday tool. In terms of camera work, Stephen Prince (2004) traces the history of digitisation. He looks at the shift in Bazinian conception of image-making, the cinematographer's role as the sole image creator when monitoring of what was being captured on the screen was not possible, and the digital manipulation of full feature length in *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2000). While Prince never really

comments on the question of how it affects labour, he traces the nature of work and how it has changed over the years since the 1980s in Hollywood. There have been clear changes in the aesthetics and the film look (the grain and noise which is almost eliminated in digital) that is highly sought after by purists, but there is also an implied change in the position of the camera person itself. As he puts it,

> *The cinematographer, in the strictest sense, is the person who creates the image on film by controlling light, color, and composition in order to help the director achieve his or her vision. Using traditional methods, a cinematographer controls color by manipulating light levels on the set and costumes or by using colored gels over the light sources. In doing so, the cinematographer is creating the image in camera. He or she does so by controlling the image variables light, shadow, contrast, color at the point of exposure of a camera negative… The digital turn in cinema has greatly changed all of this. In regard to color timing and the control of many other image variables, digital methods now offer filmmakers greatly enhanced artistic powers compared with traditional photo-mechanical methods.* (Prince 2004: 26)

The influx of digital technology has made manipulation possible even after capturing the image to the extent that the pressure of creating images "in-camera" is considerably lower than in the era of film. While this has multiple implications in terms of aesthetics, the process of image-making and the role of the cinematographers itself has come under scrutiny following digital interventions. In the current context, it also signifies the downplaying of risks associated with the profession. One can posit, as the amount of control the cameraperson had over the image creation reduced, more and more women joined the profession. Aligning with the argument that employing women was always considered a risk. As this risk went down, it became more acceptable to have women dabble with cameras. All participants conceded on having felt like a liability, being treated as a risk by employers. Nisha, an established director of photography (DoP), currently working in the Mumbai film industry points out:

> *So, whether a man or a woman, it is difficult to meet people if you have no contacts, but for guys its easier, first because [while] a woman has to prove her worth, a guy will [only] be doubted when he screws up. So if a film student comes out, they'll be like, "You're from FTII,* tumhe kuch to ata hoga *(you must know something)", till he goes and majorly screws up, but if a female film student comes out, it will be, "What have you done, let's see some of your work". So, till they don't have confidence in you, they won't employ you, so it's like a vicious circle—it's almost as if they don't want to risk ruining a project by hiring a woman.*

Having worked on two back-to-back editions of a Netflix show Nisha also talks about the reach of web content, an offshoot of media digitisation. This reinforces Strachnan's second point about digitisation, the widening scope of audience engagement. While talking about her web work, Nisha said:

> *It was a pleasant surprise. I had never got the kind of response I got for my web series because the reach was far more. The convenience of watching something trumps having to go out and watch things in a theatre, so people far and beyond had seen it. The film people have a lot of permutations and combinations: people don't like an actor, they don't like a director, then your family and friends may watch it but others won't make the effort of going and seeing it,* "Choti film hai, TV pe ayegi to dekh lenge *(it's a small film we will watch it on TV)," so a lot of your work goes amiss, unless it's like a supremely big Salman–Sharukh film where, irrespective of anything, people are going to land up and watch it. Sometimes certain cinema gets missed because of that, so just the reach of the OTT platform was overwhelming, which is why I went ahead and did the second season. There were no limits on what one could do creatively.*

As Nisha puts it, the audience reach accorded by the digital medium tackles the issue of lack of female role models to some extent. Comparing one's access to films made by female film-makers in 2001 to that of now will prove the point. Thus, when young girls are able to access content made by other women, they can aspire to create content too. In terms of one's career, given that film-making is a two-way street, the success of a film is not solely based on how good a film it is, but also on how the audiences perceive it at a point in time. This is directly related to profitability and indirectly related to how profitable the technician is to the next producer who hires the technician.

While digitisation has in a sense democratised film-making in some senses, as Ganz and Khatib (2006: 26) summarise a counterpoint, "The digital allows the representation of multiple yet fractured points of view, which gives a sense of privileged yet partial access." Digitisation has led to massive shifts in how labour on sets is viewed and has transformed into a dispensable commodity, given the casual nature and marginally greater supply (Casilli 2016). This is also foreshadowed by meagrely paid internships, irregular jobs as assistants, and apprenticeships (Casilli 2016, Wing-Fai et al 2015). Further, as problematised by McRobbie (2015) is the practice and romanticisation of "working" into the night and the diluting boundaries between personal and professional lives. Nadiya, the DoP on a major feature in 2017 and a web series in 2018, and a

mother of one, shared that her producer friend who had two children had installed baby cameras in their cribs and was used to monitoring them from her office. While this gives one a sense of freedom, flexibility, and autonomy, it is also pushing individuals, especially women into a privileged and self-chosen position of precarity (Lorey 2015). Regular jobs are done away with, the nine-to-five structures looked down upon, passion has quickly become the new driving force over the earlier sought-after stability, and choice has become the new benchmark of employment.

Duffy and Schwartz (2017) claim that this new influx of web-based work has an increasing number of women due to certain sought-after criteria like multitasking, round-the-clock availability, emotional management at work, and flexibility. While this has led to increasing feminisation of labour on production sets, it is also accompanied by an increased sense of precarity, parallel to which one has to constantly prove one's worth and relevance to one's employer.

However, for good or bad, this has led to an increase in the number of women on set, either through the traditional pathway of film schools or through their ability to work up through the ranks of interns, assistants, and eventually head of departments. Nadiya remarks at this increased visibility:

> *Each department has more women, not just camera, camera of course has been like this for a while. Now if you just work on a set and you don't see a girl in the camera department, you will be surprised because there are so many girls and not just on the operation side, but even girls in the grips, rigging the heavy ginny set-ups, so girls are there everywhere.*

The entry of women at mid-level positions in cinematography is also an indication to a possible feminisation of the profession and the industry itself (Duffy and Schwartz 2017). As the nature of the industry is changing, digital technology is providing more and more opportunities for content creation and more and more cheap labour is required. Therefore, more and more women are employed. According to Duffy and Schwartz (2017), this feminisation has less to do with structural changes in the industry like the decrease in masculine standards of work or better work conditions for women. Rather, it is correlated with cultural and economic devaluation of work. However, it is yet unclear and opinions are divided as to whether it's the cultural and economic devaluation of

work itself that lets women enter or the other way around, where women's entry leads to the devaluation. While talking about science being viewed as a masculine subject Chanana (2007, 591) argues, "*Moreover, subjects are considered masculine not because of numerical preponderance of men but it is the other way around, i.e., science is viewed as masculine and therefore, more men take*". One can argue in this light that by virtue of more women entering the profession, there is a chance that it might be viewed as less masculine, if not feminised.

This is also coupled with a new and wider set of expectations from employees—criteria such as informality, emotional management, self-directedness etc.—become a part of the job. However, to dismiss in a blanket fashion the entry of women in these fields as an absolute result of cultural devaluation or digitisation and downplaying their individual efforts would be unfair. Rather, it would be of service to take a step back from an absolutist position and look at the multiple factors at play.

Passion and Precarity

One of the most important aspects separating cinematography and other above-the-line film labour from other forms of employment is the passion-driven nature of it. A common factor of various culture industries, passion is an important component for seeking employment in these professions. Very few artists have ever reported being forced into cinematography. However, the presence of this choice, to follow one's passion, is dependent on the nature and extent of economic support one can expect from their family. Only those individuals, who are not under any commitment to provide for either themselves or their family are able to avail this first step of having a "choice" (Umney and Kretsos 2015). Amrita, an early-career cinematographer and FTII alumnus currently working as an assistant DoP, when asked about the economic instability and contract-based nature of the job, points out:

> *See it's always been the case that I don't take money very seriously. Maybe it's because I come from a very stable background [and that] I don't have to support my parents financially. They have their own hospital; I don't have to make sure I earn a certain amount monthly so X amount goes to my family. But this thought has come across my mind in recent times. I did not think about it when I thought of leaving a very safe profession, so to say. It was more of an intuitive call that I had to take, otherwise it would've been a regret. When presented with an opportunity to study in one of the prime institutes in India … if I [had said] no, I*

might've regretted it all my life. That's what I thought then, but now when I think about it, I was always subconsciously aware that I did not have any financial responsibility towards my parents. The only thing that guided me was that I don't want to have any regrets [that] when given a chance, I didn't do it … That is mostly what guided me.

Amrita's opinions resonated with all of the participants. All participants reported family stability and lack of liability as far as providing for either their parents or contributing to their own family went. Adiba, who moved to Delhi after finding the professional environment in Mumbai not conducive, mentioned how she felt she had to stick with cinematography given that very few people had the opportunity to find their calling and, furthermore, the privilege to follow their calling. This lack of responsibility towards one's parents is an advantage given that it eventually translates into the ability of these women to transgress boundaries of traditional work in their upper-class setups. Family support, even if it's limited to economic support, in the early stages of one's career and later spousal support for women who decided to have children, forms an important support system for women.

Further, passion is often the justification of multiple struggles that first-generation entrants have to face while trying to make it in the industry. This is what Umney and Krestos (2015) call the "contextualisation" of struggle by professionals who have traversed through the instability and reached an economically and socially viable position, people who have "made it in the industry". A number of the current participants also shared the belief that one has to struggle to achieve their dreams. However, no consensus was reached as to what is the benchmark where struggle becomes a side effect of systemic oppression. In this light, passion is not just the fuel that provides an entry point into the profession, it is also the justification for hardships and the struggle for sustenance. This is also an offshoot of the neoliberal framework that has been a common thread of understanding the individual responsibility for making it in the industry. As Mcrobbie (2015) argues, this neoliberal thought of "passion" needs to be critiqued for what it is a "neoliberal delusion". Similarly, Rottenberg (2014: 420) argues that the end product of the neoliberal framework is the independent woman who "accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care" and, one might argue, for her failure as well. Amrita used it first to contextualise her time in film school and later to contextualise concerns regarding women's "respectability":

> *That is not the case. It depends on how you conduct yourself and not how people look at you. It is always like that in any case: in journalism, in medicine, in engineering, in film-making. It is not about how people look at you but how you project yourself, what vibes you give.*

Poorva, while talking about changing mind sets, too, takes this rhetoric of individual responsibility.

> *I think when you work hard and there's sincerity in your work, then people can't overlook what you're doing. You have to really prove it—everybody has to. As a person, you have to prove your worth. But then, there are always male chauvinists, you can't help that, and even women have that. There were few people who were ready to work with me and, in my class, we were divided into a group of five people for work, [out of] which three–four of them would really take me seriously and help me, but there were some who would not change their mind sets about me. I [told myself] at one point, "You know that I can't deal with their problems, I have to deal with mine. I don't want to change anybody, I want to do my work and more of my work, see how I improve and then let my work change their mind sets. But if I go and fight, I don't think they will change."*

While both these statements stem from different instances, both point towards a structural system where women have to strike a balance with what Anyon (1984) calls "resistance and accommodation", wherein women in situations of conflict or domination choose to resist subtly in their own right, either by owning their femininity in ways that assert their presence or by using it for subversion, however, never really translating into full-blown rebellion. For e.g., in her interview, Poorva referred to her male assistant's discomfort at seeing her menstrual blood on her clothes and she responded by engaging in a discussion with him, which, according to her, is an act of resistance on a set populated by men. However, she also engages in accommodation by making a decision that she will not engage in any activism per se, and let her work speak for itself. This accommodation is, however, not necessarily a thing to be looked down upon. Rather, it is a symptom of the structure she is a part of. The neoliberal rhetoric of individual responsibility will only be confirmed if one expects individuals like her to operate only within the purview of resistance. However, this also branches off into the debate of governmentality[2] posited by

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[2] Originally coined by Michel Foucault in the twentieth century, the Britannica Encyclopaedia defines governmentality as: "Approach to the study of power that emphasizes the governing of people's conduct through positive means rather than the sovereign power to formulate the law. In contrast to a disciplinarian form of power, governmentality is generally associated with the willing participation of the governed" (https://www.britannica.com/topic/governmentality [Accessed: 26th November 2021]).

McRobbie (2015). By giving opportunities to young women for education, professional achievement, and sexual and physical freedom, this governmentality ensures an informal contract of sorts, where women enter patriarchal institutions. However, their survival is ensured by keeping power structures intact, eventually keeping them away from forms of political activism that challenge such dynamics. It's providing women all the resources that mark freedom in a masculine society with the social contract that women will not question the neoliberal source, which eventually profits the economy and the masculine hierarchy. This leads to and fosters the post-feminist thought that a perceived sense of professional achievement and individual freedom is the ultimate realisation of feminist politics and the understanding that there is no need for more. Contesting this post-feminist realisation of choice McRobbie (2004: 261) says, "Choice is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint." Choice, in this sense, is realised for what it is: a privileged position.

The IWCC: Working with Women

The IWCC was informally set up as a WhatsApp group in 2015 by three senior women cinematographers. Independent of the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE), which otherwise looks after the needs of various factions of the industry, including cinematographers, the IWCC grew into a collective that seeks to help women and other non-cis males with professional development.

The website description reads:

> *The Indian Women Cinematographers' Collective is a forum by and for craftswomen/technicians of the film industry, based in India. We intend to make a difference in the industry through our growing numbers, and we believe this is possible only when we stand together.*

> *The Collective is also designed for contemporaries to showcase their diverse body of work. We extend our solidarity to not just our fellow craftswomen, but also to the non-cis male technicians and workers in the film industry.*

> *The world of cinematography and its allied fields, such as gaffing, grips, and assistant cinematography, is growing wider to accommodate talent. We hope to inspire girls and those breaking out of the gender binary to consider roles behind the camera as viable professions.*

We invite more from the industry and the ones just graduating from film and media schools to connect with us and be a part of the Collective.

As a group, our vision is to bring under the spotlight the calibre of our work above all else.[3]

Most of the new entrants in the field have found the collective to be helpful in terms of finding others to relate to, to find moral support, and for social identification. It is involved in conducting regular workshops and supports women cinematographers' representation outside the country, as in the case of Modhura Palit.[4] Research has shown that subscription to such collectives enhances women's access to information, confidence, self-esteem, solidarity, and access support in times of need. It provides opportunities to learn from each other, pool resources to acquire inputs and capital, receive training, and improve production techniques (Jones, Smith, and Wills 2012). Moreover, collectives like the IWCC also tackle the problem of representation and presence in industry head-on. The fact that aspiring young women can find a repository of women working as cinematographers in the industry on the IWCC website can only lend support to their decision to enter the industry.

However, the collective limits itself to enabling those who are doing "good work", not engaging with the question of the conditions in which that work is produced. Even in its statement, the unwavering and unrelenting focus on work is indicative of its refusal to deal with the underlying reasons for its very own existence. Nowhere has the collective or its members acknowledged patriarchy or the lack of women in the industry. It aspires to engage in discussions and possibilities of equality in terms of number and workflow, without acknowledging the reasons for the lack of the same.

Adiba, who was a student of Jamia and later worked at a content production company as a producer, made a career shift by moving to cinematography. Without specific technical education, Adiba decided to enter the industry based on the contacts she had made over the years as a producer. She recalls a number of horrific experiences she had over the initial period of her work, which included harassment and non-payment of work (she was compensated almost a year late). When asked why she did not seek support from the collective when she went through regarding

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[3] https://iwcc.in/about/ [Accessed: 26th November 2021].
[4] Modhura Palit became the first Indian cinematographer to win the Angenieux Special Encouragement Award at Cannes Film Festival in 2019.

her harassment, Adiba responded with doubt, wondering whether the collective would stand by her during the process, amongst other things.

This lack of critical commentary from the collective during crucial moments in the industry, whether it was #MeToo[5] or otherwise, limits its participation in helping women share and advance technical and industry-related knowledge. While this knowledge sharing is commendable and democratising as a process, the lack of a conclusive position by an important technical collective like the IWCC in the technical industry binds it in a relatively passive position.

Compared to this, the WCC, a collective based in Malayalam Film Industry has been actively engaging in dialogues about "equal spaces and equal opportunities for women" in the industry. Its website reads:

> *WCC works towards building a safe, non-discriminatory and professional workspace for women in cinema through advocacy and policy change.*
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> *WCC encourages more women to be a part of the industry through outreach initiatives for career advancement opportunities, industry support, and mentorship opportunities for its members.*
>
> *WCC showcases the creative acumen of women by curating films and bodies of work by women.*
>
> *WCC seeks to create awareness about gender bias and exploitation faced by women in film industry, both onscreen and off-screen.*
>
> *WCC promotes responsible filmmaking practices accelerating the work culture transformations required for a gender-just film industry and cinema.[6]*

The WCC takes a more active approach, while IWCC seems to be playing into the governmentality trope that McRobbie (2015) criticises. McRobbie (2015) also argues that the neoliberal focus on

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[5]Following the 2017 breakout of the #MeToo Movement in the US film industry, a similar movement precipitated in India. The history can be traced to the release of an informally compiled the List of Sexual Offenders in Academia (LoSHA) by a Dalit law student, Raya Sarkar. The veracity of the list and using the Internet as a mode of grievance redressal came under some criticism. Following this, many women came out with stories of harassment in academia, media, and the film industry.

[6] https://wccollective.org/about/ [Accessed: 26th November 2021].

the individual also indicates a move away from collectivisation and political activity. However, both the collectives are able to resist this individualistic neoliberal impulse. Moreover, rather than identifying one as depoliticised, one can argue that it "is not about less politics but about a different kind of politics altogether" (Burnham 2001; cited in Hay 2014: 307), which seems to be neoliberal in nature, by focusing on individual work rather than collective mobilisation.

According to Polletta and Jasper (2001: 298) collective identity "involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of pre-existing bonds, interests, and boundaries". This is different from a common ideological commitment. One can argue that while both collectives are based on the same collective identity—the identity of being a woman—their ideological commitments differ. Although both are arguing for a more gender-balanced industry, the WCC is asking for a safe industry, policy changes, and awareness of gender bias. The IWCC, on the other hand, is arguing for more women in the industry by simply proving that women can do as much as men can and maybe better, which is an important argument, but it does not deal with the problems women are already facing in the industry or should be wary of facing if they do decide to enter the industry.

The basic argument remains: Rather than expecting women to perform "like men", it remains to be seen what we can do to make those workplaces safer, more equitable, and inclusive, and what women can do when education is more equitable and workplaces safer.

Care Work: Women Who Can Have It All

While we were sitting and discussing how women get work based on their physical attractiveness, Nadiya gets a call. On the other end of the line is a potential house help/domestic worker. Apparently, Nadiya's last cook had to leave due to personal reasons and thus she was actively on the lookout for another one. As Nadiya she gets off the call, her four-year-old son runs up to her and asks about the Tascam kept on the floor in front of me, asking whether it is a new type of camera. Interruptions like these happen multiple times. The concern for a cook comes up again as I'm sitting at Poorva's dinner table, as she sets the plate for dinner she ordered from a local restaurant. I wonder if these concerns would have come up if I was interviewing a man or if they would've shared these concerns with me if I was a man.

Clearly, having the option of hiring a nanny or employing a domestic worker puts these women in a privileged position, but the fact remains that the unequal division of care work pervades, one might say, in a more insidious neoliberal fashion. This is also indicative of how care work is eventually passed on from woman to woman, in this case, from women who are "deemed disposable since they are neither considered strivers nor properly responsibilized" (Rottenberg 2017: 332). This also paves the way for a more class-based distribution of care work, ignoring once more the interplay of gender (Rottenberg 2017).

While economic and marginal social support from one's family came across as evident in the case of pursuing a career in cinematography at the beginning of the career trajectory, in the current sample pool, spousal support was of great importance for the older participants in terms of one's ability to choose the quality and quantity of work and the decision to have children or not. As Nisha talks about rethinking her career:

> *Now I have a four-year-old daughter, I need to reconsider the projects that I take. Up until she was little, I could just pick her up, pack her in a suitcase, and go, but now that's not possible with her school. For sure, there's a lot of rethinking one has to do, but because I have a partner [who] supports me, it makes [things] a lot easier. I'm still doing big projects, I'm still doing a lot for outdoor work, but there's a lot of balancing. Like, now that I've done a big project, I will take a break for three months, which wasn't the case earlier. Now I need to finish a project [and then] I need to space myself out, give my daughter time, so she gets four– five months with me. Of course, that's a downside for women once you have kids. I was married for five years before I had a baby. Till then, I was working [on] back-to-back [projects], and I had complete support even then, but as women—and women who want families—one does have to rethink a little bit, especially for [me and my husband]. We don't have out parents in Bombay, it's really just me and my husband. So, we need to figure out lives out in a way that he's not taking a long-term project when I'm taking [one], but that's worked out fine for us.*

Nisha also recalled how she used to take her daughter on shoots when she went back to work eight months after her birth. She points out two major aspects of working as a mother: reconsidering career options and making adjustments after having children and eventual unequal division of care work. While most participants who decided to have children did relate to having extremely supportive spouses, it eventually ended up in an unequal division of child-care responsibility. While

Nisha decided to carry around her daughter across the sets she worked on, Nadiya took a four-year break, and Fabeha reportedly decreased her frequency of work.

McRobbie (2015), while talking about what is constituted as remarkable work in academia, says:

> *The ideal career track in the academy, especially one which carried all the laurels of prizes, awards, fellowships, and a high volume of grants, seemed to have been tailored around the image of the brilliant young man untrammelled by any of the fine details of domestic life. And if the young woman was to follow this pathway and plan the right time to have a child, then when would this right time be?*

She remarks how the very successful (read: male) academics of her time had the privilege of not taking care of their own domestic needs, even their own laundry, and did not have to look after their own children. As most of them were men, had wives to look after these needs. However, this masculine understanding became the benchmark of success, in line with Bielby and Bielby's (1996) argument of men defining the rules of the game and the inability of anybody else to match up to that being marked as a failure. McRobbie posits that this unrealistic expectation of success disallows women who balance work and domestic responsibilities to be truly successful and until professional institutions do away with such narrow conceptions of what success in a given field can mean, gaps will only continue to widen.

This argument becomes rather important in the context of women working as cinematographers, given the highly "undomestic" nature of the job, which keeps women away from home, requires one to be at work at odd hours, and needs major muscle work, usually not recommended for new mothers. However, within the industry and outside, women have been hailed for "doing it all": raising children and working jobs like cinematography, without questioning why only women have to (Rottenberg 2014). As another young female cinematographer, during a brief conversation, remarked, "Oh, you should definitely talk to Nisha, she's like this superwoman! She carried her child around all through the shoot." While Nisha's achievements are arguably commendable, one cannot expect to exemplify her ability to do so, or consider it as a benchmark for "real success". There's always a possibility that another woman might choose to take a two- or three-year-long break to raise her child or might not have as illustrious a career as her, but still might be balancing both. What McRobbie is suggesting here is a critical examination of what we consider to be exemplary and, in this case, Superman-like achievement.

While most women reported tailoring their personal lives according to the demands of their jobs, what remains to be done is tailoring jobs according to the requirements of other genders. Provisions for childcare, on and off-set, making film institutes safer for women, etc. require structural changes from within the industry—changes that might only materialise when women are seen as a legitimate part of the workforce and not a cheaper alternative to male technicians. Further, one cannot ignore the number of women who work as assistants, interns, designers, and in other below-the-line positions on sets while having such conversations. Inclusivity in any industry cannot be one-time act of benevolence: it has to be a constant and conscious struggle for improvement.

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