

# The Social Enterprise

Fusing Discourses of Business and Development in  
Delhi, India.



Karoline Øisteinsdatter Opåsen

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the Master degree,

Department of Social Anthropology

University of Bergen

30.11.2016





*My dear mother,*

*22.02.1953-22.11.2013*

*For introducing me to this world.*

*This is for you.*



# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	VII
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Research Purpose .....	2
Chapter Overview .....	4
Theoretical Landscape and Theoretical Overview .....	5
Methodological Reflections .....	10
Ethical Considerations .....	13
Introducing the Centre.....	14
The Kamana Caste and Conventional Household Cyclicity .....	16
Kamana: A “Criminal Tribe”?.....	17
Hierarchies.....	19
A Note on Gender .....	21
<b>2. The Social Enterprise: A Fused Discourse .....</b>	<b>23</b>
“The Secret Plan” and the Forming of Change by Hand .....	25
Gifts, but no Charity .....	26
Bringing Tablets to the “Needy” .....	27
The Obligations of the Gift .....	30
Business but no Profit, Gifts but no Charity.....	31
The Social Enterprise: A “Fused Discourse” .....	33
A Note on Moral Capitalism .....	36
Delhi Skepticism .....	37
Summing Up .....	39
<b>3. "Fresh and Fun": Aesthetic Distances .....</b>	<b>41</b>
Social Geography of the Commodities.....	43
The Commodities: “Whatever Pays the Bills” .....	46

Aesthetic Confusions: “What Would Ann Like?” .....	48
Aesthetic Distancing.....	50
Towards an Aesthetics of Consumerism: “Creative Workshop” .....	52
Crash Course in “Good” Aesthetics .....	54
Searching for the Kamana Women’s “Expression” .....	58
Summing Up .....	62
<b>4. “Shop to Empower Women”: Paradoxes of Moral Capitalism .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Consumption as a “Tool of Development”.....	66
High-Potency Development Commodities.....	69
The Case of the “Fair-Trade” String-Bags.....	72
Work Ethics.....	76
Summing Up .....	79
<b>5. Filling the Gap: Waithood, Hope and Ruptures .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<i>“The Problem is the Mind-Set”</i> .....	83
Waithood and Timepass .....	84
Hope as a Category of Social Analysis .....	87
Angeli .....	89
Jyoti’s Song at the Cultural Event .....	93
Hope and Potentiality: Filling the Gap.....	98
Summing Up .....	102
<b>6. Final Reflections .....</b>	<b>103</b>
References .....	109
Appendix 1 – Angeli’s poem .....	115
Appendix 2 – Jyoti’s Song, <i>Rupaiya</i> .....	119

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank the amazing people connected to Change by Hand. You know who you are. Thank you for sharing your lives with me. You will always have a special place in my heart.

Bjørn Bertelsen, I could not ask for a better tutor. I am extremely grateful for your sincere interest in my work, your detailed comments, constructive feedback and for believing in me and my project. Ali at Zabaan Language Institute in Delhi, thank you for patiently teaching me Hindi. I also owe a huge thanks to Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Bergen. I cannot express how thankful I am for having had the chance to spend a year in such a vibrant, including and inspiring research environment. Especially thanks to the Gender and Rights-cluster for constructive and encouraging feedback on my presentations and ideas. Especially thanks to Karin Ask for your optimism and interest in my work. Thanks to my CMI co-students for making the year of writing a memorable and happy one. I am grateful to the Egalitarianism project and the Meltzer-fund for supporting me financially and, thus, making this project possible. I also want to thank the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen for including me in their scholarship support program for Asian Studies (NIAS SUPRA). My two weeks at NIAS in Copenhagen was a shot in the arm inspirational wise that came just in time. Nina, Suzanne, Oda, Kajsa, Kaja, Angelina – thank you for reading my chapters and providing me with valuable advices. Deirdre – thank you for proofreading my (un)idiomatic English. A special thanks to *Superantropologane* for enlightening me all these years. Especially thanks to Kaja, my dear friend and co-student for emotional support and faithful reading room comradeship.

Sveinung, you are an excellent field-assistant! Thank you for always reminding me that life is bigger than a master thesis. Thank you for your patience, your encouragement and company, for your love and your care. Thank you for being you.

Takk. Thank you. धन्यवाद।





## Chapter 1

# Introduction

*"[It's a] cultural matter, which makes it tricky"*

Ann

We were sitting in a car, driving from the Diplomatic Area in South Delhi towards the outskirts of the city and towards the Centre. In the car was Ann, the American founder of the organization *Change by Hand*, and Elizabeth, another American, who represented an attaché-wives'<sup>1</sup> charity organization that was a potential financial contributor to the organization. A lot was at stake. If Ann managed to convince Elizabeth to donate money to the Centre, Change by Hand would be able to afford to buy high-quality sewing machines and, thus, manufacture better products, make Change by Hand "sustainable" and increase the seamstresses' wages. Elizabeth asked several questions about the Kamana caste, which was the community in which Change by Hand exclusively worked. Ann explained her how the Kamana women were captured in "*a vicious circle of prostitution*". Upon this, Elizabeth turned around from the passenger to look at Ann, who was sitting in the back seat, next to me, asking: "*And what can you possibly do about that?*" Ann quickly replied that the Centre contributed to a "*cultural change of mind*". "*I know it's a huge goal*", Ann

---

<sup>1</sup> In diplomacy, an attaché is a person who is assigned to a diplomatic mission, and may include military personnel, diplomats, administrative staff and more. An attaché wife, then, is the wife of a person who is posted to that diplomatic posting.

continued, *“but that’s what they need [...] We think we only need a few girls [in succeeding] to change the mind-set”*.

The above vignette captures what this thesis is essentially about, namely ideas and approaches to so-called development issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This thesis is about an organization in Delhi,<sup>2</sup> which is neither a charity nor a business, but something of a hybrid: a so-called social entrepreneurship. Such phenomena have become important configurations within the world and language of development. Capitalist influences into the development discourse has led to coercing the “poor and marginalized” into some sort of labour. Within this logic, giving “them” “incentives to work” have become highly valued by would-be “developers” (Ferguson, 2015:xi). I argue that the notions of and concerns with fair-trade, ethical trade, corporate social responsibility and other forms of trade valued as of high moral and/or ethical worth, are fruits of this tendency. In line with such general patterns of development re-orientation, Change by Hand urged the women of the Kamana community to work and produce commodities that would be sold in an ethical trade environment, and I thus understand Change by Hand as a manifestation of such trends at a general level.

## **Research Purpose**

The aim of the ethnographic explorations presented in this thesis is to say something about how ideas and ideals of development come into being and are being appropriated in our time and age and, in this context, what social entrepreneurship constitutes. How have we arrived at a point where it makes sense for us to “shop to empower women”? And what kind of imaginaries of “the Other” is constituted through the commodities which we buy to empower these “disempowered others”? How do

---

<sup>2</sup> Colloquially, people tend to use Delhi and New Delhi interchangeably. However, there is a difference. Delhi is a Union territory, meaning that it is a federal territory governed by the Central Government – unlike an Indian state, which is commonly ruled by government elected by its people. New Delhi, on the other hand, is the joint capital of both Delhi and India, and is one of the 11 districts in Delhi. For example, the Change by Hand Centre was located in Delhi, not New Delhi, and I will refer to it as such. The markets where the commodities produced by the Centre were commonly sold, however, were located in New Delhi and South Delhi. South Delhi is another Delhi-district and hosts many of Delhi’s most upscale residential areas of Delhi. Colloquially, however, I have noticed that people use South Delhi to refer to the wealthier parts of Delhi, this including both South Delhi and New Delhi. Throughout this text, trying not to confuse the reader, I will use South Delhi (to refer to the wealthier areas of Delhi where the commodities were sold) and Delhi (to refer to the Union territory).

ideals and ideas about change manifest themselves in the context of the production of “development commodities”? Further, why do people engage in philanthropic activities in the first place? How can we make sense of their engagements?

Through ethnographic explorations based on a fieldwork with a small-scale, recently established social entrepreneurship in Delhi working with women of a specific disadvantaged caste, I seek to provide a deeper understanding of the questions above. This thesis does so by capturing moments from ethnographic reality as these may aid us better understand the normative orientations so crucial to contemporary development discourse and, thus, what comes to be defined and accepted as the “appropriate order of the world, and why people accept or reject this” (Miller, 2009:19).

Following Stirrat and Henkel (1997), and at a more general level, this thesis is an attempt to “understand the nature of the emerging new orthodoxy in development praxis from an anthropological point of view” (1997:67) Defining emerging orthodoxies in development thinking is not easy, and might even be a futile task, as Stirrat and Henkel (1997) have noted. However, although the thinking of development might be in a continual process of change

there is some degree of agreement among the proponents and practitioners of what we see as the new orthodoxy, in particular their self-conscious rejection of what they see as a preceding orthodoxy (1997:67),

like top-down models of development and charity-based development initiatives.

However, now we can start to see the outlines of a new form of so-called development intervention emerge through a language of work and production. Fair-trade, ethical trade, corporate social responsibility, and other forms of development-informed consumption and production inscribed with high moral and ethical value, are all a part of a discourse of what I call moral capitalism - a domain that has emerged as the solution to the world's inequalities and injustice. This moral capitalism has been promoted by the rich and powerful, such as Bill and Melinda Gates, and what they call “creative capitalism for the poor”. Here, the ideals of developing certain skills, doing certain work, producing certain commodities are applauded as

compromising forms of participation in one's own development towards becoming a successful, empowered, neoliberal subject. I see this merging of capitalist and development discourses as powerfully materializing in the phenomenon of "social entrepreneurships". A study by consultancy firm McKinsey & Company shows that "businesses designed to bring about social change have mushroomed in India over the last decade" (in Bhalla, 2016), and that India has emerged as one of the largest destinations for such ventures. This phenomenon is general, but have to be understood specifically and ethnographically. This is why Change by Hand, which I understand as an assemblage of much of what is trending within the world of development in Delhi today, is a good ethnographic starting point for such analytical explorations.

## **Chapter Overview**

To come closer to an understanding of the above research aim, each chapter in this thesis explores a domain where ideas and ideals of development configures.

Chapter 2. In this chapter, I seek to provide a deeper understanding of the framework in which Change by Hand operated within. Change by Hand presented itself as a social entrepreneurship. I will look closer at the notion of "social entrepreneurship", clarifying its emic and etic qualities.<sup>3</sup> I will show how "social entrepreneurship" is marketed by the organization itself, and further show why it is also a useful term to use descriptively and analytically in this thesis.

Chapter 3. In this chapter, I explore the domains in which Change by Hand sold their commodities. This chapter consists of two parts: In the first, I will look closer at how people relate to each other and create imaginaries of "the other" through the medium of things in the context of what I will refer to as *moral capitalism*. In the second part, I will ethnographically investigate what might give work such an important role within moral capitalism, and reflect upon what we might learn about the

---

<sup>3</sup> An emic term is a term that exists within the social context one has studied, a term that is being used in real life by one's interlocutors. An etic term, on the other hand, is a term that is used descriptively and/or analytically to see the social context or the interlocutors from "outside".

discourse through a case when the “poor and marginalized” refused to make an order of so-called fair-trade commodities and rather preferred some “*time off*”.

Chapter 4. The work at the Centre evolved around the production of *commodities*, and in this chapter, I investigate this aspect of the organization. I will look at how ideas and ideals of change manifests themselves in the manufacturing of certain commodities and, thus, produce aesthetic distances and friction. I ask: How do interstices between aesthetics, materiality, consumption and morality come into play in the processes of design and production of what I call development commodities?

Chapter 5. In this chapter, I will consider what the aim of the organization was. Further, I will aim to understand why the young Kamana women engaged with the Centre, and how we can make sense of their engagements beyond economic aspects.

Chapter 6. In this brief and concluding chapter, I will summarize what I have done throughout the thesis and spotlight some larger, structural concerns and remaining questions.

### **Theoretical Landscape and Theoretical Overview**

To discuss the aim of this thesis and the questions listed above it is necessary to clarify analytical terms and theoretical perspectives that I have found appropriate to draw upon. Much of the literature about development work and empowerment has been written in the development sector’s own terms, such discourses often being oriented towards improved effect and asking how they are empowered. I agree, however, with Stirrat and Henkel (1997) who stress the importance of anthropologists to place ourselves analytically “*outside the world of development and its various orthodoxies and ask questions not about how to make these orthodoxies more effective but rather to understand them as cultural artifacts*” (1997:68) and further, as discursive terms. An important stance in this thesis is to see concepts such as “empowerment” and “development” work as cultural artefacts, as this inform a more fruitful approach towards Change by Hand and its work, and further to other development and empowerment work.

Before we continue, I want to make it clear that this thesis does not revolve around a singular and internally consistent theoretical approach. This, I felt, would be unnatural, and would not do justice to the beautiful messiness of ethnography. Throughout the process of working with my ethnographic material, I have endeavoured to follow a process of what Shweder (1997) poetically calls the “surprise of ethnography”. This has, thus, naturally led me to an eclectic application of theoretical approaches making it difficult to here present a comprehensive “theoretical framework”. I will, however, present the main approaches that structures this thesis.

For one, Svati P. Shah has influenced my perspective on the discourse on sex work, with her powerful ethnography *Street Corner Secrets* (2014) on sex work and migration in Mumbai. Taking my cue from her work, in this thesis I have chosen to use the term “sex work” (2014:14-15) because the term

suggest[s] we view sex work [and sex worker] not as an identity<sup>4</sup> – a social or psychological characteristic of women, often indicated by ‘whore’ - but as an income-generating activity or form of labour for women and men (Kempadoo, 1998:3 in Shah, 2014:15).<sup>5</sup>

Second, women empowerment is mentioned several times throughout this thesis, and although I do not address it explicitly, it is an important backdrop throughout the text. For this reason, it is necessary to clarify the term here. It does not seem that there is a clear consensus on what the concept of “empowerment” means, and the way it is used in development in general, and by Change by Hand in particular, it does appear like an opaque term. In her critical analysis of the third United Nations’ Millennium Goal of women’s empowerment, however, Naila Kabeer (2005:13-14) defines empowerment as following:

---

<sup>4</sup> As opposed to how prostitution is commonly approached, which bears closer association to identity.

<sup>5</sup> I am aware that sex work seen as a form of violence appear to have coloured a lot of the literature on the topic, which, as a result, have contributed to somewhat blurred lines between sex work and trafficking (Shah, 2014). Overall, the human trafficking discourse have since the late 1990’s been the main entry point to understand sex work in India (Shah, 2014:10). Because of this close association, it is necessary to mention that I have chosen not to substantiate further on this link between trafficking and sex work, as I feel that my ethnographic material, as will become clear, does not relate to a trafficking-sex work complex.

One way of thinking about power is in terms of the *ability to make choices*. To be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability. In other words, *empowerment entails change*.

Andrea Cornwall (2007) call terms like empowerment “development buzzwords” which are getting their buzz “from being in-words” (Cornwall, 2007:472), meaning words that defines what is in vogue at the moment. I have played on the category of the “poor and marginalized” several places in this thesis. With this, I am not attempting to stereotype one large category of people, but rather, infer the term to make a play on how the subjects of development often are being portrayed. The category of “the poor and marginalized” points to the “moral unassailability of the development enterprise” which is secured to copious references to such “nebulous, but emotive” categories (Cornwall, 2007:472).

A third vein of inspiration is drawn from Tereza Kuldova’s work on the anthropology of fashion and materiality. Her recently published work, *Luxury Fashion India* (2016) on the production and consumption of luxury fashion in India, became a valuable source of inspiration for the analytical work of this thesis. Kuldova investigates the Delhi luxury fashion market’s dependence on cheap artisan workforce in Lucknow, where cheap labour is disguised as a form of “women empowerment”, but in reality, she argues, creates and reproduce complex systems of hierarchy and oppression. Her analysis of the workshops and the intricate relationships between elite designers, village artisans, charitable capitalism and fashion, has informed much of my own material from the Centre - also in terms of a basis for comparison for some of my own findings and arguments. Throughout the chapters, I will therefore refer to Kuldova’s work comparatively and use her insights as a source of useful analytical perspectives. Her work becomes especially useful for my analysis in chapters 3 and 4 when looking at materiality and aesthetics connected with broader social structures and conditions in the Indian context.

Design- and production processes took place nearly every day at the Centre, and, thus, aesthetics was an underlying topic. To better understand some of the

interstices between aesthetics, materiality, consumption, hierarchies and morality, I found Pierre Bourdieu's famous work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984 [1979]) enlightening for my material on this topic. He shows how aesthetic *taste* – which usually is ascribed to represent individual preferences – actually derives from highly structured conditions of existing hierarchies and the society as a whole. Moreover, and, as also Daniel Miller (Miller, 2009:5) makes clear drawing on Bourdieu, aesthetic tastes and preferences are thus anything but individual; instead they exemplify the position who he or she holds in society and contribute in reproducing it. Bourdieu's outline of forms of capital are a convenient tool for analysis of some of the social mechanisms concerning the production and trade. This becomes especially relevant when I turn to describe the social spaces within which the handmade merchandises are produced, the expectations which circumscribe the production and, further, the social spaces in which the products finally are traded for money. No judgement of taste is ever innocent. Throughout the thesis, particularly in chapter 3, I will apply some of Bourdieu's insights as a means to understand the broader meanings of aesthetics and taste.

Change by Hand focused on paid work and the production of commodities as a means for women empowerment. The central objective for a lot of social work is helping people become so-called "work ready" and help them move into jobs (Macarov 1980:12 in Weeks, 2011:7). But what is work? And why, in the context of an analysis of social entrepreneurship, is it interesting subject for analysis? In previous research on work, work is seen as an economic phenomenon. I, however, agree with Kathi Weeks (2011) who argue that work should be seen as a fully political phenomenon, rather than simply an economic one. I apply Week's approach as a useful vantage point throughout this thesis. Her notions of anti-work ethics, an ethics which valorizes children, chatter and leisure over full working days, a clean work environment, large salaries or 'empowerment', become especially relevant for the analysis in chapter 4. I am also leaning on her readings of Karl Marx when it comes to my approach to work and production.

Post-development theories also provide an important inspiration for this thesis. These theories grew out of the Foucauldian concept of discourse and his focus on how "fields" of knowledge are socially, politically and historically constructed (in Gardner and Lewis, 1996:71). Much anthropology has drawn on this and one of the



most vocal in this regard was James Ferguson (1994), who, rather than being concerned with “whether development is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or how it could be improved”, instead argued that we should “analyse the relationship between development projects, social control and the reproduction of inequalities” (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:72). The development discourse, meaning the statements and ways of thinking and speaking within the field, are interesting entry points for analysis, as discourse is “dynamically interrelated with development practice, affecting the actual design and implementation of projects” (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:73) and, thus, ways of constituting ideas and ideals of development. I understand Tereza Kuldova (2016), Henkel and Stirrat (2001), Erica Bornstein (2012) and Mike Goodman (2010) to carry forth these critical approaches to development and they are, at various points throughout the thesis, all drawn on in order to illuminate the ethnographic material.

There was, however, one thing I could not find satisfactory answers to in these critical theories: Why do people engage in philanthropic activities? And how can we understand their engagements? Why did the seamstresses come to the Centre, even if previous initiatives to change their ways seemed to have “failed”? My search for analytical approaches to illuminate my ethnographic material, led me to the “anthropology of hope”, represented by a wide range of academic work (Rio, 2015, Moore, 2011, Mar, 2005, Miyazaki, 2006, Bloch, 1986, Chambers-Letson, 2012, Crapanzano, 2003). Although we should always keep a critical gaze on what is represented as unquestionable, normative good, we must not forget that there is also a reason why people choose to engage, heart and soul, in these kinds of initiatives for change. Drawing on ethnographic material, in chapter 5 I will argue that hope and potentiality constitute important aspects of such motivations.

Above I have presented some main terms and approaches and I have decided to present those remaining *in situ*, as it were, as the ethnographic explorations moves on.

## Methodological Reflections

What Clifford Geertz once so lightly called “deep hanging out” started making sense to me as my days went by, precisely, hanging out and chatting, drinking tea and sitting around with the women at the Centre. “*Are you not bored?*”, Lakshmi, one of the seamstresses, would ask me over and over again for the first couple of weeks. She could not understand why I would find it interesting to sit with her and the others as they were working. After a month or so, she, like the others, begun to warm to my presence, and started letting me get the scissors or iron some fabric. Slowly, they accepted my participation at the Centre.

For me, participant observation involves coming so close to people and making people feel so comfortable with your presence that they go about their business as usual and allows you to observe and record information about their lives (Bernard, 2011). The possibility of participating in activities on an informal level, making them comfortable with my presence, was one of the reasons I chose to work with a small organization, instead of a large organization with external headquarters and international branches. Once a month or so I would also join Ann on various sale events hosted at various venues in the Diplomatic Area in South Delhi. There I would sell and promote Change by Hand alongside Ann. Together with the Centre, these arenas provided the axis of my five months of fieldwork.

I clearly occupied a higher socioeconomic status and generally have a very different background and reference points than my interlocutors, which naturally affected the nature of my data. However, I would argue that this is what participant observation involves. There is no neutral, uninvolved knowledge (Bernard, 2011).

None of my interlocutors lived at the Centre, and nor did I. Commuting to the Centre took me one and a half hour from leaving the doorstep of my home in an area of South Delhi. Ann, too, resided in this same area.<sup>6</sup> Like her, I spent much time commuting to the Centre by metro and bus. All my main interlocutors, except Ann, lived close to the Centre or in the Sangampur area. Although the geographical distance might have added to the sociocultural and economical distance to the

---

<sup>6</sup> Which was a particular class location that Ann, as an American earning money from various writing work to companies and organizations in South Delhi and an American call centre job, and me as a funded student, could both afford to inhabit.

women at the Centre, it also provided me with perspectives of Delhi as a mega-city.<sup>7</sup> This would later help me understand the vast political economy in Delhi which the organization was a part of, and the context in which the markets for the commodities merchandised by the Centre were a part of.



Scene from the working room. Lakshmi (left), Tanu (middle) and Naina (right) with their assigned electric sewing machine, working.

My main approach to the fieldwork was as an apprentice (Jenkins, 1994:107) and my roles at the Centre developed and changed from day to day, week to week, as I came to know the people there better, and they me. For the first month, my role was that of an assistant for the children's teacher at the Centre, Khushi. As time went by, I became more and more involved in the daily businesses of Change by Hand. I ironed fabric, I measured lengths, I sold their products, I advocated for their case. Day by day, my interlocutors' trust in me increased. About half way through my fieldwork, Ann the founder told me that she looked at me like a co-founder, a person who understood her worries about the organization when no one else did. Sometimes I would be the translator and advocate for the seamstresses to Ann, who did not know Hindi. Some days it would be the other way around, and I would translate for the seamstresses to Ann and advocate for them. As the women at the Centre became used to me, I started to openly noting things down, hoping to remind

---

<sup>7</sup> Delhi has a population of 17 million registered inhabitants.

them of my role as a researcher. The joke became that I was a spy, as I would always note things down on my android phone. I learned to laugh of what my interlocutors found to be funny (and eventually found it funny myself), and slowly I adjusted myself to the pace and the atmosphere of the Centre.

When it came to language, I completed five months of intensive Hindi training at Zabaan Language Institute in Delhi prior to my fieldwork. This period also served a valuable preliminary fieldwork. Without the broken Hindi I developed throughout these months, this fieldwork would have become a very different one, as only Ann, Anika (the daily manager) and Khushi (the children's teacher)<sup>8</sup> spoke English. My Hindi continued to develop throughout my fieldwork, but when it proved insufficient, Anika and Khushi were patiently translating for me. I did one round of semi-formal interviews with the seamstresses. This I recorded with their permission, and had it translated.<sup>9</sup> This is where I have most of the direct quotes from the seamstresses from, and misunderstandings or incorrect accounts is on me. To make it as clear as possible for the reader I have chosen, where it was natural, to mention methodological approaches *in situ* throughout the text.

Ann was the person fitting the classic role of the gatekeeper (O'Reilly, 2012:91) in my fieldwork. My initial worry was that the other women would too easily connect me with Ann, and I feared this would limit my access to daily life at the Centre. For this reason it was important to create for myself an autonomous role at the Centre. By coming regularly, I wanted to prove to them that I was committed and predictable. For this reason, I was also careful to bring Indian vegetarian dishes from my own kitchen, so that I could participate in the food sharing ritual the staff members always practiced for lunch – an important and cherished part of the day – which I felt was important for building my relationships with them.<sup>10</sup> I did my best participating in conversations in Hindi. Slowly, I gained unrestricted access to the rest of the Centre, and day by day, I built my autonomy

---

<sup>8</sup> Khushi did not feel confident with her English. However, as she realized that I understood some Hindi, and that she could fill in with Hindi whenever she felt her English became insufficient, she started speaking with me in English.

<sup>9</sup> I sent all the recorded interviews to Shivani Bajpai, a research assistant and Master's degree student in History at the National Archives of India in Delhi, who helped me transcribe and translate the interviews.

<sup>10</sup> Ann rarely brought food to the lunch sharing, as she often would eat non-vegetarian food from restaurants – which the staff would usually not eat.

as a researcher and as a human being, and gained their trust. I was careful not to appear intrusive, and not wanting to scare my interlocutors off, I deliberately avoided asking sensitive questions. Further, I was deliberate about not conveying false expectations to the people I worked with (Henriksen, 1997:104). I never promised anyone anything – and, hence, I hope that I have not and will not disappoint anyone by not being or doing something I cannot.

It is said that participant observation is a craft, and as with all crafts, it requires practice to become a skilled artisan at participant observation (Bernard, 2011). Although this thesis presents the ethnographic work of a rookie sailor, I hope that I have managed to do justice to the ethnographic realities that took place around me, and to the lives that I, for a short while, was allowed to be a part of.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Upon contacting Ann prior to my fieldwork, I sent her my full research proposal and a document confirming my ethical obligations. She laughed about my formality but liked the idea of my project, and invited me to do fieldwork with her organization. As I arrived at the Centre, I spoke with Anika about my project. She, too, was positive, and said that she hoped they could also learn something from my work. Together we held a meeting with all the seamstresses at the Centre, Khushi (the children's teacher) and Auntie (the sewing teacher). In Hindi, Anika informed the women about my project and got their explicit acceptance to write about them.

My topic is one that has required sensitivity when it comes to ethical consideration, and many of my interlocutors belong to a small, unique community with a specific social and historical background. With the trust I received from my interlocutors and the relationships we developed, follows a great responsibility. Out of respect and ethical concerns, I follow the contemporary convention of ethnographic presentation, involving I have changed all names, geographical locations, and certain characteristics and details that might reveal my interlocutors identity or locations. All personal names and most geographical areas are anonymized using pseudonyms. I am aware that it is not common in scholarly work on India to anonymize caste belonging, but I have come to the conclusion that changing the name of the caste in

this thesis is the best way of maintaining the organization's, the caste's and my interlocutors' anonymity. If I had not, their identities would be a quick Google-search away from being revealed because of earlier organizations and Change by Hand's extensive use of various social media channels.

### Introducing the Centre

As my auto rickshaw turned off the main road after some time, the calm atmosphere of the narrow streets of Sundernagar in Sangampur, felt soothing. Sundernagar, the area where the Centre was located, was mostly residential. In between there were also a few small shops selling snacks.



View from the Centre in Sundernagar, Sangampur. The Kamana community resides only one block away.

Change by Hand occupied a tall, concrete building with three floors. This was the Centre. Right across the building was a modest residential house, and next to that, an empty plot of land, being used as a neighbourhood landfill, playground and grazing land for cattle. If I had not known, I would have been forgiven if I had mistaken this place for a small town somewhere in Northern India. Entering the Centre screaming kids greeted me at the Centre entrance. *"Hello!" "Whatsurname?" "I am phine!" "Hello!"* I made my way through the hordes of children, and into the building.

Inside it was cool. If there were an ongoing class, it often quickly cracked up once I entered. The ground floor where I entered was dedicated to the Kamana children, and the walls were decorated with drawings, alphabet posters, and a white board. This room was often filled with children ranging from a few months old to young teenagers. Up the stairs the women had their space. There was the “working room” dedicated to sewing work. The room was lined up with desks and electric Singer sewing machines, an air conditioner and a speaker that the whole day, Monday to Friday when the Centre was open, played loud Bollywood tunes. Next door was a small kitchen, and the “office”, which in theory was Anika’s office. Due to scarce space and because of the seamstresses’ preference, Anika’s office was often dedicated to whatever non-machine work going on at the moment – that often being embroidery.



Scene from Anika’s office. One of many wall decorations at the Centre, encouraging to "Be brave".

The first floor was beautifully and neatly decorated in different shades of colours. On the walls was a showcase of different products the women had made, in addition to magazine and newspaper cut-outs. Through the big windows in the hallway, the light flowed in. Several of the walls were decorated with different motivational quotes, like “*Believe in urself* [sic]” written in English on colourful yellow paper cut to the shape as mangoes. On another wall was the message “*Be brave*”, also in English, written inside peach-coloured paper apples.

There were seven seamstresses coming regularly to the Centre. They were ranging from 13 to 25 of age. I will introduce these women, as well as the staff, as they show up in my ethnographic descriptions.

### **The Kamana Caste and Conventional Household Cyclicity**

To understand what was implied as Ann spoke about a “change the mind-set” among the Kamana community, it is instructive to have a sense of the typical Kamana household cyclicity. For one, large segments of the Kamana community members’ financial survival are based on female sex work and such work<sup>11</sup> and is integral to their particular form of social organization. The Kamana community is not, however, unique in the Indian context when it comes to the importance of sex work and it bears some similarity to Anju Agrawal’s (2008) description of the Bedia caste’s socio-political organization: Here, the Bedia women are analysed as choosing between marriage life or a life pursuing sex work with the two pursuits excluding each other. In the community of the Kamana, however, these pursuits do not exclude each other: Instead, marriage and the delivering of the first-born is the stage for the very inauguration of sex work. The exchange of sexual services against money is legal in India, but if the activity involves a second part earning money from it (“pimping”), is not. However, the local police would rarely do anything with it if they received complaints, as the Kamana community paid a monthly fee (bribe) to the nearby police station to stay out of trouble.

While they lived in the middle of a non-Kamana residential area, they mostly kept to themselves and others clearly kept away from them. In general, I was told that the community avoided public institutions as much as they could, and that most decisions and settlements was made by the Kamana *panchayat* (village council) in the area.

Engagements for future marriage are usually arranged between families when the children are around four to six years old and usually follow endogamous patterns. At the Centre, “bride price” was the English term I would hear to refer to the money

---

<sup>11</sup> Often I would hear Kamana women refer to sex work as just “work”. Comparatively, this was also a tendency which Reshma Bharadwaj noticed in her fieldwork with sex workers in Kerala. She notes that this may suggest the “unspeakability in the Indian context of the sexual component of sex work or may signify sex workers’ entrepreneurial experience of sex work transactions” (Prabha Kotiswaran 2011:22 quoted in Bharadwaj, 2015).



that was given from family of the groom-to-be to the bride-to-be's family. On several occasions, I overheard conversations between the Kamana women at the Centre teasing each other with comments like "*what's your price?*", "*how much were you bought for?*" and "*oh, are you that expensive?*", or "*Oh, are you that cheap?!*". As the term "bride price" in English jargon have close associations with ideas about purchase and the market, and even slavery, I have chosen to follow Evans-Pritchard (1931), and refer to the practice with the less objectionable term *bride-wealth*.<sup>12</sup>

Commonly, after marriage and carrying their first-born, sometimes before that, the bride-wealth frequently transformed into a "debt" that the woman was in charge of returning. The husband or a female organizer, or a "pimp", like Anika called it, would organize the sex work by bringing the woman to customers along a dark high-way. My impression was that the mother-in-law often was commonly the figure who insisted that her daughter-in-law should become involved in sex work, as she herself (and often her mother-in-law again, and all the other in-married women in the house) most likely too were. Thus, there is a cyclicity to this practice at various levels.

### **Kamana: A "Criminal Tribe"?**

I was often told, both by the staff and also by Kamana women themselves, that the women had problems getting any other work than sex work. Once I heard an older woman say that this work was also all they knew. Further, I was told the men in the community did not work at all<sup>13</sup>. They were lazy, and besides, no one would hire them anyway, I was told by Anika, as most people could not trust a Kamana person, as they have a habit of stealing. Why these notions of no one wanting to hire Kamana men and women? It is crucial to understand what social, political and bureaucratic structures the Kamana community is a part of to understand what social contexts were reflected in these statements.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> First, it should be mentioned that in the Indian context, bride-wealth is uncommon as most Hindu communities practice dowry – money going from the bride family's side to the groom family's side (Anderson, 2007). Second, this should not be understood as bride-wealth in its conventional form, as the sum later is paid back to the husband's family.

<sup>13</sup> This was, however, an exaggeration, I soon found out. Some men kept horses and band gear and did jobs in weddings for the "general community" ("general" referring to non-Scheduled Castes (SC)/Other Backward Castes (OBC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST)).

<sup>14</sup> Due to a scarcity of literature to be found on the Kamana caste in particular, I have relied largely on my own ethnographic material, in addition to scholarly works on other similar communities (the so-called "criminal

In 1871, the Kamana community, together with hundreds of other communities who lived on the margins of society, was notified<sup>15</sup> as a “Criminal Tribe” with the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA). According to Subir Rana (2011:19), the CTA was a result of losing control of the British empire, trying to regain full control, especially over the subjects who would not let themselves be controlled, and hence the CTA was made to justify this effort to discipline and do control on them. Further, “[t]he CTA was framed with the intention of transforming the ‘delinquent’ into ‘honest’ subjects” (Rana, 2011:19).<sup>16</sup> The CTA thus represented an “undisguised and concerted effort at banishing entire groups of people into the ranks of the habitual and born criminals” (Yang, 1985a:12). Later, in 1952, the Habitual Offender’s Act replaced the CTA, and Rana (2011:19-20) argues that the new act was no different than its predecessor. Rather, it proved to be far more aggressive, giving the police full authority to extract false testimonies and search for any act of crime committed in areas where the so-called de-notified communities resided. The new legislation thus further stigmatized these communities.

Even if they are not any longer notified, and negative discrimination of caste belonging is formally illegal in India, the stigma is still very much present and exercised socially. Before I started coming regularly to the Centre, the organization used to occupy a different building, close by. The house owner did not like that her property was used by Kamana women working and she talked to them in a rude manner any time he came by, Anika told me. Further, she spread rumours that the women were not at all using his building for sewing work, but for sex work. I also frequently heard stories about how hard it was for the community members to access paid work outside sex work. Because of a particular way the women dress, speak and behave, they have a hard time getting work outside, as they are easily recognized as Kamana. Anika warned me that if I ever saw a group of Kamana people on the bus or the metro, I should be careful with my valuables. She explained to me that sometimes they would form in groups to steal, and that they even would

---

tribes”) and works on the Criminal Tribes Acts. I do, of course, not claim that I am here providing the full picture of the complexity of these communities and their sociality and history.

<sup>15</sup> In India, “notification” and “de-notification” are common expressions to use about Government decisions, announcements and information. When someone or something is de-notified, the earlier announcement has been drawn back.

<sup>16</sup> Not an uncommon phenomenon for anthropological analysis. See for example (Scott, 1998).

bring their children on these raids. As I have showed, the current popular perception of the Kamana community still seemed to be that of a “criminal tribe”<sup>17</sup> whose “tradition” and occupation is still theft and sex work – despite the so-called de-notification of the so-called “Criminal Tribes”.<sup>18</sup>

## Hierarchies

Sundernagar is a predominantly Hindu area. Anika, the daily manager, Khushi, the children’s teacher, and Auntie, the sewing teacher, were all Hindu,<sup>19</sup> and so are the Kamana community. According to Louis Dumont, the religious ideology of Hinduism is “premised on the notion that everything – including human beings – can be classified according to a hierarchical scheme consisting of an opposition of purity and impurity” (in Rio and Smedal, 2009:3). India is a “land of multiple hierarchies rooted in caste, class and gender” (Nielsen and Waldrop, 2014:1). Following this, it is the gradation of humans along an axis of purity and impurity that produces caste. Caste, thus, includes “the complex and often contradictory notions that make some people consider themselves superior by birth and that regulate their interactions with others accordingly” (Frøystad, 2003:74). The caste system provides in India a structuring framework for many people’s ideologies and practices. However, I want to follow Agrawal (2008:6) and just note here that it is still far from obvious that people’s or communities’ practices are intrinsic to that of the “traditional caste system”.

Nonetheless, the Kamana community may be seen to be a part of the category often referred to as “untouchables”<sup>20</sup> or *Dalits*.<sup>21</sup> Castes like the Kamana have historically occupied “the lowest rank in the ritual hierarchy of Indian society” and have been “suffering from extreme social educational and economic backwardness arising out of age-old practices of untouchability, lack of infrastructure

---

<sup>17</sup> The British colonialists did not make a strict distinction between caste and tribe, and often used them interchangeably. Today the Indian government defines the Kamana as a caste.

<sup>18</sup> Rana (2011:19-20) argues that the reason for these communities to take to sex work (which later has become inter-generational in nature), was due to the treatment as ‘criminals’ they still received after the de-notification.

<sup>19</sup> In short, Hinduism denotes a group of traditions united by several common features, like a shared revelation, belief in reincarnation (*samsara*), liberation (*moksha*), similar ritual patterns, and a particular form of endogamous social organization or caste.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Untouchability’ is actually ascribed to Sir Herbert Risley, and was a part of the British efforts to classify and rank castes in the subcontinent as a whole (Das, 2015:225).

<sup>21</sup> Literally the ‘downtrodden’.

facilities and geographical isolation” (National Commission for Scheduled Castes, n.d.). After India’s independence from the British in 1947, the Indian Constitution designated several hundred castes as Scheduled Castes. Scheduled Castes was the new collective name for those groups who were previous to 1950 known as untouchables (Guha, 2007:102), a term that was now abolished. It should be noted that despite practicing untouchability was abolished more than sixty years ago, a recent study published by the University of Maryland shows that every fourth Indian say they continue to practice it (Chishti, 2014). Recognizing caste belonging is a locally an embodied knowledge in India, meaning that people are experts at “reading” each other’s caste in order also to know who one can mingle with and not (Frøystad, 2005).

It soon became clear to me that they were not only classified according to a hierarchical scheme consisting of an opposition between purity and impurity, like Dumont suggested, but also light and dark skin colour, the beautiful and ugly – and these dichotomies limited the range of possibilities for social mobility within the community. Nonetheless, the Kamana women and their families whom I met did not fit into the stereotypes of caste, poverty or sex workers. Some (usually the ones with the most beautiful daughters, I was told) lived in lavishly decorated houses with up to three floors, equipped with air-conditioning, televisions and fridges. Some only had a room and one bed that the whole family shared. Many owned the house they lived in. In short, the Kamana community was a socio-economically internally differentiated community.

When it came to the sex work, it offered the potential for earning good money. Once I met a young Kamana woman, who was not working at the Centre, but would often come by and make fun of her husband whom she said was “*always drunk, sleeping all day*”. She was one of those people who, when they start telling a story, everyone gathers to listen. Once she excitedly came to the Centre to tell a story from the night before. She had been out with two other women, “working” [selling sex], and while one of them were distracting the customer, the others managed to steal the man’s gold chain, worth INR 6000,<sup>22</sup> which they distributed equally afterwards. Another time, I met an older Kamana woman, whom I had not previously met, who

---

<sup>22</sup> INR 6000 equals about NOK 600.

she visited the Centre with her daughter, who was dressed in a private school uniform. It turned out that her mother was a “*good pimp*”, as Anika explained me, meaning that she organized the sex work for women in the community who did not have husbands who were able to do the job. Thus, the mother, working as a pimp, could afford sending her daughter to a good school. I took all this to mean that within the Kamana community there were actually larger possibilities for social mobility than one might have expected.

### **A Note on Gender**

The Kamana women were in a peculiar situation in the Indian context.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, they were the breadwinners of the family and responsible for reproductive tasks and that which has to do with the domestic sphere. On the other hand, they were the target of repetitive attempts from various actors to “civilize” and “change the mind-set” of the Kamana community as a whole. The Kamana women were portrayed by the organization as the victims, but also the heroines narrated to change the sociocultural ways of the whole community. This is a tendency in development pointed at by Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007:3). This aspect reflects general development thinking, where, women have long been seen as the pillars of the community in relation to culture. Back in the colonized India, the woman’s body also was central as modernity was negotiated. Kenneth Bo Nielsen and Anne Waldrop (2014:3) writes that in “order to justify colonialism as a civilizing mission, the British colonizers emphasized the ‘savage’ nature of Indian cultural practices such as untouchability”. The British turned the social position of Indian women into a political question that was soon resolved by Indian nationalists through gendered dichotomies (home/world, spiritual/material) which together came to constitute the “reformed” and domesticated Indian woman as “the embodiment of authentic cultural-spiritual values” (Chatterjee, 1993 in Nielsen and Waldrop, 2014:3). This, we will see, is not unlike how Change by Hand approached the Kamana women. The gendered aspect of the “solutions” (sewing) provided by the Centre is undoubtedly important. From the very start of my fieldwork, I focused on the Centre

---

<sup>23</sup> Patriarchal hierarchies rank men above women in most spheres of Indian women’s lives, and assign men as the heads of the family, decision makers in the public realm and commonly as the breadwinners of the family (Nielsen and Waldrop, 2014:2).

and its activities. As the Centre exclusively worked with the women and children of the Kamana community, all my main interlocutors were women. This naturally echoes throughout this thesis. Although gender is not analytically the main focus of this thesis, it still provides an important backdrop for analysis. Throughout the text, I will show how the Kamana women were torn between family expectations and new expectations from the Centre. More, I will touch upon gendered analyses as I explore how definitions of what it means to be a Kamana woman was contextually defined and further renegotiated by Change by Hand. This will interlace with the main point I have wanted to make in this thesis, namely that about work and production having become an important aspect of today's development orthodoxy.

## Chapter 2

# The Social Enterprise: A Fused Discourse

*“We are not a charity.*

*I mean, we are, but we aren’t.”*

Ann

When we want to help the poor, we usually offer them charity. Most often we use charity to avoid recognizing the problem and finding the solution for it. Charity becomes a way to shrug off our responsibility. But charity is no solution to poverty. Charity only perpetuates poverty by taking the initiative away from the poor. Charity allows us to go ahead with our own lives without worrying about the lives of the poor. Charity appeases our consciences.

The above is a famous quote by Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank,<sup>24</sup> and was shared by Ann through one of Change by Hand’s social media platforms.<sup>25</sup> With this update Ann echoed scholarly apprehensions whether or not charity can

---

<sup>24</sup> Grameen Bank was a micro-credit (loan) financing system that was started in Bangladesh, and was regarded as a pioneering initiative to fight poverty.

<sup>25</sup> Which was administered by Ann.

contribute to social change and development (Sundar 1997 in Bornstein, 2012:41) and further expressed her reluctance towards the concept of charity. I will argue that Yunus's quote also captures many people's attitude toward charity in India, particularly Delhi, today.

Most of the time, Ann chose to refer to Change by Hand as a "social entrepreneurship". As Ann so often proudly stated it when I would come with her to promote the organization to potential customers or financial donors: That the Kaman women had "*asked for work, not charity*". She respected that, and said that she wanted to be the catalyst who made it happen for them.<sup>26</sup> This refusal of being a charity, as I will explore throughout this chapter, is reflecting current orthodoxies in development discourse.

In this chapter, I will explore the paradoxical essence of Change by Hand: Reliance on gifts, but no charity, business, but no profit. What kind of development entity was Change by Hand? Why did it make sense for Ann to communicate Change by Hand as a "social entrepreneurship"? Looking closer at the notion of "social entrepreneurship", I aim to clarify its, on the one side, emic and, on the other side, etic and descriptive qualities. I will show how "social entrepreneurship" is marketed by the organization itself and further show why it is also a useful term to use descriptively and analytically in this thesis.

Using particularly one ethnographic example, I will argue that Change by Hand was, indeed, reliant on charitable gifts, good will and financial donations despite Ann's reluctance to refer to the organization as a charity. Further, I will argue that placing the organization within what I call a "fused discourse" – neither a no-profit charity nor a for-profit business – is strategically convenient in an environment with low trust towards charitable organizations and high trust towards businesses. But before progressing, let me first explain on what grounds Change by Hand arose.

---

<sup>26</sup> This is a good place to note my own impact on my surroundings during my fieldwork. Once, as Ann and I were speaking, she were looking for the right words to describe her role in relation to the Kamana women. She explained that she wanted to be the one who made it happen for them. "Like a catalyst?" I asked. She agreed that that was exactly what she meant. Ann seemed to have become excited about the term I had used, and after that I noticed that she herself started using the word.



## **“The Secret Plan” and the Forming of Change by Hand**

Five years ago, when she was in her mid-twenties, Ann moved to India to do volunteer work. She had ended up working for the non-governmental organization (NGO) *Ashaa*, one of the largest and most influential anti-trafficking organizations in India. That was where she met social worker Anika, as they came to work together on the same project in Sundernagar with the Kamana community. Gradually, Ann and Anika united in their growing dissatisfaction with how *Ashaa* was run. The two of them happily told me again and again about the time in *Ashaa* when they started making what they had liked to call their “*secret plan*” of starting their own organization as they neither approved of the way *Ashaa* ran its activities, nor their trafficking- and rescuing-approach. Yes, by the definitions of the law, the occupational activities of the Kamana community could be defined as trafficking, Ann told me, but she argued that one can not call it a rescue if one takes a child from its parents. That, Ann and Anika argued, is kidnapping and neither believed in it as a viable approach.

In addition, they argued that *Ashaa* more than once had inflated the numbers of how many people they were helping and they further claimed that *Ashaa* did nothing to create change, but merely raised money for the organization’s leader. *Ashaa*’s Centre in Sundernagar offered activities and classes for the Kamana women, but no paid work. Ann told me how they had been asked by some women to sell abroad hand sewn things they had made, so that they could get some profit. They did not get much money selling them in their own area of Delhi. She kept saying how “the women basically forced me into starting the business” and that that had been her first time working with development where the people had asked not for charity but for work. Ann and Anika wanted to make that happen for them and started by initiating an income program within the organization they already was a part of. However, they did not receive the support from the organization that they had expected.

At this point Anika and Ann started developing what they loved to call their “*secret plan*”. They soon broke out of *Ashaa* and started up an organization on their own, also in Sundernagar, which they named “Change by Hand”. This rapidly turned into a competition between the two organizations to attract Kamana women to make use of their respective organization’s facilities and their offers. As Change by Hand

quickly gained more popularity among the Kamana women, the women stopped coming to the Ashaa Centre. Thus, Change by Hand thereby replaced Ashaa as the only organization in the neighbourhood with an agenda to help the Kamana women.

Change by Hand hired staff and – reflecting its paradoxical configuration - registered as *both an Indian Trust* (non-profit) *and* as an Indian-registered *Private Limited* (for-profit). In funding applications to various American organizations and in an advertising brochure, Ann presented Change by Hand as a “hybrid social enterprise model” that merged social work with the sustainability of a business. Their stated goal was to offer the Kamana women an alternative income from sex work through attempting to prevent Kamana girls having to joining the family sex work business through sewing diverse handmade products. They organized a course for the women in basic sewing techniques and appliqué handicraft.<sup>27</sup> The products were sold in South Delhi, online and in the United States. Sewing was not the goal per se, Anika and Ann kept telling me, but rather sewing was treated as a means to reach their goal of changing the mind-set of the Kamana community.<sup>28</sup>

### **Gifts, but no Charity**

Most of the time, the donations, as items or in the shape of monetary contributions, came from private individuals within Ann’s social network in one way or another. Ann herself did not take out any money for herself from the organization – and also as she was self-financed through side-jobs like writing content for larger organizations, in addition to a part-time call-centre job. Once she asked to work from my living room, as her internet connection was bad that day. She sat in my living room, connected to a server in the United States, and started answering calls as a receptionist on a doctor’s office in the United States. She had not wanted to ask any of her friends to use their space for the job, and asked me not to tell anyone about her call-centre job, saying that she wanted to maintain the illusion that Change by Hand as a business that went well and was “*sustainable*”. People do not want to support something they think is not doing well, she argued. And the fact that she was working a call-centre

---

<sup>27</sup> In our context, appliqué refers to a technique in which patterns are created by applying smaller pieces of fabric to a larger piece.

<sup>28</sup> This I will come back to in chapter five.

job would give people the impression that it was not. The content writing job together with the call-centre job gave Ann enough to pay rent and maintain her lifestyle in South Delhi. She had a large network in Delhi, and many of them were entrepreneurs, designers and creative workers. My impression was that most of her friends were well off financially coming from wealthy South Delhi families. A few times, as pay-time for wages and rent approached, and the Change by Hand bank account was depleted, she would reach out to her “*rich South Delhi friends*” as she called them, to donate money to the organization. Ann was also applying for several founding sources, both Indian and American.

### **Bringing Tablets to the “Needy”**

It was going to be my first proper day at the Centre. Together with Ann and two American computer-programming students who were visiting, we were heading towards the outer edges of Delhi, where the Change by Hand centre was located. Travelling beneath and flying above the megacity’s hustle and bustle it struck me how big the city actually was. The two students who accompanied Ann, named Kate and Bob, were going to donate three tablet computers with educational games on them. I was surprised by how uninterested Bob seemed to interact with us as he sat a bit away from us and plugged his headphones into his ears. He neither looked out of the window nor did he seem to enjoy the journey. Meanwhile, Kate seemed quite eager to get to know us, and to enjoy the views the metro offered. She eagerly explained us that the two of them had been in the city for about three weeks, working on an educational children’s game for tablet computers. The tablet game was part of a project work for their programming class at their university in Los Angeles. Their idea was that poor children who could not attend school, could use their tablet game as a learning tool.

After about one hour of travelling, we got off the metro, and walked down the long, dusty stairs from the metro station and down to the busy street. Although I had been there once before, I was still stunned about how piercingly drowning the noise from the traffic was. Ann, the two students and I received a lot of attention. Groups of foreigners, except when Ann brought them here, rarely visited this area. A beggar woman sat close to the stairs, shouting at us to give her some money for food. A

crowd of dusty looking street children gathered around us soon after we reached the bottom of the stairs. They kept touching our feet and tried to grab our hands. Kate looked very uncomfortable and stressed by the scene. Ann manoeuvred us into an auto rickshaw, bargained the price, and as we started driving, Katie asked with wide eyes, seemingly alarmed: *"I don't understand how children can grow at all, growing up on the streets?!"*. Ann asked, seemingly cold: *"What do you mean?"* Kate continued: *"Well, how do they become fully grownups under these conditions?"* Ann, still acting very cool and nonchalant, quickly replied *"They don't. They die"*. Kate looked shaken by Ann's straightforwardness. Ann, looking cold out on the passing traffic, continued: *"Try not to take it in too much, it won't help"*. As a reaction, maybe from experiencing these kinds of situations with Westerners earlier, Ann took on the air of an fieldworker who "had seen it all before", and seemed to take pride in knowing suffering and the hard reality.

Arriving at the Centre, we were met with hordes of excited children. The students immediately started taking pictures and holding their hands. Soon enough, Khushi, the children's teacher, had managed to calm the children down and had them gather in the working room upstairs. The students prepared two tablets. The quality of them was not great. They had meant to give three, but then one of them broke on the way there, they explained.

The seamstresses found chairs for the staff and their white guests to sit on. *"Sit, sit!"* Auntie commanded in Hindi, and waived her hand in the air pretending to slap the kids who dared still standing. It took about ten minutes before the room, filled with about 25 women and children went quiet. The children waited hopeful, stretching their backs long while sitting cross-legged on the floor, trying to get a glimpse of what was going on. Anika was sitting next to the students in front of the room to translate from English to Hindi, patiently waiting for the tablets to be switched on and made ready. After a session on use and maintenance of the tablets, it was show time, and the kids flocked excitedly around the two Americans with tablets in their hands. One of the older boys was selected to try it out first, before it was passed on between the kids. Bob and Kate kept in the background clicking pictures; they did not know the children's language and were unable to explain them how to play the games, which

were also in English. Khushi took charge, and helped the kids with the games, explaining them as she figured it out herself.

It did not take long before the women had taken control over one of the tablets and figured out how to transfer music from their memory sticks over to the tablet. They danced to the music, and filmed it with the tablet. “*They are so advanced*”, Anika said proudly. As the women danced, Bob grinned widely, nodding over to the women who were busy shooting their dance moves, saying: “*They’re going to have a blast*”.

After lunch, consisting of several home made dishes and bread, which Anika, Khushi and Auntie so generously offered us all, and several clicked photos later, we left the Centre, walking along the street heading to the main road. The streets were sandy and dusty, and as we walked past head-turning shop keepers and passer-byes, curious about the white, strange looking company walking past, I asked the male student what his impression from the day had been. He again grinned widely, saying “*They were just so happy*”.

Later that same day, I noticed that Ann was quick to write an update from the day on one of the social media sites of Change by Hand, about how grateful they were that they had received tablets for the Centre and that these had enabled the children to play empowering games. She wrote how powerful this kind of technology is and that they would also be valuable to the seamstresses, as they would be able to use the tablets to see patterns for products, and browse the organization’s social media channels, which would make them develop “*so many more skills*”.

In a conversation Ann and I had had before, I had expressed my confusion about the donation of tablets. Was it not sewing machines that they needed so desperately? Ann replied that “*Yeah. But they want to give us tablets, and they’re really cute.*” The students had got to know about Change by Hand through common friends with Ann and wanted to help. Ann shook her head, saying that if tablet computers were what they wanted to give, they would take these, despite their low quality (as one had already broken before reaching the Centre). She explained to me that they were “*students from [an American] university with money*”. She hoped that,

eventually, in the future, the university's money-stream would be directed to her organization by her receiving these tablets now. Anyway, she reckoned that the children would appreciate the tablets, and get some fun out of it. Ann was hoping that by taking them out to the Centre, by them *seeing* it and *interacting with* the women there, they would realize that what they needed were not at all tablets – but sewing machines.

Ann had multiple times brought outsiders to the Centre. It appeared to me to be a time-consuming effort trying to suit their expectations to what was meeting them when they would come there, and the outcomes of the visits were always unpredictable. The two students certainly seemed to have enjoyed themselves at the Centre, clicking pictures and receiving loving attention from the children. Now they also received gratitude for their acts on social media. As far as I know, Ann never told the two students about her long-term hopes about the effect taking the two out to the Centre. If this strategy would work remained to be seen.

### **The Obligations of the Gift**

The giving of the tablets is both a good example of a technical “quick fix” solution and also illustrates what Mauss (1999 [1925]) calls the obligations and expectations of the gift. The Centre had not needed tablets, but sewing machines. Furthermore, the games developed by the students were in English and the tablets themselves of low quality. Still, they accepted the charitable tablet gifts from the two students. Why was that? “[I]n principle every gift is always accepted and even praised”, writes Marcel Mauss (1999 [1925]:41). Thus, there was no other option than to accept the tablets, no matter how peculiar Ann found the actual gift. A lot was potentially at stake. Ann had some common friends in the US with the students, and in addition, there was the potential of building alliance with representatives of a wealthy, American university. To refuse to accept the gift of the tablets would be “to reject the bond of alliance and commonality” (Mauss, 1999 [1925]:13). As Ann announced her great gratitude for the tablets on behalf of the organization on social media, praising the two tablets for more than it actually was, she fulfilled another obligation of the gift; the obligation to voice appreciation and gratitude for receiving the gift (Mauss, 1999 [1925]:41). It was a part of creating bonds and alliances, assuring the giver that they did not give in vain.

In arriving at the Centre, the students started taking the children's pictures, without asking for permission. The Centre had a policy on not taking pictures of the seamstresses' faces, and the Kamana community generally seemed sceptical to any picture-taking (especially by foreigners). This made me particularly aware of the fact that it seemed to be very important to donors and contributors who came to the Centre in general to take pictures of the receiving part. This, too, is one of the obligations of the gift. Because "[i]t is all a manner of etiquette" and "[n]othing is unimportant" when it comes to the gift (Mauss, 1999 [1925]:59), and this also include *how* a gift is appreciated. How the gift is received, how it is given, what is given, and how it is appreciated are all accounted for in this system of exchange. Mauss argues that "[...] by accepting a thing one knows that one is committing oneself. A gift is received with a burden attached". Hence, in the cases where Change by Hand presented itself as a charity, it at the same time exposed itself to become dependent of donors and obliged to certain obligations embedded within the gift. Allowing the students to click pictures and document the ritual of handing the gifts over to the recipient, in an environment where the seamstresses generally were uncomfortable with photos being taken, was, in a Maussian sense, part of both the commitment and burden attached.

Obligations and burdens attached to the gift involved both having to cater to donor fantasies of the worthy receiver as well as donors' desires to meet, greet and *experience* "the poor and marginalized" in their natural surroundings. Kate and Bob's photo taking and their touching of children's hands, created a zoo-like setting at the Centre that day. And it illustrated starkly how the gift does not create an equal relationship between the giver and the receiver, but rather, demonstrates the power relations involved in the exchange. These obligations and power-relations might have been what Change by Hand attempted to evade when branding itself a social entrepreneurship.

### **Business but no Profit, Gifts but no Charity**

Ann often liked to identify herself as a social start-up entrepreneur and participated in workspaces, seminars and workshops around in South Delhi for social entrepreneurs and business start-ups. Crucially, being a "social entrepreneur" seemed to give

access to domains of both business and charity. This meant that Ann, who was the one who maintained and decided on the appearances of the organization, could both apply for funding as a charity as well as get access as a business to sell their commodities in shops. Ann was usually the one who decided what commodities would be produced by the seamstresses at the Centre and how they would look.<sup>29</sup> She was also the one who would have dinners with potential funding donors and network to navigate potential funding or channel orders their way. She was also the one who applied for funding and handled the sales part. Managing the business side of the organization, she maintained and created relations to potential funders and companies that might order products from them.

Although Ann had lived in India for the last five years when I met her, she did not speak Hindi. This made it difficult for her to do home-visits to families, give proper training or have deeper conversations with the women at the Centre. Anika, on the other hand, strongly identified herself as a social worker. On various social media channels where she was active, she would nick name herself “social worker Anika”. While Ann navigated mainly in South Delhi, speaking with potential donors, selling their items and looking for orders, Anika had grown up in Sangampur, close to the Centre and the area where the Kamana community resided. Anika had studied social work in college. Her position was paid, just like the positions of Khushi, the children’s teacher, and Auntie, the sewing teacher. Auntie was in charge of the production,<sup>30</sup> and would be the one who cut fabric, helped the seamstresses when needed, made sure the quality was good, and overlooked that the stitches were straight. Anika would manage the organization on a daily basis, and maintained the relationship with the Kamana community. If one of the seamstresses would not come to the Centre in a few days, which would happen on a monthly basis or so, she would go to their house to inquire about the situation. Sometimes she would visit the homes of newlyweds, if the bride came from outside of the Sangampur community, and let her know about the Centre.

---

<sup>29</sup> Read more on the aesthetics of the commodities in the next chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Auntie was a neighbourhood woman who sympathized with the Kamana community. She had been with the Centre since it started but left her job at the Centre during my fieldwork. This probably had several reasons, one being that her homely obligations were not able to combine with her job. When Auntie left, Jyoti, one of the Kamana seamstresses, took over her responsibilities and pay check.



My impression was that many in the Kamana community in Sangampur appreciated Anika's visits. Although Anika was very invested when it came to the social work part of the organization, she was not so interested in the other part that regarded the sales or production. She did not have any interest in fabrics or designs,<sup>31</sup> and was uncomfortable when Ann was not there and she was left with the role of having to purchase fabrics or match colours for items that were to be produced. She never wanted to take part in the sales events that Ann would often go to, as they would take part in South Delhi – an area where she said she was afraid not to fit in.

Ann and Anika both looked forward to the day when they would have a sustainable flow of income. They hoped to eventually be able to split the organization in two; one non-profit part that would deal with social issues and that would run on donor funding. The second part would be for-profit and would deal with the production and sales part that would be “sustainable” monetary wise from sales income. Ann would be responsible for the business-part, and Anika for the social, charitable part.

When they were talking about it, Anika became excited, and went on about all the things she would finally have time to do, like writing reports and do educational workshops for the women and children. But for the time being, as I was doing my field-work, Change by Hand was trudging along, everyone having to do their bit to make things go around. Khushi would for example sometimes cancel her classes to help with production. This illustrates how the (temporary) focus of the organization was on the production-side. The underlying logic was that they would have to be “sustainable” before they could focus equally on both the social part and the business.

### **The Social Enterprise: A “Fused Discourse”**

As shown both by the example of the donation of the tablets and in how Ann got her “*rich South Delhi friends*” to donate money to the organization, Change by Hand was

---

<sup>31</sup> See next chapter.

fundamentally reliant on gifts. At the same time, they also depended on producing and selling commodities.<sup>32</sup> Both express the paradoxical essence of Change by Hand: Reliance on gifts, but no charity. Business, but no profit. What kind of organization was, then, Change by Hand? Why did it make sense for Ann to communicate Change by Hand as a “social enterprise”? Change by Hand was neither a charity nor a business, but rather what I understand as a hybrid between the two; a “social enterprise”.

The recent years the phrase and phenomenon “social entrepreneurship” has struck a responsive chord (Dees, 1998, Schwittay, 2011) within the development and business sectors alike. It is a phrase well-suited for our time in that it is supposed to combine social missions with an “image of business-like discipline, innovation, and determination” (Dees, 1998). Big companies, as well as development organizations, increasingly see the market as the solution to global injustice and poverty in that it will enable the poor to “enterprise themselves out of poverty” (Schwittay, 2011:71).

In a critical on the social entrepreneurships in post-socialist Ukraine, Sarah Phillips (2005) asks whether the market will actually free people from poverty. This is where social enterprise<sup>33</sup> as a concept links the discourses of non-profit and business, creating what Phillips calls a “fused discourse” (2005:253). It draws from an ethical, moral activist framework, merging the idealistic idea of self-determination with the market framework “where competition and leadership are important, and where individuals, left to their own resources, become resilient” (Kenny 2002:296 in Phillips, 2005:253). Social entrepreneurship has in the recent years been promoted worldwide through organizations like *Ashoka*,<sup>34</sup> *USAID*, *Virtue Ventures*<sup>35</sup> (Alter 2001, 2002 in

---

<sup>32</sup> As I will elaborate in chapter 4.

<sup>33</sup> I follow Phillips (2005) and use the concept of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship interchangeably.

<sup>34</sup> A global organization in the business of funding individual social entrepreneurs making “everyone a changemaker” as their slogan suggest.

<sup>35</sup> A consultant firm specializing in guiding non-profit organizations develop business skills and encourage for-profits to integrate social goals into their business practice.

Phillips, 2005:253), *Skoll Foundation*<sup>36</sup> and *Schwab Foundation*<sup>37</sup> (Martin and Osberg, 2007). The discourse on social entrepreneurship emerged during what was perceived as a crisis in the welfare states of Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia as a strategy to shift some of the burden from the state to the non-profit organizations, while at the same time empower individuals and communities to take responsibility for their own economic and social development (Phillips, 2005:253). In many ways, Anika represented the social part, while Ann represented the business part of the organization. They were a living manifestation of the contrasts that constitute a social enterprise.



Scene from the working room. A newspaper clip advertisement reading: "A business that will shine forever".

---

<sup>36</sup> An initiative investing in people they identify as social entrepreneurs, so that they can take their social enterprise further. As they say on their own webpage, they are "buoyed by the knowledge that social entrepreneurs are the world's best bet for solving some of the world's thorniest problems" (<http://skoll.org/about/about-skoll/>, accessed 15:30, 19.10.2016).

<sup>37</sup> A no-profit initiative with the purpose to "advance social entrepreneurship and foster social entrepreneurs as an important catalyst for social innovation and progress" (<http://www.schwabfound.org/content/about-us-0>, accessed 15:20, 19.10.2016).

I am aware that challenges might arise as one uses one's interlocutors own terms analytically and descriptively (etic) on the one side and like one's interlocutors use it (emic) on the other side. However, I want to make it clear that I do not understand it in the classical market sense, but rather see it as another buzz-word (Cornwall, 2007) within the development orthodoxy (Stirrat and Henkel, 2001), a novel term attaining a hegemonic position within development that is also useful for descriptive analyses. Let us now look closer at what this concept involves.

Within this (fused) discourse of social entrepreneurship, neoliberal ideals like production, work and personal development mend with the philanthropic ideals of development and activism. Some argue that social entrepreneurs are needed to “develop new models for a new century” (Dees, 1998:1), while some critics argue that they are materialization of a strong belief in neoliberal discourses “of the ‘entrepreneur of the self’ – the normative contemporary subject who as a self-realizing, responsible, calculating market participant is empowered to take control of his or her own destiny” (Rose, 1999 in Schwittay, 2011:72). It appears to me that social entrepreneurship and what I call moral capitalism comprise general tendencies seen in development discourse.<sup>38</sup>

### **A Note on Moral Capitalism**

For charities oscillating between insisting on not being charities and then asking for donations seem to reflect an emergent global trend.<sup>39</sup> This fused discourse has also become a popular subject for linguistic innovation and has been referred to with phrases such as “creative capitalism for the poor” (Bill Gates 2008 in Schwittay, 2011:72),<sup>40</sup> “inclusive capitalism” (Prahalad 2005:1 in Schwittay, 2011:72) and “social capitalism” (Fast Company 2008 in Schwittay, 2011:72). On the scholarly side, Michael K. Goodman (2010), whom I will also return to below, writes about

---

<sup>38</sup> In India, I have come to know about several similar initiatives to Change by Hand, also acting upon the idea that paid work and production of commodities sold within the frames of ethical trade would “empower women”. For example, Purpose Jewelry (<http://www.purposejewelry.org/>), Mata Traders (<https://www.matatraders.com/>), Raven and Lily (<http://www.ravenandlily.com/brands/Empowering-Women-in-India.html>), Symbology Clothing (<https://symbologyclothing.com/>) and Sari Bari (<http://saribari.com/>) all sell high-end jewellery, clothing or home decor supposedly contributing to the empowerment of women in India.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Goodman (2010:107) on Bono's RED campaign.

<sup>40</sup> In 2008, Gates presented his idea about “creative capitalism” at the World Bank Forum in Switzerland.

development consumption, ethical/moral trade, and so-called fair-trade, while Tereza Kuldova (2016) speaks of “philantrocapiasm”.

Scholar in law Stephen Young wrote a guide for businesses to behave morally called *Moral Capitalism*. Young writes that his book affirms a vision of social justice: that “moral capitalism is the most appropriate means by which our modern, global human civilization can empower people and enrich their lives materially and spiritually” (Young, 2003:1). I understand Young’s term of moral capitalism to refer to a wide range of production and consumption of commodities inscribed with high moral and ethical value, like fair-trade, ethical trade and corporate social responsibilities, and will use the term as such throughout this thesis. I suggest that the commodities produced at the Centre, like the other commodities advertised to “empower women”, are integral to such an ideal of “moral capitalism”. To be clear that I understand all these forms of fusions as a part of a greater trend that basically come down to the same, I understand scholar in law Stephen Young’s (2003) term “moral capitalism” as an umbrella phrase including all the above.

### **Delhi Skepticism**

But what makes this such a popular concept with which to approach poverty in Delhi? For one, in Delhi, NGO’s are generally met with suspicion and Erika Bornstein’s work (2012) on humanitarianism and giving in Delhi states that she during her work there repeatedly heard people say that “although some NGOs were doing good work, most were not to be trusted” (2012:65). India has close to one million voluntary organizations registered as trusts, trade unions, societies or section 25 charitable companies,<sup>41</sup> which is the largest number in Asia (Bornstein, 2012:60). The Charities Aid Foundation report from 2000 reported that overall these organizations received 80 percent of their funds from abroad, and concluded as a result that NGOs and VOs [volunteer organizations] would “‘be held culturally and politically suspect’ because they were not accountable to authorities in India” (Bornstein, 2012:60). This

---

<sup>41</sup> A non-profit can be registered in the following ways in India: as a trust, a society, a section-25 company (also called a section-8 company), or with special licensing.

illustrates, and might have contributed to fuelling, the general scepticism and a form of “everybody knows” certainty that most NGOs were corrupt, money laundry set-ups or plain “paper NGOs”, a term which refers to NGOs that only exist to receive funds without doing any actual work. Bornstein writes that she is not

arguing that Delhi is more corrupt than other places, but rather that Delhi mistrust is a more public event than giving. One trusts family and known others, but one does not automatically trust strangers (Bornstein, 2012:85).

Blending philanthropy with the business sector is nothing new in India. Kuldova (2016:101-102) refers to the phenomenon as *philanthrocapitalism*, a form of moral capitalism as I understand it. In public discourse in India this mix of capitalism and philanthropy is also well established with the figures such as Ratan Tata, Jamnalal Bajaj and GD Birla being prominent examples. Crucially, these were all active during the struggle for independence from the British in supporting Gandhi’s movement and popularization of village industry and production of *khandi* (handmade fabric). The business community invested their wealth in setting up cultural institutions, commercial and technical colleges, hospitals and museums after the country won its independence in 1947. Nevertheless, maybe exactly due to this historical backdrop, philanthropy in general was “typically viewed with suspicion” in India as “the wealthy could control others through their capital, implement policies and enforce moralities – not unlike the situation today” (Kuldova, 2016:102).

It did not help the NGOs’ case when on June 3, 2014, the Indian Intelligence Bureau presented a report to India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi warning him of the effects foreign-funded NGOs had on India’s development (Times of India, June 12, 2014 in Bornstein and Sharma, 2016:10). The report accused NGOs of sabotaging important industries like mining and energy and misusing issues like human rights and ideals of gender equality to harm India’s international reputation (Bornstein and Sharma, 2016:10). This form of escalating state suspicion and the upscaling of regulation on the voluntary sector that is unfolding in India is a part of a global trend (Dupuy et al., 2014, Bornstein and Sharma, 2016:10) as more than 50 countries tightened the regulating on civil society between 2004 to 2010.

As we can see from this deep suspicion towards charitable initiatives, it is no question about the gift being problematic in Delhi.<sup>42</sup> Following Mauss' logic of the obligations to receive and give back, so-called stake-holders (financial donors) demand to see reports and results (change) as a sign of their fundamental distrust (Bornstein, 2012:59-86). A question that I overheard sometimes at various NGO-events I participated in with Ann, representing and selling items for Change by Hand, was something like "*But what do you get out of it?*", had undertones of this deep suspicion that seemed to be evident among Delhi people. Paradoxically and interestingly, even if people in Delhi, both public and private sector, do not trust NGO's, they do consider the business sector very trustworthy and exempted from suspicion (Bornstein, 2012:59). Illustrative of this, Kuldova's report of how the business elite were described in the newspaper *The Hindu* as "the noble and benevolent national heroes and the magic key to India's shining future as a global economic superpower" (Kuldova, 2014:16). This attitude may be neatly illustrated by a quote from one of Kuldova interlocutors; "*Greed is good, in fact, it is a virtue, only the superrich can save the world!*" (2014:16).

Taken together, this trust in businesses added with the deep belief in the capabilities of the superrich to "save the world", good growing conditions for "social entrepreneurship" were created. It should therefore not come as a great surprise why the fused discourse of social entrepreneurship seemed like a refreshing shortcut out of any potential suspicion. The fact that the business sector is seen as more trustworthy in Delhi, and that the term "social entrepreneurship" connotes business rather than NGO, might explain why Ann chose to frame Change by Hand in this way – also helping people putting their guards down and mending their scepticism.

### **Summing Up**

On the one side, "social entrepreneurship" is an emic term used and marketed by organizations themselves. On the other side, it can also cater as a useful etic term, meaning that it is valuable in approaching the phenomenon analytically and descriptively.

---

<sup>42</sup> See more on this in Bornstein's book on the gift in Delhi (2012).

As I have now showed, there are several reasons why it could have made sense for Change by Hand (through Ann) to define itself as social entrepreneurship. In an environment characterized by distrust towards charities and NGOs and high trust towards businesses, the fused form gains popularity and social entrepreneurship effectively blurs the line between them, making it an attractive alternative. Further, such a framing gives access to two potential sources of income from both the NGO-field, with its potentialities of financial founding, and from markets of moral capitalism and its commodities. I also showed that gifts and donations comes with certain obligations to donors, which might have made a pure business-approach more attractive.

However, as I will show in chapters 3 and 4, these obligations and dependency towards donors are simply switched with obligations, expectancies and dependency towards potential customers. In the next chapter, I will introduce the daily life at the Centre, which centred around the design and production of commodities. How do these dependencies and expectancies manifest themselves through the design- and production processes?



### Chapter 3

## **“Fresh and Fun”: Aesthetic Distances**

“Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier.”

Bourdieu, (1984 [1979]:2)

Ann and I had set up a stall at an embassy market. The market seemed to focus on “sustainability” and fair-trade. From another stall vegetarian, ecologically grown food was sold. A woman was preparing to hold a yoga class, and it was announced that a chef would do a course on healthy eating after that class was done. To match the “sustainability”-image of the market, Ann had brought tote bags and hairbands from the Centre to sell, made from what Ann called “*upcycled sarees*”. The products were all popular. As Ann regularly explained to people who stopped to look at her stall that she was the founder of Change by Hand, many people congratulated her for doing great work. Indeed, there was a very positive energy surrounding the stall.

At one point, Ann explained to anyone interested how they were still learning, and that as “the girls”, as she called them, became better at their work, they would expand what they produced. They wanted to learn, work and earn. Ann was speaking with a potential customer who was interested to know more about the Centre and the seamstresses. In particular, she was interested to know whether it was the Kamana women themselves who designed the things on offer. Ann replied that

*We really want the [Kamana] women to decide themselves what the products should look like, but they are teenage girls, and every time they get to decide, it ends up ugly. They love everything pink and with stars. They are so cute. But the problem is that no one wants to buy that.*

The woman, who was from the United States, nodded understandingly, and laughed with Ann about the Kamana women's preference for stars and pink.

The above quote captures the frictions of taste between the ideal customers (interpreted through Ann) and the Kamana women who worked as seamstresses. Further, the quote, the theme and structure of the market as a whole illustrates interstices between aesthetics, materiality, consumption and class/caste that I will explore throughout this chapter.

In *Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) convincingly shows how *taste* – which is usually ascribed to represent individual preferences – actually derives from highly structured conditions of existing hierarchies and the society as a whole. Thus, aesthetic tastes and preferences, which are the focus of this chapter, are anything but individual; instead they exemplify the position he or she holds in society and contribute in reproducing it (Miller, 2009:5). Throughout this chapter, I will apply some of Bourdieu's insights as a means to grapple with the broader meaning of aesthetics and taste.

Such a focus is all the more important as the work at the Centre revolved around the activity of *making things*. Throughout this chapter and the next, I will make the point that the things made at the Centre comprise something more than simply ordinary "customer goods". For this reason, I have chosen to refer to these things as *commodities*. For Karl Marx, commodities are the "products of labour" (Renfrew, 1986:158). Following Kathi Weeks (2011), who use "labour" and "work" interchangeably, I will use the label "work" to refer to the "productive cooperation organized around, but not necessarily confined to, the privileged model of waged labour" (2011:14). I will refer to the actual process of making things as *production*. A Marxian approach sees that production

“involves the fabrication not just of material goods, but also of relationships, subjectivities, and ideas; cultural forces and forms of consciousness are inseparable from, and thus crucial to, whatever we might delimit as mode of production” (Weeks, 2011:40).

In this way, Marx’s definition of production opens up for a broader understanding of production and the subject-object relationship.<sup>43</sup> This provides a highly relevant approach for looking at how the production of the commodities at the Centre was also a production of a certain type of subjectivity, which I will show through ethnographic descriptions of the design process.

Tereza Kuldova’s (2016) recently published work *Luxury Fashion India* on the production and consumption of luxury fashion in India has also been a valuable source of inspiration for this chapter. Throughout the chapter, I will refer to Kuldova’s understandings in my analysis looking at materiality and aesthetics connected with broader social structures and conditions in the Indian context.

As shown, I understand Bourdieu, Marx and Kuldova as useful vantage points from which to help analyse the ethnographic material presented in this chapter. Before we continue, it is useful to make a note on some aspects of the social geography of Delhi in order to give a sense of the places the commodities were produced, brought and, eventually, sold. This will be a relevant backdrop as I later in the chapter will go into ethnographic descriptions of how “*Delhi-life*” can mean different things to different people (e.g. the designer vs. the seamstresses).

### **Social Geography of the Commodities**

As illustrated by the ethnographic vignette that I started this chapter with, the places in which many of the commodities made at the Centre were purchased, were at wealthy, restricted areas. The lush and posh Diplomatic Area of South Delhi,

---

<sup>43</sup> Here, it could have been relevant to apply Arjun Appadurai’s theoretical approach of spheres of exchange (1986) and how things can be transformed from a gift to a commodity and back, depending on the sphere it is exchanged in. It could also have been relevant to apply Karl Polanyi’s theory of embeddedness (in Coleman, 2005:340), namely how, in so-called pre-capitalist societies, the economy is embedded in social relations. In contrast, for Polanyi, the market, thus, represents a disembedded economy. However, as I am more interested in what Polanyi and Appadurai does not include in their theories, namely work and how aesthetic taste is established in the first place, I do not deal with their approaches directly.

characterized by tight security, well-kept flower-beds and green lawns, is a world away from the Change by Hand Centre.

As described in Anne Waldrop's article on gating and class relations in Delhi, driving through the city "one could observe how the expanding city engulfed old villages and new slums, apparently blurring old spatial lines between classes and castes" (Waldrop, 2004:93). Delhi is a mega city where the upper middle class lives "in expensive colonies with servants in the back alleys, beggars on the colony corner, and squatters across the street from the colony entrances" (Waldrop, 2004:93). Waldrop describes how these colonies were turning into gated communities. More than 10 years later after Waldrop's article, I would add that gated communities seem to have become the new normal in many wealthy parts – especially in South Delhi, where the embassy was located, and where both Ann and I resided. To enter the embassy market event described above, one had to show one's passport or other photo ID accepted as relevant. There were guards with guns and a machine that scanned us for traces of bomb material. Following Kuldova (2016) I want to suggest that it is no coincidence that most of these areas are gated; they are islands of "security, sanity and peace" and being "[s]eperated from the everyday by a visible boundary, they are profoundly utopian spaces" (2016:28). The walls are visualizing the grand differences between the rich and the poor, the different classes and castes in Delhi. These islands was where the commodities produced at the Centre were sold.

The social geography of Delhi today is different from the classical portrayals of caste-segregated villages and cities. South Delhi has developed as the area where most of the middle class colonies are located, but at the same time, until the 1990's, these colonies have "been interspersed with old villages, cows, squatters, beggars, shops, markets and ruins" (Waldrop, 2004:95). The government is frequently pursuing policies of "cleaning up the city" from cows, slums and pop-up shops. When Delhi hosted the 2010 Commonwealth Games the government's efforts to make the city "shine" took an aggressive turn with efforts to resettle slum settlers to outer parts of Delhi. As written about in an article in the Telegraph (Nelson, 2009) the government soon realized their defeat in doing so, they ordered a vast supply of bamboo poles to use as "curtains" to hide the settlements. The poor slum settlements

did not fit into the picture of a rapidly growing economy. As the news article says, the memories of a country suffering from chronic poverty had to be forgotten. This was a challenge in a city where “the streets linking upper class colonies” and embassies still are on “public streets where poor and rich mingle” (Waldrop, 2004:95).



Early morning in the Diplomatic Area in South Delhi.

Change by Hand's booth at the “sustainability market”.

Looking closer at forms of (im)material distinctions in connection with the Centre aids us in uncovering some aspects of how people of Delhi assert social differences – even in their efforts to abandon them. Having the above description of Delhi and the “sustainability market” in the back of the head while continuing the ethnographic explorations in this chapter may help reveal important aspects of the megacity’s social and geographical differences and distances, and how these differences and distances were reflected in the commodities that were designed to help young Kamana women prosper.

## **The Commodities: “Whatever Pays the Bills”**

As outlined above, although Change by Hand’s existence was supported by various private financial donors, including Ann’s network of “rich South Delhi friends”, this was money that would come irregularly. The Centre therefore depended on selling their products, and had developed a strategy for such a variegated customer, funding and donor environment.

Initially, the idea of Change by Hand, was to make commodities of their own brand, designed mainly by the American founder, Ann – allegedly inspired by the young Kamana women themselves. That, Ann said, was the reason why most of their products were decorated with patchwork of birds and leaves. They had learned the patterns of birds and leaves from a designer who had visited them once. Since then one of the seamstresses, Lakshmi, explained, all she had wanted was to make that pattern over and over again.

Ann would have preferred that Change by Hand only manufactured for their own brand. It seemed to me that she went from having an ambitious vision of creating a financially sustainable brand out of Change by Hand that could survive on its own, to a realization that they would have to do “*whatever pays the bills*”, as Ann herself described it. However, sales from Change by Hand’s own commodities did not generate enough income, and Ann started sourcing for orders from other companies. Laundry bags for a luxury hotel chain, cushions for a music festival and pouches for an exclusive jewellery brand were just some of the commodities they produced during my six months there.

Nevertheless, the commodities that were made at the Centre constituted the economic lifeline for Change by Hand. Although they did receive some funds from lump sum contributions from other organizations and from the already mentioned category of Ann’s “*rich South Delhi friends*”, they did rely on selling products to pay rent and wages.

Change by Hand’s “own” line of commodities often required careful hand stitching or embroidery. Ann used to buy scarves of raw silk in different colours at a silk vendor in South Delhi, and would bring these to the Centre. The designs for the scarves would vary and the seamstresses did get some freedom to decide this for

themselves, but the design would always be made out of 25 leaves that would be cut out of some other fabric. Much time was spent by matching fabric for the leaves with the colour of the scarf and deciding on what colour combinations would work out and not, and what colour of thread. The same went for the machine-made tote bags where colours and fabrics had to be matched before sewed. This was an important part of the production process. If the fabrics and colour combinations combined in the product, did not suit the ideal consumer's taste, it meant that it would not sell. "Own" products or ordered ones – if they did not succeed in selling their products, it would firstly mean that they would not be able to pay rent and wages. Secondly, it would mean that their vision for the organization was in vain, meaning that they would become more of a charity than that of a social entrepreneurship/business. This created friction between Ann – who was the link with the customers, the donors and the one in control of Change by Hand's bank account and knew the economic stakes – and the local staff and seamstresses, who did not.



Scenes from production. To the left: Eva working on where to place the 25 leaves on a silk scarf.

To the right: Newly finished, freshly ironed tote bags ready for the market.

As reflected here, “things” were an important part of life and work at the Centre. Daniel Miller (2009) writes about the “humility of objects” arguing precisely that things often are overlooked in our analysis of social life – despite the power these things have in our lives. I agree with him in that ordinary material is key in how we understand and create the world, and going ahead, I want to follow up on Miller’s suggestion of taking seriously “the ability of material things to establish the frame for proper behaviour without us noticing that they inhabit this powerful role” (2009:4).

### **Aesthetic Confusions: “What Would Ann Like?”**

Ann would commute to the Centre from her home in South Delhi a couple of times a week – sometimes less, sometimes more. After I had been around for a while, she would sometimes not come to the Centre if I was going there reflecting that she started to look at me as her stand-in, instructing me with different tasks. As my authority at the Centre too grew, I became in some ways also to be seen as her substitute, and was expected by Ann to fill some of her role. Ann would often laugh and call me her “*little spy*” at the Centre. In her absence she would sometimes ask me to make sure that everyone did their job and to make sure that quality and design of the commodities were maintained. Also, because I always carried my android phone with me, always being connected to internet, I became a medium for Anika and the Kamana women to communicate with Ann when she was not there.

At one point, when Ann was away from Delhi, travelling, she trusted me with the responsibility to make “good” colour combinations in her absence. “*It’s not that hard*”, Ann assured me, “*Just, you know, don’t make it ugly*”. Although I felt flattered by her trust in me, I dreaded the task. The seamstresses, the staff and I had all experienced on several occasions that their suggestions for colour combinations were not appreciated by Ann. During these sessions matching colours, threads and fabrics, therefore, what the seamstresses would do, was trying to figure out “*What would Ann like?*”; a question they (including I!) would spend hours struggling to figure out.

The seemingly simple task I had been given, to decide on combinations that were *not ugly*, thus became very stressful. I found myself in piles of saree fabric



leftovers for hours and hours, trying to figure out what Ann would like, constantly worrying that Ann would pass a negative judgment on my taste when she finally would see the final item. I ended up asking Khushi, Anika and the seamstresses for help. I remembered that Naina, one of the youngest seamstresses, had frequently been praised by Ann for her great taste, and I gave her some authority in deciding. As I would always bring my android phone with me to the Centre, they would often ask me to message Ann for them, asking her this and that. Now they insisted I take photos of the fabric and thread matches, and send them to Ann for approval through the messaging service WhatsApp. This was often how Anika did it when she was left alone with the matching responsibility, a task which she disliked, and also, according to Ann, was not at all good at, as Anika stated she had no interest in fabrics and designs.

The colours did not show well in the pictures on WhatsApp; the lighting at the Centre was too low for taking high quality photos where the colours showed. Her “yes” to some matches and “*definite no*” to others, were hard to work from not really knowing what she was looking for. Ann wanted to see the combinations before the seamstresses sewed the tote bags. Because they did not have anything else to do, everyone was waiting for the matches to be done before they were able to start working. Everybody wanted to contribute and came with suggestions, looking at me for a “yes” or a “no”. Ann had given me the responsibility for this part of the process in her absence and because of my “Westernness” I was assumed to know which aesthetic expression was acceptable and what was not.

Clearly I did not know. Through WhatsApp, Ann had now declined five out of ten matches that we had suggested. “*Matching is very easy for me!*”, Anika laughed as we were sitting on the floor covered in a chaos of different fabrics and matches, lifting up two patterned fabrics that she knew did not go together, saying “*look, even this is very beautiful for me!*”. Khushi, Naina, Anika and I laughed so much we cried. It amused them that even I, the Westerner, did not manage to satisfy Ann’s aesthetic demands. We finally decided on some matches and I let the seamstresses decide more of the colour combinations than they usually did, as it was generally Ann’s job, and they made the scarves and tote bags in the colours we had decided on without Ann.

I felt nervous when Ann finally came to the Centre to go through what we had produced. “*It looks like a saree*”, she commented on one of them,<sup>44</sup> implying that it did not look “fresh” and that she did not like it. I told her that we had all spent the last days trying to figure out “what Ann would have liked.” “*Well!*”, Ann said, a bit off, “*it’s not my taste – it’s Western taste!*”. “Yes,” I agreed, “*but for them...you are...the Western taste*”. To this, she did not reply. Some Ann liked, others she definitely did not. Her approval and disapproval of the matches were difficult to foresee, and we all relied on her subjective taste for what came to be defined as “fresh”, “fun” and “beautiful” – and what was not.

### **Aesthetic Distancing**

Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) provides us with analytical tools to approach aesthetic choices and taste as a sense of distinction. Such distinctions, argues Bourdieu, function as class markers, being used by groups to create distance from each other. What is accepted as legitimate aesthetic choices and tastes among a group or society is socially constructed, mediated by social relations. “Good taste” per se, thus, does not exist but “good taste” is frequently claimed by certain groups of people in relation to other groups. Bourdieu defines taste as a form of cultural capital – the sum of cultural knowhow and skills which a person possesses. This cultural capital is a product of upbringing and frame of references, meaning it is transmitted from the person’s social background. Bourdieu also define other forms of capital; economic and social. His point is that even if a person acquires high economic capital, this will not necessarily change how others judge him. This is because social and cultural capital is an important part of how one judges others to be.

Social and cultural capital are closely connected with what Bourdieu calls a person’s *habitus*; an unconscious, tacit form of bodily knowledge that is an internalization of social structures. A person’s *habitus* (internalized body language, knowhow, skills, habits) might quickly reveal the low caste person who is entering the restaurant and starts eating with five fingers instead of two or the truck driver attending an art exhibition forced to give his comment on a picture. I understand taste as being an important part of habitus; it is as if inscribed in the body and this is what

---

<sup>44</sup> On commenting on the item portrayed on the front page of this thesis.

Bourdieu refers to as aesthetic dispositions which are determined by social origin rather than easily accumulated.

In reference to what comes to be defined as “beautiful” and “ugly” by whom, Bourdieu (1984 [1979]:2) writes;

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly [...]

What is evaluated as beautiful and what is deemed ugly by a person may reveal a person’s aesthetic dispositions and, hence, his habitus. Because of the vast differences in social background between Ann/the ideal customer/-market and the local staff and Kamana women from Sangampur and Sundernagar, what came to be seen as beautiful for Anika and Naina (one of the seamstresses) was deemed ugly by Ann. What Ann found beautiful, Anika and Naina would laugh at and find ugly.

Again, Bourdieu’s distinction between “high aesthetics” and “popular aesthetics” is helpful as the former often judge negatively the “popular” taste of the common people and “never ceases to haunt the popular experience of beauty” (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]:31-32). When Ann comment negatively on a colourful piece that was made in her absence that it “*looks like a saree*”, I interpret that as a negative comment on popular aesthetics – an aesthetic that was not in line with what Ann wanted Change by Hand to represent.

Aesthetic preferences may create cohesion and points of identification among some. At the same time – and as Miller (2009:19) underlines in a way that compliments Bourdieu – this cohesion of order and “points of identification for some may also alienate, harm or disempower others, who are excluded from or do not share this experience of the world”. As Ann pointed out they “*really want the women to decide themselves what the products should look like*”. Yet, by saying that every time the Kamana seamstresses get to decide “*it ends up ugly*”, she at the same time claims monopoly of aesthetic legitimacy and effectively marks an aesthetic distance from the Kamana women and the staff at the Centre.

Following Bourdieu, these kinds of struggles for aesthetic monopoly are not as innocent as they might seem. Rather, “[a]t stake in every struggle over art there is

also the imposition of an art of living” (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]:57). The art here being the design, judging the design of a commodity to be vulgar or “ugly” is to judge the very aesthetic disposition of the person who created it. Aesthetic dispositions of a person are a “product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions” (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]:56). Needless to say – and as demonstrated by the examples above – the Kamana seamstresses’ or Anika’s “conditions of existence” and frames of references were very different from Ann’s or the ideal upper-middle class South Delhi customers’.

However, let us return to another aspect of this, namely Ann’s comment that she wanted them to “*make products for Delhi-life, like fresh and fun*”. “Delhi-life”, of course, is not one kind of life, as we see from the contrast between the reality at the embassy venue, presented in the introductory case of this chapter, and the reality of Sundernagar. The young Kamana women’s lives were also Delhi-lives, but I do not think the right description of their lives would be “fresh and fun” and I know for a fact that their lives were not at all what Ann thought about when she referred in this way to “Delhi-life”. The world in which the ideal customer (at the embassy venue) lives and perceives, is a world away from Sundernagar and the Kamana community and, following Bourdieu, the different ideas about what the commodities made at the Centre should look like, reflects these vast differences. The “fresh and fun” products would, rather, be customized to the “fresh and fun” privileged South Delhi-life, tastes and fashions – aspects alien to the young Kamana seamstresses. Still, if the commodities they make are considered “beautiful” or “fresh” enough, at least they – the “product of their labour”, meaning the commodities themselves – would be granted access to the world of “fresh and fun” South Delhi life.

### **Towards an Aesthetics of Consumerism: “Creative Workshop”**

Ann brought in a cure to what we may label as the aesthetic confusion at the Centre – a context creating situations of unproductivity and inefficiency, as we saw above. The remedy came in the shape of a young designer named Myra. Ann knew Myra through a common social network in South Delhi, and was hoping that she could contribute to the change she felt that the production process needed. The idea was that if they enhanced the quality and design (with Myra’s help), they would receive

more orders from other enterprises, in addition to making their own products more attractive among well-paying consumers. Myra would, in other words, help them come closer to an aesthetic of consumerism.

Entering the Centre for the first time, Myra expressed a striking self-confident and authoritative vibe, and her expensive looking outfit was in stark contrast to her present surroundings at the Centre. She did not greet any of us, before she asked us all to sit down in a circle in the sewing room. As far as I knew, none of the seamstresses knew who she was yet. Myra spoke in clear Hindi, which I understood most of, and which I have reconstructed here. She started speaking, dreamingly;

*Think! You are sitting here in this small room, and that what you make is being sold far away from here! That, you can be proud of!  
And that, that is why the products need to be of the best kind.*

I noticed that she repeated the phrase “*you are sitting here in this small room*” several times throughout that afternoon. This phrase illuminated how it was not only a distance in aesthetic preferences, but more concretely, also a geographical distance between the (the big rooms of) the potential customer and the working room where the seamstresses spent their days. After a round of the seamstresses introducing themselves, Myra started to talk about designs, but Angeli, one of the seamstresses, interrupted her, insisted Myra to present herself. “*Oh, I had forgotten that!*”, Myra laughed, explaining that she was 24 years old, and that “*I like to make things. With my hands. I like thinking something*”, she said pointing at her head, “*and then make it with my own hands*”. She pointed with her hand to her head, and then down towards her arm. “*That’s what I like. I like painting, and I like making things with my hands. But I do not know these machines*”, she made clear pointing over to one of the sewing machines.

Myra seemed to come from a wealthy family. She was a NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology) graduate, a highly acknowledged institute that educate India’s future fashion designers. Within the NIFT discourse and socialization, according to Kuldova, the students are taught to be “patrons of crafts and ‘do some good’, help elevate the craftspeople and provide them with ‘design assistance’” (Kuldova, 2016:107). Myra did “*not know these machines*”. Myra’s words echoes

Tereza Kuldova's (Kuldova, 2016:79-80) observation among Delhi designers where "[t]he designers' magic formula is: 'I imagine, they execute'". Along similar lines, Myra positioned herself as the visionary, knowledgeable designer, perceiving the seamstresses as "skilled but not knowledgeable" (Venkatesan 2009:38 in Kuldova, 2016:86), in need of a visionary, innovative designer to lead them (for they do not know what they are doing) – a rhetoric that echoes a typical developmental discourse (Kuldova, 2016:86).

The designers at NIFT are encouraged by their educators to guide the savage craftspeople to make products for a civilized life.<sup>45</sup> The fashion educator and co-founder of NIFT, Singanapalli Balaram (2011 in Kuldova, 2016:86) writes:

one of the most pressing needs is helping people with design. This requires educating students to give design training to people who are illiterate... It also means leaping from past traditions to future aspirations; connecting traditional materials, forms, techniques, and wisdom to the world's future materials, techniques and needs.

### **Crash Course in "Good" Aesthetics**

They were still sitting in a circle in the sewing room and Myra asked to see the things they had made. Jyoti got up and went out of the room, bringing her a selection. Myra started, looking at a tote bag. Studying it carefully, dragging her fingers over the stitches and the seams, she nodded saying it was good – but that that it needed to be even better. I heard some of the seamstresses sigh. They needed to remove every little loose thread, Myra explained. "*Your products need to be the best. People want it saaf [literally meaning clean]*".

Myra continued to the next product. "*No pencil marks should be visible*", she remarked, with her soft, calm, but determined voice. Myra pulled a sofa cushion up from a bag. "*Now, look at this!*". The cushion was white, with a printed illustration on it. Indeed, it was clean cut with its straight lines and clean seams. "*It's beautiful!*"

---

<sup>45</sup> Myra can be said to have followed the philosophy of her generation of designers in India and what Howels call an European-like "opposition of body and mind, savagery and civilization" (2003:5 in Kuldova, 2016:86).

Lakshmi said in her usual ironic, mocking manner, looking around to the other seamstresses for confirmation, laughing. They too laughed. Throughout the session, I continued hearing sighs from the seamstresses and Lakshmi continued her mocking comments towards Myra and the others seemed to enjoy them as they tried to hide their giggles.

This much resembles a passage in Kuldova's ethnography where she describes the craftworkers' mocking and making fun of the designer who comes by to inspect their work. Following Kuldova's reading of Michael Herzfeld (2001 in Kuldova, 2016:124-125), Lakshmi's bold comment can be understood as acts of insubordination. Yet, an act of insubordination

is not always resistance: it can lock one into the structures of power more firmly than ever – a considerable price for the momentary satisfaction of symbolically inverting the prevailing order. Those who mock the educated and powerful, for example, may nonetheless play the game of clientilism because it is pragmatically stupid not to do so (Herzfeld 2001:71 in Kuldova, 2016:124-125).

Thus, irony should be taken seriously, as it offers an analytical perspective that recognize people's capability to theoretically reflect upon their own predicament (Herzfeld 2001:65 in Kuldova, 2016:124-125) which is the "very ability that is systematically denied them by the designers. Being ironic necessarily implies an awareness of one's circumstances and the ability to reflect on these circumstances" (Kuldova, 2016:124-125).

Lakshmi's use of irony and the women giggling with her brings forth their insistence that the designer's notions of a "good life", "empowerment", aesthetic preferences, the value of work, of "development" and so on, are not necessarily universally shared or sought after, as Kuldova points out (2016:125). In this sense, the seamstresses invoked an anti-work ethic (Weeks, 2011) valorising relations, leisure and chatter over clean, clean cut materials, design, effectivity and "empowerment" through low wages.

Myra, however, seemingly disregarded Lakshmi's mocking comment. She had a point to make. She started by asking everyone to imagine an apple, saying that

in doing so, everyone will think about different things and aspects about the apple. Some might think about the juice that comes out of the apple when it is cut. Others might visualize the pattern of sliced apples on a plate, some might think about the colour of an apple. *“From one simple topic, we will all think of different things. You understand?”* She held the cushion up, to prove her point. *“I have designed this myself, on the computer”*, she said. *“This pattern is made out from one single topic, a topic called geometry. Look at its clean stitches. This I sell at exhibitions. How much do you think I sell it for?”* The room went quiet. Myra insisted that they should try to guess. *“A hundred rupees!”* Angeli finally suggested. *“Ah, a hundred rupees!?”* Myra snorted. *“That’s not more than minimum wage! Others? What do you think?”* Jyoti was confused of what would be included in the price and asked if it included the filling cushion. *“Yes, and only that is worth two hundred rupees!”* she said. Lakshmi suggested three hundred. *“I sell it for one thousand rupees!”* Myra finally revealed. Lakshmi and Angeli gasped wide-eyed. Myra explained that the whole process, from *“me working and thinking on the design, and to the sewing of it, is a lot of work, and in my opinion, that means that it needs to cost more”*.

The distance between the young Kamana women’s lives in Sundernagar and the market in which their products were sold in South Delhi, was illustrated by the seamstresses finding it hard to grasp that one pillow could be sold for INR 1000<sup>46</sup> – half of what the most hard working seamstresses could earn in a good month. This distance was further illustrated as Myra found some coloured magazines from her bag. One of them had the title *“Living etc. – For fashionable and stylish homes”* on the cover page. In the pile of magazines was also a copy of *Vogue India*, a high-end fashion magazine. She opened the *Living etc.* magazine on a page with a picture of a seemingly pleasant living room, Western style, with a beige, soft sofa, and polished surfaces. On the couch was a woman dressed in a white dress, apparently relaxing while she was sipping from her designer tea-cup, sitting next to a white cushion with a print of a simple green leaf on it. Myra showed it to the girls. *“Wow!”* said one. They all got off their chairs to get closer to the picture, to see it closer. *“So beautiful!”* said another. They all agreed on how beautiful it was.

---

<sup>46</sup> INR 1000 equals about NOK 100.



While Myra was talking about the beauty of the cushion and how it so gorgeously fitted the room, the seamstresses were more preoccupied with the room itself. “*You are able to make this*”, she said encouraging. Myra continued going through the magazine, and opened it on a new page, showing it to the seamstresses, this time of a big bed full of cushions. “*This magazine is filled with ideas about beautiful things to fill one’s life. What you think is beautiful, someone else will also find beautiful*”, Myra said.

After spending some time looking through the magazines, Myra then wanted the seamstresses to think about a topic from which they could make a beautiful design, something simple. Again, the seamstresses were hesitant. “*Think of something simple, something you see every day*”, Myra instructed. “*Grapes*”, suggested Jyoti. “*Sewing machine!*”, suggested Angeli. “*A girl!*” Venya suggested eagerly. Myra did not seem happy with their answers, as if she had something else in mind and looked at on the sewing machines. “*What about thread and spools? You see thread every day, don’t you?*”, she suggested, almost tasting the word thread (*dhaga*). The seamstresses did not seem convinced that that was a good idea, and continued with other suggestions. Myra seemed to have decided on spools and threads, and placed three spools on the floor in the shape of a star, and asked the women to visualize that pattern seen from above made many, many times next to each other. “*Like this*”, she suggested, and placed the spools in a triangle shape. “*With one idea, we can do many different designs. Do you know the word colour palette?*” she asked, using the English word “colour palette”. When she did not receive an answer, she replied that the whole room had a colour palette. She asked them to repeat the word, and so they did: “*Colour palette*”. She explained that if they used many different colours of thread for their design, they would make a colour palette. The next word she wanted them to know was the English word “*collection*”. Myra asked if they knew what it meant. Jyoti suggested hesitantly that it meant family. A family of things. Myra seemed happy with the answer, and went on to explaining them the meaning of the word “*colour wheel*”. She had them all repeat the new, English words again. Myra later had the seamstresses spend a whole afternoon being creative with threads, creating designs and patterns with threads and spools. As they did this, Myra photographed the designs she liked with her phone, and would work with the designs on a computer program. A screen-printing machine, located far

away from the Centre, would then print the finished design and be brought back to the Centre for the seamstresses at Change by Hand to sew into simple, square cushion covers.

Following the already mentioned educational philosophy of NIFT, many students – like Myra – start their own organization or work with NGOs after graduating, helping craftsmen who lack the knowhow, the market or the awareness as far as trends are concerned, “the colours and the quality or the kind of products one would require in today’s market” (Kuldova, 2016:107). Myra seemed to share this enthusiasm of craft revival, and through something that could be labelled a crash-course in high aesthetics through introducing the seamstresses to *Vogue India* magazine and technical design terms in English (like *colour palette* and *colour wheel*), wanted to share her enthusiasm.

People reading the kind of magazines like *Vogue*, *Living etc.* were the same people which Ann targeted to sell Change by Hand commodities. Through her crash course in high aesthetics Myra wanted the seamstresses to notice the way in which the cushions were designed. However, all the seamstresses seemed to be interested in was the size and luxury of the room itself. The magazines offered a glimpse of their commodities’ consumers’ lives and their ways of perceiving the world. At the same time it was a reminder of a world which the seamstresses did not access – a life of excess, lavishness and luxury. Showing the seamstresses, who would earn maximum INR 2000<sup>47</sup> on a good month, high-end, expensive fashion magazines to inspire them to make beautiful objects for rich people’s homes, thinking that it would motivate them and inspire them to do better, illustrated the differences in cultural and economic circumstances in which Myra and the seamstresses spent their lives.

### **Searching for the Kamana Women’s “Expression”**

According to Myra, all this was done by maintaining the Kamana girls’ own “expression” throughout the process, including the end-product of the cushion. Myra explained that “*my goal is that I want to keep the initial idea that they had in the beginning, and then carry that idea through to the end-product*”. This seemed to be important to her. All brands claim authenticity in some way or the other, and this

---

<sup>47</sup> Approximately NOK 200

“expression” that Myra was seeking also constituted a claim to a certain authenticity in the end-product. Authenticity is “[...] that quality that somehow connects the commodity to a place or time with special significance, often rooted in notions of tradition” (Smith 1996:506 quoted in Kuldova, 2016:181).



Scene from the “Creative workshop”: Myra (not in the picture) instruct the seamstresses on how to make designs out of threads and spools.

Myra seemed genuinely interested in developing the young Kamana women’s *own expression*. However, in applying her own ideas on how to create authentic, sellable designs (correlated with Myra’s aesthetic ideals) the Kamana women’s “own expression” seemed to get lost somewhere on the way. Perhaps Myra’s reasoning was in line with Ann’s words to the potential customer at the embassy fair; “*We really want the [Kamana] women to decide themselves how the products should look like [...] But the problem is that no one want to buy that.*”

Ultimately, the Kamana women lived in a different visual world from the one that the products were to be consumed in. Therefore, the seamstresses’ aesthetic expression would have to be disciplined and adjusted into frames suitable for their high-end consumers. The high-end contemporary development consumer to whom Ann wanted to sell the Change by Hand products, demanded clean cuts, high

quality, straight lines, and clean products, with a touch of an authentic expression and a touching story linking the product to the person who made it, and the consumer to the producer.

Ann wanted the commodities to “*sell themselves*”; that people would want to buy the things for what they were and what they saw without having to “*guilt*” anyone into buying them, which was the phrase Ann would use, meaning not having to make potential customers feel guilty (in front of this highly moral and ethical initiative) in order for them to purchase the commodity. She wished that a mere look at the commodity would induce someone to purchase and appreciate its value. Within “the economy of late capitalism that has drifted away from dealing with commodities per se to trading in experiences, feelings, visions and promises of future life scenarios, this wish appears naïve and nostalgic” (Kuldova, 2016:39). Myra was, however, trained on the subject. She knew what costumers would buy, and knew how to frame products. She knew how to capitalize on and play with the image of the seamstresses’ situation as marginalized, suffering women, and make beautiful commodities out of it to fit the contemporary upper middle class lifestyle and their need to “do some good”. Kuldova (2016:181) points out that among middle- and upper class India in particular

[s]entiment, emotions, morality, both individual and collective, qualities such as prestige [...] or Indianness, are all becoming inseparable from the realm of consumption – it is no longer what you are buying, but what you are buying into.

Thus, making sure that the concept of the commodity is something one would want to buy into was important. The commodity should itself be able to tell a story and hence “sell itself”. In this sense, the idea of a sofa cushion with a thread and spool design was, by all accounts, likely not coincidental. First, a cushion cover is simple to produce, and a readymade, machine printed design would make it easy to mass produce identical products which was preferred so that people could order a design online. Further, the cushion was the manifestation of an assembly of different conditions that the products of Change by Hand had to fulfil in order to comply with all the demands of the high-end development consumer world, represented by the embassy fair described in the introduction of this chapter. With this, a particular way

of life too was consumed with the cushion. The cushion contributed in making life more beautiful and comfortable, and in this way represented the ethical demands of the high-end development consumer. A cushion (for a more comfortable life) with a thread design would fit well with the name of the brand, underlining a buyable story that the Kamana women were, really, by threads and fabrics were creating *Change by Hand* (for a better future). It combined the “fresh and fun” with the “authentic” and told the story of hard-working women working to become empowered. At the sales events, whenever a potential customer would point out that the quality of the products were low, or that the corners weren’t straight, Ann would assure them that the women were still learning, that they were getting better and better at their work, and that they were eager to make a living for themselves.

Much like Marcel Mauss’ (1999 [1925]:66) claim that “*things sold still have a soul. They are still followed around by their former owner, and they follow him also*”, when consumers bought a product like a cushion from Change by Hand, they did not only consume the physical cushion. Moreover, they were consuming the *history* of the product. This was why it was important that the commodity visually embodied some of the social milieu in which it was produced. In creating this ethical, caring, soulful commodity Change by Hand could not afford dirty products, “ugly” aesthetics or crooked seams. Ironically, it had to be just enough dirty and crooked (but not too much) in order to pass as handmade, authentic and filled with potential. The (just enough) crookedness of the products represented the Kamana women’s will to become empowered and become “better”. Hence, through the materiality of the cushion, they consumed the story of the exotic other who could only help herself by way of the warm-hearted consumer. If only for a brief moment, the buyer invested and took part in the utopian dream of a different and better future, a better self – both for the purchaser and for the poor woman who made the pouch. The physical cushion with its particular aesthetic would become a souvenir from a utopian realm where a better world was possible. Even if a “commodity appears at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood [its] analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx 1986:76 in Renfrew, 1986:157).

In a sense, the commodities became the Kamana seamstresses’ delegates to geographical and social spaces and spheres they themselves did not access.

Potential purchasers of Change by Hand's commodities did appreciate and ask for the Kamana women's stories, but the Kamana women themselves did not access the areas where the commodities were sold or the people who bought them. One of Bourdieu's main points, illustrated by the Kabyle house, is exactly this; the materiality, which we produce around us, reflects social structures in society. Order exists external to ourselves, and in that manner people are found "to have an endless creativity to explore the properties of various genres of objects to create their understanding of themselves in the world" (Miller, 2009:20).

### **Summing Up**

As I have shown, due to Change by Hand's dependency towards potential consumers, Ann and the designer attempted to satisfy consumer's imaginaries of the worthy receiver through the design of the commodities. This form of development consumerism that they were catering was part of the larger discourse of moral capitalism, and made the seamstresses dependent on the networks and aesthetic knowhow of Ann and the designer. Following up on this note, I will now move to look closer at some of the paradoxes that arise within this moral capitalism.

## Chapter 4

# **“Shop to Empower Women”: Paradoxes of Moral Capitalism**

“[T]he point is less about selling a particular product and more about selling a particular cause or concern”

(Goodman, 2010:105).

It was a chilly winter morning in the lush green Diplomatic Area in South Delhi, and the heavy morning smog coloured the place grey. Ann and I had just finished setting up our stand at the Christmas market, taking place annually at the Australian Embassy. While Ann kept moving our products back and forth on the stand table, trying to decide how they were better presented, I wandered out onto the fresh, big, green lawn to familiarize myself with the place. Big, red letters on a white banner encouraged attendees to “SHOP TO EMPOWER WOMEN!” and I soon realized that most of the stalls were filled up with charities, non-governmental organizations and other social entrepreneurships. At one stand sat a woman selling monthly subscriptions to apple juice made by aging, poor women in the mountains of

Himalaya, another offered ecological paper made by the hands of disabled people, represented by one of the disabled persons it claimed to aid.

This was going to be a hard place to sell stuff, Ann had remarked earlier, complaining that everyone were selling similar items, all for “*the same good causes*”. It smelled like barbeque and grilled meat was being prepared in the food area. Indian women dressed in colourful Indian costumes, like *salwar kameez* and *sarees*, were walking around on the big, green lawn sipping bottles of beer – an unusual sight in Delhi, especially 10:30 in the morning. Several expatriates were also attending the market. The sun was getting stronger, and soon the grey smog was clearing away. More people were entering the lawn around lunchtime, many with their children and strollers. A man dressed in a Santa Claus costume and flip-flops entered the lawn, and the children excitedly gathered around, as Christmas songs were playing from the loudspeakers. The products made at the Centre – the pillowcases, scarves, table runners, wall hangings, hairbands, tote bags, and the cardholders, ended up being very popular.

As should be clear from the setting, this was the expatriate, high-end kind of market, much like the sustainability market described in the preceding chapter, it was what I would argue to be the kind of cultural sphere that would generally comprise the framework within the products made by Change by Hand were sold.

In the previous chapter, I looked at the production and design processes. Now I will proceed to look closer at the next step in the journey of the commodities produced at the Centre, namely the contexts where the commodities were presented for the potential customer. The chapter consists of two sections. In the first, I will look closer at how people relate to each other and create imaginaries of “the other” through the medium of things in the context of *moral capitalism*. I suggest that the commodities produced at the Centre, like other commodities advertised to “empower women”, are integral to what I described above as a “moral capitalism” and that they, as such, comprise of something else than ordinary customer goods. The notion of moral capitalism is “good to think with” to analytically explore these kind of markets as a whole. Within the logics of moral capitalism, as I will show, there is an expectation and demand for commodities to be embodied and de-fetishized. What this implies analytically, I will return to shortly.



As I am interested in the theory of value, production and the social relationships that are forged and imagined through the exchange of things, I understand Marx and Mauss (1999 [1925]) as highly useful vantage points for analytic explorations of our case. I will draw on Weeks' (2011) reading of Marx in this chapter.

What I mean by embodied commodities is that the commodity is infused with a value and spirit that goes beyond its physical appearances and practical value. Commodity fetishism, a concept introduced by Marx, involves the de-socialization of commodities through market trade, meaning that the production process and the history behind the production of the commodity are made invisible for the consumer, alienating the producer from the consumer. Conversely, de-fetishized commodities are commodities that have not been cut off from the social relations in which these arose.

Gifts and commodities have been constructed as in strict opposition to each other in much anthropological literature (e.g. Gregory, 1980, Carrier, 1990). From a Maussian point of view, gift exchange and commodity exchange are mutually exclusive, as they were seen as two essentially different forms of exchange belonging to different societies, where gift exchange belonged to so-called archaic societies, while commodity exchange belonged to industrial societies (dominated by division of labour and class).

In this chapter I will demonstrate how such a strict opposition is not so analytically useful in our case. Specifically, I will suggest that the commodities in this case are infused and embodied with the spirit of the gift and that they are not morally neutral but carries the intention and the histories of those who produced it.<sup>48</sup> I thus propose that the commodities produced at the Centre are better described as “hybrid objects”, simultaneously inhabiting features of both gifts and commodities. I will empirically investigate how the “things always contain something from the person who creates or transfers them and they embody the intention, energy and meaning invested in them” and thus as “objects circulate, [...] they become both the vehicle for

---

<sup>48</sup> See also (Parry, 1986) on the inalienability of the gift.

connections with other people, and an expression of the desire to establish or maintain social relationships” (Geert De, 2008:6).

Discourses within development consumerism and moral capitalism appear to centre on giving the poor and marginalized paid work so that they may be emancipated. But what happens when the “poor and marginalized” (Cornwall and Brock, 2005) does not want to work? In part two of this chapter, I will be leaning on Kathy Weeks’ (2011) theoretical insights on work and anti-work ethics. I understand anti-work ethics as the valorisation of the opposite of what work ethics value: Leisure, chatting, long hours on the roof sipping tea, children, family, and other activities that in a capitalist perspective would be referred to as so-called unproductive. As businesses and organizations provide the “needy” with work of a different kind, within this logic it seems almost unthinkable that the recipient would not accept this work ethic. In the same way that “unwillingness to work is symptomatic of the lack of grace” (Weber 1958:159 in Weeks, 2011:53) as the “morally suspect state of poverty can be attributed to the lack of individual effort and discipline” (Weeks, 2011:53). I will ethnographically investigate what might give work such an important role within moral capitalism, and why it might be seen as problematic when the seamstresses at the Centre refuse to make an order of so-called fair-trade commodities in favour of some “*time off*”.

Earlier I defined moral capitalism as an umbrella term covering a wide range of production and consumption of commodities inscribed with high moral and ethical value, like fair-trade, ethical trade and corporate social responsibilities. I see the paradoxes within this moral capitalism to be the insistence on luxury, high-end consumption as a solution to the world’s inequalities (“shop to empower women”), and further the insistence on a certain work ethic (diligent production) as the one and only hegemonic path to emancipation, empowerment and prosperity within the logics of moral capitalism.

### **Consumption as a “Tool of Development”**

As I showed in the vignette, the stalls at the embassy Christmas market was displaying a range of social and development initiatives and even some of their subjects (like the disabled man who sold ecological paper made by disabled). It was

a “showcase of humanitarian ethics” that were turning consumerism and Christmas shopping into, using Kuldova’s words, “the main form of (pseudo)political action” (2016:103). This borderland between charity and business is illustrative of what I identify as moral capitalism. Advocating shopping as a means to reach empowerment for women is based on fashionable ideas of “‘creative capitalism’ for the poor” (Gates 2008 in Goodman, 2010:104).<sup>49</sup> The creative capitalism for the poor is today a big business with a substantial supply and demand for moral and ethical commodities, “fair-trade” and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), where the idea is that it is possible to reunite private financial interests with public good of some sort.

A concrete example of this is that Change by Hand were producing pouches for a woman named Kavitha and her jewellery brand *Shanti Malas* – the brand itself exemplifying how consumption is seen as a “tool” of development (Goodman, 2010:105) within moral capitalism discourse. Kavitha sold her jewellery online and in her family’s South Delhi jewellery shop *Shanti Jewellery* located in a green up-market place in South Delhi. Kavitha and Ann had met each other at a bar in South Delhi. Kavitha was in search for a philanthropic, charitable aspect for her brand and Ann offered just that. Their collaboration started from there. *Malas*, the kind of jewellery that Kavitha produced, are a style of necklaces that are made with 108 beads and have been traditionally used in India as a tool in prayer and meditation to count the number of *mantras* recited and to keep concentrated. The kind of *malas* that Kavitha did business with, were of the high-end, fashionable kind, made by exclusive and “traditional Indian” seeds, crystals and silk thread in different designs to suit different “needs”, with names such as “*Earth*”, “*Healing*” and “*Aspire*”. The price of the *malas* were between INR 1000 and INR 22.000 INR.<sup>50</sup>

Change by Hand made the pouches for Kavitha to pack the jewellery in as it was sold. Together with the product a small flyer explaining about the *mala*’s spiritual qualities and about Shanti Mala’s collaboration with Change by Hand were placed in the pouch. The flyer advertised that

---

<sup>49</sup> See also Bill Gates on “creative capitalism” (Kiviat and Gates, 2008), David Bornstein on social entrepreneurship (1998), Stephen Young on “reconciling Private Interest with the Public Good” (2003).

<sup>50</sup> Between NOK 100 and 2200.

Our pouches are made out of *Khadi fabric* [organic cotton hand-woven from hand-spun yarn] and the pattern is block printed using *vegetable dyes*. We use a variety of beautiful prints and patterns. Our pouches are sewn by the women of *Change by Hand* in India. Change by Hand provides *vocational skill training* to young adult women in [...] Delhi who otherwise would be forced into prostitution. By buying our products you are helping these women learn a *skill* they can use for life to keep them off the streets in India. *Thank you* for supporting them and us.

On another flyer that was put into the pouch with the product it was explained how they followed the principle of *ahimsa* (which may translate as non-violence, peace, do-no-harm) and thus “*no silk worm was harmed*” in the process of making threads for the *malas*. Further, the pouches were made with *khadi* fabric (handwoven cloth) and cords for an exact number of pouches, from artisans whom made the organic fabric and printed it by hand with vegetable dyes. Hence, the message is that buying that piece of expensive jewellery the purchaser is consequently contributing to making a better, more ethical, sustainable, moral and just world.



Scene from *Shanti Jewellery* shop. To the right in the picture Shanti Malas were displayed.

Notice the vault in the back to the left.

The above correlates to what social geographer Michael Goodman (2010) refers to as *developmental consumption*. The sort of “development” you can do

through consumption is astounding, and Goodman (Goodman, 2010:105) observes that development today “[...] can be bought nearly everywhere”, whether it is buying a bottle of water where a fraction of the price goes to solving some water crisis, buying a t-shirt to support poor farmers or CO2 quotas to mend global warming. This form of developmental consumption is the umbrella under which we might place the sales event at the embassy Christmas market that morning as described in the introduction, and also the Shanti Mala pouches.

### **High-Potency Development Commodities**

As just mentioned, khadi fabric was used in the production of the pouches. Choosing *khadi* fabric for this particular use was likely no coincidence. The fashionable *malas* capitalized on its ancient “Indianness” just like “Indian fashion capitalizes on craft that has been central to Indian nationalist narratives since Mahatma Gandhi and the Independence movement” (Kuldova, 2016:11). The commodity (the *mala* presented in the pouch), thus, was not only fair, organic, *ahimsa*, spiritual and fashionable, but also instrumentalized a specific form of *Indianness*. All this was investing in the commodities with magical qualities and an utopian potential of advertising (Ernst Bloch 2000 in Kuldova, 2016:28).

Purchasers of Shanti Malas are then not just purchasing ordinary commodities – but rather development commodities with magical qualities. These forms of development commodities produced by the seamstresses at the Centre were in fact invested with the spirit of gift exchange. Further, they appeared to be embodying aspects of the social milieu from which they were produced.

Malinowski taught us, through his discussions about the Kula circle of goods, that goods “have histories and that those histories are central to the creation and consolidation of social relationships” (Malinowski, 1984 in Geert De, 2008:6). Malinowski’s argument, thus, was that it was not the use value per se which gave the goods value, but rather the accumulated histories of the circulating goods and the relationships they establish. As people purchase the commodity they are also purchasing a *gift* but one that should not be understood as part of (or having the

potential for) an inter-individual exchange. Rather, this is a gift for themselves (inner spiritual growth, a fashion statement), for the environment and nature (the ecological vegetable dyes and the un-harmed silk worm), to their conscience, and all this at the same time as they offer a gift in the form of a donation to “keep [the Kamana women] off the streets in India” through their purchase.

In purchasing this spiritual gift to oneself and to the world, I would also argue that there is identity building at stake. Paul Heelas (2008b) notes how, in today’s industrial society full of office jobs, people’s sense of identity is bound up with their patterns of consumption rather than with work roles.<sup>51</sup> Within this logic, he build on Bocoock when he says, “to have is to be” and that people seem to think that they “are what they buy” (1993:109 quoted in Heelas, 2008b:177). This echoes Lévi-Strauss’s argument that “commodities are not just objects of economic exchange; they are goods to think with, goods to speak with” (Fiske, 1989:31 in Heelas, 2008b:178). The Shanti Mala jewellery, with all of its advertised healing and spiritual enhancing qualities, should be seen in the light of New Age spiritualities. Possamai (2003:31 in Heelas, 2008a:83) writes that New Age is a consumer religion par excellence with “alternative spiritualities ... consum[ing] products for gathering and enhancing sensations”. Further, also ‘responsibility’ is filled with a certain spirituality that belongs to the realm of consumption in New Age circles, where “financial sacrifice is rewarded with the cultural capital and moral sense of having consumed “responsibly” – whether that means responsibility toward one’s own personal consciousness and spiritual development, one’s community, or one’s planet” (Lau 2000:18 in Heelas, 2008a:83). Though these high-potency commodities, people seek to give a “slight [spiritual] flavouring [to] their mundane lives” (Bruce, 1996:273 in Heelas, 2008b:168).

Buying a piece of jewellery from the already mentioned *Shanti Jewellery*, which cost up to INR 22.000<sup>52</sup>, INR 40<sup>53</sup> went to the Kamana seamstresses who made the pouch.<sup>54</sup> Like Goodman’s examples above, I see Change by Hand’s commodities as development promoted as something one “can ‘do’ through

---

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, David Graeber’s (2016) writings on how capitalism makes pointless jobs.

<sup>52</sup> INR 22.000 equals about NOK 2200.

<sup>53</sup> INR 40 INR equals about NOK 4.

<sup>54</sup> Although Change by Hand initially had insisted on getting INR 50 per piece.

consumption” (Goodman, 2010:105); by buying a commodity, the purchaser “are helping these [Kamana] women learn a skill they can use for life to keep them off the streets in India”, like the Shanti Mala flyer informed. The logic of moral capitalism is that the more you buy of these goods, the better.

There is nothing new about development being store-bought, Goodman points out. However, what are of more recent origin are the

growing ties of livelihoods as linked directly to consumption choice and – even more persistently – the growing need of the poor to *sell themselves* as sustainable, entrepreneurial stewards by marketing their ‘worthy’ livelihoods, their communities and, of course, some sort of sellable product (Goodman, 2010:105).

Like the big banner encouraging to “SHOP TO EMPOWER WOMEN” at the embassy Christmas market illustrate how consumption as a tool of development and empowerment has come to be accepted within a consumer and development discourse. Within this logic, it becomes less about the practical value of the commodity, and more about the intention and histories that the commodity embody. There seem to be a widespread desire for de-fetishized commodities among the consumers who seek out markets of moral capitalism. Through repeating for potential customers at the embassy market that “*the women [from the Kamana caste] are caught in a vicious circle of intergenerational prostitution*” the producers became, “simultaneously, *promoters of commodities* and the *commodities they promote*” (Bauman 2007:6 in Goodman, 2010:105).

The consumer, on her part, undertakes a novel subjectivity in a role as ‘moral’, ‘ethical’ and ‘responsible’ consumer, and thus, the act of consumption becomes “re-cast as a/the ‘savior’ whose power to promote development the world over has become paramount” (Goodman, 2010:105). The consumers, organizations and businesses who operates within the domain of moral capitalism are often acting the role of “saviours” of the “poor and the marginalized”. This easily overshadows the fact that the recipients themselves may not want to do just any kind of fair-trade or ethical production. Illustrated by the ethnographic case of the 350 ordered “fair-trade” string bags, I will now turn to thematise who has the right to set the premises within moral

capitalism and development consumerism, and what we can learn from what appear to be the seamstresses' anti-work ethics.

### **The Case of the “Fair-Trade” String-Bags**

The staff and the seamstresses had been working intensively the last week, working long hours even during the weekends (which were usually off) to finalize a last minute, large order of cushions for a music festival. Children and women from the Kamana community who did not usually come to the Centre, had come to help us finish in time. Even Khushi, the children's teacher, and I had helped closing the one end of the cushions by hand sewing and I therefore knew that it was not only *my* wrists and fingers that were sore after the work. The Centre had been filled with people and activity. Now it was quiet and that day only the regular seamstresses showed up. They, Khushi and I were sitting on the floor working on the last cushions as Ann arrived the Centre with boxes of sweets. “*It's because you've been working so hard!*” she grinned, offering boxes of sweets to the seamstresses.

Later that day, as Ann and I were alone in the hallway, she explained to me that the festival company would not pick up the cushions today after all, but a hundred the next week, and then a hundred more the next month. Thus, it had not been such a rush to get them finished after all. She was hesitant to share this news with the seamstresses, she told me, as “*they will be so disappointed*”, continuing saying that “*I'm glad, though, because this gives us more time to start the string bags [...] they [350 string bags] need to be done by Monday*”.

The order of string bags came from another similar business/NGO, named *Betterment*. Betterment resembled in many ways Change by Hand; it, too, was started up by an American woman and they also had eight seamstresses working for them, but in another area of Delhi. Betterment, however, on their webpage and through their branding, had a strong focus on themselves as a fair-trade, socially conscious business. They were based on outsourced work, but now they had accepted too many orders for them to handle and had to outsource their outsourced



job to Change by Hand.<sup>55</sup> Per string bag, they would only earn INR 13,<sup>56</sup> which in total would, even if they finished the whole order, be INR 4550.<sup>57</sup> On each seamstress that would be INR 650.<sup>58</sup> Ann was the first to agree that this was bad money, but that they had to think forward, and that the seamstresses would have to understand that if they did this order, there might be more and better work coming their way in the future.

Ann asked Anika to tell the seamstresses in Hindi that they should stop working on the cushions immediately and start working on a new production of 350 string bags that had to be ready for the upcoming Monday. Upon receiving these news, Eva and Lakshmi looked like they had been slapped in the face, and their eyes teared up. Lakshmi, Eva, Tanu, Jyoti, Angeli and Venya all looked at each other in disbelief, shaking their heads, as if they could not believe what they had just been asked. The ones who had been sewing, stopped. The calm atmosphere changed. They would only have two days to make 350 bags. They probably thought the same thing as I did: It just was not possible. They had also worked through the last weekend and it seemed they would have to rely on another weekend working. None of them seemed happy about the message. One by one, they disappeared out of the office where they had been sitting, and gathered in the work room, without working. I went after the seamstresses into the work room. I sat down next to Lakshmi and Tanu, who were sitting on the work desk. I smiled towards Lakshmi, and she smiled back, nevertheless her eyes were filled with frustration. Lakshmi asked me to help them convey their message to Ann. "*She does not understand. Time off is very important! Please make her understand*", Lakshmi said begging in Hindi.

The winter was just around the corner, several were getting a cold and their muscles were sore after all the hard work. I went into the office, where Ann was sitting. She was confused and frustrated: "*What is happening today!? Why is no one working?!*". I tried to explain the situation, that Anika had not really prepared them for this order, and that it came as somewhat a shock. Now the only thing they wanted was some time off to relax and be with their family during the holiday. Ann suggested

---

<sup>55</sup> Meaning they were based on outsourcing while also outsourcing already outsourced work.

<sup>56</sup> INR 13 equals about NOK 1,3.

<sup>57</sup> INR 4550 equals about NOK 455.

<sup>58</sup> INR 650 equals about NOK 65.

we would have a meeting, and the seamstresses agreed. Anika entered in and Ann turned towards her, saying that they needed to do a meeting with the girls. *“They are not working. We need to explain a few things properly”*. Anika nodded acceptingly.

Anika announced in Hindi that now there would be a meeting. They placed, like Anika always insisted during meetings, the chairs in a circle in the work room, and sat down. Like usual, Anika kept insisting that they sat “properly”, which, according to Anika, included sitting with straight backs and both feet on the floor, instead of sitting crossed legged on the chairs. As soon as she was happy with how they were sitting, she took on an authoritative, strict voice, and started saying in Hindi; *“Ann want to tell you some things”*. She turned to Ann: *“You can talk”*. Ann shook her head; *“No, I think they should start – what’s the problem? Venya? What’s the problem?”*. Venya giggled shyly, hesitant to reply. *“Well, you can decide. Do you want to make these bags or not?”* Anika translated, and insisted that they’d reply one by one. One by one, they shook their heads. They did not want to make these bags. Ann wanted to know why, and asked Jyoti to answer. Jyoti was smiling hesitantly, looked over at a couple of the other girls. Finally, she explained that they were all very tired. They did not have much time to finish the string bags. They had worked ten days in a row, and wanted some time to relax. Also, she said, they would not get much money from making the string bags. One by one, they gave the same reasons; too little money, too little time and too little time off. Anika translated what had just been said to Ann, who was sitting next to her. Ann continued, turning to Anika:

*Can you explain them that it is really important that we do this order, Anika? We want to be associated with Betterment, and they might give us work in the future. If we do not do this order, we are likely not to get any more orders from them.*

Anika turned to the seamstresses and translated. The seamstresses were not convinced. *“Ok, I’ll tell you what”*, Ann started, *“What if they start today and make as many as they can”*. She suggested that they then could estimate how much time it took, and then see how many they would be able to make for Monday. *“I don’t think it’s so important that we make all 350, because initially they put in an order for 200, then they raised it. I think it’s more important that we produce some and give it to them, than cancelling the order fully”*. Further, she suggested, they could take the day

after off, which was a bank holiday, and then work one day during the weekend. “*What do they say to that?*” Anika translated what Ann had said and continued with a long, convincing talk. The seamstresses usually listened to Anika and, not surprisingly, finally shook their heads in agreement. “*They will do it!*”, Anika announced firmly. “*Ok, great!*” Ann grinned, clapping her hands. With relief in her voice, she turned to the seamstresses, saying that “*tomorrow you can all take full rest! After these string bags we might not have any more work, and it will be quiet again*”, Ann declared, before she cleaned her throat nervously and looked over at Anika; “*well, except for those 750 [five star hotel] laundry bags we’ll have to make! Haha!*”

Jyoti looked worried, saying that they would try, but that it would be difficult without Auntie, the sewing teacher, to start something new. After a period with long working days, even during the weekend, Auntie had suddenly stopped attending work. She had her parents-in law visiting and had to attend to her household obligations. Her work at Change by Hand came in the way of that. Auntie had been the one who usually had done the job of measuring and cutting the fabric, Jyoti explained, saying that she was not so familiar with these things. Jyoti, helped by her half-sister Angeli, took the big pile of cream white fabric, and started measuring, carefully and a little bit nervous.

Soon after the meeting, all the seamstresses except Jyoti and Angeli, disappeared into the office room. I followed them into the office. They had shut the door, and opening it, I found that they had all laid down on the festival cushions. One of the girls shut the door behind me. “*What are you doing?!*” I asked in Hindi. “*We are doing like Ann!*”, one of them screamed with her face pushed down in a cushion, the others laughed in response. Ann had a medical condition that made her sick quite often and it was not unusual to find her laying on the floor in the office during her visits, closing her eyes. Now the seamstresses were mimicking the condition they so often had seen her in.

In the next section, I will analyse how we can make sense of what happened that day at the Centre and how we might learn something from the seamstresses’ actions and what I will introduce as their *anti-work ethics*.

## Work Ethics

Why do we work so long and hard, Weeks asks in her book *The Problem With Work* (2011:1). To this, there are two common answers, she writes (2011:37-38). First, because we must; in an economy predicated on waged work, few have the choice not to work – although some more than others are in the position to choose where and with what they want to work. The second reply emphasizes willingness to work as we work because we want to: it provides us with a variety of satisfactions like income, meaning, purpose, social ties, recognition and structure. Weeks suggests that although these explanation models are both important, they are not sufficient as they

cannot explain the relative dearth of conflict over the hours we are required to work or the identities we are often expected to invest there; individual consent cannot account for why work would be so much more appealing than other parts of life (Weeks, 2011:37).

Weeks (2011:38) seeks a more complex account of why, how and to what extent so many of us come to accept and inhabit the requirement to work. Waged work remains the showpiece of late capitalism and the main source of access to life's necessities (2011:6). It is the way in which income is distributed. However, "work produces not just economic goods and services, but also social and political subjects" (2011:8), and the wage relation produces disciplined individuals, governable subjects and responsible family members, in addition to worthy citizens. Further, the workplace is a place of subject-making, re-creating, enforcing and performing class and gender. Work has a great centrality in any individual's social imaginary and constitutes an important site of "interpellation into a range of subjectivities" (2011:9), which makes it a good instrument for would-be "developers". For an employer it is not just a matter of putting the workers to work but "actively managing workers' gendered identities and relationships" (2011:10). Work is an activity coloured by normativity and moralization, which in turn is defended by traditional work values like the collective ethical obligation, moral practice, economic necessity and social duty (2011:10-11).

Within the discourse of moral capitalism, work appear to be seen as an action of emancipatory qualities for the poor and marginalized undergirded by the logic that goes: “work hard and you will do well”. The logic of moral capitalism, just like other forms of capitalism, is that the market “helps those who helps themselves” (Weeks, 2011:53). Moral capitalism thus plays with temporality; embedded in it is the promise of a better future if one only works hard enough in the present. Kuldova (2016:113) notes:

Designers, traders, managers, or their middle class NGO employees come to the village to preach to these women, typically emphasizing [...] the necessity of upgrading and perfecting the skill and quality (which they equate with ‘education’), while reinstating the promise of a better future ‘only if they work hard enough now’. Hidden in their discourse is the promise of agency, the Faustian dream of self-development and self-transformation, the promise that everything depends only on their hard work and dedication. They are indoctrinated in the mythology of meritocracy [...]. The promise goes like this: ‘if only you do as I say, work hard, dedicate yourself to work, you too can be like them. Indeed, if you fail, it is only because you have not worked hard enough.

In the already mentioned case of the string bag order, Lakshmi insisted that Ann and Anika did not understand, and that “*Time off is very important!*” Within the neo-liberal logic of meritocracy, wanting “time off” to relax is illegitimate. Meritocracy is based on measurable forms of merit and the harder one work and the more willing one is to learn, the better one’s future prospects. Within this logic, work is a moral duty, highest calling and necessary centre of social life (Weeks, 2011:99). It makes sense to draw a parallel from my ethnographic observations at the Centre to Kuldova’s observations among craftworkers in Lucknow who also, at one point, refused to work. Following Kuldova’s analysis of the Lucknow case, I want to argue that by refusing to work the seamstresses at the Centre were in fact

Push[ing] us [...] towards a rethinking of the value of work, and of the work ethic that dominates contemporary capitalism. [They] provoke

us by their statements about the value of laziness, they want to live *aaram se*, as they say, without bother, without hassle, without control, without cutting up of their day by strict work routines (2016:126-127).

By refusing this ideology of work and by mimicking Ann in the process of doing so, the seamstresses made a statement confirming to what Weeks calls *anti-work ethics*. Anti-work ethics valorises children, chatter and leisure over full working days, a clean work environment or 'empowerment' (Kuldova, 2016:125). In doing this, I would argue, they negotiated with Change by Hand's ideal of who the ideal Kamana woman is. Ann and Anika might have failed to understand Weber's insight that material need alone is not necessarily enough of a stimulus to work (Kuldova, 2016:128). Instead,

interpellated by contemporary capitalist ideology with its obsession with productivity and creativity as a source of individual fulfilment, joy, and status [...] typically fail to understand that this is not the only way a life worth living can be imagined (Kuldova, 2016:128)

and further, I would add, not the only way to be a woman. Rather, refusing work should be interpreted as a creative practice, Weeks (2011:99) provocatively suggests. By this she means that it is a practice that "seeks to reappropriate and reconfigure existing forms of production and and reproduction" (2011:99). Refusing work can "make time and open spaces – both physical and conceptual – within which to construct alternatives" (2011:100). Through refusing work and mimicking Ann, the seamstresses were deploying what James Scott (1985) would call *the weapons of the weak* in seeking their right to co-determination and bargaining rights towards an alternative approach to work and gender. Through this insubordination, the seamstresses resisted the normative discourse of work where a dedicated work ethic is celebrated as the ultimate moral virtue, and thus protects the seamstresses' lifeworlds with its values of well-being, values and notions of what life is worth living for (Kuldova, 2016:125). Within the logics of moral capitalism, a certain work ethics is hegemonic and held as the only path to

emancipation, empowerment and prosperity. These ideals, however, as I have shown, were challenged by the seamstresses' anti-work ethics.

### **Summing Up**

I have shown two paradoxical aspects of moral capitalism. On the one hand is the insistence on luxury, high-end consumption as a solution to the world's inequalities and that shopping is means to empower the unknown others. On the other is the assumption that a certain work ethic is the one and only hegemonic path to emancipation, empowerment and prosperity – circumscribed by a normative framework of such “good” work ethics being the only legitimate ones. I have shown that moral capitalism and its assumptions of *the* “good” work ethics is not the hammer that fit all nails in terms of development and that it should be problematized.

However, this critique does not in any way explain another central aspect, namely this: Why was it that the Kamana women kept returning to the Centre, remaining optimistic about such initiatives? This question is what I will explore throughout the next chapter, where I turn away from the post-development theories to find answers in what one might call “the anthropology of hope”.





## Chapter 5

# Filling the Gap: Waithood, Hope and Ruptures

Me: *“Please explain, why do you come to the Centre?”*

Angeli: *“I dream about my future like other girls.”*

*Seriously, I can't imagine how it would have been if it wasn't for this Centre. Maybe I would have just stayed back at home because there was no other Centre we went to. Also, I wouldn't have been able to study. Maybe I would have got married. Now my parents do not say anything because I go to the Centre. If I would have stayed free [with nothing to do] they would have pressured me to marry.*

This was how Angeli, one of the seamstresses replied when I asked how her life would have been if it had not been for the Centre. Upon asking her if anything had changed in how she perceived life and her future after joining the Centre, she replied that *“by coming to the Centre I realized that even I could dream of doing something.”* Replying to what she wanted to do in life, confidently she explained that:

*I want to teach the illiterates. I want to become a teacher. I want my family to support me, not when I am wrong but when it comes to important decisions. I don't want to waste my life. I want that they*

*should support me in my dream to study. I want to change other's lives too.*

Angeli expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to “*explore*” herself. What was implied in this expression? Ann and Anika presented the Kamana community’s “mind-set” as the main obstacle to its prosperity and emancipation – seeking to change this being an aim of aim of Change by Hand. They were, however, not the first organization that had sought rupture in the ways of the Kamana: As referred to above in relation to the rise of Change by Hand, previously the anti-trafficking organization *Aasha*<sup>59</sup> had been working with the community. Also, in 2012 an international anti-trafficking organization, fronted by a prominent Hollywood celebrity came to the Kamana neighbourhood. In a newspaper article from that year, he poses with a serious face, surrounded by Kamana girls. The article recount how he says that these girls were the bravest he had ever met and that he would do what he could to alleviate their situation. I recognize most of the faces of the girls who is sitting around the celebrity. They had now grown into young women, working as seamstresses at the Centre. I ask: Why did these women still seem to be positive to yet another one of these kinds of initiatives that sought to change them?

At a general level, then, in this chapter I am also seeking to go beyond pure economic understandings to better comprehend how we can make sense of *why* the young women came to the Centre. First, I will explore what is contained by the expression of changing the “mind-set” of a community. Second, I will introduce Jeffrey’s (2010) analysis of the common Indian expression *timepass* and link this with Honwana’s (2014) concept of *waithood*, suggesting that the young Kamana seamstresses who came to work at the Centre were in a liminal period of what I will generally refer to as “waithood”.

My search for analytical and theoretical tools that could help explain dimensions to why these women still seemed to be positive to just another of these kind of initiatives led me to discover a series of works within what one might call “the anthropology of hope” (Moore, 2011, Bloch, 1986, Chambers-Letson, 2012, Crapanzano, 2003, Mar, 2005, Miyazaki, 2006). Through the case of Angeli, I will look at how notions of hopefulness and potentiality may be used to grasp crucial

---

<sup>59</sup> As introduced in chapter 1.

dimensions of seamstresses' lives. Further, I will present a case of Jyoti, representing Change by Hand, singing about change from a stage in the middle of the Kamana neighbourhood. Jyoti's act of singing, I suggest, illustrates how the women of the community were treated as agents of change. Critically, I will suggest that by imbuing the period of waithood with hope, Change by Hand is nonetheless using hopefulness and potentiality instrumentally in their quest to challenge the Kamana "mind-set". On the one side, the terms waithood and timepass represents immobile and passive aspects of these Kamana women's lives, while, conversely, hope and potentiality represents generative and dynamic dimensions. This, we will discover, represents the main opposition in this chapter – but also in the lives of the young Kamana women connected with the Centre.

### ***“The Problem is the Mind-Set”***

What was the mission of Change by Hand's work? In lack of any existing statutes or plans for the organization,<sup>60</sup> I want to answer this question by describing a conversation that took place in an air-conditioned car on our way driving to the Centre from the Diplomatic Area of South Delhi. Ann had been asked by a potential funding donor organization to take one of their board members to the Centre so that the organization could decide whether they would consider Change by Hand a “worthy” recipient of their monetary resources. Ann had just talked her through what she identified as the Kamana community's issues; the social organization around the daughter-in-laws' sex work and the “bride-price” turning into a debt that needs to be repaid. I had heard Ann go through the same argument multiple times with other potential financial donors or customers.

As was also evident in the conversation recounted in the Introduction, where Ann was bringing a potential financial donor to the Centre, Change by Hand's aim was to change the Kamana people's “mind-set”. This meant, like Anika and Ann sometimes would put it, the way they *thought*. Thought is a form of agency that clearly impact the way we live in the world, as worlds and futures are created by

---

<sup>60</sup> I never saw any such written statuses or plans. If they did exist, they were, however, not a central part of the everyday life of the Centre.

human's actions in specific contexts. Arjun Appadurai (2009:30) points out that for the last century culture has been viewed as a "pastness", something belonging to the non-present, with its customs, heritage, and traditions. Development, on the other hand, has been viewed in terms of the future, closely connected with plans, hopes, targets and goals. Following this logic, there is no space for culture, traditions and heritage in the development towards the future. However, as I have shown in the two previous chapters, culture and tradition seem to be given as a function within moral capitalism only if it is possible to commodify and "aesthetify" it. The Kamana mind-set represents "pastness" while, conversely, Change by Hand exemplifies a general pattern where it is cast (and brands itself) in terms of futurity, hope and potentiality. Moreover, Change by Hand seemed to presume some specific notions of women, their engagement with family and home, and, in Cecilie Ødegaard's words, their "role as guardians for the reproduction or change of culture" (2006:356), which is similar to how women have commonly been approached in development initiatives all over the world.<sup>61</sup> Playing on certain ideals of womanhood, creating modern, morally "good" Kamana women would therefore result in the transformation of the whole Kamana community's sociocultural logic -- so that it, eventually, would constitute an ideal modern, moral community.

### **Waithood and Timepass**

"*What would you have done if the Centre was not here?*", I asked Angeli, who was 17 years old at the time when I met her. "*I would just have sat at home and got married,*" she replied. Her reply was similar to those of other young seamstresses and also reflected that the Sundernagar Kamana community parents did not allow teenage girls to attend school. Thus, despite only having studied up to 10<sup>th</sup> class, Angeli was the highest educated woman in the Kamana Sundernagar community.

Government schools, like the one Angeli and the other girls had attended, are free of charge in India.<sup>62</sup> None of the seamstresses had quit school because their parents had depended on their workforce. Instead, the parent's main problem with

---

<sup>61</sup> See for example Cecilie Ødegaard's (2006) analysis of Peruvian projects for development and modernization.

<sup>62</sup> Under various articles of the Indian Constitution (e.g. *Right to education* act) free and compulsory education is supposed to be provided for children between the age of six to fourteen. However, action on the legislation might be hindered locally by social and economic challenges.

school appeared to rather be concerns about the risks involved in their daughters meeting boys. While the school taught boys in the afternoon and girls in the morning, so their daughters would not actually share classrooms with boys, their parents still feared that they would meet them while coming and going to school. Commonly, they would insist that their teenage daughters would leave school around 6<sup>th</sup> class, but it did not seem like they made them leave to do something else. In between the time they quit school and got married, the young women did not seem to have any particular responsibilities that would fill their days at home. In daily conversations and one recorded round of individual semi-formal interview with the seven regular seamstresses, I asked about their life at home and their life at the Centre. Spending time at home was described, in some way or another, by most of them as spending time *doing nothing*. As these young women were not in married relationship, they lived with their families in households where their mothers tended to do most of the household chores. While most of them said that they did help their mothers, most of the time they would spend at home were described as time without routines or set chores to structure time. At home, they felt bored. Thus, in various ways and predominantly, spending time at home was described as an unproductive, uninteresting time.

All of the young women who came to the Centre to work were in a period of their lives where they had left school and were either still unmarried or had recently divorced or separated from their husbands.<sup>63</sup> Two of the seamstresses, Lakshmi and Jyoti, had been married previously, but lived with their families when I met them. Anika had convinced the parents of the seamstresses that their daughters would face no risk of meeting boys at the Centre. Also, the Centre was close to the Kamana neighbourhood, which meant a much shorter walk to the Centre than it would have been to the school. As Lakshmi, one of the seamstresses, put it: spending time at the Centre was a nice *timepass* (*acche timepass hai*).

This is not an uncommon expression in Hindi. Craig Jeffrey (2010) writes about the notion of timepass with reference to young men in Uttar Pradesh following

---

<sup>63</sup> My impression was that divorce was much less associated with dishonour within the Kamana community than among the “general” community. I got to know that several Kamana people had divorced and re-married. If the woman has not paid her debt (the bride-wealth) already before the divorce, she needs to pay back the full amount. Further, it was not uncommon for men to take another wife without divorcing the previous one.

the state's vast educational decay and a shortage of paid employment between 2004 and 2005. This created widespread feelings among men having surplus time, being detached from education and generally experienced being left behind (2010:466). All these feelings, writes Jeffrey, were commonly expressed by reference to the idea of "timepass" (2010:466). Timepass was commonly used to refer to what was seen by his interlocutors as unproductive activities like chatting with friends, drinking tea, sitting around with friends et cetera. In this context, Jeffrey would often hear the phrase to "*do nothing*". Doing nothing, essentially, was doing timepass. To "*do nothing*" was a phrase the seamstresses at the Centre also would often use. But timepass not only referred to boredom and disengagement, Jeffrey notes, but also to refer to feeling left behind (2010:471). Like Jeffrey (2010:470) writes, the "discourse of timepass acted as a form of 'structure of feeling' in Raymond Williams's sense of a social consciousness that gives a distinct form to people's actions and sense of their place in the world" (1977 in Jeffrey, 2010:470).

I find it relevant to relate the Indian term timepass to the general term of waitthood as the seamstresses I got to know were in-between-states, a limbo between youth and adulthood, adulthood often being connected with marriage in this part of India. It seemed to me that they were in what Alcinda Honwana, drawing on particularly African material, labels *waitthood*:

a portmanteau term of 'wait' and '-hood', meaning 'waiting for adulthood. On the one hand, they are no longer children in need of care, but on the other, they are still unable to become independent adult (Honwana, 2014:29).

It was during this liminal period of waitthood that most Kamana women would come to the Centre to work. In the previous chapter, I presented the case where the seamstresses preferred "time off" over work. I want to note that I understand the conception of timepass and waitthood to be different to that of "time off" in that the latter is a more temporal domain of non-work. Like timepass, I understand waitthood to be a form of social consciousness with existential proportions, giving a distinct form to the seamstresses' action and sense of place in the world. It was not only that they were bored or doing nothing, but drawing on Jeffrey, this time of waitthood was

also filled with feelings of being left behind, not having any particular responsibilities or engagement that would structure their days.<sup>64</sup>

### Hope as a Category of Social Analysis

Lakshmi was one of the two separated young women coming to the Centre. In asking her how she thought her life would have been different if it was not for the Centre, she responded:

*If it wasn't for this Centre I would have never got to know so many things. I joined the Centre and Didi [elder sister]<sup>65</sup> taught me many things. Today we have an understanding about things. I feel that because of this Centre our lives are going to get better.*

Lakshmi, being the most edgy one of the seamstresses and always with a sarcastic comment at hand, I would have expected her to reply to my question with an edge as well. But it seemed like she, like the other seamstresses, shared this optimism about the Centre. To me that was surprising, as I knew that during their lives they had heard promises of the future from both other organizations and (to them, unknown) Hollywood celebrities' anti-trafficking advocacy organization. My search for analytical and theoretical tools that could help explain why they seemed still remained positive and hopeful led me to discover "the anthropology of hope".

Vincent Crapanzano (2003) notes that hope, unlike desire, had not received much attention in anthropological works, and call for hope to be a "category of social [...] analysis" (2003:19). In the same fashion, Henrietta Moore aims to introduce hope and desire as analytical starting points to break with the pessimism of pre-theoretical assumptions concerning globalization and change within anthropology. Her argument is that too much of the scholarship on change focuses on how powerful external forces like capitalism has reinvented, transformed or reconstructed subjectivities (Fagertun, 2014:121). Crapanzano notes that, unlike desire, hope rarely has been

---

<sup>64</sup> In many ways, the notion of "timepass" resembles what Kristeva calls "abjection" (1982, in Ferguson, 1999). This term was further developed by James Ferguson, with reference to the African context, to refer to a process of people "being thrown down aside, expelled, or discarded. But its literal meaning also implies not just being thrown down out but being thrown *down* – thus expulsion but also debasement and humiliation" (Ferguson, 1999:236).

<sup>65</sup> *Didi* is a respectful form of address to any older woman familiar to the speaker, but is also sometimes used to address women around the same age as the speaker.

mentioned in anthropological work, and calls for hope to be “a category of social [...] analysis”. Courtesy of Moore (2011) and others, the anthropology of hope has lately emerged as a somewhat trendy subject within anthropology. Indeed, I do agree with Mar (2005:364) that hope is

[...] a slippery concept to think with and about because it involves engaging with a heavily overdetermined field of values and significations. In ‘the west’, the concept of hope is strongly embedded in Christian and utopian ethical traditions, due to its long association, along with faith, hope and love with discourses of salvation and redemption [...].

Nevertheless and despite the risks of painting a romanticized picture of harsh realities, I do however believe that taken together, theories of hope make an important contribution to attaining a deeper understanding of what is important to people and what drives their actions. Anthropology has often been occupied with studies of suffering and Henrietta Moore notes that if we theorize states of pessimism and alienations, we also need to theorize sources of hopefulness (Moore, 2011:137). Hope draws on deep roots to individual and collective notions of “the good life” (Moore, 2011:139). Hope, possibility, vision and goals are organizing terms and good to think with, and intertwine with histories and institutional arrangements, and are, therefore, analytically irreducible to empty promises. Rather, the root of hope is to be found in acknowledging that “the world in which we live is insufficient and that something better must and can be attained” (Chambers-Letson, 2012:144).

While this is so, nevertheless, Crapanzano (2003:18) warns us that hope may lead to paralysis. With this, he means that one run the risk of waiting for hope for hope’s object to occur while doing nothing to bring it about. Hence, there is a risk that ‘positive thinking’ might dominate action to change one’s situation. Moore, on the other side, does not worry about hope and positive thinking to have such paralyzing effects. Rather, she advocates for hope as a source of agency, and seeks to change the focus towards the subjects themselves as actors, and the ways in which they think about themselves and their self-other relations. Fagertun (2014:122), in her reading of Moore, comments that Moore’s



[...] concept of the ethical imagination seems to overlap with her notion of culture: it is the radical potentiality within subjectivity and a means to imagine the future – the ‘not-yet’. Moore identifies the interest in forms of ‘self-making’ and ‘self-stylization’ as a mark of our contemporary moment. Drawing on Foucault, she sees this not as a form of individualization but as an attempt to imagine the self other than it is [...]. The key to the reconfiguration of self-other relations is ‘fantasy’ (imagination).

Throughout *Still Life* Moore (2011) uses the term “the ethical imagination” which is her theory of ways in which “technologies of the self, as well as the forms and means through which people imagine relations with others, produce the conditions for social transformation” (Fagertun, 2014:120). These ethical imaginaries (subjectivation) are created by hope, desire and satisfaction, which in turn is what attach people to this world.

Considering all above, I want to argue that what might have attached the young Kamana women to the Centre and what made them enthusiastic and optimistic about Change by Hand, is their ethical imaginaries – created, in part, by hope.

## **Angeli**

How did this hopefulness intertwine with the lives of the individual young Kamana women? I already introduced Angeli above and her view illustrate well the rapturing opposition created by waithood and timepass on the one side and hope and ethical imaginary on the other side.

As Angeli was the most highly educated among women in the Kamana Sundernagar community, she was generally looked upon by the staff and the other seamstresses as “the bright one” among them. She often helped Anika with paper work and management, which led her to be referred to as “Anika’s right hand”. Anika described her to me as a close friend to whom she could trust with everything. Angeli was excellent at keeping track of expenditures and was often given the responsibility

of counting work points and paying out wage for the other seamstresses. Although Angeli was not paid for this extra job, she appeared to enjoy the responsibility.

Angeli was very interested in studies, although she had dropped out of school in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She dreamt about continuing her studies and Anika's aim was to have her enrolled into school again to finish 12<sup>th</sup> class and then help her get a good job in the police or in the government sector. Angeli herself expressed that she wished becoming a children's teacher. Finishing 12<sup>th</sup> class would allow her to apply for further studies and government jobs. Anika had confidence in the basic fairness of the employment system in the governmental sector in India and maintained the idea that the quota system for Scheduled Castes actually made it quite easy for Kamana people to get government jobs or work in the police. Anika insisted that the actual problem was that they never tried, as they thought acquiring such jobs was impossible. Angeli's position thus echoed Ann and Anika's insistence that it was the Kamana women's mind-set that was the issue – not the structural or systemic constrains. Anika clearly aimed to make an example out of Angeli that would induce the Kamana community realize that it could send their children, especially daughters, to school, and that it could lead to good jobs.

When I conducted the interview session with the seamstresses, Angeli was among the chattier ones. My first question was about why they came to the Centre, and Angeli's reply was that she came to the Centre to secure her future. If she would have stayed back home she would not have learned anything and not had the opportunity to "*explore herself*", Angeli said. Further, she said that:

*By coming here I realized that even I can dream and I can think like other girls. We even get to learn new things. It is by coming here that I realized that I have the talent to sew.*

Ernst Bloch spent much of his career as a philosopher to create an account of humans' orientations towards an improved future exploring what he held to be the origin of all agency, namely *hope*.<sup>66</sup> He Weeks (2011:175-225) explores the future in

---

<sup>66</sup> His work on hope, potentiality and utopia grew out of his fundamental disagreement with the deterministic theories of the time, like Sigmund Freud's psychotherapeutic theories. Bloch thus wanted to inscribe agency (that for him is created through hope) into theories of society, and is commonly referred to as one of the founding fathers of hope as an analytical category.

the present, utopian demands and temporalities of hope in connection with work. Her reading of Bloch becomes relevant in analysing Angeli's and the other young Kamana women's orientation towards the future. Let us explore, first, the figure of hope through Weeks' reading of Bloch's three volumes of *The Principle of Hope* from 1995.

The "Not-Yet-Conscious" is the term which Bloch uses to "designate what enables us to anticipate the Not-Yet-Become as an open possibility" (quoted in Weeks, 2011:190). This Not-Yet-Conscious is a capacity for thinking and wanting the future, and may be discovered in several different practices and artefacts, including what Bloch refers to as the act of daydreaming (in Weeks, 2011:190). I understand the concept of daydreaming in a wide sense, and when I heard Angeli describe her dreams of becoming a teacher and change other people's lives, I thought about these as daydreams. The concept of daydreaming is a highly suitable concept to analytically consider because "like utopia itself, it is so often doubly discredited as at once wasteful and trivial: a notoriously unproductive use of time" (Weeks, 2011:190).

Here, however, I want to make the point that daydreaming in our case is anything but trivial and wasteful. Rather, it is the very starting point for agency and generative change. Angeli, as shown in the interview section above, had many ideas how she wished her future life to become. Angeli was fond of writing and poetry, and would often jot down poems in a book that she kept at the Centre. I was allowed to copy and read one of them and use it for my work. In the one she let me read, she wrote about taking up the fight with society and expectations, or "play against the winds", as she so beautifully put it, and further that "I do want to dream, but my mind tells me to stop."<sup>67</sup>

Weeks (2011:192) note that dreams are "worldly, rather than otherworldly, [and] they tend toward world-improvement". Thus, daydreaming is a world-improving exercise, differing from "night dreams in that they typically invoke a reformed intersubjective situation, one compatible with the strengthened" (:192). In Angeli's dreamt version of her self, a higher educated, more respected and stronger person

---

<sup>67</sup> See appendix 1 for the full poem.

emerges. Unlike the night dream, Bloch notes, the day dream “has a goal and makes progress towards it” (1995, quoted in Weeks, 2011:193).

Bloch claims that hope is “teachable” (1995 in Weeks, 2011:194) and defines hope as both a cognitive ability and an emotion. Practicing hope as cognitive ability is comparable to remembering or historicizing, and thus, Bloch notes that what he calls “hopefulness” may best be grasped “in contrast to fear and anxiety” (quoted in Weeks, 2011:194-195).

In the gap between leaving school and being married, there was not much for Anika to do other than *timepass* and the occasional house chore duties. While chronological age might have defined most of the seamstresses as adults, socially they were not recognized as such. Through Anika’s encouragement and having a place to speak together about challenges in life, I see the Centre as opening and teaching the practice of hoping. By coming to the Centre, Angeli explained that she realized that even she could dream of “*doing something*”, or in Bloch’s words, dreaming of the Not-Yet-Become. Change by Hand fuelled the imaginations, like that of Angeli; that of better worlds, better lives and better futures. And the Centre filled this gap in between these two important life stages, what I have chosen to refer to as waitthood, and invested in it hopefulness at a stage where it otherwise would have been filled with fear, immobility, passivity, anxiety and “*just doing nothing*”.

It follows from this that in this period of waitthood, the young women may be said to be particularly receptive for hopefulness. The Centre encouraged the young women to take control over their own situation, “*stand up for themselves*”, work hard, learn and *then* they would succeed. Thus, the message was that work and individual agency were the paths to self-reliance – a message which echoes Weber’s market logic that “God” – here we can add the market and also the Centre, “help those who help themselves” (1958:159 in Weeks, 2011:53). This rhetoric appeared to have become somewhat embraced by some of the young Kamana women, illustrated by another excerpt from Angeli’s poem:

Life is supported by courage, not fear.

If you couldn't become anything in life, then don't blame faith.

Rather, refine your skills to the extent that your faith changes.

Angeli was meant to marry that autumn during my fieldwork. However, through talking with Angeli's parents Anika convinced them to postpone the wedding for a year until she was 18 years old. This would give Anika time to enrol Angeli in school again to finish 12<sup>th</sup> class. Imbuing the period of waithood with hopefulness, in this case postponing a wedding that Angeli was dreading, the Centre did, indeed, challenge the sociocultural logic of at least some members of the Kamana community and I chose to interpret this as a rupturing event. Interestingly, I observed several of these rupturing events during my fieldwork – another one of which I will turn to now.

### **Jyoti's Song at the Cultural Event**

It was not only within the walls of the Centre that Change by Hand was spreading their message of self-help and hopefulness. During my fieldwork, Change by Hand arranged a "cultural event" in the middle of the Kamana neighbourhood, inviting the whole community to watch the seamstresses and the children perform from stage.

Anika's commitment to ideals of social change probably informed Anika to insist that we should hold the event. She argued that we would draw more girls from the community that way and create support among the Kamana community in general. The children and seamstresses had been practicing their respective Bollywood hit songs and dances for several weeks, and now that the day was finally here, the atmosphere was excited. Anika had asked to borrow a shack that was usually used to keep horses in the middle of the street in Sundernagar where the Kamana community resided. A "tent man" was hired for the day, and had decorated the shack in bright pink fabric. It would have been easy to forget that it was a shack for horses had it not been for the smell. As the tent man was managing the speakers and the audio system, Anika was testing the microphone. A wedding ritual had been going on that same day in the community, and thus, we did not expect as many to come and see as we otherwise would.

To our big surprise, therefore, many people from the community gathered, both men and women. From stage, Jyoti was singing a well-known tune from

Bollywood A-celebrity Amir Khan's show *Satyamev Jayate*.<sup>68</sup> In the Indian context the show is innovative, focusing on social issues like acid attacks, preference for male children, dowries and other serious topics in an entertaining fashion during prime time. The show has gained quite some popularity among the *aam admi* ("the average Joe"), and has become a popular subject for discussion in social media and in homes and cafes across the country. The song Jyoti herself chose and was singing passionately, is called *Rupaiya* and is closely linked with and used in the show. The song goes like this (translated from Hindi):

*O dear father, o beloved, friend,  
Listen o my mother,  
I am not a burden on anyone,  
Nor I am like a boat without a rudder  
Rather, I'll be the oar, I'll fight the waves (against us),  
No amount of money in the world can buy me  
O, how could money ever sell me*

*Only yesterday I was a small child holding my father's finger  
Tomorrow I'll become his walking stick too  
O mother I am the bird of your nest  
I'll come back home with grain only*

*In whose nature there is no curiosity  
who didn't like me more than he liked money,  
I don't need such a partner  
Listen, this is the right time to say no  
I'll walk alone, I'll face my fate  
How can money sell me!*

*Our hearts didn't meet, so why waste money*

---

<sup>68</sup> *Satyamev jayate* translates from Sanskrit to "Truth alone triumphs". The TV-show's name is not a coincidence, but refers to Indian history and pride. It is a mantra from the Indian scripture *Mundaka Upanishad*, and was adopted upon the Indian Independence in 1947 as the national motto of the newly independent country. Together with a motive of the Lion of Ashoka the phrase is inscribed on all Indian currency, national documents and on the national emblem.

*on performing ceremonies and rituals in the name of marriage*

*We weave relations, willing for love*

*Why should we bear greed for a couple of such relations*

*Is there no life at all ahead of marriage?*

*that marriage alone is the book of all records?*

*I don't need such a partner*

*Listen, this only is the time to say no*

*I'll blossom like morning, I'll be filled like a night,*

*How can money sell me*

*How can money ever sell me!<sup>69</sup>*

Through the song Jyoti clearly conveyed this message to her friends, family and neighbours; that marriage should be based on love and not financial calculations. As Jyoti was singing, Jyoti's mother was nodding eagerly to the music, lifting her hands up in the air to agree with the verses.

By now, many people had gathered, the tent was full of people, and more were standing outside, looking in. It looked like most of the Kamana community members in Sundernagar had come to watch. The song was clearly challenging the socio-political logic of her own community, where money and "buying women" was a big part of contracting a marriage and of married life. That day, Jyoti effectively became the spokesperson of Change by Hand's agenda, singing out the message from the stage, expressing her wishes and dreams about the future.<sup>70</sup> Considering the fact that a wedding ritual had taken place that same day, and that the bride and several of her family members were attending the performance, it appeared to me as a particularly powerful symbolic statement and a rupturing event.

From what I was once told by Anika, Jyoti's mother, grandmother, sister-in-law and several of her sisters were involved with sex work. The women of the family were attractive, I was told. They were well-built, had light skin and soft facial features,

---

<sup>69</sup> Radhika Narang helped me translate the song from Hindi to English. See appendix 2 for Hindi version of the song.

<sup>70</sup> Expressing dreams about the future through songs or/and poems is characteristic of Bollywood movies.

which supposedly had resulted in the family business running well, and that the house in which they lived had two floors and several bedrooms, including a fridge, a TV and air conditioning. Jyoti had previously been married and had a son from the marriage.

Jyoti did not want to join the sex work business.<sup>71</sup> However, refusing sex work was not the reason for her divorce,<sup>72</sup> I was told, but that a feud between their two families where Jyoti's husband's sister, Sona, was to marry Jyoti's uncle. This way, there would have been a balance in women between the two families' houses. Her uncle was much older than Sona, and Sona did not like him. Besides, Sona already had a boyfriend. According to Anika, Sona was "*a modern woman*" and made good money working as an "*escort [...] on her own*". When Sona refused to move into Jyoti's family's house after their marriage, it was decided that Jyoti had to separate from her husband and move out of Sona's parents' house and back with her own family. Now Jyoti faced another issue: It was expected that she would marry again, but marrying again also meant that she would have to leave her son with his father.

The matter of marriage, money and the socio-political logic of the Kamana community was wearing Jyoti down. She would often complain how exhausted she was with going through the separation and the ever-lasting, expensive court-case.<sup>73</sup> I suspect the fact that she insisted on how happy she had been with her husband and how much she loved him, did not make the situation any easier for her emotionally. Through singing a highly political but popular tune out to her community, Jyoti positioned herself in opposition, expressing resistance to the sociocultural structures of the Kamana community through the lyrics of the song. The power of daydreaming that I discussed earlier was thus effectively instantiated through Jyoti's song.

---

<sup>71</sup> Anika, however, did not exclude the possibility that she might change her mind at some point, as so many in her family was involved in the trade, and it offered good money.

<sup>72</sup> However, this appeared to be the most common reason for divorce within the Kamana community.

<sup>73</sup> This, I was told, was a rare case of the Kamana community using the official justice system for internal issues.





Preparing the Cultural Event.

Following the song, Anika took to stage, giving a long motivational speech about how marriage is not a necessity and how important it is that girls too are allowed to go to school. Then she started to talk about the Centre, and encouraged more women to come, letting them know that they were welcome to come even after marriage. From now on Jyoti is an independent woman, Anika preached proudly from the stage. Anika explained that Jyoti worked hard, and for that reason, she was hired by Change by Hand as a teacher, meaning that she will get a set wage every month. Jyoti's appointment as a sewing teacher in Change by Hand organization is portrayed as a big achievement for Jyoti, as if all her dreams and hopes had come true, and thus she was portrayed as a leading star to follow for the other women in the community.

The newly wed bride left with her girlfriends as Anika had started on her speech. I would not have been surprised if Anika's negative note about marriage from the stage was the reason for their departure. However, the fact that the newly wed bride had wanted, and been allowed, to attend the community event at all was a positive sign of change, Anika noted after the arrangement.

### **Hope and Potentiality: Filling the Gap**

When I choose to interpret the above event as a rupturing event, I follow a long anthropological tradition of understanding events of rupture as windows into a deeper understanding of societies and what it means to be human. The event approach was first initiated by Max Gluckman's Manchester School as an opposition to the structuralism colouring the anthropology of the time (Kapferer, 2010). The rupturing events that break the "apparent calm or routine of everyday life" were the focus of Gluckman's Manchester anthropology (Kapferer, 2010:2). Events of tension or conflict were conceived to reveal the "social and political forces engaged in the generation or production of social life" (Kapferer, 2010:2). In Gluckman's analysis, these events were understood to drive radical social change and political transformations breaking with patterns of the past (Kapferer, 2010:2). I understand the cultural event held by Change by Hand as such an event.

The community event had made Anika optimistic. Change by Hand was working to create friction against the established ways of doing things in the Kamana community. To me, the newly wed bride represented the common sociocultural structures of the Kamana community, while Jyoti's song and Anika's speech represented change. The sight of the bride, dressed up in a colourful, glittering dress and her face covered with makeup, watching Jyoti's performance and leaving while Anika spoke, to me exemplified the power of friction and rupture. With Jyoti's song and Anika's speech, Change by Hand was trying to re-order their audience's orientations to different possible futures and thereby using hope instrumental, as a force and method in their work. Hope is, like Moore (2011:145) writes:

[...] an animating force in providing reorientations towards possible futures [and] focuses attention immediately on how such a process

involves the deployment of knowledge and the engagement of forms of agency.

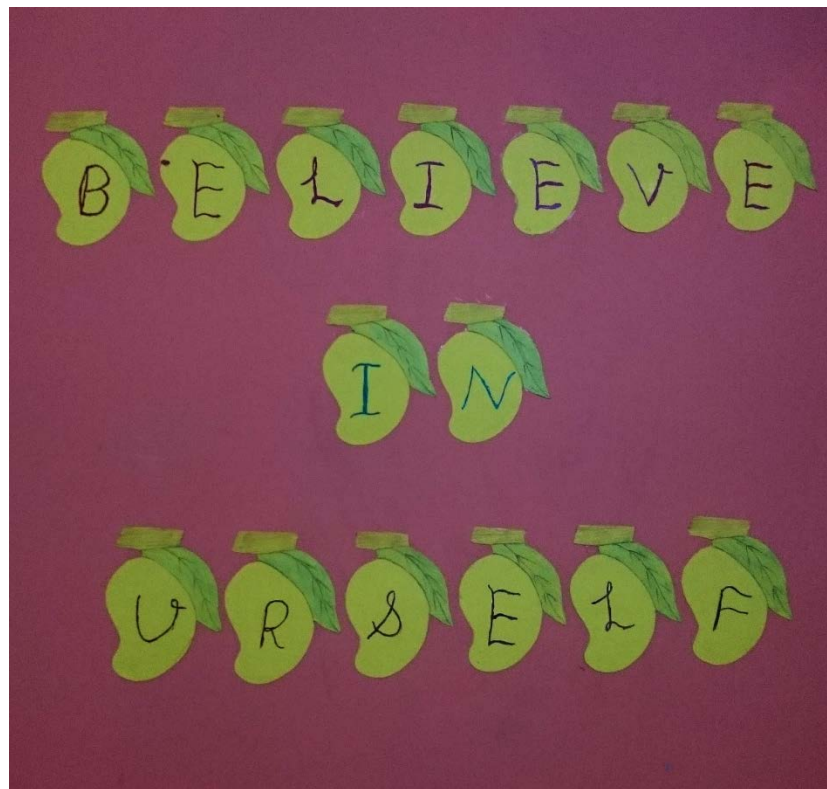
Hope, then, is the force that creates new orientations towards the future. In this, she agrees with Bloch, who held that humanity is gifted with

a Not-Yet-Conscious, one that has never existed in the past, therefore itself a forward drawing, into the New. It is the drawing that can surround even the simplest day – dreams; from there it extends into further areas of negated deprivation, and hence of hope (1986:77).

He stresses the optimism of hope and the potentiality that lies within it, and suggests that hope is that which asserts action and change into history. Creating this friction (between waithood/timepass and hope/potentiality), and thus challenge and finally change to the socio-political logic of the Kamana community members, were perhaps part of the motivations for many of the women involved in Change by Hand's activities. This would be the "biggest prize", so to say. Here it makes sense to draw a line to the insights of Knut Rio's (2015) article on gambling in Norway. Rio argues that it is not the biggest prize in itself that pushes people to play. Rather, it is the potential of winning the biggest prize that every gambling ticket holds that makes people excited to play (:244).

Even though taken from a completely different setting, Rio's ideas about gambling is useful for our analysis here in understanding what the people involved with the Change by Hand Centre find meaningful and attractive about it. Following Rio, participating in the game, or rather, in our case, coming to the Centre, offers not the first prize (that being ending sex work as a family occupation). Rather, the Centre offered instead a temporal figure where the idea about the new beginning, the new and better life, appear as a futuristic possibility. Allowing this creates room for dreams. The potentiality and hopefulness transforms the waithood from a time of "doing nothing" to a time of stepping into a world of potentiality. Angeli explained it like this: "*These people [at the Centre] saw my talent and made me capable of dreaming about my future*".

Generally, therefore, spending time at the Centre was spending time in a place of potentiality and hope. During the performances that day, with the pink fabrics covering up the shack and songs of change, they created a space for hopefulness and potentiality in the street of the Sundernagar Kamana community. “*Listen, this only is the time to say no*”, Jyoti sang. Indeed, the event can be described as one of ruptures and rebellion against the socio-cultural logics of the Kamana community.



Scene from the Centre. A motivational quote decorating the wall, encouraging to “believe in [yo]rself”.

What I draw from Rio’s article on gambling is the significance in itself of the potentiality that hope creates. What Change by Hand really offered, in addition to paid work, was a timeframe during the day where this idea of new beginnings and alternative futures emerge and are experienced as possible. The reward of coming to the Centre, though, did not seem to be a grand liberation from life as it is – although that might have been the *ultimate* goal. Rather, the Centre offered time to withdraw from daily chores and the daily worries and thoughts about life never becoming just

as one dreams – in many ways making life a little bit easier, and a scope of possibilities of creating new conceptions about the future. The daily work producing the commodities generated a space of opportunities where its potential came a bit closer.

Moore (2011:145) suggests that we should separate between hope as realizable, as method and hope as an ultimate goal, an ideal. Inspired by Crapanzano (2003), Miyazaki (2005) and Appadurai (2007) Moore (2011:145) proposes that by

focusing on the difference between hope as ‘ultimate ends or goals’ and hope as ‘means or methods’, the analysis seeks to differentiate between unrealizable aspirations, on the one hand, and types of orientations to the future, on the other, associated with outcomes that are realistically and/or potentially in view. This latter set of possibilities invokes hope as capacity, aspiration, speculation, reconfiguration: the hope of think tanks, NGOs and entrepreneurs.

Following Moore’s argument, I will suggest that Change by Hand deployed the figure of hope as an orientation towards the future associated with an alternated future that is potentially within view and reach. With their song and inspirational speech, Anika and Jyoti imposed their visions of alternate futures on the Kamana community members who were present. Change by Hand was, therefore, attempting to fill the structural gap in the reproductive cycle of the household – one that was previously dominated by waihood and was now being imbued with hope and potentiality. In so doing, they were using hope and potentiality instrumentally in attracting female candidates for their work to “change the mind-set” of the Kamana community. Doing this and as previously noted, they identified women to be the guardians of the reproduction or the change of culture (Ødegaard, 2006:356). Crucially, however, hope and potentiality can also be said to be *exactly* what attached the young Kamana women to the Centre, who might have sought a room where ethical imaginaries were possible.

## Summing Up

In this chapter, I have explored reasons for what might motivate the Kamana women to engage in initiatives like Change by Hand represents. I have suggested that through applying anthropological theories of hope and potentiality, we can make better sense of such engagements, and the value they represent. Second, I have suggested that by imbuing hope into the period of waithood and timepass, Change by Hand was using hopefulness and potentiality instrumentally (in trying to re-order the Kamana community's orientations to different possible futures) in their quest to challenge the Kamana sociocultural logic, and thus create a so-called "change in mind-sets" among the Kamana.

For the young Kamana women, life at home seemed to be coloured by timepass and doing "*just nothing*". The period of waithood that they were in was characterized by passivity and immobility. Change by Hand, on the other hand, offered generativity and a change of dynamics through conveying encouragement of hope and ethical imaginaries. This represented the main opposition to the lives of the young Kamana women working with the Centre, and the main friction that Change by Hand created through their work.

## Chapter 6

# Final Reflections

“[D]evelopment is much more than just a socio-economic endeavor; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies [...]”

(Wolfgang Sachs, 1991:1 quoted in Cornwall, 2007:471)

As anthropologists enter and leave people’s worlds, they “span boundaries of difference to understand specific ‘others’ and write about their experiences in terms of more general human questions” (Bornstein, 2012:1). Through following the activities and people connected with Change by Hand – my specific “others” – I aimed to capture an ethnographic moment in time and space and to explore normative dimensions within the current development discourse. With this thesis, I have endeavoured to come closer to an understanding of what comes to be defined and accepted as the “appropriate order of the [development] world, and why people accept or reject this” (Miller, 2009:19).

In every chapter, I have focused on a domain where ideas and ideals of development are being configured, negotiated, appropriated and lived; the social entrepreneurship, the design- and production process of development commodities, the markets of moral capitalism and, last but not least, the effect on the lives of the subjects of development.

In chapter 2, I clarified the emic and etic aspects of the phrase “social entrepreneurship”. I showed that there are several reasons why it made sense for Change by Hand to define itself in terms of social entrepreneurship. In an environment characterized by distrust towards charities and NGOs, but high trust towards businesses, it makes sense that what I called *the fused discourse* has gained popularity; social entrepreneurship blurs the line between them, making it an attractive alternative. Further, such a framing gives access to potential sources of income *both* from the NGO-field, with its potentialities of financial founding, *and* from the markets of moral capitalism. I also showed that gifts and donations to charitable NGOs comes with certain obligations to the receivers – which might make the business-approach even more attractive.

In chapter 3, I explored various interstices between aesthetics, materiality, consumption and class/caste, and showed that ideals of and ideas about development are manifested in development commodities. Supported by the insights of Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) and Kuldova (2016) on how taste contributes to create aesthetic distances between people, I showed that Change by Hand, with the help from the professional designer, moved towards an aesthetics of consumerism. In this way, they were attempting to cater to the expectations from well-paying potential customers wanting to consume a particular development commodity (Goodman, 2010).

In chapter 4, I argued that both the insistence on high-end consumption as a solution to the world’s inequalities as well as shopping as a means to empower the unfortunate others, constitute two highly paradoxical aspects of moral capitalism. Yet another paradoxical aspect of moral capitalism, I argued, is the assumption that a singular hegemonic work ethic is celebrated as the only path towards emancipation, empowerment and prosperity. I have shown that moral capitalism and its assumptions of *the* “good” work ethics is not the hammer that fits all nails, and should be problematized further, not least in the context of development.

In chapter 5, as Change by Hand was not the first initiative that aimed to change the sociocultural ways of the Kamana community, I attempted to come closer to an understanding as to why these women *still* seemed to be so positive to yet another initiative that sought to change them. I suggested that we can make better



sense of their engagements in general, and the value they represented to the women, through applying anthropological theories of hope and potentiality. I argued that Change by Hand, by imbuing hope into the period of waithood and timepass, was tapping into and using such hopefulness and potentiality in an attempt to re-order the Kamana community's conceptions of possible futures. Hope, thus, was central to their quest to challenge the Kamana sociocultural logic and, thereby, change what they identified as the so-called "mind-sets" of the Kamana.

The Kamana community had been the target for change, modernization and development for a long time. When the British notified the community as a "Criminal Tribe" in 1871, the intention was, according to Rana (2011:19), to transform "the 'delinquent' into 'honest' subjects". This is not unlike the aim of Change by Hand, which aimed to "change the mind-sets" of the Kamana community. However, instead of trying to discipline the Kamana into "honest subjects" with top-down categories and state legislations, Change by Hand approached the issue differently: aiming to change the community from within. The Kamana women were important here as they were challenged to change their own lives and "stand up for themselves" in a context characterized by hierarchies of gender, class and caste. Such individualization of poverty and suppression echoes what Ferguson (1994) termed an "anti-politics machine". With this he referred to the systematically misrecognizing and depoliticizing of the lives subject to the would-be "developers" (Ferguson, 1999:247-248). This, I would argue, is a description which is also well suited for the individualization of development that I have shown is to be found within the logics of moral capitalism and social entrepreneurship. What needs to be challenged further is how humanitarianism mixed with neo-liberalism and global capitalism tend to individualize the problems, and thus further fail to "tackle the broader politics of inequality" (Kapoor 2013:115 in Kempadoo, 2012:18). This issue has not been dealt with in detail in this thesis but I want to note that it should be worthwhile following up in later research.

Change by Hand transformed and incorporated what was earlier "household work" done by Kamana women at home into a global market system of moral capitalism – a set-up accommodating key segments of the global wealthy's demand for spiritual and moral self-improvement through development commodities. In such a context, the Kamana community served well as the ultimate community of the exotic

“Other” which had to be morally disciplined and “empowered” through benevolent consumption. The Kamana women were the victims, but also the heroines narrated by the organization to change the sociocultural ways of the whole community. Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead (2007) points out that within this general tendency in development discourse and practice to target women, men commonly play the role as the violent oppressor and are pushed out of the focus frame. However, as I have shown in this thesis, with mothers-in-law insisting on their daughters-in-law to join the lines of sex work, women might as well be approached as the ones who insist on other women’s subjugation. Based on the material analysed in this thesis, I would claim that the dual heroinization and victimization of women in development discourse run the risk of overshadowing such aspects and, further, ignore the role of men. Future research on development buzzwords such as “women empowerment” and “social entrepreneurship” should look closer at the category that is commonly not included within this development discourse – namely the men.

As shown throughout the thesis, the Centre persistently communicated that if the women worked hard, took control over their own situation and started standing up for themselves, *then* they would succeed. Angeli echoed this poetically in her poem: “If you couldn't become anything in life, then don't blame faith. Rather, refine your skills to the extent that your faith changes”. The message was that work and individual agency were the paths to self-reliance, emancipation and social mobility. This might seem “out of place” in the Indian hierarchical context. In this regard, it is interesting to see Change by Hand in the light of the current political climate in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the *Bharatiya Janta Party* (BJP) promised at his election in 2014 that better days would come (*acche din aane wale hai*). Modi himself became famous and beloved by many for the way he effectively narrated himself as a low caste man with background as a poor *chai wala* (person selling tea).<sup>74</sup> Through hard work, Modi has portrayed himself as a man who moved up in society from rags to riches – an image appealingly appealing to millions of Indians. Modi’s story, it is claimed on the Prime Minister’s webpage,<sup>75</sup> “reflects the aspiration and hope of over a billion Indians.” By opening up for a more liberal market system, he would make it

---

<sup>74</sup> If Modi actually was the *chai wala* he claims to have been, and if he actually is born as a OBC (Other Backward Caste) has been a popular subject of dispute.

<sup>75</sup> See <http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/pms-profile/>, accessed 17:27, 20.11.2016.

easier to start businesses and for individuals to build themselves up – just the way Modi did. Distilled, Modi’s political message seems to be this: Anyone – high or low caste – are able to prosper. In this way, Modi’s rise is an expression of an Indian political environment already attuned to liberalization and individualization.

Interestingly, this individualistic spirit contradicts the Dumontian idea of caste and hierarchy. Change by Hand emerged in this environment and capitalised on it. Thus, the way Change by Hand effectively imbued the seamstresses with hope and dreams about the future might not have been as “out of place” in the current Indian context as it first seem, but, rather, just “in place”.

Throughout the text I have demonstrated how social entrepreneurship-initiators, development commodity consumers and the “subjects of development” all were – in one way or another – driven by hope and a will to end the suffering and struggles of other’s. They wanted to do *something*, and surely, *something* must be better than *nothing*? I would dare to suggest that it is a part of being human. In chapter 4, however, I demonstrated that such a will sometimes results in paradoxical efforts, such as the banner who encouraged us to “shop to empower women” – simple, quick-fix solutions to complex issues. In chapter 3, I showed how the process of designing the aesthetics of development commodities might reveal certain ideas about “the Other” and further underline social inequalities and distances between the consumer and the producer even in their efforts to abandon them. Yet, I want to underline that my aim with this thesis has not been to claim that one should or should not act on these human impulses to do something to relieve other people’s misery. As I showed in chapter 5, the hope and potentiality that initiatives such as Change by Hand might provide, should be seen as valuable in their own right. My aim, rather, has been to problematize the undisputed moral good and simplified solutions within development – which I identify being represented by buzz-words such as “women empowerment” and “social enterprise”. Because it is exactly when people seem to have stopped to problematize certain notions about development that we need to look closer and ask ourselves: According to whose premises are these initiatives actualized and why are they gaining popularity?



## References

- Agrawal, A. 2008. *Chaste Wives and Prostitute Sisters*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Anderson, S. 2007. The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21, 151-174.
- Appadurai, A. 1986. Introduction: commodities and the politics of value. In: Appadurai, A. (ed.) *The Social life of things : commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bernard, H. R. 2011. Participant Observation. In: *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches, 5th edition*. The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.
- Bhalla, N. 2016. *Investment in India's social enterprises could rise eight-fold to \$8 bln by 2025: research*. Reuters [Online]. Thomson Reuters Foundation. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-social-enterprise-idUSKBN13C1IJ> [Accessed 20.11.2016].
- Bharadwaj, R. 2015. *Ways of being : ontological insurrections by little selves in Keralam, India : a study focusing on sexual minority womens's movements*. [PhD. thesis] University of Bergen.
- Bloch, E. 1986. *The principle of hope*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bornstein, D. 1998. *Changing the World on a Shoestring*. The Atlantic [Online]. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/01/changing-the-world-on-a-shoestring/377042/> [Accessed 11.11.2016].
- Bornstein, E. 2012. *Disquieting Gifts : Humanitarianism in New Delhi*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bornstein, E. & Sharma, A. 2016. The righteous and the rightful: The technomoral politics of NGOs, social movements, and the state in India. *American Ethnologist*, 43, 76-90.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984 [1979]. *Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Carrier, J. 1990. Gifts in a world of commodities: The Ideology of the Perfect Gift in American Society. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, 19-37.

- Chambers-Letson, J. T. 2012. The Principle of Hope. *The Drama Review*, 56, 143-149.
- Chishti, S. 2014. *Biggest caste survey: One in four Indians admit to practising untouchability*. Indian Express [Online]. Available at: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/one-in-four-indians-admit-to-practising-untouchability-biggest-caste-survey/#sthash.NrPd1krm.dpuf> [Accessed 01.12. 2014].
- Coleman, S. 2005. Economy and religion. In: Carrier, J. G. (ed.) *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 339-352.
- Cornwall, A. 2007. Buzzwords and fuzzwords: deconstructing development discourse. *Development in Practice*, 17, 471-484.
- Cornwall, A. & Brock, K. 2005. What do buzzwords do for development policy? a critical look at 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'poverty reduction'. *Third World Quarterly*, 26, 1043-1060.
- Cornwall, A., Harrison, E. & Whitehead, A. 2007. Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: The Struggle for Interpretive Power in Gender and Development. *Development and Change*, 38, 1-20.
- Crapanzano, V. 2003. Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis. *Cultural Anthropology*, 18, 3-32.
- Das, V. 2015. Caste. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*. 2 ed.: Elsevier.
- Dees, J. G. 1998. The Meaning of "Social Entrepreneurship". *Stanford University: Draft Report for the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership*, 1-6.
- Dupuy, K. E., Ron, J. & Prakash, A. 2014. Stop Meddling in My Country! Governments' Restrictions on Foreign Aid to Non-Governmental Organizations. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2529620>.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1931. 42. An Alternative Term for "Bride-Price.". *Man*, 31, 36-39.
- Fagertun, A. 2014. The effect of 'affect' : Henrietta Moore's Turn. *Social Analysis*, 58, 120-126.
- Ferguson, J. 1994. *The anti-politics machine : "development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

- Ferguson, J. 1999. *Global Disconnect: Abjection and the Aftermath of Modernism. Expectations of Modernity : Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ferguson, J. 2015. Preface and Acknowledgements. *Give a Man a Fish*. Duke University Press, xi-xv.
- Frøystad, K. 2003. Master-Servant relations and the domestic reproduction of caste in Northern India. *Ethnos*, 68, 73-94.
- Frøystad, K. 2005. Outside: 'Good' People and 'Small' People. *Blended boundaries : caste, class, and shifting faces "Hinduness" in a North Indian city*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 94-128.
- Gardner, K. & Lewis, D. 1996. *Anthropology, development and the post-modern challenge*, London: Pluto Press.
- Geert De, N. L. 2008. *Hidden hands in the market: ethnographies of fair trade, ethical consumption and corporate social responsibility Research in economic anthropology*, 28, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.
- Goodman, M. K. 2010. The mirror of consumption: Celebritization, developmental consumption and the shifting cultural politics of fair trade. *Geoforum*, 41, 104-116.
- Graeber, D. 2016. *Why Capitalism Creates Pointless Jobs*. Economics [Online]. Available at: <http://economics.com/why-capitalism-creates-pointless-jobs-david-graeber/> [Accessed 04.11.2016 2016].
- Gregory, C. A. 1980. Gifts to Men and Gifts to God: Gift Exchange and Capital Accumulation in Contemporary Papua. *Man*, 15, 626-652.
- Guha, R. 2007. *Minding the Minorities. India after Gandhi*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Heelas, P. 2008a. The Debate. *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 81-96.
- Heelas, P. 2008b. A 'Fag Ending' of the Sacred or Fit for the Future? *Spiritualities of Life : New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 167-194.
- Henriksen, G. 1997. Noen refleksjoner over sosialantropologisk advokatur med særlig referanse til urfolk. *Norsk antropologisk tidsskrift*, 8, 120-130.

- Honwana, A. 2014. 'Waithood': Youth Transitions and Social Change. In: Foeken, D., Dietz, T., Haan, L. and Johnson, L. (ed.) *Development and Equity*. Brill, 28-40. Available at: DOI:10.1163/9789004269729.
- Jeffrey, C. 2010. *Timepass : Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Jenkins, T. 1994. Fieldwork and the Perception of everyday life. *Man*, 20, 433-455.
- Kabeer, N. 2005. Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender & Development*, 13, 13-24.
- Kapferer, B. 2010. Introduction: In the Event – toward an Anthropology of Generic Moments. *Social Analysis*, 54, 1-27.
- Kempadoo, K. 2012. Introduction. In: Kempadoo, K., Sanghera, J., Pattanaik, B. (ed.) *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers. vii-xlii.
- Kiviat, B. & Gates, B. 2008. *Making Capitalism More Creative*. Time Magazine [Online]. Available at: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1828417,00.html> [Accessed 11.11. 2016].
- Kuldova, T. 2014. Designing an Illusion of India's Future Superpowerdom: Of the Rise of Neo-Aristocracy, Hindutva and Philantrocapiatalism. *The Unfamiliar*, 4, 15-22.
- Kuldova, T. 2016. *Luxury Fashion India - A Social Critique*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Mar, P. 2005. Unsettling Potentialities: Topographies of Hope in Transnational Migration. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 26, 361-378.
- Martin, R. L. & Osberg, S. 2007. *Social Entrepreneurship: The Case for Definition*. Stanford Social Innovation Review [Online]. Available at: [https://ssir.org/articles/entry/social\\_entrepreneurship\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_definition](https://ssir.org/articles/entry/social_entrepreneurship_the_case_for_definition) [Accessed 19.10.2016 2016].
- Mauss, M. 1999 [1925]. *The gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. London: Routledge.
- Miller, D. 2009. Individuals and the Aesthetic of Order. *Anthropology and the Individual : A Material Culture Perspective*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.



- Miyazaki, H. 2006. Economy of Dreams: Hope in Global Capitalism and Its Critiques. *Cultural Anthropology*, 21, 147-172.
- Moore, H. 2011. *Still Life. Hopes, Desires and Satisfactions*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- National Commission for Scheduled Castes. n.d. *Introduction*. Government of India [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ncsc.nic.in/pages/view/73/68-introduction> [Accessed 28.11.2016].
- Nelson, D. 2009. *New Delhi to hide slums with bamboo 'curtains' during 2010 Commonwealth Games*. The Telegraph [Online]. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/othersports/commonwealthgames/6043719/New-Delhi-to-hide-slums-with-bamboo-curtains-during-2010-Commonwealth-Games.html> [Accessed 03.09. 2016].
- Nielsen, K. B. & Waldrop, A. 2014. Women and Gender in a Changing India. In: Nielsen, K. B. & Waldrop, A. (eds.) *Women, Gender and Everyday Social Transformations in India*. New York: Anthem Press, 1-20.
- O'reilly, K. 2012. *Ethnographic methods*. London: Routledge.
- Parry, J. 1986. The Gift, the Indian Gift and the 'Indian Gift'. *Man*, 21, 453-473.
- Phillips, S. D. 2005. Will the Market Set Them Free? Women, NGOs, and Social Enterprise in Ukraine. *Human Organization*, 64, 251-264.
- Rana, S. 2011. Nomadism, Ambulation and the 'Empire': Contextualising the Criminal Tribes Act XXVII of 1871. *Transcience*, 2.
- Renfrew, C. 1986. Varna and the emergence of wealth in prehistoric Europe. In: Appadurai, A. (ed.) *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rio, K. 2015. Konsumentens dobbeltliv: Fremtidshorisont i vareverden. *Norsk antropologisk tidsskrift*, 25.
- Rio, K. M. & Smedal, O. H. 2009. Hierarchy and Its Alternatives. An introduction to movements of totalization and detotalization. In: Rio, K. M. & Smedal, O. H. (eds.) *Hierarchy. Persistence and Transformation in Social Formations*. New York/Oxford: Bergham Books, 1-64.
- Schwittay, A. 2011. The Marketization of Poverty. *Current Anthropology*, 52, 71-82.
- Scott, J. 1998. *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. Yale: Yale University.
- Scott, J. C. 1985. *Weapons of the weak : everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Shah, S. P. 2014. *Street Corner Secrets: Sex, Work, and Migration in the City of Mumbai*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.
- Shweder, R. A. 1997. The Surprise of Ethnography. *Ethnography and Sociocultural Processes: A Symposium*, 25, 152-163.
- Stirrat, R. & Henkel, H. 2001. Participation as spiritual duty: Empowerment as secular subjection. In: Cooke, B. & Kothari, U. (eds.) *Participation: The new Tyranny?* London/New York: Zed Books.
- Stirrat, R. L. & Henkel, H. 1997. The Development Gift: The Problem of Reciprocity in the NGO World. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 554, 66-80.
- Waldrop, A. 2004. Gating and Class Relations: the case of a New Delhi "colony". *City & Society*, 16, 93-116.
- Weeks, K. 2011. *The Problem with Work. Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Yang, A. A. 1985. Introduction. Issues and Themes in the Study of Historical Crime and Criminality: Passages to the Social History of British India. In: Yang, A. A. (ed.) *Crime and Criminality in British India*. Arizona: The University of Arizona Press.
- Young, S. 2003. *Moral Capitalism : Reconciling Private Interest with the Public Good*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Ødegaard, C. 2006. *A quest for progress : migration, work and gender in the Peruvian Andes*. [PhD. Thesis] University of Bergen.

## Appendix 1 – Angeli's poem

Hand-written by Angeli on two pages in her notebook:

Page 1/2:

जिन्दगी डर पर नहीं होसली ये  
थिकी रहती है  
जिन्दगी में अगर कुछ बन ना सकाती  
किस्मत को दोष मत देना  
बल्कि अपने हनर को इतना तराशी  
कि किस्मत को लपल जाए  
जिन्दगी होती अगर रूक पुआ  
तो खुदा भी उसे दे देता  
ना है जिन्दगी में कोई रंग  
तो जिन्ना भी पुआ सकुजंग  
होता शायद मुझमें भी कोई हनर  
तो हवाओं से खेल जाती ये भाजिया  
फिर कहा रोक पाती मुझे ये आंधिया  
लड जाती मैं तलवार की दार बनकर  
रीर का ये निशाना बनकर  
फूलों की पूर कुली बनकर  
मगर बनगी में कुछ जरूर  
क्योंकि बनना है मुझे किसी का गुनर!  
जहाँ मिले मेरा खुदा मेरी खुदाई से  
उस ओहदे को सबसे पहल रखूं  
कलक ह मैं मेरी जिन्दगी  
लड बनकर बह रही हू मैं मेरी  
जिन्दगी  
आग में जलकर मैं राख ना बन  
जाऊँ जिन्दगी

मेरे सपना देखना तो चाहूँ पर  
मेरा मन तोड़ने को कहता है  
ये कहकर मेरा मन मुझसे  
बदल आता है  
बदले दिन ये मेरे मन उल्टे  
रुकता है  
हर दिन कोई डर लेकर आता है  
अब ये हवा और ये धूप ये छाव  
सब बदली सी लगती है  
अब तारे से नहीं चाँद से  
डर लगता है  
समुद्र से कम किनारे से ज्यादा  
डर लगता है  
जुआ ना लगा है मैं अपनी  
कोई जिन्दगी का  
कोई दाऊ ना चला है  
अपनी इस जिन्दगी का  
कोई सोने सी सट की बाजी  
ना मार जाय मेरी जिन्दगी की  
जिन्दगी डर पर नहीं होसलौ  
वे टिकी रहती है

English translation:<sup>76</sup>

Life is supported by courage, not fear.  
If you couldn't become anything in life, then don't blame faith.  
Rather, refine your skills to the extent that your faith changes.  
If life had been a wish, then God would have granted it.  
If there's no colours in life, then life itself becomes a battle.  
Maybe if there had been any skill or talent in me,  
then I would have played against these winds.  
And then how could these storms have stopped me?  
I would have fought, becoming the edge of the sword,  
becoming the one directing the arrows,  
becoming the bud of the flower  
But I will definitely become something,  
because I have to become someone's pride!  
The point where the divine finds the divine in me, I will keep foremost  
I am face to face with you, life!  
Having become blood, I am flowing.  
Lest I am burnt and become ash.  
I do want to dream, but my mind tells me to stop.  
Saying this, my mind fights with me.  
These days that are passing by, my life stops them.  
Every day comes with some new fare.  
Now this wind, sun and these shades all seems to have changed.  
Now I am more scared of the moon than the stars.  
Less than the sea, I'm more scared of the shores.  
What if I bet away my life.  
Like someone wins the bets of gold,  
someone might win my life.  
Life is supported by courage, not fear.

---

<sup>76</sup> This translation was conducted together with eager help from my language teachers Ali, Neha and Raza at Zabaan Language Institute in Delhi.



## Appendix 2 – Jyoti’s Song, *Rupaiya*

Babul pyare sajna sakha re  
Suno o meri maiyya  
Bojh nahi main kisi ke sar ka  
Naa majhdhar mein naiyya  
Patwar banoongi, leharon se ladungi  
Arey mujhe kya bechega rupaiya  
Ho arey mujhe kya bechega rupaiya

Kal baba ki ungli thaame chali thi  
Kal baba ki lathi bhi bann jaaungi  
Amma tere gharonde ki chidiya hoon main  
Daana lekar hi wapas ghar aaungi

Jiski fitrat mein hairat samaayi nahi  
Jisko daulat se zyada main bhaayi nahi  
Aise saajan ki mujhko zaroorat nahi  
Naa kehne ka sun lo muhurat yahi  
Akeli chalungi, Kismat se milungi  
Arey mujhe kya bechega rupaiya  
Ho arey mujhe kya bechega rupaiya  
Ho ho ho..

Dil se dil ke taar toh jude nahi  
Do rasmon pe daulat ye kaahe bahe  
Hum toh pyaar ki khwahish mein rishte bunein  
Do rishton mein lalach hum kaahe sahein  
Kya shaadi ke aage zindagi hi nahi  
Jo shaadi hisaabo ki keval hai bahi  
Aise saajan ki mujhko zaroorat nahi  
Naa kehne ka sun lo muhurat yahi

Subaha si khilungi, Ratiya si bharungi  
Arey mujhe kya bechega rupaiya  
Ho arey mujhe kya bechega rupaiya

