

CHAPTER IV

Women and their Created Everyday within the Prison.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with Meena's narrative and image. She is a woman of 39 years old, with black hair, a small build, and a medium complexion. In addition to having brilliant eyes and a smile on her face at all times, she is energetic and active. She has been imprisoned for the last ten years. She was the first woman I talked to in Jail AS. Her ten years of existence in jail, which I heard in bits and pieces, helped me understand how the women were able to subvert the purposes of imprisonment and how they were able to adapt to the prison environment, which was mirrored in their day-to-day lives. Due to the fact that the interviews with the majority of the women originally only depicted their boring existence in jail, which was consistent with the schedule of the institution, it was she who made the statement that "Life here is not simply about following the routine of the jail; it was something else more...*lahe lahe bujibo apuni* (slowly you will understand)". As the fieldwork went, the layers of the women's jail lives began to unravel in front of me, which allowed me to comprehend what Meena was trying to convey. As a result, this chapter is concerned with the things that women do daily, outside of the prison routine. A primary emphasis of this chapter is on how women manipulate prison time and space to their advantage to build a daily routine for themselves, which turns into their created everyday. This chapter addresses the subject of why women try to construct a routine that is distinct from the prison routine as well as how they do this. In what ways does the daily routine of the women provide light on the nature of the institution that is the prison? These are the fundamental concerns that the chapter intends to address in its discussion.

4.2 Boredom fostering the creation of an 'everyday'

To begin with, the prison routine for prisoners consists of a singular logical strategy that has been formulated to meet the official objectives of the institution, rather than catering to the specific requirements of the prisoners. Their day begins at 5.30 am with the morning *Gunti*. At 6 o'clock, they are provided with breakfast. Before 9 am, they are assigned the task of cleaning the ward and bathrooms. Those who have court dates leave

at 9 am, while others have free time until 11 am. At 11 am, another *Gunti* session takes place. At 11.30 am, they are served meals. They have free time again until the evening *Gunti*, which occurs before sunset, typically at 4.30 pm in the summer and 5.30 pm in the winter. Dinner is served at 4 pm, and after the evening *Gunti*, they must remain inside their dormitories, only for using the washrooms they can come out. The majority of women in the initial days in both the Jails, mentioned the monotonous aspect of their daily lives, emphasizing the similarity between each day and expressing a sense of boredom. Jyoti said, “*Ghor t eto kamer hesa asil, kob raat aar kob din, gom bhi nepaisilu, eyate tu din bhor boshi thak bos*” (At home I had so much pressure of work, I didn’t know when it was day or night, here on the contrary all day I sit idle). Another woman Riti expressed, “Somedays I feel, I will break the walls!!! and go out...what to do with so much of free time? Before coming here, I used to work as a cook for two families, also all the household chores I used to do, my time of rest was only when I slept, but here so much of free time”. It was about boredom which the women were attempting to highlight. According to Heidegger (1962, p80), boredom is closely connected to our perception of time and our relationship with it. It is a sensation or emotion that arises from our experience of time. The experience of boredom and the subsequent contemplation of its nature prompted me to delve into the intricacies of the concept of time. Time is designed to regulate and enforce the suppression of the external self in women prisoners by the loss of temporal and sensory experiences (Cohen & Taylor, 1972). However, for the women, the issue at hand was not just a matter of time, but also of space¹. Lefebvre's (1976) work is essential for integrating the concepts of space and time while examining the phenomenon of boredom in daily life. He places particular emphasis on space, without disregarding time. He expresses a clear viewpoint when he argues that time and space have a close connection, and when he states that time is distinguished but not completely independent from space. Lefebvre's indirectly asserts that boredom is inherently linked to spatial considerations while also acknowledging the importance of temporal aspects. The foundation for this assertion can be found in Lefebvre’s book *The Survival of Capitalism* (1976) when he establishes a connection between everyday life, space, and boredom:

It is the every day that carries the greatest weight. While Power occupies the space which it generates, every day is the very soil on which the great architectures of politics and society rise up. It is still, however, ambiguous, a mixture of poverty and wealth. In the everyday, the unbearable is mixed up with pleasure, and unease with satisfaction. The concrete becomes abstract and abstract concrete. Happiness easily becomes intolerable. The reproduction of the relations of production enlarges, we said, by reproducing the

¹ Chapter III reflected how prison time and space acted in a corporeal way for the women.

fundamental contradictions: the contradiction between happiness and boredom has turned into a running sore. The great Positive Minds will no doubt regard it as utterly utopian and unrealistic to introduce boredom into a theoretical and political discussion. For them, boredom doesn't count. Really it doesn't. Let's not insist, however, on this curious contrast between realized boredom and promised happiness. Let us dwell instead on the contradictions of space (Lefebvre, 1976, p.81-82)

Though Lefebvre's concept of every day is relevant to the lives of the women prisoners, but I critique when he put forward the view that boredom doesn't count as a concept. As in case of women prisoners, it is because the prison routine creates boredom among them, in a sense getting rid of it, creates their own everyday. To delve more into detail on this, an essential component of the strategy chosen for this chapter is the natural setting of the jail, which served as the environment in which women prisoners discover methods to get away with boredom. The following sections delineate the manner in which within the confines of the jail, women shape their everyday lives via the processes of adaptation and resistance.

4.3 The tricks and tactics of creating an 'everyday'

During my fieldwork, I observed that the women in both the jails had leisure time throughout the day, starting from the time when I arrived. Aside from giving evening *gunti*, they had no prescribed tasks. Upon my arrival, a significant portion of the prison schedule already gets completed. The majority of the women were observed participating in conversations, while a few of them were occupied with personal tasks such as bathing and doing laundry. Beginning with the scene of Jail KG, the majority of the women occupied various corners of the ward and engaged in conversation, while a few took brief naps. To mention, I observed a consistent presence of a minute amount of orange powder on the foreheads of the majority of women, starting from the initial day. After observing it consistently for several days, I inquired about it from the *mate* Rani. She responded with a joyful tone, "Every day we ardently worship *Bholenath* (Lord Shiva)." Immediately out of curiosity I asked, "But where do you offer your prayers?" She replied, with a point to the far right corner of the courtyard, "There"²

² A short point to the right side of the wall in the courtyard

I went to the spot, she followed me, and I observed an image of Lord Shiva, taken from some old calendar, affixed on the wall, which is often hidden from view. Beneath the wall, the ground was tidy, devoid of any trace of grass, and regarded as a sacred space by the women. She then enthusiastically expressed herself in limited Assamese.

“ *Eyate moi roj puja koru aru suwali gita bhi kore* (I and the girls always offer my prayers here). I always encourage the women to do prayers, believe in God, or else what can we do here, that’s way I am famous as *Pujari Bai* in the ward..” she gave a gentle smile. She also recited a Lord Shiva Vandana³ “*Shiv shiv shiv tu, Shiv hi jap, Bhole Shiv ka, Raag alaap..*”

She claimed to be acquainted with numerous *Vandanas* and asserted that many of her peers have learned it from her. The prohibition of women from visiting the prison temple represents a strategic approach to transforming a section of the penal area into a sacred space. This practice is both a manifestation of spatial considerations and a reflection of the prisonization process among women prisoners (Clemmer, 1940).

I inquired about the timing of the puja, given the apparent strict scheduling of the morning routine. Subsequently, she stated that following the morning *gunti*, all women, excluding that menstruating or non-Hindu, are required to take their baths. By 7 o'clock, we are nearly prepared, and we proceed to sit for the prayers. After reciting the *Shiva Vandana* ten times, we express our desires to God and conclude our prayers. Following that, we gather together and partake in our morning meal, consisting of chapattis. Although breakfast is served at 6, we typically gather the chapattis and consume them after the puja. Subsequently, we commence the cleaning tasks at 9 o'clock and by 10 o'clock, we are nearly finished with all the jobs. To mention in this instance, in regard of cleaning chores, on interviewing a newly admitted undertrial woman Preeti said in a low tone "The convict women do not perform any tasks; we are responsible for all the cleaning chores. Additionally, there are two bathrooms: one designated for the *convicts* and the other for us. The toiletry products are exclusively reserved for their use and not permitted in our bathroom." Preeti and many other recently appointed undertrials asserted that the elder *undertrials* and the *convict* women do not engage in any work.

³ Divine chant of Lord Shiva

Consequently, there is a clear hierarchy between the just-entered *undertrials* and the *convicts* and this hierarchy persisted in both the jails. Preeti's subdued voice indicates that the newly admitted women feel a sense of apprehension towards the older women prisoners.

Regarding the scenario at Jail AS, it was largely uniform. The majority of women would congregate in clusters and engage in conversation. Frequently, the *female warder* on duty, the *mate* Gopi, and a woman prisoner named Monika engaged in playing Ludo⁴, while the remaining women prisoners yearn for an opportunity to play the same. The ludo serves as a symbol of hierarchy between the two groups of women. On one side, there is the *mate*, the warder on duty, and Monika. Monika is a formidable figure in the ward. The concept of a "powerful woman" is especially evident among long-term prisoners who are familiar with the prison environment. Monika, a woman in her late thirties, was imprisoned for life. She is a slim, nut-brown woman with a pleasant face and a boisterous voice, neatly dressed as always. Though I found her approachable, most of the women in the ward were apprehensive of her and some especially Gopi, the *mate*, was jealous. Most of the time in the ward, she sits beside the warder on duty and keeps on talking with her. Even the authority in the main office treated her with respect. In the line of *Gunti*, she placed herself before Gopi, the *mate*. During lunchtime also, she never used to wait in the queue, the other woman used to bring the lunch plate for her. One day, during lunch, I saw her throwing her lunch plate and shouting madly at a woman Saira, as she got a hair on her plate, “*Oi kot mon thake tur...edal ture suli hoi, aru jodi edin suli pau, suli kati dim tur, mur khong tu jano tu...*(Where is your attention...this is your hair, if someday again I get a hair, I will cut your hair, you know my anger)”.

Immediately the hustle and bustle in the ward stopped and an aura of silence began, for some time no one spoke. Saira, with a visible fear on her face was cleaning the food split on the floor and others were silently eating the food. The women hardly revolted against her, as they knew by doing so they will land in trouble. Another day I saw, Monika, shouting at a woman, while I was attentively observing what the matter was, a woman suddenly came very near to me and said in a tone of confidence...

⁴ Ludo is a strategic board game designed for two to four players. The objective of the game is for players to move their four tokens from the starting point to the finishing point based on the outcomes of a single dice roll.

“ *Ji kore amar bhalor karone kore, apunak tu ghoror manuh beya dekhile koi, teneke amaku koi, he joni⁵, notun ke ahise, hikute bujute homoi lage eyat* (Whatever she does is for our good, you are also told at home, when your elders see something bad in you, same Monika Baideu does for us, the woman is a newly admitted one, so she will need time to understand everything)”

I gently nodded my head in response. So in Jail AS, two groups were there among the woman, one Monika’s group and the other Gopi’s. When a new woman gets admitted, the respective cliques try to pull them toward their own group, as the larger the group strength more advantages they have in leading a comfortable life within the ward. For instance, Monika’s group was larger than Gopi’s. So in most of the things within the ward, Monika and her group gained advantages like getting to bathe earlier, not to make a long queue, getting better places in the dormitory to sleep, getting extra add on with meals, etc. As once I heard a woman saying to a newly admitted one,

“ *Eyat bhal ke solibole hole, Monika baideu r kotha hunibi* (To stay here properly, listen to Monika) a short point to Monika, who was a few yards away...”

So the *mates* and woman like Monika to a great extent influenced the activities within the ward. In jail KG, not a single woman was there, who can be categorised as a powerful woman. Here, the influence of religiosity was there, among the Hindu women an inclination towards Lord Shiva was noticed, as their *mate* Rani was an ardent follower so. While in Jail AS, no such inclination towards a particular God was observed, they carried out religious activities, in their own way. But the women who were in Gopi’s cliques, I observed doing prayers during their lunch. During lunchtime, women had their meals in different small groups in the areas of the courtyard within the ward. They cleaned the ground by sprinkling some water, and with closed eyes offered a short prayer before the meals. When I asked a woman about it, she said,

“ Gopi,our *mate* is a Christian, and before every meal, she closes her eyes and prays to her God, it is a thanksgiving to God for the meal, by seeing her we too started following her, and you know *Baideu*, by doing so it gives me a different kind of peace”.

An essential component of the routines that the women engage in on an everyday basis, as revealed by the fieldwork, is the utilization of material goods in order to violate

⁵ A short point to the woman whom the mate was shouting over.

particular regulations that govern prison life. Over the course of the first several days, nearly all of the women who expressed their boredom revealed to me the other side of their lives. This holds true for when Lefebvre (1971), asserts that daily existence extends beyond simple repetition and boredom. The women also now and then used to talk about their skills to me, they would start with,

“*Baideu*, what did you have for breakfast”, suppose I said, Chapati, then they would relate, how they used to prepare food for their families, now and then sometimes directly or sometimes in an indirect way they would assure me that they were responsible woman towards their family. Frequently, they would bring their past roles towards the family into the present, and deliberate on the diverse roles and obligations they assumed for their families. This form of narration demonstrates a purposeful and conscious intention. The intrinsic memory in this form of intentionality functions as a realm where narratives are generated, duplicated and incorporated. It is essential to understand that the women, by sharing their narratives and taking action, continually work to communicate their feeling of duty to their families and to transcend their current status as prisoner. Moreover, they intensely deliberated about their capabilities. A woman Moni of jail AS, one day proudly showed a pillow cover embellished with superb embroidery, asserting it as her original design. With immense elation, she exclaimed : “*Baideu* I have a dream of opening my own embroidery shop, where I will train girls...here also now and then I keep on running my hands, but I cannot do it openly, as keeping needles is not allowed...”. Then out of curiosity, I asked her how does she manage to get needles, she in a tone of confidence said,

“*Baideu eyat poisa thakile sob pai*”(if you have the money you get here everything)

I asked, “*Kintu keneke, tumalukor tu poisa rokha mana ase* (But how, you all are not allowed to keep money)”

She winked her eyes and replied with a gentle smile, “*Hoi jai manage...*(It gets managed)” From that reply of hers, I was pondering it for a few days, particularly how they managed money, as it was against the prison rule to keep money. The circulation of money within the prison surfaced from Bandyopadhyay’s (2010) work on prison ethnography, a trend of that sort was noticed in the female wards of both the jails. In this regard, the first incident that I observed was an *undertrial* woman, who was attempting to pour a small amount of shampoo from a shampoo sachet into a small plastic bowl. I

then questioned her why she was attempting to do this...but she didn't bother to answer me and continued with her task.

" *Baideu* little amount she will keep it with her and the other one she will sell..." replied another woman named Rupa, who was standing next to me at the time. She had noticed that my curiosity had been aroused and responded accordingly. I was able to make out then the way they circulated money and related it with, what Moni had said.

Women who do not have access to money are able to acquire goods according to their requirements by selling things that are provided to them by the authorities. This is accomplished through simple monetary or barter exchanges. On court dates or during *mulakatas*, members of the family come and give them money. In this process of strategizing money, along with the women, the *female warders* and the male prison guards equally participated. It was only because they were involved, that the process became feasible. I did not observe and neither any women told me about the higher prison authority to be directly involved with the women in these dealings. I heard in the process, one rare exchange in the form of help came from the higher prison authority in Jail AS. Puni the mother of the three-year-old child said to me:

"My Son Munna could not eat the jail food as it was sometimes spicy or the other day half cooked. Though the authority was supposed to give baby food on a regular basis it was rare...but I was lucky it so happened that one of our assistant jailor sahibs⁶ daughter was born few months ago, *but memsahib ka doodh nehi nikalta tha, to Sahib aur memsahib dono ek din aaye aur bole hamari beti ko thoda doodh pila sakti ho aapne se tum!!!* (She emphasizes...), *mujhse khud aake ke boli Baideu.. maine bola kyun nahi...lekin memsahib bole tumhare bete ke liya cerelac⁷ bagera jo bhi zarurat ho, wo hum dhenge tumhe, mujhe wo baat sunkar aur accha laga* (Madam could not produce milk, so one-day sir and madam came and told me to breastfeed their daughter, I readily agreed, then I was happier to hear when Madam told she will give cerelac and whatever other things necessary for my son)"

When Puni said this to me, I could see happiness on her face, infact often she used to say about this incident, what I realized was, somewhere she felt herself worthwhile that she could of help to an officer's family. To come to monetary transactions again, Women

⁶ Meaning Sir

⁷ Packed baby food

who had menopause in jail would hide it from the authorities for some time so that they could sell the monthly sanitary napkins they got on a monthly basis. Most of the women had the habit of eating *gutka*⁸ in Jail KG and it was sold to them at prices two times higher than the original and it was supplied by the *female warders* or the male guards . Not only *gutka*, but other prohibited commodities and services would be priced higher than their market value. By engaging in uncomplicated monetary or barter exchanges, these financially disadvantaged women are able to acquire necessary items by selling goods allocated to them by the jail. This suggests an effective strategy for eroding power without relying on the material possessions that are provided by force. Thus, contrary to the traditional interpretation of resistance, the daily resistance shown by women derives its power from being unseen, using deception, and displaying ingenuity. The preceding chapter elucidated the fact that the system for imprisoned women predominantly caters to the needs and requirements of male prisoners. So the above everyday activities of the women may be seen as a kind of tactical resistance, which helps make their living conditions somewhat bearable. The act of subverting the system in order to achieve a personal objective is a defining feature of what Certeau (1984, p.14) refers to as “tactics”. These tactics functioning within the spaces of the female wards, negates the established structure of control. It represents the concept of exercising one's freedom despite being confined or restricted.



Figure 4.1: Memory Drawing of the female ward of Jail KG depicting an ‘everyday’

Source: Field work

⁸ A product of Tobacco

4.3.1 “She is....she has....Have you heard!!!...Gossip, gossip and gossip

Gossip is defined in various ways in the existing sociological literature. From a broad perspective, it might be characterized as "a universal curiosity about the actions, qualities, and flaws of other individuals" (Gluckman, 1963). Gossip served as a form of amusement for women, as one of their motivations for participating in gossip was to pass the time. It served as a means by which social order was generated. Gossip undoubtedly provides a sense of exhilaration and excitement (Valmore and Uy 2013, p. 66). Inside the ward, the women would congregate in clusters and engage in idle chatter. Among the imprisoned women, friendship serves as a means of exchanging information through gossip, which fosters a sense of unity and similarity among them. During the course of my fieldwork, I was able to readily discern the distinct clusters of gossip among the women prisoners in both the jails. The newly admitted undertrial was first excluded from the gossip circles since they like to keep to themselves during the initial days. However, with time, they gradually integrated into the gossip groups. As my fieldwork advanced, I became aware that I was privy to the gossip exchanged among the women. However, I maintained a neutral stance and attentively listened to their conversations. These interactions became significant entries in my field notebook, enhancing my overall observational skills. This phenomenon demonstrated that the women's gossip not only provided amusement but also acted as a strategy for the women to control how they were perceived and enhance their reputation in my presence. Referring to such an instance of Gossip in jail KG,

“They do dirty things in the name of friendship...*Iss duniya mein mard kam ho gaya hain kya, enlog jo ey sab karte hain, jail ke andar hi kitne mard hain* (Are males becoming less in this world, that they do all this, in fact inside the jail only there are so many males). Have u noticed Hema and Meena, they constantly touch each other? Someone was even saying that day that Meena was pressing Heena’s breasts, such shameless things are happening here, I don’t know what are you thinking of us... but everyone is not like them”

One day, while I was jotting something in my field notebook, Hakima, an elderly prisoner, with a serious face, said this to me, an indirect point towards Kuhi and Gulati who were giggling among themselves, a few yards away. I just listened to Hakima with a smile, and in the counter didn’t reply anything. Coming back to again what Hakima

said, within the wards, love among women was gossiped as *suwali-suwali bhalpuwa, ladki-ladki wala pyar* (literally girl-girl love) and which was observed in both the jails. Kuhi and Gulati were one such couple who thought of sharing a lesbian relationship among themselves. This gossip about lesbian relationships usually happened among elderly women. When I tried to know about these relationships some were open about it, whereas some didn't express it openly. Talking to Kuhi and Gulati about their life in prison, they talked of all other things, except each other. But every time I noticed them, I saw them together, maybe she thought that the other women have already informed me of their relationship so she did not speak anything about their friendship. Also, the lesbian couples had a hard time within the ward, as they are often taunted as “*Mrs and Mrs...etc*”. Mentioning of Timu and Latika of Jail AS, who were also thought to be in a lesbian relationship but they mentioned about each other when I talked with them, and even indirectly confessed that they are in love with each other. Both of them referred to each other as their best friend and said that they could spend their lives with them and did not need a man thereafter. The women also gossiped that in the male ward also “*Lora-lora k bhalpuwa, Ladka-ladka wala pyar*” (Love between boys) was there. Once the women were discussing about Puni and her husband who was lodged in the male ward. On their scheduled weekend meeting, Puni was quarreling with him, as someone told her that he was having something with another prisoner.

Ayesha and Sakina⁹ was a common topic of gossip among the women in the jail. Talking about Ayesha first, a woman in her mid-twenties, plump with a fair complexion and curly hair, carried a smile on her face all the time. She was one woman who never complained anything about her life in prison. Whenever I talked with her, she was always polite-the right intonations, the right gestures, no raised voices, and no excited tones. The women said that she had all the advantages in acquiring the necessary items. Now and then the women used to taunt her, “*Es..special Ayesha...*” when she used to pass by. But strange she never reacts to any comments. Once while they were talking about Ayesha, one of the women said to me,

“We have to manage so hard to earn a rupee, but Geeta has no problem with anything. You see *Baideu* , she wears such deep-cut *kurtas* and does not take the *dupatta* also...

⁹ Ayesha was jail KG and Sakina from jail AS.

we elders tell her so much to take a *dupatta*, but she does not dare to listen...she sarcastically smiled and said...her chest... helps in acquiring all things for her”

Her narrative highlights the way in which breasts serve as the principal symbol of sexual specificity (Young, 2010) and as a means of fulfilling subversive activities. However, I contrast this with the fact that many of the women in the ward used to walk around with nothing more than a petticoat¹⁰, and many of them wore kurtas without *dupatta*. I inquired about it from the *mate*, Rani, for labelling Ayesha in that way. She then said,

“*Baideu*, there is a difference between wearing a petticoat if your clothes are wet or you are feeling hot so you are not taking a *dupatta*...But Ayesha is something different...there is a strong desire for her among the majority of the males in the prison...”

But Rani’s reply did not satisfy my curiosity to know why Ayesha was labelled so. For some days I was not able to impinge upon for labeling Ayesha in such a way, then one day when I was checking the list of the crimes the women were charged with, then I realized that Ayesha was caught being involved in a prostitution racket, she is still an undertrial. So crime history plays a role in creating images of women within the ward. Sakina was also the topic of gossip now and often. She was a convict in her late thirties, a fair, tall woman, always with a serious face, she stayed alone always, hardly talked with anyone, and also did not agree to talk with me. About her, the story was that when she first came to the jail, then of the Jailors was in love with her. She used to get special treatment then, also the jailor did his best so that she could get *bail*, she got *bail*, but again proved guilty, and then the jailor left her, and after she became insane... Women sharing room with her said often at night she used to scream. The women used to gossip about the main office authority also, but they did not gossip at ease about the main office authority in front of me, they feared that I might go and tell them, and they would land in trouble.

4.3.2 The Power of Friendship Surpasses Gossip

Merely engaging in gossip does not negate the existence of strong relationships of friendship and affection among women. The everyday experiences of the women were

¹⁰ Inner skirt

also evident in the relationships they formed with one another. These frequently develop into sources of social support, which is crucial for fulfilling both practical and emotional requirements in an otherwise alienating and isolating setting. During my days of fieldwork, in both the jails, I often noticed how the women took care of the ones in their closed circles. To mention such an instance in Jail AS, one elderly woman named Juri had a lump on her buttock, from dressing to making her bath, everything was done by another woman named Narzu. She nursed her with great care, like her own daughter. When I asked Juri how does she feel, that someone is taking so much care of her in a setting such as jail, she smiled with contentment and said,

“ Narzu is like my own daughter...I have three daughters of my own, but sometimes I feel more than them, Narzu cares for me...Poor Narzu!!! She never got her parent's love, she thinks of me as her mother and I in my capacity try my best to protect her from everything...as she is new here...its just one year and I am here for the last seven years...so I guide her in everything”

Women like Narzu and others did not have a clear idea of their pre-prison homes, as they revealed that their pre-prison homes were fraught with neglect, and frequent physical and sexual abuse. Narzu with teary eyes narrated about her pre-prison life as, “My childhood went in locating and relocating to different relative's houses after my mother's death where at different times I faced neglect, abuse, and burden in the different homes in which I grew up”. She only expected that marriage would give her the dream home. But to her utter dismay, a few months into her marriage she found out her husband had an illicit affair. The discovery led to untenable torture from her husband, which finally pushed Narzu into killing her husband and his lover. Against the norm of equating ‘home’ or ‘inside’ with security, the different homes in which Narzu grew, up brought her insecurity, uncertainty, and disorder. So, for these women when they receive love and care from their prison peers, it leads to the development of fictive kin ties among them. Bonds like Narzu and Juri were common in the *female wards*. Establishing friendships and fictive kinship relationships served as a means of acclimating to the jail environment. When women in jail encounter others who share similar life experiences, they form a bond of support and become trusted allies. The fictive kin bonds developed among the women greatly contributed to facilitating their lives and giving them purpose within the prison. In prison when women with the same tales of life meet, they become support and confidante of one another. The fictive kin bonds formed among the women go a long

way in making their life easy and meaningful within the prison. Gopi, the *mate* of jail AS said

“I treat the young ones as my own daughter...*aru uparwale kripat moi bhalke asu eyat, suwalibure sobe mane muk aru morom u diye* (By God’s grace I am happy here, the girls listen and take care of me). I want a good life for the girls as some of them are very young and a few months ago one of the girls named Jina from here, got released and married my bhatija(brother’s son).

I was a little bewildered by hearing about the marriage. But within a few days, I came to know that Jina was not the only one to find her groom through prison peers, there were many others also who found their partners through their peers. Simona was one such woman who had no one to go back to after prison. She was a child born out of wedlock and grew up with her grandparents, a mother married to a far-off place, who never came once also to look after her, her childhood till adult passed on working in different households, and the last household where she worked suspected her in robbery and she was placed in the jail. It is like match-making happening in a disciplinary space like a prison. This match-making within the spaces of the prison proved to be a useful means by which women could rebuild and secure their lives outside. These relationships give women a sense of meaning and self-worth, in turn reassured them of their identity as a woman (Mehta,2014). Thus as reflected friendship and fictive kin ties indeed served as sources of social capital for the women.

Like there were friendships among the women, fights were also common. I witnessed many such fights among the women in both wards. The first instance I noticed during the early days of my fieldwork in Jail AS, one afternoon while I was talking with an *undertrial* woman, two women were yelling, pouring adjectives at each other. The two women were Rubina and Latika. They were fighting over a bucket, as according to Rubina, she saw Heena putting her undergarments in the bucket, that bucket was meant only for bathing, and Heena was denying the blame. In no time, the fight between the two, expanded, and then two groups were fighting, one supporting Rubina and the other Latika. But Rubina’s group was overpowering the other group, as Rubina was backed by Monika. The warder on duty was enjoying the fight when I asked her won’t she go and resolve it, she said,

she worked suspected her in robbery and she was placed in the jail. It is like match-making happening in a disciplinary space like a prison. This match-making within the spaces of the prison proved to be a useful means by which women could rebuild and secure their lives outside. These relationships give women a sense of meaning and self-worth, in turn reassured them of their identity as a woman (Mehta,2014). Thus as reflected friendship and fictive kin ties indeed served as sources of social capital for the women.

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“It's no point resolving them, it is a good time pass for them as well for me, it will not continue for long, don't worry...*apuniu moja louk...giggles!! Enekuwa kajia dekhise janu agote...aru nedekheu koutu...*” (You also enjoy...Have you seen this type of fights before and you will not see also)

When she said this I silently watched as a spectator. This reminds me of Goffman (1989), who said that the role of a fieldworker is also that of witness¹¹ but from the fight I came to know many things about Rubina and Latika, for instance, Rubina was yelling at Latika, “*Toi ki bhal joni, maiki ejoni he bhal pau* (Your are also not good, you love a woman)”. Heena also countered, “*Moi tu karu murder kora nai, toit u nijer giriye ok mariso, beleg motar karone, tur tu charitro beya...toi...¹²hoi..., tur saja hoboey, kot basibi toi¹³*’ . (I did not kill anyone, but you killed your husband for another male, you are characterless, you will get

¹¹ See Erving Goffman, On Fieldwork. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 1989

¹² A hindi fowl word meaning whore

¹³ As Rubina was still an undertrial

punishment, you won't be spared)". Like the *female warder* said, I couldn't enjoy the fights, the only thing I did was jot the instances of the fights, in my field notebook, and these fights revealed a lot about the women to me. Fights also ensued sometimes between the warder on duty and the women, one such fight took place between Sumi, she was an undertrial prisoner, of jail KG, a girl hardly of 22 years old, she was very introvert, when I interviewed her, it took many days for her to open up. It was her eighth month in jail and she was there for some robbery case. She quarreled with the *female warder* Papori, as she asserted that it was almost two weeks, and some clothes were sent for her from home, but it was not yet handed to her, she was crying and pleading before her, but the warder didn't pay any heed. Then after some time, she burst out, "*Dibi ne, ne tuk mari pelam moi*" (Are you giving me, or else I will kill you) and scratched her wherever possible, Rani the *mate* came and tried to resolve the fight, the warder beat Sumi mercilessly by opening the belt from her *saree* I was feeling so bad for her, but my hands were tied, I couldn't do anything. All the other women were watching it, some were enjoying it, and one or two who had a good bond with her were shedding tears. Overall the women's ward in both jails were very chaotic, not all the fights were big, but small fights took place almost every day. But the fact that one day I saw them fighting like cats and dogs, and the next day I see them together. In one of the jails once an assistant jailor asked me, "*Madam, baki fighting bur dekhi se nai...moi tu ehotok kauri bah buliey kou...pise kajia nelage koribo nu ki, homai bur tu par koribo lagibo*"(Have you witnessed the fights...I call them crow nests...but without fighting what will they do, they have to pass their time). The everyday instances in the lives of the women in jail echo the recognition of feminist geographers of prison as an embodied environment (Moran, 2012)

4.3.3 Love and Longing

Within the wards, the terms "*Bhalpuwa*," "*Prem*," and "*Pyar*," which are local words for love, started to emerge as appealing combinations for the majority of women prisoners. The concept of love encompassed a wide range of behaviors, including the giving and receiving of glances and winks, the writing of love letters, friendships, and other types of commitments. Most of the women had a soft spot for male guards, while others had a soft one for the male prisoners. The majority of these interactions was established through a strategic negotiation of time, space, and movement, and this was the primary factor that influenced the way in which women arranged their day-to-day lives within the

confines of the prison. It was regarded fortunate for women who were participating in romantic relationships with male guards, for all the material benefits they reaped. The romantic experiences of the women prisoners that emerged from the field bear some resemblance to the scholarly works on love within the prison walls by Mehta (2018) and Sharma (2022). With regard to Namita, Sukhi, an elderly woman of Jail AS said with a face of remorse...

“Namitare bhal, prothome ahute dujur kapur ye asil, ajikali tu dher kapur, ajikali style u bahil taier...dorkar hole bostu ahi jai..amar nisinake sinta kori moribo nelage (Namita is having good time, first when she came, she had only two pairs of clothes, nowadays she has so many, her style also increased, anything she requires it comes, not like us that we have to think over, how things will come)”

The women who had lovers outside the ward everyone were jealous of them. Those who did not have lovers according to them, the women loved only to reap material benefits, to make jail life easy, they left no stone turned to taunt those women who had lovers. One woman Minate of Jail KG, who was in a love relationship with a male prisoner said

“Nobody loves them, what is our fault. Every now and then they taunt us for nothing. “Bhal pabo logia gun thakibo lagibo nohoi” (They should have qualities to be loved)

Primarily, elderly women and women who were single, engaged in gossip pertaining to women who were in romantic relationships. Women such as Minate and Namita, who were involved in romantic relationships, felt a sense of happiness and a hint of pride when discussing about their love lives. They believed it was a method that effectively controlled their tarnished reputation and enhanced their social standing. Namita enthusiastically recounted her love story to me.

“ The previous day before my court date, most of the women came to me and asked, ‘How are you going to do your hair tomorrow?’, ‘ you better shampoo your hair, your hair is looking sticky’, at first I couldn’t make out, why they were saying all these, as at that time I was quite new here, then Sheila told me that If I go nicely, I can make male friends, having male friends is very much advantageous in a jail...then I understood...Following her words, I wore the best

pair of clothes, among the few which I had, plated my hair nicely, and wore lipstick, kajal ...Along with me, three other male prisoners, two male warders went. The court as you know is just on the other side of the jail¹⁴, I was just out of the ward, that I reached the court. We were taken to a room, where long thick bars on either side of the room separated males from us... While I was in the lock-up there, one of the guards came and asked my name, and it was all that happened...she blushes!! but then after a week, Mili, came and told me that someone loves me, and I guessed it might be the guard who asked my name...then after some days it was in the Independence day celebration I was sure, he was one, as he handed me one extra packet lunch, and inside it was a small paper, on which it was written, *Nami, tumak bor bhal lage mur* (Nami, I like you very much) Blushes!!!... and since two years we love each other”

The women treated court visits as joyous events, as Namita’s narrative reflects. Prior to the court hearings, they dedicate extensive time to grooming rituals such as meticulously shaping one other's eyebrows, performing facial massages, putting henna¹⁵ to each other's hair. Bandyopadhyay (2010), Mehta (2014, 2018) and Sharma's (2022) literature on women prisoners also revealed instances of beautifying operations among the women within the prison.

To mention an incident of the district court concerning jail KG, the waiting room of the male and female prisoners were common. So the men were kept in the cell, while women sat outside on the courtyard, on a wooden bench. On my visits to the courts, I always occupied seats close to the women, so that I can observe them from close. But the guards allowed conversations between the men and women prisoners and it was during these dates, that private talks happened between the lovers, in the pretext of going to the washroom, which was situated at the backyard of the court, few of the maintenance staff of the court made chances for them, in return for money. This I came to know, on a certain court date when I went, Noorima, who was in love with a male prisoner, asked me 100 rupees, and after that immediately went towards the toilet situated, in the

¹⁴ The district court and Jail AS stands opposite to each other.

¹⁵ A hair natural hair dye.

4.3.4 Mothering in and from jails

As previously said, imprisoned women expressed a strong desire for love and companionship. In chapter III, as already described, the most difficult part for the women in jail was that they had to live away from their children. Despite their confinement, these women extensively emphasized the satisfaction they gained from motherhood, even under the constraints of the prison environment. Women's primary motivation for managing separation and dealing with the challenges of jail was to preserve the close bonds with their children. Ruksana, a woman from Jail KG, was convicted for the murder of her spouse. She herself vividly described about her crime

“ He was a devil in the form of a human...he had an eye on his own daughters, *ji korilu mur maak hisabe daityo korilu* (whatever I did, I did it as a duty of a mother) and I have no repentance for it...”

But women also talk about the constant stress and blame that comes from being separated from their children. In other words, the mothers' narratives showed two different points of view: on the one hand, children gave mothers hope and drive to deal with being locked up; On the other hand, women who talk about motherhood as a source of grief say that being away from their children made them feel guilty and anxious. The women talked about how worried they were that they weren't living up to societal expectations of "good mothering."

Malati, of Jail AS in this regard said, “In my absence, my daughter’s health deteriorated, last time she came to meet, she was so pale and thin...Who will care like a mother Baideu, no one...she sobs..Hope my years pass soon ...”

Here I engage Traustadottir's (1991) idea of care for children of women with special needs. It means "caring for" or "caring about." "Caring for" refers to the physical labor of taking care of children while "Caring about" refers to love and respect. “Caring about” continued for the women even in prison, but the women failed in case of “Caring for” for their children due to their physical separation, but in a way, it got reflected in the context of coordinated mothering in the case of Munna, Jay, and Shree in both the jails. Munna as previously mentioned was the three-year-old boy and Jay and Shree were twin boys, four and a half years old. By using the word coordinated

mothering I mean the women who were mothers and now separated from their children, they nursed for and cared for these kids as their own children. According to them engaging and involving with the kids served as an important means to survive the everyday pains of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958). In fact, during the first few days of my visits to Jail KG, I couldn't identify who was Jay and Shree's mother. As every other day, I saw someone else nursing them. Mamata said in this regard how they feel the same emotions within the jails.

“Jay and Shree's presence makes us happy, you know *Baideu*, I have taught them the prayer *Brahma Adi Kori* (Assamese prayer), and they remind me of my daughter, Neha...weeps a little...Neha, knows most of the prayers, when I was with her, every evening we used to do prayer together, she was very good at memorizing, when she last came here to meet me, she narrated a poem before me, the famous one *Baideu...Janam Bhumi* (an Assamese poem)...she is just eleven years old, but understands everything...”

Women like Mamata, whose children were not with them, were more attached to the children than the other women. The mothering roles that they were deprived of as a result of their imprisonment were expressed in their relationships with Munna, Jay, and Shree. Beginning with imparting moral lessons to children and progressing to providing them with physical nurture, the roles of motherhood were depicted. Once Munna, uttered a 'bad' word, I was there talking with one of the woman then, and one woman, Madhabi immediately turned towards the little boy and gave a stern look and said, it is a bad word, don't say this again, at this the warder on duty who was roaming nearby, in a tone of mockery said,

“*Kaidor loraey bhal kotha nu keneke kobo, makor petot thakute beya kotha hiki ahise ehoti* (How will prisoners son say good things, they have learned bad things while they were at the mother's womb only)”.

At this the woman said to me with a voice that was almost choked with the emotion she was experiencing at that moment.... wiping her tears with the end of her *saree*...the words she uttered were...“It is because of people like them that our children suffer, I also have three daughters...I can imagine how much they are suffering because their mother is a criminal, a prisoner... But what is their mistake, you say *Baideu*...Can our children not be good...she started to weep again...”

I was at a loss for words to comfort her, I held her hands and comforted her by saying , “One day, your daughters will make you proud; all you need to do is have confidence in God”. By imparting moral lessons to the kids, the women tried to bring out that their crime doesn’t define their identity, they had the potential qualities of good mothers. As motherhood is a primary source of identity for women who have children. “Good mothers” are commended for their ability to provide direction, structure, and discipline to their children (Stringer, 2020). Both the mothers of the children said how their peers helped them in the upbringing of their kids. Love and care were bestowed upon them in all possible ways. Runi, the mother of the twins expressed

“My husband is also here in the men’s ward. When we came here our boys were two years old, and we were so worried, how will I upbring my boys here...what will I feed, I was lactating at that time, but all the women here are so cooperative, they think of them as their own children...as the jail diet is not enough for them, my sisters here would manage extra packets of milk, fruits, and all other good things...often they risk with the authority for managing the things for my boys”

“Caring about” got reflected in instances such as, when they used to pay the warder on duty to do phone calls and sometimes also did video calls to the children. Arranging meetings with their children, during court visits, and during hospital visits, by managing the prison guards, and the hospital staff. While a mother’s imprisonment can separate her from her children, it does not necessarily mean the end of motherhood, which got reflected from the women prisoners instances. The respondents who were mothers deeply cared for their children and continued to perform and identify themselves as mothers.

4.4 Conclusion

The women experienced boredom as a result of the prison routine. To maintain a steady flow of time, the women attempted to recreate the kind of life they led before imprisonment. This was accomplished through both tangible ways like use of forbidden items to make their life comfortable and pass their abundant free time and intangible means such as gossip, friendship, and engaging in love relationships. Emotion played a major role in the women’s created everyday. Every day, thus, evoked a complicated and

intertwined collection of connections, tactics to sustain these relations, communication networks, the physical places that permit the enactment of these relations, and the material world, which further offered the crutches for this enactment (Lefebvre, 1991). In the created every day of the women, there was a hierarchy among the women in the ward, a category of powerful women existed within the ward, and feelings of jealousy were also there among the women. To take into consideration, the category of powerful women, there was no particular way that we can define why a woman was considered powerful but long-term stay in prison was definitely one of the reasons which worked as a criterion in making the women powerful. The prevalence of hierarchy and also authority which was there among the women in the ward which power mechanism functions informally in the micro level. The negotiation between the authority and the women was also a part of the women's every day. The created every day of the women in a way demonstrated that places are products of relationships negotiated with trajectories¹⁶ by emplaced actors (Massey 2005 cited in Baldwin 2012, p. 209).

Their every day reflected in a way how power can be resisted in a total institution. To bring in Foucault (1977) who opines that resistance is a necessary precondition for the relations of power and the resistance of power resulted in the creation of spaces among women for communicating and experiencing a sense of independence. The tactics which the women adopted to create their every day, allowed for practices, which became spaces for communicating and experiencing a sense of independence. The narratives of the women I have provided, as well as the everyday occurrences, demonstrate that power within a jail, as a total institution, is not just confined to the overarching structure or circumstances, but also manifests itself in the small-scale processes and in-between spaces (Foucault, 1990 cited in Bandyopadhyay, 2010). The inherent power inside these micro-processes highlights that while women's lives are not exempt from the confines established by the Prison, they do manage to disrupt it by employing tactics and techniques that demonstrate the potential for negotiation within this system. From the women's every day, it can be postulated how social identities are made and remade through spaces and, through the interactions in those spaces. Thus, Prisons, being

¹⁶ Baldwin (2012,208-209) defines 'Trajectories are ideas, practices and material processes that can affect people in the conduct of their lives, in their quest to live well; they are relationships and processes that affect others and may be authored by individuals, groups and by non-humans.

heterotopic places, may seem different from other areas, but they really imitate the larger social order and structures, making them interconnected rather than separate (Baer and Ravneberg ,2008)

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